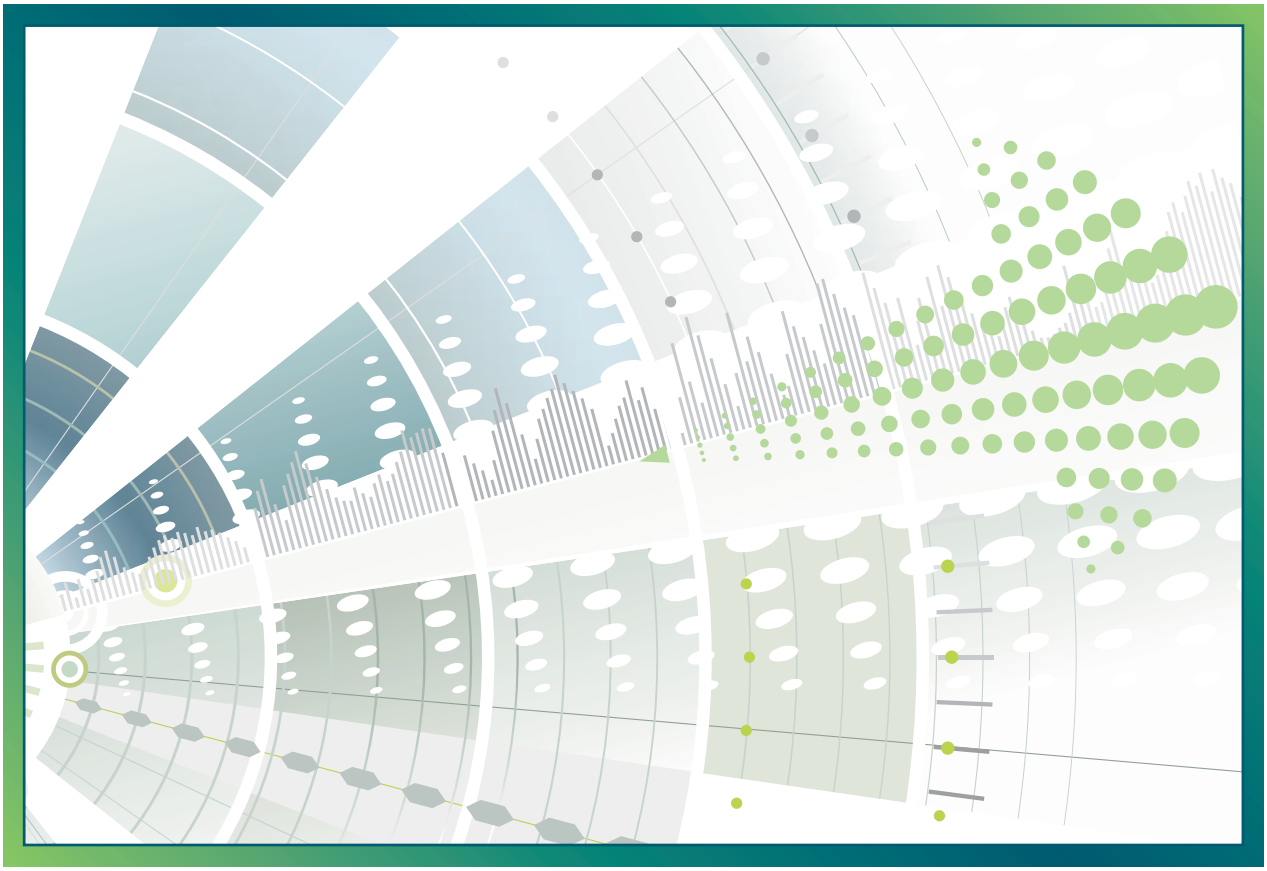
CENTER ON EDUCATION POLICY CEP

Student Achievement Policy Brief #1: African American Students

A Call to Action to Raise Achievement for African American Students



Center on Education Policy

June 2010

A Call to Action to Raise Achievement for African American Students

Introduction and Summary

One out of every six public school students in the U.S. is African American. The achievement of African American students as a group will have a significant impact on the nation's economic strength and social well-being. This brief looks at the performance of African American students on state reading and mathematics tests and considers the policy implications of these achievement trends.

Part 1 of this brief summarizes key results for African Americans on the state tests used for accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Included in the review are trends since 2002 in the percentages of African American students reaching various achievement levels on state tests; trends since 2002 in the black-white achievement gap; and 2008 state test results for African American students and other racial/ethnic groups. The information in part 1 is drawn from an immense set of test data from all 50 states that was gathered by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) with technical support from the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) and was verified by state officials. For the past three years, CEP has used these data to do an ongoing study of state test score trends. Previous CEP reports with more detailed findings about achievement for various subgroups and for students overall can be accessed at www.cep-dc.org.

Part 2 of this brief considers policies that could be undertaken at the local, state, and federal level to raise achievement for African American students. We arrived at these policy implications after reviewing studies by other researchers about possible factors underlying the black-white achievement gap and possible strategies to address this gap.

Our own achievement studies and our review of other research revealed several key findings and policy implications about the state test performance of African American students:

- ***Rising achievement and narrowing gaps.*** Since NCLB was enacted in 2002, African American students as a group have made gains on state tests in both reading and math and have narrowed achievement gaps with white students in most states. Despite this progress, many African American students are not achieving at the high levels needed for future success in college and careers, and achievement gaps remain large.

- ***African Americans relative to other racial/ethnic subgroups.*** According to the median[1] percentages of students scoring proficient across all states with sufficient test data, the African American subgroup was the lowest-performing racial/ethnic subgroup in 2008

[1] The median is the middle number in a list of numbers ordered by value, so that half of the numbers in the list are greater in value than the median and half are less. As used in this paper, the median percentage proficient for a specific subgroup in a particular subject and grade (such as African American students in grade 8 math) represents the midpoint across all of the states with sufficient data and with sufficiently large African American subgroups; half of these states had percentages proficient above the median and half had percentages proficient below.

in the majority of grade levels and subjects analyzed (grades 4, 8, and high school in reading and math). In the nine states that together enroll more than half of the nation's African American students, the African American subgroup also had the lowest percentage proficient among racial/ethnic subgroups in reading and math with few exceptions. School systems, states, and the federal government, as well as communities and families, need to take stronger actions to address the educational and societal factors that contribute to low achievement for the African American subgroup.

- ***States with racially-isolated schools.*** States in which African Americans were the lowest-performing racial/ethnic subgroup in both reading and math at all tested grades in 2008 tended to be those in which relatively high proportions of students attend racially isolated schools (those in which African American students comprise 90% or more of the enrollment).

- ***Possible policy actions.*** Stronger and more focused policy actions are needed at the local, state, and federal levels to raise achievement for African American students. Efforts to address "in-school" factors could include enhancing course offerings, curriculum, and instruction in schools with high enrollments of African American students; improving the distribution, effectiveness, and cultural awareness of teachers who teach African American students; reducing *de facto* racial and economic segregation in the educational system; and other policies. Efforts to mitigate "out-of-school" factors affecting African American student achievement might include policies to help families overcome the challenges of poverty; programs to help build parents' capacity to reinforce their children's learning; attention to health issues that impinge on learning; and other policies.

Other policy briefs in this series examine state test results for Latino and Asian American students.

Background on African American Students

A significant number of U.S. students—17% of all public school enrollments—are African American. Many districts enroll much greater proportions; African American students comprise more than one-fourth of the enrollments in the 100 largest school districts, and more than half of the enrollments in the 14 largest districts (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.; 2008a).

The majority of school-age African American children are economically disadvantaged. One-third (33%) come from families with incomes below the poverty level—a much higher proportion than for white students and a slightly higher proportion than for Latino students—and another 27% are near-poor[2] (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b). In addition, the majority (54%) of African American school-age children live in single-parent families, much higher than for white (21%) or Latino (29%) children. These realities of poverty and family configuration can have a strong impact on the achievement of African American students.

This policy brief focuses on the achievement of the African American subgroup in the aggregate, which is how test scores are tracked for NCLB accountability. But it is important to keep in mind that the African American subgroup is very diverse. It includes many very high-achieving individuals, as well as individuals representing the full range of achievement, income levels, family background, and other characteristics, as explained in **box A**.

[2] In this Census data set, "near-poor" families were defined as those with incomes between 100% and 199% of the poverty threshold.

Box A. Diversity within Racial/Ethnic Subgroups

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, schools and districts must collect and separately report test results and other achievement data for each major racial/ethnic subgroup in the state, as well as for low-income students, English language learners, and students with disabilities. The most common racial/ethnic subgroups tracked by states include African American, Asian American, Latino, Native American, and white students. Schools, districts, and states must report the percentages of students in each major subgroup scoring at the proficient level on state tests.

These aggregate test results for a single subgroup conceal the considerable diversity found within every racial/ethnic group. Each group includes very high-achieving students, as well as students in the middle and at the low end of the achievement scale. Each group has students from low-income, middle-class, and affluent families and from a range of family circumstances. Each group encompasses children from a variety of nationality and cultural backgrounds. The culture of a Filipino student may be very different from that of a Chinese student, just as the culture of a child whose parents came from Ghana is unlike that of an African American child whose ancestors were once enslaved in Georgia. In addition, each racial/ethnic group includes, to varying degrees, students who are recent immigrants and refugees and students whose native language is not English.

Aggregate reporting of test results can also mask the existence of subpopulations within the larger group that have unique educational needs. Refugee children, such as Hmong immigrants, may have faced trauma, hunger, or war and had very little formal education in their native country, in contrast with children of highly educated immigrants. Children who are recent immigrants from Guatemala, for instance, are likely to have different educational needs than children who descended from early settlers of New Mexico.

Although an analysis of trends for racial/ethnic subgroups as a whole can shed light on critical educational issues, one should keep in mind the diverse composition of the subgroup.

Part 1. State Test Results for African American Students

To understand better the achievement of African American students on state tests, we analyzed the following data:

- Trends in the percentages of African American students at grades 4, 8, and high school scoring at the proficient level on state tests between 2002 (where available) and 2008; and trends in grade 4 only at the basic and advanced levels of achievement
- Trends in gaps in percentages proficient between African American and white students between 2002 and 2008—specifically, whether gaps have narrowed, widened, or stayed the same—as well as trends in gaps during this same period in average (mean) test scores
- Test results for 2008 for African American students and other major racial/ethnic subgroups

Not all states had comparable data going back to 2002 because some states have changed their testing programs or cut scores for proficiency since that time. To address this situation, our analyses of both achievement and gap trends included only those states that had at least three consecutive years of comparable test data extending through 2008, the most recent year available at the time we collected data for our 2009 achievement studies. In addition,

states were excluded from our analyses if the number of African American test-takers was small (fewer than 500 students for the particular grade level and subject being analyzed).[3]

Because of the enormous amount of data involved in analyzing test results for 50 states, five subgroups, two subjects, and up to eight testing years, our analyses focused on grade 4, grade 8, and the high school grade tested for NCLB (usually grade 10 or 11). In some cases we looked at data for all tested grades (3-8) to confirm whether the trends found at grades 4 and 8 held true at other grades.

Additional findings for racial/ethnic subgroups are discussed in CEP's 2009 report, *State Test Score Trends Through 2007-08, Part 3: Are Achievement Gaps Closing and Is Achievement Rising for All?*

GAINS BY AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS SINCE 2002

Generally speaking, the percentages of African Americans students scoring proficient on state tests have increased since 2002, the year NCLB was enacted. (The percentage proficient is the main indicator of progress used for NCLB accountability.) Many more states had gains in percentages proficient for African Americans between 2002 and 2008 than had declines. For example, 31 of the 36 states with sufficient data showed gains for African Americans in grade 4 reading, and 32 of 36 states posted gains for this subgroup in grade 4 math. The proportions of states with gains for African Americans were roughly similar to, and in some cases higher than, the comparable proportions for other subgroups.

Four states—Arkansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Virginia—showed notably strong gains in percentages proficient for African American students. Relative to other states, these four states had large gains between 2002 and 2008 in at least four out of six possible subject/grade combinations.[4]

Our research included a special analysis of trends by subgroup at three achievement levels—basic, proficient, and advanced—in order to detect changes in performance across the achievement spectrum that would not be captured by the percentage proficient alone. Because of the large amount of data involved, we limited this analysis by achievement level to grade 4 (grade 8 and high school will be studied in future reports). In 4th grade reading, 86% of the states with sufficient data made gains at the proficient level for the African American subgroup, while 14% showed declines—a higher share of states with gains than for other racial/ethnic subgroups. In 4th grade math, 89% of the states with sufficient data showed gains at the proficient level for African Americans, while 11% showed declines. At the basic and advanced achievement levels, states with gains for African Americans 4th graders also outnumbered states with declines, although the proportion of states with gains were somewhat lower than at the proficient level. Progress was particularly notable for African American 4th graders at the advanced level in math, where 91% of the states analyzed made gains.

Even with these gains, however, state test scores remain low for African Americans as a group, a situation discussed in more detail later in this policy brief.

[3] These and other rules for analysis for CEP's achievement studies were developed with advice from a panel of experts in education testing and education policy. Members of the expert panel include Laura Hamilton, senior behavioral scientist, RAND Corporation; Eric Hanushek, senior fellow, Hoover Institution; Frederick Hess, director of education policy studies, American Enterprise Institute; Robert L. Linn, professor emeritus, University of Colorado; and W. James Popham, professor emeritus, University of California, Los Angeles.

[4] The six possible combinations represent two subjects (reading and math) times three grade levels (grade 4, grade 8, and one high school grade).

PROGRESS SINCE 2002 IN NARROWING BLACK-WHITE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

Between 2002 and 2008, gaps in percentages proficient between African American and white students narrowed in both reading and math at grades 4, 8, and high school in a large majority of the states with sufficient data and sufficient numbers of African American test-takers. In grade 4 reading, for example, the African American-white gap narrowed in 28 of the 36 states with sufficient data. In grade 8 reading, this gap narrowed in 30 of 35 states.

The percentage proficient has limitations, however, particularly for analyses of achievement gaps. Gaps can appear larger or smaller depending on where states set their cut scores for proficient performance. For example, gaps will appear to be quite small if the cut score is set so low that most students reach it or so high that very few students reach it, while gaps will appear larger with cut scores set closer to the mean score for a test. To compensate for this statistical phenomenon and to pick up changes at the lower and higher ends of the scoring scale that are not captured by percentages proficient, we also analyzed achievement gaps between African American and white students in terms of average, or mean, scores on the scoring scale for each state's particular test.

Mean scores also showed that gaps have narrowed more often since 2002 than they have widened, although in somewhat fewer instances than the percentage proficient data showed. The African American-white gap narrowed 65% of the time using mean scores, compared with 75% of the time using percentages proficient.[5]

It is important to remember that for gaps to narrow, achievement for the target subgroup, such as African Americans, must improve at a notably faster rate than achievement for the comparison group, such as white students. Indeed, when achievement is rising for all groups, gaps can still widen if African American students improve at a slower rate than white students. For that reason, policymakers should understand that narrowing achievement gaps can be a long, slow, and uneven process.

ACHIEVEMENT IN 2008 FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS AND OTHER RACIAL/ETHNIC SUBGROUPS

Obtaining a national picture of achievement for different racial/ethnic subgroups is complicated because state tests vary widely in their content, difficulty, format, cut scores for proficiency, and other characteristics. For this policy brief, we compared the median percentages proficient on 2008 state tests for African Americans and four other racial/ethnic subgroups, across all of the states with at least three years of comparable data through 2008. The median percentage proficient for a specific subgroup, subject, and grade (such as African American students in grade 8 math) represents the midpoint in a list of percentages proficient in rank order from all states with sufficient data; half of these states had percentages proficient that were higher than the median and half had percentages that were lower. Medians were calculated for grades 4, 8, and the high school grade tested for NCLB.

States were excluded from the median calculations for a particular racial/ethnic subgroup if the number of test-takers for that subgroup was fewer than 500 for a particular grade and subject. As a result, in some states the African American subgroup was compared with fewer than four other racial/ethnic subgroups. For example, 38 states had sufficient years of comparable data and sufficiently large African American subgroups to calculate an African American median, but in 19 of these states, no median was computed for Native American students

[5] These percentages were calculated based on the total numbers of gaps narrowing, widening, or staying the same for three grade levels (4, 8, and high school) and two subjects (reading and math) in all the states with at least three years of comparable data and with sufficient numbers of African American students.

because the Native American subgroup was too small. The number of states excluded for small subgroups ranged from 7 states for Latino students in grade 4 to 27 states for Native American students in high school. Some states were also excluded because they were missing data at one or more grade levels for other reasons.

As shown in **table 1**, the African American subgroup had the lowest national median percentage proficient for 2008 among the major racial/ethnic subgroups for most of the six subject/grade level combinations analyzed. In grade 8 math, for example, the median percentage proficient for all the states meeting the criteria described above was 46% for African American students, 86% for Asian students, 55% for Latino students, 54% for Native American students, and 77% for white students. The exceptions were in grade 8 reading and high school math, where the median was lowest for Native American students.

Table 1. Median percentages of students scoring proficient on state tests for African Americans and other racial/ethnic subgroups, 2008

Subject & grade	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White
Reading					
Grade 4	58%	83%	64%	62%	81%
Grade 8	58%	83%	58%	57%	81%
High school	53%	78%	56%	57%	78%
Math					
Grade 4	56%	88%	67%	63%	82%
Grade 8	46%	86%	55%	54%	77%
High school	45%	81%	50%	44%	71%

Table reads: In grade 4 reading, the median percentage of students scoring proficient on state tests was 58% for the African American subgroup, 83% for Asian Americans, 64% for Latino students, 62% for Native Americans, and 81% for white students.

Note: Subgroups were excluded from the calculations in this table if the number of test-takers was small (fewer than 500 students in the grade level analyzed) or if data for a particular subgroup were missing for other reasons.

There is a great deal of variation among states in terms of the difficulty of their tests and the location of cut scores to determine proficiency, as well as demographics and actual achievement levels. States with low percentages proficient may have harder tests or higher cut scores than states with high percentages proficient. To give an indication of the range among states, we identified the lowest and highest percentages proficient in any state for each racial/ethnic subgroup in a particular subject and grade. **Table 2** shows these ranges from lowest to highest for African American students.

Whether the percentage proficient for African Americans is low, medium, or high, this subgroup is often the lowest-performing among racial/ethnic subgroups in a particular state. The tables in the Appendix show the 2008 percentages proficient in reading and math at grades 4, 8, and high school for the major racial/ethnic subgroups in each of the 50 states.

Table 2. Lowest and highest percentages proficient in any state for African American students, 2008

Subject & grade	Lowest	Highest
Reading		
Grade 4	25%	86%
Grade 8	13%	90%
High school	17%	94%
Math		
Grade 4	22%	85%
Grade 8	8%	82%
High school	6%	87%

Table reads: In grade 4 reading, the lowest percentage proficient in any state for African American students was 25%, while the highest percentage proficient in any state for this subgroup was 86%.

Note: Subgroups were excluded from the calculations in this table if the number of test-takers was small (fewer than 500 students in the grade level analyzed) or if data for a particular subgroup were missing for other reasons.

African American students are not distributed evenly throughout the country; some states have large numbers and others have relatively few. If achievement trends for states with the highest African American enrollments differed notably from trends in states with lower enrollments, then the medians used in table 1, which are not weighted for student population, would not give an accurate national picture of achievement. As an additional check, we compared percentages proficient for African Americans and other racial/ethnic subgroups in the nine states with the highest number of African American students, according to both the data on numbers of test-takers collected for our achievement studies and enrollment data from the Common Core of Data in the U.S. Department of Education (n.d.). These states include Georgia, Texas, Florida, New York, California, Illinois, North Carolina, Louisiana, and Michigan; together they enroll more than half of the African American test-takers in the country.

As shown in **table 3**, our findings in these nine states generally confirmed the pattern for African Americans that we observed using medians. With few exceptions for certain subjects and grades, the African American subgroup was the lowest-performing racial/ethnic subgroup in the nine states with the highest numbers of African American test-takers.

Table 3. Percentage of students in racial/ethnic subgroups scoring proficient on 2008 state tests in the states that together enroll more than 50% of the African American test-takers nationwide

	Reading					Math				
State	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White
Grade 4										
GA	81%	95%	83%	n	93%	57%	90%	67%	n	80%
TX	73%	94%	78%	85%	91%	73%	96%	81%	84%	91%
FL	53%	82%	64%	75%	81%	54%	87%	66%	76%	80%
NY	56%	83%	57%	61%	80%	72%	94%	77%	78%	90%
CA	43%	78%	41%	48%	74%	46%	86%	52%	50%	74%
IL	56%	88%	59%	n	84%	69%	95%	77%	n	93%
NC	41%	71%	43%	47%	43%	55%	88%	67%	66%	84%
LA	60%	83%	65%	n	80%	53%	88%	69%	n	81%
MI	69%	92%	77%	83%	89%	69%	95%	79%	85%	91%
Grade 8										
GA	86%	95%	83%	n	95%	49%	87%	55%	n	73%
TX	87%	97%	89%	94%	96%	61%	93%	69%	78%	85%
FL	34%	69%	45%	58%	65%	46%	86%	61%	71%	78%
NY	38%	70%	38%	42%	68%	49%	88%	55%	61%	80%
CA	32%	69%	31%	39%	63%	24%	72%	29%	30%	54%
IL	69%	93%	74%	n	88%	61%	94%	75%	n	89%
NC	33%	65%	37%	38%	69%	50%	87%	59%	54%	80%
LA	42%	76%	58%	n	71%	39%	83%	56%	n	73%
MI	58%	87%	65%	72%	83%	45%	89%	59%	67%	79%
High school										
GA	NA	NA	NA	n	NA	87%	98%	91%	n	96%
TX	81%	94%	83%	86%	92%	46%	87%	54%	63%	76%
FL	17%	53%	30%	41%	50%	46%	86%	64%	73%	80%
NY	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
CA	37%	70%	37%	50%	71%	31%	82%	37%	46%	68%
IL	25%	64%	31%	n	65%	21%	78%	33%	n	64%
NC	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
LA	45%	69%	52%	n	70%	48%	87%	60%	n	79%
MI	34%	69%	43%	56%	68%	13%	67%	28%	35%	53%

Table reads: In Georgia, which has a large number of African American test-takers, 81% of African American students scored proficient in grade 4 reading, compared with 95% of Asian American students, 83% of Latino students, and 93% of white students. Results for Native American students are not shown because Georgia had fewer than 500 Native American test-takers at this grade level.

Note: NA = data not available; n = state percentage was not calculated because state had fewer than 500 test-takers per grade level and subject for this subgroup.

To check whether our findings about African American achievement at grades 4, 8, and high school were similar for other grades tested for NCLB accountability, we also examined percentages proficient for all the racial/ethnic subgroups with a sufficient number of test-takers at grades 3, 5, 6, and 7. As shown in **table 4**, we found that the African American subgroup had the lowest percentage proficient in 2008 among these subgroups at *all* tested grades in both reading and math in 19 states; in math alone in 11 additional states; and in reading alone in 3 additional states. In the remaining states with sufficient data, the African American subgroup was the lowest-performing racial/ethnic subgroup in some or most, but not all, grade/subject combinations.

Table 4. States in which the African American subgroup had the lowest percentage proficient among racial/ethnic subgroups at all tested grades (3-8 and one high school grade), 2008

Subject	States	Number of states
In reading and math	AR, IL, IN, IA, KY, LA, MD, MN, MS, MO, NJ, NC, OH, OK, PA, SC, TX, VA, WI	19
In math only	AL, CA, CO, CT, GA, KS, NV, NY, TN, WA, WV	11
In reading only	DE, FL, MI	3

Table reads: In 19 states, the African American subgroup had the lowest percentage proficient among racial/ethnic subgroups of sufficient size in both reading and math at all grades tested for NCLB.

Note: States were included in this table if the percentage proficient for the African American subgroup was at least 1 percentage point lower than that of any other racial/ethnic subgroup.

Note: Subgroups were excluded from the calculations in this table if the number of test-takers was small (fewer than 500 students in the grade level analyzed) or if data for a particular subgroup were missing for other reasons. African American results were compared only with racial/ethnic subgroups of sufficient size in the same state—those subgroups with at least 500 test-takers per grade.

RACIAL ISOLATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

As an additional analysis, we wanted to see whether the performance of the African American subgroup varied according whether these students attended schools with very high African American enrollments. We split the states into two groups. The first group included states in which African Americans had the lowest percentage proficient in both reading and math across all tested grade levels (those listed in first row of table 4 above). The second group included all other states. Upon request, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provided us with its most recent state-by-state data (2007) on the percentages of African American students enrolled in what NCES refers to "African American-isolated" public schools—those in which 90% or more of the students enrolled are African American.

Among the first group of states, the percentage of African American students attending African American-isolated schools averaged 20% and sometimes exceeded 40%, as in Illinois and Mississippi. Among the second group of states, 6% of African American students on average attended African-American isolated schools.[6] In short, this suggests that the states in which African American students are the lowest-performing subgroup tend to be those with the most racially isolated schools.

[6] A t-test of these data found the difference between the averages in the first and second groups to be statistically significant at the .05 level.

This finding suggests the need for policymakers at all levels of government to consider policies and programs, as discussed below, to provide better learning opportunities in schools with high concentrations of African American students and to reduce *de facto* racial and economic segregation in the educational system.

Part 2. Policy Implications

Although our own achievement studies did not gather evidence about the reasons for the trends in African American performance that we found, we do believe it is critical for policymakers, educators, and others to consider the policy implications of our findings. These findings point to the need for strong, focused, and collaborative policies at all levels of government that are likely to improve achievement for African American students. To suggest what these policies might be, we reviewed several studies by other research organizations of factors that may impact or help explain the black-white achievement gap and the overall performance of the African American subgroup. These studies, which appear in the reference list at the end of this brief, point to a variety of factors inside and outside of school that could be the focus of policy actions.

Local, state, and federal governments could develop or refine policies such as the following to address "in-school" factors:

- Bringing greater rigor, more advanced courses, and more effective curriculum and instruction to schools with high enrollments of African American students
- More equitably distributing experienced and well-prepared teachers, technical expertise, funding, and other resources to schools and classrooms with high concentrations of African American children
- Examining school assignment policies, such as cross-district choice or integration of schools by income, that could reduce the very high concentrations of African American and other racial/ethnic minority students in some schools
- Providing preservice and in-service professional development to improve the cultural awareness and effectiveness of teachers and school leaders in working with African American students and other racial/ethnic minority students and to address the negative expectations held by some educators about the achievement of minority students
- Providing before-school, after-school and summer learning opportunities for children who need additional help or lack access to experiences outside of school that reinforce learning
- Examining the effects of ability grouping, assignment to special education, and retention policies on teaching and learning for African American students
- Developing comprehensive policies and supports to strengthen the involvement of parents and community members in schools and establish home-school relationships that support student achievement
- Expanding the availability of affordable early childhood education, particularly for low-income children

Studies of achievement gaps by a variety of organizations have also called attention to the impact of factors outside the control of a local school, such as family and community factors. Many of these factors are related to the poverty experienced by a significant number of African American families and the isolation of some African American neighborhoods. Local, state, and federal governments, as well as community organizations, might consider policies and programs such as the following to mitigate "out-of-school" factors that shape achievement:

- Enacting policies and programs to help families overcome other challenges related to poverty that can hinder the goal of high achievement, such as frequent changing of schools, absenteeism, loss of learning during the summer, and deteriorating neighborhoods

- Working with parents to build their capacity to reinforce their children's learning through such activities as monitoring homework, talking and reading to children, and reducing television watching

- Focusing government, communities, health care providers, and others on health issues that affect achievement, including low birth weights among African American children; exposure to environmental hazards such as lead and mercury; poor nutrition; drug and alcohol abuse; and poor medical, dental, vision, and mental health care

- Reducing *de facto* economic and racial segregation through housing policies, employment options, transportation, and other policies

In addition, the federal government and the states could take steps to pull together richer data than is currently available about the achievement, educational needs, and other characteristics of students of various racial/ethnic backgrounds. The NCLB requirements to disaggregate achievement data by subgroup and hold schools accountable for subgroup progress have brought greater attention to the academic needs of African American students and other racial/ethnic groups. These requirements should be continued in whatever accountability system replaces NCLB. Furthermore, as states design longitudinal and integrated data systems that link student, teacher, and testing data, they should consider what additional types of information could be helpful in developing targeted policies to raise achievement for particular groups of students. Examples of information that might be relevant include whether African American students come from low-income families; whether differences in achievement exist for African American girls and boys; whether African American students are also immigrants, refugees, or English language learners; and whether students had access to early childhood education.

In conclusion, there is reason to be optimistic that local, state, and federal policies and school instructional choices can have a positive impact on student achievement. Some schools and districts with large numbers of African American students have made impressive progress in raising achievement. Their experiences could be instructive for other schools and districts. National leadership from the Obama Administration and the Congress could energize communities and the broader society to work toward the goal of improving educational outcomes for African American students and other racial/ethnic groups.

References

Barton, P. E. (2009). *Parsing the achievement gap: Baselines for tracking progress*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

Berliner, D. C., (2009). *Poverty and potential: Out-of-school factors and school success*. Boulder and Tempe: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit. Retrieved on April 20, 2010, from http://epicpolicy.org/publication/poverty-and-potential

Braun, H. I., Wang, A., Jenkins, F., & Weinbaum, E. (2006, March). The black-white achievement gap: Do state policies matter? *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 14*(8).

Center on Education Policy. (2009). *State test score trends through 2007-08, part 3: Are achievement gaps closing and is achievement rising for all?* Washington, DC: Author.

Clotfelder, C., Ladd, H., & Vigdor, J. (2005). Who teaches whom? Race and the distribution of novice teachers. *Economics of Education Review 24*, 377-392.

Condron, D. (2009). Social class, school and non-school environments and black/white inequalities in children's learning. *American Sociological Review 74*(5), 685-708.

Education Trust. (2006). *Funding gaps 2006*. Retrieved on April 22, 2010, from www.edtrust.org/dc/publication/the-funding-gap-0

Hanushek, E. A., & Rivkin, S. G. (2006). *School quality and the black-white achievement gap*. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Jencks, C., & Phillips, M. (1998). *The black-white test score gap*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Krueger, A., & Whitmore, D. (2000). *The effect of attending a small class in the early grades on college-test taking and middle school test results: Evidence from Project STAR.* NBER Working Paper No. 7656. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

McKinsey & Company, Social Sector Office. (2009). *The economic impact of the achievement gap in America's schools*. Retrieved on May 25, 2010, from www.mckinsey.com/App_Media/Images/Page_Images/Offices/SocialSector/PDF/achievement_gap_report.pdf

Orfield, G., & Lee, C. (2007). *Historic reversals, accelerating resegregation, and the need for new integration strategies*. Los Angeles: The Civil Rights Project, UCLA.

Paige, R., & Witty, E. (2010). *The black-white achievement gap: Why closing it is the greatest civil rights issue of our time*. New York: AMACON Press.

Southwest Comprehensive Center at WestEd. (2006). *Research on the African American student achievement gap*. Retrieved on April 16, 2010, from www.swcompcenter.org/pdf/confo406/African_American_Overview.pdf

Thompson, C. L., & O'Quinn, S. D. (2001). *Eliminating the black-white achievement gap: A summary of research*. Chapel Hill: North Carolina Education Research Council.

U.S. Department of Education (n.d.). *Student enrollment data from the Common Core of Data*, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010309/index.asp and http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/bat

U.S. Department of Education. (2008a). *Characteristics of the 100 largest public elementary and secondary school districts in the United States: School year 2006-07.* Retrieved on April 20, 2010, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/100_largest/tables/table_a09.asp?referrer=report

U.S. Department of Education. (2008b). *The condition of education 2008.* Retrieved on May 26, 2010, from www.nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2008/section1/table.asp?tableID=864

Xia, N. (2010). *Family factors and student outcomes*. Pardee Rand Graduate School. Retrieved on April 16, 2010, from www.rand.org/pubs/rgs_dissertations/2010/RAND_RGSD256.pdf

Appendix

Table A-1. Grade 4 percentages of students in racial/ethnic subgroups scoring proficient on state tests, 2008

	Reading					Math				
State	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White
AK	n	79%	82%	62%	90%	n	74%	73%	56%	83%
AL	78%	95%	79%	n	91%	69%	93%	72%	n	85%
AR	48%	69%	54%	n	75%	54%	76%	67%	n	82%
AZ	62%	82%	58%	51%	83%	64%	88%	66%	56%	85%
CA	43%	78%	41%	48%	74%	46%	86%	52%	50%	74%
CO	82%	94%	80%	83%	95%	79%	95%	83%	84%	96%
CT	45%	82%	43%	n	81%	61%	93%	63%	n	90%
DE	69%	n	77%	n	89%	62%	n	73%	n	88%
FL	53%	82%	64%	75%	81%	54%	87%	66%	76%	80%
GA	81%	95%	83%	n	93%	57%	90%	67%	n	80%
HI	n	59%	n	n	74%	n	47%	n	n	58%
IA	56%	78%	61%	n	80%	55%	85%	65%	n	83%
ID	n	n	64%	n	87%	n	n	72%	n	87%
IL	56%	88%	59%	n	84%	69%	95%	77%	n	93%
IN	55%	78%	58%	n	78%	55%	84%	63%	n	78%
KS	71%	87%	73%	n	91%	71%	92%	77%	n	90%
KY	51%	n	65%	NA	74%	51%	n	63%	NA	74%
LA	60%	83%	65%	n	80%	53%	88%	69%	n	81%
MA	25%	56%	23%	n	56%	26%	66%	28%	n	56%
MD	82%	96%	84%	n	94%	81%	97%	84%	n	95%
ME	n	n	n	n	64%	n	n	n	n	61%
MI	69%	92%	77%	83%	89%	69%	95%	79%	85%	91%
MN	44%	62%	47%	53%	79%	38%	64%	43%	50%	77%
MO	27%	55%	31%	n	51%	22%	62%	33%	n	50%
MS	36%	n	87%	n	63%	42%	n	83%	n	68%
MT	n	n	n	55%	82%	n	n	n	42%	70%
NC	41%	71%	43%	47%	43%	55%	88%	67%	66%	84%
ND	n	n	n	52%	80%	n	n	n	54%	81%
NE	81%	90%	86%	85%	94%	85%	95%	91%	85%	95%
NH	n	n	54%	n	75%	n	n	44%	n	69%
NJ	67%	93%	73%	n	89%	68%	95%	76%	n	92%
NM	48%	n	44%	36%	69%	32%	n	33%	25%	55%
NV	44%	70%	45%	53%	69%	50%	79%	58%	61%	75%
NY	56%	83%	57%	61%	80%	72%	94%	77%	78%	90%
OH	59%	90%	69%	n	86%	49%	88%	59%	n	81%
OK	86%	95%	88%	92%	91%	67%	91%	75%	82%	87%
OR	76%	87%	66%	77%	87%	64%	83%	59%	69%	82%

continued on page 14

Table A-1. Grade 4 percentages of students in racial/ethnic subgroups scoring proficient on state tests, 2008 *(continued)*

	Reading					Math				
State	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White
PA	45%	83%	49%	n	77%	56%	92%	64%	n	86%
RI	48%	n	40%	n	72%	36%	n	29%	n	63%
SC	28%	67%	33%	n	58%	22%	67%	31%	n	56%
SD	n	n	n	71%	93%	n	n	n	49%	85%
TN	85%	94%	82%	n	94%	83%	96%	87%	n	93%
TX	73%	94%	78%	85%	91%	73%	96%	81%	84%	91%
UT	58%	77%	54%	51%	82%	51%	81%	53%	53%	80%
VA	81%	94%	84%	89%	92%	74%	93%	76%	85%	89%
VT	n	n	n	n	69%	n	n	n	n	63%
WA	58%	78%	52%	54%	77%	31%	64%	31%	32%	60%
WI	57%	74%	66%	73%	87%	47%	76%	61%	65%	83%
WV	76%	n	n	n	82%	67%	n	n	n	77%
WY	n	n	62%	n	76%	n	n	68%	n	79%
US median*	58%	83%	64%	62%	81%	56%	88%	67%	63%	82%
Lowest	25%	55%	23%	36%	43%	22%	47%	28%	25%	50%
Highest	86%	96%	88%	92%	95%	85%	97%	91%	85%	96%

Table reads: In Alaska, 79% of Asian American students scored at the proficient level on the state grade 4 reading test. Comparable percentages proficient for other racial/ethnic subgroups were 82% for Latino students, 62% for Native American students, and 90% for white students. Results for African Americans are not included because the number of African American test-takers in Alaska was fewer than 500 at grade 4. Across all states with available data and with at least 500 African American test-takers in grade 4, the median percentage of African American students scoring proficient in grade 4 reading was 58%. Among these states, the lowest percentage proficient for African Americans in grade 4 reading was 25%, and the highest percentage was 86%.

Note: NA = data not available; n = state percentage was not calculated because state had fewer than 500 test-takers at this grade level.

*The median is the midpoint; half the states with data had percentages above this point and half had percentages below.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on data collected from state departments of education.

Table A-2. Grade 8 percentages of students in racial/ethnic subgroups scoring proficient on state tests, 2008

	Reading					Math				
State	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White
AK	n	83%	87%	71%	92%	n	68%	64%	51%	77%
AL	61%	85%	65%	80%	82%	53%	91%	63%	75%	77%
AR	45%	n	54%	n	75%	32%	n	46%	n	65%
AZ	59%	81%	54%	48%	80%	48%	81%	49%	42%	75%
CA	32%	69%	31%	39%	63%	24%	72%	29%	30%	54%
CO	80%	92%	77%	85%	93%	57%	88%	59%	65%	86%
CT	54%	89%	50%	n	87%	58%	93%	59%	n	91%
DE	68%	n	76%	n	89%	46%	n	56%	n	77%
FL	34%	69%	45%	58%	65%	46%	86%	61%	71%	78%
GA	86%	95%	83%	n	95%	49%	87%	55%	n	73%
HI	n	63%	n	n	78%	n	34%	n	n	43%
IA	45%	72%	48%	n	75%	46%	81%	55%	n	79%
ID	n	n	74%	n	91%	n	n	62%	n	82%
IL	69%	93%	74%	n	88%	61%	94%	75%	n	89%
IN	46%	74%	51%	n	73%	49%	84%	61%	n	80%
KS	63%	83%	63%	n	88%	50%	82%	54%	n	80%
KY	48%	n	57%	NA	69%	28%	n	39%	NA	54%
LA	42%	76%	58%	n	71%	39%	83%	56%	n	73%
MA	58%	81%	50%	n	81%	24%	68%	22%	n	56%
MD	58%	89%	62%	n	85%	41%	89%	51%	n	78%
ME	n	n	n	n	72%	n	n	n	n	52%
MI	58%	87%	65%	72%	83%	45%	89%	59%	67%	79%
MN	36%	54%	41%	42%	72%	23%	52%	28%	28%	63%
MO	24%	60%	33%	n	55%	17%	62%	32%	n	51%
MS	29%	n	n	n	61%	42%	n	n	n	68%
MT	n	n	n	58%	84%	n	n	n	29%	63%
NC	33%	65%	37%	38%	69%	50%	87%	59%	54%	80%
ND	n	n	n	52%	77%	n	n	n	45%	74%
NE	85%	94%	85%	82%	94%	80%	95%	85%	77%	82%
NH	n	n	n	n	68%	n	n	n	n	59%
NJ	62%	92%	68%	n	90%	38%	88%	50%	n	79%
NM	63%	n	58%	54%	77%	31%	n	29%	23%	55%
NV	37%	68%	40%	51%	69%	34%	70%	39%	45%	66%
NY	38%	70%	38%	42%	68%	49%	88%	55%	61%	80%
OH	58%	90%	66%	n	84%	46%	90%	58%	n	79%
OK	68%	87%	67%	82%	87%	69%	92%	74%	78%	86%
OR	50%	72%	40%	54%	71%	48%	81%	49%	57%	74%

continued on page 16

Table A-2. Grade 8 percentages of students in racial/ethnic subgroups scoring proficient on state tests, 2008 *(continued)*

	Reading					Math				
State	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White
PA	57%	88%	58%	n	84%	46%	88%	51%	n	77%
RI	41%	n	38%	n	70%	25%	n	24%	n	57%
SC	13%	50%	18%	n	39%	8%	47%	14%	n	30%
SD	n	n	n	50%	84%	n	n	n	38%	81%
TN	90%	97%	88%	n	96%	82%	96%	87%	n	93%
TX	87%	97%	89%	94%	96%	61%	93%	69%	78%	85%
UT	64%	87%	61%	57%	87%	53%	79%	51%	47%	78%
VA	71%	92%	75%	89%	89%	72%	94%	74%	88%	89%
VT	n	n	n	n	69%	n	n	n	n	59%
WA	52%	76%	52%	49%	69%	28%	64%	30%	32%	57%
WI	59%	76%	68%	75%	90%	37%	73%	55%	64%	83%
WV	72%	n	n	n	81%	59%	n	n	n	73%
WY	n	n	56%	n	73%	n	n	48%	n	71%
US median*	58%	83%	58%	57%	81%	46%	86%	55%	54%	77%
Lowest	13%	50%	18%	38%	39%	8%	34%	14%	23%	30%
Highest	90%	97%	89%	94%	96%	82%	96%	87%	88%	93%

Table reads: In Alaska, 83% of Asian American students scored at the proficient level on the state grade 8 reading test. Comparable percentages proficient for other racial/ethnic groups were 87% for Latino students, 71% for Native American students, and 92% for white students. Results are not included for African Americans because the number of test-takers in this subgroup was fewer than 500 at grade 8. Across all states with available data and with at least 500 African American test-takers at grade 8, the median percentage of African American students scoring proficient in grade 8 reading was 58%. Among these states, the lowest percentage proficient for African Americans in grade 8 reading was 13%, and the highest percentage was 90%.

Note: NA = data not available; n = state percentage was not calculated because state had fewer than 500 test-takers per grade level.

*The median is the midpoint; half the states with data had percentages above this point and half had percentages below.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on data collected from state departments of education.

Table A-3. High school percentages of students in racial/ethnic subgroups scoring proficient on state tests, 2008

	Reading					Math				
State	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White
AK	n	71%	n	61%	90%	n	60%	n	43%	71%
AL	71%	85%	70%	87%	87%	74%	94%	83%	90%	90%
AR	23%	n	33%	n	61%	41%	78%	57%	n	74%
AZ	67%	85%	60%	53%	87%	56%	85%	56%	47%	80%
CA	37%	70%	37%	50%	71%	31%	82%	37%	46%	68%
CO	77%	91%	77%	82%	91%	41%	77%	42%	52%	76%
CT	61%	90%	62%	n	91%	50%	89%	55%	n	90%
DE	54%	n	56%	n	80%	58%	n	47%	n	69%
FL	17%	53%	30%	41%	50%	46%	86%	64%	73%	80%
GA	NA	NA	NA	n	NA	87%	98%	91%	n	96%
HI	n	66%	n	n	76%	n	33%	n	n	41%
IA	53%	79%	57%	n	79%	45%	77%	56%	n	80%
ID	n	n	67%	n	89%	n	n	57%	n	80%
IL	25%	64%	31%	n	65%	21%	78%	33%	n	64%
IN	41%	67%	47%	n	73%	36%	74%	49%	n	70%
KS	62%	78%	62%	n	86%	50%	81%	58%	n	81%
KY	43%	n	49%	NA	62%	18%	n	29%	NA	41%
LA	45%	69%	52%	n	70%	48%	87%	60%	n	79%
MA	55%	77%	49%	n	80%	48%	85%	46%	n	78%
MD	73%	91%	77%	n	83%	74%	89%	81%	n	82%
ME	n	n	n	n	49%	n	n	n	n	42%
MI	34%	69%	43%	56%	68%	13%	67%	28%	35%	53%
MN	36%	58%	42%	48%	78%	7%	29%	12%	11%	38%
MO	17%	48%	26%	n	44%	18%	64%	32%	n	53%
MS	32%	n	n	n	68%	44%	n	n	n	71%
MT	n	n	n	50%	80%	n	n	n	23%	56%
NC	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
ND	n	n	n	42%	67%	n	n	n	n	58%
NE	78%	89%	82%	82%	91%	79%	90%	79%	75%	87%
NH	n	n	n	n	67%	n	n	n	n	14%
NJ	65%	91%	69%	n	90%	45%	91%	57%	n	85%
NM	45%	n	43%	35%	65%	25%	n	25%	17%	52%
NV	63%	82%	62%	n	84%	26%	62%	31%	32%	59%
NY	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
OH	69%	91%	75%	n	89%	54%	92%	67%	n	85%
OK	57%	83%	61%	72%	81%	58%	91%	67%	71%	81%
OR	40%	67%	39%	53%	71%	25%	68%	30%	36%	57%

continued on page 18

Table A-3. High school percentages of students in racial/ethnic subgroups scoring proficient on state tests, 2008 *(continued)*

State	Reading					Math				
	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White	African American	Asian	Latino	Native American	White
PA	36%	71%	38%	n	71%	27%	78%	31%	n	62%
RI	41%	n	40%	n	68%	6%	n	6%	n	27%
SC	43%	75%	51%	n	76%	38%	82%	50%	n	73%
SD	n	n	n	42%	71%	n	n	n	31%	70%
TN	94%	98%	95%	n	98%	72%	95%	86%	n	94%
TX	81%	94%	83%	86%	92%	46%	87%	54%	63%	76%
UT	n	84%	57%	59%	86%	n	74%	41%	41%	73%
VA	89%	97%	91%	97%	97%	80%	95%	85%	87%	92%
VT	n	n	n	n	68%	n	n	n	n	30%
WA	63%	83%	63%	62%	82%	19%	56%	23%	25%	50%
WI	38%	62%	49%	61%	82%	25%	62%	41%	50%	77%
WV	63%	n	n	n	74%	49%	n	n	n	69%
WY	n	n	n	n	68%	n	n	n	n	67%
US median*	53%	78%	56%	57%	78%	45%	81%	50%	44%	71%
Lowest	17%	48%	26%	35%	44%	6%	29%	6%	11%	14%
Highest	94%	98%	95%	97%	98%	87%	98%	91%	90%	96%

Table reads: In Alaska, 71% of Asian American students scored at the proficient level on the state reading/language arts test in the high school grade tested for the No Child Left Behind Act. Sixty-one percent of Native American students and 90% of white students scored proficient in high school reading/language arts. Results are not included for African American or Latino students because the number of test-takers in these subgroups was fewer than 500 in the tested high school grade. Across all states with available data and with at least 500 African American test-takers in the high school tested grade, the median percentage of African American students scoring proficient in high school reading/language arts was 53%. Among these states, the lowest percentage proficient for African Americans in high school reading was 17%, and the highest percentage was 94%.

Note: NA = data not available; n = state percentage was not calculated because state had fewer than 500 test-takers at this grade level.

*The median is the midpoint; half the states with data had percentages above this point and half had percentages below.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on data collected from state departments of education.

Credits and Acknowledgments

This policy brief was written by Nancy Kober, a CEP consultant, with assistance from CEP consultants Victor Chudowsky and Naomi Chudowsky and CEP intern Shelby Dietz. Sunny Becker, Hilary Campbell, Monica Gribben, Wade Buckland, and Rebecca Dvorak from the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) provided support in data collection and analysis. Jennifer McMurrer, CEP research associate, assisted with research and data verification. Diane Stark Rentner, CEP's director of national programs, oversaw the student achievement study project for CEP and provided advice and assistance for all aspects of the study. Jack Jennings, CEP's president and CEO, provided advice and assistance.

The Center on Education Policy extends appreciation to the following people who reviewed and commented on a draft of this policy brief:

Jane Coggshall
Policy Research Associate
Learning Point Associates

Kenji Hakuta
Lee L. Jacks Professor of Education
Stanford University

Laura Hamilton
Senior Behavioral Scientist
RAND Corporation

Robert L. Linn
Professor Emeritus
University of Colorado

Peter McWalters
Interim Education Workforce Strategic Initiative Director
Council of Chief State School Officers

Michael T. Nettles
Senior Vice President, Policy Evaluation & Research Center
ETS

Arturo Pacheco
Director, Center for Research on Educational Reform
University of Texas at El Paso

W. James Popham
Professor Emeritus
University of California, Los Angeles

Terry E. Spradlin
Associate Director for Education Policy
Center for Evaluation & Education Policy
Indiana University

Caitlin Scott
Evaluation Advisor
Education Northwest

Linda Trinh Vo
Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Asian American Studies
School of Humanities
University of California

Brenda Welburn
Executive Director
National Association of State Boards of Education

Judith Wilde
Executive Director
National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition
George Washington University

The Center on Education Policy receives nearly all of its funding from charitable foundations. We are grateful to the Carnegie Corporation, the Smith Richardson Foundation, and the Spencer Foundation for their support of the research on student achievement that formed the basis for this policy brief. The George Gund Foundation and the Phi Delta Kappa International Foundation also provide the Center with general support funding that assisted us in this endeavor. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the Center.

Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in January 1995 by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy is a national independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. We do not represent any special interests. Instead, we help citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create the conditions that will lead to better public schools.

© Center on Education Policy June 2010



Center on Education Policy
1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 522
Washington, D.C. 20036
tel: 202.822.8065
fax: 202.822.6008
e: cep-dc@cep-dc.org
w: www.cep-dc.org

www.cep-dc.org