



NCPIE Update

A Publication of the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education March 2005

Inside this Issue:

- The National Education Association's Work to End Achievement Gaps
- NCPIE's Continuing Column: *Spotlight on the Evidence*
- Parent Involvement Resources, Upcoming Meetings & Trainings

Closing Achievement Gaps: An Overview of the National Education Association's Initiative to Create Great Public Schools for Every Child

Denise Alston, Senior Policy Analyst in the Human and Civil Rights Department at the National Education Association (NEA) was the featured speaker at the February NCPIE meeting. Her presentation, "*Closing Achievement Gaps*," provided an overview of NEA's work to close student achievement gaps with specific attention to efforts at encouraging NEA members to use community and school specific data.



Below, please find an overview of the presentation and information on how to find out more about the NEA's work in this area.

NEA's focus on this topic is a continuation of the Priority Schools Initiative. Since 1998 the NEA has been focused on helping members address, understand and tackle the challenges of failing schools. The purpose behind this work is to effectively apply and coordinate NEA's resources, in collaboration with affiliates and external partners, towards efforts that close achievement gaps.

Why all children deserve great public schools:

NEA is focusing on achievement gaps for many of the reasons outlined below:

- Public parent expectations

- Changing student demographics
- Static teacher demographics
- Future productivity of America's workforce
- The critical role of teachers and para-educators
- To help NEA members address educational accountability
- To achieve equity and access

Achievement Gaps: What Are They?

Achievement gaps exist when groups of students with relatively equal ability do not achieve in school at the same levels. In fact, one group often far exceeds the achievement level of another. Gaps can be found based upon:

- Race/Ethnicity
- Income levels
- Language backgrounds
- Disability status
- Gender

Disparities in academic achievement by various groups are evidenced in a variety of data including academic performance on tests, access and enrollment in advanced classes, and attainment levels, including graduation rates and collegiate degree completion.

A Look at the Numbers:

	Graduated High School	Completed at Least Some College	Earned at least a Bachelor's Degree
For every 100 White 24-year-olds	92	65	30
For every 100 Hispanic 24-year-olds	65	32	8
For every 100 Black 24-year-olds	84	46	16

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, Current Population Reports, 2004

Closing Achievement Gaps with Voice, Advocacy, and Affiliate Engagement and Support

NEA has a 3-pronged approach that guides its efforts at diminishing the expansive academic divide between groups of students. It includes:

Voice

1. Caucus observances at NEA Board meetings
2. Speeches given by leaders in the NEA organization
3. Publications and presentations by noted researchers
4. Presentations at all NEA Regional Conferences
5. Maryland State Teachers Association's radio spots on closing achievement gaps

Advocacy

1. Political activity at the state and federal levels of government
2. Partnerships with national organizations and policymakers
3. Activities to support the inclusion of working conditions that improve student outcomes in bargaining agreements
4. Linkages to grants from the NEA Foundation
5. Indiana State Teachers Association's state legislative work around achievement gaps data

Affiliate Engagement and Support

1. Policies, products, and other resources that will help states address achievement gaps issues
2. Continuous collection of data from states about current work underway
3. Participation and engagement of para-educators, higher education, student and retired members to support affiliate work in closing gaps

But the work does not end there. In the summer of 2003, NEA gathered a diverse group of researchers, practitioners, Association staff and community-based advocates in Washington, D.C, to identify research-based instructional strategies, school change activities, and family/school engagement efforts for closing the achievement gaps. The result of that work is the *C.A.R.E.: Strategies for Closing Achievement Gaps* guide. It is designed to help educators to explore new ways of thinking about what and how to teach by offering concrete ways to examine and change curriculum and classroom practices. C.A.R.E. stands for culture, abilities, resilience, and effort. It is NEA's latest resource aimed at helping education professionals to understand that culturally diverse students have assets that may not be identified in traditional ways. It asks educators to reflect on their current practices and challenges them to look at what they themselves may need to learn in order to do a better job at closing achievement gaps within various student groups.

The C.A.R.E. guide is divided into four main chapters aligned with the themes. Each of the theme chapters has a similar structure with key sections that are described below:

SCHOOLS THAT CLOSE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS:

- **Focus on improving learning for all students**
- **Maintain a no excuses attitude**
- **Use Research data to improve practice**
- **Involve everyone**
- **Persist through setbacks and difficulties**
- **Celebrate accomplishments**

1. C.A.R.E. Theme Introductions: A brief orientation to the C.A.R.E. themes is given that underscores their importance in effectively closing the student achievement gaps, defines each theme, and references what research has identified as key factors in that theme.
2. Enduring Understandings: These emphasize the understandings NEA would like to be sustained in the classroom, and are drawn from the research on effective pedagogy for teachers of low-income and or culturally and linguistically diverse students.
3. Optimal Instruction for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students: This section describes the knowledge and skills that educators of low-income and/or culturally and linguistically diverse students need in order to be most effective, drawing from the research in culturally relevant pedagogy.
4. Educator Check-In: How Am I Doing?: The Educator Check-In is a self assessment that includes a series of questions about the chapter theme and is designed to help them reflect on their practices and think honestly about what they are doing in each of these areas.
5. Approaches, Strategies, and Activities at-a-Glance Grid: This matrix is a ready-reference to sample activities that illustrate each theme and is designed so that educators can review the contents and quickly access what they need.
6. CREDE Standards for Effective Pedagogy: Each C.A.R.E. theme correlates to one or two key Standards for Effective Pedagogy, building on over 30 years of extensive research on instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse students and students living in poverty by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE)
7. Ready-to-Use Approaches, Strategies, and Activities: This section consists of learning experiences that help educators (a) develop a culturally competent learning community in their classroom; (b) recognize and strengthen students' abilities; (c) promote students' resilience; and (d) engage student motivation and effort. The strategies and activities presented are intended to be only a starting point for educators to strengthen their success with culturally and linguistically diverse students.
8. Chapter References: This summary of resources is designed to help educators expand their repertoire and understanding of each C.A.R.E. theme.

The *C.A.R.E.: Strategies for Closing Achievement Gaps* guide has just completed printing and NEA has plans for wide exposure of it to union members as well as plans for placement of the guide on CD.

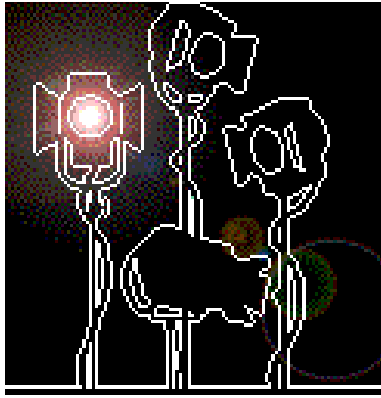
Additional efforts by NEA that address achievement gaps include discussion guides designed to help jumpstart the conversation and the work desperately needed around closing achievement gaps. Each guide helps to:

- Identify achievement gaps in individual schools, districts, and communities
- Identify contributing factors to the achievement gaps
- Identifies strategies for closing the achievement gaps
- Identifies stakeholders' responsibilities for closing achievement gaps

The NEA wants to attack this issue with systemic change. Opportunities for changes in how achievement gaps are addressed can be found at all levels, including classrooms, schools, districts, and at the state level. As a union, NEA believes that it has an opportunity to lead the way to that change and has identified 9 strategies of how to do the work. They include: (please note: bulleted items below are just a few of the examples given in the guide).

1. Enhanced cultural competence
 - Consider students' diversity to be an asset
 - Increase faculty's cultural competence
2. Comprehensive Support for Students
 - Work with medical, social service and community agencies
 - Support students via mentoring, tutoring, peer support networks and role models
3. Outreach to Students' Families
 - Establish family centers at schools and other community locations
 - Make sure the school has a welcoming environment
 - Hire staff, especially para-educators, from the community who speak the families' home languages
4. Extended Learning Opportunities
 - Extend learning to before-and after-school, and during the summer
 - Institute full day Kindergarten and Pre-kindergarten
5. Classrooms that Support Learning
 - Use effective instructional strategies
 - Target literacy and math instruction
 - Safeguard instructional time
6. Supportive School
 - Provide ongoing professional development for school-based leaders on effective strategies for closing achievement gaps
 - Use test data and other research on students' performance to inform instruction
7. Strong District Support
 - Decrease class size
 - Involve teachers in the design of ongoing professional development
 - Provide additional resources and support for students experiencing achievement gaps
8. Access to Qualified Staff
 - Compensate teachers who take on extra responsibilities
 - Prepare teacher leaders to be effective on school reform
 - Prepare teachers and para-educators to work effectively with families and communities
9. Adequate Resources and Funding
 - Target resources on closing the gaps
 - Engage businesses, universities, foundations in schools' work
 - Seek state, federal or private funding in collaboration with partners to leverage NEA programs

For more information on NEA efforts at closing achievement gaps, please visit them online at www.nea.org, or contact Denise Alston at dalston@nea.org.



Spotlight on A New Wave of Evidence

A continuing column highlighting parent involvement research found in “A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement” by Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp.

Predictors of High School and Family Partnerships and the Influence of Partnerships on Student Success
Beth Simon Shara, 2000; Page 180

With the current focus on high school academic success by the National Governors Association as well as the current administration we thought it timely to highlight a piece of research on high school achievement as it relates to family involvement. This month we spotlight Beth Shara Simon’s doctoral dissertation, which received the American Educational Research Association’s year 2000 Family, School, Community Partnerships Special Interest Group’s Outstanding Dissertation Award.

The need for more research on how schools, families, and communities connect to support adolescents is a well known fact in the family involvement community. Simon addresses that need and builds upon existing research in the area of parent and family involvement at the high school level. It aims to improve understanding of the nature and intensity of high school, family, and community partnerships. Specifically it looked at:

- 1) the effects of partnerships on high school students and,
- 2) the influence of high schools’ outreach on family involvement practices.

Data for this study came from a sub-sample of 11,348 high school students and their parents, and 1073 high school administrators who participated in the 1988 National Educational Longitudinal Study, including those with complete data through follow-ups in 1990 and 1992.

Family involvement was measured by family, school administrator and student responses to questions in the following areas:

- Parenting: parents monitoring students’ time and activities, making decisions about rules, discussing school and college plans, spending fun time together, attending college planning workshops.
- Communicating: school contacting parents about program, courses, and information to help student; parents contacting school about student’s program and courses.
- Volunteering: parents helping at school, taking part in the parent organization(s).

- Learning at home: parents reporting knowing how and what their teen is doing in school; students reporting talking with parents about courses, activities, and grades; both report talking about school.
- Decision making: parents reporting having enough/wanting more influence on school policies; administrators reporting on parent influence on school policies (like tracking, hiring, discipline, and budget).
- Collaborating with community: parents participating in community service programs, establishing partnerships with business and community groups.

Student Achievement Measures and What the Data Revealed

Measures of student achievement included standardized test scores, course credits acquired, absences, and school preparedness.

Findings suggested that various parenting, volunteering, learning-at-home and decision-making activities positively influence selected student outcomes, including grades, course credits completed, attendance, behavior, and school preparedness.

School Outreach to Families Measures and What the Data Revealed

School outreach to families was measured by reports on whether the school contacted parents about:

- teens' academic program, plans after high school, and course selection.
- teens' attendance and behavior.
- parents' taking part in school fund-raising or volunteer work.
- schools' providing parents with information on how to help their teen at home with skills or homework.

An investigation of the influence of schools' outreach on partnerships found that according to parents, when schools reach out, parents respond with greater attendance at postsecondary planning workshops, engage in more parent-teen discussions about postsecondary planning, attend more school activities, have increased knowledge of teens' progress, and work more with their teens on homework.

Findings

Simon found that families and communities do participate in a range of partnership activities to support students through high school. Parent involvement increases with support from the school. For example, when school staff members contact parents about these opportunities, parents are more likely to:

- Attend planning workshops and talk to their teenagers about college and employment.
- Volunteer as audience members at school activities.
- Work more often with their teenagers on homework.
- Talk with teenagers more often about school.

Her analysis also found positive effects of partnerships on students' success. Involvement in parenting, volunteering, learning at home, and decision-making activities was related to:

- Higher grades in English and math.
- More completed course credits in English and math.
- Better attendance and behavior.
- Increased preparedness for class.

Simon found stronger relationships between partnership practices and student outcomes that were logically linked. For example, parents' attending college-planning workshops and talking to students about college were linked more to better grades and courses completed than to behavior and attendance.

Conclusions

The overall findings from this study found that partnerships positively influence student outcomes through the last years of high school. This study concludes that families are involved in and support learning in many ways during high school years. Yet, it found that schools themselves can impact the direction in which families steer adolescent success. Simon states that students and their families require research-based partnership programs to ensure sustained success in high school and after graduation, and she issues a call for more comprehensive research in the area.

New Parent Involvement Resources & Upcoming Meetings & Trainings

- The dates of the 2005 Summit Conference (and Parent Institute) of the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) are November 30 to December 2. The conference will be held at the Washington Hilton Hotel.
- The National Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Advocacy Task Force is a group of local, regional, and national stakeholders supporting the laws prohibiting national origin discrimination because of language barriers and is now providing a new and informative training for school districts. The specifics are outlined below.

Bridging Language Barriers with English Language Learners & Parents/Guardians Updated Legal Obligations for LEAs pursuant to Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act & No Child Left Behind Act

Did you know that LEA's must :

- Develop & implement a Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act LEP Plan that addresses, in detail, the provision of qualified interpretation and translation services in all programs and activities? (Your current policies may not be sufficient without these revisions)
- Assure that staff is trained to know when and how to access language assistance?

- Assure that you are able to provide effective face-to-face, telephone and written communication in a timely manner?
- Assure staff is trained to work effectively with interpreters?
- Provide posted notice in different languages of the availability of qualified interpretation and translation services?
- Translate written materials?
- Assure interpreters and translators are trained & qualified?

Fee: \$35.00 per participant

Maximum number of participants- 25

For more information or to set up teleconference training please contact Kathy Poulos-Minett at 207-878-5196 or lep@maine.rr.com.

SEDL Publishes New Research Synthesis: Early Experience in School Sets the Stage for Later Progress

Children’s earliest experiences in school often set the pattern for later academic progress, according to a recent research synthesis published by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL). “Young children enter kindergarten with a range of cognitive and social skills that contribute to their achievement during kindergarten,” says Catherine Jordan, director of SEDL’s National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools. “According to our new synthesis of research studies related to school readiness, children who get off to a good start in kindergarten tend to maintain that advantage as they progress through school.” Jordan explains, “This finding points out the importance of readiness as a strategy for helping to close the achievement gap. In other words, the research suggests that the achievement gap starts early and persists. Our challenge is to find strategies that can help all children to experience that critical early success.”

The research synthesis, titled *Readiness: School, Family, & Community Connections*, was written by SEDL program associate Martha Boethel and published by SEDL in December. The report synthesizes information from 48 research studies and literature reviews—all published since 1998 and included correlational, experimental, and quasi-experimental studies—to answer three questions:

- What is known about differences in children’s skills and performance at kindergarten entry and the contextual factors associated with those differences?
- What is known about early childhood or preschool interventions that include family or community components?
- What is known about children’s transition to kindergarten, including transition beliefs and practices and patterns of family-school interactions?

The studies indicate that a variety of factors contribute to children’s readiness for

kindergarten, according to Jordan. “For example, the home environment is strongly associated with children’s early skills and abilities,” she says. “Though we still have a lot to learn about what works, there is evidence that early interventions not only can help children directly, they can also help families to develop more effective supports for their young children’s learning.”

She notes, “Many of these findings aren’t new, but they confirm previous research and lend support to the work of the National Center and other organizations focused on strengthening home and school connections and educating families and communities about their roles in their children’s education. Other findings in the synthesis give us insight into needs for future research—we still have a lot to learn about the relationships among children, schools, families, and communities and how they affect young children’s success in school.”

Readiness: School, Family, & Community Connections is available online at <http://www.sedl.org/connections/> or may be ordered from SEDL’s publications department by calling 800-476-6861.

American Youth Policy Forum Releases New Report on Academics and Civic Engagement

A new report, *Restoring the Balance between Academics and Civic Engagement in Public Schools*, released by the American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) questions the No Child Left Behind Act's focus on core academic subjects at the expense of the public school's equally important role: preparing students to be engaged and effective citizens. The report is the product of a year of discussion with policymakers, education practitioners, community groups, parents, and youth from across the nation. It offers a seven-step action plan to help schools refocus on the goal of creating both academically proficient and civically engaged students. The new report also highlights several programs, including school-community partnerships that promote both quality academics and civic engagement.

To order the report, *Restoring the Balance between Academics and Civic Engagement in Public Schools* (56 pp.), please send \$5 per copy (includes shipping/handling) to AYPF, 1836 Jefferson Place, NW, Washington, DC20036. An online version of the report will be available soon at www.aypf.org.

Good Resources for Parent Involvement

Social Advocates for Youth, in San Diego, California has an easily accessible, on-line set of tips for parents. Each of the twenty tips is well-formatted and usually prints onto one page. Even though the topics listed below are in English, there is a complete set of tips in Spanish as well. You may access all of the tips by going to their web site: <http://www.saysandiego.org/parentinfo.htm>.

|

Topic headings include:

Conference Tips For Parents	Failing-What To Do
Getting a Handle on Homework	Getting Set for Middle School
Homework 123	How to Read with Children
Improving Academic Performance	Lee Canter Homework Tips
Preparing For College	Problem Solving Conference
Studying For and Taking Tests	Supporting Literacy at Home
Test-Taking Tips	That's Interesting!
Survey Results	Using Your Students Planner

Questions Parents Ask Series:

Questions Parents Ask-Academic Standards
Questions Parents Ask-College
Questions Parents Ask-How Good is Good Enough
Questions Parents Ask-Parent-Teacher Conferencing
Questions Parents Ask-Standardized Testing

For Parent Information files in Spanish visit <http://www.saysandiego.org/parentinfo.htm>. Be sure you look down the page to find the second list for the Spanish versions of all tips. For more information, contact Ellen Yaffa, Program Director at SAY San Diego. Phone: 619 - 582 - 9056 ext. 232, Email: ellen@saysandiego.org

The NCPIE/PEN Action Brief on Parent Involvement Policy is on the NCPIE web site: www.ncpie.org/Resources/nclbactionbriefs.html.

Don't forget to check the NCPIE web site periodically for new information on parent involvement at www.ncpie.org.

NCPIE's March Meeting and Presentation

Our next NCPIE meeting will be **Wednesday, March 30th** from 9:00 to 12:00 at NEA, Conference Room B. NEA is located at 1201 16th Street NW, Washington DC. Please join us at 9:00 for coffee and conversation. The meeting will begin at 9:30.

Our guest presenter is **Kavitha Mediratta** from the Institute for Education and Social Policy, New York University. The title of her presentation is: **Community Organizing for School Reform: It's Growing and It's Getting Results.**

Kavitha Mediratta is not just a researcher. She also provides technical assistance and strategic advice to organizing groups around New York City. For the past five years, with support from the Mott Foundation and other funders, Kavitha has been conducting a series of studies to map organizing efforts across the country, and to document the strategies they are using and the impact they have had on schools, districts and communities. Her most recent study, with Norm Fruchter and other colleagues at IESP, is *Constituents of Change: Community Organizations and Public Education Reform*. Free copies of the study and other materials will be available for all who come.

Her presentation will cover:

What is community organizing for school reform?

Who are the groups that do this?

Why are they organizing?

How is this work changing schools and districts?

How does organizing lead to improved school and district capacity for improved student learning?

What's the theory that drives this work?

What does it look like?

Chicago ACORN

Oakland Community Organizations

We will end with a discussion around the implications for educators and other questions raised by the group. Please come prepared for a lively session