

Equity and Opportunity: Closing the Achievement Gap

By Dr. Connie Kamm

Finding research-based solutions for closing the achievement gap continues to be a pressing challenge. Adding complexity is the demographic shift of students attending public schools. A report from The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) titled *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2017* indicates that between 2000 and 2016, the percentage of White and Black students decreased (White, from 62% to 52%, Black from 15% to 14%). By contrast, other racial/ethnic groups increased: Hispanics (15% to 25%), Asians (3% to 5%), and children of two or more races (from 2% to 4%). Native Americans and Pacific Islanders remained at approximately 1%. The analysis of poverty levels in the NCES report reveals that in 2014 the number of children under 18 living in poverty was highest for Black children (37%), followed by Hispanic children (32%) and White and Asian Children (12% each).

Analysis of these demographic differences and disparities has prompted educational researchers to situate the achievement gap within a broader context of what they discern as the opportunity gap (Milner, 2012). Students come to school with differing and, in some cases, inequitable experiences related to their access to resources, support, and possibilities for academic growth. For those who are disadvantaged, low achievement has a wide-reaching effect including higher dropout rates, incarceration, poor health, substance abuse, poverty, and more. These students could have had very different lives had their experiences in school, at home, and in their communities provided them the tools they needed to be successful academically and personally.

There are practices that schools can implement to support these students who experience low achievement. In the article, "Good Leaders Make Good Schools," David Brooks, Op-Ed columnist for *The New York Times*, notes that principals have the power to build a positive school culture that supports a growth mind set for all learners. Brooks points to the researchers

from McKinsey who studied test scores from half a million students in 72 countries and found "that students' mind-sets were twice as powerful in predicting scores as home environment and demographics were." (Brooks, 2018, p. A25).

In addition to building a growth-oriented school culture that benefits all learners, effective principals also create conditions where collective teacher efficacy (CTE) can flourish. CTE is a shared belief that educators working collaboratively can positively impact student outcomes. "When teachers believe that together, they are capable of developing students' critical thinking skills, creativity, and mastery of complex content, it happens!" (Donohoo, Hattie, & Eells, 2017). CTE energizes teachers, giving them the confidence to try new approaches, take on challenging tasks, and set rigorous goals that improve learning for all students.

School leaders play an important part in building teacher efficacy. "The greatest power that principals have in schools is that they can control the narrative of the school...if the narrative is about high expectations, growth in relation to inputs, what it means to be a 'good learner' in various subjects, and what impact means, then teachers and students will think about learning in a different way" (Donohoo, et al.). Closely related to successful efforts to create a high level of teacher efficacy is leadership's role in building the school's social capital, a vibrant network of relationships between teachers, parents, the community, and administration in support of the goals and norms of the school (Goddard, 2013).

Research on effective principal leadership, CTE, and developing high levels of supportive social capital provides a context for reviewing the attached body of educational research that explores effective practices, programs, and structures to increase student learning and close the achievement gap.

Main ideas	Additional Information	Resources
Policy and Systemic Changes are Needed to Close the Achievement Gap		
<p><i>The systems and policies by which districts, schools, and classrooms operate play a critical role in closing the achievement gap for minority students.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State, local, and school policies and practices have the potential to create conditions that promote student success. Note the following examples of such practices: investing in and setting high standards for high-quality teacher education; providing time for teacher collaboration in planning curriculum; engaging in meaningful and relevant professional development, and revising teacher evaluation criteria to include inquiry and collaboration. • An imbalance in funding needs to be addressed. Systemic practices that impede providing all students with enriched educational experiences often involve the inequitable distribution of resources. Low performing schools not only tend to serve large numbers of poor and minority students but also struggle to attract and retain high quality teachers. Additionally, inequitable school funding often results in poorly maintained school facilities and outdated technology and instructional materials. • Institutional racism and a lack of cultural competence at district and school levels needs to be recognized and understood as impacting students' experiences in schools (Bailey & Dziko, 2008). Schools that have closed the achievement gap have put in place policies and practices that focus on addressing the following human capital needs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teachers who work to close the achievement gap are well-prepared to address students' academic, social, and emotional needs. ○ Teachers are supported in their efforts to revise and improve their instructional practices in order to yield high achieving student performance. • As an example of a statewide effort to close the achievement gap, an advisory committee in the State of Washington, recommended the following educational policy changes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Change the language in the official definitions of the State's education policies to include the requirement that students be provided an "excellent and equitable" education. In 	<p>Resources on Closing the Achievement Gap from NEA.org</p> <p>A Plan to Close the Achievement Gap for African American Students</p> <p>Identifying Factors that Contribute to Achievement Gaps</p> <p>The Achievement Gap, a Look Into Causes</p> <p>Richard Rothstein on the Many Causes of the Achievement Gap</p> <p>Causes of and Solutions to the Achievement Gap: Teachers' Perceptions</p>

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	<p>many circumstances, the gap in student achievement is truly about race where White and Asian students living in poverty score higher on average than African American students who are not living in poverty.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Expand the State’s definition of education to include early learning for three to five-year-olds so that all students, without discrimination, have access to high quality early education to prepare them for success in school. African American students in particular tend to start kindergarten significantly behind their peers in their early learning development (literacy skills, number sense, social behavior, etc.). ○ Revise statewide improvement plans to include the requirement that districts and schools close achievement gaps. ○ Identify schools and districts with 20% or more minority populations and establish a statewide achievement gap oversight committee to monitor the plans and efforts of these schools and districts to close the achievement gaps within their student populations. This committee would provide resources to help these schools and districts create or revise improvement plans with specific goals and strategies, as well as monitoring benchmarks to specifically address the needs of minority students. ○ Collaborate with individuals and boards within higher education to revise and develop statewide practices that increase college, technical school, and career access for minority students. ○ Create partnerships between higher education institutions and school districts to provide professional development programs for educators that emphasize improving school climate, engaging diverse classrooms, and employing instructional strategies specifically for diverse students (Bailey & Dziko, 2008). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Brown-Annenberg Institute for School Reform has made several recommendations for practice and policy changes within schools and districts to successfully infuse cultural competence 	<p>Closing the Achievement Gap: Focus on Latino Students</p> <p>Diversity Toolkit: Cultural Competence for Educators</p> <p>Student-Centered Schools: Closing the Opportunity Gap</p>

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	<p>into schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Establish standards and strategies for culturally responsive practices for educating Black and Latino males ... and create tools and guidelines for implementing and assessing them. ○ Prioritize and hold district and school-based educators accountable in their evaluations for cultural responsiveness. ○ Ensure that all teachers and staff members participate in regular professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy and behavior management, and ensure that daily, in-school professional collaboration time is used to improve curriculum and instruction, paying specific attention to Black and Latino males. ○ Develop facility among district and school leaders in understanding theories about the education of students of color so that they can model explicit talk about racism and otherisms in our schools and classrooms.” (Best practices in supporting Latino student achievement, 2015 p. 12). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In matters of school policy reform, it is important to consider the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Are the communities these policies affect contributing to the policy-making process? Are their voices heard? Are their concerns represented? ○ What might be the unintended consequences of this reform? ○ Will the educational outcomes of this policy reform raise the level of achievement of all students or only that of students of a certain demographic? ○ How will the policy outcomes be monitored? How will data be collected and interpreted? ○ Are these reforms setting up all teachers and all students for success? ● Matters of Policy are also critical for closing the gap for English Language Learners. Consider the following facts and suggestions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ English Language Learners (ELL) are the fastest growing population within the educational system in the United States and the majority of these students are US born and speak Spanish as their first language. In 2014, about 4.7 million public school students participated in English language learner (ELL) programs. Hispanic students made up the 	<p>National ELL Achievement Gaps</p> <p>Addressing Achievement Gaps: The Language Acquisition and Educational Achievement of English-Language Learners</p>

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	<p>majority of this group (78 percent), with around 3.6 million participating in ELL programs. Many of these students also come from low-income families and most perform well below their peers – evidence of a distinct achievement gap (NCES, 2017).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For the ELL student population it is important to establish educational policies that allocate resources to support the teachers, students, and their families and to provide high-quality professional development in ELL instructional practices and cultural competence. 	

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Discipline Practices Often Have Racially and Ethnically Disparaging Effects		
<p><i>Discipline practices--especially out of school suspensions--have had racially and ethnically disparaging effects on students across the country and contribute to the achievement gap.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Center for Civil Rights Remedies in its report, <i>Are We Closing The School Discipline Gap?</i> states: “If we ignore the discipline gap, we will be unable to close the achievement gap. Of the 3.5 million students who were suspended in 2011-12, 1.55 million were suspended at least twice. Given that the average suspension is conservatively put at 3.5 days, we estimate that U.S. public school children lost nearly 18 million days of instruction in just one school year due to exclusionary discipline” (Losen et al., 2015). • Out of school suspensions are more common at the secondary level and are racially and ethnically divided across the country where African American and Latino males are consistently suspended more frequently than white males and all female students. African American females with disabilities are also more likely to be given out of school suspension as a discipline practice than any of their counterparts of other ethnicities with disabilities. ELL students that attend schools with English-only policies are also more likely to be suspended. • Out of school suspensions result in the following damaging results that can have a significant lifelong impact: denying students valuable instructional time; failing to recognize students’ emotional, social, and academic needs; increasing the academic challenges of already disadvantaged students; and potentially violating students’ civil right to have access to education. • District and school leaders are the best-positioned to affect meaningful change in the culture and discipline practices at schools by fostering an awareness of the disparaging effects of out-of-school suspension as well as implementing school and district-wide restorative discipline practices. • Districts and schools also need to put in place the following policies and practices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Track the discipline patterns at individual campuses by collecting school data 	<p>How School Suspensions Push Black Students Behind</p> <p>The Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University</p> <p>Reclaiming Michigan's Throwaway Kids: Students Trapped in the School-to-Prison Pipeline</p> <p>Restorative Discipline in Schools</p>

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	<p>disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and gender in order to positively impact institutional effectiveness and equity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide resources to support school and districtwide professional development focused on implementing more effective, practical, and alternative discipline practices (including restorative practices) that address students' needs and help teachers understand how to meet their professional and legal responsibilities and avoid unjustifiable disciplinary exclusion (Losen et al., 2015). ○ Protect the civil rights of children and provide them equal access to learning. ○ Establish accountability measures to ensure the implementation and support of more effective, equitable, and thoughtful discipline practices. 	

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High Quality Teachers Can Close the Achievement Gap		
<p><i>In order for achievement gaps to be effectively addressed, teachers who interact daily and directly with students must be qualified, supported, trained, and well-versed in strategies to effectively meet the academic, social, and cultural needs of minority students.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality teachers have the greatest impact on student achievement. When students are consistently exposed to well-informed, effective teachers, they can overcome many obstacles to learning and close the achievement gap. On the other hand, the impact of ineffective teachers can be persistent enough to be measurable at least four years later. Good teachers in subsequent grades can boost achievement but not enough to compensate for the deficits in learning that resulted from an earlier ineffective teacher. • Students need effective teachers who are diverse, experienced, culturally knowledgeable, and well prepared to eliminate the achievement gap. Minority students, in particular, benefit from having teachers who look like them, who share similar cultural experiences, and who act as role models by demonstrating the importance of education and high achievement. • Teachers, administrators, and school staff members need to be well trained, sensitive, relatable, flexible, and committed. They need to have ample resources to teach their students well, and they need to collaborate and support each other, and have the support of school and district leaders and the community. • <i>Best Practices in Supporting Latino Student Achievement (2015)</i> suggests high quality teachers skilled at teaching ethnically and racially diverse populations display the following behaviors and practices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Scaffold during a teaching episode: ... students expect a caring teacher to individualize instruction for them, provide guided practice or examples, distribute knowledge in ways that make sense to them, and review content, another form of scaffolding for them. ○ Academic support in the classroom setting: According to the findings, ...high school students view their teacher’s candid concern and direct actions to improve failing marks as characteristic of a caring teacher. ○ Personal interest in the student’s well-being, inside and outside the classroom: ... 	<p>Improving Student Learning by Supporting Quality Teaching</p> <p>Teachers Matter</p>

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	<p>students viewed their teacher’s willingness to know them outside the academic arena and the personalization of her teaching as ways to convey caring.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Availability: Teachers who initiate extra time and opportunities to assist ...students, rather than only during a prearranged time designated by the school culture, are perceived as caring educators. ○ Empathetic listening: Knowing that a teacher solicits and appreciates feedback from high school students conveys a message of accepting them as real persons and as a sign of respect. Likewise, conveying body language that is open and unreserved communicates a form of caring for ... students.” (p. 10). 	

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<p>Research-Based Instructional Practices, High Expectations, and the Use of Technology Close the Achievement Gap</p>		
<p>Research-based instructional practices merged with high expectations; technology; and rigorous and relatable curricula combine to eliminate the achievement gap.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools that are able to close the achievement gap embrace instructional practices that are student-centered. Such schools have common characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices are designed to help students develop analytical, collaborative, and communication skills with specific focuses on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student leadership and autonomy in the classroom, ▪ Students connecting and applying what they are learning to their personal lives and the community, ▪ Relevant and relatable curricula, ▪ Inquiry-based instruction, ▪ Collaborative learning, ▪ Student-directed learning, ▪ Mastery of skills, ▪ Flexible uses of time, ▪ Performance-based assessments. ○ The structures of the school day and systems present in the schools promote positive student relationships with one another, with the adults on campus, and with the community surrounding the campus. Through advisories, student-centered schools provide <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Academic support, ▪ Differentiated instruction, ▪ Tutoring help before and after school, ▪ Ample resources to help students who are ELL or who have special needs. ○ Teachers work together to improve their instructional practices; engage in their own learning; and to focus on students' strengths, interests, and needs. These techniques are central to a personalized learning approach (Office of Educational Technology, 2014.) 	<p>Student-Centered Schools: Closing the Opportunity Gap</p> <p>CARE: Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gaps</p> <p>Language-Gap Study Bolsters a Push for Pre-K</p> <p>Understanding the Language Gap</p> <p>Do We Invest in Preschools or Prisons?</p> <p>Diverse Teaching Strategies for Diverse Learners</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The adults on campus share the leadership roles and incorporate the voices of teachers, staff, administrators, and parents in key decisions. ● Access to high-quality preschool programs that emphasize vocabulary development, early literacy skills, number sense, and social and emotional development is critical to eliminating the achievement gap for students of color. High quality early learning programs produce long term benefits that include higher rates of high school graduation and employment after high school (Coley, 2002; Sadowski, 2006). ● Low expectations for African American and Latino students in particular have continued to persist, even though it is well known that such expectations are a significant deterrent to academic achievement. There is a higher percentage of African American students referred to special education or diagnosed with having an emotional and behavioral disorder, and fewer African American students placed in advanced and gifted programs. ● Low expectations also persist for other students of color for a number of reasons including the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Language barriers for ELL students who are very capable students, but struggle to show what they know because the assessment and instructional practices at their school limit their abilities to demonstrate their proficiency. ○ A lack of cultural competence on the part of educators and school personnel. ● All students, including students of color, need high expectations. Teachers and school leaders who have high expectations of all of their students will create rigorous, relevant, and relatable curricula that will engage, challenge, and connect all students to each other and to the world in which they live. The following items support high expectations: 	<p>Student-Centered Learning Approaches Are Effective in Closing the Opportunity Gap</p> <p>Best Evidence Encyclopedia Reading Program Reviews</p> <p>Closing Achievement Gaps: Improving Educational Outcomes for Hispanic Children</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rigorous academic standards focus on improving educational outcomes and correlate with high expectations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ High-quality assessments are also important tools to provide accurate data for student progress. Such assessments are not given simply for the sake of testing, but should be free of cultural bias and help teachers understand what students know and where they need more help. ○ Safety nets, support, and encouragement for every student must accompany high expectations. For example, students may need extra time and more assistance in completing challenging assignments. Such help may include chunking challenging assignments into smaller sub assignments with extensive scaffolding, modeling, discussion, and in-class practice. ○ Access to teachers during the school day in academic lab settings or before or after school office hours, or through study groups or homework clubs. Such a school day structure will likely require a late bus to get students home safely. ○ Summer bridge or catch-up programs as well as summer acceleration or enrichment, which should be free or of minimal cost and should be fun, engaging, and challenging. ○ Time for enrichment, remediation, and re-teaching should be imbedded in the daily schedule. • Starting early and providing instruction in basic skills will help alleviate gaps in the learning of underserved students. Basic skills instruction should include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Intensive emphasis on vocabulary development and reading, ○ Teaching students to read rather than <i>teaching reading</i>, which requires progress monitoring and thorough intervention to help students read well, ○ Teacher looping in primary grades, ○ Interventions and student advisories in secondary grades, 	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The implementation of research-based strategies and programs to help students master basic skills. ● Students of color also need access to more STEM subjects, more advanced placement courses, more gifted or highly capable courses and programs, and more supports and interventions that help them be successful in these courses. ● The National Education Association recommends the following focuses in ELL instruction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Recognize and build on cultural and equity assumptions and culturally relevant instruction. ○ Create classroom and school environments that facilitate language learning. ○ Absorb, understand, and capitalize on language acquisition theory. ○ Recognize language development stages and promising instructional practices for teaching in the classroom and school. ○ Identify appropriate ELL instructional strategies aligned and differentiated to lessons and objectives and goals. ○ Find innovative ways to motivate ELLs to practice academic language skills that are carefully structured and require students to demonstrate growing proficiency. ● Technology, when implemented effectively, can also play an important role in closing the achievement gap for minority students. Underserved students, including students of color and ELL students, often do not have access to computers and the Internet at home, which negatively affects their academic achievement. These students need access to technology and instruction on how to use it in purposeful and meaningful ways. 	<p>Technology Can Close Achievement Gaps, Improve Learning</p> <p>Using Technology to Support At-Risk Students' Learning</p> <p>Promising Practices: A Literature Review of Technology Use by Underserved Students</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When implementing technology to help at-risk students it is important that <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A one-to-one ratio of students to computers is available, ○ The school facility is equipped with a large enough bandwidth to maintain appropriate speed and access to online resources, ○ Students use technology to learn content, develop skills, create products, and demonstrate what they know. 	

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Leadership Must Direct and Support the Effort to Close the Achievement Gap		
<p><i>School leaders are charged with spearheading the effort to eliminate the achievement gap. Their support and contribution to this effort is critical to its success and is most effective when they help to create schools that act as supportive communities focused on enabling student success.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Overall, the most significant challenge in eliminating the achievement gap that school and district leaders face is changing the institutional practices and mind sets of staff that negatively impact students of color. Too often, rather than supportive communities, schools become a place for alienation and hostility toward minority students. ● School leaders have a significant impact on the mindset and tenor of a campus. They must be committed to and passionate about eliminating the achievement gap and lead the effort to do so. This starts by hiring the right people to work with their students, having high expectation of these educators, and providing them the support and training they need to be effective teachers. To support their efforts to eliminate the achievement gap, school leaders can engage in the following actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Collaborate with teachers and staff when making plans to close the achievement gap. ○ Allocate resources to support the plans. ○ Create accountability measures to determine the effectiveness of the implementation of the plans. ○ Establish a common instructional framework that guides curriculum, teaching, assessment, and learning climate. ○ Provide professional development for all school personnel about eliminating the achievement gap by eliminating ineffective practices and mindsets. ● Professional development for teachers of ELL students is different from traditional professional development. It is important to note that approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ of Latinos in the US are not proficient in English and nearly one in 10 school children in states such as Arizona are ELL students (Best practices in Supporting Latino Student Achievement, 2015). As a result, all teachers, whether they are designated as ELL teachers or not, need to learn how to best teach students who are simultaneously learning new academic subjects and a new language. The best 	<p>Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gaps</p> <p>Closing the Achievement Gap from Educational Leadership</p> <p>Closing the Achievement Gap: School Leaders in the Knowledge Age</p> <p>Leadership as Learning: Closing the Achievement Gap by Improving Instruction through Content-focused Leadership</p> <p>Creative Ways to Close the Achievement Gap</p>

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	<p>ELL instructional practices should specifically focus on how to use what students know to help them develop their literacy skills. More specific recommendations for professional development for teachers of ELL students include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Offering pre-service for teachers that integrates language, literacy, and subject-matter knowledge for teaching diverse student populations. ○ Providing staff development that is outcomes-based, comprehensive, and provides ample time and tools for self-assessment and improvement. ○ Identifying coaches and administrators who support the type of instruction ELLs need through their own extensive professional development (McBride, 2008). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Professional learning is most effective when the following actions occur: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It is not only collaborative, but also built into the daily experience of teachers and school leaders. ○ It encourages teacher leadership. ○ It is research-based, data-driven, and focused on improving student-achievement. ○ Teachers focus on developing teaching strategies that move students to the next stage of learning. ○ Teachers and school leaders share in the responsibility for their own learning as well as that of their colleagues. This is most successfully achieved when teachers work in grade-level or content area teams that meet frequently, observe each other in action, collect and interpret data, and directly support each other in their efforts to teach all students. ● School leaders should make efforts to attract high-quality teachers who look like the students at their schools. In addition, schools also need resources and funding to expand successful programs and support school personnel and students directly in their efforts to boost student achievement and eliminate the gap. The reallocation of funds can partly address this issue, but 	<p>6 Ways Teachers Can Foster Cultural Awareness in the Classroom</p> <p>Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for School Reform</p> <p>What is Social and Emotional Learning?</p> <p>Resources to Introduce Mindfulness in the Classroom</p> <p>Mindfulness and Wellbeing</p>

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	<p>obtaining further funding through grants, community scholarships, and other means may also be necessary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leaders must work to develop meaningful relationships on their campuses to support high expectations of all students and all teachers. Such relationships require a high degree of self and cultural awareness. They also require that school leaders engage in the following actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reach out to engage parents and the community to support high achievement. ○ Establish trusting relationships with students, staff, and families. ○ Create a trusting culture on their campuses. ○ Have the courage to challenge the status quo. ○ Inspire those in their communities to support and sustain the efforts of schools to make learning engaging, challenging, and meaningful for every student. 	

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Student Support Determined by Student Needs is Critical to Closing the Achievement Gap		
<p><i>In order for all students to be successful, schools must support the whole child by addressing students' academic and social and emotional needs from Pre-K through college.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All students, without discrimination, need campus mentors, strong and supportive leadership, effective instruction, and academic and social supports. Students who struggle may need tutoring, mentoring, supplemental instruction, and individual counseling and support. • Supports for minority students who are falling below the achievement gap need to be thoughtful, individualized, and culturally sensitive. They especially need to help students succeed and excel, and not merely pass. • Many of the students who are struggling in school need robust and attentive counseling where they are provided resources, guidance, and professional help to reduce gaps in experience and development. Such efforts should not only include academic and career counseling, but also social and emotional wellness counseling. The goal is to help students understand the benefits of high academic achievement as they build and sustain meaningful connections and relationships with their peers and the adults on campus as well. • Schools should directly provide resources and programs to help students who struggle on their campuses as well as establish partnerships with universities, local colleges, and community programs to help struggling students achieve academic excellence. Indeed, high expectations and meaningful rigor with the necessary support should also be a central part of the help provided to struggling students. And, some students may need very individual help to overcome specific mindsets or cultural barriers to their personal success. • Support groups facilitated by school counselors or teachers for specific struggling populations of students (Latino, ELL, African-American, students with special needs) help students feel connected and supported as well as provide students access to resources they need for academic and personal success. 	<p>Improving Student Achievement and Closing the Achievement Gap</p> <p>Support All Students to Close the Achievement Gap</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Families need to be invited to participate in their children’s education and work with teachers and administrators to help students be successful and understand the value of a rigorous education as a preparation for not only post-secondary education and future careers, but also for meaningful contribution to the communities in which they will live. ● Academic guidance via teachers, school leaders, counselors, parents, and peers needs to be consistent for all students and should begin as early as elementary school. Students need the opportunity to consider their interests, their aptitudes, their strengths, their goals, and their plans for the future. ● As was earlier noted, there is a pattern of low expectations for minority students. These students are under-represented in Advanced Placement, Honors, high level math and science courses, and programs where support for transitions to post-secondary educational opportunities are provided. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To counteract the pattern of low expectations students need specific supports provided by guidance counselors, teachers, tutors, mentors, and other qualified educational professionals. Such supports should include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Build awareness about post-secondary options. ○ Navigate college entrance requirements. ○ Focus specifically on students who are the first in their families to go to college. ○ Improve teacher to student and teacher to family communication. ○ Begin this support early in students’ academic careers. ○ Be consistent in communicating lifelong expectations. ● Schools need to be safe places in order for students to learn. Students who live in poverty or who come from difficult home circumstances require particular attention in order to feel safe at school. They need to be well fed and have appropriate clothing and all the necessary school and 	

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	<p>extracurricular supplies. They need to be treated with dignity, respect, and kindness, and they need to know that they are cared about at school, that they matter, and that they can succeed academically and personally. They and their families need to feel supported and valued as part of the school community.</p>	

Main ideas	Additional Information	Resources
Family and Community Engagement is Critical in Closing the Achievement Gap		
<p><i>Engaging parents, families, and the community in all that goes on in classrooms and on campuses is a critical component to eliminating the achievement gap for minority students.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research has clearly determined that when parents and families are involved, children will do better in school. Yet, too often, the communication between educators and students and their families is not as effective as it could be. Families of minority students typically want to be involved in their children’s education and participate in school activities, but they either don’t know how to do this, they don’t feel proficient enough in English to communicate with teachers and school personnel, or they do not feel welcome at their children’s school. • A comprehensive family engagement program will not only impact student success, but also improve the overall school climate. These programs often include the following practices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Invite parents to be involved on campus as classroom helpers or as school event volunteers. ○ Consider starting a Parent Teacher Student Organization (PTSO) to provide opportunities for parents to be involved and to support what goes on at their children’s school. ○ Encourage school staff members to be friendly, helpful, professional, and engaging with all parents. ○ Make available translators when needed for parent-teacher conferences, and all communication that goes home needs to be in English as well as in the home languages of students who are learning English, or whose parents speak another language. ○ Provide hospitality events where students perform and the atmosphere is welcoming and relaxed. • Sometimes, parents and families of minority students struggle with knowing how to help their children with homework or planning for higher education because they themselves were not particularly successful academically. There is much schools can do to support these parents and families so that they can learn how to help their children. 	<p>Closing the Achievement Gap: the Critical Importance of Parental Engagement</p> <p>What Can Parents Do to Help Close the Achievement Gap?</p> <p>Parent, Family, Community Involvement in Education</p> <p>Access to Preschool Won't End the Literacy Problem in America, Experts Say: Parents Need to Do Their Part to Spend More Time Reading and Talking to Their Children</p>

Main ideas	Additional Information	Resources
Family and Community Engagement is Critical in Closing the Achievement Gap		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Offer specific training for parents via evening community seminars, regular email or paper newsletters with study tips and homework helps (available in the languages the families speak) to help them understand how to work with their children at home on homework and projects, to understand and interpret testing or other assessment data, to provide resources for enrichment. ○ Host frequent college day or evening events and invite representatives from community colleges and universities to discuss the application process, scholarships, etc. so that students and their families know what to expect and can prepare for post-secondary education. ○ Establish partnerships with professional and technical schools and military programs and invite them to campus events to share information about what they offer with students and their families. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Additionally, parents and educators note that there is not enough attention paid to issues of cultural competence. Parents of minority students often feel that they and their students are misunderstood, and teachers, who are predominantly White, generally feel ill-prepared to relate to their minority students. Educators need more training in cultural competence in order to improve their relationships with their students and their parents. ● Creating partnerships with families is central to improved academic achievement in high performing schools. Schools that involve families of diverse students tend to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Focus on building relationships among teachers, families, and community members that are both trusting and collaborative. ○ Identify, respect, and address the needs of the families and the differences among them that are characterized by their cultures. ○ Embrace the power of partnership where responsibility and influence are collective. 	

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