



The Education Trust

Yes We Can

Telling Truths and Dispelling Myths About Race and Education in America

September 2006



More than 50 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, most children of color in this country are still denied the education they need. The education they need to find meaningful and well-paying jobs. The education they need to thrive in college. The education they need to participate fully in this nation's economic and civic life. The education they need to join and continue the fight for a truly just society.

The litany of sad statistics about the academic achievement of our children should enrage us all:

- ❑ Nearly two-thirds of African-American fourth-graders don't read at even the basic level, according to results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).
- ❑ More than half of fourth-grade Native Americans don't have even basic reading skills.
- ❑ Half of Latino eighth-graders don't do math at the basic level.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

Across this country — every single day — children of color who are being taught to high levels are achieving at high levels. It's happening at preschools in Chicago. It's happening at schools on the Nez Perce Reservation in Idaho and in the bustling heart of Atlanta. It's happening in Newark and on Long Island and in thousands of schools in every part of the country.

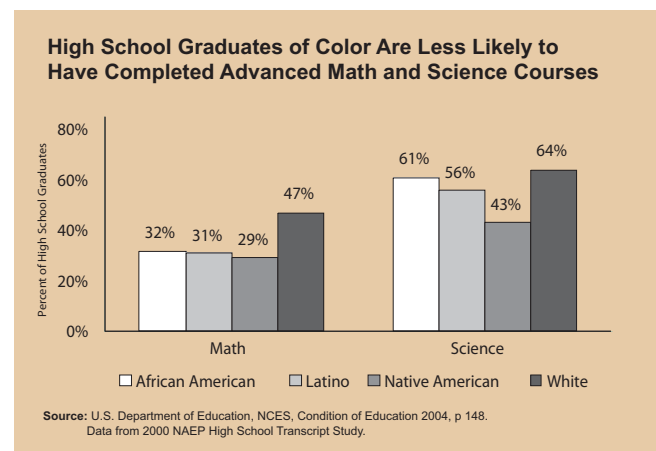
The schools and school districts that are changing the life opportunities for children of color aren't performing magic, and these high-achieving students aren't the product of "creaming schemes" that teach only the best and brightest. These schools and districts are simply engaged every day in the hard work of teaching all children to high standards. They are giving their students the tools for success: Clear goals; high expectations; rigorous coursework; extra instructional help when needed; and strong teachers who know their subject matter and how to teach it.

The evidence is clear: Given the right teaching, the right classes and the right support, African-American, Latino and Native-American children soar.

But instead of doing right by our children, our educational system is rigged to give them **less** of everything they need. Research tells

us that teacher quality is the single most important factor in student achievement — more important than many of the out-of-school factors like parental education and income that are so often blamed for low achievement. But classes at schools that serve mostly children of color are twice as likely to be taught by inexperienced teachers as classes at schools that serve mostly White students.

Research also tells us that high school students who study advanced math beyond Algebra II — classes like trigonometry and calculus — **double** their chances of earning a bachelor's degree. Yet, less than a third of Black high school graduates are exposed to advanced math in school.



The conviction that children of color can achieve at high levels is by no means intended to let the larger society off the hook for the appalling conditions under which too many of our children grow up. Of course, racism and poverty matter; they matter a lot and daily do damage to our children, their families, and their communities. This country has a moral obligation to fight racial discrimination, poor housing conditions, inadequate health care, and all the other social and economic conditions that harm our children. But as we work toward those goals, we cannot allow racism and poverty — and their effects on students — to become excuses for the educational malpractice that is taking place in too many schools.

The most pressing question for those of us concerned with the academic achievement of students of color is: How should schools respond to racism and poverty? The fact is that too many educators — including some educators of color — have simply surrendered to these forces, and in doing so are surrendering our children's futures.

The schools and school systems that are helping students of color achieve at high levels are those that have responded to racism and poverty differently. Instead of giving up, they have chosen to fight — fight hard and fight smart for the lives of children of color. And they are using assessments and standards as highly effective weapons.

Historically, African-American students have been the victims of bad tests and the inappropriate and punitive use of testing results. These practices have cost us dearly, individually and collectively. It is little wonder then that some African Americans view the academic standards movement — and the assessments it requires — with deep suspicion.

We must remain vigilant on testing issues and ensure that high-quality tests are used appropriately, but we cannot simply continue to blame the messenger when tests show dismal results for students of color. The assessments that states are now using are not what's holding our kids back.

In fact, dedicated educators and activists are using standards and assessments to shine a bright light on educational inequities and bring about real change that benefits children. The woodcut of the body-packed hull of the slave ship *Brookes* provided powerful evidence of the brutality of the Middle Passage. The evening news coverage of dogs and fire hoses unleashed on Black protestors provided powerful evidence of the brutality of the South in the 1960's. Today's assessment results provide the strongest

evidence of the wrongs being done to children of color in school.

The real culprit here is an educational system that does not prepare children of color for all the tests real life will throw at them — whether it's getting into college or getting in the door for a job interview, passing the bar exam or earning a promotion.

It's time that we — with one strong voice — reject the persistent and pernicious myth that low academic achievement is inevitable among children of color. And it's time that we demand radical change of the school systems that hurt our kids.

Dispelling myths

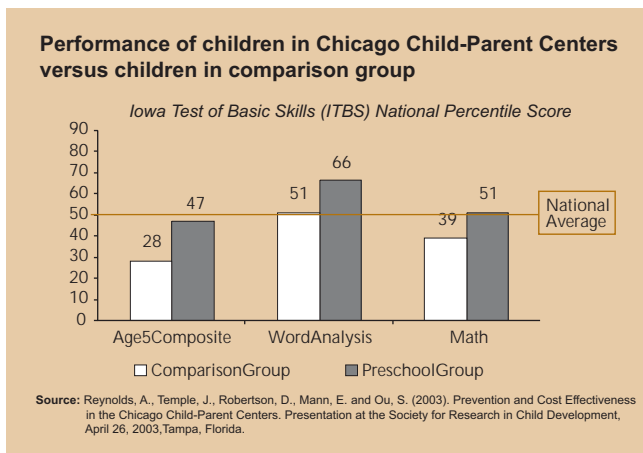
For years, the popular media have repeated the mantra that African-American parents send their children to kindergarten less ready for school than White children. But recent evidence suggests otherwise. Tapping into the most comprehensive source of early childhood data now available and controlling for socio-economic status as measured by parental education, household income, birth weight and the like, researchers have found that African-American students enter kindergarten with *slightly better* reading skills than their White peers.

This analysis, by Roland Fryer and Steven Levitt, economists at Harvard and the University of Chicago, respectively, contrasts sharply with decades of research, analyses, and received wisdom. Their findings indicate that whatever test-score gaps exist at school entry are more a function of *class than race*.

The popular image of African-American children as so “damaged” by their early experiences as to be “hard to educate” turns out to be, like so many stereotypes about Black America, inaccurate.

There's even more good news on the early childhood front.

Research on the Chicago Child-Parent Centers shows that low-income minority children thrive in high-quality pre-kindergarten programs. Children participating in the Chicago program not only have higher academic skills than low-income children of color who did not attend the schools, but the youngsters in the program also scored at the same level or **better** than the national average in mathematics and word analysis.



At every grade level, evidence abounds that when we teach children of color to high levels, they can and **do** achieve at high levels.

At Lapwai Elementary School in northern Idaho—where almost all students are members of the Nez Perce tribe and most come from low-income families—95 percent of fourth-graders met state reading and math standards in 2005. These proficiency rates are higher than those in the state overall.

At Frankford Elementary School in Frankford, Delaware, 34 percent of students are Latino, 29 percent are African American, and three-fourths of the students are low-income. Yet all third- and fifth-graders met or exceeded state standard in reading in 2005, and about nine out of 10 met or exceeded state standards in math.

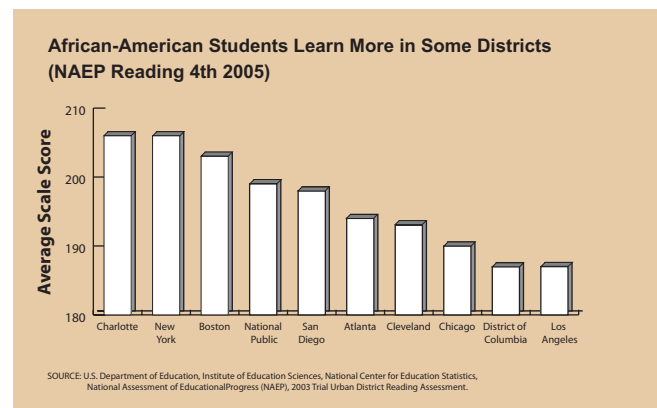
At Elmont Memorial Junior-Senior High School in Elmont, New York, about three-

quarters of the students are Black. The school was recently recognized by The College Board as the high school that gets more African-American students taking and passing (getting a score of 3 or higher) in AP World History than any other school in the country (23 last year).

These are just a few images of schools that have achieved success for their students by doing right despite their color and income. These schools make it clear that it is not so much the kids, their families, and their communities that determine school outcomes, but rather school policy and practice.

More evidence of institutional responsibility for the achievement of students of color can be found in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results. Reading results from NAEP, for instance, show us that African-American fourth-graders in New York City perform significantly better than African-American fourth-graders in Los Angeles.

We also see dramatic differences when we compare states. Some states are making far more progress than others. In 2000, 70 percent of African-American eighth-graders in both South Carolina and Alabama performed below the basic level in math on the NAEP. Five years later, math achievement for African-American eighth-graders in



Alabama was unchanged. But South Carolina made big strides. By 2005, 50 percent of African-American students performed at or above the basic level in eighth-grade math. While South Carolina still has much room for improvement, these figures demonstrate that significant improvement in student achievement is possible.

These wide differences in NAEP scores — from district to district and state to state — indicate clearly that what schools and school systems do, matters. The excuses about the effects of racism and poverty simply don't hold up against data like this. In the face of this data, we must look inside the schools and school systems — at instructional policy and practice — not outside of them, in order to explain the achievement gap.

Some colleges and universities also are dispelling myths about low achievement.

At Florida State University, for example, a large public university in Tallahassee, White students and students of color graduate at nearly the same rate. A similar story is playing out at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas. The school has a student body that is 68 percent Latino and a graduation rate for Latino students that is higher than that of White students.

Ugly patterns persist

Despite all the proof we have that children of color can excel at all levels, troubling patterns still persist.

Remember the good news about preschoolers earlier in this report — evidence that, when researchers control for class, Black kids enter kindergarten with slightly better reading skills than their White peers? The same research offers a chilling picture of what happens as they move through school. A few

Spotlight on Centennial Place

African-American students breeze past state standards

Centennial Place Elementary School is in the heart of Atlanta. Almost all the students are African American, and more than 60 percent of the students meet the criteria for free or reduced-price meals. Two nearby homeless shelters provide a constant stream of new children, many of whom have been badly served by other schools.

And yet all but a very small handful of children met state standards in the 2004–2005 school year. But that isn't what the school is aiming for. "It's just not enough to meet state standards," says Principal Cynthia Kuhlman. She wants all her children to exceed standards. Last year almost half did just that in reading, putting it in the top 2 percent of all Georgia schools in reading performance.

Centennial Place just blows past targets for "adequately yearly progress" set out in the federal No Child Left Behind law. The school's principal hardly even thinks about them. She thinks more about the superintendent-set targets which call for no child to fall below state standards. "But we think we will meet that," Kuhlman says.

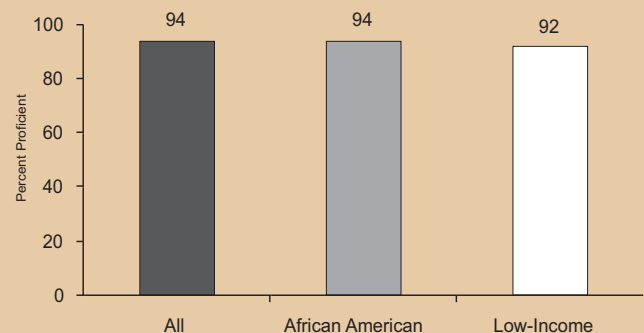
"People think we have something extra that other schools don't have," she says. "But we have the same funding every other school gets."

Although Centennial Place spends some time each year helping students prepare to take state and nationally normed tests, it doesn't focus relentlessly on test preparation.

"The best way to do well on the test is to teach the standards in an exciting way," Kuhlman says. Children learn through doing projects at Centennial Place. One project was to organize a "trip to Africa," where one of the classrooms was set up as an airplane, staffed by a parent who is a flight attendant, and "traveled" to Africa where they went on a safari. Another project was to build a "tundra" out of cake, ice cream and other foodstuffs that then got eaten at a big party.

Centennial Place demonstrates that a school that is organized for success and teaches to high levels does not have to sacrifice creativity and imagination.

High Reading Achievement for African-American and Low-Income Students at Centennial Place in Atlanta



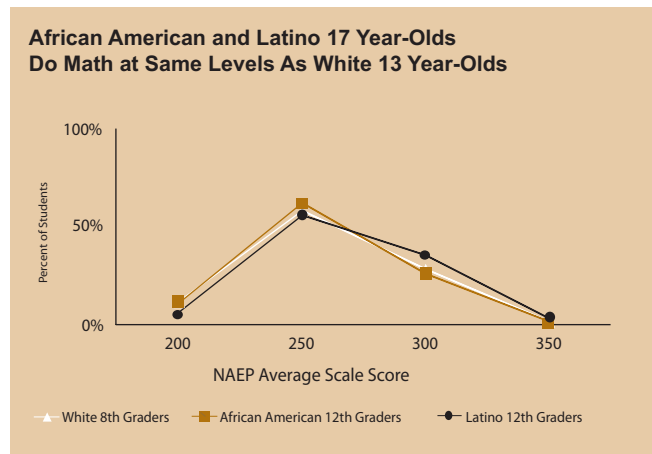
Source: Georgia Department of Education, <http://www.doe.k12.ga.us>

years later, a gap has opened, and it's big. By the third-grade, African-American children have only just mastered the basic reading skills that White students learned at the end of the first-grade.

Simply put, the longer children of color stay in school, the further behind they fall.

At the fourth-grade level, more than eight in 10 Black and Latino students are not reading at the proficient level on the NAEP, compared with roughly six in 10 White students. At eighth-grade, 91 percent of African-American and 87 percent of Latino students are not proficient in math.

And by the time Latino and African-American students hit the age of 17, they have been taught to the same level as 13-year-old White students. Roughly half of Black, Latino and Native American students don't even make it out of high school in four years.

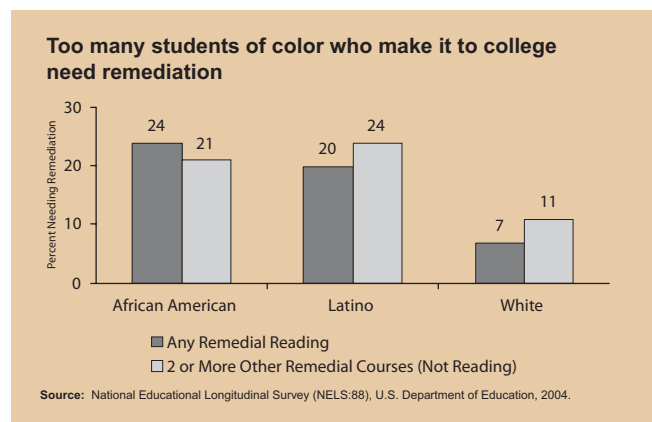


Not surprisingly, these patterns play out in college, too.

Many of our students who do graduate from high school simply have not been prepared for the world that awaits them. Just consider this: Nearly 25 percent of African Americans who make it to college need remedial reading help, compared to 7 percent of White students.

Research by Clifford Adelman at the U.S. Department of Education shows us that students who take any remedial courses in college are much more likely not to graduate than students who don't need any remedial coursework.

Our research into institutional graduation rates shows that just four in 10 African-American students who started as first-time, full-time freshmen in 1998 earned a bachelor's degree within six years, compared to six in 10 White students.



If we could but cut that gap in half, the number of Black college graduates would grow by at least 10,000 per year. Over a decade, another 100,000 African-Americans could earn degrees and access to opportunity now shut off to them. And if we actually closed the gap, the country could gain another 200,000 Black college graduates over 10 years.

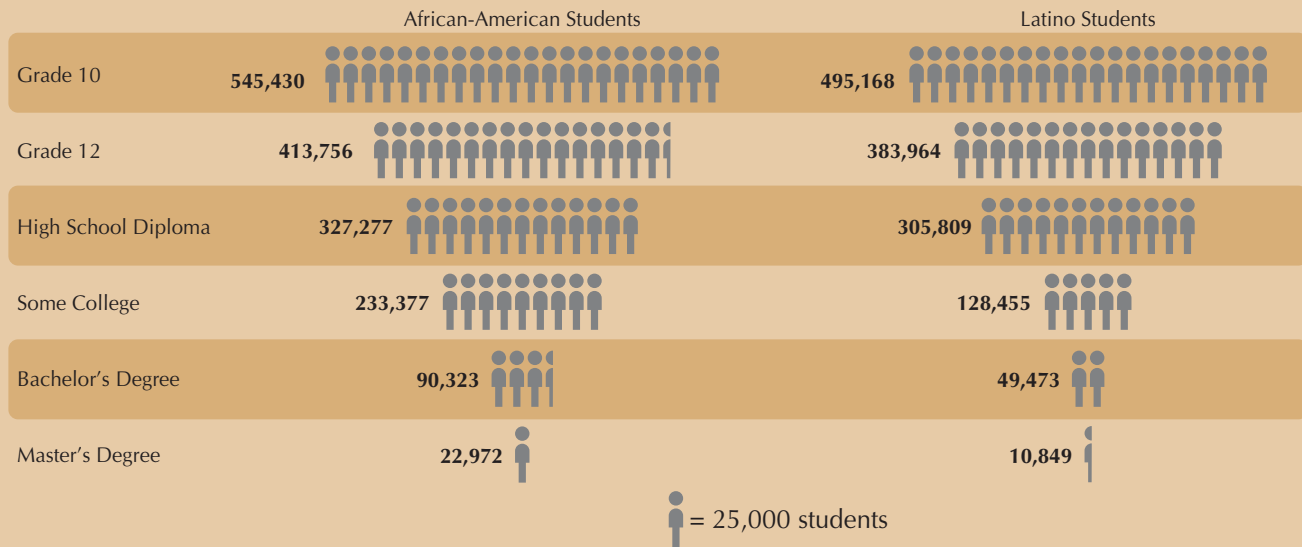
Opportunity gaps for children of color

If we are going to close gaps in achievement, we must close gaps in opportunity. Unfortunately, our public educational system gives children of color less of everything that makes a difference.

Lower-quality preschool: African-American children participate in center-based

Losing Our Children...

Roughly one million African-American and Latino students enter 10th grade in a given year, but their numbers drop off dramatically as they move through the educational system. The squandered potential behind these numbers is immeasurable.



Note: These are *estimates* of the numbers of students who make it to key points in the educational system. The numbers of students in the 'Some College,' 'Bachelor's Degree,' and 'Master's Degree' categories were calculated by applying the rate at which 25- to 29-year-olds made it to these points in 2001 to the number of first-graders in 1992.

child care and pre-kindergarten programs at higher rates than do White children. But, despite the evidence that teacher quality is a key factor in preschool quality, research shows that most adults who work in these centers have too little education to prepare our children for school. Research from the Keystone Research Center in Pennsylvania indicates the problem of teachers with too little education is growing at a faster rate in central city pre-kindergarten programs that are more likely to serve low-income children and children of color than in other programs.

Less money: Our research shows that school districts that educate the greatest number of minority kids consistently receive less state and local money to educate them than the districts serving the fewest number of minority students — roughly \$614 less per pupil per year in 2003.

Less qualified, less experienced teachers: Researchers like Ronald Ferguson at Harvard University have clearly demonstrated the huge impact that teacher

quality has on student outcomes. If students are going to learn to high levels, their teachers need to know their subjects and how to teach them. But we consistently give children of color the least experienced and lowest-scoring teachers. Classes in high schools and middle schools that enroll high percentages of students of color are more likely to be taught by teachers who lack even a minor in the subject they are teaching than classes in schools with few children of color.

In his long academic career, Edmund Gordon, the head of the Institute for Urban and Minority Education, has eloquently described the attributes of and strategies used by teachers who are effective in helping African-American students learn at high levels. And while it is certainly true that there are some deeply dedicated and highly effective teachers working in schools serving high percentages of students of color — the fact is that these schools, and most importantly, our children — don't get their fair share of strong teachers.

Less challenging coursework: Despite the fact that the skills needed for college and work are virtually the same, only 25 percent of Black and 22 percent of Latino high school graduates were enrolled in the college-preparatory track at their high school. Even when we give students courses with the right-sounding names like “Algebra II” or “Honors English,” too many children of color are not getting the content promised. A New Orleans student who earned an “A” in Algebra II and was named valedictorian of her graduating class learned that the hard way when she could not pass a high-school exit exam that measures 10th-grade level math skills. (See sidebar)

Or look at the assignments at the top of the next page. Which assignment better prepared students for rigorous high school work?

They both are seventh-grade English writing assignments from two schools in California with very different student demographics. Students at the predominantly White school got the writing assignment. At the predominantly African-American and Latino school, students got the worksheet.

Given the sort of educational malpractice that our students endure, is it any wonder that achievement gaps have persisted for generations in this country? Our children bear the costs of these opportunity gaps for their entire lives. Adults with only a high school degree are twice as likely to be unemployed as those with a college degree. Young adults with a bachelor’s degree earn on average more than \$15,000 more each year than those with only high school diplomas.

Louisiana Student Learns Hard Lesson

Bridget seemed on a straight course for success back in 2003. She earned mostly A’s and B’s during her career at New Orleans’ Alcee Fortier Senior High School. She balanced a load of extra-curricular activities that included basketball and track. And as her graduation neared, she was named class valedictorian and asked to deliver the year’s commencement speech.

But her graduation plans came to a halt only days before what should have been one of the proudest moments of her young life.

Despite having earned an A in Algebra II, Bridget had failed — for the fifth time — the math portion of the Louisiana Graduate Exit Exam, a test that experts say measures 10th-grade level work. Not only was she stripped of her honor as valedictorian, but she wouldn’t walk across the stage with her classmates to receive her high school diploma, either.

Bridget’s story, chronicled over several months in The New Orleans Times-Picayune, illustrates what many of us in education know all too well: Too many students, particularly low-income students and students of color, are being cheated out of a decent education by their schools.

After doing everything she thought she was supposed to do, Bridget fell victim to a system that not only failed to equip her with the skills needed for college-level work, but wasn’t honest with her about it.

“I really thought I’d passed,” the then 18-year-old told the newspaper. “And when they told me I was valedictorian, I thought that meant I’d definitely passed.”

She wasn’t alone. Bridget was one of at least 30 Fortier students who school officials say had the grades to graduate that year, but did not pass the exit exam, the newspaper reported.

“This story puts a face on the squandered opportunities, the way we’re robbing children of an education,” Leslie Jacobs, a member of the state school board, told the Times-Picayune. “This school had no expectations of this student.”

Some in the community quickly blamed the graduation test itself for Bridget’s plight. But there was at least one other indicator that Bridget had not been taught to high levels.

A Times-Picayune editorial disclosed that Bridget had earned a composite score of just 11 points out of a possible 36 on the ACT college-admissions exam. Most Louisiana universities require an ACT score of at least 20 for admission. And ACT research shows that students who earn a composite score of 17 are at best only marginally prepared to perform at the college level.

Bridget’s heartbreaking tale played out on the pages of her hometown’s largest newspaper. Despite all the attention, she demonstrated enormous tenacity and will to succeed.

In December 2003, seven months after she was supposed to graduate, the media in New Orleans heralded the news: Bridget had passed the math test by one point.

It was her seventh try.

Two Writing Assignments; Two Sets of Expectations

○ Essay on Anne Frank

Your essay will consist of an opening paragraph which introduces the title, author and general background of the novel.

Your thesis will state specifically what Annes overall personality is, and what general psychological and intellectual changes she exhibits over the course of the book.

You might organize your essay by grouping psychological and intellectual changes OR you might choose 3 or 4 characteristics (like friendliness, patience, optimism, self doubt) and show how she changes in this area.

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The "Me" Page	
My name:	
Three words which describe me best:	
Three words others would use to describe me:	
My best feature:	
A neat expression:	
My best friend:	
My favorite food:	
A chore I hate:	
Something I wish would happen at my home:	
My hero:	
My favorite sport:	
A car I want:	
The best thing about my school:	
My biggest secret:	
A television character I act like:	
My worst fear:	
A contest I want to win:	
My favorite movie star:	
My hearthrob:	
A political office I would like to hold:	
Something I want to buy:	
My chosen career:	
My favorite beverage:	
A place I want to visit:	
A school subject I adore:	
My favorite book:	
A nightmare I have:	
Someone I would like to have as a relative:	
A movie I would like to be the star in:	
Something I would like to do for my family:	
A teacher I respect:	
What I would do if I were in Hollywood:	
A friend I would like to have:	
What I would do to change our world:	
My dream for America:	

○

Standards and assessments improve outcomes

Opposition to testing among communities of color is understandable, given the ways assessments have been misused over the years. But standards and assessments — when those assessment results are broken down by race and ethnicity — offer the best evidence of the effects of educational malpractice on children of color. And such evidence can be forged into effective advocacy efforts.

Before we had *explicit* written state standards, *implicit* learning standards pervaded our schools. And they were

double standards, rooted in racism and classism and played out in every aspect

of education — from teachers’ attitudes and practices in the classroom to funding decisions in state capitals.

While some of us may wistfully recall pre-*Brown* classrooms where African-American teachers pushed, prodded and nurtured our students, the truth is that those schools were, for the most part, desperately under-resourced and — despite the best efforts of dedicated Black teachers — could not compete with what White schools could offer their students. The broadest truth about education and race in America — before and after *Brown* — is that much has been expected of, and given to, affluent White children while little has been expected of and given to low-income students and students of color.

Explicit written standards — a single set of statewide standards for *all* students measured

by common statewide assessments — we believe, are the key to ending the educational double standards that have diminished the opportunities and aspirations of African-American students for generations.

Across this nation, educators have seized on standards and assessments to expand opportunities for our children.

Expectation is excellence In NY high school

Elmont Memorial Junior-Senior High School in Elmont, New York, is a big, intimidating brick building housing almost 2,000 students in seventh through 12th grades. About three-quarters of the students are Black, most of whom are African Americans but a sizable minority of whom are recent immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa; 11 percent are Hispanic; and 11 percent Asian, Pacific Islander, or American Indian. About 16 percent of the students qualify for free lunch, and another 8 percent qualify for reduced-price lunch, a measure of poverty. Between 11 and 20 percent of the students qualify for public assistance.

Unlike many other schools New York State Education Department identifies as “similar,” it posts very high achievement, with very small achievement gaps among groups of students. It also holds onto its students in much higher proportions than schools with similar demographics — its senior class is 83 percent the size of its freshman class — and 100 percent of its seniors graduate, 97 percent of whom go on to college.

“But we’re not aiming our students to go to college,” says Elmont’s former principal, Al Harper. “We’re aiming higher than that — we’re aiming them at graduating college.”

Partly for that reason, Elmont encourages students to take Advanced Placement classes and tests. In fact, Elmont was recently

recognized by The College Board as the high school that gets more African-American students taking and passing (getting a score of 3 or higher) in AP World History than any other school in the country (23 last year).

“We push our kids to excel in all their classes,” said Alicia Calabrese, chair of the English department. “If I hear that a student is arriving at gym unprepared, or isn’t doing well in art, I’ll ask him about that.”

Former Principal Harper dismisses all talk of the difficulties of getting poor children to meet high standards. “Because a child is poor doesn’t mean he can’t learn. Because a child lives in the projects doesn’t mean he can’t learn. If there are gaps, we as a society must fill those gaps.”

Data drive better teaching in North Philadelphia

In North Philadelphia, we find M. Hall Stanton Elementary School, where all the students are African American, and 87 percent qualify for free- or reduced-price lunches. It is surrounded by block after block of urban devastation — burned-out and boarded-up row houses and vacant lots. Children walk past crack houses to get to school.

And yet, in the 2003-2004 school year, more than 70 percent of these students met the state’s grade-level reading standards. The school’s reading scores were so high that the district retested the students to ensure that there had been no mistakes or chicanery. There hadn’t been and this high performance continues. Stanton students are learning — despite crushing poverty and shop-worn stereotypes.

Part of Stanton’s success can be attributed to a new city-wide reading curriculum, but most of the credit goes to the principal and teachers who have used assessment data to

make the curriculum work for the students.

The “assessment wall” of the staff meeting room is covered with Post-It notes, each note representing a child, color-coded by teacher and arranged by reading level so that the principal and all the school’s teachers have an instant read on how the school is doing as a whole and on the progress of each of its 527 children. This informal, but highly informative and visible use of assessment data allows Stanton’s educators to spot and quickly address school-wide, classroom level, and individual reading problems. Short in-the-classroom videos are made of any child who, according to the wall chart, is beginning to struggle with reading. These videos, along with assessment data, are used during a meeting including the child’s teacher, the principal, and the child’s parents to develop an immediate intervention program for the student. A follow-up meeting, again including parents, is held within 30 days to evaluate progress and determine next steps.

These efforts are paying off in higher achievement for most of the school’s students — children most people thought just couldn’t succeed.

Data prove powerful

Arming themselves with the data that assessments give us, people around the country are doing battle on behalf of our children — from states that unfairly fund schools to suburban schools and districts that, for years, hid the under-achievement of African-American and Latino students who attended their schools.

Take just three examples: Fairfax County, VA, Palm Beach County, FL, and the state of New York.

Fairfax County in northern Virginia is one of the wealthier school districts in the country.

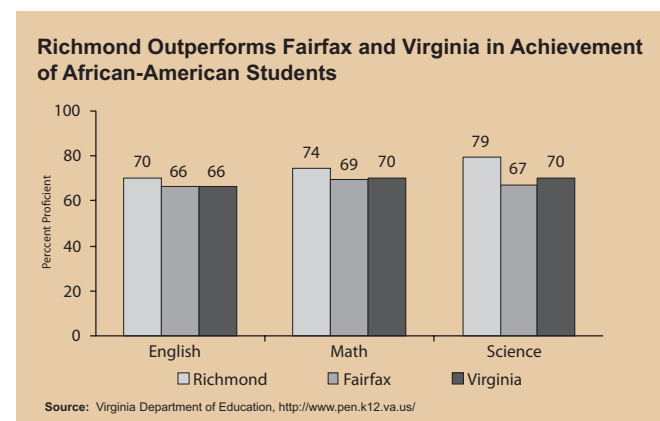
Its scores on Virginia’s Standard of Learning (SOL) tests are often touted as among the highest in the state; and its students, on the whole, passed English, mathematics and science exams at higher rates than did students in other parts of the state.

Fairfax was quite content with that reputation.

But when the SOL pass-rates of African-American students in the county are compared to those of other Black students in the state, the county loses some of its luster. Statewide, African-American students are outperforming African-American students in Fairfax.

In fact, despite Fairfax’s wealth and reputation, a number of poorer, more heavily African-American school districts in Virginia are achieving higher African-American SOL pass rates than is Fairfax. Black students in the city of Richmond are doing better in science. African-American students are doing better in English in Henrico County. And they are doing better in math in Hampton City.

How do we know this? An enterprising Fairfax County parent used the data to spark a *Washington Post* editorial. And that spurred change. Today, the Fairfax superintendent and school board are working to develop strategies to boost African-American achievement in their county.



Among the actions taken: a field trip of Fairfax educators to Richmond to learn what Richmond was doing right.

Without statewide standards and assessment results broken down by race, the public, parents, and educators themselves in Virginia would still be in the dark about these disparities in achievement.

Data spur action in Florida

In West Palm Beach, FL, the test-score data mobilized a group of parents to improve results for Black students. One of them even got elected to the school board and relentlessly uses assessment results to demand better – better teachers, better principals, and better instructional support – for children of color.

Florida was one of the early states to judge school performance by student achievement on the state test. The first school-by-school release of test-score data created a firestorm in the Palm Beach County community. The results for African-American students were dismal. Embarrassed and infuriated, The Coalition for Black Student Achievement held a series of community meetings, which focused on understanding the achievement data and the causes for the under-achievement among African-American children.

Raising these and other similar questions led the group to focus on what was going on in the schools: Who was teaching their children? What was the rigor of the curriculum?

While many people focused on the test as the problem, Dr. Debra Robinson, the first chairwoman of The Coalition for Black Student Achievement and now a school board member, focused on pushing the school administrators, teachers, and students to

improve. Using the test data as a battering ram, Robinson presses the board to ensure that struggling students get the most competent and experienced teachers and principals.

The test results show her that she cannot give up the fight. Just 10 percent of Black 10th graders in Palm Beach read at the proficient level in 2004. Robinson, a physician who speaks her mind frankly, said the scores have caused her “brain damage.” She reports that the 2005 results are not much better: Only 13 percent of African-American high school sophomores met state standards in reading

“They are on the brink of being in the real world,” she said. “But they can’t even read the manual to fix my air-conditioner.”

Academic standards as a weapon for equity

In 1993, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) sued the state of New York, challenging the constitutionality of the state’s system of funding public schools. CFE, a nonprofit coalition of parent organizations, community school boards, concerned citizens, and advocates, sued on behalf of the children of New York City, who had for years received thousands of dollars less in per-student school funding than other students across the state.

After years of litigation, the case finally made its way to the state’s highest court. In 2003 that court ordered the state to reform its funding system in a way that provides all children with enough resources for a sound, basic education. While the state has not yet adopted a solution that meets the court mandate, current estimates suggest that it may involve more than \$5 billion per year in additional resources for the students – overwhelmingly low-income and students

of color — of New York City.

Academic standards lie at the heart of CFE's success. From the beginning, they argued that if the state was going to require all students to meet common standards of learning, then it also had an obligation to provide all schools with enough money to meet those goals. CFE used evidence from standardized test scores to prove that most New York City schoolchildren were falling far short of the standards — and that their schools received less money than others around the state despite having a *higher* percentage of low-income students.

In demanding more from students, teachers, and schools, states have created additional obligations for themselves. Standards have created a new legal foundation for advocates to use in forcing states to finally provide students of color with the education they need and deserve.

In the end, the data from these assessments give us countless examples, both encouraging and discouraging of what schools are doing for, to, and with our children. But there are too few examples of adults taking up this data and wielding it as a weapon on behalf of our children.

We must have the courage to change these patterns. Yes, low achievement among children of color is at a crisis level in this country. But schools, communities, even entire states prove every day that our children can and do achieve at high levels if we but use the tools for change at our disposal.

What will it take for us to wake up and challenge the inequities our children confront each day in too many schools in this country? When will we finally teach all children of color to their full potential and close these shameful achievement gaps once and for all?

Resources

More information about some of the research cited in this report:

“The Black-White Test Score Gap Through Third Grade,” an analysis of The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten Cohort by Roland Fryer, Jr. of Harvard University and Steven Levitt of the University of Chicago

http://post.economics.harvard.edu/faculty/fryer/papers/fryer_levitt_ecls2.pdf

“One Step From the Finish Line: Higher College Graduation Rates Are Within Our Reach,” and “Choosing To Improve: Voices From Colleges and Universities With Better Graduation Rates,” both by Kevin Carey of The Education Trust, highlight the work of colleges that are improving graduation rates and closing achievement gaps. The papers, along with College Results Online, an interactive Web tool that allows users to learn more about graduation rates at any four-year college and university in the country – can be found at www.collegeresults.org

“The Funding Gap 2005: Low-Income and Minority Students Shortchanged by Most States,”

<http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/31D276EF-72E1-458A-8C71-E3D262A4C91E/0/FundingGap2005.pdf>

“The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion from High School Through College,” by Clifford Adelman of the U.S. Department of Education, examines what contributes most to long-term bachelor’s degree completion.

“All Talk, No Action: Putting an End to Out-of-Field Teaching,” by Craig Jerald of The Education Trust with data analysis by Richard Ingersoll, of the University of Pennsylvania. This report examines out-of-field teaching and its prevalence in schools that serve children of color and those from low-income families.

<http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/8DE64524-592E-4C83-A13A-6B1DF1CF8D3E/0/AllTalk.pdf>

Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress can be found at

<http://www.nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>

“Who Graduates? Who Doesn’t? A Statistical Portrait of Public High School Graduation, Class of 2001,” by Christopher Swanson of The Urban Institute can be found at

<http://www.urban.org/Template.cfm?NavMenuID=24&template=/TaggedContent/ViewPublication.cfm&PublicationID=8742>

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About The Education Trust

The Education Trust, Inc. was created to promote high academic achievement for all students, at all levels—pre-kindergarten through college. While we know that all schools and colleges could better serve their students, our work focuses on the schools and colleges most often left behind in plans to improve education: those serving African American, Latino, Native American and low-income students.

The Education Trust works side-by-side with policy makers, parents, education professionals, community and business leaders—in cities and towns across the country—who are trying to transform their schools and colleges into institutions that genuinely serve all students. We also bring lessons learned in local communities back to Washington to help inform national policy debates.

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