

# Editor's Note

Valerie Norville  
Editorial Director

Gaps in educational achievement have persisted in the United States since its founding. Significant attempts to measure and explain all the reasons for these gaps, particularly those by race and income, date to the first National Assessment of Educational Progress in the early 1970s. Across the decades, the gaps have sometimes narrowed and sometimes widened.

And though there is no consensus on the degree to which any particular factor is to blame or credit for the changes, education policy experts point to many differences in educational opportunity that play important roles. Among them are things that schools and state education policymakers control—teacher distribution, funding, access to early education, for example—as well as things they do not, such as unsafe neighborhoods and single-parent homes. Whether the gaps highlight inequities for students of color, or those living in poverty, or those who are English language learners, there is more than one policy lever to explore, and education policy remains key.

Each author of this *Standard* offers a piece of the puzzle that states must fit together. In his overview, Peter Cookson issues the call to arms, pointing out that public education remains our society's most fruitful avenue for upward mobility, and yet too few students at the lowest end of the income distribution are equipped to participate fully in the economy of the 21st century.

Sonja Brookins Santelises urges policymakers to hold fast to the guiding purpose of No Child Left Behind—equality of opportunity for all students—even as it fixes its flaws. She calls annual testing “the canary in the coal mine,” ensuring

that no one can easily ignore disparities across schools and in student performance. Achievement gaps are apparent before children begin school, which underscores the importance of access to high-quality early education. Phil Sirinides looks at the unintended consequences of recent state and federal efforts in this area. On distribution of the best teachers, Kate Walsh and her colleagues say that it is hard but not impossible to train, recruit, and keep good teachers in high-needs schools.

Monica Martinez and Dennis McGrath examine the gap in college readiness for students of color and prescribe a steady diet of deeper learning experiences during these students' K-12 years. Ivory Toldson and Kimberly Charis share an intriguing exploration of the achievement gap through the lens of African American young men. And Ace Parsi revisits his own experience as an English language learner and free and reduced-price lunch recipient.

Two states are showcased: Rand Quinn and Matthew Steinberg look at Pennsylvania, which simultaneously topped a recent US Department of Education list on funding disparity and presents researchers a unique opportunity to assess the impact of fiscal policy changes. Jay Barth looks at Arkansas's efforts to close the achievement gap in his state.

The problem of inequities of educational opportunity and achievement gaps is multifaceted and difficult, as the authors attest. Yet it is ignored at our peril. Undoubtedly, closing the gap is a job for state boards of education and state education agencies across the land.

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