




African American
Leadership Forum

A Crisis in Our Community
Closing the Five Education Gaps



The State of Minnesota is facing a state of emergency: we have created two Minnesotas. In one, White children get a great education in our schools; in the other, African American children enter our schools behind, fall further behind as they advance in grade, and drop out with alarming regularity.²

The implications are far reaching. African American students, most of whom are low-income, constitute a growing majority of students of color attending Minneapolis and St. Paul public schools. The number of African American children, ages 5-24, is expected to grow 24% between 2006 and 2020. Their future success depends on success in school today. That's because by 2018, 70% of jobs in Minnesota will require a postsecondary education. The community must be able to attract knowledge-based companies with the next generation of well-educated employees. If the next generation of employees will be increasingly made up of racial/ethnic minorities, then reducing the achievement gap is critical to the economic vitality of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area.

The African American Leadership Forum/Education and Life-Long Learning Work Group (AALF/ELL) believes that the achievement gap for African American children is actually comprised of 5 different gaps: preparation, belief, time, teaching, and leadership.

The Preparation Gap. The achievement gap begins before children are old enough to enter school. Upon entering kindergarten, they show differences in personal and social development, in language and literacy, in mathematical thinking, as well as in the arts and physical development. Children in households with lower family income, and children whose parents had less education, tend to have lower school-readiness ratings. But school-readiness is not simply a matter of academics. It involves a child's home environment, economic status, emotional and social development, health, and cultural identity. All are related to achievement in school.

To resolve this issue, AALF/ELL believes that four changes are needed: access to high-quality, certified, early childhood education must be made available; family support systems must be ensured; community resources and social services must be brought into schools; and parents must get education and training.

The Belief Gap. The beliefs and expectations of students, parents, teachers and the community all contribute to the achievement gap: students, parents, teachers and the community do not believe it can be closed until they see it done. Once the gap is closed in one school district, others will follow. Additionally, teachers' expectations strongly influence students' effort and performance. High expectations or pressure to learn ranks highly among school-level factors that impact student achievement.

To resolve this issue, AALF/ELL believes there must be a laser-like focus on student achievement and African American students must be offered more rigorous curriculum choices. Success stories must be widely publicized to dispel the myth that our children cannot succeed.

The Time Gap. Many of our children have fallen behind grade level. To successfully address this shortfall will take time; more time focused on learning during the school day, a longer school day and school year are necessary. This gap cannot be reduced without adequate time for teaching and learning. After-school and summer programming are also critical components of closing the time gap.

The Teaching Gap. The single most important factor contributing to student success is teaching excellence. Good teachers make good schools. Students taught by several effective teachers in a row soar, no matter what their family backgrounds, while students taught by just two ineffective teachers in a row rarely recover. Strong teaching is especially critical for children at risk, and highly effective teachers are most critical to those furthest behind.

To resolve this issue, AALF/ELL believes that: The best teachers must be placed where the greatest need exists; educators must be culturally competent; effective teacher evaluation and coaching must be implemented; and traditional teaching preparation must be transformed.

The Leadership Gap. The impact of principals and school leaders on student outcomes is second only to that of teachers. School districts that have been most effective in closing the achievement gap are led by strong and effective district superintendents and school principals. Such leaders have applied proven and effective models of academic success.

Closing the Leadership Gap necessitates the evaluation and professional development of school leaders to ensure they are familiar with and implementing best practices for success. Principals must also be able to choose their teachers.

Summary. AALF/ELL believes that a cross-sector approach to leadership is needed, one that brings together leaders in education, business, government, philanthropy and the community, and unifies the entire educational continuum from cradle to career. Our community cannot afford to squander our most precious regional resource — the growth potential of our children of color. It is morally wrong, economically destructive and socially imprudent. It is time that we come together and eliminate the achievement gap in our great state once and for all — the economic vitality of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area depends on it.



... a cross-sector approach to leadership is needed... that brings together leaders in education, business, government, philanthropy and the community...

THE 5 GAPS

1. THE PREPARATION GAP

The achievement gap begins early, before children are old enough to enter school.¹⁴ According to Dr. Arthur Reynolds, Professor at the Institute of Child Development at the University of Minnesota, close to one-half of the achievement gap is present at the time children enter school.¹⁵ A 2003 study conducted by Wilder Research on Minnesota children entering kindergarten showed differences in personal and social development, language and literacy, mathematical thinking, the arts, and physical development.¹⁶ Children in households with lower family income, and children whose parents had less education, tended to have lower school-readiness ratings.¹⁷ Eighty-three percent of racial/ethnic minority students in St. Paul, for example, are in low-income families.¹⁸ Children of upper-income families have heard 30 million words by age 3 compared with 10 million words heard by children of low-income families.¹⁹ By age 3, upper-income children have heard 500,000 words of encouragement and 80,000 words of discouragement. Conversely, in the low-income home, the ratio is reversed — by age 3 low-income children have heard 80,000 words of encouragement and 200,000 words of discouragements

However, we know that the development of young children and their readiness for school is not simply a matter of academics. A significant body of research shows that gains made in early childhood education (ECE) tend to fade in the first few years of elementary school.²⁰ Research is making it more and more clear that a child's home environment, economic status, emotional and social development, health, and cultural identity are all related to achievement in school.

Citing the Spring 2005 issue of *The Future of Children*, Wilder Research identified key social factors in the achievement gap between White, and Black children before kindergarten. It estimated how much of the gap in school readiness might be explained by each factor:

- Parenting (talking and reading to child, nurturance and discipline): 25-50% of the difference between Whites and Blacks
- Child's health: 13% of the Black-White gap
- Maternal breast feeding: 6% of the Black-White gap
- Maternal depression: 6% of the Black-White gap
- Improving the quality of Head Start programs: 4-10% of the Black-White gap, and
- Low birth weight: 4% of the Black-White gap

In addition to a concentrated effort on ECE, prenatal care, family support, education and training must take place before children enter kindergarten. Residential or school instability has been linked with a host of academic problems. For example, data demonstrates a striking relationship between stability and graduation rates. In the class of 2000, 82% of St. Paul graduates stayed in the same school for four years, compared with only 1% of dropouts. On the other hand, a striking 92% of dropouts spent one year or less in the same school.²¹ In Minneapolis, children in special education programs had a four-year graduation rate of only 22%. Of children with serious emotional and behavioral disorders, 73% were arrested within five years of leaving school.²² Race often becomes a proxy for larger underlying social forces and factors that contribute to poor performance in school. One systematic effort to provide comprehensive services to at-risk youth was Communities in Schools, a national program that works to keep kids in school by coordinating community resources and social services through school-based service delivery. An evaluation of the program found that participants generally had higher graduation rates and better academic outcomes than other at-risk young adults.²³

The AALF/ELL Work Group clearly recognizes the impact of these additional factors on the achievement gap and discusses ways to address them in this paper. However, numerous examples throughout the country — from the Harlem Children's Zone, to Urban Prep High School in Chicago, to the 90/90/90 schools — have demonstrated that the achievement gap can be closed, despite the presence of these factors.

THE BELIEF GAP

Research shows that the beliefs and expectations of students, parents, teachers and the community contribute to the achievement gap. Sometimes described as the “Bannister Effect,” students, parents, teachers and communities do not believe the achievement gap can be closed until they see it done.²⁴ Once the achievement gap is closed in one school district, many others will follow.

Research also shows that teachers’ expectations strongly influence students’ effort and performance.²⁵ High expectations have been one of the most consistent findings in the literature. Virtually every review of the topic mentions the importance of this factor whether British, Dutch, or American.²⁶ High expectations (pressure to learn) ranks second among school-level factors that impact student achievement.²⁷

Stacks of research reports indicate that attitudes towards, and expectations of, African American students are lower than for White students. African American students are not given the same opportunities to participate in enriched educational offerings, and they are more frequently removed from the general education classroom due to misclassifications by Special Education policies and practices.²⁸ At present, large racial disparities mark the participation rates in more rigorous or advanced courses, or in high school, advanced placement (AP) coursework. Nationally, White male students are more than twice as likely to be placed in gifted/talented programs and four times more likely to take AP math and science classes as are Black male students. Conversely, Black male students are more than twice as likely to be classified as mentally retarded as White male students, despite research that demonstrates that the percentage of students from all groups is approximately the same at each intelligence level. In addition, Black males are twice as likely to be suspended and three times more likely to be expelled than White males.²⁹

From 1995 to 2000 the Center for Performance Assessment, a Denver, Colorado, educational consulting firm, conducted a 5-year assessment of students in a variety of school settings, from elementary through high school. The study was called “90/90/90 Schools: A Case Study.”³⁰ 90/90/90 schools were defined as schools in which:



High expectations...ranks second among school-level factors that impact student achievement.

- More than 90% of students were eligible for free and reduced lunch (a euphemism for low income)
- More than 90% of students were from ethnic minorities
- More than 90% of students met or achieved high academic standards

The study looked at more than 130,000 students in 228 urban, suburban, and rural schools. Student populations varied from rich to poor, minority to nonminority, etc.

The study is significant, because its findings debunk the hypothesis that poverty and ethnicity are inextricably linked to lower levels of student achievement. This hypothesis, dating back to the 1960s, leaves no room for students who have high academic achievement that is coincident with high poverty and high minority enrollment. The study concluded that, while the impact of poverty has not been eliminated, the prevailing hypothesis — that poor minority students are destined to perform poorly — does not conform to the data.

There is another, and perhaps more pernicious belief gap that exists. This belief gap involves African American's distrust of the dominant society and its

institutions, including its schools.³¹ Educational anthropologist, John Ogbu, has offered what some have considered a controversial theory, based on a voluntary versus involuntary minority typology.

Under Ogbu's hypothesis, voluntary minorities — those who chose to immigrate to a host country — view the host societies' institutions, including schools, in terms of opportunity. They take an instrumental approach to schooling and view the schools in terms of what they can gain from them. Likewise, they view teachers as experts in specific areas and as the source of the knowledge they need. *Even if they face discrimination* (emphasis added), they do not internalize the mistreatment. Rather, they remain focused on the opportunity to gain valuable knowledge and skills. They are also willing to learn, accept, and adapt to the cultural norms of the majority group. They see no threat to their own sense of identity as a result of adopting new behaviors. In fact, they expect to learn new ways as necessary for their success in the host country. In Ogbu's conception, voluntary minorities are steady academic achievers.³²

Involuntary minorities, those who did not choose their minority status through migration, but rather occupy that demographic status as a result of conquest, forced migration or enslavement (e.g., African Americans and Native Americans), have an oppositional approach to schools. Because of long periods of discrimination by the dominant society and its institutions, involuntary minorities have developed responses and behaviors that emphasize their distrust of, and opposition to, the dominant society and its institutions, including schools. In addition, they sustain alternative, self-affirming norms and values that maintain boundaries between themselves and the majority group—norms and values that undermine academics.³³ Further, the actions and attitudes of involuntary minorities reflect the fact that they come to school with distinctive cultural and language patterns that distinguish them from the majority cultural behaviors. In fact, they will go so far as to defend their “alternative” behaviors, even though these behaviors — of which the school disapproves — facilitate academic failure. In addition, rather than adapting their behaviors for maximum efficiency and efficacy in the quest for academic success, involuntary minorities “will devote disproportionate effort fighting for political, social, and economic equality with the dominant group members.”³⁴

Whether one agrees with Ogbu's hypothesis or not, any casual observer of our educational system will find ample evidence to support its existence. In order to reform the system, we must understand the perspectives

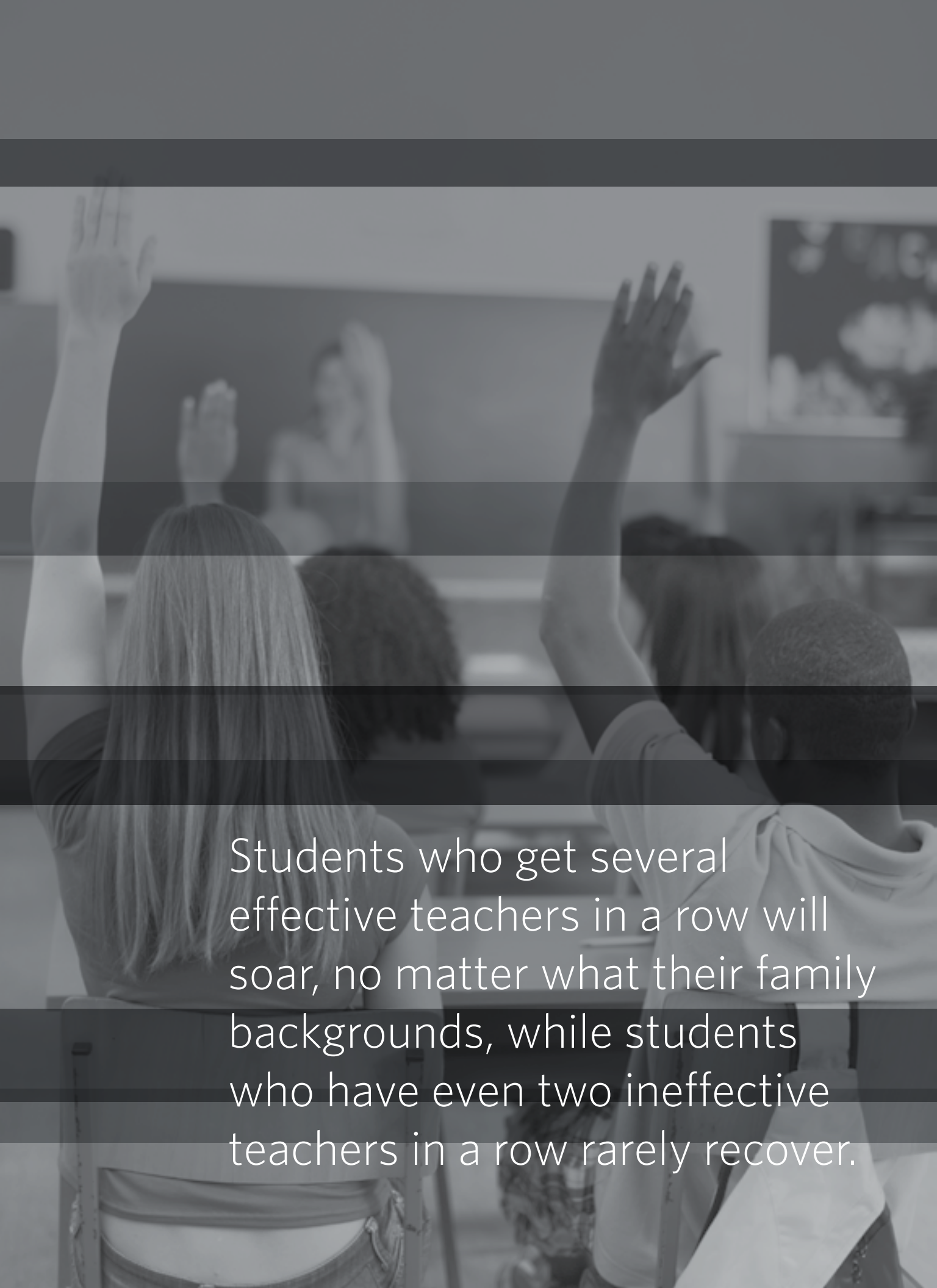
of those we seek to change. Teachers and school leaders, and indeed all of us involved in the education of African American children, must understand how we arrived at our current condition in order to effect a change. We must reduce the pervasive distrust between school boards and administrators, administrators and teachers, teachers and parents, and teachers and students. We must change the media bias about what can be achieved. We have to deal with people's beliefs about each other. We must have conversations about the underlying beliefs. We should recognize and understand that public beliefs and values are not always congruent. We need to develop these bonds of trust. We must provide positive information on African American students and the African American community. We must create materials that stress positive school models, that is, excellence and equity in schools serving high numbers of African American students.

3. THE TIME GAP

Paraphrasing Geoffrey Canada, President and CEO of the Harlem Children Zone, "Simple physics tells us that if African American children enter kindergarten already behind, if they spend the same amount of time on task in school as everyone else, they'll never catch up." Stated another way, the gap cannot be reduced if there is not adequate time for teaching and learning.

Recent research indicates another alarming concern. According to Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), U.S. schools do not provide sufficient instruction time for students to learn. According to McREL, there are 200 standards and 3,093 benchmarks taught in grades K-12, requiring 15,465 hours of instruction. The typical school year has 180 days with 5.6 hours of instruction each day for 13 years (K-12), which provides 13,104 hours of instruction. Studies show that the actual use of classroom time for instruction vary from 21% to 69%. At 69%, 13,104 hours become 9,042 hours. The conclusion is that, at best, children are receiving less than 60% of the instructional time needed to learn, and at worst, less than 20%. Under the best of circumstances, 40% of the time needed to learn must be made up at home, in after-school tutoring or in summer school.

Further compounding the problem is that the U.S. spends far less time teaching far more topics than countries that outperform us. For example, in the fourth grade, the U.S. spends 180 days to teach 78 math topics, whereas Japan spends 253 days teaching 47 topics, and Germany spends 230 days teaching 23

A black and white photograph of a classroom. In the foreground, the back of a student with long blonde hair is visible, sitting at a desk. To her right, another student is also seen from behind, raising their right hand. In the background, several other students are visible, some with their hands raised. The classroom setting includes a whiteboard and a poster on the wall. The overall atmosphere is one of active participation in a lesson.

Students who get several effective teachers in a row will soar, no matter what their family backgrounds, while students who have even two ineffective teachers in a row rarely recover.

topics. According to the National Education Commission on Time and Learning, students abroad are required to work on demanding subject matter at least twice as long as U.S. students.

In addition, recent research shows that, compared with middle- and upper-income children, low-income children lose ground during the summer and the gap increases.³⁵ It is estimated that 65% of the achievement gap is a gap of opportunity.³⁶ Upper-income families can provide their children with multiple other opportunities to make up for the time gap through such simple things as conversations at the dinner table or in the car, supplemental tutoring and summer activities, and travel opportunities. Middle-income families can provide their children with some of these opportunities. But, for families of children at risk, the opportunity to make up this time is rarely present.

In order to close the achievement gap, more effective use of time-on-task is needed with African American children by extending the school day and the school year, and by making available multiple other opportunities to make up the time gap. New Jersey, a state that has substantially closed the high school graduation gap, has attributed much of its success to the fact that since 2003, it has provided students with increased hours of education each day, on the weekends, and during the summer. In its 2010 report on Black males, the Schott Foundation identified after-school and summer programming as a “condition for success” in closing the gap.³⁷

The AALF/ELL Work Group joins the Minnesota DFL Committee on Closing the Achievement Gap in identifying the lengthening time in school, including summer school, as a recommended strategy for closing the gap.

4. THE TEACHING GAP

It is agreed that the single most important factor contributing to student success is good teachers.³⁸ The research is very clear: Good teachers make good schools.³⁹ Students who get several effective teachers in a row will soar, no matter what their family backgrounds, while students who have even two ineffective teachers in a row rarely recover.⁴⁰ Good teaching is especially critical for children at risk.⁴¹ Highly effective teachers are most critical for those furthest behind.⁴² Research affirms that teacher effectiveness is a major factor in students’ academic growth from year to year.⁴³ In one study, fifth-grade math students in Tennessee who had three consecutive highly effective teachers scored between 52 and 54

percentile points ahead of students who had three consecutive teachers who were least effective, even though both groups had the same achievement rates prior to entering second grade. A similar study in Texas showed a difference of 34 percentile points in reading and 49 percentile points in math.⁴⁴

To elevate Minnesota's education system, the state will need to attract, develop and retain teachers that consistently match the quality seen in the world's leading systems. For example, Finland and Singapore recruit teaching candidates from the top 10% of their graduates. Conversely, U.S. data indicates that teachers generally come from the bottom third of college-bound high school students.⁴⁵ Attracting a new generation of highly qualified teachers will require altering the value proposition of the profession.⁴⁶ In addition, classrooms in high-poverty schools and high-minority schools are far more likely than those in low-poverty or low poverty or low-minority schools to be taught by teachers out of their field of expertise.⁴⁷ Consequently, low-income and African American children are disproportionately affected by having inexperienced teachers, high teacher turnover, and teachers teaching outside of their area of study.⁴⁸



Attracting a new generation of highly qualified teachers will require altering the value proposition of the profession.

Concomitantly, most teachers in Minnesota colleges are not being adequately trained to teach racially and ethnically diverse students. A 2008 study found that, in a large sample of accredited bachelor degree programs, only 43% required at least one course in working with culturally and ethnically diverse children.⁴⁹ The AALF/ELL Work Group adopts the approach of the Bush Foundation Teaching Program, which requires students to co-teach in schools with African American children during their educational training.

5. THE LEADERSHIP GAP

The impact of principals and school leaders on student outcomes is second only to that of teachers. Some would argue that it is first.⁵⁰ School districts that have been most effective in closing the achievement gap are headed by strong and effective district leaders, including district superintendents and school principals. Such leaders have applied proven and effective models of academic success.

In the 90/90/90 study, the distinguishing feature of the successful schools was not merely that they had standards, but rather, how the standards were implemented, monitored and assessed. One of the most powerful findings of the 90/90/90 study was the continuous nature of the success of these schools, even as the poverty of students attending these schools remained intractable from year to year. Moreover, these schools were achieving these results without proprietary programs. None of them used a specific program or any other proprietary model in achieving their success. The take-away point is that there is no need to purchase special textbooks, curriculum materials, or secret information to achieve the level of success enjoyed by these schools.

School leaders must understand that they are the instructional and academic leaders of the school, and must be results-oriented. In the United Kingdom, educational leaders have implemented a rigorous inspection and intervention process that not only drives school improvements, but has also seen the number of required interventions drop by over 50% in 10 years.

Leadership must focus on instructional excellence rather than administrative issues.⁵¹ Student outcomes, the ultimate goal of public education, must be linked to major elements of the educational system in ways that facilitate understanding about what is, and what is not, working.⁵²

For managers outside of the education system, a formula with demonstrated results begins with a systematic effort to identify and groom potential leaders. Access to ongoing mentorship and training helps develop the

leadership skills that are demanded of front-line managers. Empowering leaders to choose their staff — and then holding them accountable for its results — produces teams that are focused on commonly shared goals.⁵³

Last, but by no means least, leaders in education, business, government, philanthropy and the community must come together to exercise a “Collective Impact” across sectors to effect large-scale educational change.⁵⁴

The scale and complexity of the U.S. public education system has thwarted attempted reforms for decades. Major funders, such as the Annenberg Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Pew Charitable Trust, have abandoned many of their efforts in frustration after acknowledging their lack of progress. Once the global leader — after World War II, it had the highest high school graduation rate in the world — the United States now ranks 18th among the top 24 industrialized nations, with more than 1 million secondary school students dropping out every year. The heroic efforts of countless teachers, administrators, and non-profits, together with billions of dollars in charitable contributions, may have led to important improvements in individual schools and classrooms; yet system-wide progress has seemed virtually unobtainable.⁵⁵

Against these daunting odds, a remarkable exception seems to be emerging in Cincinnati. A program known as Strive has brought together cross-sector local leaders to tackle the student achievement crisis and to improve education throughout greater Cincinnati and northern Kentucky. In the four years since the group was launched, and despite the recession and budget cuts, Strive has achieved success in 34 of 53 success indicators that track educational improvement, including high school graduation rates, where the achievement gap has been closed.⁵⁶

Strive has achieved this success because community leaders decided to abandon their individual agendas in favor of a collective approach to improving student achievement. More than 300 leaders of local government, education, philanthropy, and business have united their efforts behind a common systematic effort, with an agreed upon Roadmap for Success from cradle to career. Leaders agreed that it would not make much of a difference to fix one point in the educational continuum without addressing all parts of the continuum at the same time.⁵⁷

Unlike many of its predecessors, Strive didn't try to create a new educational program or attempt to convince donors to spend more money. Instead, through a carefully structured process, Strive focused the entire educational community (including business, philanthropy, and others) on a single set of goals, measured in the same way.⁵⁸

HOW WE CAN CLOSE THE GAPS

AALF/ELL agrees with the following quote from the Itasca Project Report, *Minnesota's Future: World Class Schools, World Class Jobs*:

A plethora of reports over the past decade have generated countless ideas on how to improve the education system. Limits on both resources and mindshare demand that the business community focus its efforts in order to achieve impact of the desired magnitude. Efforts [should be] prioritized [on] the following factors:

- Anticipated impact on student achievement must be significant, as gauged by scalability and sustainability
- There should be clear examples, drawn from world-class and quickly improving systems, of the actions to be taken
- Actions should take advantage of opportunities to build on existing momentum established by other organizations, either within or outside the system
- Success should not hinge on legislative policy changes⁵⁹

The AALF/ELL believes that the following strategies are the most effective strategies for closing the gap.

1. PREPARATION

Access to High-Quality, Certified, ECE Must Be Made Available

The most promising strategy for closing the school readiness achievement gap is to increase access to high-quality, center-based, ECE programs for 3- and 4-year-olds. Studies of such preschool programs provide promising evidence that these programs can help close the school-readiness gap, a gap that contributes to the achievement gap seen in later years.⁶⁰

In 2005, St. Paul Public Schools, in conjunction with the Wilder Foundation, piloted Project Early Kindergarten (PEK) to bolster the school success of children at risk of poor academic performance.⁶¹

Preliminary results for students participating at school sites in 2005-06 are promising. On average, students at PEK schools experienced the following initial changes:

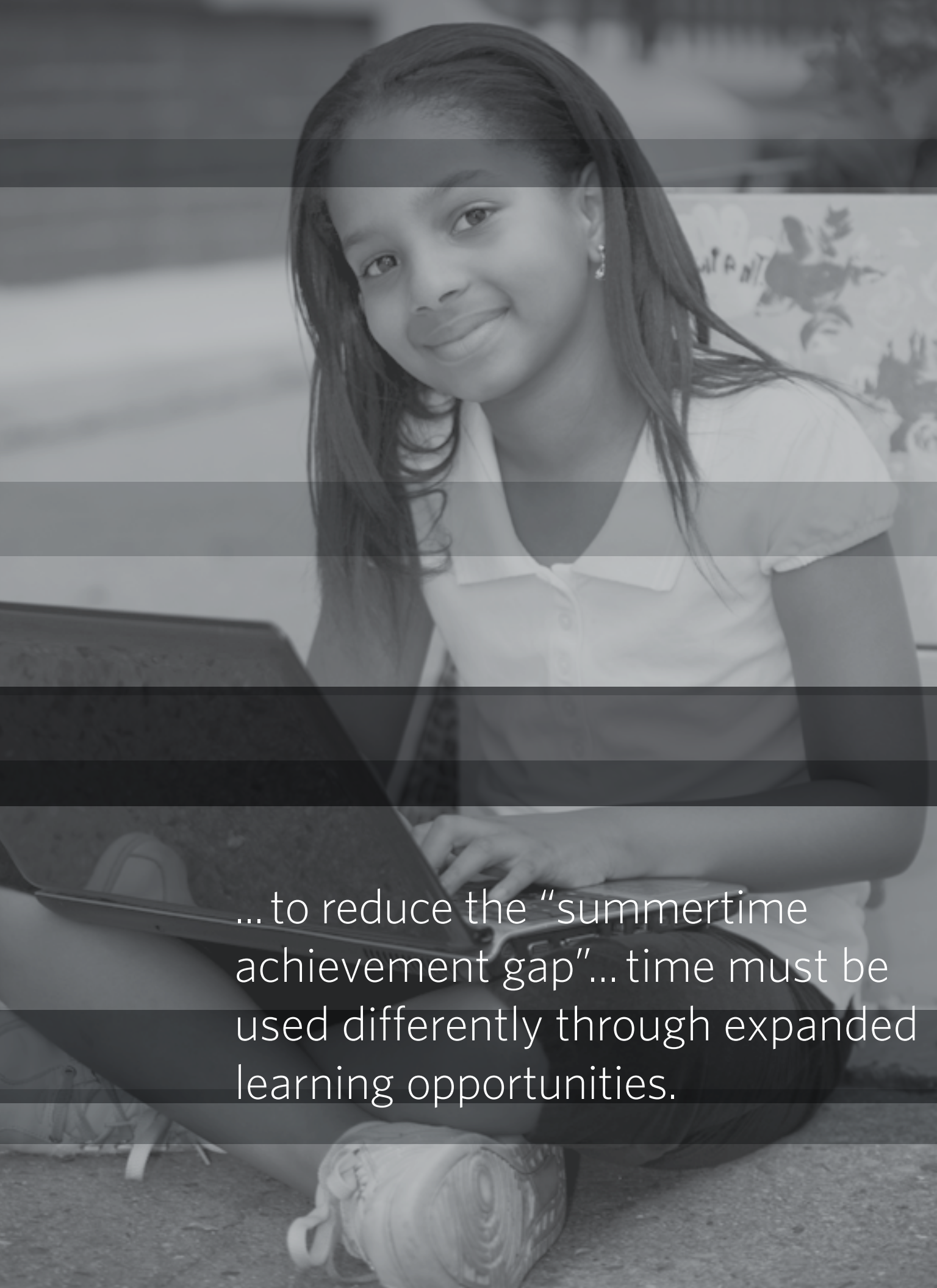
- They made faster progress than their peers nationally in vocabulary and early reading and writing skills
- When they started kindergarten, they were ahead in vocabulary and early reading, writing and math skills compared to demographically similar children who had not attended PEK.
- They were also ahead in vocabulary and early reading, writing and math skills compared to their kindergarten classmates, who came from a variety of backgrounds.
- Kindergarten teachers rated former PEK students significantly higher than their classmates in social skills and academic competence.
- Principals and parents provided very positive feedback about the program.⁶²

Research indicates that these programs can have a long-lasting impact on school success for low-income and minority children. High-quality programs have low child-staff ratios, well-educated staff, and strong supervision. They include an emphasis on developing cognitive skills, which tends not to be an emphasis of Head Start programs.⁶³

Family Support Systems Must Be Ensured

Any program that is designed to impact the achievement gap must address the social factors that contribute to the gap. Systematic efforts to provide comprehensive services to at-risk youth, such as Communities in Schools and Quantum Opportunities Program, have achieved higher graduation rates and better academic success by coordinating community resources and social services through school-based service delivery.⁶⁴ The Build framework, which was adopted by Minnesota Early Childhood Care and Education, interconnects ECE with family support, health and mental health, and social needs/early intervention.⁶⁵ It has identified three things that a child needs for its development and school readiness:

- A caring and responsive adult
- A language-rich environment
- A safe environment to explore ⁶⁶



...to reduce the “summertime achievement gap”... time must be used differently through expanded learning opportunities.

Community Resources and Social Services Must Be Brought Into Schools

A fundamental component of the family support effort is to bring community resources and social services into the schools through school-based service delivery. One systematic effort to provide comprehensive services to at-risk youth is Communities in Schools, a national program that works to keep kids in school by coordinating community resources and social services through school-based service delivery. An evaluation of the program found that participants generally had higher graduation rates and better academic outcomes than other at-risk young adults.⁶⁷

Parent Education and Training Must Take Place

Training should be available to develop leadership within communities to carry out plans for educational improvement. Parents should have access to the educational system and understand how it operates. Parents and community should be involved in decision-making processes in schools, in the district and in the state. Social service collaboration between schools and community entities should be bridged on behalf of children.

2. BELIEF

There Must Be a Laser-Like Focus on Student Achievement

The 90/90/90 study found that there were profound differences between the “90/90/90” schools and low-achieving schools. First and foremost, the 90/90/90 schools had a laser-like focus on student achievement. For example, the most casual observer could not walk down the hallway without seeing charts, graphs and tables that displayed student achievement information, as well as data on the continuous improvement that students made. School trophy cases were full of exemplary academic work. It goes without saying that this is particularly important in an environment where many students come to school with academic skills that are substantially below grade level. The consistent message is, “It’s not how you start, but how you finish.”

African American Students Must Be Offered More Rigorous Curriculum Choices

Opportunities to engage in more rigorous curriculum choices increases achievement and must be made available to all students, particularly African

American students who have historically been denied access to such programs. If the achievement gap is to be reduced, African American students must be given the opportunity of a challenging, but realistic, curriculum. To even out these disparities, students of all races need to be offered a challenging curriculum and instruction beginning in elementary school, so that they are prepared to take more rigorous or advanced courses in secondary school.⁶⁸ If everyone is taught challenging content, everyone is much more likely to learn challenging content.⁶⁹ The focus must be on academic achievement.⁷⁰ There should be clear curriculum choices. The curriculum should identify essential learning and emphasize depth over breadth and quality over quantity.⁷¹

3. TIME

After-School and Summer Programming Must Be Offered

AALF/ELL recommends increasing the length of the school day and the school year to allow more effective time-on-task and to reduce the “summertime achievement gap.” Time must be used differently through expanded learning opportunities. The extended time (a longer day and year-round schedules) should focus on the learner; it should complement the curriculum and be more of the same thing. In the now famous 90/90/90 study, the schools with large gains in reducing the achievement gap made dramatic changes in their schedule.⁷² At the elementary level, they routinely devoted three hours each day to literacy, with two hours of reading and one hour of writing. At the secondary level, they routinely provided double periods of English and math. To break the mold in student achievement, successful schools discovered they had to break the schedule.

4. TEACHING

The Best Teachers Must Be Placed Where the Greatest Need Exists

Major changes are needed in the system by which teachers are allocated to schools. At present, the system rewards teachers financially and professionally mainly for the amount of time they have spent in the profession and for the amount of additional education they have obtained.⁷³

As a consequence, the least experienced teachers end up in the schools with the most challenges and the least resources. A comprehensive system of enhanced compensation and resources, including professional development, needs to be aggressively developed for teachers who agree to work in the toughest schools. In addition, a rigorous process with clear performance goals, supervision and support, and annual performance reviews should be used to select these teachers.⁷⁴

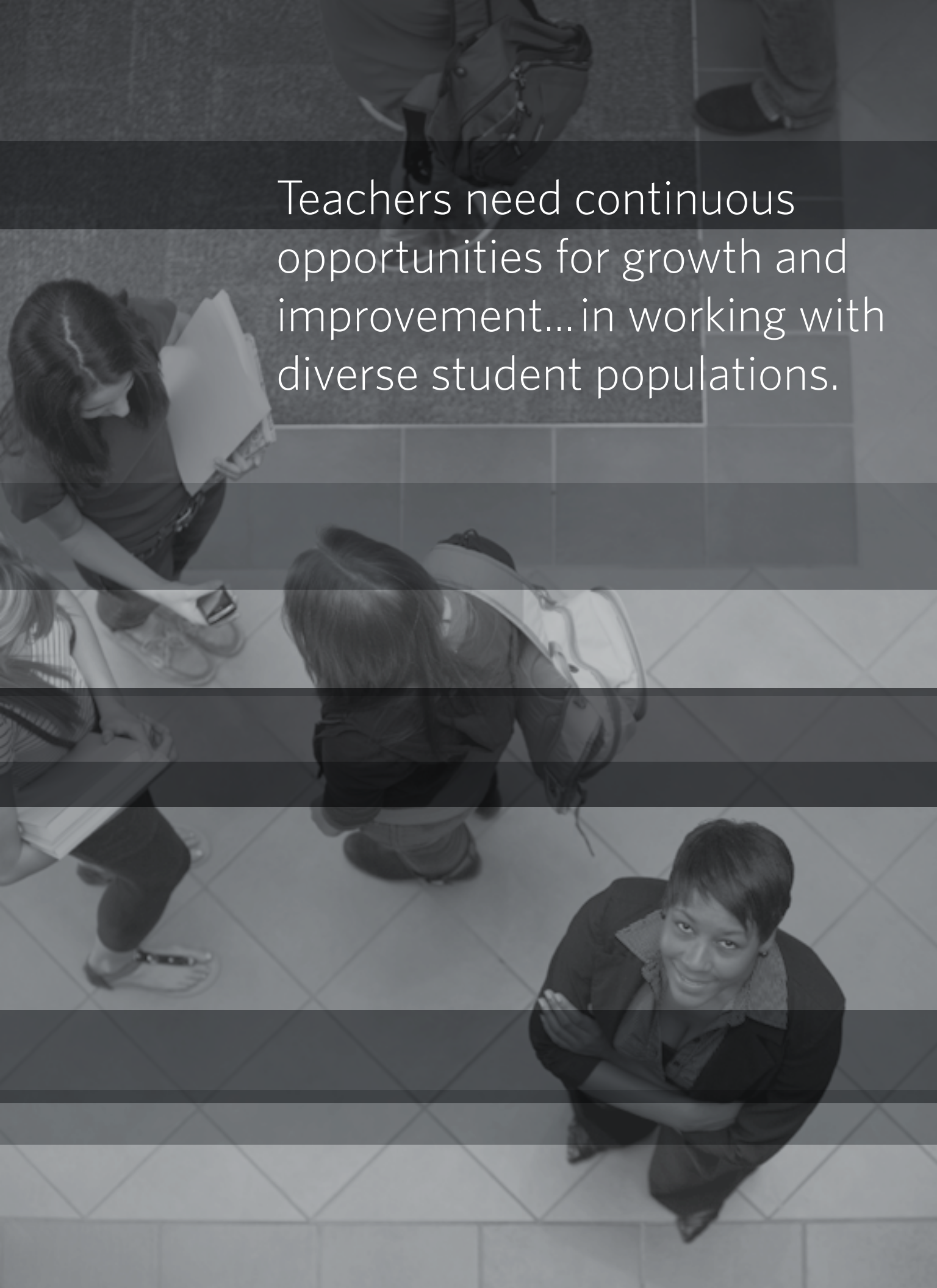
Educators Must Be Culturally Competent

Teachers must be able to teach across lines of difference. They must have experience working with African American students in their undergraduate licensing process, experience that is consistent and continuous. Student teaching is not enough. At present, less than one-half of national teacher training universities require students to take courses in cultural competency. Difference has to be mainstreamed into the teacher preparation program curricula, and must be measured and evaluated. Cultural content must be linked with subject content. Teachers must strengthen their knowledge, understanding and use of culturally proficient strategies.⁷⁵

Teachers need to have a deep understanding of effective and varied teaching approaches.⁷⁶ Teachers must do continuous informative assessment and provide constant feedback that is focused on improving learning.⁷⁷ Frequent assessment of student progress and multiple opportunities for assessment must take place.⁷⁸ Students need an inclusive curriculum that is pluralistic/multicultural. Using a proprietary curriculum, for example, Scott Foresman, Houghton Mifflin, among others, is not sufficient to move students more than one year's growth in an academic year.

Alternative Pathways to Teacher Licensure Must Be Created

Further compounding Minnesota's challenge in attracting high-performing teaching candidates are the limited points of entry into education. According to the Itasca Report, there is only one viable pathway: 99% of Minnesota teachers come through traditional preparation programs.⁷⁹ Alternative pathways, which have demonstrated success in other states, must be developed. Barriers must be removed that prevent high-achieving graduates



Teachers need continuous opportunities for growth and improvement...in working with diverse student populations.

and professionals who are interested in teaching but do not have an education degree from entering teaching.⁸⁰

Traditional Teaching Preparation Must Be Transformed⁸¹

High admission standards must be set and enforced to ensure quality, to match supply and demand, and to improve the value proposition of teaching. The preparation curriculum must be evaluated with increased emphasis on the effective use of student data. Transparency and accountability must be introduced; they should be tied to student outcomes in order to drive continuous improvement.⁸² Effective schools are characterized by the use of student performance data in decision making and regular student assessments that are tied to the curriculum.⁸³ There should be clear rewards and consequences for school completion outcomes.⁸⁴

Highly qualified teachers must be well-trained in content, cognitive strategies and affective strategies.⁸⁵ Teachers need continuous opportunities for growth and improvement in differentiated instruction and formative assessment in working with diverse student populations.⁸⁶ First and foremost, the school must have a strong focus on teaching and learning. The instructional program must be what a school is all about, driving daily efforts.⁸⁷ Professional development for teachers is a critical part of a strong curriculum and instructional program.⁸⁸ Giving teachers a sustained opportunity to improve their classroom skills appears, thus far, to yield the best return for the investment.⁸⁹

5. LEADERSHIP

There Must Be A “One Table” Approach to Solve This Problem

The achievement gap has been studied and discussed ad nauseum, with very little to show for the effort. Notwithstanding the proliferation of research, studies and theories, only isolated gains have been made in addressing this problem.

At the AALF/ELL Policy Makers Forum in March, 2010, Todd Otis, former Minnesota legislator and current Executive Director of Ready for K, stated that there must be a cross-sector approach to addressing the achievement gap,

bringing together leaders in education, business, government, philanthropy and the community. Efforts that have proven the most successful in closing the achievement gap and taking it to scale have used this “One Table” approach. The One Table approach brings together leaders in each of these sectors and connects the entire educational continuum from “cradle to career.” It connects ECE to family support systems, to an extended school day and school year, to quality teaching and leadership, and establishes a system of agreed-upon metrics for evaluating success. The acclaimed Harlem Children’s Zone is one such model, albeit confined to a limited geographic area. Another successful model of this approach is Strive Together in the greater Cincinnati area, which, in the course of four years, closed the high school graduation gap in Cincinnati. We must adopt a Strive-like “One Table” approach to solving the gap.

Systematic Efforts Must Be Made to Identify and Groom Potential Leaders

For managers outside of the education system, a formula with demonstrated results begins with a systematic effort to identify and groom potential leaders. Access to ongoing mentorship and training helps develop the leadership skills that are demanded of front-line managers, such as the Leadership Academy and the Principal’s Academy.⁹⁰ Additional sources of school leaders include teachers and administrators at high performing charter schools which have a history of demonstrated success with African American and low income children.

School Leaders Must Be Evaluated and Must Be Able to Choose Their Teachers

Just as we demand teacher accountability for producing student results, similar performance assessment must take place with school leaders. Principal evaluations should be mandated and conducted by the district superintendent or designee, and should use student data to conclude determine a principal’s effectiveness.⁹¹ However, to adequately assess school performance, we must empower leaders to choose their staff — and then hold them accountable for its results. Research shows that this produces teams that are focused on commonly shared goals.⁹²

CONCLUSION

Minnesota students have higher achievement than students in most other states, as evidenced by high rankings in standardized tests, college entrance exams and graduation rates. However, a closer look reveals several troubling statistics, including the facts that (a) the achievement gaps between its demographic groups are among the worst in the nation and (b) those groups with the lowest performance are growing the fastest.⁹³

Fifty years ago, people with less than a high school education were not necessarily doomed to a life on the economic margins. In fact, according to the Census Bureau, only about a third of the population in 1950 had completed high school.⁹⁴ Over the past few decades, information- and service-based industries have displaced natural-resource extraction and low-skill manufacturing as the principal engines of our economy.⁹⁵

According to the McKinsey report, “The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in American Schools,” if America had closed the international achievement gap between 1983 and 1998 and had raised its level of performance to such nations as Finland and South Korea, the U.S. GDP in 2008 would have been between \$1.3 and \$2.3 trillion higher. If the achievement of Black and Latino students was the same as White students by 1998, GDP in 2008 would have been between \$310 billion and \$525 billion higher.

The wages of those with a high school diploma or less are generally not enough to support a household.⁹⁶ According to the Center on Education and the Workforce, in 2008 there was an income disparity of about \$40,000 per year between persons with a college degree or better and those with a high school degree.⁹⁷ The community must be able to offer a new generation of well-educated employees to attract knowledge-based companies. The school-age population isn't expected to grow much in the next 20 years. The new generation of employees will be increasingly made up of racial/ethnic minorities. Thus, reducing the achievement gap is critical to the vitality of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area.⁹⁸

The choice facing our state is stark. Continue to study the problem or throw money at it and hope to get a different result, or get serious about an integrated, coordinated approach that leverages all of these wonderful assets of this community. The African American Leadership Forum is deeply committed to the thousands of children our state is failing every year, every day. In a very real sense, these are our children. But they are all of our children, for the future of the state is inextricably linked to their success. If we do not prepare them to become productive citizens, not only will we deprive the state of the economic value they could create, but the state will be saddled with an ever-increasing burden of social services and prison expense, an increasingly uneducated, unengaged citizenry, and ultimately a non-competitive labor pool for the businesses it seeks to attract. We have a moral, ethical and economic responsibility to close the achievement gap. We can accomplish this task — others have done so — by coming together, better coordinating and focusing our efforts and holding ourselves accountable. We owe this to our children.



We owe this to our children.

Notes

- 1 The African American Leadership Forum/Education and Life Long Learning Committee (AALF/ELL) is a volunteer organization of individuals committed to improving educational outcomes for African American children. The goal of the AALF/ELL is to Close the Achievement Gap for African American students from pre-K through 12 in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. The purpose of this Position Paper is magnify the sense of urgency in engaging in this effort and to identify "Best Practices" in closing the gap and to recommend strategies.

The working model of the AALF/ELL is to Convene, Collaborate and Advocate. Community organizations can make a difference in closing the achievement gap. What one organization can do on its own is quite modest. However, working in concert with other community organizations and interest groups, a substantial impact is possible. The public, the legislature, executive agencies, parents, teachers and administrators all hold part of the solution for achieving greater school success for students in our core cities.
- 2 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Known as the Kerner Commission Report, 1968
- 3 Minnesota Campaign for Achievement Now. *The State of Minnesota Public Education*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Campaign for Achievement Now, 2011.
- 4 Id.
- 5 David Heistand, Ph.D., *Achievement Gap Trends in Minnesota and Minneapolis Public Schools*. St. Paul, Presentation to the [DFL] Committee on the Achievement Gap, 21 May 2010.
- 6 Id.
- 7 Id.
- 8 Measurement of the African American Academic Achievement Gap, African American Leadership Forum, Education and Life Long Learning, Best Practices Committee, 2010 (See: Addendum 1)
- 9 Retelle, Cecilia. *Wanted: Prepared Workforce, Needed: Education Reforms*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, 2011.
- 10 Anthony P. Carnevale, Nicole Smith, Jeff Strohl. *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2010.
- 11 Mueller, Dan. *Tackling the achievement gap head on*. Saint Paul, Minnesota: Wilder Research, 2005.
- 12 Id.
- 13 "The 5 Gaps" is a framework for analysis developed by Eric Mahmoud, CEO of Harvest Preparatory Academy and Best Academy charter schools, Minneapolis, Minnesota, based upon his education, experience and training in educating African American children.
- 14 Op Cit, footnote 11
- 15 Arthur Reynolds, PhD, Presentation to the [DFL] Committee on the Achievement Gap, 28 September 2007
- 16 Op Cit, footnote 11
- 17 Id.
- 18 Id.
- 19 Betty Hart, Todd R. Risley, *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*, Paul H. Brookes, 1st Ed., 1995
- 20 Wilder Research. *A Collective Action Plan for Early Childhood Care and Education in Minnesota*. St. Paul, Minnesota: Wilder Research, 2008.
- 21 Chadwick, David. *A Failing Grade for School Completion: We Must Increase School Completion in Minneapolis and Saint Paul*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Citizens League, 2001.
- 22 Id.
- 23 Id.
- 24 Roger Bannister was the first runner to run the one mile track event in less than 4 minutes. Until he accomplished the feat, no one thought could be done. However, once Bannister broke the barrier, it was quickly broken by many other runners. The "Bannister Effect" is a term coined by Eric Mahmoud, CEO of Harvest Preparatory Academy and Best Academy charter schools, to describe the impact that is created when the achievement gap is closed by one school or district .
- 25 Op Cit, footnote 11.
- 26 Holzman, Michael. *Yes We Can: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males 2010*. Cambridge: Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010.
- 27 Id.
- 28 Id.
- 29 Id.
- 30 Reeves, Douglas. "The 90/90/90 Schools: A Case Study." *Accountability in action: a blueprint for learning organizations*. Englewood: Advanced Learning Press, 2000.
- 31 Foster, Kevin Michael. "Coming to terms: A discussion of John Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory of minority academic achievement." *Intercultural Education Vol. 15, No.4* December 2004: 155.
- 32 Id
- 33 Id
- 34 Id.
- 35 Drehle, David Von. "The Case Against Summer Vacation." *TIME Magazine*. New York: TIME Inc, 2 August 2010.
- 36 Markavitch, Dr. Vickie L., *Learning for All: What Does It Take*. Oakland, September 2006.

- 37 Op Cit, footnote 23
- 38 Itasca Project and Minnesota Business Partnership. *Minnesota's Future: World-class Schools, World-class Jobs*. St. Paul, Minnesota, 2009.
- 39 Id.
- 40 Education Trust, Inc. *Education Watch Minnesota: Key Education Facts and Figures-Achievement, Attainment and Opportunity From Elementary School through College*. Washington, DC: Education Trust, Inc., 2006.
- 41 Op Cit, footnote 19
- 42 Bush Foundation, *Increasing Educational Achievement*. 3 December 2009. 4 April 2011 <http://www.bushfoundation.org/Education/PC_Resources.asp>.
- 43 Op Cit, footnote 11
- 44 Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, *BUSINESS PLAN FOR K-12 EDUCATION REFORM*. St. Paul: Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, 2010.
- 45 Op Cit, footnote 35
- 46 Id.
- 47 Op Cit, footnote 37
- 48 Snipes, Jason and Casserly, Michael C, *Improving Student Achievement in Urban School Districts, A Case Study of School Reform in Large Urban School Systems*, Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 9 (2), by MDRC for The Council on Great City Schools, Lawrence Earlbaum and Associates, Inc., 2004
- 49 Emarita, Betty, *Minnesota Early Care and Education Action Plan: High Impact Opportunities for Action: Perspectives of Cultural Communities of Color*, 2010
- 50 Op Cit, footnote 35
- 51 Op Cit, footnote 11
- 52 Drivers of the Racial Achievement Gap, African American Leadership Forum, Education and Life Long Learning, Best Practices Committee, 2010 (See: Addendum 2)
- 53 Id.
- 54 Kramer, John Kania & Mark. *Collective Impact*. Stanford: Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2011.
- 55 Id.
- 56 Id.
- 57 Id.
- 58 Id.
- 59 Id.
- 60 Edith Gozali-Lee, Caryn Mohr, Dan Mueller. *Tackling the achievement gap through Project Early Kindergarten*. Saint Paul, Minnesota: Wilder Research, 2007.
- 61 Id.
- 62 Id.
- 63 Op Cit, footnote 11; See also: Op Cit, footnote 19; Op Cit, footnote 23; The Minnesota DFL Committee on the Achievement Gap , identified Early Childhood Education for children at risk as the highest recommended strategy for closing the gap.
- 64 Op Cit, footnote 19
- 65 Op Cit, footnote 18
- 66 Id.
- 67 Op Cit, footnote 19
- 68 Op Cit, footnote 11
- 69 Op Cit, footnote 48
- 70 Id.
- 71 Id.
- 72 Op Cit, footnote 27
- 73 Op Cit, footnote 35
- 74 Op Cit, footnote 19
- 75 Op Cit, footnote 49
- 76 Id.
- 77 Id.
- 78 Id.
- 79 Op Cit, footnote 35
- 80 Id.
- 81 Id.
- 82 Id.
- 83 Id.
- 84 Op Cit, footnote 19
- 85 Op Cit, footnote 49
- 86 Id.
- 87 Op Cit, footnote 11
- 88 Id.
- 89 Id.
- 90 Op Cit, footnote 41
- 91 Id.
- 92 Op Cit, footnote 11
- 93 Op Cit, footnote 19
- 94 Id.
- 95 Id.
- 96 Op Cit, footnote 11
- 97 Op Cit, footnote 23
- 98 Op Cit, footnote 11

Bibliography

- Bush Foundation, (2009, December 3). *Increasing Educational Achievement*. Retrieved April 4, 2011, from www.bushfoundation.org/Education/PC_Resources.asp: http://www.bushfoundation.org/Education/PC_Resources.asp
- Carnevale, A. P., N. S. (2010). *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.
- Chadwick, D. (2001). *A Failing Grade for School Completion: We Must Increase School Completion in Minneapolis and Saint Paul*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Citizens League.
- Drehle, D. V. (2010, August 2). The Case Against Summer Vacation. *TIME Magazine*. New York, New York, United States of America: TIME Inc.
- Education Trust, Inc. (2006). *Education Watch Minnesota: Key Education Facts and Figures-Achievement, Attainment and Opportunity From Elementary School through College*. Washington, DC: Education Trust, Inc.
- Foster, K. M. (2004, December). Coming to terms: A discussion of John Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory of minority academic achievement. *Intercultural Education Vol. 15, No.4*, p. 155.
- Gozali-Lee, Edith, C. M. (2007). *Tackling the achievement gap through Project Early Kindergarten*. Saint Paul, Minnesota: Wilder Research.
- Hart, B., Risley, T.R., Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children, Paul H. Brookes, 1st Ed., 1995
- Heistand, David P. (2010, May 21). Achievement Gap Trends in Minnesota and Minneapolis Public Schools. *Achievement Gap Trends in Minnesota and Minneapolis Public Schools*. St. Paul, Minnesota, United States of America.
- Holzman, M. (2010). *Yes We Can: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males 2010*. Cambridge: Schott Foundation for Public Education.
- Itasca Project and Minnesota Business Partnership. (2009). *Minnesota's Future: World-class Schools, World-class Jobs*. St. Paul, Minnesota: Itasca Project and Minnesota Business Partnership .
- Kramer, J. K. (2011). *Collective Impact*. Stanford: Stanford Social Innovation Review.
- Mahmoud, E., (2010) "The 5 Gaps" . Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States of America: Harvest Preparatory Academy and Best Academy.
- Markavitch, D. V. (2006, September). Learning for All: What Does It Take? *Learning for All: What Does It Take*. Oakland, California, United States of America.
- Minnesota Campaign for Achievement Now. (2011). *The State of Minnesota Public Education*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Campaign for Achievement Now.
- Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, (2010). *Business Plan For K-12 Education Reform*. St. Paul: Minnesota Chamber of Commerce.
- Mueller, D. (2005). *Tackling the achievement gap head on*. Saint Paul, Minnesota: Wilder Research.
- Reeves, D. (2000). The 90/90/90 Schools: A Case Study. *Accountability in action: a blueprint for learning organizations*. Englewood, Colorado, United States of America: Advanced Learning Press.
- Retelle, C. (2011). *Wanted: Prepared Workforce, Needed: Education Reforms*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Chamber of Commerce.
- Rudy Crew, J. F. *Drivers of the Racial Achievement Gap Best Practices*.
- Snipes, J. (2004), Improving Student Achievement in Urban School Districts, A Case Study of School Reform in Large Urban School Systems, *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 9 (2), by MDRC for The Council on Great City Schools, Lawrence Earlbaum and Associates, Inc.
- Wilder Research. (2008). *A Collective Action Plan for Early Childhood Care and Education in Minnesota*. St. Paul, Minnesota: Wilder Research.

Addendum

1. Measurement of the African American Academic Achievement Gap, African American Leadership Forum, Education and Life Long Learning, Best Practices Committee, 2010
2. Drivers of the Racial Achievement Gap, African American Leadership Forum, Education and Life Long Learning, Best Practices Committee, 2010



The African American Leadership Forum addresses challenges and creates long-term solutions to promote a vibrant and sustainable community in the Twin Cities. www.aalf-tc.org

A Crisis In Our Community was co-authored by Jeffrey A. Hassan, Esq. and Eric Mahmoud and edited by Kim Nelson

Education and Life-Long Learning Work Group Co-Chairs (Current and Former):

Kim Nelson - General Mills; Jeffrey A. Hassan, Esq. - Jeffrey A. Hassan, PLC;

Dr. Robert Jones - University of Minnesota; Sylvia Bartley - Medtronic; Chris Stewart - Yielding Assets

AALF Co-Chairs: Gary Cunningham - Northwest Area Foundation and

Trista Harris - Headwaters Foundation for Justice

Funded by General Mills Foundation, Grotto Foundation, Headwaters Foundation for Justice, The Jay and Rose Phillips Family Foundation of Minnesota, The Minneapolis Foundation, Northwest Area Foundation, Otto Bremer Foundation and The Saint Paul Foundation.



African American Leadership Forum

Our voices. Our future.

Education And Life-Long Learning
www.aalf-tc.org