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SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE BLACK-WHITE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

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ABSTRACT

The black-white achievement gap has challenged educators in the United States over many decades. Not only are some students disenfranchised by an educational system designed for all citizens, but the racial divide presents an unrelenting social justice failure. Test score data from the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) has been recorded for students aged 9, 13, and 17 from the late 1970s forward. While results showed some narrowing of the gap in 2007 compared with prior years, the gap continues to persist. During fall semester 2011, we (eleven Educational Leadership graduate students in EDA556 Leadership in Diverse Communities) studied the achievement gap by reviewing the statistical profiles in the NAEP data for specific ages in reading and math. We studied the strategies revealed in the metaanalysis of Ronald Ferguson, a Harvard professor and national leader in identifying strategies to ameliorate barriers to closing the gap. Individually, we developed plans to become advocates for making the black-white achievement gap a priority in our roles as aspiring school leaders with commitments to social justice. In this Stander Symposium 2012 poster presentation, we show the aggregated dimensions of those ideas: evidence-based efforts by school leaders to take on the injustices that continue to plague the schools led by those in the professional roles to which we aspire.

The fourth-grade mathematics gap in 2007 was statistically significant in all 46 states for which data could be reported. The gaps ranged from 14 points in Hawaii and West Virginia to 54 points in the District of Columbia.” (p. 13). In Ohio the gap was 25 points.

The Black-White grade 4 reading gap in 2007 was significant in all 44 states for which data could be reported. The gaps ranged from 13 points in West Virginia to 67 points in the District of Columbia.” (p. 35). In Ohio the gap was 27 points.

The eighth grade mathematics gap in 2007 was statistically significant in all 41 states for which data could be reported. The gaps ranged from 16 points in Oregon to 51 points in Nebraska.” (p. 21). In Ohio the gap was 33 points.

“In 41 states for which reliable data could be reported, differences in reading were statistically significant. The gaps ranged from 15 points in West Virginia and Nevada to 38 points in Wisconsin.” (p. 43). In Ohio the gap was 27 points.

Our Plans as School Leaders include:

More diagnosis of math and reading difficulties
Structure strong community – school linkages
Expand early childhood education
Create a stronger role for parents
Lengthen the school calendar
Embed cultural histories into teaching and learning
Build dimensions of culture/race/ethnicity into the curriculum
Strengthen the focus on best practices for low achieving students who have special needs (ESL, highly mobile, minimal reading, minimal out-of-school support, disabilities)
Get best and most highly qualified teachers into low-achieving schools
Teach cultural proficiency
Reward administrators who practice social justice advocacy

References


