

# Closing the Achievement Gap

## Oregon's Plan for Success for All Students

Oregon Department of Education

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Office of Education Improvement and Innovation



### Closing the Achievement Gap: Research, Practice and Policy in Oregon

The achievement gap spans numerous educational indicators (e.g. test scores, grades, graduation and dropout rates, college entrance & completion rates) (D'Amico, 2001). This gap--which primarily affects poor, minority and disenfranchised youth--has existed for over 30 years, since it first was measured in the 1970s.

Susan Castillo, Superintendent of Public Instruction in Oregon, named closing the achievement gap as a top instructional priority in Oregon

today. Superintendent Castillo notes three aspects to the achievement gap:

- Performance gap: The discrepancies between the educational achievement and performance of students of diverse races, ethnicities, income levels and other groupings (e.g., students with disabilities, English Language Learners).
- Resource gap: The disproportionate access of students to equitable funding, highly competent and trained teachers and administrators, highly engaging and rigorous curriculum, and opportunities for educational supports and experiences beyond the classroom.
- Willingness gap: The collective will of society to tolerate or reject the inequities in both the educational system and society at large that disproportionately and negatively affect students who are poor, minority, disadvantaged and disabled.

In Oregon and throughout the nation, the achievement gap appears in kindergarten, and widens as children continue on through secondary and post-secondary education. Oregon students who are disproportionately affected by this gap are mostly likely to be: living in poverty, Native American, Hispanic, African-American, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities.

While Oregon schools are increasingly successful in significantly reducing the achievement gap at the elementary grades, the gap persists at the secondary level. The Oregon Department of Education and Oregon schools are committed to developing, implementing and supporting strategies, practices and policies that will effectively assist all children to succeed in school, from kindergarten through college.

**"The dream of expanding the educational opportunities open to children disadvantaged by race or poverty is hardly a new one. Indeed, the desire to level the playing field was a major reason for the creation of our public school system in the first place."  
--Abigail Thernstrom and Stephan Thernstrom, *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in America***

## Multiple Factors Contributing to the Achievement Gap

The causes for the achievement gap span multiple contexts, beginning with individual and family factors and extending into school and societal factors. Below is a list of some of the most common factors contributing to the achievement gap.

**Poverty:** Hispanic, African American, Native American and certain Asian subgroups are most likely to live in poverty (Barton, 2003). Poverty, which influences achievement, is linked to race/class in the U.S. (Manning & Kovach, 2003). Differential access to resources (e.g., high quality schools, highly qualified teachers), family chaos, frequent moving and school changes, maternal education, a family member's incarceration—all are factors associated with poverty and achievement gap outcomes.

**Family experience with education:** Many families, particularly immigrant families, have limited experience with the expectations and norms of school culture in the U.S. (Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Portes, 1999). When school information is communicated via an unfamiliar method or a language, or expectations for involvement are not explicit, parents are less able to support their children's education.

**Cultural norms and values:** Schools and pedagogical practices tend to reinforce the American values of individualism and independence (Delgado-Gaitan, 1987; Reyes, Scribner, & Paredes Scribner, 1999). These values may conflict with the values of cultures that are familial and cooperative, such as Hispanic, Hmong, Native American and Pacific Island cultures.

**Racism, prejudice and segregation:** The effects of racism, prejudice and segregation (Spring, 2000; House, 1999) influence diverse factors

through out the educational system, including teacher relationship with students, classroom norms and school policies.

**Inequities in school resources:** Not all students are educated in schools that offer high quality educational experiences. Inequities that disproportionately affect poor and minority youth include limited access and equity in programming, fewer highly-qualified teachers, and fewer opportunities to learn (Barton, 2003).

**School and teacher attitudes:** How schools and educators respond to student diversity (Delpit, 1996; Cohen & Steele, 2002), e.g. how they encourage (or fail to encourage) academic excellence in all students (Ogbu, 2003; Barton, 2003) influences the achievement gap.

**Student motivation:** Students may disengage from school for a variety of emotional and psychological reasons (Board on Children, Youth and Families, 2003). For example, some minority students reject schooling due to the misconception that academic success is equated with "acting white" (Ogbu, 1994).

**School environment:** Schools in which students don't feel safe or valued contribute to the achievement gap (Board on Children, Youth and Families, 2003). Schools serving poor and minority students have a significantly higher incidence of violence (aggression, bullying, sexual harassment, fighting, etc.) (Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, 2003).



### Some Facts about Oregon Students:

- 23% of all students are minority students.
- 11% of all students speak a native language other than English.
- 37% of all students qualify for free or reduced price lunch (an indicator of poverty).
- 13% of all students receive special education services.

(Oregon Report Card, 2004)

**The Achievement Gap in Action:  
National Educational Attainment of Students**

- Native American: 58% graduate HS, 7% graduate college (with at least BA)
- Asian: 94% graduate HS, 49% graduate college
- African American: 87% graduate HS, 16% graduate college
- Hispanic: 62% graduate HS, 6% graduate college
- White: 91% graduate HS, 30% graduate college

(Haycock, 2001)



**Key Findings: Oregon Students and the Achievement Gap**

Group	CIM Reading 2004--Percent of Students Meeting Standards				CIM Math 2004--Percent of Students Meeting Standards			
	3rd Grade	5th Grade	8th Grade	10th Grade	3rd Grade	5th Grade	8th Grade	10th Grade
Native American	78	68	43	35	73	71	42	25
Asian	86	80	67	50	85	85	73	58
African American	74	65	42	27	71	66	39	19
Hispanic	63	54	32	22	63	60	32	17
White	87	81	64	55	85	82	63	47
Multi-Racial	85	76	69	51	83	78	69	38
Special Education	52	43	21	13	57	48	22	11
All Students	82	76	59	50	81	78	59	43

(Oregon Report Card 2003-2004)

• African American, Hispanic, Native American, Multi-Racial and Special Education students consistently demonstrate lower scores on CIM assessments in every subject tested and at every grade level.

• While the percentage of students Meeting Standards declines in each racial-ethnic group as

students progress through school, the decline is significantly more acute for Native American, African American and Hispanic students. The same holds true for Special Education students.

• The percentage of students Meeting Standards has risen each year, across all racial and  
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ethnic groups, since 1996. Progress in reading and math, however, is inconsistent across grade levels, with the greatest increases concentrated in the elementary grades.

- Students in high poverty and high minority schools are less likely to Meet Standards, and are more likely to be rated at the low point on the scale, than are their peers in low minority and low poverty schools.

- 35% of white students earned a CIM with

diploma, compared to less than 12% of Black and Hispanic students.

- Overall, over 17% of Oregon students drop out of school. Those in high poverty schools are at greater risk of dropout than their peers. While dropout rates are declining in Oregon, African American and Hispanic students, followed by Native American students, drop out at rates higher than white students.

(Oregon Report Card, 2002-2003; 2003-2004)

**“We are making a commitment to ensure that all of Oregon’s students – not just some – are equipped with the tools they need to meet their full potential. We are taking the next step – moving from a dialogue about how to close the achievement gap to taking the actions we know will yield the results we want – success for all students.”**

**--Susan Castillo, Superintendent of Public Instruction**

## Oregon’s Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gap

Oregon educators, administrators, parents, community members and members of the Oregon Department of Education are developing and implementing strategies that will be effective in closing the achievement gap. Below is a list of the strategies being implemented across the state at schools, districts, educational service districts (ESDs) and the ODE.

- Align K-12 curriculum, instruction and assessment with academic content standards, ensuring effective, evidence-based and culturally appropriate strategies and supports (Fashola, 1998; Wenglinsky, 2004).
- Connect curriculum, instruction and assessment to contexts that engage and meet the unique needs of diverse K-16 students (Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Byrk, 2001).
- Foster parent and community partnerships to encourage and support student learning (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).
- Promote and support leadership dedicated to ensuring success for all students by a) establishing a positive learning environment and b) facilitating collaboration among staff to provide comprehensive and appropriate instruction and

support necessary for all students to achieve (Ferguson, 2002;

National Research Council, 2003).

- Advance secondary school improvement through professional development and effective, evidence-based instructional strategies (Wenglinsky, 2002).
- Ensure safe and violence-free learning environments (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, & Czeh, 2000).
- Develop guidance and planning of next steps to address: a) K-16 continuum of education, b) successful student transitions, and c) opportunities for successful and engaging learning beyond the school environment (Lerman, 1999; National Research Council, 2003).
- Communicate policy, leadership, research and development practices and strategies within educational system, with parents and community, and with policymakers (Clark, 2002).
- Promote 3-tiered educational system (core content, supplemental support, intervention support).



## Key Considerations in Reducing the Achievement Gap: What Schools Can Do

- Make closing the achievement gap and academic success for all students central to the school's mission, and address activities to include gathering and analyzing data, professional development, and outreach to parents and the community.
- Make sure the transitions--from preschool to kindergarten and/or first grade, elementary to middle and middle to high school--are smooth for children, parents, and teachers.
- Engage families in children's education—including families of secondary level students. Help parents understand how children's social and learning abilities develop. Cultivate an ethos within the school of respecting and cultivating diverse family cultural values and traditions. Use non-traditional forms of communication to reach out to parents.
- Creates a school environment immersed in literacy and committed to student learning of mathematics concepts and basic skills. Students having reading difficulty should be diagnosed early and given immediate, appropriate, and high-quality interventions.



- Make the curriculum relevant to students by utilizing students' and families' diverse skills and experiences, and establishing small learning communities. Provide rich and rigorous curriculum for all students.
  - Use data to identify needed changes in instruction, and monitor and evaluate policies and practices to ensure fairness, inclusion, and focus on high levels of achievement for *all* students.
  - Develop and support leaders who have a clear vision of and commitment to student academic achievement and support. Include everyone — teachers, parents, and students — in setting and carrying out the mission.
- Provide on-going, high-quality professional development around effective strategies to close the achievement gap.

**“Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men -- the balance-wheel of the social machinery.”**

**--Horace Mann**

**“Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength for our nation.”**

**--John F. Kennedy**

(Excerpted from Poverty and Race Research Action Council, 2001)



## Oregon Department of Education's Policies and Supports for Closing the Achievement Gap

- Academic Content Standards
- Literacy education and training (Early Head Start, Head Start, Even Start Family Literacy, Early Reading First, Reading First, Lexiles)
- English language learners programming: Newcomer center, bilingual education and English as a Second Language, English Language Proficiency Standards
- State Action for Educational Leadership Project (SAELP)
- Special Education Improvement Grant
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century After School Education Program
- Service Learning Program
- Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities
- Career Related Learning Standards
- Character Education Project
- American Indian/Alaska Native State Education Plan
- Guidelines for Multicultural Education Plan
- Technology Enhanced Student Assessment
- Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Framework
- Cultural Competency Training of Trainers Program
- Transition Planning
- Parent Involvement Program
- High School Improvement Research and Demonstration Sites
- Superintendent's Closing the Achievement Gap Conference
- Secondary Literacy and School Reform Conference
- Superintendent's Summer Institutes
- Underrepresented and Minority Student Achievement Advisory Team

## Selected Resources on Closing the Achievement Gap

- Raising Achievement and Reducing Gaps: Reporting Progress Toward Goals for Academic Achievement: Lessons from the States. Available online at [www.negp.gov/issues/publication/negpdocs/negprep/rpt\\_barton/barton\\_paper.pdf](http://www.negp.gov/issues/publication/negpdocs/negprep/rpt_barton/barton_paper.pdf)
- Add It Up: Using Research to Improve Education for Low-Income and Minority Students. Available online at [www.prrac.org/pubs\\_aiu.pdf](http://www.prrac.org/pubs_aiu.pdf)
- Insight into the role poverty plays in maintaining the achievement gap, "What No School Can Do." Available online at [www.augsburg.edu/education/edc480/noschool.html](http://www.augsburg.edu/education/edc480/noschool.html)

**“Data highlight the gaps between rhetoric and reality. Data can point to the steps that must be taken to close those gaps. Finally, the process of compiling and reflecting on schoolwide data can bond teachers together in a common understanding that they are part of a larger team of professionals responsible for creating a culture of high achievement for all students.”**

**--Anne Whelock, *Using Data to Close the Achievement Gap***