



THE ACHIEVER

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Study Shows New Profile of Gender Achievement Gaps

Females are now doing as well as or better than males on many indicators of achievement and attainment, according to a new study by the U.S. Department of Education.

On the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), females outperformed their male peers on reading (2003) and writing (2002) assessments at the fourth, eighth and twelfth grades. In mathematics, the gender gap between average scale scores has been quite small and fluctuated only slightly between 1990 and 2003. At the college level, female freshmen were more likely than their male counterparts to graduate within six years (66 percent versus 59 percent).

Other findings reveal that females were less likely than males to repeat a grade and to drop out of high school, and that gender differences in math and science course-taking appeared to be shrinking.

“The issue now is that boys seem to be falling behind,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige. “We need to

spend some time researching the problem so that we can give boys the support to succeed academically.”

Although women have made substantial educational gains over the past 30 years, they are still underrepresented in some fields of study, such as computer science, engineering and the physical sciences, as well as in doctoral and first-professional degree programs, the study found.

Trends in Educational Equity of Girls and Women was produced by the Department’s National Center for Education Statistics in the Institute of Education Sciences. To download a copy, visit <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2005016>.

“We have high expectations of our students,” said Sherry Webber, a second-grade teacher at School 114, whose students’ scores are well above district averages. At left, she gives her student Cheyanne a congratulatory hug for finishing her assignment.

Photo by John Gress

A Feeling of Community Inclusion Efforts Help Indianapolis School Cope with Poverty, Turnover, Special Needs

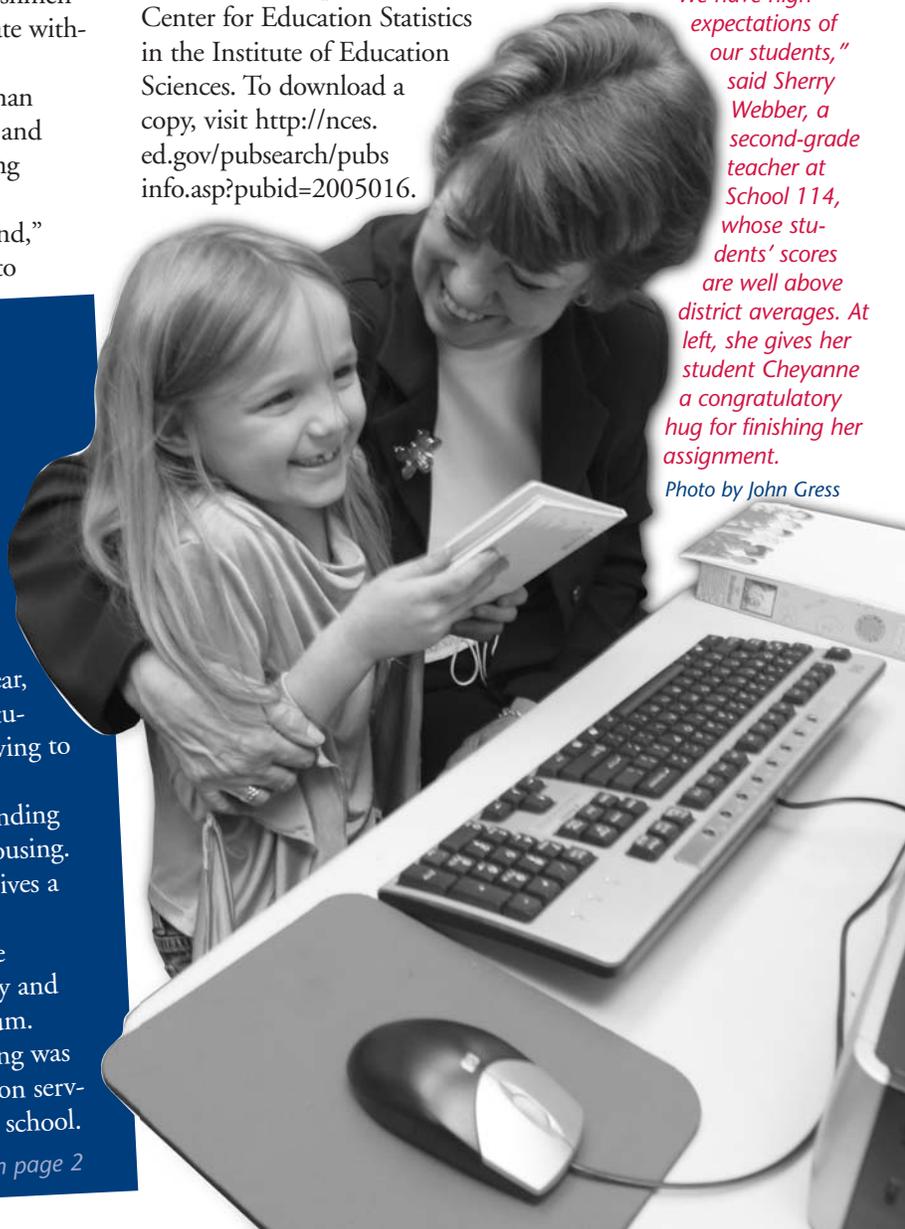
“There’s a feeling of community, a sharing of ideas that makes our school so special that no one ever wants to leave,” says Cindy Meek, a special education teacher who has taught at Paul I. Miller School 114 for 26 years.

But students do leave. During the 2002-03 school year, the Indianapolis, Ind., school experienced a 46-percent student turnover, due in large part to families constantly having to move to find better job opportunities.

The mobility rate reflects the dire conditions surrounding School 114: many of its neighbors live in low-income housing. Because of the overwhelming poverty, every student receives a free lunch.

Yet, School 114—a 2004 *No Child Left Behind* Blue Ribbon School—proves that the concepts of community and diversity are not at opposite ends of the learning spectrum. During the 2002-03 school year, the single-story building was also home to 132 students who received special education services—30 percent of the 465 students who attended the school.

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Department of Education (ED). Rod Paige, Secretary.

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While many of these students are immersed in regular classrooms, the school has two areas set aside for severely handicapped students, who are supported by a full-time nurse.

To meet the challenges presented by its diverse student body, the school has instituted a differentiated learning curriculum. Following periods of instruction, students break into small groups to work on targeted learning opportunities.

"Gifted students may work on enrichment activities while special education students receive focused instruction," explained Sherry Webber, a second-grade teacher in her 17th year

at the school. "The small groups also provide an opportunity for us to work with students who need to catch up in a particular area."

For new students, teachers use the small group time to assess where they are in respect to School 114's curriculum. "When new students arrive, our teachers find out where they are academically and either help them catch up to our program or find ways to engage them if they are ahead," Principal Alan Stephens explained.

Teachers also use the small groups, such as the Young Authors program, to bring together students with different learning strengths and abilities.

"The Young Authors program is an opportunity for high- and low-achieving students to work together so everyone feels special," said Meek. As an example, she said a special education student who enjoys telling stories but cannot type may team up with another student who is able to use the computer. Together they write a story while a third student provides the illustrations.

The individual and small group attention is working. In fall 2004, 87 percent of School 114's third-graders passed the Indiana state exam in both English/language arts and math. These test scores, including those from the previous two years, have placed School 114 well above state and district averages.

"We have high expectations of our students, and our parents support us," noted Webber.

In return, School 114 celebrates the success of each of its students. The Honors Day ceremonies at the end of each quarter recognize students who excel in scholarship, attendance and good citizenship.

It's not uncommon, explained Webber, for students to announce they are going to be recognized in all three areas before the school year is over.

"The awards build self-esteem," she said, noting the assemblies are a big deal. "We invite the parents and community—everyone comes." In recognition of their achievements, students are given pencils, certificates or pins.

These assemblies are just one of several programs that provide opportunities for every student to be recognized. The local Kiwanis club, a leading service organization, hosts ceremonies to recognize School 114's Terrific Kids several times a year. They also support the BUGS—Bringing Up Grades—program.

With writing as a curriculum focus, the school has instituted writer-of-the-month awards for which teachers nominate students. The school throws a pizza party for everyone who is nominated, and the winning writers' names are placed on a wall display that stays up throughout the year.

For the Young Authors program, each book is bound and includes a note about the authors. An outside panel of community members spends a full day judging the submissions. Parents are invited to read the books at the school, and winning entries are displayed in the community. The books become treasured keepsakes, said Meek, who noted that one high school student recently told her that he still has the book he prepared in her classroom. "The recognition that comes with these programs motivates our students to go through the writing process," she explained.



Cindy Meek, a special education teacher who has taught at School 114 for 26 years, goes over a lesson with her student Linda. "There's a feeling of community, a sharing of ideas that makes our school so special that no one ever wants to leave," said Meek.

Photo by John Gress

"We live in a nation founded on ideals of individual freedom and compassion. Since the earliest days of the republic, Americans have embraced the virtues of hard work, charity, and community service. And each generation of Americans has recognized its responsibility to pass these values on to the next generation."

U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige, in his remarks at the launching of the USA Freedom Corps Children's Web site, Dec. 8, 2004.

Close-Up:



No Child Left Behind

Individuals with Disabilities Act

Last month, President Bush signed into law a bill revamping the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The new legislation builds on the reforms of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), including parental choice and academic results for students, while addressing issues of paperwork reduction and litigation to ensure a quality education for over six million children with disabilities.

Under NCLB, states and school districts must account for the academic progress of all students with disabilities, and new provisions released last year allow greater flexibility for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. In addition, in schools that have been identified as being in need of improvement, students with disabilities now have the same access to NCLB benefits as all other students. They are eligible to either transfer to a better performing school or receive supplemental educational services such as tutoring.

Following are the key changes in the nation's special education law:

- **Expand options for parents.** Parents, along with the local education agency, may agree to make changes to a student's individualized education program (IEP) without having to hold a formal IEP meeting. They may instead develop a written document for an amendment.
- **Prevent requiring medication for education services.** Schools cannot force parents to medicate their children as a condition of attending school, receiving an evaluation or receiving services.
- **Extend the timeline for teacher certification.** New special education teachers who teach multiple subjects exclusively to students with disabilities and who are deemed "highly qualified" in math, language arts or science will have two years after their employment date to demonstrate competency in the other core academic subjects they teach.
- **Reduce the paperwork burden on teachers.** A 15-state pilot program will allow states and school districts to offer parents the option of a multi-year IEP, not to exceed three years, as opposed to a yearly plan. Another pilot program will allow the U.S. secretary of education to waive certain paperwork requirements for up to 15 states.
- **Reduce litigation.** Prior to a due process hearing, the local education agency must hold a resolution session with parents and IEP Team members within 15 days of receiving notice of a parent's complaint. In addition, a request for a hearing must be filed within two years from the date of the alleged violation.
- **Reduce misidentification of non-disabled children.** School districts can address the problem of children being erroneously placed in special education by using a portion of their IDEA funding to provide intervention services to children who have not yet been identified as needing special education but need additional academic or behavioral support.

For more information on the new special education law, visit the Web site of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce at <http://edworkforce.house.gov/issues/108th/education/idea/idea.htm>.

Tips for Parents:



For parents of children with special needs, an individualized education program (IEP) ensures students with disabilities receive the services needed. The plan is developed at an IEP team meeting with parents and school staff. Below are suggestions to help families throughout the process:

Before the IEP team meeting:

- Consider the vision you have for your child's future as well as for the next school year.
- Request a written copy of your child's evaluation results or a meeting with school staff to discuss the evaluation before the IEP meeting. Do these results fit with what you know about your child? Is the evaluation complete and accurate?
- Consider a variety of ways to involve your child in developing his or her IEP, starting at a young age if appropriate. Self-advocacy skills are important to develop.

At the meeting:

- Use school data, your child's progress reports, and other information you have about your child to make decisions.
- You may not want to agree to a proposed IEP at the end of the meeting. Review the proposed IEP document at home. If you disagree with what is being proposed, you must notify the school as soon as possible to resolve the disagreement.

After the meeting:

- Your child's school must inform you regularly about your child's progress. You will be informed about whether your child is making progress toward meeting the annual IEP goals and whether that progress is enough to reach the goals. If your child is not making sufficient progress, a meeting should be held to review the IEP and make needed changes.
- You may request an IEP meeting at any time during the year if you believe it is important to consider changes in your child's IEP.

Source: Adapted from "Planning Your Child's Individualized Education Program (IEP): Some Suggestions to Consider," PACER Center Inc., www.pacer.org, 1-888-248-0822. Used with permission.

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**PRESORTED
FIRST CLASS**



**“When it comes to
the education of our
children ... failure is
not an option.”**

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

NEW WEB SITE! **Encouraging America's Youths to Make a Difference**



The U.S. Department of Education, along with the USA Freedom Corps and the Corporation for National and Community Service, are looking to show elementary and middle school students that no age is too young, or no task too small, to make a difference in the world. The organizations recently launched a new Web site—www.usafreedomcorpskids.gov—to help direct the passions of youths toward volunteer opportunities in their communities.

The site is organized for kids (elementary school-age), youths (middle school-age), parents and teachers. It contains ideas for volunteer service, profiles of notable persons to encourage youths to volunteer, and additional Web resources. Ideas include taking a dog from an animal shelter for a walk, setting up a lemonade stand to raise funds for a local charity, and collecting canned food to help restock the shelves of a neighborhood food bank. And to further inspire youths to volunteer their time toward a worthy cause, the site includes interactive, illustrative games and a coloring book.

For teachers and parents, the site provides information on how to start a service program and how to support a child's involvement in one, respectively.

According to the site, those completing numerous hours of volunteer service can earn the President's Volunteer Service Award. Youths 14 and younger earn the award by completing 50 or more hours of service in one year, adults 100 hours or more, and families and groups at least 200 hours.

The USA Freedom Corps is an office of the White House that was started by President Bush to help expand volunteer service around the United States.