



ACTION ALERT

50 Years Later...What has Changed?

50 years ago on September 4, 1957, under the protection of the U.S. Army and the Arkansas National Guard, nine African American students defied history to become the first African Americans to attend the racially segregated Little Rock Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Today minority students are still facing challenges to attaining a quality education.

The authors of *Closing the Education Gap: Benefits and Costs* wrote that “three major trends are converging to make the education of the future generation of America’s children particularly challenging. First, the nation’s educational institutions must educate an increasingly larger and more diverse student population, a growing share which is lagging behind the rest in education attainment. Second, structural shifts in America’s economy are making education in general, and postsecondary education in particular, necessary...And third, this increase in demand comes at a time of declining public budgetary support [for education].”¹ The National Conference of State Legislatures acknowledged that “costs for programs like No Child Left Behind...has placed additional stress on state budgets...increasing pressures to address...education issues such as funding formulas, equity and adequacy, teacher salaries and facilities...”²

According to a recent study conducted by the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBA), “a disproportionate number of students from diverse cultures are placed in special education and other lower-track programs and students from diverse cultures attend schools with a lower-level curriculum.”³ Studies conducted by The Education Trust have found that minority students are more likely to be excluded from honors and advance placement classes. Minority students “who meet the criteria for access to advanced courses are more likely to be restricted based on the recommendation of a counselor or teacher.”⁴ By the end of high school African American and Hispanic students have skills in both reading and math that are the same as those of white students in eighth grade.⁵ According to NASBA, “the achievement gaps among students from diverse ethnic, cultural, and racial background persists regardless of parent’s income or education levels.”⁶

Thirty-nine percent of all American children live at or near the national poverty line. “Latino children are more than three times more likely than white children to live in poverty, and black children are almost four times as likely.”⁷ Schools in high-poverty areas have less challenging curriculums where students are given fewer and easier assignments. Kati Haycock of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development states, “...we take the students who have less to begin with and then systematically give them less in school. In fact, we give these students less of everything that we believe makes a difference.”⁸

Some policy analysts have determined that “intergenerational mobility and the role of education in enabling less advantaged children to move up the economic ladder” is stymied by an “education system [that] tends to reinforce rather than compensate for differences in family background.”⁹ Isabel Sawhill, in her report *The Future of Children*, writes that while black Americans and women have made “steady gains” over the past half century, class “at virtually every level of education tends to perpetuate rather than compensate for existing inequalities.”¹⁰ Many civil rights leaders, however, believe reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (PL 107-110), signed into law on January 8, 2002, may offer new possibilities for enhancing opportunity and closing the achievement gap. Education in America is mainly a responsibility of the state. Federal financial resources provide only about 7 percent of total state and local spending on education.¹¹ There are enormous differences in such spending from state to state. For example, in the state of New York the amount spent on each child’s education between 1999 and 2000 was \$10,957, while in the state of Mississippi the amount was \$5,356 during the same period.¹² Declines in tax revenues at the state level and cuts in state education budgets increases the importance of any money flows from the Federal government. NCLB requires states to adopt challenging academic curriculums; to provide more assessments of student achievement; to provide information to parents in simple formats and in languages parents can understand; to set defined standards for teacher qualifications; to address the issue of teacher assignments to schools; and to teach all children at the same standards. Funding NCLB, which must be reauthorized each year, therefore has also been a serious issue.

NCLB supporters have used results from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), the federal government’s national assessment of what American students know in various subject areas, to suggest that NCLB leads to improved test scores, improved standards, increased accountability and options for parents of children in low performing schools, and increased attention



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to minority students by creating common expectations for all students. Opponents to NCLB criticize the strategies states use to manipulate test outcomes and suggest that “teaching to the test” can narrow the range of learning experiences a student is offered, and shifts resources from disadvantaged students.

Many states are exploring innovations to respond to these requests. The Vermont Equal Educational Opportunity Act, passed in 1997, sought to equalize per-child spending throughout the state. As a result, the gap in achievement between children in its wealthiest and poorest schools has “decreased by 26 percent.” Illinois and Kentucky are examining ways to create equal “educational experiences” for all its students by increasing revenue flows targeting poor school districts, combined with creative curriculum and teacher support. Missouri’s state education task force on K-12 issues concluded that improved teaching quality is the single most important factor in broadening education opportunity. This led to training programs to increase teacher understanding of urban issues, and offering financial incentives for teachers in low performing schools. This past September, New York City won the \$ 1 million Broad Prize for Public Education—which provides scholarships for graduating seniors—“for reducing achievement gaps between rich and poor and minorities and whites.” Other city finalists included Bridgeport, Connecticut, Long Beach, California, Miami-Dade County, Florida, and San Antonio, Texas.¹³ While graduation rates in New York City are still low (at about 50 percent and improving) reading and math scores are going up. Principals have been given greater control over their schools, and beginning this fall each school will receive a letter grade by the City Department of Education.

Such models can be useful in shaping your recommendations to Congress as NCLB moves through the reauthorization process, and as Congress debates the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2008 (H.R. 3043 and S.1710). The Appropriations Act will set the federal funding level for elementary and secondary education and funding for disadvantaged students and special education. The President’s FY 2008 budget request called for a \$1 billion increase to NCLB funding, but the total requests made since the enactment of NCLB has been \$70.9 billion below what has been needed. The House has produced a discussion draft for renewal of NCLB, and introduction of a bill in the Senate is expected by the end of this year. The President has threatened to veto any proposal that does not include stronger “accountability rules and school choice measures.”¹⁴



Tell Congress and your state legislators you want to *eliminate the education gap!* Contribute to the NCLB debate by sharing information on innovative education models that can reduce disparities.

To learn more about the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind visit the Women’s Division website at www.umwmission.org and read “Update and Action on No Child Left Behind Act Reauthorization.”

To find out how students are doing in your state visit the U.S. Department of Education’s *The Nation’s Report Card* website at <http://nationsreportcard.gov/>

Join the Women’s Division online community for public education by visiting www.umwonline.org

Read *The Book of Resolutions 2004* Social Principles, III. The Social Community, pg. 48.

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals includes a goal of providing free, quality basic education to all children by 2015. How are economically disadvantaged children being educated in developing countries? Visit <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2006/20061107/edu.htm> to read “Knowledge Enriches the Poor.”

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¹ George Vernez, Richard A. Krop and C. Peter Rydell. *Closing the Education Gap: Benefits and Costs*. Center for Research on Immigration Policy. RAND Education.

² National Conference of State Legislatures Press Release. *NCSL’s Top 10 Policy Issue Forecast: Heat is on State Legislatures*. January 4, 2007.

³ National Association of State Boards of Education. *A More Perfect Union: Building an Education System that Embraces All Children*. The Report of the NASBE Study Group on the Changing Face of America’s School Children. Powerpoint Presentation. October 18, 2007.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Haycock, Kati. *Closing the Achievement Gap: Helping All Students Achieve*. ASCD Educational Leadership. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

⁶ National Association of State Boards of Education. *A More Perfect Union: Building an Education System that Embraces All Children*. The Report of the NASBE Study Group on the Changing Face of America’s School Children. Powerpoint Presentation. October 18, 2007.

⁷ National Association of State Boards of Education. *A More Perfect Union: Building an Education System that Embraces All Children*. The Report of the NASBE Study Group on the Changing Face of America’s School Children. 2002.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Sawhill, Isabel. *Opportunity in America: The Role of Education*. The Future of Children. Princeton-Brookings. Policy Brief. Fall 2006.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ University of Michigan website. http://sitemaker.umich.edu/356.ellison/what_can_we_do_about_disparities

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Broad Prize for Urban Education website. <http://www.broadprize.org/>

¹⁴ Education Week. *Bush Says He Would Veto NCLB Reauthorization Bill That Lacked Key Elements*. October 18, 2007.