

Promoting Excellence For All

Closing the Achievement Gap



Senior Project Paper

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Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American essayist, once said "Our greatest glory is not in never failing but in rising up every time we fail." Not only had the achievement gap affected schools in America but it also affected different groups of students who are falling behind their peers. The achievement gap had always been a problem in the history of education but people, such as teachers, never gave up on trying to make a difference in their schools. Closing the achievement gap can change the future to improve social equity in education. Although the achievement gap is a big deal in the schools of America and globally, many people are not aware of what it is. The most effective way to close the achievement gap is to raise awareness of who is affected and how to close the gap.

Many students are affected, yet people fail to know what the achievement gap is and who it concerns. The achievement gap is the differences of academic performances and test scores ("Achievement Gap"). The gap affects certain group of students between the minority and poor compared to their white and in some cases Asian peers. It's never the same in every school or district. According to the achievement gap article in 2009 and 2011 Education Statistics proved that African-American and Hispanic students are behind their white peers with an average of 20 or more test-score points on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) math and reading assessment. This wasn't the only article that talked about how the Black and Hispanic students are falling behind and it indicates that the minority and low income families refers to them. "It is most often used to describe the troubling performance gaps between African-American and Hispanic students" ("Achievement Gap"). Since the beginning of their childhood, the achievement gap affected the generations and individuals in which they belong to (McKown). How schools are structured and the way that the minority and the poor grew up has a big impact on their success in their school and education.

The heart of the achievement gap starts with the school community and at home. Not all students have the same resources and it came down to a point where school counselors are aware of it and they want to do something about it (Hartline and Cobia). It is a problem because it can be a struggle for low-income students to get the items needed for school such as calculators, posters, and supplies for projects. It causes stress and depression to students because they know that they can't get access to what they need. This leads to a downturn in their education and students won't do as well or pay full attention in class with many things going on in their lives, therefore, they won't learn as much information from their classes. "Parents and communities and school play a critical role in education of young children" (Williams). If the parents doesn't earn enough income to support their family and pay for the house bills, it will eventually lead to moving homes and schools multiple times. With this, students would fall behind with their work and lose progress in school (Williams). This causes misleading information learned at school because different schools and districts go at different paces with their teaching and class schedule. The minority and poor students will not do as well at the end of the year exams when the reports of their academic scores are out. Not only are students affected by their income but the teachers are too.

"Social readiness and academic are associated with the kinds of jobs and wages people are able to secure" (McKown). Even with staff and teachers, their incomes affect the way they teach and it can be bad or good because they are what make up the school those impacts all students. The government found that to promote excellence, it starts with the teachers and an important factor can be to raise their wages (Manna 384). Although, it most likely would not happen, it can be an effective method to motivate better teaching. Teachers look at their students as the future so they do try to adjust to students and change how their classes are taught to help

(*Closing Achievement Gaps*). Even though some teachers are not satisfied with their pay rate, they are still able to cooperate to help the students in the achievement gap to improve their scores.

Test scores are improving but the gap between students is still there. "In all exams, both black and white students in the United States had an increase in test scores but the white students are still exceeding and leading" (Novinson). Parents and students don't check these types of scores and they are unaware of how they are doing. Progress had been proven but with the white students also improving, it leaves the gap in the same place (Williams). It shows that the white students are still taking lead. Not only that, but the Asian students are rapidly improving. The Asian-American students' advanced math level went from 59% to 76% compared to 43% to 58% of their white peers and their math scores were 17 points higher (Sieff). The Asian-Americans students are another factor to why the achievement gap is opening wider. "Despite encouraging signs of progress reflected in the most recent NCEES reports, the pace of improvement is too sluggish" (Novinson). Although schools are slowly improving, there had more been actions taken upon this situation.

If everyone knows the achievement gap, more actions would be taken and it's getting there. Demond Means, position of the task force chair in closing Wisconsin's Achievement Gap Program said, "Unless we are willing to talk about this openly with courage and be audacious in the conversation, then we'll never close it" (*Closing Achievement Gap*). The achievement gap is not talked about to parents and students. The minority and the low-income students are most likely not aware that they are in the loop of the achievement gap. In most cases, only the school and their district are aware of who is affected in their schools. An example is at John A. Johnson, many students are not aware that they are separated from their African-American

classmates with a gap, academically (Thompson). In some states, such as Georgia, 100 counseling programs are implemented in the schools to help narrow the achievement gap. Training from the counselors is required. The counselors provide counseling interventions for students who are in the gap. Results of this program are recorded every year and based on the 100 schools that are doing this counseling program reported back that their school's test scores had gone up (Hartline and Cobia). An example would be the gains in both results of scores and perception data went from a 24% to a 57%. This program doesn't just include test scores but it includes the following: grades, discipline/behavior, attendance, and other things. The counseling program is just one of many programs. Another program that was made to close the achievement gap is that "No Child Left Behind (NCLB)" act program that was passed in 2001 ("Achievement Gap"). NCLB requires public schools to send report cards to parents every year to show their student's performance in their classes. They seek to empower parents by giving them with information about how schools, district, and the students are doing ("No Child Left Behind"). This program also requires schools to show improvements within their schools and if the school district fails to do that, they must draft school improvement plans. With programs in the schools, it encourages motivation for students, parents, teachers, schools and districts to improve and do better in the attempt to close the achievement gap.

The best way to close the achievement gap is to take action on implementing programs and creating awareness so that people will know about the gap. If everyone knew what the achievement gap was, they would be aware that it affects the minority and the poor. With this, people can donate money for programs or do studies to find ways to solve the problem of closing the achievement gap because it's possibly dealing with their kids or kids that they know. If the government also helps to fund more programs, it would be affective. There has been little

progress in closing the gap. Test scores are indeed improving, but the gap still remains between the minority and their white peers. The heart of the achievement gap starts at home and at school. This is so important because many students are falling behind, specifically the African-American and Hispanic students. It decreases the amount of colored students going to college every year and there hasn't been a sign of improvement. The achievement gap had always been a problem and it will continue to be a problem in America and globally but it will no longer be a problem when it becomes known to everyone.

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Annotated Works Cited

"Achievement Gap." - *Education Week Research Center*. N.p., 7 Aug. 2004. Web. 13 Nov. 2014.

This article talks about the general information of what an achievement gap is and what created it. It also talks about who is involved in the gap. It goes into what programs are created in attempt to minimize the gap.

Closing Achievement Gaps: Strategies for Promoting Excellence for All in Wisconsin. Dir. Tom McCarthy. Perf. Tony Evers. 2014. *Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction*. Web.

This video is about the achievement gap in Wisconsin. It has short clips of teachers, principals, and board of directors talking about what the problem is and how it can be solved. The teachers also discussed about the things they do to help improve their student scores.

Hartline, Julie, and Debra C. Cobia. "School Counselors: Closing Achievement Gaps And Writing Results Reports." *Professional School Counseling* 16.1 (2012): 71-79. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 12 Nov. 2014.

This research is about a counseling program designed for counselors to take on. They must report back results every from their schools. I used the results and statistics from this research. They go in depth with information on the program and the procedure of how it works.

Manna, Paul. "Centralized Governance And Student Outcomes: Excellence, Equity, And Academic Achievement In The U. S. States." *Policy Studies Journal* 41.4 (2013): 683-706. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 13 Nov. 2014.

This journal is about the theory of political, administrative, and fiscal centralization affecting student outcomes on their academic achievements. It includes results of studying academic performances through the view of the government.

McKown, Clark. "Social Equity Theory And Racial-Ethnic Achievement Gaps." *Child Development* 84.4 (2013): 1120-1136. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 12 Nov. 2014.

This article talks and describes the social equity theory. This article has good evidence in proving social equity. It also gives reason to why some races are still lacking and looped in the achievement gap.

"No Child Left Behind - Overview." *Background & Analysis*. Federal Education Budget Project, n.d. Web. 15 Nov. 2014.

This article is about the No Child Left Behind program. It talks about the history of the program and what it is supposed to do. What I took from this web page was the information about what the program required schools to do. It's a reliable website and source, very informative.

Novinson, Michael. "Test Scores Improve, but Achievement Gap Remains." *La Prensa San Diego*: 2. Jul 17 2009. *ProQuest*. Web. 12 Nov. 2014 .

The author's purpose of writing this article is to show that although students are now doing better the gap between black and white students. It also has reading and math scores and compares them to previous assessment.

Sieff, Kevin. "Achievement gap widening between Asian American students and everyone else." *The Washington Post*. Education, 05 April 2011. Web. 14 Nov. 2014

This article is about the achievement of Asian-Americans is improving but not everyone is included. This article includes statistics on the percentage of testing scores. It also has information on the study of the Center on Education Policy.

Thompson, Michael. Personal Interview. 8 September. 2014

This was actually a leadership meeting of student council and Mr. Thompson. We talked about the achievement gap and how we have a new program this year to help our African-American peers.

Williams, Armstrong. "What does it Take to Close the Achievement Gap?" *Afro - American Red Star*: 1. Sep 2006. *ProQuest*. Web. 12 Nov. 2014 .

This article talks about the disadvantages of students and what is separating the poor and minority from the students with more advantages. It also includes what impacts the gap and what it would take to close the gap.