Windows of Opportunity

State Strategies to Close Educational Gaps and Raise Achievement Levels for All Students

The Report of the NASBE Study Group on Closing the Achievement Gap

October 2004

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In January 2004, the National Association of State Boards of Education initiated its Study Group on Closing the Achievement Gap: State Strategies that Work. While many individual states and school districts have taken similar action, this committee, composed of state board of education members and others involved in school improvement representing 22 states, hoped to take a systems approach to addressing this problem. The Study Group intended to learn not only from national experts and research, but from the experiences of the states and our individual members who have been at this work before us. Obviously, despite all the attention it has garnered, the differences in achievement among various groups of students remain a huge problem at many levels. But the work ahead was not so much to figure out what must happen in classrooms and school buildings to close achievement gaps. This has been well documented, and it is happening in a number of places, even with students from the most challenging circumstances. Rather, the task was to understand and make recommendations about how states can bring these classroom and school-based reforms to scale so that students and schools everywhere will be successful.

After looking at the data and the enormity of the task ahead, the Study Group needed to begin by answering several questions that would help define its approach. First, the Study Group members needed to identify just which of the gaps we were talking about: The African-American-white gap? The rich-poor gap? English language learners versus native English speakers? To make the issue more complex, there are gaps in inputs (teacher quality, funding, leadership, facilities) as well as gaps in outcomes (achievement, graduation rates). All this led the Study Group, as befits a national organization whose members are responsible for the education of all students in their states, to take a broad view of the problem: that is, the most significant achievement gap is the one that exists between the high level of academic proficiency we believe all students are capable of reaching and, on the other hand, the lower levels of achievement at which far too many students are now performing.

This is not to dismiss the importance of other gaps. The gaps we see in national averages have far-reaching implications for our society. But from the perspective of state boards of education, the overarching mission is to build an education system that drives improvement at all levels—from the state department of education to the classroom.

A second underlying question the Study Group needed to answer was how expansively to think about the causes and solutions of the problem. Many politicians, educators, and researchers believe that closing the achievement gap is as much (or more) a societal problem as it is a school problem, involving cultures of poverty and other social concerns. While this may be true (and indeed, many educators and social scientists argue persuasively that achievement gaps will never be fully closed until the nation more successfully addresses a whole range of social problems), the Study Group members held that there is still a great deal that education systems can and must do—and that education is where the Group should focus its attention.

Finally, the Study Group wanted to define what is at stake as educators address the achievement gap. In many ways, this is not a new crisis, and the core concerns have been with us for more than a quarter of a century: a changing world has placed new demands on citizens and on the schools that educate them—demands that require all students to reach higher levels of academic proficiency. That the issues are not new
does not lessen the urgency with which we must address them, however. To the contrary, it means our window for reform may be narrowing. The Study Group defined the importance of closing the achievement gap in the following ways:

i) It is a moral imperative—as Education Secretary Rod Paige and others have said, a high-quality education is a civil right;

ii) It is imperative for the health of our democracy—we need a highly educated citizenry that can understand public issues as they become more complex and to ensure that we do not become a society of haves and have-nots; and

iii) It is an economic imperative in order to maintain the United States’ place in the world economy.

But the Study Group did not see these imperatives as just a crisis scenario. Rather, it also saw the issue as an historic opportunity, given that a confluence of educational advances—ranging from new research on best practices and the evolution of more robust data systems to a growing consensus on the importance of high standards—has now made the reality of educating all children in the country to high levels of achievement a real possibility.

Indeed, throughout the meetings and discussions, the Study Group members remained confident that America has the means and the knowledge to close the achievement gap. What we have been lacking is the will. Principals and teachers are frequently and properly reminded that they must not use the disadvantaging social conditions many students grow up in as a justification for poor performance. But policymakers, administrators, and citizens must recognize that such admonitions apply to themselves as well in terms of maintaining focus and support for a full-out effort to bring all students to high standards.

“...The Study Group is confident that America has the means and the knowledge to close the achievement gap. What we have been lacking is the will. Principals and teachers are frequently and properly reminded that they must not use the disadvantaging social conditions many students grow up in as a justification for poor performance. But policymakers, administrators, and citizens must recognize that such admonitions apply to themselves as well in terms of maintaining focus and support for a full-out effort to bring all students to high standards.”
Today, as states, districts, and schools move forward in fulfilling the requirements and the vision of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), this nation is being confronted more explicitly than ever by the wide gaps in academic achievement that exist between successful students (preponderantly middle and upper income whites and Asians) and those students who are far from achieving to their potential (generally low-income students of every race and ethnic group, students in special education, and students attending low-performing schools). And while large numbers of students from all backgrounds can be found in the under-achieving groups, the situation for minorities, particularly African-Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans, is especially alarming. All too frequently these students carry multiple burdens, as they are stuck in poverty, stuck in special education, and stuck in low-performing schools.

But performance gaps don’t just exist in terms of test scores. There are also significant gaps among groups of students in terms of dropout rates, placement in advanced classes, who gets good teachers, and who goes to college.

At the same time, other gaps appear when it comes to system performance. In this case, states themselves can differ markedly not only in terms of student achievement, but in terms of the financial and other support they offer their neediest districts. And significant gaps in performance exist between school districts and between individual schools, even when they are provided with equal resources and serve families and students with roughly the same characteristics.

All of these gaps were considered by NASBE’s Study Group on C losing the Achievement Gap when it began its deliberations in January 2004, charged with recommending ways states can successfully and on a broad scale address this issue. Below are some of the numbers that gave concrete meaning to the Study Group’s discussions. It’s true that by now many educators are all too familiar with the achievement data. But it is helpful to reiterate some of the numbers or put them in a new light, because the statistics are indeed discouraging—and yet there are also positive signs.

A. Achievement Gaps by the Numbers

It is frequently noted that achievement gaps among different racial and ethnic groups, as measured by results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), narrowed somewhat in the 1970s and 1980s, only to stagnate or even widen during the 1990s. How significant are these gaps today? Following are results from recent NAEP exams and other sources that portray a stark picture of education gaps in America today.

| Percentage of 4th and 8th graders scoring below basic in reading (2003) |
|-----------------|-----|-----|
| White           | 26  | 18  |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 31  | 22  |
| African-American | 61  | 47  |
| Latino         | 57  | 46  |
| Native American | 53  | 41  |

We should not lose sight of what these numbers mean: well over half of all African-American, Latino, and Native American 4th graders are below basic in reading, compared with about a quarter of white
Achievement gaps begin early

There is no doubt that gaps, both in terms of opportunity to learn and achievement, show up very early, well before children get to school. As demographer Harold Hodgkinson concludes in his 2003 report, Leaving Too Many Children Behind,

Long before children knock on the kindergarten door—during the crucial period from birth to age five when humans learn more than during any other five-year period—forces have already been put in place that encourage some children to “shine” and fulfill their potential in school and life while other forces stunt the growth and development of children who have just as much potential. The cost to the nation in terms of talent unfulfilled and lives of promise wasted is enormous.

It is also clear that most of the negative “forces” on children are related to poverty and the educational attainment of parents. Following are some of the census and achievement data that flesh out these early gaps.

- In 2000, about 17 percent of all children in the United States lived in poverty, up from 15 percent in 1971. This is higher than for any other industrialized country.
- In 1999, about one-third of all births were to single mothers; by race/ethnicity, 26 percent of white births were to single mothers, 68 percent of African-American, 42 percent of Hispanic, 58 percent of Native American, and 5 percent of Asian. Statistically, children raised by single parents are two to three times more likely to live in poverty than those raised by both parents.
- Head Start rarely manages to reach even half of those children who are eligible to attend.
- Math and reading achievement data show that even at the beginning of kindergarten, children from the lowest socio-economic status (SES) quintile are already substantially behind their better-off peers. For this group, the average

| Size of the gap in average 4th grade reading scores for various groups (2003) |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| White 228.6 | African-American 197.9 | Gap = 30.6 |
| White 228.6 | Latino 200.5 | Gap = 28.1 |
| Not Poor 229.4 | Poor 201.3 | Gap = 28.1 |

What is striking about these data is that the gap between poor and not poor students (using eligibility for free or reduced lunch as the qualifier for being “poor”) is nearly identical to the gaps between other groups. The same is true in terms of the percentage of poor students scoring below basic. For example, nationally 56 percent of poor students scored below basic on the 2003 4th grade reading exam and 53 percent of poor students scored below basic on the 2003 8th grade math exam, compared with 25 percent and 22 percent respectively for students who are not poor. Poor students comprise every racial and ethnic group, but the majority of poor students are white. Indeed, in a number of states that have small minority populations, the vast majority of poor students are white—and yet the poor versus non-poor achievement gaps are still very large. So while African-Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans are disproportionately affected by poverty, policymakers seeking to improve the achievement of all students should not think only in terms of minorities.

Comparing 8th grade white achievement with 12th grade African-American and Latino achievement

Several researchers have made the following disturbing observation based on NAEP scores: achievement levels for 12th grade African-American and Latino students basically mirror 8th grade white achievement levels. We can tell this because NAEP 4th, 8th, and 12th grade exams are all scored on the same scale. For these groups, there are serious implications for finishing high school, getting a job, and getting into and being successful in higher education.
cognitive score of children in the highest SES group are 60 percent higher than the scores of the lowest SES group.\textsuperscript{10}

- It is estimated that preschool children from literacy-rich families come to school having been read to for 1,000 to 2,000 hours, while those from literacy poor families have been read to for 25 or fewer hours.\textsuperscript{11} This can translate into a developmental gap in prereading skills of almost six months by age five.\textsuperscript{12}

- A study of California children found that almost 90 percent of the white-Latino mathematics gap observed on the 2003 NAEP 8th grade test is already apparent at entry to kindergarten.\textsuperscript{13}

Gaps in dropout rates and high school completion

Some educators are concerned that when confronted with higher expectations and high-stakes exit exams, many struggling students will simply choose to drop out, especially if there is a lack of support. Evidence of an increase in dropout rates in the face of higher standards is mixed, but without question school systems already face a huge problem with dropout and lack-of-completion rates— and again it mirrors the achievement data in terms of which students are most affected. This issue has remained somewhat masked because of varying definitions of “dropout” and difficulties in recordkeeping at the school level. Recently, however, researchers at Johns Hopkins University have taken a no-nonsense approach to this problem, and their results are stunning.\textsuperscript{14}

Simply put, the Johns Hopkins researchers went to the U.S. Department of Education’s Common Core of Data for enrollment numbers for every high school in the country with at least 300 students. Then they compared the number of students enrolled as freshmen (or as 10th graders in high schools with a 10-12 grade configuration) with the number still enrolled as seniors to gauge a school’s “promoting power.” While granting that this calculation is not the same as a dropout rate, the researchers believe that when a high school’s senior class is only half the size of the freshman class, there is a very high probability of a significant dropout problem.

Following are just a few of the findings:

- Nearly one in five high schools across the country (about 2,000) has such a weak promoting power that the senior class is 60 percent or less than the size of the freshman (or 10th grade) class. In 900 to 1,000 of these schools, the senior class is less than half the size of the freshman class.

- The number of these struggling high schools has grown by 75 percent since 1993 (there was only an 8 percent growth in the overall number of high schools during this period).

- High schools with poor promoting power are overwhelmingly majority minority. Nearly two-thirds of high schools that are at least 90 percent minority have senior classes that are less than 60 percent the size of the freshman class.

- The researchers note that “Poverty appears to be the key correlate of high schools with weak promoting power. Majority minority high schools with more resources (e.g., selective programs, higher per-pupil expenditures, suburban location) successfully promote students to senior status at the same rate as majority white schools.”

- The struggling high schools are concentrated in northern and western cities and throughout Southern states. For example, Atlanta, Cleveland, Dallas, Houston, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Oakland, New York City, and St. Louis are just a few of the cities where more than 80 percent of high schools have senior classes that are less than 60 percent the size of the freshman class. In South Carolina, 58 percent of schools across the state are in this category, and over one-quarter of the state’s high schools have lost more than half their class enrollment by the time students are seniors.

Where do all these students go? Some will sooner or later earn a GED. But that number is nowhere near a majority of the missing, and even GED officials state that this alternative is not as good as a high school diploma. Many simply end up on the streets, unemployed or in a life of intermittent, low-paying employment. And far too many will end up in prison, costing taxpayers much more than the extra support these young people would need to stay in school and succeed.
Performance gaps between states

Finally, policymakers should not forget that there are also serious gaps among states. On the 2003 NAEP 4th grade reading exam, for example, the top eight states in the nation had an average score of 226, while the lowest-scoring eight states had average scores below 210. (See chart.) Looking at the data in another way, for the lowest 12 performing states, this meant that nearly half of all students scored below basic, while for the highest 12 performing states, on average 29 percent of students scored below basic.

On the 2003 8th grade math test, there were even greater gaps, with the highest state average at 291 and the lowest at 261. Discouragingly, this meant that for the poorest performing state, the average state score was below the Basic level.

B. Hopeful Signs

Despite the litany of achievement and other gaps provided in this overview (which could be far longer), the Study Group was impressed by the abundance of positive research on teaching, learning, and school leaders, the emergence of data and evaluation systems that can help educators pinpoint problems and improve practice, and the number of success stories that can be found at the state, district, and school levels. For example:

At the state level

Latinos in Virginia regularly score higher than Latinos in other states on the NAEP 8th grade reading exam, and on the 2003 exam outscored white 8th graders in eight other states. All this despite an influx of immigrants that more than doubled the state’s Latino population since 1990. On the same 2003 test, Latinos in Ohio outscored whites in nineteen other states (although that is the only year for which the Ohio data are available).

At the school level

There are literally hundreds of schools that have made great gains in achievement levels in recent years despite having many students from challenging backgrounds. A typical example of such schools is Samuel Tucker Elementary in Alexandria, Virginia, which has a student population that is 25 percent Latino, 43 percent African-American, and 17 percent white, with 56 percent receiving free or reduced-price lunch. Students in every subgroup beat the state average in terms of percentage passing state math and language arts tests, but even more impressively, the subgroup passing rates at the school nearly equal or exceed the passing rates for whites statewide. For example, the 2003 statewide passing rate for whites in math was 84 percent. At Tucker, the math passing rate was 84 percent for African-Americans, 85 percent for Latinos, 84 percent for all economically disadvantaged, and 93 percent for limited English proficient.

A Washington Post columnist (and high school English teacher) who visited Tucker agreed that it was a model elementary school. “And what makes it one seems so simple: an outstanding principal and a team of dedicated teachers, all working in unison,” he wrote. On a more sober note, he added that this “fundamental formula is amazingly— and distressingly— difficult to duplicate…. “(B)ottom line, it just seems that there aren’t enough great principals and teachers in Alexandria, or any school system, to create many schools like Tucker.”

But is this statement really true? Note the following district-level example from the same state:
At the district level

The Norfolk, Virginia public school system began its serious reform program in the late 1990s, based on world class standards, a multi-tiered and data-driven accountability system, and a laser-like focus at the school and district level on instruction and assessment, among many other components. Since then, the 37,000-student district has won several national performance awards. With a student population that is about two-thirds African-American, closing the achievement gap has been a priority— and in many areas the gap has been cut by 50 percent or more, and by 75 percent in high school English and Algebra II. Several of the elementary schools and middle schools are among the elite group that have high rates of poverty, a high percentage of minority students, and have now improved to have high passing rates on state tests.19

Many other large school systems, in cities ranging from Boston to Chattanooga and from Aldine, Texas to Long Beach, California are also making significant gains in raising overall achievement and closing achievement gaps.

C. A State Self-Assessment: The Power of the Question

For states faced with discouraging data on achievement gaps and isolated examples of success, the fundamental issue becomes bringing to scale what has been shown to be possible at the school and district level. If it can happen in several schools or districts, why not in hundreds? But while abundant research has shown what is needed to succeed at the school level, and more research is beginning to define what must be done systematically at the district level, much more work is needed at the state level.

Today, a look across the country reveals many differences in how much and how effectively states have addressed seriously raising achievement levels for all students and closing learning gaps. Some states began serious efforts 10 to 15 years ago and have taken many strong actions since; others have taken only a few. Some have taken well-meaning steps that, in the end, have not done the job in relation to the one thing that really matters: raising student achievement.

Despite the uneven record, the Study Group is optimistic and is convinced that there are many actions states can take to close achievement gaps. But the first task for state boards of education and other leaders is to find out where their state is at in terms of getting the job done— in short, to do an inventory of what has been done to raise achievement and close gaps. For policymakers, the foundation for this self-assessment lies in the power of the question. Simply put, states must ask themselves a series of tough questions about the steps that should be taken, answer them forthrightly, and then be willing to take action where needed. The Study Group offers just such a list of questions below.

One note of caution in beginning this self-assessment: There are a lot of questions, many with far-ranging implications— and we don’t presume that our list is inclusive. No one should fool themselves that the task ahead is not enormous. In hearing from school districts and states that have had some success in raising achievement and closing gaps, the Study Group was very impressed with how many different but coordinated, focused, and sustained steps and actions had to be taken. But this in itself makes it all the more important for states to know what needs to be done and to accurately track their progress in accomplishing these objectives. The list of fundamental questions below is intended to be of general use by all states. For an example of a state-specific model, we encourage readers to examine the matrix developed by North Carolina, available online at www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/schoolimprovement/implementation03.pdf.

D. Questions for States on Steps Taken to Raise Achievement and Close Gaps

These questions are organized around four key areas states must address if they are to bring isolated examples of success to scale statewide. The remainder of this report is also divided into these four areas in order to provide more background and analysis for each of the questions. Appendices A and B present examples of large-scale efforts to close the achievement gap at the state and district level, and Appendices C and D provide annotated resource guides of organizations, websites, books, and reports that may be helpful in efforts to close achievement gaps.
A State Self-Assessment: Steps Taken to Raise Student Achievement and Close Educational Gaps

Policymakers using this self-assessment can think of each question as having two parts. The first part deals with priority: how important is it for the state to address this particular policy issue in order to close achievement gaps (ranging, for example, from “not important” to “crucial”)? The second part deals with actions taken or anticipated: To what extent is the state addressing policies in this area (ranging, for example, from “have not addressed this issue” to “major changes made or planned”)?

Building a State System to Close the Achievement Gap

1. Does the state have a specific comprehensive policy framework for closing the achievement gap?
2. Does the state have an infrastructure that provides districts and schools with reliable, transparent, and timely data to drive targeted improvement?
3. Has the state made a priority of ensuring that preparation programs and professional development provide educators with the knowledge and skills to continually monitor students’ achievement and to intervene quickly when students are not progressing sufficiently?
4. Does the state have policies and intervention systems in place to promote the use of research-proven strategies and monitor their implementation and impact?
5. Does the state review on a regular basis policies and strategies to determine their impact and unintended consequences?

Ensuring an Opportunity for All Students to Learn

1. Does the state regularly collect and analyze data that describe the degree to which different groups have access to educational opportunities (e.g., graduation and dropout rates, advanced placement course-taking, suspensions, special education placement)?
2. Does the state have aligned policies (e.g., curricular frameworks, school improvement planning, professional development, supplemental services, and technical assistance) that promote a rigorous curriculum at every school?
3. Does the state have equitable and consistent policies to avoid sorting students and ensure all students achieve high standards?
4. Does the state have policies that support equitable distribution of academic and other resources such as quality staffing, facilities, and instructional materials?
5. Are policies on curriculum and instruction aligned with evidence-based instructional strategies linked to improved student achievement?
6. Do curriculum frameworks, textbooks, and instructional materials emphasize reading and writing at all levels and across all curricula?
7. Does the state provide high-quality, universal voluntary preschool for all three- and four-year-old children and full-day kindergarten for all five-year old children in order to promote school readiness?
8. Does the state have a plan for or support a variety of school structures for high school students who are struggling in traditional settings (e.g., charter schools, alternative schools, alternative programs within regular schools)?

9. Has the state defined what it means and how much it costs to provide an adequate education?

10. Has the state targeted significant resources to help districts and schools educate disadvantaged students.

11. Has the state invested in the capacity of the state department of education to help schools and districts improve?

**Improving Teacher Quality for All Students**

1. Does the state have a multi-year support or induction program that includes staff development and mentoring for every new teacher?

2. Has the state investigated the potential of value-added models of teacher evaluation to improve teacher practice, inform state and local policy, and provide additional accountability indicators for school systems and teacher preparation programs?

3. Does the state have a comprehensive professional development plan focused on improving student performance (such as differentiating instruction, developing diagnostic assessments, and using assessment and evaluation results to improve teaching)?

4. Does the state have a plan for recruiting and retaining teachers for hard-to-staff schools?

5. Does the state have options for differentiating teacher pay, both in terms of building career ladders for teachers and in terms of what and where they teach?

**Building School Leadership**

1. Does the state provide districts with the flexibility, resources, and information to adjust incentives and working conditions to attract qualified candidates?

2. Has the state developed policies to promote the recruitment, hiring, and support practices that will draw more effective leaders to work in high need schools?

3. Does the state promote university/district partnerships as a way to expand recruitment, school-based training, and professional development and support for leaders?

4. Do preparation and professional development programs for school leaders emphasize the core functions of high-performing schools (i.e., curriculum, instruction, and student achievement)?

5. Does the state review administrator preparation programs to ensure that they foster the skills and dispositions of effective leadership.

6. Has the state incorporated performance-based measures, including student achievement, as part of accreditation, licensure, and administrator evaluations?

7. Does the state allow for alternative preparation programs to admit promising candidates with varying professional backgrounds?
Chapter 2. The Importance of a Comprehensive State System to Close Achievement Gaps

For states looking to close achievement gaps, perhaps the single-most important event over the last 10 to 15 years has been the rise of standards-based education. From its shaky beginnings in the early 1990s as “outcomes-based education,” through long struggles to develop effective language for standards across the curriculum, what has emerged is often a powerful tool for policymakers and practitioners to use for ensuring a quality education for all students. Embedded in the idea of standards is not only the idea that all students— even those frequently marginalized within our educational system— should achieve to at least a level of achievement the public has deemed “proficient,” but that adults should be held accountable for ensuring that all students have the opportunity to meet these standards.

The good news is that standards-based reform has now been around long enough so that some states can point to significant progress in helping all groups of students improve their achievement levels. For example, in 2004 the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission in Virginia found that the state’s Standards of Learning (SOLs) have had a “profound” and “positive” impact on shifting from a process to an outcomes-based system, and that “the greatest positive impact of the SOLs appears to have occurred in schools that face demographic and other challenges.”

Despite these and other successes, it is clear from data presented in the Introduction that overall achievement levels are far from where they should be, gaps in most places remain wide, we are still losing far too many students before graduation, and truly successful schools and districts remain “islands of excellence.” This leaves both policymakers and the public asking, “Why is this so difficult?”

While there are many answers to this question that have been touched on, this chapter looks at it from a “systems” perspective, particularly the state education system. The Study Group is firm in its belief that if we are to move beyond islands of excellence, the foundation of the state system must be clear in its vision of success for all students and change it’s own expectations and ways of doing business. This chapter, then, provides guidance on the overall qualities of an effective state education system that are needed to successfully address the more specific issues of teacher quality, school leadership, and providing opportunities to learn that are taken up in the remaining chapters.

A. A System in Tension

Key to understanding, from a system perspective, the difficulty in closing the achievement gap is remembering that the change sought is monumental and will not happen overnight.
The reality is that if standards-based reform is to work properly, there must be a significant shift in how the education system actually works.22 But while all states have developed standards and created comprehensive accountability systems, many remnants of the historic structures for school governance, local practices, and attitudes remain, causing fundamental disconnects between state policies and what actually occurs within districts, schools, and classrooms.

To put it another way, the education system is now really two systems layered on top of one another. That is, the new, standards-based system that asks all students to be educated to high levels and holds educators responsible for results is still dealing with the old system in which teachers and principals worked in isolation without clear, uniform objectives and in which it was tacitly agreed that it was okay if a great many students did not succeed academically. Elmore describes the way education has worked through much of the 20th century as a model of “loose coupling”; that is, the decisions regarding teaching and student learning reside within classrooms and outside the purview of the larger system. Only in recent years, and especially with the passage of NCLB, have the doors swung wide open on the core elements of what teachers do and what students learn.

In addition, for years the education system mirrored the assumptions of our traditional method of comparative evaluation: the bell curve. In contrast to using the standards-based framework, the bell curve assumes a wide dispersion of scores around the average—and even then only 49.9% of students will perform above average. This does not guarantee that students performing above the mean are actually proficient in applying mathematical formulas or writing a coherent essay. However, the bell curve is efficient at sorting students, sending the upper quintile or quartile to college for example. Thus, the system as it was initially designed performed accordingly: the societal and economic context through much of the twentieth century could support a school system in which significant portions of students either failed to obtain diplomas or graduated with low level-skills.

With the change in civil rights and economic realities, an education system that benefits only a portion of the student population is no longer acceptable. And fortunately, as we have seen, there are now sufficient examples of schools and districts that have more fully rejected the old ways and have systematically implemented policies and procedures to ensure that nearly all students succeed.24

What do the new ways look like in practice? In 2002, the Education Trust analyzed a new federal database to identify “high flying” schools that achieve high levels of student performance with high-poverty, high-minority populations. Based on 2,770 schools that achieved high performance in at least one grade level and subject over more than one year, Education Trust concluded that the schools shared the following characteristics and elements:

- Extensive use of local and state standards to design effective curricula and instruction, to evaluate student work, and to evaluate teachers;
- Increased instructional time that is targeted to reading and math;
- Investment in professional development for teachers and leaders that is focused on instructional practice;
- A comprehensive system to monitor the performance of individual students and to intervene before at-risk students fall behind;
- Parent involvement in helping students meet standards;

“You must maintain unwavering faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties, AND at the same time have the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.”

• Use of formative assessments as a frequent part of teaching and learning;

• Holding all adults accountable for student learning; and

• Allocation of resources to close funding gaps.25

In order to complete the reform agenda and make these conditions a part of all schools and districts, states must make a major shift towards a systems approach to education, in contrast to the hierarchical, bureaucratic structure that has dominated for the past 100 years. The state's goals, standards, accountability system, and assessments must be aligned both in state policy and in the state-to-district-to-school-to-classroom connections. There must be a unity of purpose (but not necessarily of means) at all levels. Just as important, standards must be accompanied by a high-quality continuous improvement system that: 1) utilizes rigorous, publicly transparent summative and formative evaluations, which are well-aligned with the state's curriculum frameworks; and 2) systematically ensures that all students have the opportunity to learn what the standards require.26

In addition, use of a strategic planning and problem-solving process must permeate the system as a way to address problems that impede organizational and individual performance. Major organizational change requires collective problem solving, a laser focus on clearly specified goals, and finally collecting systematic data to monitor progress. Michael Fullan states, “Gathering data is...crucial. The success of implementation is highly dependent on the establishment of effective ways of getting information on how well or poorly change is going in the school or classroom.”27

But policymakers and administrators must not only take on strategic planning and monitoring at the state level, they must work to ensure that district leaders, principals, and teachers also understand and are able to use a continual improvement process to ensure that all students perform at high levels. As we have noted, this differs dramatically from the way the educational system functioned in the past, whereby it served to sort students, frequently along socio-economic and racial/ethnic lines.

The first charge for states is to establish a comprehensive state policy framework to close the achievement gap that becomes an integral part of the state's overall accountability system. This framework should identify the relationships between the state accountability system and those policies focused specifically on minority and under-performing students and other reforms for at-risk students. In addition, the framework should include development of a continuous improvement model that targets how to strategically link instruction with specific performance outcomes.28 Alignment is key: All aspects of the state system, from assessments and curriculum frameworks to teacher development, must be working together toward improving achievement for all students.

Most importantly, the framework should require systematic collection of formative and summative data to identify the nature of the problems, strategically apply interventions to address these problems, continually monitor the results, and modify the interventions when necessary. From the state level down through the classroom, there must be a universal focus on collecting, understanding, and using data to improve the system, target resources, and improve instruction. Implications for training and for building data collection and analysis infrastructure are enormous. States and districts must ensure that data results are accurate, transparent, and released in a timely manner so they are useful. Schmoker points to the calamitous results of not using data to monitor results. He asks how long we will continue to avoid using collection and analysis of performance measures to determine how we are doing, what is and is not working, and how to adjust effort toward improvement.29

“The shift to this new paradigm for education mirrors the dramatic change in the way that corporations and the healthcare industry have functioned since the 1980s, when many industries adopted total quality management systems to heighten their capacity to compete in a fluid, complex global economy.”
B. Building a State Framework to Close the Achievement Gap

Following are the critical steps identified by the Study Group that states must take as a system to raise achievement levels for all and close gaps. For an example of one state’s long-term effort to close achievement gaps, see Appendix A.

1. Develop the technical infrastructure needed to collect, disaggregate, and report data at the school, district, and state levels to understand achievement patterns. States should analyze this information in order to target low student achievement and the corollary factors that may contribute to poor performance. In addition, the data should enable states to identify those districts and schools that have successfully produced high performance (particularly in areas where low-income and diverse ethnic and racial student groups predominate). This information can be regularly disseminated along with the effective strategies that may account for high performance. States should also develop policies that require specific actions when student subgroups are not performing well (e.g., on end-of-grade and end-of-course tests).

In short, states must go beyond using data merely to identify problems. Systems that solely focus on state assessments and designation of poor performance fail to take account of the fundamental systemic and capacity issues within schools, districts, and states that perpetuate low achievement. These systems also miss out on valuable information that should be used to help improve the design and implementation of academic and support programs. The bottom line for all schools—and the most critical component in any effort to improve those that are failing—is developing the knowledge and capacity within every school to foster rigorous teaching and learning across the curriculum. This requires analyzing and using data to relentlessly target resources in ways that develop capacity. This is a key aspect of building an improvement model—and way of thinking—that reduces variation in achievement across schools by bringing everyone to expected levels.

2. Ensure that pre-service and professional development programs provide educators with the knowledge and skills to continually monitor students’ achievement and to intervene quickly when students are not progressing sufficiently. State policies on certification, professional development, school improvement planning, and intervention must have the power to make a meaningful difference in student performance. It is not a mystery. A substantial body of research supports particular practices in teaching, assessment, classroom organization, and curriculum. This requires thoughtful inquiry into the research and challenges to the prevailing myths. Although disaggregating data is a first start to identifying gaps in student performance, states must look beyond ethnicity and poverty to determine what interventions can help low-achieving students.

3. Maintain a sharp focus on student achievement and design systems to apply research-proven strategies and monitor their implementation and impact. The research literature is replete with practices and strategies that can significantly accelerate students’ rates of progress. Unfortunately, these strategies and practices remain under-utilized. One result, for example, is that despite extensive research on early reading development, scores from the 2003 NAEP 4th grade reading assessment show that more than one out of every three students reads below basic (37 percent). Students who reach 3rd or 4th grade significantly below grade level will never catch up with their peers because of the lack of systematic interventions to accelerate their progress rate. (See box on opposite page.)

“In contrast to the wait and see approach that typically dooms a large portion of children to long-
term school failure, there are numerous examples of districts and schools that have judiciously selected reasonable goals, tracked them using data, and then used the data to assess or adjust efforts toward better results. For example, officials at Cherry Creek Schools—a high-achieving district near Denver—took a hard look at their reading achievement data. Their mean scores in reading were high, but at the same time, they found that only 69 percent of their 1st grade students were reading at grade level. They set improvement goals, monitored students' progress frequently, and within two years the percentage was up to 82 percent.

Unfortunately, it's much more likely that by the time children reading below grade level reach 3rd or 4th grade, they will be referred to special education or remedial programs, where their progress rates diminish because of a less rigorous curriculum and reduced expectations. To counter this, some states have developed policies that prohibit students from being identified as disabled if in fact they have not received appropriate reading instruction within the general education setting.\(^{35}\)

The importance of implementing strategies that focus on small but immediate improvements and monitoring their impact cannot be overstated. For example, utilizing goal setting, teamwork, and monitoring of performance data, Colorado’s Weld County School District 6 successfully raised overall student achievement while at the same time reducing disparities between high- and low-income students. Teachers introduced multiple interventions in reading, mathematics, and writing and monitored student performance monthly and quarterly.\(^{35}\)

States can use such successful local districts and schools as laboratories for experimenting with alternate solutions and institute computerized feedback systems to examine not only data on outcomes, but on those elements that may or may not correlate with outcomes (e.g., resource allocations and staffing patterns).
4. Evaluate policies and strategies to determine impact and unintended consequences. Because closing achievement gaps and raising performance levels for all students is such a complex undertaking, policymakers must steadfastly ask about the effectiveness of their policies and constantly be aware that well-intentioned initiatives or directives in one area can have unfortunate consequences in another. This is especially true as state education boards and other policy bodies face politicization of issues, strong interest groups, battles over funding, longstanding policies or traditions that are not easy to change, or simply the fact that sometimes making the right choice is not easy or clear.

For example, the choices that policymakers make when selecting assessments and designing accountability systems are critical because they have a major impact on school practice. Assessments that demand a lot of writing, for instance, tend to result in more writing assignments in schools than those that measure “writing” through multiple-choice items. It has also been shown that when students and teachers increase the frequency of their informative writing assessments, student scores increase not only on state and district writing assessments, but also in mathematics, science, social studies, and reading. Thus, when the legislature in Illinois felt forced recently to eliminate writing tests from the state assessment program due to budget pressures, the impact is likely to go well beyond saving some money.

One of the most significant and as-yet-uncharted areas states must look at in terms of the impact and possible unintended consequences of state policies is that of high school dropouts. See the accompanying text box, opposite, for a more detailed discussion of this issue.

“The research literature is replete with practices and strategies that can significantly accelerate students’ rates of progress. Unfortunately, these strategies and practices remain under-utilized.”
Dealing with Dropouts: The Need for High School Reform

According to a study by the Civil Rights project at Harvard University and the Urban Institute, only 68 percent of 9th grade students complete high school on time with a regular diploma. Graduation rates for diverse student populations are even lower. African-American, Latino, and Native American Indians graduate at rates of 50 percent, 53 percent, and 51 percent, respectively. For minority males, the rates drop below 50 percent, and in large minority urban districts these figures dip below 40 percent.

It is essential to evaluate policies impacting high schools in the light of accurate, timely data in order to weigh the intended benefits of specific requirements and regulations against unintended negative consequences. For example, a number of researchers have raised questions about both the fairness and rigor of high-stakes exit exams as a driver of standards-based reform.

We do know, on the other hand, that a critical factor to long-term student success is completion of a solid academic curriculum. A delman found that a strong academic program was more strongly correlated with a bachelor’s degree than high school test scores, grade point averages, or class rank.

States need to create an organizational focal point to provide research, information, and targeted resources to build capacity and instructional improvements in high schools. The National Association of Secondary School Principals outlined a number of recommendations for transforming high schools, including:

- Increasing personalization and individualization through smaller schools, schools within schools, and mentoring;
- Conducting frequent performance monitoring and increasing time and support as needed;
- Establishing technical assistance groups to guide reform processes, provide resources, and ensure support provided to students and teachers; and
- Strengthening the middle grades connection by developing transition processes (e.g., aligned curricula and programs, visitations by students, counselors, teachers, and administrators).

Maine has made a systematic and sustained effort to promote a new vision for its high schools. Revisions to the state’s graduation standards and instructional requirements call for multiple measures of student achievement and a curriculum with content areas for all students in career preparation, languages, and visual and performing arts. Although the state requires the acquisition of credits in content areas for graduation, high schools no longer have to offer Carnegie units as measures of seat time.

Maine also established a Commission on Secondary Education to examine “the quality of education provided to 14–19 year olds.” As a result of the Commission’s report, the state committed its Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration grant to high school improvement. Each school had to commit to 1) developing personal learning plans for every student; 2) assessing students’ learning through exhibitions and demonstrations; 3) creating teacher and student teams; and 4) scheduling space, time, instruction, and resources in response to diverse and changing student needs and goals.

After the initial phase, the state learned more about the key leverage points essential to changing the culture of secondary schools. As a result of this evaluation process, the state dropped the requirement for students to have personalized learning plans and instead directed teachers to personalize learning. Schools were to ensure that every student receiving a diploma could demonstrate through performance exhibitions the knowledge and skills necessary to begin adult life.

The state established partnerships with other organizations to build capacity to lead and manage change and to improve classroom instruction. The Partnership spearheaded the redesign of the teacher preparation program at the University of Southern Maine and is working on revamping its professional development systems. It appears that real change has occurred in high schools and now the reforms have sufficient traction to survive changes in political and educational leadership.
Chapter 3. Ensuring an Opportunity to Learn for All Students

A. The Long Road to Equal Opportunity

May 2004 marked the 50th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision in the case of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka. In this landmark case, the Court found the separation of the nation’s school children on the basis of race unconstitutional. Chief Justice Warren delivered the court’s famous opinion, stating that “segregated schools are not equal and cannot be made equal, and hence they are deprived of the equal protection of the laws.”

Over the past 50 years, legislative and legal jurisprudence has continued to challenge systemic practices that chip away at the pivotal role education plays in helping each child realize his or her full potential. Yet for all of the promise and progress to provide all children with an equitable education, efforts remain fragmented and ineffective. The Study Group believes policymakers must reaffirm our commitment to the Supreme Court’s command that “where a State has undertaken to provide an opportunity for an education in its public schools, such an opportunity is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.”

As discussed earlier, there is a close relationship between closing achievement gaps and providing all students with a real opportunity to learn, something that is also emphasized in the accountability provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act. And as numerous courts across the country have found, states—not districts or the federal government—bear the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that all students have access to a solid education. Nor is this just about funding, which is dealt with in a special section at the end of this chapter. Below are a number of steps states should take to ensure an opportunity to learn for all students.

1. It is imperative for state policymakers to establish a system to assess disparities in the degree to which different groups have access to educational opportunities. Many minority and low-income students are disproportionately excluded from schools, college preparatory programs, and various school activities. It is essential that states require districts and schools to provide disaggregated data on the numbers of students by subgroup on suspensions and expulsions, dropouts, special education placements, as well as the numbers assigned to gifted programs, advanced placement courses, and those who cannot participate in school activities due to social/economic barriers (i.e., finances, transportation). The North Carolina Advisory Commission on Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps found that during a three-year period, more than half of the long-term suspended students were African-American or multi-racial, even though the African-American student population was only 33 percent of the public school population. Similar disparities in the rates of dropouts and special education referrals between student populations have been well documented.

2. States, by aligning all policies with clear standards and curricular frameworks, should ensure that every school uses a rigorous curriculum. The research is clear—students who complete a strong college preparatory sequence perform much higher on NAEP and are more likely to graduate from college. These findings are consistent with major syntheses of 35 years of research on school effectiveness. School-based factors are those largely under the school’s control, and hence responsive to formal and informal policy decisions (e.g., accreditation, certification, school improvement planning, state intervention). Based on hundreds of studies, Robert Marzano identified implementation of...
a guaranteed and viable curriculum as the most important factor in student success.

One key aspect of delivering a rigorous curriculum is “time.” As David Berliner notes, academic learning time is a complex measure of “that part of allocated time in a subject-matter area in which a student is engaged successfully in the activities or with the materials to which he or she is exposed, and in which those activities and materials are related to educational outcomes that are valued.” Researchers have found that extensive academic engagement is a primary factor in high-performing classrooms and schools. For example, eight out of 10 high-poverty, high-performing schools included in the Education Trust’s Dispelling the Myth study increased instructional time in reading and math to improve student achievement.

Other factors that complement implementation of a viable curriculum include setting challenging goals (ranked second on impacting student achievement) and providing effective feedback (ranked third). In other words, goals and instructional practices should not underestimate students’ potential. Researchers have also found that high-performing schools provide frequent, corrective feedback resulting in an increase in students’ academic engagement and producing dramatic improvement in student performance.

Obviously, these variables are mostly manipulated by teachers, and thus teachers’ skills and knowledge have an extremely powerful effect on student learning. The importance of high-quality teachers in raising achievement levels is discussed in Chapter 3.

3. States must contend with conflicting policy agendas that ask schools both to sort students according to ability and to develop high achievement among all students. States must provide clear and public standards of what all students should learn at benchmark grade levels. Schmoker and Marzano point out that many states’ standards lack clarity, alignment, and consistency and, in fact, state documents and frameworks have inadvertently exacerbated the problem of inequitable learning opportunities. In addition, despite the “standards movement” of the last 20 years, long-standing policies maintain the sorting mechanisms that work at cross-purposes with state efforts to bring every student to high standards. In particular, low-income and minority students who fall behind their peers during the early years often continue to be sorted into slower-paced remedial classes that compound their low achievement over time.

A case in point is the amount of seatwork and dittos assigned in remedial and special education classrooms. Decades of research consistently show the negative relationship between low-level seatwork and student learning. The Education Trust, in its research, has been “stunned by how little is expected of students in high-poverty schools—how few assignments they get and the low level of the few assignments that they do get.” Unfortunately, engaging curricula that ask students to think and discuss their ideas are implemented in schools in inequitable ways; while only 15 percent of white 12th graders are exposed to a curriculum that asks them to complete daily ditto worksheets, nearly one-quarter of Latino and African-American 12th graders are.

Students in high-poverty areas generally report on the lack of educational rigor in their schools. Young people talk about teachers who often do not know the subjects that they are teaching, counselors who consistently underestimate their potential and place them in lower-level courses, and a curriculum and set of expectations so miserably low that they bore the students right out the school door.

When Lononsbury and Clark conducted a nationwide study of 162 middle schools, they found a “dominance of passive learning” rather than the active learning widely advocated for middle grades. Most 8th graders “have resigned themselves to the fact that classes are boring.” Although students must be engaged in learning to retain and apply it, the neediest students frequently receive the least engaging kind of curriculum.

There is ample evidence that children can achieve at high levels if they are taught at high levels. In Pittsburgh, the National Science Foundation financed the “Everyday Math” curriculum and contracted with Lauren Resnick’s Institute for Learning to provide intensive professional development and coaching for the teachers. The result: both African-American and
white students in so-called “high-implementation” schools (i.e., those receiving embedded professional development with expert teacher coaches) were significantly outperforming their peers in a matched set of “low-implementation” schools. Furthermore, after three years, the high-implementation schools eliminated the African-American/white gap on math skills and reduced it considerably in problem solving and math concepts. A fricAn-A merican students in the high-implementation schools significantly outperformed the white students in low-implementation schools on skills, concepts, and problem solving.58

4. States must ensure equitable distribution of academic and other resources such as quality staffing, facilities, and instructional materials. In areas of high poverty, schools are often operating at two and three times their intended student capacity, which reduces the availability of important academic resources such as libraries and computer labs. A fricAn-A merican students are four times as likely as white eighth-grade students to have science classes with no access to running water. Such basic inadequacies are coupled with less emphasis on developing hands-on lab skills and minimal requirements for synthesizing data and writing lab reports.59 D istricts and schools vary widely in how much support they provide teachers (i.e., curriculum frameworks, bridge documents, diagnostic instruments, instructional technology, and support personnel). T he lack of resources leads to reduction in the amount of active student engagement in learning course content.

5. States must design policies consistent with the research on instruction that promotes high levels of academic engagement in order to improve student achievement. Researchers have identified an extensive number of successful instructional strategies, and have even demonstrated their relative effectiveness with highly diverse student populations—yet these findings remain consistently underutilized, particularly with students in high-need areas.

For example, based on 125 studies, H attie60 found that the average effect size of tutoring is approximately .50.* T his translates into a 19-percentile point gain.

4 This is just one of over 20 strategies that positively impact student achievement. A nother strategy shown to be effective is cooperative learning, which has an average effect size of .73 (a 27-percentile gain). O ne simple form of this technique involves pairing students to work together on checking their understanding of difficult concepts. Bruce Joyce and his associates found simple pairings were particularly effective in helping low achievers succeed in math and science.61 T hough most teachers have acquired some rudimentary training in cooperative instruction, it is estimated that only about ten percent of teachers use it.62

“Direct instruction” is another method that provides clear, sequenced instruction, fast pacing to generate high levels of engagement, and precise academic feedback. It is based upon instructional design components that research has shown to be significantly related to achievement. For example, Wesley E lementary School in H ouston, which serves a student population that is 99 percent minority and 82 percent low-income, has implemented direct instructional methods and is now ranked as one of the best in the city. F irst graders place in the 82nd percentile, fully 50 percentile points higher than their socio-economic counterparts in other schools.63 (See text box on opposite page for more details on how different instructional strategies affect achievement.)

States must ensure that all policies are designed to capitalize on the rich knowledge base on effective teaching practices. T here is much room for improvement in this area. A ccording to one set of researchers, “O f the 20 or more most powerful teaching strategies that cross subject areas and have a historical track record of high payoff in terms of student effects, we speculate that fewer than 10 percent of us—kindergarten through university level—regularly employ more than one of these strategies.” 64

6. Standards and curriculum frameworks should emphasize literacy and writing skills at all levels and across all curricula. Reading is the basis on which all academic successes are built, more than income, age, ethnicity, or level of parental education.65

*The effect size reports how many standard deviations the average score in the experimental group is above the average score in the control group, which did not use the strategy.)
Mortimore and Sammons\cite{mortimore1995reading} found that reading interventions were “about six times more important than background. For written math and writing, the difference is tenfold.” Decades of research tell us that reading readiness is the best predictor of 4th grade performance in both reading and math and that students are less likely to graduate from high school if they do not read moderately well by the end of grade 3.\cite{smith1999reading} It is now widely accepted that through carefully planned instruction and extended opportunities to read and write, children can achieve success despite differences in their home environment. During the early years, teachers must provide the instructional scaffolding that systematically builds children's phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, reading fluency, and writing.

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Reprinted with permission from R. J. Marzano, What Works in Schools (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2003). Sources listed include the following:


of the 20 or more powerful teaching strategies that cross subject areas and have a historical track record of high payoff in terms of student effects, we speculate that fewer than 10 percent of us—kindergarten through university level—regularly employ more than one of these strategies.”

B. Joyce, I. Wolf, and E. Calhoun, The Self-Renewing School

It is critical that teachers connect reading and writing across all content areas. Despite research on the importance of regular writing, it still gets short shrift in the classroom. According to NAEP, the average student spends about 30 minutes a week on writing without the benefit of most well established practices such as prewriting, peer editing, immediate feedback, and revision.68 Too many schools substitute inferior activities for actual reading and writing during the large block of time devoted to the language arts. In contrast, at La Cima Middle School in Tucson, teacher teams developed and used high-interest activities and assessments to help prepare students to succeed on the state writing exam. In four months, La Cima, with a 42 percent free and reduced-lunch population, tied the most affluent school district in Arizona on the state writing exam.69

In fact, when students and teachers increase the frequency of their informative writing assessments, student scores increase not only on state and district writing assessments, but also in mathematics, science, social studies, and reading.70 Moreover, school improvement goals that emphasize core areas—reading, writing, and math—do not implicitly preclude substantial attention to science, social studies, music, art, and physical education. Rather, there is a clarion call to integrate core areas across all domains and avoid the curriculum fragmentation that prevails, particularly in middle and high schools.71

The implications for teacher training are vast. State policymakers must ensure that teacher preparation programs and professional development instill a wide repertoire of pedagogical skills to ensure that students acquire the ability to comprehend text and write effectively. Because of the growing diversity in the student population, teachers must be adept in adjusting instruction for culturally and socio-economically diverse learners. This requires use of diagnostic, informal assessments and implementation of practices effective in accelerating rates of learning.72

7. Provide high-quality, universal, voluntary access to preschool to all three- and four-year-old children and full-day kindergarten for all five-year-old children.

The achievement gap is already present when students enter kindergarten. Differences in young children’s opportunities to develop skills and knowledge in the area of foundational literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional development follow children throughout their years of schooling.73 Research shows that access to high-quality early childhood programs may help bridge the achievement gap by accelerating social and cognitive skills that are critical precursors to later learning. Regrettably, the United States lags behind many other developed countries in providing equitable learning opportunities for its younger children.74

States need to design a cohesive infrastructure for a well-integrated first level of public education for children three to eight years of age. One exemplary program is the Child-Parent Center (CPC) program in Chicago, Illinois. A unique feature of this program, which is administered by the Chicago Public School System, is that it provides for a multi-year intervention with well-trained teachers and a curricula aligned to standards for the public K-3 system. The CPC has served about 100,000 poor urban families over 35 years. Parents are required to work with the program for one half-day each week. Compared to a control group of students who did not attend the program, CPC participants were more likely to graduate, less likely to be arrested as a juvenile, less likely to be arrested for a violent crime, less likely to be retained in school, and less likely to need special education services. Other systems are developing aligned, PreK–3 systems, which produce strong longitudinal results. (See Appendix B for a description of Montgomery County, Maryland’s successful effort to close achievement gaps in the early grades.)

In order to ensure sustained benefits from early childhood education, states must establish clear
standards for prekindergarten teacher preparation. According to the National Research Council,75 teacher quality is the primary factor for student achievement. Yet only a few states have adopted licensure standards that demonstrate a clear relationship between early childhood education training and child outcomes. However, the use of effective classroom practices in prekindergarten is essential, since research has also suggested that gains following one-year programs diminish over time due to a “fade-out” effect.

Moreover, in crafting program approval and certification standards for pre-service and professional development programs for early childhood teachers, states need to attend to the emerging body of research on the teacher behaviors and practices that lead to positive outcomes. Researchers from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the National Center for Early Development and Learning conducted extensive observations of prekindergarten, kindergarten, and 1st grade settings.76 Based on observations of over 1,500 classrooms, the researchers described the settings and teacher practices and behaviors in both social and instructional quality. Not only did the data show wide variability across classrooms, the observations also revealed that children are exposed to relatively low levels of instructional situations. What was most surprising was that classroom quality was not related to the level and nature of the teacher's education and experience, on whether or not there was a curriculum in place, or even class size. States need to institute policies that result in the provision of direct and thorough feedback to teachers regarding high-quality instructional practices that are linked to child outcomes.

B. A Special Section on Funding

Volumes have been written about school finance, and we cannot hope to do full justice to the topic in the space available here. However, education funding—both the amount of money and how that money is distributed and used—is such a key element of creating an opportunity to learn for all students and for closing achievement gaps that the Study Group felt it vital to make several points in this area.

First, it is important to understand that education funding is in a watershed era. For much of the last 30 years, finance equity, and the lawsuits on the part of poorer school districts claiming that they do not receive their fair share of state funding, have dominated discourse in state capitols and courtrooms. Over the last decade, however, policymakers, educators, and judges have been more likely to talk about adequacy: that is, what level of funding is needed to ensure that every student receives an adequate education.

It is no accident that adequacy has emerged at roughly the same time as the standards-based reform movement. Once a state demands that students meet certain standards, the question naturally arises as to whether schools and districts have the resources necessary to bring students to these levels. This is precisely what judges across the country have been—and are likely to continue to be—asking. As the national Committee on Education Finance said in its 1999 report, Making Money Matter, the concept of adequacy is particularly useful “because it shifts the focus of finance policy from revenue inputs to spending and educational outcomes and forces discussion of how much money is needed to achieve what ends.”77

The Way Money Is Directed Matters

Grissmer and others compared Texas NAEP scores to California's scores and found that scores for students from similar family backgrounds differed significantly, with students in California scoring about 12 percent lower than students with similar family backgrounds in Texas. What makes the difference? The researchers found that about two-thirds of the difference could be explained statistically by three things: lower student to teacher ratios in Texas, a much greater percentage of students attending public prekindergarten in Texas, and a larger percentage of teachers in Texas reporting that they have the resources they need to teach.81
For closing achievement gaps, the difference between equal and adequate is critical, which can clearly be seen in New York City’s lawsuit against the state’s funding system. As a Standard and Poor’s report points out, while the City receives a share of state aid roughly equal to its share of the state’s student population, this is “not necessarily an… adequate share, because the City enrolls a disproportionate percentage of educationally disadvantaged students who typically cost more to educate.” Indeed, the S&P study found that while the City “enrolls 37.7 percent of the State’s students, it enrolls 62.6 percent of the State’s economically disadvantaged students, and 73.9 percent of its limited English proficient students…. Both groups of students typically need additional educational resources.”

Just how much more money disadvantaged students cost remains an open question, but estimates commonly range from 20 percent to 40 percent more per student. It is when viewed in this light that many states fall especially short in providing adequate funds to districts with large numbers of low-income and minority students. Returning to New York State, for example, in 2001 per-pupil funding in high-poverty districts was nearly $2,000 lower than per-pupil funding in low-poverty districts (after adjusting for regional cost differences and assuming the 20 percent adjustment for low-income students). The national average across states was $1,020 less for each student in a high-poverty district.

In short, adequacy, especially when applied to disadvantaged students, is likely to involve both more funding and strategically thought-out targeting of the money. In dealing with this critical area, the Study Group makes the following recommendations:

**States should define what they mean by an adequate education.** Many states, either on their own or because of court actions, have been involved in calculating what an adequate education should cost. This is not a precise science and there are a number of different methods being used. Still, this is an important exercise, as it explicitly makes the connection between states’ educational goals and what it will cost to achieve those goals. It also makes much more explicit what additional costs are required for educating disadvantaged students.

**States should carefully examine how money for education is currently being spent.** Knowing where money has been going and how that compares to the state’s strategic goals is a critical part of using resources efficiently. Standard and Poor’s Performance Evaluation Services is in the process of compiling financial and performance profiles of all state education systems, using a format that is accessible for policymakers and the public and also provides key questions for policy consideration.

**States should target additional resources to high-poverty districts and schools.** This is a significant and
critical component of closing achievement gaps, and politicians and the public must be willing to step up to the plate in this area if they are serious about the goal of high levels of performance for all students. Fortunately, there is positive news: states such as Massachusetts that have provided more funding for low-income students have seen some significant payoffs in terms of higher achievement, as can be seen in the higher percentages of students passing Massachusetts’ graduation exam.

In defining an adequate education, states must maintain high academic standards. Given the strong link between funding adequacy and standards, nothing will undermine the meaning of an adequate education—or do a greater disservice to those students on the lower side of achievement gaps—so quickly as lowering expectations.

Adequate funding must be inextricably linked with a statewide strategy for increasing system and student performance. This is a critical step for ensuring that what must get done is funded, that it relates to other pieces of the system, and that it gets accomplished in as cost-efficient a way as possible.

States should invest in the capacity of the education system, particularly the state education agency (SEA). Given the enormity of the task of helping all students achieve to higher standards, as outlined in other areas of this report, the responsibilities of SEAs are far greater than ever. State boards of education, in particular, must be the primary advocates for increasing the capacity of their agency to meet these challenges. The importance of the SEA’s mission—and what it will take to fulfill that mission—must be brought to the attention of governors, legislatures, and the public. Policymakers and citizens must understand that they cannot expect high-level results from decimated departments of education.

“As a Standard and Poor’s report points out, while New York City receives a share of state aid roughly equal to its share of the state’s student population, this is not necessarily an adequate share, because the City enrolls a disproportionate percentage of educationally disadvantaged students who typically cost more to educate.”
Chapter 4. The Power of Good Teachers in Closing Achievement Gaps

A. Improving the Quality of the Teaching Work Force

Research over the last decade has made clear that the quality of teachers has a tremendous effect on student achievement. From the well-known value-added studies in Tennessee and Dallas to a long string of other research, it is now apparent that teachers contribute roughly half the value of student gains (as opposed to other factors such as parent education, language background, and parental income). The research is also clear that when students of whatever background have several highly effective teachers in a row, their performance is much higher than students who had several ineffective teachers in a row. The results are especially dramatic for lower-performing students.

The tragedy is that research has also shown that low-income and minority students are far more likely to have less effective teachers. Some of this research is based on value-added teacher evaluations in Tennessee and Dallas, while other research uses proxies for teacher effectiveness, such as qualifications, years of experience, and teacher test scores. No matter what data is used, however, the results are the same: the students in struggling schools and districts who most need good teachers are the least likely to get them.

For example, the study of Virginia's schools by that state's Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) cited in Chapter 2 was very clear in its findings about teacher quality: "High-poverty divisions [i.e., school districts] employ a larger proportion of teachers who are provisionally licensed, have more classes taught by teachers who are not highly qualified, and have fewer teachers who hold an advanced degree, compared to low-poverty areas." The JLARC researchers also noted that the principle reason schools with high numbers of African-American students in that state were often low performing was likely that these schools also had more than their share of inexperienced and poorly qualified teachers. And study after study has shown that the same is true for poor students, low-performing students, and students of color all across the country. For example:

- High-poverty and high-minority schools are twice as likely to employ inexperienced teachers as low-poverty and low-minority schools;
- Classes in high-poverty schools are 79 percent more likely to be taught by teachers out of their field;
- High-poverty districts are nearly four times as likely to hire teachers with low SAT scores than low-poverty districts;
- A study of New York State teacher workforce data over 15 years found that the quality of teachers "is much worse in large urban areas in comparison to other regions," and that even within urban areas, the average poor or African-American or Latino student "is much more likely to have a lower-quality teacher than the typical non-poor or white student";
- Finally, the New York study confirmed a common suspicion when it found that teachers who began their careers in the City "are far more likely to leave the New York public school system than are teachers from other areas," and that those teachers who did leave "are generally higher-quality teachers than those who remain."
It is no wonder that The Education Trust, in its work to close achievement gaps, so often says that as a nation we take students who need the most, and we give them the least.

Clearly, the hard work for policymakers looking to close gaps is to 1) improve the quality of the teaching work force (paying attention both to newcomers and to those already in the classroom), especially making sure teachers know how to work with struggling students; 2) ensure that poor and minority students have teachers who are as good or better than those teaching any other students; and 3) help schools with high numbers of poor and minority students keep the good teachers they already have.

B. The State Role in Ensuring a High-Quality Teacher Work Force

There are many elements to an effective state plan for developing high-quality teachers, including:

- rigorous teacher standards;
- rigorous teacher preparation program approval standards (linked to teacher standards);
- high-quality alternate routes to licensure (also linked to teacher standards);
- a statewide teacher recruitment strategy;
- an induction program for new teachers; and
- a state role in ensuring high-quality professional development for teachers.

There is not the space here to fully develop each of these important issues. (The Study Group recommends that state policymakers and administrators turn to NASBE’s recent report, The Numbers Game II: Bringing High-Quality Teachers to All Schools, for a detailed explication of a model state teacher development system.) However, there are a number of points regarding effective teachers and closing achievement gaps—points that were brought again and again to the attention of the Study Group—that we will make here.

1. Teachers must set high expectations for every student and not accept excuses for failure. This attitude about student learning must be fostered at every level of the education system, from teacher preparation programs, professional development programs, and principals to boardrooms and education agencies.

2. Teachers must be able to alter their instructional practices to meet the needs of their students. Teachers must understand that there is no one best way to reach all children, something that has become even more important with our increasingly diverse student population. In helping the public understand this concept of differentiated instruction, Superintendent Jerry Weast of Montgomery County, Maryland, has likened teachers to golfers with a bag full of different clubs (i.e., instructional techniques). Each different lie of the ball (or learning situation) is likely to require a different club. A key aspect of the science and art of teaching is knowing which club to use—and how to use it—in any given situation.

There are many ways to differentiate instruction. For example, given the same material to cover:

- Some students might work in a more structured environment, where the teacher gives more direct guidance in discussing a topic and finding solutions, while other students work in a more open environment that allows them to more autonomously explore the material and come to their own conclusions.
- Teachers can alter the pace, moving more slowly for some students, and more quickly for others.
- A concept might be dealt with in a more concrete way (a lesson about democracy might deal with specific events like the signing of the Magna Carta) or in a more abstract way (discussing the difference between direct democracy and representative democracy).

In terms of closing achievement gaps, differentiated instruction is important because no matter what method of instruction is used, the standards (i.e., learning goals) are always the same, no matter if the student needs more time and/or direct instruction or if the student is more independent and able to move more quickly to the conceptual or complex level. And differentiating instruction is not just a way to teach all students to the same standards, but to keep all students—those who are
struggling, those who are advanced, and all those in between—actively engaged in learning.

3. Teachers must know how to develop ongoing formative assessments and use the results and other performance data to guide instruction. The Study Group heard repeatedly from education administrators and researchers that most new teachers do not arrive in their classrooms with a real understanding of how to use data (from state or district standardized tests or their own formative assessments) to alter or pinpoint their instruction to address learning gaps in individuals or the class as a whole. Indeed, few teachers or leaders receive much formal training in assessment design or analysis. Fewer than half the states require competence in assessment for licensure as a teacher.92 Yet this knowledge is important in closing achievement gaps because information from assessments and other evaluative data is a key element in finding and then helping students who are struggling with certain skills or materials. It is also an important facet in teachers’ ability to improve their overall instructional techniques.

Policymakers should be aware that just placing “formative assessments” in state teacher standards is not likely to be enough to ensure that this knowledge and skill has been acquired by new teachers. States will also need to consider other means, such as preparation program accreditation and professional development guidelines, of ensuring that professionals are able to 1) conduct on-going inquiry to assess whether students have learned what they need to know to make adequate progress and 2) develop strategies to act quickly and effectively when they haven’t.

4. Value-added models for teacher evaluation show promise for accountability and policy improvements. Assessment systems that measure the actual yearly growth in student achievement in comparison with the expected amount of growth have garnered increasing interest since the results of such a “value-added” system first started coming out of Tennessee some ten years ago. In the Tennessee system developed by William Sanders, the amount of expected growth for individual students is calculated based on their achievement history. Many other statistical controls are also used to take into consideration, for example, the length of time a teacher has been in the classroom or the difficulty of one year’s test in relation to previous exams.

Results from Tennessee and several large districts using various value-added models are important for several reasons.

• First, they demonstrate consistency—that is, effective teachers tend to be highly effective year after year (and vice versa for less effective teachers).
• Second, they add to the evidence that teachers truly do make a great deal of difference in student learning.
• Third, they demonstrate the potential of high-quality teachers for closing achievement gaps. In the study from Dallas cited at the beginning of this chapter, 90 percent of low-achieving 4th graders who were lucky enough to get three effective teachers in a row were able to pass the 7th grade math test by the time they were in that grade; on the other hand, of the low-achievers who were stuck with three ineffective teachers in a row, only 42 percent were able to pass the 7th grade test. As the study authors concluded, “A sequence of ineffective teachers with a student already low achieving is educationally deadly.”93

• Finally, value-added data provides a tremendous amount of information that has not been available before, enabling school systems to see where the best and least effective teachers are, which students get these teachers, which schools are accelerating learning, and how teacher preparation, support, and professional development relate to teacher effectiveness.

This is not to say that the value-added concept is without limitations or comes without uncertainties at this point in time. Value-added evaluation models are built on complex statistical formulas that still need more study to understand their validity and reliability in relation to specific purposes (such as for school accountability or teacher compensation). Indeed, the best-known evaluation of value-added models to date, by RAND Education, concluded, “the research base is currently insufficient to support the use of value-
Value-added systems can help identify effective teachers, but they don’t identify the skills and attributes that make these teachers effective. In order to delve into this area, the Public Education Foundation in Chattanooga, in partnership with the district, studied 92 highly effective elementary and middle school teachers. Through interviews, surveys, classroom observations, and personnel records, researchers looked for some of the common personality characteristics and instructional practices of these teachers.

According to the study, “the researchers who conducted observations found the teachers’ classrooms to be quite similar in a number of interesting ways.

- Student work could be found everywhere, inside the classroom, out the door and, in some cases, down the hall;
- The teachers did not stand still and lecture; they covered every part of the room and monitored every activity that took place;
- Multiple small group activities were often found in their classrooms, with the traditional arrangement of desks in rows practically non-existent;
- Students in their classes were at ease asking questions and commenting on statements made by teachers and other students;
- Expectations for the students were clearly stated and exemplars of previous years’ assignments were shown to students as models of what to produce; and
- The organization of the rooms and the lessons was clearly evident. Materials were easily accessible when needed and no class time was wasted from lack of preparation.”


added models for high-stakes decisions.” Some of the problems include taking account of such effects as class size, summer school or other remedial instruction, school climate, and missing or incomplete data caused, for example, by students transferring in or out of a school.

On the other hand, the Rand researchers admitted that value-added models may not be any “more harmful than the alternative methods currently being used for test-based accountability.” They also concluded that value-added models showed “promise for lower-stakes diagnostic purposes” such as initially identifying possibly low- or high-performing teachers who can then be further evaluated to confirm results. 

After examining the evidence, the Study Group—while cognizant of the need for more research and
development—remained enthusiastic about the potential of value-added models on a number of fronts:

- as an element of a robust state data and information system;
- as another way to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs and alternative routes to licensure;
- as part of a school accountability system;
- as an element of accountability for higher education teacher training;
- as a tool for principals in teacher evaluation; and
- as a tool for districts and schools in closing achievement gaps by assigning the most effective teachers to those students who need them the most.

5. High-quality professional development is an essential part of closing achievement gaps. Bringing low-performing or disadvantaged students to higher standards is challenging work even for the best teachers, and ongoing training—of the right kind—is a critical component of this job. Research has not only shown that professional development works, but particularly in schools that have high numbers of disadvantaged or low-performing students—which are also schools that typically have more than their share of unlicensed teachers, teachers teaching out of field, and ineffective teachers—high-quality professional development is “the linchpin of teacher quality.”

Schools and districts that have been successful despite high numbers of disadvantaged and minority students target a considerable amount of their resources (for example, often 10 percent or more of their Title I funds) on training that focuses on changing instructional practices among their teachers. The Montgomery County, Maryland district, in implementing its strategy of targeting grades K-2 in its schools with the highest poverty levels, gave kindergarten teachers more than 100 hours of training in the curriculum and methodology for assessing student knowledge, while first and second grade teachers received four days of training in the summer and 45 additional hours of training throughout the year. These teachers also received on-site support through “teacher coaches,” a newly created position assigned to every school, and additional support was provided to new and underperforming teachers. The results of the district’s comprehensive strategy to close the achievement gap among young learners has been powerfully successful.

One problem that both policymakers and teachers frequently point to is that there is a lot of low-quality, off-the-mark, or unsustainable professional development around (leading to such quips as “drive-by training” or “sit-and-get training”). The good news is that we know what high-quality in-service training looks like. Following are some characteristics of effective professional development:

- It is rigorous, ongoing, school-based, and embedded in teacher work;
- Its primary goal is improving student learning, and it is evaluated accordingly;
- It deepens teachers’ content knowledge, provides them with research-based instructional strategies to help students meet academic standards, and provides teachers with formative classroom assessment techniques appropriate to the subject matter and types of performance called for in state or local standards;
- It is supported by school administrators who make ongoing professional development and collaboration a regular part of the school day;
- It gives teachers the chance to practice what they are learning, provides them with feedback and opportunities for discussion, and includes coaching or other follow-up activities; and
- It helps teachers meet the needs of all students.

Another serious problem is that funding or time for professional development is frequently the first to disappear when budgets are tight or other priorities emerge. This can happen at the state, district, or school level. In North Carolina, the legislature recently cut the number of professional workdays for teachers in half (as part of a school calendar bill
designed to accommodate the tourism industry), despite an outcry from the state board of education and other policymakers. On hearing this news, one former district administrator said, “We can’t expect to use the same techniques and achieve the progress goals set out in NCLB. We have to retool and come up with new, innovative teaching strategies for students who are traditionally low performers. When do we accomplish that now that our time options have been limited?”

Such setbacks can be very frustrating to education policymakers dedicated to raising performance and closing the achievement gap. Fortunately, there are a number of options states have for promoting effective professional development, including:

- Constructing a model evaluation instrument that schools and districts can use for judging the effectiveness of professional development programs in relation to state academic and teacher standards;
- Establishing regional professional development centers across the state or providing some other state-sponsored professional development program to schools and districts at a reasonable cost;
- Targeting training or funds to support training to schools and districts with high numbers of low-income or minority students; and
- Disseminating statewide examples of promising practices and the effective elements of professional development.

6. Placing and keeping good teachers at the schools that need them the most must be a priority for states and districts. This chapter has made clear both the incredible potential that excellent teachers have for closing the achievement gap and the stark reality that students in high-poverty, high-minority schools are far more likely than their peers in low-poverty schools to have unqualified, less-effective teachers. The problem of placing and retaining good teachers at high-need schools is even more challenging in light of the difficulty many districts already have finding candidates in a number of shortage areas. Fortunately, there are strategies available to policymakers that have shown success in improving this situation.

Incentive programs for recruiting teachers is an obvious strategy, and by the 2000-2001 school year 19 states had such initiatives, totaling over $216 million. However, California accounted for over half this amount, and in only four other states were programs funded above one million dollars. Moreover, most states did not specifically target hard-to-staff schools for these recruitment efforts, and a study of recruitment programs concluded that most states have not done a good job in collecting and analyzing data to establish where their most pressing needs are, matching these needs with targeted incentives, and then evaluating the programs to see how effective they are in bringing teachers to where they are most needed.

In Tennessee, the Hamilton County school district has had success in using the state’s value-added system to help administrators identify the most effective teachers and then offering them financial and other incentives to work in struggling schools. Administrators also moved 100 less effective teachers out of struggling schools and spread them around to more successful schools in the district (where, it was
reasoned, it would be easier to help them become more effective.\textsuperscript{102}

States should be aware, however, that financial incentives will only go so far without making other changes. According to several different surveys of teachers, what would most motivate teachers to work in hard-to-staff schools are improvements in the school environment. In other words, working directly to improve teaching and learning in schools is also one of the main things that will help keep good teachers in place and attract new ones, and is likely to make compensatory approaches to recruitment less necessary.

7. Mentoring, induction programs, and other ways of supporting new teachers are critical both for keeping recent hires in the classroom and for helping them acquire the skills needed for working with all students. A trition rates for new teachers are high— it is estimated that over 30 percent of new teachers leave the field in their first five years, a figure that is even higher in hard-to-staff schools where the achievement gap is a serious issue. It is little wonder that some observers have dubbed teaching as “the profession that eats its young.”\textsuperscript{103} The Study Group is convinced that high-quality induction programs that include trained mentors, are grounded on the state’s teacher and academic standards, continue for at least three years, and include performance assessments to help improve effectiveness are a key component of ensuring good teachers for all students. Indeed, \textit{NASBE recommends that new teacher induction programs should be in place in every state and be adequately funded with state resources.}
Chapter 5. School Leadership

A. The Importance of Leadership

Educational leadership matters greatly, but high-caliber principals are not the norm, and truly visionary leaders are rare. Today, many states and districts are only beginning to consider the ramifications of policies and practices that have left a majority of educational leaders unprepared to deal with the enormous pressures that come with standards-based reform and closing the achievement gap. With NCLB, the stakes are even higher—especially as recent studies have confirmed that school leaders exert a significant, if indirect, influence on teaching quality and student learning. A review of literature for the American Educational Research Association concluded that school leadership has significant effects on student learning, second only to the effects of the quality of curriculum and teachers' instruction. A similar study by the Mid-Continent Regional Laboratory (McREL) also found a significant positive correlation between certain leadership practices and student achievement. The McREL authors also identified 21 specific leadership responsibilities significantly correlated with student achievement. (See text box on page 36 for examples.)

In looking at the differences in student performance across schools, leadership accounts for nearly one-quarter of the variation explained by school factors—and these leadership effects are even more pronounced in schools with challenging social and economic conditions. Studies document strong leader effects for: articulating a vision that is value-laden; fostering and communicating group goals; creating high performance expectations; working effectively with community stakeholders; and developing conditions that can strengthen curriculum and instruction.

While policymakers have generally acknowledged the importance of educational leadership, states have not adopted intentional, strategic steps to ensure a sufficient pool of high-quality leaders who could address the challenges of improving student performance and closing the achievement gap. Though numerous examples of superior leadership exist, it has become increasingly apparent that even in the same district, two schools that deal with the same student characteristics, same central office, same union, and same constraints from parents can have dramatically different results. Such variances must be eliminated if we are to successfully address the achievement gap. Thus, as with other areas, it becomes a matter of strategically “going to scale” with those policies and practices that can strengthen leadership, improve conditions to support and retain leaders, and increase student achievement across all schools and districts.

To some degree, the differences in how well students achieve across the school, district, and even state level mirrors the disparities in the quality of the applicant pool for leadership positions. Over the last several years, ominous reports of pending shortages in the number of principal and superintendent applicants have been common. This problem is likely to get worse considering that the number of positions in education administration is expected to grow by as much as 20 percent by 2008, that 40 percent of current school leaders will be eligible to retire in the next six years, and that the annual turnover rates of principals and superintendents have already reached alarming levels—20 percent or more in some places.

Moreover, the problem of shortages and high turnover rates is particularly acute in areas serving the neediest student populations. These trends are expected to pose the greatest challenges for urban and
rural districts with large concentrations of high-poverty and low-performing schools, since these districts often pay lower salaries and receive significantly fewer applicants for open positions. As a result, low-performing urban and rural schools are much more likely to end up with inexperienced principals and assistant principals.

Yet, the problem of finding quality principals appears to be more complicated than simply a shortage of certified principals. Research teams commissioned by The Wallace Foundation in 2003 found that there is "no statistical evidence of a nationwide shortage of certified candidates for the principalship." Instead, the problem is centered in several underlying factors: 1) many certified candidates do not seek positions in those schools that need them the most—that is, schools in rural and inner city areas; and 2) many people who are certified candidates may not have the skills needed to become successful principals. This is exacerbated by the reality of difficult working conditions and high turnover rates in schools serving low-income and minority students.108

States must be strategic in how they intervene in the system of leadership development and how they create policies to ensure that leaders have the necessary support to improve curriculum, instruction, and student achievement. Policymakers play their own leadership role with respect to leveraging their authority as well as using their influence to balance system inequities in the quality of leadership. Failing to exert the political will to challenge the status quo, poor implementation of school reform will persist primarily in districts and schools serving poor and marginalized student groups.109

Indeed, principals in low-performing schools tend to be ineffective in providing the necessary support, resources, and mentoring to teachers. Policymakers must take on the complexities of addressing difficult working conditions and their underlying factors (e.g., lower per-pupil expenditures, inadequate resources, the lack of incentives, counter-productive hiring practices, and the lack of support to implement federal, state, and local mandates.)110 For example, state policies and district hiring practices frequently exacerbate turnover rates. States may require a minimum number of years of teaching experience that exclude some promising candidates who have fewer years than necessary. Furthermore, many states issue principal licenses to a significant number of individuals who do not intend to seek an administrative position—the license itself often confers significant pay raises for teachers without requiring them to take on new administrative roles or responsibilities.111
Conditions of Practice for Leaders: Policy Recommendations:

- **Build policies that give districts the freedom, resources, and data to adjust incentives and working conditions to enable non-competitive schools and districts to attract qualified leadership candidates.** For example, leaders could receive extra years toward retirement, extra support personnel, extra remuneration, and smaller student bodies. Signing bonuses, relocation packages, and tuition reimbursement may also help attract high-quality candidates.\(^\text{112}\)

- **Ensure that state policies promote recruitment, hiring and support practices that address problems with the distribution of quality leaders, particularly in high need areas.** This requires multi-faceted approaches to improve administrators’ readiness and to provide effective support networks so that leaders are more likely to reach organizational goals for high student achievement. States are encouraging a range of initiatives that redefine leadership as well as the way leaders are selected and supported. These include defining leadership as a collective problem-solving process, which involves distributing key roles and responsibilities across teachers and leaders with a focus on student learning above all else.

  Other initiatives include developing succession plans for high-performing teachers with particular emphasis on recruiting women and minority candidates; developing regional leadership academies to work with teams of administrators, teachers, and central office personnel on closing the achievement gap; and providing flexibility to districts to “grow their own” administrators by designing aspiring principal programs in collaboration with universities or private vendors.

- **Work with districts to tie salary schedules and compensation to advanced licensure.** These changes should seek to factor in pay differentials for highly skilled principals who agree to work in the neediest schools. They should also limit raises for teachers who earn advanced degrees to teachers who obtain a master’s degree in a content area or an area directly relevant to their classroom and school responsibilities.

### B. Accreditation and Licensure

Policymakers must strategically attend to the accreditation and licensure requirements for educational leaders, ensuring that the performance criteria for recruiting, hiring, placing, evaluating, and supporting leaders are consistent with heightened expectations for academic performance. A University of Washington report found that districts are looking for a new and higher caliber of leader, possessing “very different capabilities than are guaranteed by the present licensing and hiring process.”\(^\text{113}\) State licensure systems typically are tied primarily to inputs such as courses taken and prior teaching experience rather than to performance-based measures such as on-the-job performance or student achievement.

As part of recent reforms of university preparation programs, many states have adopted standards for school leaders such as those developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) or by the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC). Although 40 states have adopted such standards, there is little evidence that standards adoption itself has driven meaningful change beyond formal compliance such as changing course titles or adding components. States must develop stronger relationships with districts to assess how current accreditation and licensure policies support or impede the training of high quality leaders. Improving instruction requires shifts in the behavior of school leaders to reculture the school organization and community towards student learning. According to Richard
Elmore, “Improvement, then, is change with direction, sustained over time, that moves entire systems, raising the average level of quality and performance while at the same time decreasing the variation among units, and engaging people in analysis and understanding of why some actions seem to work and others don’t.”

Despite heightened accountability, states continue to struggle with developing coherent preparation and professional development systems to ensure every district and school has leadership that results in improved student performance. States frequently grant licenses based on whether an individual has completed an “approved program,” which typically translates to completion of university coursework. Most preparation programs provide only cursory attention to curriculum and instruction and do not instill the type of strategic thinking necessary to address schoolwide achievement problems. Universities typically operate in isolation from the real world, so potential leaders have minimal opportunities to wrestle with the challenges of galvanizing the multiple actors within schools and communities to achieve high performance goals.

According to a comprehensive analysis of principal and superintendent leadership, most leadership frameworks and theories have taken an overly narrow view of leadership. Leaders are not grounded in the school effectiveness research that would prepare them to:

- Identify organizational structures, instructional practices, and curriculum most likely to improve student outcomes;
- Develop ways to monitor their implementation and effectiveness; or
- Execute corrective actions when performance falls short.

Nor are leaders prepared to capitalize on the family educational cultures and resources of students who come from low-income and a mix of racial and ethnic backgrounds. These students frequently have access to strong and well-developed resources that are simply different from what schools typically expect. For example, schools frequently neglect the rich linguistic resources of less advantaged families.

Weak accountability systems prevail for leadership preparation programs and for graduates of programs. State policies are typically loosely coupled and fail to ensure that preparation programs and professional development provides the research-base, clinical experiences, and performance monitoring necessary to produce exemplary leaders. Most states do not require evidence of improved school practices and student achievement for professional licensure or renewal. Yet, a mounting body of evidence indicates that strong leadership particularly in those schools serving low-income or historically marginalized populations makes an enormous difference in improving student achievement.

A number of states are making significant progress in redesigning both accreditation, licensure, and professional development systems. For example, under an initiative launched by The Wallace Foundation, the State Action for Leadership Project (SAELP — see box opposite), Massachusetts’ state policymakers along with the business community and professional educators are collaborating closely with districts to revamp recruitment, preparation, and retention of leaders. Through regional partnerships, the state intends to focus intensively on recruiting and training a more diverse pool of potential leaders. At present, the administrator workforce does not come close to reflecting the state’s diverse student population. The state sees expanding workforce diversity as only one component of a master plan to ensure that preparation programs produce leaders who have the knowledge and experience to develop the intellectual competence and academic ability of a broad range of students. For example, the state board of education approved new Regulations for Educator Licensure and Preparation Program Approval that clarify alternative ways in which prospective administrators can be prepared. The state intends to revise licensing requirements and develop principal and superintendent profiles that articulate the roles, responsibilities, and skills required for administrator positions.

Virginia, also one of The Wallace Foundation SAELP grantees, embarked on an ambitious and highly successful initiative to conduct a comprehensive review and analysis of school leadership issues and current policies by establishing a Joint Legislative Commission of the General Assembly and conduct-
The State Action for Education Leadership Project

The State Action for Education Leadership Project (SAELP) is funded by The Wallace Foundation, which has been actively involved in efforts to strengthen school leadership. In fact, the foundation has committed over $150 million to education leadership through its national initiative to place quality leadership at the core of school reform and to expand the field of knowledge that can spread improvements on a broad scale. The Wallace Foundation has adopted a strategy that focuses on three kinds of connections: between training of leaders and their conditions; between different levels in the system—state, district, school, and classroom; and between current efforts and necessary new strategies. The heart of the work is coordinating the efforts across all levels of the system to bring about the needed leadership that will result in significantly greater student achievement.

In 2001, The Wallace Foundation announced a three-year, $8.9 million grant to launch the State Action for Education Leadership Project (SAELP). A national consortium, including the National Association of State Boards of Education, the National Governors Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, and the Education Commission of the States began working with 15 selected states to establish new requirements for licensing and preparation of school leaders; provide incentives for recruitment and fellowships; and promote creative, effective working dynamics between local leaders and governing boards that result in better student performance. The SAELP states are: Connecticut; Delaware; Georgia; Illinois; Indiana; Iowa; Kentucky; Massachusetts; Missouri; Montana; New Jersey; Oregon; Rhode Island; Vermont, and Virginia.

In April 2004, The Foundation announced one-year grants totaling $3.6 million to all 15 states to participate in the second phase of the state-based project. The states will be eligible to renew their grants for up to an additional two years for another $16 million based on results.

Accomplishments of SAELP to date include:

- New Jersey has adopted new governance structures and roles that afford superintendents and principals the ability to make more personnel decisions;
- Missouri introduced and passed legislation aimed at modifying administrator certification rules, fostering administrative mentoring, and improving administrative effectiveness;
- The Vermont House introduced a proposal to clarify roles of school boards and administrators and to establish a school leadership academy;
- Georgia launched a Leadership Institute for School Improvement in May;
- Delaware has developed and implemented education leadership standards; and
- Indiana, Kentucky, and Virginia have created study commissions on leadership through their state legislatures.

For more information on The Wallace Foundation, please visit www.wallacefoundation.org
ing a careful examination of professional preparation and ongoing professional development through the deliberations of a statewide Task Force To Evaluate and Redesign Preparation Programs and Professional Development for School Leaders. The Commission, which included nine educators and 12 state policymakers, heard testimony over a two-year period from numerous educational associations and practitioners. At its final session, the Commission approved a set of 12 recommendations generated by the Task Force. Some of the major recommendations include:

- Develop a model core curriculum for principal preparation programs that is consistent with the state’s administrator performance standards and evaluation criteria;
- Provide high-quality professional development based on best practice, including targeted training activities in which school leaders and leaders from other enterprises study leadership issues together;
- Collaborate with institutions of higher education to reflect the service demands of the region to be served in principal preparation programs;
- Establish a more effective and uniform evaluation of principal preparation programs for continuing accreditation;
- Require a comprehensive internship for at least 300 clock hours; joint supervision would be the responsibility of participating school divisions and partnerships with institutions as a component of the initial school leadership program;
- Require the School Leaders Licensure Assessment for initial licensure of school leaders; and
- Study the feasibility of establishing a two-tier licensure system focusing on initial preparation and proven student and school achievement.

As part of the second phase of the project, the Virginia State Board of Education and State Council for Higher Education are revising licensure requirements and program approval procedures to ensure that the performance and leadership standards described in the Board’s “Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers, Administrators, and Superintendents” are reflected in preparation and training programs for principals and superintendents in institutions of higher education. Throughout the next several years, Virginia will focus on increasing the academic rigor of all administrative licensure programs and strengthen faculty expectations so that each institution’s licensure program will meet or exceed requirements for professional accreditation.

### C. Professional Development

Typically, the decentralized delivery of professional development varies greatly in quality and is often poorly linked to state reform efforts. States need to align the work of academies, regional service centers, and private vendors to meet the accountability standards applied to high-quality preparation programs. According to research, sound professional development for leaders can be characterized as:

- focusing on student learning and authentic school-based problems;
- promoting collaboration among all staff and district personnel;
- maintaining consistency of focus over time; and
- using feedback from teaching and learning to inform instruction and program changes.

NCLB Title II, Part A funds may be used to support the professional development of principals and educational leaders. The Title II, Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High-Quality Teachers and Principals is designed to increase the implementation of professional development strategies grounded in scientifically based research. It is intended to provide grants aimed at increasing student achievement by improving teacher and principal quality and increasing the number of highly qualified principals and assistant principals in schools. In order to determine the effectiveness of professional development, it will be critical to develop processes for gathering information (e.g., performance-based evaluations, value-added data) from districts and schools to inform policies for statewide implementation.

Rhode Island has worked on linking district professional development for leaders with the state’s accountability system to improve student performance. The state amended its accountability frame-
work to encompass school leadership. It requires districts to create infrastructures for formal training of school leaders in standards-based instruction, school improvement planning, and effective use of data in the decision-making process, and community involvement. These initiatives are coupled with a network of districts that are connecting school improvement and accountability to leadership development. The state/district efforts focus on professional development, linking with higher education in school leader training, and adopting performance standards for administrators.

D. Recommendations

The Study Group makes the following recommendations to states in the area of school leadership to close the achievement gap.

- **Build preparation and professional development programs that emphasize the core functions of high-performing schools—curriculum, instruction, and student achievement.** The redesign of university preparation programs should be based on schools’ real instructional problems and strong field-based experiences. The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) recommends that at least one-third of the program focuses on curriculum and instruction.

- **Review preparation programs for school leaders to ensure they foster the skills and dispositions of effective leadership.** States can leverage their authority by ensuring that program accreditation and certification programs are aligned to performance standards. Many states are now requiring on-site reviews by a formal committee to determine if the programs are meeting the standards for quality leaders. Both Mississippi and North Carolina have successfully used program reviews to close down poorly performing university-based programs and press for policy changes to improve leadership development.

- **Establish indicators for tracking the quality of educational leaders and use performance-based accreditation and certification.** A number of states such as Kentucky, Louisiana, and Ohio have developed tiered, performance-based licensure systems. In some states, candidates must demonstrate competencies through performance-based assessment after completing their formal preparation program. Following a three to four year period, principals may renew their license based on their on-the-job-performance, which may include measures of student achievement and other school indicators (e.g., attendance, graduation rates).

- **States should allow and expand alternative preparation programs.** Preparation programs should be given the discretion to admit promising potential leaders with varying professional backgrounds. Promoting university/district partnerships may serve as a vehicle to expand recruitment, school-based training, and providing on-going professional development and support.
Appendix A. North Carolina’s Long-Term Effort to Address the Achievement Gap

Since 2000, North Carolina education officials have worked to build a strong foundation for closing achievement gaps between the state’s highest- and lowest-achieving students. The state created a division to address the issue inside the state’s Department of Public Instruction and launched an Advisory Commission on Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps. The charge to the Advisory Commission was to research the achievement gap and then to advise the State Board of Education and other state and local education officials on ways to close the gaps in student achievement outcomes and student participation in higher level learning activities, while continuing to encourage high performance overall.

Beginning in August 2000, the Commission reviewed statewide test data that had been disaggregated by race and economic status; examined national research on closing the achievement gap; studied other state and local systems that have made progress; and invited schools in North Carolina that had been relatively successful at closing their achievement gaps to share effective practices.

The Commission divided its task into five core areas that impact the achievement gap, including: home and community; participation by minority students in the learning process; relevant laws and policies; preparation and support of teachers; and the underachieving child’s condition for learning.

Preliminary Findings and Beliefs of the Commission

- Minority students in at least three ethnic groups (African-American, American-Indian, and Hispanic) are out of school more due to suspensions, dropouts, etc., and participate in less rigorous classes disproportionately when compared to white students.
- A serious state of disconnectedness exists between a large percentage of minority families and their schools.
- A disproportionate number of the least qualified teachers are assigned to the most needy student populations.
- Closing the gap should be achieved by accelerating the achievement of the lower-performing group, not by reducing the rate of growth of the highest performing groups; there should be clear measures for tracking progress; the model for closing the gap should recognize—and help educators, parents, and community leaders understand—the benefits of diversity in the student population, and the cultural differences that must be understood, respected, and addressed.

Commission Recommendations

ONE: The state should take steps to reduce, then eliminate, the disproportionate number of minority students assigned to special education programs. As a part of the state accountability reporting process, schools should provide descriptive data that will allow for comparisons among the percentage of students assigned to the various categorical education programs.

TWO: The state should recognize its obligation to ensure that students have an equal opportunity to learn by promoting, encouraging, and funding instructional approaches that expose minority students currently functioning at or near grade level to advanced content, challenging strategies, and quality work, thus increasing the number of minority students who perform at the highest levels on standardized and end-of-grade tests.
THREE: A professionally designed public information campaign should be initiated statewide to get the attention of parents (especially those with consistently underachieving students) and local communities.

FOUR: Each district should request the following from every school: 1) an annual action plan for creatively seeking to improve the school’s image with parents, and to raise the level of connectedness with parents; 2) parent involvement records that record the parents’ efforts to assist and support the school and their child in the learning process; and 3) voluntary home visits that should be taken by teachers and administrators with the goal of building a trusting relationship between home and school.

FIVE: The State Board of Education and the Superintendent should immediately make a public commitment to design and fund a required, but flexible professional initiative that will ensure that classroom teachers acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to be successful in teaching a diverse population of students.

SIX: The state should provide the substantial time that classroom teachers need to update their skills and gain new skills in working with diverse populations by requiring that veteran classroom teachers accept paid 11-month contracts once during every four-year period.

SEVEN: The state should create, fund, and support special seminars and course development for existing university teacher education faculty designed to ensure that they command and model the specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to prepare pre-service teachers to be successful in teaching diverse student populations.

EIGHT: The State Board should seek the support of the President of the University of North Carolina and the various chancellors to require all search committees for new teacher education faculty members to assess and rate applicants as to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they will need to teach pre-service teachers to work successfully with diverse student populations.

NIINE: The state should demonstrate seriousness about resolving the shortage of qualified classroom teachers in North Carolina prepared to be successful with diverse populations. It should design and implement a specific preparation delivery system that provides monetary incentives, then identifies high school and community college graduates who want to teach; and finally prepares, graduates, and places them in high needs schools and teaching areas.

TEN: The State Board should adopt a closing the gap component to the accountability system that sets a universal standard and sets measures and incentives at the school district level.

ELEVEN: A study should be commissioned by the state to examine and profile the history of organized education for American Indians and African Americans in North Carolina.

Implementation

To follow up on its recommendations and keep track of progress made toward closing the state’s achievement gap, the Commission developed an Implementation Plan detailing the status of the group’s goals. The plan lists each recommendation, along with actions that should be taken to fulfill the recommendations; specific people responsible for seeing that those actions are carried out; status of whether the goal has been implemented, is ongoing, etc.; which strategies have been implemented toward meeting the goal; and any strategies that should be implemented in the future toward meeting the goal.
n March 2004, Jerry Weast, Superintendent of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), spoke to NASBE’s Achievement Gap Study Group about his district’s Early Success Performance Plan. This initiative, which targets resources at the youngest learners, is part of a comprehensive strategic approach to producing high student achievement in one of the most diverse school districts in the nation.

MCPS enrollment has grown by some 12,000 children to more than 140,000 serving students from more than 160 different countries. The ethnic composition of the county has shifted dramatically from nearly all white to one in which more than five of every 10 students is classified as African-American, Asian-American, or Hispanic. During the last decade, the English language learner population grew by almost 50 percent and the poverty rate has increased significantly: more than 32,000, or one-fifth, of all students qualify for free and reduced lunch. In addition, the mobility rate poses a major challenge—more than 14,000 students enter and 12,000 exit the system annually.

In 1999, the school community coalesced around how to hold high standards for all of its students, while at the same time meeting the needs of the growing urbanized core of students served in approximately 60 schools. These schools educate almost half of the system’s entire elementary enrollment, but they include 75 to 80 percent of all elementary, low-income African-American and Hispanic students, and English language learners in the county. Without a targeted, intentional effort to provide more resources and educational opportunities to the most vulnerable students, the county faced the prospect of becoming a divided community—one of haves and have-nots. To take on the daunting task of addressing the achievement gap, the district adopted a strategic plan to address the needs of all of the system’s students—including the specific interests of both the more affluent neighborhoods as well as the needs of the high-poverty inner corridor.

Weast outlined the primary goals of the MCPS Early Success Performance Plan initiative. It was designed to ensure that all children achieved grade level performance in reading and math by grade three. Tracking the performance records of students who were successful through secondary school, the MCPS identified grade three performance as a strong predictor of whether a student would be able to handle a rigorous curriculum at the middle and secondary school levels. The district found that if children were not meeting certain benchmarks by the end of 1st grade, there was little likelihood that they would be able to read fluently by 3rd grade. In order to “raise the bar and close the gap,” the district launched a set of comprehensive strategies to meet the growing challenges of increasing poverty, cultural and linguistic diversity, disability, and mobility among its youngest children.

Although elements of the reform were phased in across the district, a full-day kindergarten, preschool, and reduced class size were provided to the schools with the highest levels of poverty. Weast spoke to the need to allocate resources strategically in order to ensure the most vulnerable students had an equal opportunity to succeed.

“We know that more time is essential for addressing the inequality of opportunity; equally important is how teachers are using that extra time in the classroom. The national discussion on high-quality early childhood programs must take into account the capacity of schools districts to provide more time and to train staff in the most effective use of time,” he said. The district transformed its way of delivering educational programs and services, focusing particularly on providing teachers the...
necessary skills and supports to effectively do their job. Teachers would need to act on the core belief that all children can learn. They would need to know how to differentiate instruction and use diagnostic assessments to respond to individual needs. In order to support teachers in providing differentiated instruction to diverse learners, the district provided the following:

- An overall policy for a challenging curriculum aligned to standards and that focused on foundational reading skills;
- Reduced class size (15:1 in the full-day kindergarten program, and 17:1 in grades one and two in the targeted elementary schools);
- Extended learning time for students entering kindergarten through 3rd grade in the 18 most highly impacted schools;
- Staff development on the district’s revised mathematics and reading/language arts curricula;
- Frequent assessment of student progress throughout the year to improve instruction;
- A process to support new and low-performing teachers, including on-going training throughout the school year and access to coaches and consulting teachers;
- An accountability system that publicly reports disaggregated data; and
- An integrated technology system to provide access to lesson plans, diagnostic tools, and student performance data.

Working with independent researchers, the county conducted a three-year longitudinal study of 27,000 kindergarten students to determine the results of the reforms. The major findings showed that increasing numbers of students from all socio-economic and racial and ethnic groups, as well as English language learners, are reading in kindergarten. Furthermore, these subgroups continue to perform at higher levels in reading through 2nd grade.

The provision of early childhood education has proved pivotal in achieving high performance across the district’s 125 schools. As of July 2004, Montgomery County boasts that 95 percent of its elementary schools achieved Adequate Yearly Progress under No Child Left Behind, with the greatest progress made by the schools most challenged by student poverty. The district also reports the following indicators of success:

- The percentage of all kindergarten students who can read and comprehend a simple story (text-reading) increased continuously over three years. On the text-reading benchmark, percentages grew from 39 in 2000 to 59 in 2001 to 70 in 2002.
- Lower-income students in full-day kindergarten outperformed their peers in half-day kindergarten in wealthier communities in text-reading. Students in full-day kindergarten at 56 high-poverty schools met the text-reading benchmark (71 percent) at higher levels than their peers in half-day kindergarten in more affluent communities (69 percent).
- African-American students in full-day kindergarten are performing at nearly the same levels as white students in text-reading. By 2003, 72 percent of African-American students in full-day kindergarten met the text-reading benchmark compared with 79 percent among white students, 80 percent among Asian-American students, and 60 percent among Hispanic students.

Dr. Weast attributed the progress made by low-income, diverse student groups to several key factors. These include focusing on teacher development in the belief that what teachers do matters most and that the system must support teachers by providing them with the right tools to deliver effective instruction. In speaking to the Study Group, he stressed the importance of enlisting political and community support and actively engaging parents. He also noted that a culture of continuous improvement now permeates the system. This involves on-going collection of frequent data to drive decision-making, as well as inviting independent researchers to evaluate the long-term effects of programs and policies.

Quotations and data are taken from Early Success: Closing the Opportunity Gap for Our Youngest Learners, by Jerry D. Weast (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Public Schools, 2004). This report is available on the district’s website at www.mcps.k12.md.us/departments/superintendent/docs/early_success.pdf.
Appendix C. Organizational Resources for Closing the Achievement Gap

The Institute for Urban and Minority Education conducts research and evaluations, provides information services, and assists schools, community-based organizations, and parent school leaders in program development and evaluation, professional development, and parent education. The Institute's Research and Policy Centers provide additional links to a selection of government agencies, research and policy institutes, and other education-related organizations that offer useful information, publications, and resources.

Institute for Urban and Minority Education
Box 75, Teachers College
Columbia University
New York, NY 10027-6696
Telephone: (212) 678-3780

Just for the Kids, sponsored by the National Center for Educational Accountability, analyzes state test data to identify schools that show consistent high performance over time to learn what is causing their academic success; identifies each school’s potential by comparing its academic achievement to that of the highest-performing schools serving equally or more disadvantaged students; provides training in the JFTK school reports and best practice framework; and provides information and training that enables foundations and policymakers to evaluate the impact of their efforts.

Just for the Kids
4030-2 West Braker Lane
Austin, TX 78759
Telephone: (800) 762-4645
Web: www.just4kids.org

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) is a nationally recognized, private, nonprofit organization dedicated to improving education for all through applied research, product development, and service. McREL provides field-based research and product development; workshops and training; technical assistance and consulting; evaluation and policy studies; information resources; and community education and public outreach. Visit www.mcrel.org/topics/index.asp for topical resources, including services and tools on Assessment/Data Use, Early Childhood Education, Literacy, and School Improvement and Reform.

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning
2550 S. Parker Road, Suite 500
Aurora, CO 80014
Telephone: (303) 337-0990
Web: www.mcrel.org

The Minority Student Achievement Network is an unprecedented national coalition of multiracial, relatively affluent suburban school districts that have come together to study the disparity in achievement between white students and students of color through intensive research. The Network was established to discover, develop, and implement the means to ensure high academic achievement of minority students.

Minority Student Achievement Network
1600 Dodge Avenue
Evanston, IL 60204
Telephone: (847) 424-7185
Web: www.msanetwork.org

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) supports early childhood education initiatives by providing objective, nonpartisan information based on research. The goal of NIEER is to produce and communicate the knowledge base required to ensure that every American child can receive a good education at ages three and four. The Institute seeks to provide policymakers with timely information addressing the practical problems they face. The Institute offers independent research-based advice and technical assistance to four primary groups: policy makers, journalists, researchers, and educators.
School Communities that Work: A National Task Force on the Future of Urban Districts was established in 2000 by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University to examine a feature of the public education system that has often been overlooked: the urban school district. The primary goals of the Task Force are to help create, support, and sustain entire urban communities of high-achieving schools and to stimulate a national conversation to promote the development and implementation of school communities that work for all children. Find information on the two phases of the Task Force’s work at www.schoolcommunities.org/aboutus/framework.html.

The Center for Performance Assessment is a private educational organization whose mission is to improve student achievement by building the knowledge and skills of educators and school leaders. A source of professional development in the areas of standards, assessment, and accountability, the Center approaches its work based on the seven keys to effective professional development, which include, among others, a clear and consistent purpose for professional development, the involvement of local leadership, and a holistic accountability system for teachers and school leaders.

The Education Trust is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to make schools and colleges work for all of the young people they serve. The Education Trust provides the following services: advocacy for academic achievement; analysis and expertise on policies intended to improve education; writing and speaking about educational patterns and practices; research and dissemination of student achievement data; and assistance to school districts, colleges, and community-based organizations to help their efforts on raising student achievement.

Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB): High Schools That Work (HSTW) is the largest and oldest of SREB’s seven school-improvement initiatives for high school and middle grades leaders and teachers. More than 1,100 HSTW sites in 30 states are using the HSTW framework of goals and key practices to raise student achievement. Other SREB initiatives include Making Middle Grades Work, Urban Network, and the Leadership Preparation Initiative. These projects focus on middle and high school education, transition from middle grades to high school, raising performance in low-performing and urban high schools, raising standards in career/technical education, and improving the preparation of new and emerging school leaders.

The Wallace Foundation's Knowledge Center on Educational Leadership is a growing repository of authoritative and practical information on ways to strengthen the performance of education leaders to improve student achievement. The Knowledge Center contains formal reports produced by researchers on behalf of the Foundation, syntheses of reports by Wallace staff, and stories that illustrate innovative ideas in action.

The Education Trust
1250 H St. N W , Suite 700
Washington, D C 20005
Telephone: (202) 293-1217
Web: www.edtrust.org

Southern Regional Education Board
592 10th St. N .W .
Atlanta, GA 30318
Telephone: (404) 875-9211
Web: http://www.sreb.org/programs/hs tw/hstwindex.asp

The Wallace Foundation
Two Park Avenue, 23rd Floor
New York, NY 10016
Telephone: (212) 251-9700
Web: www.wallacefoundation.org/W F/

This report goes beyond “multicultural education” to address the full range of issues brought to schools by the increasing diversity of our population. Based on the premise that diversity is—and has always been—one of this country’s greatest strengths, the report examines what schools can do to close the achievement gap between white and culturally diverse students, ensure that all students are prepared to live and work in a diverse society, and bring about a new vision of unity based on shared values of freedom, democracy, and mutual respect and responsibility.


This guide gives educational leaders a clear framework and specific steps for developing an accountability system that is fair, rigorous, and meets the needs of the school system. Each chapter has worksheets and discussion questions to structure the process. Appendices include sample accountability reports, hundreds of sample indicators, templates, checklists, and resource lists for accountability research.


This report details the outcomes of a meta-analysis of research on the effect of principal leadership practices on student achievement. Findings of this analysis include: a significant, positive correlation exists between effective school leadership and student achievement; 21 key leadership responsibilities are significantly correlated with higher student achievement; and effective leaders know not only which school changes are most likely to improve student achievement, but also understand staff and community members’ dispositions to change and tailor leadership practices accordingly.


This report shows how five high poverty school districts have raised student achievement. The report outlines lessons from the five districts and identifies practical steps that school districts can take to move beyond a few excellent schools to success across entire systems. The districts, from Texas, California, Maryland, Minnesota, and Rhode Island, were selected based on their ability to exhibit at least three years of improvement in student achievement in mathematics and/or reading across multiple grades and across all races and ethnicities.


The achievement gap between African-American and white students is a key measure of our country’s failure to achieve true equality. Federal and state officials are currently pursuing tougher accountability and other reforms at the school level to address this problem. In making schools their sole focus, however, these policy makers are neglecting an area that is vital to narrowing the achievement gap: social class differences that affect learning. This book shows that social class differences in health care...
quality and access, nutrition, childrearing styles, housing quality and stability, parental occupation and aspirations, and even exposure to environmental toxins, play a significant part in how well children learn and ultimately succeed.

**Driven to Succeed: High-Performing, High-Poverty, Turnaround Middle Schools.** Ali Callicoate Picucci, Amanda Brownson, Rahel Kahlert, Andrew Sobel. The Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, 2002. Online at www.utdanacenter.org/ (under the heading "products," click on "reports").

This study investigates how seven high-poverty middle schools demonstrated strong academic improvement so that they were performing at levels consistent with, and in many cases better than, higher-income schools in their states. What differentiated these schools from demographically similar schools were conscious efforts by staff to understand school contexts and work proactively to raise all students' performance. Four characteristics emerged as essential to supporting teaching and learning: high expectations for all students; dedication to collaborative environments; commitment to supporting teaching and learning through implementation of thoughtful organizational structures and building the capacity of the system; and attention to individual students and provision of extra services and supports beyond those traditionally offered by schools.


This report details achievement gains by 4th and 8th grade students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Summary tables and charts include state-by-state information on where minority students are making the largest gains in reading, math, and science, and on state progress in moving students to higher levels of proficiency in reading and math.


This document reports on a study on the relationship between resources and student performance. The study examined district-level patterns of resource allocation, district and school resource practices implemented to improve student performance, and barriers and challenges to efficient resource allocation faced by districts and schools. The study took place in independent school districts in Arkansas, Texas, New Mexico, and Louisiana. The findings from the research demonstrated a strong relationship between resources and student success. The results indicated that allocating resources within select areas and for certain practices might make a significant impact on student performance.


This report explains why the debate over social promotion versus retention presents a false choice—and how the best alternative is to carry through with the full promise of standards-based reform by providing all students with real opportunity to achieve to high expectations. The report includes an abundance of program examples and policy options at the state and local levels to help schools ensure that no students are left behind.


This report examines the evidence concerning what schools need to improve. It provides a compelling argument that state accountability systems cannot foster significant school improvement until they are designed to collect and analyze information about why schools fail and then develop specific, data-driven responses to the needs to low-performing schools. Topics covered include the key elements in transforming low performing schools, moving state systems from a focus on accountability to a focus on improvement, building a coordinated state policy environment, increasing district capacity to assist low-performing schools, building community support for schools, the role of money to ensure equity and adequacy of resources, and the critical importance of data-driven decision-making.

Based on an analysis of the U.S. Department of Education's Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K), the report shows that there are substantial differences in young children's achievement scores in literacy and mathematics by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (SES) as they begin kindergarten. Moreover, children from low-income backgrounds are often placed in low-resource schools, lower-quality schools, which magnifies the initial inequalities. The authors also provide evidence of how these initial discrepancies can be reduced. For example, children from low SES backgrounds who attend center-based preschool arrive at kindergarten with higher achievement.


In this report, Dr. Hodgkinson focuses his renowned expertise on America's most vulnerable population: children from birth to five years old. Through a variety of statistical data and other sources, he paints a “politically incorrect” picture of projected outcomes for what he feels are shortsighted state and federal policies, which will ultimately undermine the best intentions of No Child Left Behind.

The report argues that key assumptions driving standards-based school reform and accountability testing do not fairly and adequately deal with the effects that poverty, low parent education levels, child abuse, neglect, and other factors, including race, have on a child's chances before they start first grade.


Using data compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics, researchers Balfanz and Legters measured the “promoting power” of 10,000 regular and vocational high schools that enroll more than 300 students. They Johns Hopkins researchers went to the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data for enrollment numbers for every high school in the country with at least 300 students. Then they compared the number of students enrolled as freshmen (or as 10th graders in high schools with a 10th to 12th grade configuration) with the number still enrolled as seniors to gauge a school’s “promoting power.” They identified about 2,000 high schools in the United States where graduation is not the norm, concentrated in 50 large cities and 15 predominantly southern and southwestern states.


This report looks to expose inaccurate and misleading official data and suggest sounder statistical methods for accurate calculation of high school graduation rates, distinguished at the state and district level, and disaggregated by race. Key findings of the report include that low graduation rates are correlated to school segregation, and this relationship is independent of poverty. Also recommended are a number of action steps, including a reversal of the No Child Left Behind provision that permits schools, districts, and states to obscure minority graduation rates.


The U.S. spends over $300 billion annually on public elementary and secondary education. As the nation enters the 21st century, it faces a major challenge: how best to tie this financial investment to the goal of high levels of achievement for all students. In addition, policymakers want assurance that education dollars are being raised and used efficiently and effectively. This book contains a comprehensive review of the theory and practice of financing public schools by federal, state, and local governments, and covers such topics as: legal and legislative efforts to reduce spending and achievement gaps; the shift from “equity” to “adequacy” as a new standard for
determining fairness in education spending; the debate and the evidence over the productivity of American schools; and strategies for using school finance in support of broader reforms aimed at raising student achievement.


The authors examine the most glaring issue of racial inequality in America today—the gap in academic performance between African-American and Latino children on the one hand and white and Asian-American students on the other. This book marshals facts to examine the depth of the problem, the inadequacy of conventional explanations, and the limited impact of Title I, Head Start, and other familiar reforms. No Excuses also highlights inner-city schools across the country that are getting outstanding results with high-needs children.


Established to advise and work with the local board of education and administration on closing the gap in academic achievement and on developing a collaborative plan for achieving that goal, the Commission released this 29-page progress report to the State Board of Education in April of 2001. It focuses on two of the five sub-committees and their work: the Student Participation sub-committee, which was tasked to identify specific findings that impact or encourage student participation; and the Legislative sub-committee, who focused its efforts on ways the General Assembly and the State Board of Education could most effectively use laws and policies to help close the gap.


This report documents outstanding student achievement gains by the America's Choice School Design (ACSD), one of the nation's largest comprehensive school-improvement programs. Reports include: a 2004 study of America's Choice elementary and middle schools in Rochester, New York by the C-Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPE); a CPE study of America's Choice schools in Plainfield, New Jersey; and a meta-analysis of 232 school reform studies by researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Johns Hopkins University.


In this expanded second edition of Results, Schmoker answers questions about school improvement by focusing on student learning. Teachers and administrators can surpass the community's expectations and facilitate great improvements in student learning by setting goals, working collaboratively, and keeping track of student-achievement data from many sources. Through hundreds of up-to-date examples, Schmoker shows how to achieve and celebrate both short- and long-term success.


This report highlights the need for states to better report their high school graduation data. Ultimately, this data should result in greater awareness of how many students—particularly low-income and minority students—make it through high school. A state-by-state analysis of graduation rates in all 50 states demonstrates that while some states seem to have seized this opportunity to provide an honest picture of high school graduation among their young people, many other states were lax in reporting complete and useful data.


The author posits that many purported causes of the achievement gap between student groups, notably white...
and African-American students, are actually myths with some elements of truth. These myths can influence educators and policy-makers to seek a simple, single solution that fails to solve the problem. Singham argues that “the gap we should be focusing on is the difference between where all students are now and where we believe they should be.” According to Singham, the solution to improving achievement for all students as well as closing achievement gaps for underperforming groups is to focus reform efforts on long-term professional development of high quality, standards-based instruction that embodies strategies that especially impact traditionally low-achieving students.

**The Numbers Game II: Bringing High-Quality Teachers to All Schools.** Carla Claycomb. The National Association of State Boards of Education, 2003. This report builds on NASBE’s widely praised document, The Numbers Game, which went beyond the rhetoric of a national teacher shortage to look at the real problems of teacher supply and demand. The new report focuses on what it takes to build a high-quality, stable teaching workforce for students everywhere. It discusses in depth our teacher development system for attracting, preparing, and retaining the best educators and examines the links between reform efforts, working conditions, and schools’ ability to find and keep good teachers. Also included are numerous policy and program recommendations for state and local leaders.


In this publication, the author shows how value-added data offers numerous possibilities for actually getting some movement on problems such as how to measure the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs, how to measure the effects of different models of professional development, and how to identify highly effective teachers using value-added data.


This report offers 23 recommendations to close gaps in academic achievement between Ohio’s highest-performing and lowest-performing students. It places a special emphasis on students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, those in major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and those with limited English-language backgrounds.


This book synthesizes 35 years of research on effective schooling to provide readers with an action plan to implement successful strategies on student achievement. Marzano defines the factors affecting student achievement and offers answers to questions such as: how can schools set academic goals that do not underestimate student potential; what instructional strategies really work; do all students have equal opportunity to learn given current curriculum requirements; and how can teachers manage classrooms that promote positive student- and teacher relationships.
Endnotes


2 How valid is using NAEP scores in this discussion? Abigail and Stephen Thernstrom, in their book on the racial gap, make the following point: “Some experts have charged that NAEP has set its achievement levels unrealistically high. Possibly so… This controversy, however, has little bearing on the issue that concerns us. Whether the standards in particular subjects err in being too tough or too easy, within each subject they are applied in precisely the same way across the racial and ethnic spectrum. The question is how racial groups compare in their distribution at the four achievement levels.” A. Thernstrom and S. Thernstrom, No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003).


4 All NAEP data are available from the National Center for Education Statistics, online at nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/.

5 Ibid.

6 Hodgkinson, Leaving Too Many Children Behind.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 V. E. Lee and D. T. Burkam, Inequality at the Starting Gate: Social Background Differences in Achievement as Children Begin School (Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute, 2002).


13 Ibid.

14 R. Balfanz and N. Legters, Locating the Dropout Crisis (Center for Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University, 2004).

15 NCES.

16 Ibid.

17 GreatSchools.net. Available online at www.greatschools.net/modperl/browse_school/va/2528/.


30 Education Trust web-site for Dispelling the Myth: Available at online at www2.edtrust.org/edtrust/dtm/.

31 Reeves, Accountability in Action.

K. Haycock reported to the Study Group that completion rates for high school and college differ substantially across ethnic lines. For every 100 white kindergarteners, 93 graduate from high school and 33 obtain bachelor’s degree. For every 100 African American kindergarteners, 87 graduate from high school and 18 obtain a bachelor’s degree. For every 100 Latino kindergarteners, 63 graduate from high school and 11 obtain a bachelor’s degree. Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, March Current Population Survey, 1971-2001.


Schmoker, Results The Key to Continuous School Improvement.

Ibid.


61 Schmoker, Results: The Key to Continuous School Improvement.
63 NASBE, From Sanctions to Solutions.
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111 The Wallace Foundation, Beyond the Pipeline.

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