

Education: The State We're In

Achievement gaps persist among people of color and the economically disadvantaged

Great divides in health, economic well-being and academic achievement continue to separate Americans of different races, ethnicities and incomes. These disparities typically accrue over a lifetime and frequently start before students even enter school. While there have been periods of improvement, minority and poor students still do worse in school than their peers. These gaps in achievement remain, despite the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education ruling, which called for the desegregation of schools, and the passage of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965, which provided extra assistance to high-poverty schools.

Young low-income and minority children are more likely to start school without having gained important school readiness skills, such as recognizing letters and counting.¹ Because they tend to begin school behind, they are less likely to get ahead. By the 4th grade, low-income students read about three grade levels behind non-poor students.² Across the nation only 15% of low-income 4th graders achieved proficiency in reading in

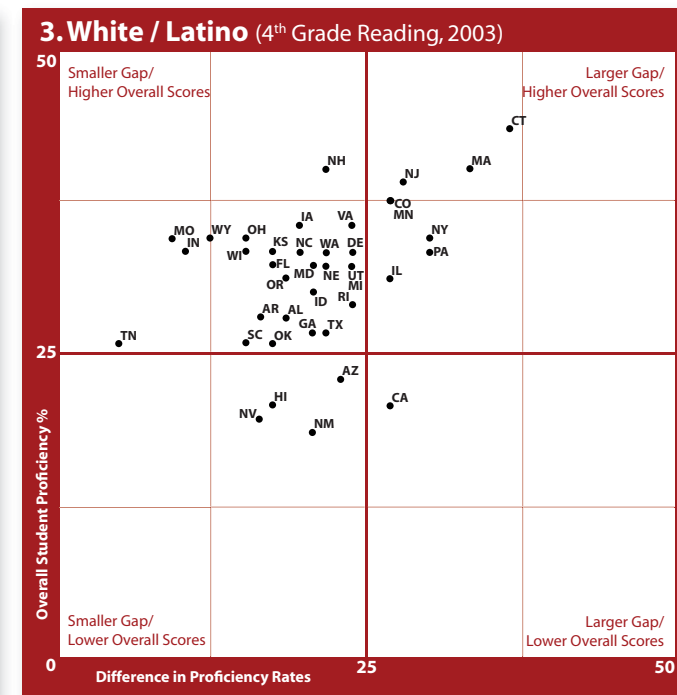
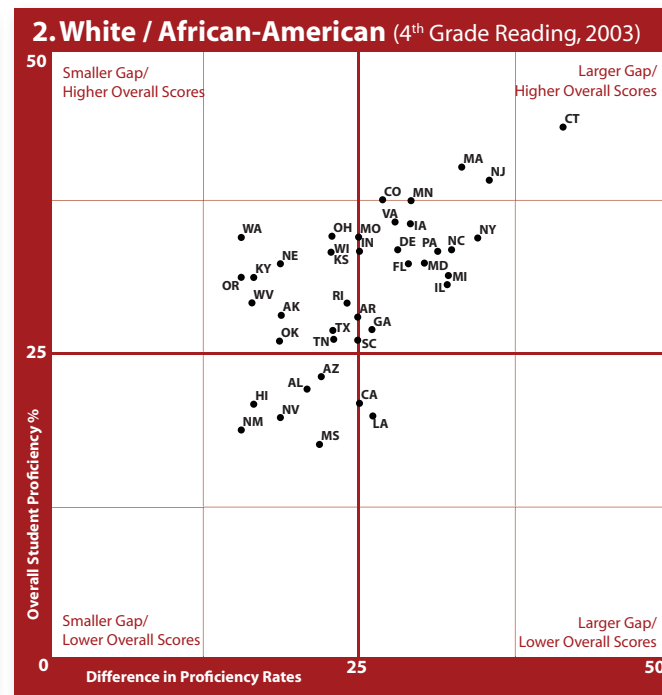
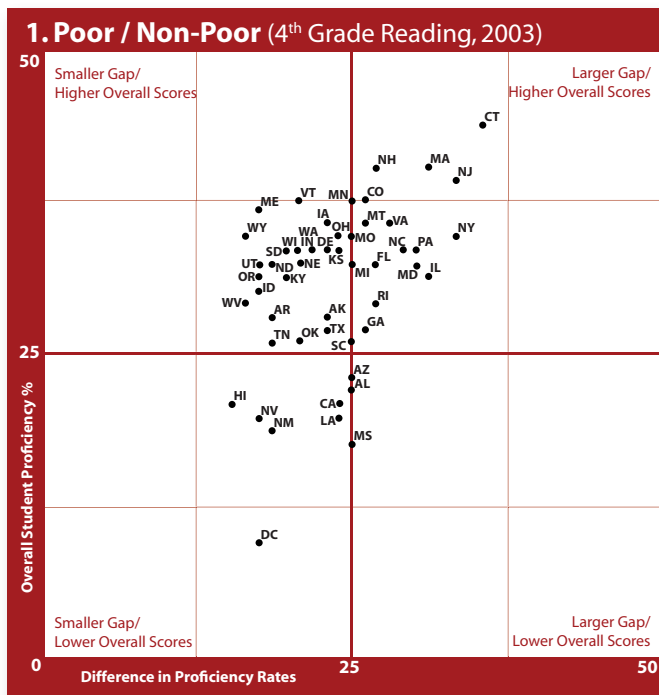
2003, compared to 41% of non-poor students.³ Put differently, non-poor students are almost three times as likely as low-income students are to be able to read proficiently.

Similar disparities exist between white students and students of color; 39% of white 4th graders can read at the proficient level, compared to only 12% of African-American students and 14% of Latinos.⁴ Overall, about three in 10 4th graders can read proficiently, and this in itself is a cause for concern. However, the markedly lower proficiency rates among low-income, African-American and Latino students are clearly unacceptable.

Although achievement gaps exist in every state, some have done a better job than others in closing the divides. Oregon and Washington have the smallest difference in achievement between white and African-American 4th graders; white students there have a proficiency rate that is 15 percentage points higher than that of African-Americans. These states contrast with DC and Connecticut, which have the widest gaps

in proficiency rates among whites and African-Americans – 63 and 42 percentage points respectively. On the white-Latino achievement gap, Tennessee performs the best, with only a 5 percentage point disparity in reading proficiency. At the other end of the spectrum, the gap in reading between white and Latino 4th graders is largest in DC and Connecticut, where the proficiency rates of 4th graders differs by 62 and 36 percentage points respectively.

The gap in academic achievement narrows little as students grow older. By the end of high school, Latino and African-American high-schoolers score at the same achievement level as white middle-schoolers in reading and math.⁵ Academically unprepared for the demands of high school, the completion rates of low-income and minority children lag their peers significantly. About 78% of white students graduate from high school in four years, compared to only 56% of African-American students and 52% of Latinos.⁶



Source: Daane, M., P. Donahue and W. Grigg, *The Nation's Report Card: Reading Highlights 2003*, (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Nov. 2003)

Of those who do graduate from high school, 66% of white students enroll in college the following fall, compared to only 58% of African-American students and 59% of Latinos.⁷ While African-American enrollment in college has increased over the last 20 years, completion rates have not kept pace. Latinos, on the other hand, have not seen an increase in either college enrollment or completion.⁸ The gaps are widest at the most elite institutions; at the nation's 146 most selective colleges and universities, 74% of all freshmen entering college in 2000 came from the top socioeconomic status (SES) group, while only 10% of students came from the bottom half.⁹ Similarly, only 6% of students at those schools are African-American, and another 6% are Latino.¹⁰

Our nation's education system is supposed to offer all children, regardless of race/ethnicity, income, geographic location, or language, the knowledge and skills to enable them to reach their fullest potential. In this sense, schools bear primary responsibility for creating equal opportunity for all. To date, however, this promise of opportunity has gone unfulfilled. *Renewing Our Schools, Securing Our Future: A National Task Force on Public Education* calls for a number of changes to our school system in order to close the achievement gap, both as a matter of fairness and a matter of economic and civic necessity.

- Elena Rocha and Amanda Sharkey

¹ Child Trends, *Early School Readiness* (Washington, DC: Child Trends Databank, 2003).

² M. Daane, P. Donahue and W. Grigg, *The Nation's Report Card: Reading Highlights 2003* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Nov. 2003).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Perie, M. and R. Moran and A.D. Lutkus, *NAEP 2004 Trends in Academic Progress: Three Decades of Student Performance in Reading and Mathematics* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, July 2005).

⁶ Greene, Jay and and Marcus A. Winters, *Public High-School Graduation and College Readiness Rates: 1991-2002*. (New York, NY: Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, Feb. 2005).

⁷ Wirt, John, *The Condition of Education 2005* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

⁸ The Education Trust, *Latino Achievement in America* and *African American Achievement in America*, (Washington, DC: The Education Trust, Spring 2004).

⁹ Carnevale, Anthony P. and Stephen J. Rose, *Socioeconomic Status, Race/Ethnicity and Selective College Admissions*, (Washington, DC: Century Foundation, March 2003).

¹⁰ Ibid.

Achievement Gap

Percent of 4th-graders Achieving Proficiency on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Exam (2003)

State	Overall % Proficient	Proficiency by Sub-Group					White/African-American Gap	Rank 1=Best	White/Latino Gap	Rank 1=Best	Poor/Non-Poor Gap	Rank 1=Best
		White	African-American	Latino	Non-Poor	Poor						
Alabama	22	30	9	--	36	11	21	11	--	--	25	31
Alaska	28	40	21	21	36	13	19	7	19	14	23	22
Arizona	23	35	13	12	36	11	22	12	23	26	25	31
Arkansas	28	35	10	18	39	20	25	20	17	8	19	9
California	21	36	11	9	34	10	25	20	27	32	24	26
Colorado	37	45	18	18	45	19	27	27	27	32	26	38
Connecticut	43	54	12	18	53	18	42	41	36	40	35	51
Delaware	33	44	16	20	41	18	28	28	24	27	23	22
District of Columbia	10	70	7	8	24	6	63	42	62	41	18	4
Florida	32	42	13	24	45	18	29	30	18	10	27	40
Georgia	27	38	12	17	39	13	26	25	21	18	26	38
Hawaii	21	35	18	17	29	13	17	5	18	10	16	1
Idaho	30	33	--	12	38	20	--	--	21	18	18	4
Illinois	31	42	10	15	45	14	32	35	27	32	31	47
Indiana	33	36	11	26	40	18	25	20	10	3	22	20
Iowa	35	37	8	17	42	19	29	30	20	16	23	22
Kansas	33	37	14	19	42	18	23	14	18	10	24	26
Kentucky	31	33	16	--	41	21	17	5	--	--	20	14
Louisiana	20	34	8	--	36	12	26	25	--	--	24	26
Maine	36	36	--	--	42	24	--	--	--	--	18	4
Maryland	32	44	14	23	43	13	30	33	21	18	30	45
Massachusetts	40	48	15	15	51	20	33	38	33	39	31	47
Michigan	32	40	8	16	41	16	32	35	24	27	25	31
Minnesota	37	43	14	16	44	19	29	30	27	32	25	31
Mississippi	18	30	8	--	36	11	22	12	--	--	25	31
Missouri	34	39	14	30	44	19	25	20	9	2	25	31
Montana	35	38	--	--	44	20	--	--	--	--	24	26
Nebraska	32	36	17	14	40	19	19	7	22	22	21	16
Nevada	20	28	9	11	28	10	19	7	17	8	18	4
New Hampshire	40	41	--	19	45	18	--	--	22	22	27	40
New Jersey	39	49	14	21	48	15	35	40	28	36	33	49
New Mexico	19	34	18	13	32	13	16	3	21	18	19	9
New York	34	48	14	18	51	18	34	39	30	37	33	49
North Carolina	33	44	12	24	45	16	32	35	20	16	29	44
North Dakota	32	34	--	--	38	19	--	--	--	--	19	9
Ohio	34	39	16	23	43	19	23	14	16	5	24	26
Oklahoma	26	32	13	14	38	17	19	7	18	10	21	16
Oregon	31	34	19	15	37	18	15	1	19	14	19	9
Pennsylvania	33	40	9	10	44	14	31	34	30	37	30	45
Rhode Island	29	36	12	12	41	14	24	19	24	27	27	40
South Carolina	26	36	11	20	39	14	25	20	16	5	25	31
South Dakota	33	37	--	--	41	21	--	--	--	--	20	14
Tennessee	26	32	9	27	34	15	23	14	5	1	19	9
Texas	27	39	16	17	39	16	23	14	22	22	23	22
Utah	32	35	--	11	38	20	--	--	24	27	18	4
Vermont	37	37	--	--	43	22	--	--	--	--	21	16
Virginia	35	44	16	20	44	16	28	28	24	27	28	43
Washington	33	38	23	16	42	20	15	1	22	22	22	20
West Virginia	29	29	13	--	38	21	16	3	--	--	17	2
Wisconsin	33	36	13	20	39	18	23	14	16	5	21	16
Wyoming	34	36	--	23	40	23	--	--	13	4	17	2
National Average	30	39	13	18	41	15	26		22		26	

Source: Daane, M., P. Donahue and W. Grigg, *The Nation's Report Card: Reading Highlights 2003*, (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Nov. 2003)

-- Reporting standards not met. Sample size insufficient to permit a reliable estimate.