

Is It Good For the Kids?

Mixed News About the Learning Gap

~ by Gene R. Carter

When it comes to the learning gap, there is good news and bad news: Although progress has been made, the gap remains too large.

Results regarding a trial urban district assessment released in December 2005 from The Nation's Report Card revealed that students in some of the largest cities in the United States are making gains in math and reading that are similar to nationwide gains. Some minority students in these urban districts are scoring at or above national averages for racial and ethnic groups. But, although many of the 11 participating cities showed greater numerical increases in math for grades 4 and 8 than average gains made across the country, overall scores in math and reading for most districts in those cities remained below the national averages.

Many of us in education have long concerned ourselves with the task of improving schools and developing the best ways to help students learn successfully. Many noneducators are becoming increasingly concerned that improvements in education are necessary for the future prosperity of the United States.

Business leaders have a growing concern that the United States may be taking a backseat to the rest of the world when it comes to education and economic strength. Companies continue to send manufacturing jobs overseas, and technology firms look elsewhere, such as China and India, to find talent to fill software design and engineering positions.

Ron Ferguson, a Harvard University economic policy analyst who has spoken nationally and at

setting depends on the quality of the schooling that we provide to African American and Hispanic students because, ultimately, nonwhites collectively will soon be the majority of the workforce.

The Center on Education Policy reported in 2005 that achievement gaps on U.S. high school exit exams remain stagnant despite efforts by some districts to increase passing rates. The achievement gaps between white students and black and Latino

Successful learning must encompass the development of learners who are knowledgeable, emotionally and physically healthy, civically engaged, prepared for economic self-sufficiency, and ready for the world beyond.



ASCD's first annual Leadership for Effective Advocacy and Practice Institute, has drawn connections between the achievement gap and the future prosperity of society. According to Ferguson, the future of the U.S. economy in the international

students on such tests remain large, with an average gap of 20 to 30 points in most states. The gaps are often greater for students from low-income families, students with disabilities, and, in particular, learners of English as a second language, who had initial

Mixed News - continued from page 6

pass rates of as much as 30 to 40 points below the overall average in math and greater gaps in reading.

More can be done to raise the achievement levels of these students and prepare them for a successful future. Efforts must focus on recasting the definition of a successful learner. Increasing student achievement through increased attention to math, science, and reading is important, but equally important to effecting world-changing innovation is adopting a whole-child approach. Successful learning must also encompass the development of learners who are knowledgeable, emotionally and physically healthy, civically engaged, prepared for economic self-sufficiency, and ready for the world beyond.

Accordingly, educators and policymakers should

*Maintain high expectations for all students.

*Implement clear standards and ongoing assessments.

*Focus on teacher quality.

*Establish comprehensive whole-child programs to address the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of children.

*Offer professional development for all educators and greater opportunities for collaboration.

*Foster strong leadership at all levels of the school building and school district.

*Get parents and community members involved to support school improvement initiatives.

The education of all students remains the ultimate goal. However, if we do not pay particular attention to the learning gap and continue to let many African American and Hispanic students simply just get by or fall through the cracks, we are hurting the future advancement of the United States. The talent that business leaders and others are looking for is available; it just has to be nurtured.

The Nation's Report Card: Results of the 2005 Trial Urban District Assessment is available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>.

A PDF of the Center on Education Policy report, State High School Exit Exams: States Try Harder But Gaps Persist, is available at www.cep-dc.org.

© 2007 Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Gene R. Carter is Executive Director of ASCD. He writes Is It Good for the Kids? as a regular feature on the ASCD website at <http://www.ascd.org/>. This article was presented in January 2006 and can be viewed in the Archived Issues.
