Research Brief

Closing the Achievement Gap

Question: What strategies are successful for helping to close the achievement gap?

Summary of Findings:

The "achievement gap" is a matter of race and class. Across the U.S., a gap in academic achievement persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts. This is one of the most pressing education-policy challenges that states currently face. The student achievement gap results from a confluence of factors—some outside of and some within schools' control. Risk factors associated with poverty—unmet basic needs, high family stress levels, and limited exposure to activities that advance cognitive development and build literacy skills—contribute to poor student performance. While poverty is not unique to any particular group, it does exist in disproportionate rates among African Americans and Hispanics, and among English learners. Both the federal and state governments attempt to mitigate the impact of poverty through health, welfare, and school readiness programs.

While schools may have little influence over these factors, what goes on in schools could lessen their negative effect. For decades, policymakers, researchers, and school reformers have sought ways in which schools could address the gap. Strategies have focused on school funding, teacher quality, student interventions and motivation, school organization, management, and climate, market competition, and school accountability to the public. Between 1970 and 1988, the achievement gap between African American and white students was cut in half, and the gap separating Latinos and whites declined by one-third. That progress came to a halt around 1988, however, and since that time, the gaps have widened.

"Closing The Achievement Gap: Principles For Improving The Educational Success Of All Students" (http://www.ericdigests.org/2002-3/gap.htm) developed by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education briefly reviews the educational policies and practices whose effectiveness in closing the achievement gap has been shown. These policies and practices include the following:

State and District Role

- √   Development and implementation of education goals
- √   Development and implementation of rigorous standards
- √   Development and implementation of accountability standards
- √   Dissemination of existing researched-based instructional programs

√ Provision of human and material resources
√ Provision of opportunities for sharing information, experiences, and problem solving across schools and levels

School Organization

√ Full desegregation
√ Smaller classes
√ Equitable grouping of students

School Climate

√ Active promotion of the expectation that all students can succeed
√ Maintenance of a school climate conducive to academic productivity
√ Identification and development of every student's potential
√ Recognition of diverse cultures
√ Maintenance of a safe and orderly school

Teaching and Learning

√ Provision of increased instructional time in reading, mathematics, and other basic skills
√ Use of challenging curricula and instructional strategies
√ Provision of learning resources
√ Operation of magnet high schools and special subject-specific programs
√ Provision of supplemental individualized education supports
√ Provision of access to college-based programs
√ Application of in-depth, appropriate, and ongoing assessments

School Management

√ Recruitment and retention of experienced, well-qualified teachers
√ Recruitment and retention of high-performing administrators
√ Provision of required ongoing professional development
√ Application of state-, district-, and school-developed standards
√ Decision making based on data collection and analysis

Family Supports

√ Active encouragement of parents' high expectations
√ Encouragement of parents' participation in school events
√ Provision of education, health, and social service

http://www.educationpartnerships.org/

Community Involvement

√ Maintenance of a culture where learning and achievement are valued
√ Provision of learning opportunities at local libraries, museums, and other cultural institutions
√ Provision of coordinated services designed to support students' educational achievement and their parents' ability to foster their children's learning
√ Maintenance of active school partnership
√ Organization of leisure activities with an academic focus

Online Resources:

Essential Online Resources (if you don't go anywhere else, go here):

Closing The Achievement Gap: Principles For Improving The Educational Success Of All Students
by Wendy Schwartz, ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education Digest, Number 169, December 2001
http://www.ericdigests.org/2002-3/gap.htm

Special Collections — Web Resources
Closing the Achievement Gaps
The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL)
http://www.ncrel.org/info/rc/sc/gapweb.htm

Closing the Achievement Gaps
The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL)
http://www.ncrel.org/gap/

Closing the Achievement Gap Requires Multiple Solutions
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
http://www.nwrel.org/cnorse/infoline/may97/article5.html

Lists of Resources for Closing the Achievement Gap

Closing Achievement Gaps: A Catalog of Sample Current Research and Program Implementation Work to Ensure All Children Succeed
North Central Regional Educational Laboratory
http://goal.ncrel.org/gap/manager.asp

Narrowing the Achievement Gap: Full Bibliography
http://www.edsource.org/edu_stu_achgap_bib.cfm

The Achievement Gap (A Tutorial)
New Jersey Professional Education Port
http://www.njpep.org/tutorials/ayp/resources.html

What Motivates Underachieving Students?
Maine Center for Meaningful Engaged Learning
http://www.mcmel.org/mel.html

Achievement Gap
US DOE NCLB articles
http://www.ed.gov/nclb/accountability/achieve/edpicks.jhtml?src=ln

Coming Together to Close the Achievement Gap
A Summit County community educational program
http://www.seisummit.org/gapresources.htm

Education Commission of the States
http://www.ecs.org/html/issue.asp?issueid=194

Eliminating the Achievement Gap
Seattle Public Schools
http://www.seattleschools.org/area/eag/index.dxml

Achievement Gap Weblog
Puget Sound Educational Service District
This weblog will share resources, discussions, and information about the
Achievement Gap and ideas about how to eliminate the gap.
http://www.psesd.wednet.edu/weblogs/achievement/

**Annenberg Challenge Meeting on Closing the Achievement Gap in
Secondary Schools**
Bibliography
 http://www.annenberginstitute.org/Challenge/pubs/cj/cjv5n2.pdf

Closing the Achievement Gap Resources:
Cooperative Educational Service Agency No. 7 (Wisconsin)
http://www.cesa7.k12.wi.us/schoolimprove/assessment/closing_the_achievement_gap_reso.htm

http://www.educationpartnerships.org/