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THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT AND THE BLACK-WHITE ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*Thesis submitted to the department of letters and English language in candidacy
for the degree of*
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Dedication

To the memory of my grandmother *Mahfouf Khadidja*

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Abstract

The present study probes into the academic achievement gap between black students and their more affluent white cohorts in U.S. public education by highlighting the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002 and weighing up its potential effects on redressing educational inequities and, therefore, bridging the black white achievement gap. The stated intent of the NCLB is to foster greater educational accountability at all levels by upgrading the performance of all students from dissimilar backgrounds. The focus of this thesis is to pore over the disparities in academic assessments specifically among black students, as their underachievement is so pronounced and lags behind the achievement of their white peers. Exploration of the distant historical origins that laid the foundations for the current black-white achievement gap; scrutiny of the miscellaneous potential explanations for African Americans' underachievement; and review of the key educational events and policies that gave birth to the NCLB are helpful to assess the impact of the NCLB on black students' academic achievement and to debate its potential perverse incentives. Tracking the progress of black and white students in U.S. public schools and appraising the changing rate of segregation against black students throughout the different levels of the American educational system, both before and after the adoption of the NCLB is equally crucial to weigh up the effect of the NCLB's implementation on bridging the gap. While the consequences of the existing gap on both American individuals and the larger U.S. society remain perverse, miscellaneous practices and dissimilar strategies proved to be highly effective in reducing the black white achievement gap and recapturing students left behind. Thus, review of the NCLB's broken provisions as well as president Obama's current education agenda becomes a prerequisite. This research reveals that despite the relative triumph of the NCLB to bridge the black white achievement gap, the slow rate of progress ensured the persistence of brutal performance discrepancies.

Keywords: the No Child Left Behind Act, the Black White Achievement Gap.

Abstract

The present study probes into the academic achievement gap between black students and their more affluent white cohorts in U.S. public education by highlighting the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002 and weighing up its potential effects on redressing educational inequities and, therefore, bridging the black white achievement gap. The stated intent of the NCLB is to foster greater educational accountability at all levels by upgrading the performance of all students from dissimilar backgrounds. The focus of this thesis is to pore over the disparities in academic assessments specifically among black students, as their underachievement is so pronounced and lags behind the achievement of their white peers. Exploration of the distant historical origins that laid the foundations for the current black-white achievement gap; scrutiny of the miscellaneous potential explanations for African Americans' underachievement; and review of the key educational events and policies that gave birth to the NCLB are helpful to assess the impact of the NCLB on black students' academic achievement and to debate its potential perverse incentives. Tracking the progress of black and white students in U.S. public schools and appraising the changing rate of segregation against black students throughout the different levels of the American educational system, both before and after the adoption of the NCLB is equally crucial to weigh up the effect of the NCLB's implementation on bridging the gap. While the consequences of the existing gap on both American individuals and the larger U.S. society remain perverse, miscellaneous practices and dissimilar strategies proved to be highly effective in reducing the black white achievement gap and recapturing students left behind. Thus, review of the NCLB's broken provisions as well as president Obama's current education agenda becomes a prerequisite. This research reveals that despite the relative triumph of the NCLB to bridge the black white achievement gap, the slow rate of progress ensured the persistence of brutal performance discrepancies.

Résumé

La présente étude examine l'écart de rendement scolaire entre les étudiants noirs et leurs pairs blancs dans le système éducatif américain, en mettant l'accent sur la loi-dite- aucun enfant n'est laissé derrière (NCLB), 2002. Cette étude mesure l'effet potentiel de cette loi sur le redressement des inégalités éducatives et sur l'éventualité de combler l'écart de rendement entre les noirs et les blancs. L'objectif déclaré de la NCLB est de favoriser une plus grande responsabilité éducative à tous les niveaux en améliorant les performances de tous les étudiants issus de milieux différents. Cette thèse a pour objectif d'étudier les disparités dans les évaluations académiques en particulier parmi les étudiants noirs, car leurs mauvais résultats sont de plus en plus discernables et les laissent derrière leurs homologues blancs. L'exploration des origines historiques distantes de l'écart de rendement actuel entre les blancs et les noirs; l'examen des diverses explications potentielles de la sous-performance des afro-américains; et la considération des politiques éducatives majeurs qui ont donné naissance à la NCLB sont utiles pour évaluer l'impact de la NCLB sur la réussite scolaire des étudiants noirs et pour débattre ses incitations perverses potentielles. Le suivi des progrès des élèves noirs et blancs dans les écoles publiques américaines et l'aperçu du taux d'évolution de la ségrégation contre les étudiants noirs dans les différents niveaux du système éducatif américain, tant avant qu'après l'adoption de la NCLB, est tout aussi cruciales pour évaluer l'effet de la mise en œuvre de la NCLB sur l'écart de rendement. Alors que les conséquences de l'écart existant sur les individus américains et l'ensemble de la société américaine restent perverses, diverses pratiques et stratégies dissemblables se sont avérées très efficaces pour réduire cet écart de performance et reprendre les étudiants laissés pour compte. La révision des engagements non-tenus de la NCLB ainsi que celle de la plateforme éducative la plus récente du président américain Obama devient une condition sine qua non. Cette recherche démontre que, malgré le triomphe relatif de la NCLB pour combler l'écart de rendement des noirs par rapport aux blancs, la temporisation des progrès engendre la persistance considérable des écarts de performances.

Les Mots Clés: aucun enfant n'est laissé derrière, l'écart de rendement entre les noirs et les blancs.

Résumé

La présente étude examine l'écart de rendement scolaire entre les étudiants noirs et leurs pairs blancs dans le système éducatif américain, en mettant l'accent sur la loi-dite- aucun enfant n'est laissé derrière (NCLB), 2002. Cette étude mesure l'effet potentiel de cette loi sur le redressement des inégalités éducatives et sur l'éventualité de combler l'écart de rendement entre les noirs et les blancs. L'objectif déclaré de la NCLB est de favoriser une plus grande responsabilité éducative à tous les niveaux en améliorant les performances de tous les étudiants issus de milieux différents. Cette thèse a pour objectif d'étudier les disparités dans les évaluations académiques en particulier parmi les étudiants noirs, car leurs mauvais résultats sont de plus en plus discernables et les laissent derrière leurs homologues blancs. L'exploration des origines historiques distantes de l'écart de rendement actuel entre les blancs et les noirs; l'examen des diverses explications potentielles de la sous-performance des afro-américains; et la considération des politiques éducatives majeurs qui ont donné naissance à la NCLB sont utiles pour évaluer l'impact de la NCLB sur la réussite scolaire des étudiants noirs et pour débattre ses incitations perverses potentielles. Le suivi des progrès des élèves noirs et blancs dans les écoles publiques américaines et l'aperçu du taux d'évolution de la ségrégation contre les étudiants noirs dans les différents niveaux du système éducatif américain, tant avant qu'après l'adoption de la NCLB, est tout aussi cruciales pour évaluer l'effet de la mise en œuvre de la NCLB sur l'écart de rendement. Alors que les conséquences de l'écart existant sur les individus américains et l'ensemble de la société américaine restent perverses, diverses pratiques et stratégies dissemblables se sont avérées très efficaces pour réduire cet écart de performance et reprendre les étudiants laissés pour compte. La révision des engagements non-tenus de la NCLB ainsi que celle de la plateforme éducative la plus récente du président américain Obama devient une condition sine qua non. Cette recherche démontre que, malgré le triomphe relatif de la NCLB pour combler l'écart de rendement des noirs par rapport aux blancs, la temporisation des progrès engendre la persistance considérable des écarts de performances.

ملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في فجوة التحصيل الأكاديمي بين الطلاب السود وأقرانهم البيض في النظام الأمريكي للتعليم مع التركيز على ما يسمى بقانون-عدم إهمال أي طفل- 2002. هذه الدراسة تقدر الأثر المحتمل لهذا القانون المتعلق بإصلاح التفاوت التعليمي وإمكانية سد الفجوة في الأداء بين السود والبيض. الهدف المعلن من NCLB هو تشجيع أكبر قدر من المسؤولية التعليمية على جميع المستويات عن طريق تحسين الأداء لجميع الطلاب من مختلف الخلفيات. تهدف هذه الأطروحة إلى دراسة التفاوت في التقييمات الأكاديمية خاصة بين الطلاب السود لأن نتائجها السلبية في تزايد وتركهم وراء نظرائهم البيض. استكشاف الأصول التاريخية البعيدة للفروقات الحالية التفضيلية بين السود والبيض والسود استعراض عدة تفسيرات محتملة لقصور الأداء من الأمريكيين من أصل إفريقي والنظر في السياسات التعليمية الرئيسية التي أنجبت NCLB مفيدة لتقييم تأثير NCLB على النجاح الأكاديمي للطلاب السود ومناقشة الحوافز الضارة المحتملة لها. تتبع التقدم المحرز للطلاب السود والبيض في المدارس العامة الأمريكية والنظرة الشاملة لمعدل تطور العزل ضد الطلاب السود في مختلف مستويات نظام التعليم الأمريكي على حد سواء حتى بعد مرور NCLB، أمر حاسم لتقييم أثر تنفيذ NCLB على التفاوت في المردود. بينما العواقب الناتجة عن الفجوة في أمريكا وجميع أفراد المجتمع الأمريكي هي سيئة، عدة ممارسات واستراتيجيات متباينة ثبت أنها فعالة للغاية للحد من فجوة الأداء. إعادة النظر في التزامات NCLB غير المعمول بها وكذا البرنامج التعليمي الأخير للرئيس الأمريكي أوباما يصبح شرطاً أساسياً. يبين هذا البحث أنه على الرغم من النجاح النسبي الذي حققه NCLB لسد الفجوة في الأداء من السود والبيض، تأخر التقدم يولد استمرار كبير لوجود فجوات الأداء.

الكلمات الرئيسية

قانون عدم إهمال أي طفل، فجوة التحصيل الأكاديمي بين الطلاب السود وأقرانهم البيض

ملخص

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACT	American College Testing
AFT	American Federation of Teachers
AP	Advancement Placement
ARRA	American Recovery and Reinvestment Act
AYP	Adequate Yearly Progress
BAEO	Black Alliance for Educational Options
CCSI	Common Core Standards Initiative
CEP	Center on Education Policy
CREDO	Center for Research on Education Outcomes
ECLS-K	Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
HEW DPT	Health, Education and Welfare Department
IASA	Improving America's Schools Act
INTASC	Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress
NCEE	National Commission on Excellence in Education
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act
NDEA	National Defense Education Act
NEA	National Education Association
NEGP	National Education Goals Panel
NELS	National Educational Longitudinal Study
NLSY	National Longitudinal Survey of Youth
NYMS	New York Manumission Society
PARC	Partnership for Assessment and Readiness for College and Careers
PAS	Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
RTTTP	Race to the Top
SAT	Scholastic Aptitude Test
SEA's	State Education Agencies
STAR	Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio
TFA	Teach for America
TMA	Thurgood Marshall Academy
US Dept. of Educ.	United States Department of Education

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INTRODUCTION

1. Overview

Signed into law by former U.S. president George W. Bush in 2002 and deemed as the most momentous federal education law in the United States' history as well as the largest expansion of federal power over America's education system, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is the latest progress in an evolving process in which the federal government has enormously augmented its role in K-12 education in the past half-century. In point of fact, a Nation at Risk report of 1983 was a catalyst which helped launch the first wave of educational reforms and was a key dynamic in mobilizing public opinion on behalf of such reforms.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was an overall concern that the U.S. educational system was falling short of the inherent objective of keeping American students better educated than students in the rest of the universe. Longtime U.S. industries were becoming defied by high quality manufactures produced quite cheaply overseas; many thought this was attributable to American students falling behind their foreign cohorts in acquiring the skills required to keep the American economy afloat. By the mid-1980s, most of the American public and policymakers assumed that America was hung over by an unmatched, escalating crisis in education. Many Americans persisted to grant their own parochial public schools high grades for quality. Yet enthusiasm for the American nation's public schools as a whole sagged even further as public reservations about the quality of education outside their own neighborhood schools persisted. And in spite of concerns about the quality of education in the late 1970s and 1980s, students largely achieved as well as before, though the gap between privileged and underprivileged students kept on existing.

Concerns about the correlation between the declining American economy and its education system laid the foundations for school reforms in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Increasingly, policymakers and the public allied the intensifying economic problems to the inadequacy of public schools. While the meticulous link between education and economic efficiency proved complex and indefinable, several analysts and policymakers supposed that upgraded education was crucial for the American nation's future economic well-being.

The landmark US Department of Education report "A Nation at Risk: the Imperative for Educational Reform" of April 1983 painted a very gloomy portrait of American schooling, often citing instances of current regressions in student attainments. At one point, A Nation at Risk did admit that average citizens at the time of publication were better educated and more knowledgeable than their peers from a preceding generation, but the report swiftly relapsed to its more dismal message. The commission, in an open letter addressed to the American people as well as to former President Reagan in April 1983, warned of the appalling state of American education and contended that this was denting their economic competitiveness overseas. The report revealed that around thirteen percent of seventeen-year-olds were functionally illiterate, Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores were dropping, and students needed an enlarged array of corrective courses in college.

Indeed, A Nation at Risk inaugurated the first wave of educational reforms that centered focus on boosting high school graduation requirements, setting up minimum proficiency tests, and issuing merit pay for teachers. While numerous states and parochial school districts reacted positively to the diverse recommendations by rising graduation provisions and bolstering the academic course offerings in schools, many policymakers were disillusioned by the lack of progress in student performance scores. Thus, while the reforms that A Nation at Risk aided to

stimulate were not sufficient by themselves to increase adequately student achievement in the 1980s, the report was ensued by further initiatives focused more on the restructuring of schools. Indeed, responding to the widening black white achievement gap, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 emerged as a vital reform initiative of U.S. public education at the threshold of the 21st century.

2. Purpose of the Study

Data from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) offers staggering statistics about the black-white achievement gap by the eve of the adoption of the No Child left Behind Act in 2002. It reveals that African American students lag two years behind their white peers by the fourth grade, they are slipped three years behind by the eighth grade, and by the twelfth grade they are virtually four years behind. This means that the average 17-year-old African American student is at the same scholastic level as a 13-year-old white student. Analogous startling statistics are provided about the black-white gap in graduation rates.

Measurement of the achievement gap is not a new phenomenon, but owing to the gap's widening, more attention has been centered on the issue. In reality, the achievement gap in the United States began to narrow in the 1970s and 1980s. A notable improvement in reading and math achievement for African Americans was displayed between 1970 and 1988, thus shrinking the black-white achievement gap, but in 1988, the gap began to widen again enigmatically, to the point where the performance of disadvantaged students is actually lower than that of ten years ago. For the sake of addressing issues of the achievement gap, the NCLB was signed into law in January 8, 2002 and was intended to define the quality of schools as measured by how well students performed on state standardized examinations.

The No Child Left Behind Act encompasses hundreds of pages of complex requirements but modest and clear-cut targets. It incorporates former American President Bush's promise to end the "soft racism of low expectations" by bridging racial achievement gaps and bringing all students to proficiency by 2014. It creates unparalleled measurement of academic advancement in two subjects, with science being added later, via mandated annual tests in elementary and middle school and spells out that all children from all racial and ethnic groups attain 100% proficiency. Schools are required, under threat of harsh sanctions, to increase achievement each year in math and reading and to eradicate the achievement gap by race, ethnicity, language, and special education status.

This thesis examines the nature of the academic achievement gap between black students and their more affluent white counterparts in U.S. public schools laying particular emphasis on the No Child Left Behind Act, a federal education measure which was signed into law by former U.S. President George W. Bush in January 2002 and was designed to boost the performance of all students at all levels, and assessing its impact on the black white achievement gap.

Backed by a devastating majority in Congress, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is undoubtedly the single largest expansion of federal power over America's education system. It reviews the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which was first enacted in 1965 and has been reauthorized periodically ever since. The most significant and distinguished component of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is Title I, which is the federal government's sole largest educational assistance program and supposedly is designed to aid underprivileged students. In exchange for federal funding, which all states receive, states and parochial school districts must abide by innumerable federal directives.

The specified intent of the NCLB is to foster greater educational accountability at all levels by upgrading school achievement and thus, student performance. Its itemized objective, briefly, is to: boost accountability for student performance; permit school choice for students attending inadequate schools; allow less rigidity for how federal education dollars are spent; and center a tougher stress on skilled teaching. Generally, the chief goals of the Act are to enhance academic attainment across the board and to eradicate the achievement gap amongst students from dissimilar backgrounds. To accomplish these ends, the Act requires states to institute rigorous academic benchmarks for all schools and to test all students on a regular basis to ensure that they are meeting those benchmarks. The Act also requires states and school districts to hire highly qualified teachers, namely those who have demonstrated some competence in the subjects they teach.

Through the passage of the NCLB, the federal government responded to remedy the persistent achievement gap and upgrade public schools across the United States. As the very name of the law indicates one of the numerous objectives of NCLB is to boost the achievement of all students while concurrently bridging the achievement gap that exists between minority students and their white peers. A review of the NCLB itself discloses provisions particularly targeted at minorities. A crucial self-stated purpose is to close the achievement gap between high and low achieving students, specifically gaps between underprivileged and privileged students. The NCLB stipulates that states devise accountability systems that safeguard the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of chief racial and ethnic groups towards eradicating this gap. In fact, it calls for local educational agencies (LEAs) to designate how they will eradicate this achievement gap when applying for Title I funds. It raises transparency by necessitating the yearly assessments of student achievement to be disaggregated and reported by ethnicity, amongst other aspects. As

stated by the text of the law, Congress expected the No Child Left Behind Act to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is lagged behind. Since the law's passing countless issues of the achievement gap have been tackled by imposing a system that penalizes those schools that fail short of meeting benchmarks.

The achievement gap commonly points to the dissimilarities among demographic groups on state and nationwide academic tests. The achievement gap comprises differences between deprived versus advantageous students, low-income versus more affluent students, students with disabilities versus those without disabilities. In this thesis, however, the achievement gap refers specifically to the disparities between the achievement of white students and black students on academic assessments such as Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores- a test taken in the U.S. to measure students' aptitudes before entry into college- and American College Testing (ACT) scores- a standardized test for high school performance and college admissions in the United States, and graduation rates. In spite of the existence of the achievement gap issue amongst other racial and ethnic minorities in the United States, namely Asian and Hispanic students, the emphasis of this research is to scrutinize the difference in academic performance specifically among black students, when compared with their white peers, as their underachievement is so distinct and lags behind the achievement of white students.

Achievement gaps are of particular concern since academic performance in the K-12 grades is a precursor to college access and accomplishment in the labor market; accordingly, a college degree has become increasingly imperative in the labor market, and has become ever more vital for economic mobility. Simultaneously, access to college, mainly to more selective colleges, has become progressively more contingent on students' test scores and academic achievement. Owing to the growing significance of academic achievement, the white-black test

score gap now elucidates virtually all of the white-black variance in college enrollment and most or all of the white-black dissimilarities in earnings. Eradicating racial achievement gaps is therefore indispensable for abridging broader racial discrepancies in U.S. society.

The primary research question to be probed in is: to what extent was the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) successful in bridging the academic achievement gap between black students and their more affluent white cohorts in U.S. public education? This research also delves into the following secondary questions: How large is the black-white achievement gap; is it shrinking or widening over time; and what are the best strategies to reduce it? What are the NCLB Act's potential perverse incentives and how should the Act's broken provisions be mended? And how far did the Obama administration live up to NCLB reauthorization and closing the black white achievement gap? In an attempt to exhaustively answer these questions, the NCLB together with the black white achievement gap have to be thoroughly scrutinized as key components of the issue under examination.

The No Child Left Behind Act is a very paradoxical federal measure that requires to be unmistakably weighed up. The NCLB has been applauded by some and criticized by others in the popular press and in education journals. Those who approve the Act highlight its laudable goals and celebrate its harsh accountability measures. Those who condemn the Act lament the weighty stress on testing and the unavoidable "teaching to the test" that will ensue. They also chastise the federal government for being intrusive with state and parochial control over education while falling short of funding all of the costs related to the Act.

A deep examination of the black white achievement gap is equally important; indisputably the main question would not be whether the gap exists, but rather whether it persists.

It is almost taken for granted that there is an achievement gap between black and white students. This fact does not stem from nowhere; the legacies of slavery and racism still have their vestiges in the American society and in the American people's mind. The problem, however, is that a considerable number of people are unaware of the magnitude of this thorny issue as they are elusively conscious that black and white students, on average, achieve differently in schools. Moreover, despite the heated debate of the black white achievement in the K-12 educational community and in a few corners of academia, startlingly few people have granted much thought to this issue.

Even those who are well-informed about the gap's reality and its magnitude frequently consider that the divide cannot be narrowed until poverty is eliminated and all vestiges of racism in America are eradicated. In other words, these observers consider the gap with a sort of determined resignation, and perceive endeavors to tackle it as futile. For these very motives and in an attempt to get rid of all kinds of ambiguities that surround the black white achievement gap, accurate data that help remedy the problems should be provided in this research.

This study is significant in that it tackles the impact of the NCLB on bridging the achievement gap between African American and white students; this is in effect crucial to fostering American citizens who are prepared to compete in a global market. It actually provides American leaders, educators, parents, and community members with data to help determine whether present-day educational measures are positively impacting the black white achievement gap. If student performance is not impacted, educators must review existing educational practices and the contemporary reform initiatives, namely the NCLB, and initiate the change procedure. American educationalists cannot persist to use unproductive practices or work within the framework of a fruitless reform movement if the target is to see affirmative student performance

upshots. Conversely, if student attainment is positively impacted, then educators need to be cognizant of this so they can keep on upgrading academic achievement in a tactical way. The effect that NCLB is having on education, specifically African American students, is very relevant to constant educational reform. American educators and leaders need to be acquainted with how this initiative that has directed education reform over the previous several years has impacted education for students. As American policymakers strive for refining the dissimilar mechanisms of the NCLB, they need data, regarding the specific constituents of the NCLB, to drive their decisions.

3. Methodological Concerns

The present thesis utilizes the historical method of research as it applies to all fields of studies encompassing their origins, growth, theories, personalities and crisis. Both quantitative and qualitative variables can be employed in the collection of historical information. Qualitative research is chiefly exploratory as it is used to gain a comprehension of underlying dynamics, opinions, and motivations. It offers insights into the problem or helps to devise ideas or hypotheses for potential quantitative research. Qualitative research is also utilized to disclose trends in thought and views, and dig deeper into the problem. Qualitative data collection methods vary employing unstructured or semi-structured techniques. Some common methods comprise focus groups and observations. As for quantitative research, it is used to quantify the problem by means of producing numerical data or data that can be converted into practical statistics. It is employed to quantify beliefs, opinions, behaviors, and other distinct variables - and generalize outcomes from a larger sample population. Quantitative Research uses quantifiable data to formulate facts and reveal patterns in research. Quantitative data collection methods contain

several forms of surveys, interviews, longitudinal studies, website interceptors, and systematic observations.

This study employs mixed methods as it decisively combines the collection of quantitative and qualitative data to offer an accurate portrait of the effect of the No Child Left Behind Act on educational achievement between black and white students and school accountability (Rudestam and Newton). “Mixed method designs can yield richer, more valid, and more reliable findings than research based in either qualitative or quantitative method alone” (Gawlik 62).

In an effort to weigh up the magnitude of the black white achievement gap and the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act on reducing the existing academic disparities between black students and their more affluent cohorts, this research reviewed numerous sets of data, in the form of numbers and percentages. Quantitative, non-experimental statistical methods were utilized to assess the collected data. In fact, data are collected from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, a national assessment program administered by the U.S. Department of Education, which tracks the progress of a national sample of kindergarten children. Moreover, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data enabled the present research to further explore how achievement gaps in reading and math evolve as students move through the grades. NAEP, backed by the U.S. Department of Education, assesses nationwide samples of students in reading, math and other subjects. Findings are reported in terms of average proficiency scores- employing a 500-point scale- and in terms of the proportions of students attaining consecutive levels of proficiency-that is basic, proficient and advanced. Additionally, researcher Jay Greene’s innovative study data of U.S. low graduation rates, specifically among African American students, made it conceivable to compare high school dropout rates and

college readiness rates among white and black students. What is more, data from the two most commonly used college entrance exams- the American College Test (ACT) and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (ACT) - were of a great significance to this study.

As for the qualitative method, it is primarily used in this research to dig deeper into the distant origins of the existing inequities between black and white students in American public education and to explore the underlying causes of the black white achievement gap by means of appraising several different theories. It is equally used to review the miscellaneous education events that gave birth to the No Child Left Behind Act and to appraise the potential impact of the NCLB enactment on African American students' achievement as well as the potential perverse incentives of the Act. The qualitative method further explores the main consequences of the black white achievement gap and recommends a wide array of efficient strategies and measures to close the existing racial academic discrepancies in U.S. public schools. It is also used to probe into the Obama educational agenda and to suggest solutions to mend the NCLB Act's broken provisions.

The present research is considered in light of a peculiar theoretical framework. Entitled "the No Child Left Behind Act and the Black White Achievement Gap in U.S. Public Schools," this study encompasses two distinct variables: the NCLB Act and the Black White achievement gap. Each variable is appraised in relation to a pertinent theory that sets up a theoretical underpinning for this thesis. Two main theories have been referred to in an effort to weigh up the potential impact of the No Child Left Behind Act on the existing black white Achievement gap in U.S. public education; they are respectively as follows: the Observational Learning Theory and the Educational Deprivation Theory.

The Observational Learning Theory, developed by Julian B. Rotter, offers a framework for grasping the accountability aspect that incorporates all the components of the NCLB. This Theory asserts that an observer's demeanor is determined by his or her interaction with a "behavioral model" (Rotter). An observer's conduct can also be influenced by the positive or negative outcomes of a model's behavior, a phenomenon called "vicarious reinforcement" and "vicarious punishment" (Rotter). The core philosophy of the Observational Learning Theory is that an observer will reproduce a model's behavior if the model has assets that the observer believes beneficial. Second, the observer is alert to the outside world's reaction to the model's behavior, implying that rewarded behaviors will more likely be reproduced than chastised conducts. In order for Observational Learning to impact learning, the students have to be presented to a model whose behavior produces a positive reaction. Further, the teachers should stimulate mutual learning, given that learning occurs in a social and environmental framework. Besides, a learned conduct needs auspicious circumstances to be performed, so the teachers should present students to an inspiring setting for the behavior to manifest. The questions that arise here are whether the instructors have the occasion to present themselves as behavior models and if the students consider the teachers' assets as attractive. Does the NCLB generate a productive environment for learning?

In reality, there is a wide array of significant theories that consider the black white achievement gap. Yet, the soundest and most pertinent theory of the startling black white academic disparities in schools to this research is the Educational Deprivation Theory. Supporters of this view contend that efficient educational practices are capable of overweighing all other external issues and proclaim that offered pedagogical support is prerequisite to efficacious learning. They believe that children motivational difficulties can be resolved by highly motivated instructors who are eager to set high benchmarks of educational achievement and to offer good

instruction associated with emotional acceptance and backing. The core elements of the Educational Deprivation Theory are vividly defined by educator, psychologist, author, and chief contributor to the policy that won *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, Kenneth Clark. He places the charge for the enormous academic failure of ghetto schoolchildren directly on teachers and administrations of ghetto schools. He believes that a basic component of the deprivation that afflicts ghetto children is that usually their instructors do not expect them to learn; the teachers perceive their function as being one merely of custodial care and discipline. He concludes that the motivational problems of these children will be sorted out when teachers can be motivated to teach efficiently- that is, to set high benchmarks of scholastic achievement and to offer good instruction, in conjunction with emotional acceptance and support (Katz 385).

An eminent study conducted by researchers Rosenthal and Jacobsen in 1968, demonstrated the potent impact teachers have on student accomplishment. Students were selected to excel by their teachers, and the students that the teachers picked to excel outperformed their counterparts by the end of the school year. Besides, researchers Fram, Miller-Cribbs and Van Horn report that high ethnic minority and low-income schools have educators with less experience, less proficiency, and lower levels of credentialing (309-319). Schools with predominantly minority students and high poverty rates are more likely to have jammed classrooms and less access to technology (Rothstein). Another sturdy source of support for the Educational Deprivation Theory can be found in the Education Trust, a Washington D.C. - based independent nonprofit organization. One of the Education Trust's creeds is: "All children will learn at high levels when they are taught to high levels" (The Education Trust). In a word, the present research approves this theory. Assessment of the No Child Left Behind Act as a new federal education reform that aims at bridging the black white achievement gap by taking into

account various educational attributes that enhance black students' performance gives the Educational Deprivation Theory extra relevant credit.

4. Literature Review

The present research relies extensively on a large array of primary sources which basically incorporate: The Civil Rights Project, U.S. Department of Education and National Assessment of education reports; Congressional statutes and Supreme Court rulings; speeches, testimonies and interviews. Secondary sources, on the other hand, encompass a wide range of specialized contemporary books; scholarly peer-reviewed journals; magazines; newspapers; working papers; second-hand reports; in addition to online essays; periodicals, dictionaries and encyclopedias.

The Civil Rights Project (CRP), conducted regularly by Professor Gary Orfield, has been of an enormous significance to this thesis. The CRP is an initiative directed and co-founded in 1996 by Gary Orfield, American professor of education, law, political science and urban planning at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. It aims to supply required intellectual capital to academic circles, decision makers and civil rights activists, and rising and publishing a novel generation of research on multiethnic civil rights concerns. The project has commissioned over 400 studies and 15 books. Amongst the CRP sources utilized in this research: "Still Segregated: How Race and Poverty Stymie the Right to Education" (2013); "Why E Pluribus...Separation: Deepening Double Segregation for More Students" (2012); "Segregation Matters: Poverty and Educational Inequality?" (2005); and "Inspiring Vision, Disappointing Results: Four Studies on Implementing the No Child Left Behind Act" (2004).

United States Department of Education and National Assessment of education reports include principally an all-embracing collection of data, statistics, findings, figures, percentages, tables, surveys, research, studies, archives, evaluations and assessments pertaining to education in the United States in general and the No Child Left Behind Act and the black white achievement gap in particular. They are chiefly conducted by the following institutions: National Center for Education Statistics; National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP); Equity and Excellence Commissions; Early Childhood Longitudinal Study; Office for Civil Rights; New York State Archives; American Anthropological and Psychological Associations; American College Testing Incorporation; Educational Testing Service; Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO); Center on Education Policy (CEP); Education Trust; Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC); National Commission on Excellence in Education; Commission on No Child Left Behind Act; U.S. Census Bureau; and Education Summits.

What is more, this thesis is loaded with a substantial number of statements and remarks made chiefly by the current U.S. President Barack Obama and the former American President George W. Bush on several occasions, particularly discussing contemporary education reforms; the implementation of the No Child left Behind Act; and the evolution of the black white achievement gap in U.S. public education. Further speeches are made by the present U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and former U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige on a number of education issues relating to the NCLB and the existing educational discrepancies in U.S. public schools. Moreover, Congressional statutes, that laid the foundations for the adoption of the No Child Left Behind Act, constitute an additional fundamental part of the primary sources used in this thesis: “No Child Left Behind Act” (2001); “Elementary and Secondary Education

Act (ESEA) Reauthorization: A Blueprint for Reform” (2010); “American Recovery and Reinvestment Act” (2009); “National Defense Education Act” (NDEA) 1958; “The Statute of South Carolina” (1740); and others. Equally important, a number of Supreme Court rulings provided a good first-hand material to assess the evolution of the black white achievement gap in American schools; among others: “Plessy v. Ferguson” decision (1896) and “Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka” ruling (1954).

Alternatively, specialized contemporary books by authorities in the field have been referred to. Among many others are: Maranto, Robert and Michael Q. Mcshane. *President Obama and Education Reform: The Personal and the Political*. 2012. This book offers a comprehensive scrutiny of President Obama's education agenda. The authors contend that the Obama-era reforms have led to fruitful innovation in both the private and public sector. Besides, *The Black-White Achievement Gap: Why Closing it is the Greatest Civil Rights Issue of Our Time*. 2010 is another book that addresses what the authors, Rod Paige, former U.S. Secretary of Education, and his sister, Elaine Witty, Ed., perceive as the paramount civil rights issue of the day, the academic achievement gap between African-American and non-African-American children.

Additionally, Chubb, J.E., and Loveless, T. book, *Bridging the Achievement Gap*. 2002, offers evidence that the achievement gap can be reduced by asserting that various schools and school reforms are boosting the achievement of black students to levels approaching those of whites. Likewise, eminent historian and policy analyst Maris Vinovskis scrutinizes, in his *From A Nation at Risk to no Child Left Behind*. 2009, federal K-12 education policies, starting with the publication of A Nation at Risk up to the No Child Left Behind, and tackles the practical features of implementing and assessing school and classroom reforms, drawing on his distinctive

experiences working in the Department of Education during both the George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton administrations.

Present-day public policy assumes that the achievement gap between black and white students could be bridged if only schools would perform highly. In *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic, and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap*. 2004, Rothstein Richard points the way toward social and economic reforms that would grant all children a more identical opportunity to be successful in school. Other books with a particular significance to this thesis are: Reardon, Sean F. et al. *Left Behind? The Effect of No Child Left Behind on Academic Achievement Gaps*. 2013; Rebell M.A. and Wolff J.R. “A Viable and Vital Agenda for NCLB Reauthorization” 2009; Boykin, A. W., and Noguera, P. *Creating the opportunity to learn: Moving from research to practice to close the achievement gap*. 2011; Reardon, Sean F. *The Widening Academic Achievement Gap Between Rich and Poor*. 2011 and many others.

Dissimilar magazines are consulted in this research to diversify the second-hand sources: Harvard magazine; American Education; the American Prospect; Education Daily; and Forbes. The most common magazine that has been of an extensive use in this thesis, however, is Phi Delta Kappan; a professional magazine that publishes articles and editorials in the field of education. It is intended for the k-12 educationalists and policy makers who deal with associated education issues. It features articles regarding classroom practice, policy, research, professional issue, and innovation in education. As for Newspapers, New York Times is heavily relied on in this research. The papers’ print version has the second-largest circulation, behind the Wall Street Journal, and the largest circulation amongst metropolitan newspapers in the United States of America. Education Week is another U.S. national newspaper that covers k-12 education and has

been of a good use in this thesis. The Washington Post, an American daily and most widely circulated newspaper published in Washington D.C., is a further newspaper used as it has a particular emphasis on national politics.

Furthermore, scholarly peer-reviewed academic journals constitute the largest secondary sources utilized in this thesis. Among many others: the *Harvard Educational Review* is a peer-reviewed academic journal of opinion and research dealing with education; *Social Forces* is a quarterly journal of social sciences which focuses on sociology but also has a multidisciplinary approach, publishing works from the realms of social psychology, anthropology, political science, history, and economics; *Education and Urban Society* is a bimonthly journal that covers research on the role of education in modern society. Furthermore, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* journal covers all features of educational policy analysis. *Educational Researcher* publishes scholarly articles that are of overall significance to the education research community and that emanate from miscellaneous areas of education research and correlated disciplines. Besides, *Education Policy Analysis Archives* covers education policy at all levels of the education system in all nations. Likewise, *Teachers College Record* is a monthly peer-reviewed academic journal of education. Moreover, the *Black History Bulletin* is dedicated to enhancing teaching and learning in the areas of history. It aims at publishing, generating, and disseminating peer-reviewed information about African Americans in U. S. history. Its objective is to inform the knowledge base for the proficient praxis of secondary instructors via articles that are grounded in theory, yet buttressed by practice. Together with the aforementioned secondary sources, working research papers, recent second-hand reports, online essays, scholarly periodicals, dictionaries, and encyclopedias have also been of a great significance to this study.

5. Structure

The present thesis comprises eight chapters. Chapter one probes into racial disparities, specifically against African American students, in U.S. public schools. In fact, the American educational system has a deeply entrenched history of racial and socioeconomic discrimination which has persisted in spite of the ratification of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, the Brown ruling of 1954 and its progeny, and the endorsement of civil rights legislations. It also explores the distant historical origins that laid the foundations for the current black-white achievement gap. In fact, the present day black-white academic discrepancies have roots in the African American experience along the historical continuum: racial bondage; the Black Codes; racial discrimination; and legally enforced separate but unequal educational opportunities are few past instances that account for the current educational inequities. Indeed, African American colonial experience during slavery remains consequential and reveals that regarding educational attainment, they have undergone a deliberate and shattering opportunity gap, when likened to the educational openings of white students.

Chapter two scrutinizes the miscellaneous potential explanations for African Americans' underachievement. African American low performance in U.S. public education is an issue that has been widely explored by a considerable number of researchers. Investigating diverse causes and grounds behind the black white achievement gap has preoccupied many scientists, theoreticians, sociologists, economists, anthropologists, education specialists and politicians. They all offered dissimilar probable arguments that might account for the existing gap. Some provided potential justifications are substantial as they arise from well- documented research and constructive studies; others are plain speculations and biased ideologies. What has to be retained, however, is that there is no sole common explanation of the black white achievement gap.

Included among the most notable recurring explanations are racism and genetic factors; black identity and oppositional culture; socioeconomic status and disparities; sociocultural attributes; and educational factors.

Chapter three succinctly reviews the key educational events and policies that gave birth to the No Child left Behind Act. In fact, a substantial assortment of key education events planted the seeds of the NCLB, from the very early foundation of the American Republic to the era preceding its enactment in 2002. It is in effect the fruitful outcome of a wide array of scholastic measures, ranging principally between commissions and summits from the early 1990's up to the threshold of its enactment. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, A Nation at Risk Report of 1983, and the Charlottesville Education Summit of 1989 are some out of many other events that featured the American realm of education and constituted potent grounds for the endorsement of the NCLB. Considered altogether these education events brought collectively the concepts that became the fundamental underpinnings of the NCLB.

Chapter four examines the NCLB as a newly-adopted federal educational measure that aims principally at redressing major flaws and eradicating existing racial inequities in U.S. public schools, notably between black and white students, and assesses its impact on black students' academic achievement. It further debates the NCLB's potential perverse incentives. Actually, the NCLB has drawn its share of praise and criticism. In spite of its laudable goals, its potential perverse incentives and unintended consequences outnumbered its positive impact on the American system of education in general and on African American students in particular. Five potential perverse incentives, namely federalism; unfunded mandate; teaching to the test; deterring good teachers; and promoting segregation and exclusion, might be held accountable for

the No Child Left Behind Act's failure to redress the academic achievement gap between black students and their more affluent cohorts.

Chapter five assesses the impact of the NCLB's implementation on bridging the black white achievement gap by tracking the progress of black and white students in U.S. public schools and appraising the changing rate of segregation against black students throughout the different levels of the American educational system, both before and after the adoption of the NCLB in 2002. The exploration of data and statistics from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) helps trace a clear image about the reality of the black white achievement gap, particularly after the enactment of the NCLB. The most common means of assessing the black white achievement gap is by weighing up the differing percentages of black and white children who demonstrate proficiency in two basic and specific skill areas, namely reading and math. The performance of black and white students in both reading and math is tracked and examined from Kindergarten through the K-12 educational pipeline and secondary institutions. Differential rates of participation in higher education and college completion rates are evenly explored.

Chapter six pores over the miscellaneous practices and dissimilar strategies which proved to be highly effective in reducing the black white achievement gap and recapturing students left behind. Actually, the identification of the different challenges that hinder students' educational progress is essential for the adoption of relevant and effective strategies that can be utilized to boost the achievement of all students. Early childhood education; summer school programs; teacher quality and support; parents' backing and effective schools for minority students, constitute operative measures that are adopted for closing the black white achievement gap. The National Center of Education has identified four states, namely Delaware, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey as being markedly successful in reducing the existing gap.

Chapter seven looks into the perverse consequences and deep implications of the existing gap on both American individuals and the larger U.S. society. It also reviews the No Child Left Behind Act's broken provisions. Ostensibly, employment and earnings inequalities have soon become the end result of the differences in educational outcomes as educationally underrepresented minorities are more likely to hold low-wage jobs and have less opportunity to pursue well-paying professional careers. Likewise, academic achievement gaps do not only threaten the economy of the state, but profoundly affect its well-being. Truly, the NCLB provisions proved to be flawed and need to be amended. Therefore, a wide array of miscellaneous recommended revisions and proposed solutions to the No Child Left Behind Act's broken promise of closing the black white achievement gap in U.S. public education are helpful to remedy the issue under examination.

Chapter eight looks at current U.S. president Obama's education agenda. In fact, the NCLB set the stage for education reform in the Obama Presidency by providing relevant required information for addressing the prevailing gap between black students and their white cohorts in U.S. public schools. In spite of its shortcomings, the central feature of the education agenda put forward by the Obama Administration was Race to the Top (RTT). The program dedicated \$4.35 billion for a competitive grant program that would be allocated only to states that met specific criteria established by the Department of Education. Furthermore, the Administration approved a set of Common Core standards developed by a consortium of state school officers and tied RTT dollars to implementing these standards. In March 2010, the U.S. Department of Education released its blueprint for Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization and outlined the three major areas for federal action.

CHAPTER ONE

Origins of the Black-White Achievement Gap

If man is without education...he lives within the narrow, dark and grimy walls of ignorance. He is a poor prisoner without hope. The little light that he gets comes to him as through dark corridors and grated windows....Education...means emancipation. It means light and liberty. It means the uplifting of the soul of man into the glorious light of truth, the light only by which men can be free. To deny education to any people is one of the greatest crimes against human nature.

(Douglass)

Introduction

Despite endeavors to redress racial discrepancies in U.S. public education, a huge number of American students, particularly African Americans, are still attending schools that are not only separate but grossly inequitable in both resources and academic outcomes. The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 aims primarily at tackling racial academic attainment gaps and bringing all students, irrespective of their racial or ethnic backgrounds, to reach 100% proficiency by 2014. The black-white achievement gap has been well documented, throughout several decades both prior to and after the implementation of the NCLB. Persistent stark disparities between black students and their white cohorts revealed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), however, ring alarm bells vis-à-vis the laudable targets of the NCLB. Thus, investigating the distant origins that laid the foundations for the achievement gap is a prerequisite. The history of the black-white achievement gap is never inconsequential; a

succinct review of the legacy of the blacks' historic educational experiences during slavery, racial segregation, and Jim Crowism is absolutely required for a deep and thorough understanding of the current gap. A specific focus on the horrific mental and intellectual bondage and enforced illiteracy that slaves endured is equally relevant to the issue under examination.

I. Racial Disparities in the American Educational System

The American educational system has a long history of racial and socioeconomic discrimination chiefly against African Americans, which has lasted in spite of the ratification of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling and its progeny, the endorsement of civil rights legislation, and the civil and human rights movement. Nowadays, African American children in the United States are still segregated by race and socioeconomic status and attend schools that are not simply isolated but wholly imbalanced in both resources and academic results. In reality, the American educational system has by no means completely lived up to its egalitarian principles and numerous black children are still enduring the legacies of slavery, Jim Crow, and institutional discrimination. Disparity is apparent in both outcome data, such as student attainment and graduation rates, and input data, such as the distribution of competent teachers- and also in the implementation of exclusionary school discipline rules (The Leadership Conference 6).

The funding devices for public schools, which are determined principally at the state and parochial level, represent some of the most noteworthy challenges to decreasing inequality in U.S. public education system. Every state controls its public education system via restricted school districts that raise revenues chiefly by charging a property tax, with the only exception of Hawaii. Nationally, local taxes constitute fairly below half of education funding. The rest is

supplied by the state and federal governments. Though the federal government has augmented its investment in public education in 2000-01, from 7.3 percent of the general expenditure to 12.7 percent in 2009-2010, it has nonetheless fallen short of keeping pace with the increasing needs of the public education system. Furthermore, it has not completely funded its two main programs of assistance to school districts, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which offer support to meet the needs of poor students and those with disabilities, notably blacks. The outcome is that districts with huge property wealth are capable of spending countless tens of thousands of dollars per student while preserving a comparatively low tax rate as opposed to districts that lack property wealth and have to make a choice between a low tax rate and well-funded schools. More frequently they are put in a dilemma of choosing none of them (U.N. Human Rights 20).

Because the Supreme Court has prohibited federal defiance to state funding schemes, (U.S. Dept. of Educ., *Equity and Excellence*), the federal government has a progressively significant role to play in addressing racial discrepancies in public education by the means of administrative action and implementation of civil rights laws. Nonetheless, up to the present time, the federal government's reaction has been inadequate (The Leadership Conference 6). Nowadays, even the most substantial federal education statute in the United States' history- the No Child Left Behind Act- is deemed as an unfunded mandate.

Both racial and socioeconomic segregation remain preoccupying issues in the United States. In spite of endeavors to remedy racial discrepancies, millions of American students, chiefly African Americans, are still attending separate and unequal schools. In 1968, more than three decades prior to the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act, 76.6 percent of African American students attended predominantly-minority schools. For African American students,

those numbers have virtually not changed at all: as of 2010, about eight years following the adoption of the NCLB as a federal education measure that aims primarily at fostering greater educational accountability at all levels by improving school performance, and thereby, student performance, 74.1 percent of African American students attended predominantly-minority schools. Even more alarming, the number of African American and Latino students attending over 90 percent segregated schools has raised: the number of African American students attending these schools increased from 33.2 percent to 38.1 percent between 1980 and 2009 (Orfield, Kucsera, and Siegel-Hawley). Although the reasons of this trend are numerous and various, the federal government is relatively to blame for its failure to supply the strong leadership, appropriate enforcement, and enough resources required to fight segregation (The Leadership Conference 7).

In reality, the No child Left Behind Act's chief goals of boosting and eliminating the achievement gap among all students among dissimilar backgrounds involve inevitably combatting all types of segregation and discrimination, inside and outside the schools, that might engender inequalities in academic achievement among students. African American students who attend isolated and unequal predominantly-minority schools would compulsorily score much below their white cohorts who attend white-dominated schools as academic attainment is affected by the kind of schools students attend.

This profound racial isolation is compounded by socioeconomic discrimination. In actual fact, the connection is so potent that nearly every predominantly-minority school is related to high levels of poverty, which is not the situation for White-dominated schools (Orfield, Kucsera, and Siegel-Hawley 20). Nowadays, "the typical Black student attends a school where almost two out of every three classmates [64 percent] are low-income, nearly double the level in schools of

the typical White . . . student [37 percent]” (Orfield and Lee). This “double segregation” has a profound lasting academic influence on the students who undergo it, (Orfield, Kucsera, and Siegel-Hawley 27) as studies demonstrate that poverty concentration within schools plays a substantial role in determining student attainment- even more than the poverty status of individual students (Orfield, Kucsera, and Siegel-Hawley 7).

The rising racial and socioeconomic segregation of American schools is reflected by increasing disparities in their funding. Though disparities in national per-pupil expenses reduced between 1972 and 2000, inequities have since been increasing. Nowadays, for instance, while the expenditures in low-poverty districts in Illinois are significantly about \$11,312 per pupil, high-poverty districts spend only \$8,707 per pupil (Orfield, Kucsera, and Siegel-Hawley 7). This trend has been constant nationally over the past ten years (Corcoran and Evans).

High-minority and high-poverty schools frequently also have the additional burden of lower funding levels, inferior teacher quality, and higher dropout rates (U.S. Dept. of Educ., *Equity and Excellence*). The consequence is that students whose families are already confronted with hardship are retained at an even greater difficulty. For instance, the U.S. Department of Education reveals that in schools where over three-quarters of the students were categorized as low-income, “there were three times as many uncertified or out-of-field teachers in both English and science” (Corcoran and Evans 337). Furthermore- no matter of whether funding has been balanced- high-poverty and high-minority schools frequently fell short of providing opportunities for numerous students to attain at the highest level, comprising courses needed by various universities (Lamura 127). Even comparing analogous curriculum, predominantly-minority schools tend to teach a less challenging courses than well-off, non-minority schools (Rooney et al. 2). Typically, these schools supply less qualified teachers with a greater rate of turnover.

These startling circumstances contradict the stated provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act, namely those of attracting competent instructors to teach in every classroom.

Partially because of these attributes, schools with predominantly low-income African American and Latino youth depend significantly on a wide usage of suspensions and expulsions, and law enforcement as well, in order to impose discipline. Nationally, between 1999 and 2011, the percent of students announcing the existence of law enforcement personnel in their schools augmented from 54.1 to 69.8 percent (Farkas 105). Schools also have invested a substantial amount of money in safety infrastructure- for instance, the percent of students announcing security cameras in their schools augmented from 38.5 to 76.7 percent (Lamura 127). Particularly, the concentration of less-experienced or unqualified teachers and administrators, and reduced or less-trained counseling offices, has been related to the abuse of law enforcement in educational settings. In numerous schools, and mainly highly-segregated school systems such as those in New York City or Chicago, administrators even resort to the parochial police force in control of school safety and guaranteeing discipline (Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Figure 21.1.*). In New York City, the New York Police Department engages over virtually 5,000 School Safety Agents who watch the city's public schools. Conversely, there are merely 3,100 supervision counselors engaged in New York City schools (Lamura 127). This engenders countrywide inequalities in punitive treatment between White students and their African American and Latino counterparts: in 2009, African American and Latino students constituted only eighteen percent of the United States student population, but included seventy percent of school-related arrests or transfers to law enforcement (Hirschfield 12).

Students' disciplinary strategies such as suspension and expulsion also have multiplied intensely over the past four decades. Currently, around 3.3 million students are expelled of school

each year- twice the number of students expelled each year in the 1970s (N.Y. Civil Liberties Union). African American students are 3.5 times more likely to be removed from school than their White counterparts (U.S. Dept. of Educ., Office for Civil Rights 2). As officials pursue safety, however, they frequently disregard the harmful effects of these practices on the aptitude of students to learn and achieve well. Actually, students who are expelled in the ninth grade have an importantly reduced probability of being graduated and enrolled in post-secondary schooling or achieving well among a multitude of other indicators of achievement (The Council of State Governments 5). In a relatively recent research that tracked nearly one million public school students in Texas for a period of eight years, investigators reported that students who were expelled or suspended for a discretionary offense were twice more likely to fail (U.S. Dept. of Educ., Office for Civil Rights 2). Approximately ten percent of students who were expelled or suspended dropped out, in comparison to only two percent of students who were not (Balfanz, Byrnes and Fox 15). Moreover, the likelihood of students who were suspended or expelled to be involved in the juvenile justice system was roughly three times (The Council of State Governments xi).

Yet, the underfunding of, and disciplinary policy utilized in, a wide range of predominantly-minority schools does not exhaustively account for racial discrepancies in punitive treatment. Even in more affluent and majority-white schools, African American students confront considerably harsher penalties than their White counterparts (The Council of State Governments 56). In a research conducted in Florida schools, thirty nine percent of all African American students were suspended at least once, as opposed to only twenty two percent of White students (The Council of State Governments xii). Even among those suspended students, White students had only an average of 6.6 days of suspension, in comparison to African American

students who had an average of 7.4 days of suspension (Hirschfield 83). Recurrent studies have revealed that such inequalities are not due to the degree or type of the offense, but rather to dissimilar reactions by schools to identical kinds of disobedience. Specifically, African American students receive harsher punishments for less severe and more biased offenses, such as defiance, which may mirror the biases and of the schools staff (Balfanz, Byrnes and Fox 5).

Similarly, predominantly-minority schools are frequently short-staffed and ill-equipped to address common school problematic issues such as bullying and harassment. Bullying and harassment frequently lead to inferior educational achievement together with greater rates of absence, drug use, and alcohol abuse. Accordingly, it aggravates already severe discrepancies in results among all usually targeted groups in those schools, comprising racial minorities, students with disabilities and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) students. Approximately, ten percent of students aged twelve to eighteen declare that someone at school has utilized offensive words against them and more than one-third (thirty five percent) state having seen offensive graffiti at school (Skiba et al. 101). LGBT youth often confront bullying, with 81.9 percent announcing having been exposed to verbal harassment due to their sexual orientation, and around 63.5 percent reporting that they feel insecure in school (Kosciw et al. 39-44). Furthermore, the likelihood of bullied African American students' to suffer academically is much higher than their white peers. (U.S. Dept. of Educ., Nat. Cent. for Educ. Stat. and U.S. Dept. of Just.). Finally, roughly fifty percent of all girls suffer from sexual harassment in school, either by enduring sexual rumors or undergoing undesirable touching (Kosciw et al. 39-44). Sexual harassment engenders inferior academic results, trouble in studying, and higher rates of truancy (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services).

In a nutshell, African American students frequently attend segregated schools where they obtain an inferior education and where law enforcement agencies, rather than school administrators, apply discipline. What is more, even students who do not attend isolated schools are excessively disciplined by being expelled from the classroom. The discrepancies of treatment in school discipline that African American students confronted by also gives rise to huge racial inequalities in attainment and outcome (Hill and Holly 2, 12). Clearly, these attributes and disapproving conditions place a high hurdle on the way of the No Child Left Behind Act and deter it from living up to the promise of closing the black white achievement gap.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka decision's promise was a country in which all students from all backgrounds and irrespective of race would have an identical chance to learn. Yet, that promise remains unmet: American students are still intensely separated by class and race, with racial minorities and low-income students far less likely to receive a high-level education and to be treated equally (The Leadership Conference 8). Correspondingly, the promise of the No Child Left Behind Act was schools in which all students from all backgrounds perform at high levels. That promise, however, has seemingly faded away.

II. Origins of the Black-White Achievement Gap: The Legacy of Slavery

In reality, a small number of historians and scholars attribute the present black white achievement gap to a historical background. Their evaluation is most frequently founded in the diverse plausible explanations and theories that will be discussed in the coming sections of this chapter. We argue, however, that the existing black white academic performance issues have also been unquestionably determined by distant historical far-reaching evidences; namely slavery codes, Jim Crow laws, and discriminatory statutes. As a matter of fact, the bulk of the history of

slavery is consequential; the academic breach between blacks and whites can be drawn back as far as 1619 when the first slaves went to the British Colonial America. Indeed, the racist underpinnings of American slavery made the institution immeasurably significant and elongated its scope far beyond the economic fabric of colonial society and profound into social, psychological, and educational fabric of the ensuing generations. African American educational experience during slavery clearly discloses that regarding educational accomplishment, they have experienced a deliberate and shattering opportunity gap, when equaled to the educational openings of white students.

American slavery is repeatedly referred to as the “peculiar institution.” The phrase appears to have been coined by Thomas Jefferson. But what significance does it have? Slavery itself is not uncommon or occasional. In fact, the practice is virtually as ancient as human society itself. For instance, the Code of Hammurabi, c.1800 B.C.E., discussed the fitting treatment of slaves. Slavery is cited in the Bible. The accounts of ancient Rome and Greece, medieval Europe, Africa, the Middle East, China, the West Indies, and the Mediterranean are full of instances of numerous practices of human oppression, involuntary servitude, and serfdom. Slavery has occurred in one form or another in nearly all human societies and continents in the world (D’Souza). In investigating history, it is vital to bear in mind the warnings of author, journalist, educator, and “Father of Black History,” Carter G. Woodson, who recommends in *The Mis-Education of the Negro* that unless the flaws of today are regarded in their historic background, they will become valueless to the present and future generations. He further asserts that “The conditions of today have been determined by what has taken place in the past, and in a careful study of this history we may see more clearly the great theatre of events in which the Negro has played a part (9).”

A considerable number of scholars and educators link the foundation of the black–white achievement gap to the period of its discovery by the United States Army in 1917, when the first extensive mental-testing program exposed that white soldiers achieved considerably higher scores than black soldiers (Jencks and Philips 15-16). Nevertheless, appraisal of the influence of slavery on the performance of blacks has to be drawn as far as the beginning of the 17th century when blacks first reached British colonial America, till their liberation roughly 250 years later. Over the sequence of that period, slavery grew from a lightly organized system of contracted indentured status for a restricted period to an iron-clad system of chattel bondage that comprised not only the period of the slave's ordinary life but also that of his or her progeny. Beginning in the mid-1600s, Colonial America progressively started transforming itself from a society with slaves to a slave society established on race by the early 1700s.

In countless historical instances, one finds proofs of slave masters enslaving people who symbolized dissimilar religions, nationalities, ethnicities, or races. It is extremely rare, however, historically speaking, for a whole ethnic group to be confined for more than a few generations, as blacks were. This, together with the racial justification of white supremacy and black dependency, is what renders American slavery such a peculiar institution. The racist foundations of American slavery made the institution tremendously influential and protracted its scope far beyond the economic fabric of colonial society, where it commenced, and profound into the social, psychological, and educational fabric of subsequent generations. Branding African American slaves as racially and mentally inferior concurrently branded all African Americans—even those who were free—as ethnically low-grade. Accordingly, the enslavement of a number of blacks based on the belief of their apparent racial subordination in reality enslaved all blacks. Impeding the educational growth of blacks is one of the peculiar institution's most shocking

heritages. Therefore, how far does the legacy of the blacks' historic scholastic involvements during slavery, racial discrimination, racial segregation, and Jim Crowism explain the present gap in educational performance between white and black students? Or is the gap owing to the absence of present-day educational pledge and engagements? Or is something else accountable for the present educational status of African Americans? (Paige and Witty 81-92). In other words, is the current black white achievement gap the outcome of blacks' long history of slavery and discrimination?

Some political scholars, like Manning Marable, confidently find that “the fundamental problem of American democracy in the twenty-first century is the problem of 'structural racism': the deep patterns of socioeconomic inequality and accumulated disadvantage that are coded by race, and constantly justified in public discourse by both racist stereotypes and white indifference” (22-23). Others assert that even President George W. Bush relatively agreed with this viewpoint—at least in principle. As a proof, they refer to his statements in July 2003, when he mentioned slavery as “one of the greatest crimes of history” and pronounced, “many of the issues that still trouble us today have roots in the bitter experience of other times” (qtd. in Sammon). Conversely, George Mason University's Walter Williams is among those who fervently disagree with the notion that historical experience and structural discrimination are to bear responsibility, contradicting, “This vestige-of-slavery argument, as an explanation for the pathology seen in some black neighborhoods, is simply nonsense when you think about it.” Williams backs his position by referring to data that display that African American cultural and social pathologies are more severe these days than they were at the threshold of the twentieth century, when racism and racial discrimination were obviously much more noticeable.

Referring to survey figures, Sniderman and Piazza display that whites are at present far less likely than in the past to be racist against African Americans, making recurrent claims of discrimination as a justification for the African American disadvantage is mainly arguable. Academics Paige and Witty find that the 2008 election of Barack Obama as current President of the United States seems to offer a solid argument in favor of the Sniderman and Piazza's survey discovery that over time prejudice has given ground. While the turnout in favor of President Obama's election was enormous in the African American community, everyone saw that he would need robust backing from within the white community to triumph. All the same, most had persistent suspicions that enough whites would really vote for Obama to elect him President of the United States. There was a prevalent debate of the Bradley effect, describing the Mayor Bradley 1982 race for Governor of California where he was in advance in the polls even up to the Election Day, but lost the race. The Bradley effect refers to what is believed to be the tendency of some whites to tell pollsters and others that they are either doubtful or that they back the African American candidate when in reality their actual intent is to vote against the black candidate. President Obama's election pours cold water on the idea of a Bradley effect and adds credibility to the Sniderman and Piazza findings (93).

The existing black–white achievement gap most surely has origins in the historical experience of African Americans, starting with slavery and going along through the Black Codes, racial discrimination, and legally enforced separate but unequal educational openings. This past and the long-lasting impact that it continues to have cannot be merely disregarded. Conversely, by the mid-1970s after the enactment and the ensuing implementation of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling, discrimination in general—and unequal educational opportunities in particular—were significantly reduced, and as such became less strong barriers to African

American educational progress. As a matter of fact, it can be argued that after the mid-1970s, though racism and racial discrimination still exist as hurdles to African American educational growth, were no longer the main hurdles hindering African American students from attaining high levels. This does not mean that all race-based issues were completely eradicated after the mid-70s, and that educational opportunities became equal between the two races. In fact, racism and discrimination were still apparent after the mid-1970s and still exist even today. But they do no longer remain the major barriers to African American educational opportunities after the mid-1970s (Paige and Witty 94-95).

Doubtlessly, the African American educational experience clearly reveals that regarding educational accomplishment, black students have experienced a deliberate and devastating opportunity gap, when equated with the educational chances provided for their white peers. The educational constraints levied by slavery and educational limits resulting from the Jim Crow regulations and a discriminatory social system were existent, and they had tangible educational impacts on African Americans' educational advancement. These historical factors did in effect influence the present black–white achievement gap in a way or another. On the other hand, though history is significant, it is not destiny; slavery and its legacy should no longer be regarded as an explanation for the present miserable academic performance of African American students in America. Stephan and Abigail Thernstrom's book *No Excuses* explain clearly that the realities of slavery cannot be discharged, but neither should they be referred to rationalize the persistent existence of the achievement gap. Separate but unequal educational chances and racial discrimination are historical evidences; they are an ineradicable part of the African American experience (Paige and Witty 94-96).

Numerous African Americans have surmounted the racial obstacles and hurdles positioned in their way. African Americans have been triumphant in all conceivable fields from the earliest days of British Colonial America. Though they had to overcome incredible odds, agonizing experiments, and severe events, African Americans always succeeded. Paige and Witty openly affirm that “the achievement gap can be closed. There is nothing wrong with African American children's DNA. They can learn. But in too many places, they are not learning-and too often, their underperformance is blamed on a racist system left over from slavery.” This gives erroneous justifications to American students and teachers for failing to attain high levels (94-96). In a relatively recent interview for the Public Broadcasting System’s (PBS) show, *African in America, Part 4*, historian James Horton, an eminent professor at George Washington University, made an inspiring distinction, uttering that slavery is not the root of the race issue in the United States of America by the end of the 20th century, he affirmed that “If it had been the problem of slavery, it'd have been over in 1865” and adds that “It is that justification of slavery that we are still trying to deal with, more than 100 years after the abolition of slavery.”

Horton's view point is that blacks’ suffering today does not result from the remnants of slavery, but rather from the lasting vestiges of the “justification” of slavery. Indeed, slave proprietors sought via all means to degrade blacks by utilizing legal decrees, publications, meetings, churches, and every imaginable ploy to persuade the colonists and the blacks themselves that African Americans were savages, unable of a decent living, and deserving enslavement. Horton James further asserts that it is the justification of slavery that Americans are still attempting to cope with. The stereotype of blacks as bestial, as low-grade, and as inferior to whites, was strengthened by every permissible and societal means obtainable for more than 200 years. This is what constituted the peculiarity of that peculiar institution. This is what set it apart

from other historical chapters of bondage. This is what still remains- it is the vestige of the lingering racial stigma (Horton J.). In reality, though the whole of the history of slavery is to be held accountable for the current and persistent academic discrepancies between black students and their more affluent white cohorts in U.S. public schools, shedding specific light on the educational experiences of African Americans during the slave period is crucial. More relevant, however, is the review of the most common and brutal tools that were utilized to deny African Americans' access to education, namely; the enslavement of African American's mind and enforced illiteracy.

III. African American Education during the Slave Period

In fact, the history of African American education in the U.S. is exclusively unrelated to the experiences of any other racial and ethnic groups. Under the menace of miscellaneous cruel laws and ruthless tactics against the teaching of slaves to read and write, literacy was far from being the custom for African Americans in the slavery epoch. Most southern states passed laws prohibiting the teaching of slaves and in northern non-slave states, very few blacks were privileged to receive a formal education in utterly segregated schools. Many slaves did learn how to read through Christian instruction but only those whose slaveholders allowed them to attend. The severe punishments that slaves who desired to attain an education endured led them to practice how to read and write in secrecy and to pass on their newly learned skills to other slaves. Even at the antebellum period, the very few public education facilities that existed for African Americans were decrepit, underfunded, and often staffed by barely literate teachers. All such tough conditions doubtlessly have inevitable consequences on the current black white academic inconsistencies in U.S. public schools.

All through the U.S. colonial epoch, two noticeable religious groups, Congregationalists and Anglicans, both deemed the conversion of slaves as a spiritual compulsion, and the aptitude to read scriptures was perceived as part of this procedure (Monaghan, 2001). The Great Awakening was considered as a catalyst for boosting education for the whole members of society. Writing, however, was not as often encouraged as reading. Writing was perceived as a badge of status, and seen as needless for numerous members of society, comprising slaves. Catechisms, memorization, and scripture constituted the foundation of what education was available. In fact, the achievement gap between Blacks and Whites can be drawn as far back as 1619 when the first slaves reached the colonies. Anderson affirms that “the laws against teaching slaves to read and write grew out of a variety of fears and concerns, the simplest of which concerned the use of literacy as a means to freedom” (“The Historical Context for the Test Score Gap” 2). Anderson also gives a noteworthy vision of the extent of the achievement gap between whites and slaves during the 1800s:

The first achievement gap that Blacks had to overcome was the “Literacy Gap.” As early as 1800 virtually all Whites in America were literate. Young White women, in a general population in which the median age was about 16, were just as literate in 1800 as White men. Both were approximately 90% literate...Blacks were highly illiterate. Indeed, the Black illiteracy rate of approximately 90 percent in 1800 was the exact opposite of the White literacy rate of 90%. Although slavery and racial oppression were responsible for the astronomical gap in the Black-White literacy rate in 1800, it was nonetheless a major achievement gap that Blacks would struggle to overcome within and beyond slavery. (“The Historical Context for the Test Score Gap” 2)

In 1967, Bullock displayed a parallel between education and values of society through a kind of interracial tolerance: “Many Southern Blacks were able to gain closer and more personal contact with the master class, acquire some degree of literacy, develop an unplanned-for leadership structure, and thereby experience upward mobility within Southern society by obtaining an education” (4). Though teaching slaves was prohibited and unlawful, many were educated clandestinely by Whites and other educated Blacks. Even though there is clearly an achievement gap on nearly every educational measure between students identifying themselves as blacks or African Americans and those identifying themselves as whites or Caucasians, the gap was historically much bigger than it is nowadays. Furthermore, the history of black education in the United States is inimitably unlike the experiences of other racial and ethnic groups in the United States, comprising Hispanics. Hence, some historic grounds of the black-white gap originate from no other ethnic or racial group in the United States. Before the Civil War, less than 5 percent of African Americans in the whole U.S. were deemed literate_ a figure that encompassed both slaves and non-slaves. In the South, where fears of a slave uprising gradually augmented after about 1840, most states had actually approved regulations barring the teaching of slaves. (Anderson *The Education of Blacks in the South*). Those blacks in northern, non-slave states who were lucky enough to obtain a formal education were very likely to have been taught in totally separated schools (Johnson et al.).

By the end of the Civil War, federally operated Freedman’s Bureau schools were opened in the South to instruct the plain fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic to a small number of newly emancipated slaves. Northern religious groups also directed representatives to the South to spread literacy together with the gospel to African Americans. Thanks to the assistance of visionaries like the former slave Booker T. Washington, establishments of black

education gradually spread all through the former Confederacy, until by 1910 when virtually 70 percent of American blacks were deemed functionally literate, (Johnson et al.) marking a noteworthy decrease in the educational gap between blacks and whites. Still, public educational accommodations for blacks- where they were accessible- were dilapidated, underfunded, and frequently staffed by unqualified teachers who were themselves barely literate. Besides, in the South, black education was a wholly isolated issue, with the force of law to make sure it remained that way. So at least through the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, much of the black-white achievement gap could be ascribed openly to domination, discrimination, and exclusion.

In inspecting the educational practices of the antebellum era, it is hard to determine exact data or statistics. Yet, in 1986 Genovese investigated a number of these areas and provides some stimulating insights. W. E. B. Du Bois and other historians and scholars estimated that nearly 9% of slaves reached at least a minimal degree of literacy by 1865. Genovese notes that: "this is entirely plausible and may even be too low" (562). Particularly in cities and large towns, numerous free blacks and literate slaves had bigger opportunities to impart others, and both white and black activists conducted unlawful schools in cities such as Richmond, Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Charleston, San Francisco, Sacramento, San Diego, and Atlanta. Furthermore, abolitionist Fredrick Douglass declares in his biography that he realized the pathway from slavery to freedom and it was to have the power to read and write. Schiller marked "After all, most educated slaves did not find that the acquisition of literacy led inexorably and inevitably to physical freedom and the idea that they needed an education to achieve and experience existential freedoms is surely problematic" (11-29).

Slaves had been obtaining biblical literacy from their owners as early as the 1710s. Slaves like Phillis Wheatley, who was instructed in her master's home, ended up being intellectually smart in that area and eventually started writing poetry and addressing government leaders on her feelings about bondage. In reality, Wheatley had an incomparable opportunity that was not open to everyone. A good number of slaves learnt how to read through Christian education but only those whose owners permitted them to attend. Some slave masters would only boost literacy for slaves because they were in need of someone to run errands for them and further minor causes. Slave owners prevented slaves from learning to write as they considered writing as the monopoly of educated white men (Bly 261-294). African-American ministers would frequently endeavor to instruct a number of slaves to read in secrecy, but there were very limited openings for concentrated periods of teaching.

There is a proof of slaves learning how to read and write clandestinely. Close to George Washington's estate in Mount Vernon, there have been anonymous slates found out with writings imprinted in them. Bly declared that on the slave sites possessed by Thomas Jefferson there have been "237 unidentified slates, 27 pencil leads, 2 pencil slates, and 18 writing slates were uncovered in houses once occupied by Jefferson's black bond servants." That displays that slaves were clandestinely learning reading and writing skills on their own when time permitted it, most likely at night. They also think that slaves learnt their letters in the dirt since it was much easier to erase than writing on slates. Slaves then transmitted their newly learned skills to others (Bly 261-294).

Penalties for slaves who wanted to accomplish an education were commonly left to their masters, while the punishments for black slaves' white teachers differed from one state to another, and were largely bitterer and crueller in the Deep South. Most frequently, slaves would

be stricken, and whipped. According to Genovese's research of slave narratives "among the bitterest recollections of ex-slaves were those of whippings and name calling insults for trying to learn to read. Few things so outraged their sense of justice" (565). In reality, physical sanctions of the slaves were comparatively less brutal than conditioning their minds for a lifetime of slavery.

A. Enslavement of the Mind

Realizing the detrimental effect of knowledge and literacy on the institution of slavery and fearing that educated slaves would be influenced by enlightenment ideas and would subsequently defy their owners' superiority and ask for freedom, slave owners resorted to the most oppressive tactics; namely the enslavement of the African Americans' mind. They employed their despotism and violence against the human mind. This intellectual bondage aimed at denigrating the slaves' sense of self-worth and creating in their minds a strong feeling of inferiority and acceptance of their lower status in comparison to whites. Slave masters wanted slaves to believe that both their color and African ancestry were badges of degradation.

When people read or reflect on the black episodes of slavery in America, they virtually always emphasize the physical bondage of the slaves, the incarceration of their bodies and the horrifying physical cruelty that they bore. Yet, the psychological, emotional, and intellectual bondage that slaves suffered received less thought. Social and mental coercion was undeniably central to slavery, however. Slave masters incessantly sought to destroy and denigrate the slaves' sense of self-worth in an effort to maintain their control over the slave population. They repeatedly resorted to strategies to generate in the minds of slaves a false sensation of inferiority and a forced recognition of their barbaric or degrading status with regards to whites (Paige and Witty 81). A delegate to the Virginia Legislature affirmed, in 1832, that "we have as far as

possible closed every avenue by which light may enter slaves' minds. If we could extinguish the capacity to see the light our work would be completed; they (the slaves) will then be on a level with the beasts of the field” (qtd. in Philips 56).

Prominent author Ira Goldenberg asserted in his book, *Oppression and Social Intervention: Essays on the Human Condition and the Problems of Change* that the slave masters' aim was to have their slaves completely assume a sense of inferiority. Precisely, slave masters desired that their slaves believe that “their African ancestry had tainted them, that their color was a badge of degradation” (Stampp 295). This steady destruction of self-worth and the process of forcing people “either subtly or with obvious malice to finally succumb to the insidious process that continually undermines hope and subverts the desire to become”-is the hallmark of repression and despotism (Goldenberg 3). During his travels in the United States, French historian Alexis de Tocqueville was stunned by the harsh and brutal strategies of Colonial America; he expressed his attitude on the issue by declaring that “The only means by which the ancients maintained slavery were fetters and death.” He further added “[But] the Americans of the South of the Union have discovered more intellectual securities for the duration of their power. They have employed their despotism and their violence against the human mind” (qtd. in Bennett 148).

Indeed, the slave masters' main role was conditioning their slaves' minds for perpetual slavery. They understood well that the efficiency of their indoctrination endeavors would principally control the accomplishment they would have with their slaves. Commonly, slaves' indoctrination included at least five different areas: severe and instant discipline, a sense of their own inferiority and of whites' superiority, a firm belief in the owners' greater power, recognition of the owners' standards, and a profound sense of their own weakness and dependency (Paige

and Witty 82). On the issue of the efficacy of this form of mind control, historian Carter G. Woodson expresses his opinion pointedly in the following statement:

If you can control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his action. When you determine what a man shall think you do not have to concern yourself about what he will do. If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself. If you make a man think he is justly an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back door. He will go without being told; and if there is no back door, his very nature will demand one. (84-85)

B. Enforced Illiteracy

Controlling the African Americans' minds during the period of slavery was not the only despotic tactic and oppressive means that was utilized against blacks. Imposing ignorance and enforcing illiteracy is a further control mechanism the slave owners resorted to in an attempt to affirm their superiority and protect the institution of slavery for many years to come. In fact, many slaveholders enforced illiteracy as a well-studied enslavement tool in an effort to prevent slaves from learning to read or to write and imposed brutal penalties on slaves' attempts to attain an education. While reading was not banned at the beginning, the teaching of slaves to write has soon become illegal in a considerable number of states as slave owners feared the spread of written abolitionist materials. Many states erected a series of laws and statutes that prohibited the education of slaves and imposed harsh sanctions on their teachers. South Carolina was the first state to prohibit the teaching of slaves to write in 1740, and was soon followed by Virginia in 1819 which instituted laws that made it a crime for slaves to learn how to read or to write.

Furthermore, the fears of slave insurrections and the spread of abolitionist materials and ideology led many states to employ radical restrictions on slaves' literacy and reflection. In spite of the brutality of these laws, they did not completely prevent the slaves from attaining some degree of literacy. Actually, the emergence of several abolitionist groups and organizations, by the end of the 18th century, helped freed slaves with their educational and economic aid, and instituted a few schools for the freed blacks.

Slave masters' aim was to make slaves helpless and remain all dominant, barring slaves from acquiring knowledge was disapprovingly imperative. Recognizing that slaves' illiteracy was a valued control instrument, a huge number of slave masters severely imposed ignorance. This is crucial to the comprehension of the current black-white achievement gap. It is a historical truth that numerous slave owners purposefully forced illiteracy as an enslavement device and, as such, forcefully imposed strategies intended to inhibit slaves from learning to read and write. These policies were not arbitrary; they were well studied and cautiously implemented. Slaveholders endorsed rulings that enforced severe lawful punishments on slaves who attempted to learn to read or write, as well as any person who was caught instructing them to do so. They also forbade the employment of slaves in areas that involved writing (Paige and Witty 83). In 1740, South Carolina passed the first laws prohibiting slave education. While there were no restrictions on reading or drawing, it became unlawful to teach slaves to write.

This legislation followed the Stono Rebellion. On Sunday, September 9th, 1739 the British colony of South Carolina was stunned by a slave rebellion that ended with the death of sixty people. Commanded by an Angolan called Jemmy, a group of twenty slaves planned an uprising on the banks of the Stono River. After breaking into Hutchinson's store the gang, now equipped with guns, calls for their freedom. As they marched, supervisors were murdered and

unwilling slaves were compelled to join the company. The group attained the Edisto River where white colonials descended upon them, assassinating most of the insurgents. As fears increased among plantation landlords regarding the spread of forged passes, abolitionist materials, and other provocative writings, the need to contain slaves' aptitude to interconnect with one another became more noticeable. On the issue, the State Assembly passed the following:

... [W]hereas the having of slaves taught to write, or suffering them to be employed in writing, may be attended with great inconveniences, Be it therefore enacted the authority aforesaid, That all and every person or persons whatsoever, who shall hereafter teach, or cause any slave or slaves to be taught, to write, or shall use or employ any slave as a scribe in any manner of writing whatsoever, hereafter taught to write, every such person and persons, shall, for every such offence, forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds current money. (McCord 461)

While the statute does not explain any penalties for the slaves who might reach this high-quality form of literacy, the financial costs for teachers are clear. Georgia modeled its own prohibition on teaching slaves to write, in 1758, after South Carolina's earlier legislation. Once more, reading was not banned. Throughout the colonial era, reading instruction was linked to the spread of Christianity, so it was not impacted by obstructive legislation until much later (Monaghan, 243). Being terrified of the threat of black literacy to the slave system- which was based on slaves' dependence on their owners- whites in a number of other colonies established laws banning slaves from learning to read or write and making it a crime for others to instruct them. Virginia was one them, the following is an excerpt from Virginia Revised Code of 1819:

That all meetings or assemblages of slaves, or free negroes or mulattoes mixing and associating with such slaves at any meeting-house or houses, &c., in the night; or at any SCHOOL OR SCHOOLS for teaching them READING OR WRITING, either in the day or night, under whatsoever pretext, shall be deemed and considered an UNLAWFUL ASSEMBLY; and any justice of a county, &c., wherein such assemblage shall be, either from his own knowledge or the information of others, of such unlawful assemblage, &c., may issue his warrant, directed to any sworn officer or officers, authorizing him or them to enter the house or houses where such unlawful assemblages, &c., may be, for the purpose of apprehending or dispersing such slaves, and to inflict corporal punishment on the offender or offenders, at the discretion of any justice of the peace, not exceeding twenty lashes. (qtd. in Goodell 2)

All other states adopted similar laws with the exception of Kentucky and Kansas which were the only Southern states not to have approved such statutes. Punishments for a slave caught learning to read or write ranged from brutal beating to physical mutilation. Whites, as well, could be penalized with fines or even prison for disrespecting these laws (Paige and Witty 83-84). Besides, the most despotic restrictions on slave education were a response to Nat Turner's Revolt in Southampton County, Virginia during the summer of 1831. Nat Turner is broadly considered as one of the most complex figures in U.S. history and his revolt is deemed as one of America's most well-known slave rebellions. Turner was profoundly dedicated to his Christian faith and thought he received messages from God via revelations and signs in nature. Nat Turner's rebellion was one of the bloodiest uprisings in U.S. history. It exploded a culture of terror in Virginia that ultimately expanded to the rest of the South, and is thought to have accelerated the

coming of the Civil War. Yet, as a direct consequence of the rebellion numerous Southern states, comprising North Carolina, tightened constraints on African Americans.

This incident not only triggered shock waves throughout the slave holding South, but it had a chiefly extensive effect on education over the subsequent three decades. The fears of slave rebellions and the spread of abolitionist tools and thought led to fundamental constraints on literacy, gatherings and travel. The illiteracy of the slaves was deemed essential to the safety of the slave masters (Albanese, 1976). Both reading and thinking were to be banned at any cost as the slaveholders feared the spread of abolitionist resources and they did not want slaves to question their authority as well.

The uprising was met with innumerable responses on the part of various states and different legislations were passed as well. For example, in Mississippi, the government passed legislation, in 1841, in which it obliged all free blacks to quit the state in attempt not to be able to teach other slaves and create an insurgence. Delaware also passed a similar regulation, in 1831, that banned the assembly of a dozen or more black slaves late at night. Likewise, in Alabama, a law was enacted in 1833 that penalized any person who began the education of a slave 250 to 550 dollars. Nevertheless, in spite of the brutality of these laws, they failed to completely ban all slaves from reaching some level of literacy. Slaveholders controlled their slaves with dissimilar cruel tactics. As a matter of fact, many slave masters challenged the rules and educated their slaves to read and write. In spite of the exception made by Frederick Douglass, a particularly literate abolitionist, illiteracy among slaves was the norm. Georgia Baker, a former slave, heartbreakingly evokes decades later to author Peter Irons: “None of us niggers never knowed nothin' 'bout readin' and writin'. Dere warn't no school for niggers den, and I ain't never been to

school a day in my life. Niggers was more skeered of newspapers dan dey is of snake now, and us never knowed what a Bible was dem days” (274-75).

The rise of a wide range of abolitionist organizations, by the end of the 18th century, played an important role in the education of freed blacks. In the 1780s a group named “Pennsylvania society for promoting the abolition of slavery” (PAS) adopted anti-slavery tactics. They assisted freed slaves with their educational and economic aid. They also provided a helping hand with legalized duties, like ensuring they did not get sold back into slavery. Another anti-slavery group called “The New York Manumission Society” (NYMS) was remarkably efficient in the eradication of slavery; one important thing they did was instituting a school for free blacks. “The NYMS established the African Free School in 1787 that, during its first two decades of existence, enrolled between 100 and 200 students annually, registering a total of eight hundred pupils by 1822” (Polgar 229-258).

Additionally, the “Pennsylvania society for promoting the abolition of slavery” (PAS) established a number of schools for the free blacks and had them run only by freed African Americans. They were taught several skills such as reading, writing, grammar, math, and geography. The schools would have an annual assessment day to demonstrate to the public, parents, and contributors the knowledge the students have gained. Its primary role was to demonstrate to the white population that African Americans can be operating in society. There are several surviving records of what they would be taught in the free schools. Some of the work disclosed that they were preparing the students for a middle class position in society. From its foundation in 1787 and for more than six decades, the African Free School provided education for Africans Americans in New York City (Polgar 229-258). Clearly, the achievement gap between black students and their white peers is the end-product of distant deep origins and a wide

range of miscellaneous probable explanations. It is evenly consequential as it has many detrimental impacts on the lives of African Americans.

Conclusion

As federal education policies incorporated testing and accountability as a part of their school upgrading initiatives, notably through the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002, the black-white achievement gap is becoming more and more discernible. Statistics eerily portray that there are startling academic disparities among black and white students; black students' underachievement is so marked and lags behind their white peers on nearly every scholastic assessment measure, even after the espousal of the NCLB that aims chiefly at boosting and eradicating the achievement gap among all students.

Numerous educationalists and scholars trace the roots of the black-white achievement gap to the point of its discovery by the American Army in 1917, when the first large-scale mental-testing program disclosed that white soldiers attained extensively higher scores than black soldiers. However, for a thorough understanding of the gap one must go back even further, before Emancipation, to the colonial and antebellum eras. In other words, the entire history of the black experience in America is concerned; more relevant is the issue of the enslavement of the African Americans' mind and enforced illiteracy. The African American educational experience makes it unarguably unambiguous that regarding educational attainment, African American students have experienced a premeditated and an incapacitating opportunity gap, when compared to the educational opportunities of white students.

When people read or think about the horrors of slavery in America, they virtually always highlight the physical bondage of the slaves; less thought is ascribed to the mental, emotional, and intellectual oppression that slaves endured. To uphold their control over the slave population, proprietors incessantly sought to subdue and denigrate the slaves' sense of self-worth. They centered focus on the process of conditioning slaves' minds for a lifetime of slavery. Recognizing that slaves' ignorance was a valued control device, many slave holders sternly enforced illiteracy. This is crucial to the understanding of the current black-white achievement gap. It is a historical fact that numerous slave owners deliberately enforced ignorance as an enslavement tool and, as such, vigorously imposed strategies designed to preclude slaves from learning to read and write. Slave masters enacted laws that enforced severe legal penalties on slaves who attempted to acquire reading or writing skills, as well as anyone who was caught teaching them to do so. They also banned the employment of slaves in services that involved writing.

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CHAPTER TWO

Explanations for the Black White Achievement Gap

There is a quagmire of conflicting views to explain the black-white achievement gap. Which view one favors can depend on many different variables, not the least of which are racial allegiances and political ideology. But the whole issue boils down to whether or not one believes all children can learn...but the degree to which one believes that all children can learn seems to be the determinant of which explanation for the gaps' existence one finds most compelling. (Paige and Witty 73)

Introduction

Actually, the potential explanations that laid the foundations for the black white achievement gap are dissimilar and varied. Actually, there is a wide range of factors and a huge array of miscellaneous explanations, or rather theories that can be held accountable for the present African American underachievement in U.S. public schools. The achievement gap issue necessitates a profound and strong comprehension of the gap's grounds. There are no unanimously conventional causes of the black-white achievement gap. Explanations vary broadly along ideological, racial, and even political lines. Of the numerous explanations that have been provided, some are the outcome of scrupulous analysis and constructive study. Others stem from ideological- or some might consider them biased- positions. Indisputably, these beliefs and views are profoundly held. The explanations usually provided to account for the gap spring from socio-cultural, socioeconomic, pedagogical, and genetic roots. Racism, genetic factors, black

oppositional culture, socioeconomic and sociocultural attributes, and educational factors are mere possible explanations of African American achievement and the gaps between their performance and that of their white peers.

I. Attributes of African American Underachievement

In an attempt to probe into the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act on addressing the academic achievement gap between black students and their more affluent counterparts, and appraise the magnitude of the gap notably after the implementation of the NCLB, it is crucial to investigate the different probable explanations that laid the foundations for the black white achievement gap. In reality, African American underachievement in U.S. public education is an issue that has been widely explored by a considerable number of researchers. Investigating different causes and grounds that planted the seeds of the academic achievement gap between black students and their white cohorts in American public schools has preoccupied a wide range of scientists, scholars, economists, sociologists, anthropologists, education experts and politicians. They all offered dissimilar probable arguments that might account for the black white achievement gap. Some provided potential justifications are substantial as they arise from well-documented research and constructive studies; others are plain speculations and biased ideologies. What has to be retained, however, is that there is no sole common explanation of the black white achievement gap; what follow are mere plausible theories and arguments that might explain the extensive academic achievement discrepancies between black and white students.

The achievement gap issue necessitates a profound and strong comprehension of the gap's grounds. There are no unanimously conventional causes of the black-white achievement gap. Explanations vary broadly along ideological, racial, and even political lines. Of the numerous

explanations that have been provided, some are the outcome of scrupulous analysis and constructive study. Others stem from ideological- or some might consider them biased- positions. Indisputably, these beliefs and views are profoundly held. The explanations usually provided to account for the gap spring from socio-cultural, socioeconomic, pedagogical, and genetic roots. Though deeply held, these explanations are just theories. Moreover, even though a wide range of people stick to one explanation, claiming it to be the sole existing ground behind the current gap, the reality is that there is no single justification of the issue.

While the comparatively low performance of African American students has been tracked for a number of years, the endorsement of the No Child Left Behind Act has brought a more concentrated attention on both assessing and understanding black-white achievement gaps. Scientists and theoreticians alike have scrutinized most features of human character, performance, and endeavor to attempt to identify significant links and treatments for the enormous dissimilarity between African American and white student attainment. Included among the most distinguished recurrent justifications are racism and genetic factors, black identity and oppositional culture, socioeconomic status and disparities, sociocultural attributes, and educational factors. In the section that follows, the literature on each of these subject variables is scrutinized for their likelihood as explanations of African American achievement and the gaps between their performance and that of their white peers. Though the hierarchy of the different explanations inhere is interchangeable, the placement of the most subjective or rather less convincing arguments at the outset is meant to shed more light on the most potent explanations by the end. Racist attitudes and their inevitable aftermath on African Americans' rocky experience in the U.S. are to be approached as first probable explanations that planted the seeds of academic disparities between black and white students in American public education.

A. Racism

A considerable number of researchers maintain that African American experience in the U.S. is replete with obstacles which hindered them from attaining high at schools. In a society that is as racially stratified as America, whites' discriminatory attitudes against blacks and the long history of bondage, Jim Crowism, and racism have inevitable consequences on African American students' academic achievement. After meticulously probing into the research literature, John Diamond, in his paper "Are we Barking up the Wrong Tree?" contends that the in an attempt to understand achievement gaps one should rather understand the academic achievement restraints confronted by African Americans due to the racial stratification of society. He confirms that "Black students face a racialized educational terrain that creates material and symbolic disadvantage for them" and further announces that "These disadvantages are embedded in our social fabric and reflected in our social structures, schools, and perceptions of race and intellectual ability (10)."

Diamond clarifies some of the distinguishing experiences of African American students founded on their race: first, the schools that black students go to are frequently less conducive to their scholastic success (Diamond and Spillane 1145-1176). Second, while the mechanisms are complex to elucidate, school segregation- specifically the concentration of low-income African American students in a number of schools- contributes to lower results for students attending these schools even after controlling for students' previous attainment (Bankston and Caldas 535-555), and schools in the United States have become more and more re-segregated in recent years (Orfield and Eaton 424). And lastly, African Americans pay higher costs for less decent housing that is more likely to be situated in isolated neighborhoods; they have inferior levels of

employment and professional flexibility, lower home loan supports, and more undesirable connections with the legal system (Bonilla-Silva).

A wide array of researchers contend that the African American experience is dissimilar to any other experience of a minority group in the United States and that this dissimilarity plays a vital role in African American trails to success. As opposed to Latin or Asian immigrants, who are frequently considered as voluntary immigrants- individuals who were determined to go to the United States, either for better job openings or to follow an education- African Americans are regarded as involuntary immigrants, compelled to enter the United States by someone else's hand (Ogbu "Racial Stratification" 264-98). Therefore, their views of the American dream and American success might vary from those experienced by other minority groups in the USA. Black Americans are hence considered to have shaped a combined identity that is defined by domination, leading to many blacks perceiving and fearing the acceptance of "white ways" as a device for breaking African American unity and identity.

Other scholars claim that the marginalization and communal ill-treatment of African Americans by whites merely on the foundation of skin color has impacted some black individuals by molding the opinions they hold of themselves and those around them. As the endeavors made by African Americans to gain deserved places in academia and the workforce are rebuffed, a larger number assumes these beliefs (Ogbu "Racial Stratification" 264-98). They might experience feelings of uncertainty and submission as they begin to question their intelligence in comparison to whites (Ogbu "Racial Stratification" 264-98). With the many impediments blacks experience as a result of a racially stratified society, joined with the hurdles they might generate for themselves through internalization of chauvinistic beliefs, the black-white achievement gap is predictable. Moreover, racism is not the only probable hurdle that stood on the way of African

Americans' success in U.S. public schools, genetic explanations, though scientifically rejected, are very commonly offered to account for the persistent black white achievement gap.

B. Genetic Factors

Furthermore, a number of scientifically alleged researchers attribute the existing and persistent wide achievement gap between blacks and whites to genetic factors proclaiming that intelligence is biologically determined by race and therefore blacks are intellectually inferior to whites. In reality, such kind of biased arguments pore over what we may call “scientific racism.” Actually, the controversial issue of racial differences in intelligence was brought to discussion again by the threshold of the 21st century when American psychologist Richard Herrnstein and American political scientist Charles Murray published their book *the Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* in 1994. The authors were reported throughout the popular press as arguing that IQ differences are genetic and that both genes and the environment have something to do with racial differences.

“Genetics” as a justification of the black white achievement gap is derived from the writings of the plainspoken social critic Mano Singham, whose influential article, “The Canary in the Mine,” is frequently cited by psychologists and education scholars when raising the issue of the achievement gap (Singham 9-15). The philosophy here is that the gaps in black and white academic achievement, together with other educational achievement discrepancies between black and white students, do not stem from educational opportunity, economics, culture, or environmental dynamics, but from a simple act of nature: blacks are intellectually inferior to whites. They contend that genetics basically did not endow blacks with sufficient cerebral

horsepower to compete scholastically with whites. Therefore, there are no resolutions to the existing achievement gap with this explanation (Paige and Witty 64-65).

The debate over race and intelligence can be drawn all the way back to French psychologist Alfred Binet, who is accredited with devising the first intelligence test in the early twentieth century (Binet). Dispute over the topic has followed since then, and American political scientist Charles Murray and American psychologist Richard J. Herrnstein threw fuel on the fire when their book *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* *The Bell Curve* was published in 1994. Herrnstein and Murray's fundamental argument is that human intelligence is significantly influenced by both hereditary and environmental dynamics and is a better predictor of numerous personal factors, comprising involvement in crime, financial income, job performance, and birth out of wedlock, than are an individual's parental socioeconomic status, or scholastic level. They claim as well that those with high intelligence, the "cognitive elite", are becoming isolated from those of average and below-average intelligence. The book was provocative, particularly where the authors wrote about racial disparities in intelligence and debated the repercussions of those differences. The authors were reported all through the popular press as proclaiming that these IQ differences are genetic. They wrote in chapter 13: "It seems highly likely to us that both genes and the environment have something to do with racial differences." The book's title originates from the bell-shaped normal distribution of intelligence quotient (IQ) scores in a population. A huge number of people rallied both in condemnation and defense of the book and a large array of critical texts were written in response to the work a short period after its publication.

Reacting to the debate initiated by *The Bell Curve*, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) made its response on the issue clear by espousing a "Statement on 'Race' and

Intelligence” in December 1994. It confirmed its profound concern concerning the public debates that pretend that intelligence is determined by race, and highlighted that “Such discussions distract public and scholarly attention from and diminish support for the collective challenge to ensure equal opportunities for all people, regardless of ethnicity of phenotypic variation.” Furthermore, the American Psychological Association's reaction was comparable. It indicated that, “Regarding genetic causes, they noted that there is not much direct evidence on this point, but what little there is fails to support the genetic hypothesis” (American Psychological Association, *The View of the American Psychological Association*).

Though the majority of anthropologists and psychologists provide a tiny backing for genetic explanations of the achievement gap, the notion still lingers profoundly entrenched in the minds of a wide array of the American population. In spite of the absence of scientific support, numerous people find it difficult to discard these ideas in the face of persistent discrepancies in performance between black and white students (Paige and Witty 66). Racist attitudes and genetic factors are not the only probable explanations that lie behind the black white achievement gap. Forces within the black community and the oppositional culture theory are evenly ascribed to clarify the current academic inconsistencies between black and white students.

C. Black Identity and Oppositional Culture

A large array of researchers and theoreticians ascribe the low academic performance of African American students to a wide range of dynamics that do exist and persist within the black community. Among the most common theories are: “relational adaptation”, “effort and reward” “acting white”, “oppositional culture”, “anti-intellectualism”, and others. The arguments provided rationalize the poor performance of blacks at schools on the basis of forces within their own

community. Such notions as working hard does not pay or that performing well in school is “acting white”, the push for scholastic underperformance as a reaction to peer pressure, and also the fear of stereotype-threat phenomenon are all the outcome of the long history of bondage and racism in the U.S. and are initially derived from whites having deprived blacks of education for centuries, namely through enforced illiteracy and enslavement of the mind.

John Ogbu, a prominent professor of anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, was interested in a wide range of dynamics that he supposed elucidated low performance among African American students (Ogbu “Racial Stratification” 264-298). Chief among these were forces within the African American community itself. Within this set of justifications, Ogbu lists three potential explanations: black folk theories of effort and reward, black relational adaptations, black belief that school learning is “acting white.” The first of Ogbu's three possibilities- black folk theories of effort and reward- implies that blacks have developed a folk theory which assumes that hard work does not pay. It is the contradictory to “effort optimism,” which is the conviction that rewards are related to the extent of action put into a task. His second possibility, Ogbu makes use of the phrase “relational adaptations” to portray the techniques African Americans have adjusted to white society. His third of three possibilities _“acting white”_ contains Ogbu's interpretation that African Americans have developed an “oppositional culture” that is compared to school standard English and school success with white culture and language. The notion that performing well in school is “acting white” leads African American students deliberately performing less well than they could do in order not to be regarded by their African American peers as being isolated from their black identity (“Racial Stratification” 264-98).

Large arrays of theories have arisen to elucidate the black-white achievement gap. Among the most popular, though not the most convincing, has been the oppositional culture theory. This theory, when attributed to African American students, has frequently emphasized peer pressure and particularly the charge by peers that serious students are in effect “acting white.” This phenomenon was originally reported by Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu (1986) as a possible explanation for the achievement gap. Their research led them to determine that when high-achieving African American students are confronted with the burden of peer pressure arising from being described as “acting white,” they reply by developing oppositional orientations and tactics to schooling that are counterproductive. Though this interpretation has been a darling of broadcast media, the confirmation of the view is at best unconvincing. As a matter of fact, considerable current evidence has been created and proposes that such behaviors are not persistent among African American students, nor are they more predominant among African Americans than among students of other racial/ethnic backgrounds (Carter). Some have contended that it is not essentially a burden of acting white, but somewhat, a burden of high achievement that students of all races and ethnic groups are faced with (Tyson, Darity and Castellino 582-605).

In 1986, Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu declared in their article *Urban Review*: “Apparently, Black children's general perception that academic pursuit is 'acting white' is learned in the Black community. The ideology of the community in regard to the cultural meaning of schooling is, therefore, implicated and needs to be reexamined” (176-206). By means of dissimilar terminology, other academics and social philosophers have pronounced analogous opinions. John McWhorter, author of *Losing the Race: Self Sabotage in Black America*, is one of them. He confidently affirms that “a culturally embedded wariness of scholarly endeavor is the

primary cause of the alarmingly persistent achievement gap between black students and most others” (135). He calls this phenomenon “anti-intellectualism” and proclaims that this is not just an inner-city phenomenon but one that “permeates the whole of black culture, all the way up the social class” (83). McWhorter states that this anti-intellectualism “is inherited from whites having denied education to blacks for centuries, and has been concentrated by the Separatist trend, which in rejecting the 'white,' cannot but help to cast school and books as suspicious and alien, not to be embraced by the authentically 'black' person” (83).

The current American President, then Senator Barack Obama gave the idea currency in his crucial speech before the 2004 Democratic National Convention, when he declared, “Go into any inner-city neighborhood, and folks will tell you that government alone can't teach kids to learn. They know that parents have to teach, that children can't achieve unless we raise their expectations and turn off the television sets and eradicate the slander that says a black youth with a book is acting white” (“The Audacity of Hope”). Obama's remarks triggered a tidal flood of pro-and-con debates and academic work about “acting white.” Education and other academic heavyweights staked out their attitudes as to whether or not there really is an acting-white phenomenon that hinders African American students' scholastic achievement in school (Paige and Witty 67).

For numerous students, school is an environment with incompatible expectations and standards. One expectation is for high attainment, as highlighted by teachers, administrators, parents, and frequently by students themselves. Oppositely, among peers, academic disengagement, rather than attainment, is stimulated and understood to be “cool” (Ogbu “Black American Students in Suburb”). Therefore, Tyson, Darity, and Cstellino focus on a difference they feel must be made between combining a common attitude pushing mediocrity versus an

attitude toward educational achievement that is understood to be distinctive within a particular racial group; namely among black students. Accordingly, they divide the view of oppositional culture into three categories of oppositionality: general, racialized, and class-based. General oppositionality is the push for educational underperformance, in reaction to taunts such as “dork” and “nerd,” a phenomenon that is found across all youth groups, irrespective of race, ethnicity, or social class.

Racialized oppositionality would be what Fordham and Ogbu have describes as the “burden of acting white,” where black students reply with academic underperformance due to taunts such as “Oreo”-meaning that these students are vigorously attempting to mimic, or become, their white cohorts. Finally, class-based oppositionality emphasizes more social class, making it a common culture across all racial groups; students are taunted with labels such as “snooty” and other words demonstrating that they feel that they are better than their counterparts. The taunts- whether they are socially, racially, or class motivated-are persistent reminders of the responses and performances that are considered tolerable by one’s peers. Subsequently, many children react to the remarks and strive for educational disengagement and underachievement.

There have also been conducted researches that reveal that “acting white” is not a persuasive cause in African American underachievement. But these studies use self-reported student statistics from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), which is integrally less consistent. Researchers Paige and Witty declare that there is a struggle between academic achievement and the black identity in the African American community that establishes one of the main explanations for the black–white achievement gap. Though this is not the only cause of the gap, it is one of the most significant causes (68-69). Jason Osborne of the University of Oklahoma provides a connected explanation for the underachievement of black students

comparative to their white peers. Osborne contends that the underachievement of underprivileged and stereotyped groups is a result of the stereotype-threat phenomenon. Stereotype threat is a fear that one's behavior will approve a stereotype which has been attributed to the group to which one belongs. Most students experience a certain amount of apprehension when confronted with taking a test that has relevance to their well-being.

In Osborne's study, the data revealed that students who belong to groups with negative academic stereotypes become anxious not only about the potential for individual humiliation and failure but also the potential for approving the negative group stereotype (Osborne 291-310). Not astonishingly, this supplementary anxiety further erodes their achievement potential, fueling the vicious phase of underachievement. In the situation of African Americans, who are clearly conscious that they are members of a stereotyped group believed to be mentally inferior to whites, the test symbolizes not only a personal jeopardy but also a danger for the whole group (Paige and Witty 71). There is rising empirical evidence that enhances Osborne's affirmation that underprivileged minorities do, in fact, experience higher levels of test anxiety when confronted with a test identified to be, or even supposed to be, an assessment of their intellectual or academic competence (293). In spite of the abundant deeply-conducted research and thoughtful studies on black identity and oppositional culture issues as potent attributes to the current black white achievement gap, the arguments offered remain merely inconclusive with the emergence of further theories that rather place more importance on socio-economic status and economic disparities between the black white ethnic communities.

D. Socioeconomic Status and Disparities

Among the soundest explanations of the startling black white academic disparities in schools are socioeconomic status and the subsequent disparities between blacks and whites. Advocates of such attributes argue that educational achievement is potently associated with economic status as it dictates the environments, resources, and opportunities that children come across as they grow up. They proclaim that lower socioeconomic status and lower academic performance are intimately linked and that poverty has been constantly related to the achievement gap. For them, poverty has detrimental effects on schooling and leads inevitably to poor academic performance. They affirm that a family's socioeconomic status is often impacted by parent academic achievement and that poor families are less likely to invest in educational enrichment items. They also assert that social class affects the ability to provide the essential support for children to succeed academically and offer several theories about the interplay of social class and academic achievement. They evenly proclaim that stability in household and neighborhood income may have an impact on males in school.

Various commonly held justifications of the black–white achievement gap have as their basis socioeconomic status and inequalities between the two ethnic groups. Fundamentally, the argument is that the gap is produced by the long history of economic discrepancies between the two communities, tracing back to slavery. Those who approve this explanation refer to the history of coercion that blacks have had to undergo. They point to such dynamics as blacks being lawfully forbidden from learning to read during bondage, being compelled to attend poor schools, being constrained to the constitutionally reinforced separate-but-equal regulations, being obliged to work in the fields when white children were in school, and other similar circumstances. They

support their argument by highlighting the research that plainly backs the fact that educational attainment correlates more intensely with economic status than with any other particular variable (Paige and Witty 60).

Socioeconomic status is a crucial issue for the achievement gap discussion since it dictates the environments, resources, and openings that children meet as they grow up. Black children are more likely to live in deprived households than white children. Because of a history of social policy that restricted African Americans' admission to the main avenues toward wealth accumulation, black families have less assets than their white peers who earn identical wages (Oliver and Shapiro). Studies have recurrently exposed that lower socioeconomic status and lower academic achievement are related (Nettles, Millett and Ready 215-252). High-poverty, high-minority schools have a bigger probability of having unqualified teachers (Olson 9-16) and have a harder time attracting and retaining highly qualified educators (Sunderman and Kim).

In 2009, data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress show that 36% of all African American children are poor. Poverty is defined by the National Assessment of Educational Progress as having family household revenue lower than the federal poverty threshold. The federal poverty threshold for a family of four is \$22,350 (National Assessment of Educational Progress). According to American researchers Martin, Martin, Gibson, and Wilkes, poverty has been constantly related to the achievement gap (689-698). "In truth, all children can learn, but how much they learn depends on socioeconomic conditions as well as school effectiveness" (Rothstein 82).

According to the US Department of Commerce, median African American family income is roughly 65% of the median Caucasian family income, and median African American family

net worth is merely around 15% of Caucasian family net worth. African Americans' overrepresentation in poverty in the United States is noticeable. Some have contended that this is owing to negative stereotypes related to the African American community. Though some of these negative stereotypes might be right for some persons, it should be born in mind that African Americans were enslaved, segregated and disqualified from equal chances for more than a century after the abolition of slavery (Rothstein).

“Being impoverished has important detrimental effects on schooling, including raising the risk of poor performance” (Verdugo 187). A family's socioeconomic status is frequently affected by parent academic attainment (Rosigno “Family/School/Inequality” 266-290). “Living in poverty usually means families are less able to afford good healthcare, secure nutritious food, or provide enriching cultural or educational experiences for their children, all of which are essential preconditions for students to sustain success in school” (Bainbridge and Lasley 426). Underprivileged families are less likely to invest in educational enhancement items, such as educational toys, books, and involvement in educational activities. These investments are related to the cognitive development of children (Kausnal and Nepomnyaschy 963-971).

Socioeconomic status does not merely have an impact on the resources to which students have access in school, but also has an impact on the resources to which students have access at home. Social class has been displayed to affect the aptitude to supply the essential family support for children to succeed academically. There are numerous theories about the interaction of social class and the academic achievement, all of which might shed supplementary light on black-white achievement gaps. It is argued that parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds may grant education a little significance and may be unsuccessful or slightly involved in their children's education. Children may integrate these attitudes, so that they, too, grant only insignificant value

on education (Lareau). Another perspective highlights the significance of parents' social networks and affiliations to provide parents with the required devices to back their children's education (McNeal 117-144). This social capital perspective accentuates social class as crucial to gaining access to many educational, occupational, and personal openings (Carbonaro 295-313).

According to the third perspective schools are responsible for treating parents of low socioeconomic status differently from those of high socioeconomic status, causing the disengagement of low-income families from their children's education (Epstein and Dauber 289-305). The fourth perspective, based on Bourdieu's cultural capital philosophy, emphasizes that a parent's social class restricts the cultural resources to which he or she has access (Bourdieu and Passeron). Additionally, the resources that low-income parents are capable of offering tend to be ignored or dismissed, in comparison to the resources that better-off families are able to offer (Bourdieu and Passeron).

Stability in household and neighborhood income may have an influence on males in school. Scientists Grogan-Kaylor and Woolley studied 2,099 middle and high school students and revealed that socioeconomic factors lead to school success for students. They also stated that neighborhoods with higher than average household incomes had higher graduation rates; this was particularly true for African American males (875-896). Ensminger, Lamkin and Jacobson stated that male students who live in neighborhoods where over 60% of adults are working in blue collar jobs are three and a half times more likely to fail in high school (2400-2416). Furthermore, Kaushal and Nepomnyaschy revealed in a research of 15,887 students that African American children are roughly twice more likely to repeat a grade than Caucasian children even after socio-demographic features were controlled. They also testified that students from African American families with a net worth of less than \$10,000 were more likely to repeat a grade. It was also

reported that African American families have lower rates of home ownership and monetary savings than Caucasian families. These were also noted to be statistically noteworthy dynamics for school success (963-971).

Advocates of the socioeconomic discrepancies theory find that the black–white achievement gap is essentially produced by class and race factors. They claim that class and race are closely related and that factors linked to class generate inequalities in school and beyond (Davidson). Regarding class, they point out the dissimilarities between the parenting behaviors of lower-class, middle-class, and professional parents; racial discrimination endured by blacks; housing conditions; and other socioeconomic dynamics as predictors of success. Researchers have exposed that there are discrepancies in education skills between parents of low socioeconomic status and those who hold professional positions. The degree to which parents read to their children, and the quantity and quality of dialogue between parent and child are influential causes of the quality of cognitive development a child will undergo (Paige and Witty 60-61).

Betty Hart and Todd Risley, two senior researchers with the Schiefelbusch Institute for Life Span Studies at the University of Kansas, investigated the dissimilarity in the quality of parent-child dialogue between professional families, lower-class families, and well-off families. They discovered that language development in young children was tremendously associated with socioeconomic status. Investigating families with infants between one and two years old for two and a half years, they reported their conclusions in their prominent book *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*. Children from professional families could have a much higher observed cumulative vocabulary than their peers from welfare and working class backgrounds. Averagely, children from professional families perceived a higher

ratio of praise to discouragement than their welfare or working class cohorts. In line with these arguments, Richard Rothstein contends in his book *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic, and Educational Reform to Close the Black—White Achievement Gap* that class and socioeconomic factors influence highly a child's cognitive development.

American academics Paige and Witty believe that this position itself lays the foundation for the gap. They affirm that the problem with this way of thinking is that it excuses schools, teachers, and school leaders by implying that the school is not to be held responsible for student achievement because socioeconomic dynamics are the real foundations of underprivileged children's poor academic performance. They proclaim that this line of reasoning is not a part of the solution; it is a root of the problem. They also claim that socioeconomic status is far from being an obstruction to success; low socioeconomic status presents challenges, but it does not prevent economic nor educational success. For them, there are countless stories of people who have climbed up from life-threatening poverty and been successful (62-63). As a matter of fact, approaching the issue of the potential impact of socioeconomic status and disparities on the black white achievement gap would be far from exhaustive without the discussion of the landmark Coleman Report of 1966 that helped transform educational theory, reshape national education policies, and influenced public and scholarly opinion regarding the role of schooling in determining equality and productivity in the United States. The report reveals that family backgrounds of black and white students together with their widely different social and economic conditions, accounted for most of the test score gap between black and white children.

1. The Legacy of the Coleman Report 1966

Commissioned under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Coleman report reveals that academic achievement is connected to the student's family background more than to the quality of the school. Coleman's publication of the "Coleman Report" in 1966 comprised significantly influential conclusions that pioneered features of the desegregation of American public schools. He also raised the issue of the reduction of the academic achievement gap between lower social class students and their higher social class cohorts. The report argues that school funding has a slight effect on student attainment. An exhaustive reading of the "Coleman Report" discloses that student background and socioeconomic status are more significant in defining students' educational results. Moreover, dissimilarities in the quality of schools and teachers have a minor positive influence on student outcomes.

In actual fact, the 50th anniversary of the Supreme Court's desegregation decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* has focused new attention on the existing achievement gap between black and white students. The court's ruling was an early suggestion that American public education should be assessed on whether schools create racially equivalent results. When it endorsed sociological reasoning, chiefly that of Kenneth Clark, to demonstrate that segregation inescapably directed black students to achieve less, the court incited a discussion in which Americans are still involved in. If equal resources do not produce equal attainment, what will? By 1964, 10 years after the court verdict, the achievement gap remained huge. Many districts resisted integration. Advocates of equality were convinced that a gap persisted simply because, whether segregated or integrated, black children continued to attend more poorly financed schools (Rothstein 13).

Accordingly, Congress ordered a research to demonstrate that blacks attended substandard schools and that this led to their comparatively low achievement. A great number of people believed the suggested study was rather meaningless to prove once again that blacks attended inferior schools. But James S. Coleman, a sociologist then at John Hopkins University, took on his shoulders the responsibility and concluded that disparity in school resources had a slight impact on what is known as the test score gap between black and white children. Instead, the family backgrounds of black and white students, their extensively dissimilar social and economic conditions, explained most of the difference (Grant 17-54).

In 1966, in an effort to resolve the problem of equal educational opportunity, Professor James Coleman and others at the Johns Hopkins University were ordered by U.S. Commissioner of Education Harold Howe to conduct a main research on the question of which approach was more likely to equalize educational opportunities for underprivileged minority students—compensatory education or racial integration? Coleman's federally funded analysis, entitled *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, revealed, first, that racial integration did little to improve academic achievement in urban schools. "Our interpretation of the data," Coleman wrote, "is that racial integration per se is unrelated to achievement insofar as the data can show a relationship." Coleman clarified, nonetheless, that compensatory education—whether provided in racially integrated *or* in racially segregated schools—was equally unlikely to mend achievement levels. As Coleman added, "differences in school facilities and curricula, which are made to improve schools, are so little related to differences in achievement levels of students that, with few exceptions, their efforts [or the *effects* of different classes or curricula] fail to appear in a survey of this magnitude" (U.S. Dept. of Educ. N.Y. Stat. *Federal Education Policy and the States*).

Coleman's *Foundations of Social Theory* impacted highly sociological theory. His "The Adolescent Society" (1961) and "Coleman Report" (1966) were two of the widely cited books in educational sociology. The landmark Coleman Report helped alter educational theory, reform national education strategies, and influenced public and scholarly view concerning the role of schooling in defining equality and efficiency in the United States. Indeed, a considerable number of studies conducted to re-analyze Coleman's data at Harvard reached comparable conclusions, proposing that the best technique to increase academic achievement was neither to integrate students nor to provide compensatory programs but, rather, to increase overall family income. In line with the work of sociologist David Armor, "programs which stress financial aid to disadvantaged black families may be just [as] important, if not more so, than programs aimed at integrating blacks into white neighborhoods and schools." Still an additional research revealed that the "racial composition of the school . . . does not have a substantial effect [on academic achievement]-not nearly so strong as the social class composition of the school." Said differently, when it came to boost academic achievement in the inner city, neither special programs nor racial integration mattered most, but rather, family background and socio-economic status. This conclusion became increasingly established over time, but strategies at the state and federal level continued to center attention principally on narrow school-based reforms (U.S. Dept. of Educ. N.Y. Stat. *Federal Education Policy and the States*).

Contesting this conclusion has been a preoccupation of education research since the Coleman report. Certainly, the Coleman's analysis was somewhat flawed. He found, for instance, more difference in achievement within schools than between them, but disregarded the fact that comparative teacher efficiency might account for this difference more than student background. Nonetheless, academic endeavors over four decades have constantly approved Coleman's basic

finding; no expert has been able to ascribe less than two thirds of the disparity in achievement among schools to the family conditions of their students (Rothstein 14). Yet no matter how frequently established the statement remains counter-intuitive. Certainly, a good qualified teacher is able to guide any child, irrespective of skin color or family income, to learn to read, write, and compute, so why should poverty stand as an impediment? Throughout American history, underprivileged children have made use of education to grow in the United States, and poverty was not a fatal hurdle. The current achievement gap implies inevitably that schools must not be doing for blacks what they did for immigrants and other poor youngsters since the American nation was established (Rothstein 14).

In his book, *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap*, the American researcher Richard Rothstein offered answers to the interrogations of why socioeconomic variations must create an achievement gap between students from different social classes, and why these variations have constantly given birth to such a gap. The author proclaims that children from lower social classes and from many racial and ethnic minorities, even in the best schools, will have lower performance, on average, than middle-class children. Though the Coleman report is a momentous book that is broadly quoted in the field of sociology of education, it raised a heated debate about "school effects" that is still significant today. In reality, socioeconomic grounds might play a significant role in the assessment of the black white achievement gap, but they are far from being the determining factors. In other words, accepting the Coleman report implies declining all further education reforms, namely the No Child left Behind act, which aims primarily at bridging the academic disparities between blacks and whites at schools. Moreover, lower test scores for black students

are not solely attributable to race-neutral socioeconomic characteristics, but also to the culture of underachievement in the black community.

E. Socio-Cultural Attributes

A wide range of conservative scholars conducted a massive amount of research about the current black white achievement gap in U.S. public schools and concluded that a considerable number of sociocultural factors- or what is commonly known as Socio-pathological Culture factors- are partly accountable for the issue. They argue that there are existing social ills in the culture of African Americans which impede them from performing highly in schools. They see that home and family variables have a potent effect on children's cognitive development and that negative sociocultural factors do contribute to the difficulties that many African American children experience in school. Some researchers even argued that the family is the primary determining force behind student performance, not schools. For them, parental involvement in children's academic and social lives plays a crucial role in children's academic learning and achievement. They also proclaim that the expectations and behaviors shown in the family can have a decisive impact on lower academic performance and that family support and setting early educational goals are two of the strongest predictors for student development and academic success. Others affirm that a student's performance may be enhanced or hindered by a steady or changeable interaction with their parents and that African American children are three times as likely as white children to be raised in low income homes.

At the outset, those who support the notion that sociocultural factors account for the gap believe that there is something inherent in the culture of African Americans that influences academic achievement. The list of social ills that many think are at the origin of the poor

academic performance of African Americans comprises: poor parenting skills, unstable families, absence of drive and determination, negative peer pressure, minor parental involvement in children's education, inadequate selection of role models, high levels of teen pregnancies, drugs, and crime, (Paige and Witty 63). Social critic Mano Singham employs the phrase “socio-pathological culture” in his article “The Canary in the Mine” to discuss such ills (9-15).

Those who hold traditional philosophical interpretations favor sociocultural explanations for the black–white achievement gap. From their viewpoint, the solution to the achievement gap is found within the control of African Americans themselves. To put it straightforwardly, their philosophy is that African Americans should get rid of whining and complaining and pull themselves up by their personal efforts (Paige and Witty 63). In line with this idea there is research displaying that home and family variables have a solid influence on children's cognitive development (Armor). A child's achievement in school seems to be tightly linked to the extent to which the child's family is able to construct a home environment that boosts learning, transfers high expectations for their children's achievement and future careers, and takes part in the child's education at school and in the community. So obviously, negative sociocultural attributes do contribute to the troubles that numerous African American children undergo in school (Paige and Witty 63-64). However, the present thesis rejects this as a vital explanation for the black–white achievement gap.

Other investigators center their attention on the family and parenting as significant dynamics in preventing children from dropping through the cracks (Furstenberg et al.). The process of learning starts at home, even before children start to be present at school. Some academics have contended that the family is the main decisive force behind student performance, not schools (Coleman et al.). Parenting includes a diversity of behaviors and roles, including

teaching, nurturing, disciplining, setting an example for, and backing children (Brooks-Gunn and Markman 139-168). Recent literature has revealed that parental involvement in children's educational and social lives plays a vital role in children's educational learning and attainment (Epstein).

In his research of Shaker Heights families, Ogbu disclosed that despite the fact black parents had high academic expectations for their children; they frequently were limited in their participation in their children's education and extracurricular activities and had low contribution in numerous school organizations and activities planned for parents (Ogbu *Black American Students in Suburb*). Though theoretically African American parents desired to push their children to be successful academically, they did not manage to be involved in practices that facilitate such success (Furstenberg et al.). Such practices might include the following: teaching time management, monitoring television time, supervision of homework, boosting their children to work hard in school, and teaching children to evade negative pressures. Furthermore, black parents were frequently ignorant of the availability of honors and advanced placement (AP) courses and the importance of enrolling in such courses during high school (Ogbu *Black American Students in Suburb*).

The family environment has an impact on student achievement. "The family is the first educator of the child, and the school cannot accomplish its purpose without at least the implicit support of the family" (Constable and Lee 220). "The expectations and behaviors exhibited in the family can have an important effect on lower academic performance" (Verdugo 188). Low parental education expectations, parents who dropped out of school, having a peer who dropped out, less parent contact with the school, absence of homework monitoring or study assistances

and rare dialogues with a child about school are all related to lower school performance (Verdugo 184-204).

Leach and Williams claim that family support and establishing early educational objectives are two of the most powerful predictors for student development and academic achievement. The academic achievement gap hinders the social and economic progression for the African American family. Leach and Williams go on to assert that bettering the achievement gap would reinforce the African American family. They further argue that without quality education and higher rates of graduation from both high school and post-secondary, African Americans will be impeded from having social and economic equality (39-59).

In an attempt to determine whether the strength of family relationships affects school results, researcher Shearin conducted a study of 179 African American middle school aged males. His research revealed that a student's Grade Point Average (GPA) together with students' regular homework were major indicators of family relationships. The study further discloses that there is a positive relationship between parent-adolescent interaction and participants' educational achievement. These conclusions reveal that a student's performance may be boosted or hindered by a constant or inconsistent interaction with their parents. Shearin declares that when children are raised in a home that fosters a sense of self-worth, competence, welfare and independence, children will be more apt to take the risk to learn (125-137).

Though the minority achievement gap is a race connected gap, it is not determined exclusively by race. The achievement gap is a complicated, interrelating combination of socio-cultural factors. It has been revealed that African American children are three times as likely as white children to be raised in low income homes (Lee 3-12). A minority status in association with

poverty reinforces the likelihood of a low educational accomplishment. This is due to these circumstances which have detrimental effects directly linked to schooling. Many of these children receive inappropriate health care and nutrition, they have less educational resources in the home, family members tend to have lower educational accomplishments and hence ignore how to adequately prepare and supervise their child's education, there is a fragile family support system, and these children tend to move more often. All of these factors work against schooling and make educational achievement less of a priority. Wealth and the prospects of higher education accumulate over time. The expectations positioned upon a specific student are influenced by the educational attainment of their parents and grandparents. For those underprivileged children who have difficulty in finding food for dinner, completing an essay or taking a college preparatory class does not appear as significant (Denslow 3).

The significance of socio-cultural dynamics is affirmed in a research conducted by investigator Jaekyung Lee. Lee found that the Black-White gaps in socioeconomic status and family circumstances reduced from 1970-1990 but the reduction decelerated in the late 1980's and 1990's. This acceleration and deceleration of the reduction in family circumstances strictly equals the narrowing and widening of the Black-White achievement gap. Lee discloses that socioeconomic status co-varies and is linked to the achievement gap but it is far to be the sole variable (3-12). Vincent Roscigno highlights these conclusions in his work on the racial disparities of achievement (1998). Roscigno found a noteworthy 6.7 point standardized test score variance in math between the achievements of Black students in comparison to the achievement of White students. Thirty percent of this racial gap is explained by family differences. When there is a one percent rise in family income, there is a successive increase in math scores of 0.4 points. Students who possess 50 or more books in the house have a 2.6 point advantage than those

students who have no resources at home. Students whose parents have at least a high school certificate have a 2.1 point advantage in math and students living in single parent homes have a 0.7 point disadvantage. Roscigno reveals that socioeconomic attributes do play a crucial role in the discrepancy between minority and non-minority children but these causes are only part of the problem. Roscigno found an alarming fourteen percent of the racial gap in math to be explained by educational processes that are not linked to family factors (“Race and the Reproduction of Educational Disadvantage”).

Being raised in an environment full of hostile circumstances clearly challenges a child's expectations for success. More detrimental, however, is the tendency of teachers and other educators to center attention on the negative environment of children's background rather than on the strong points that the children have. This opinion emerges out of the huge quantity of research advocating the conclusion that teacher expectations have potent impact on student learning (Rosenthal and Jacobson *Pygmalion in the Classroom*). The fact that many African American children do succeed academically despite the difficulties presented by societal circumstances, nevertheless, weakens the sociocultural explanation. There are countless instances of individual success stories of African Americans whose resiliency carried them through undesirable institutional and community conditions. Additionally, there are isolated cases of schools in inner-city neighborhoods where high achievement is school wide. Paige and Witty rightly maintain that the negative sociocultural attributes do not entirely account for the achievement gap; they are in effect hurdles to high achievement, but they can be overwhelmed by good schools (64). Moreover, cultural influences and socioeconomic dynamics are so tightly linked to each other to the point that it is very hard to distinguish which of the two factors overweigh the other as a potential upshot on the black white achievement gap.

1. The Socioeconomic-Cultural Relationship

Given the intimate relationship between socioeconomic factors and cultural forces as probable attributes that account for the current and persistent disparities between black students and their more affluent white cohorts, the most common question that comes to one's mind is does culture or social class explains the most the black-white achievement gap? The debate is rather heated among both conservatives and liberals who hold conflicting views regarding the economic and cultural factors. While conservatives proclaim that cultural differences are accountable for the African American students' low performance in schools, liberals do rather assert that economic issues are at the root of the black white achievement gap problem. In spite of the differing argued divergences about the most probable explanations that lie behind the present academic inconsistencies in U.S. public schools, both of culture and socioeconomic features are so intertwined that they cannot be disjointed.

Because of the sensitivity and politicization of race in the American political history, extreme attention is paid in public discussion to the extent to which lower test scores for black students are ascribable to race-neutral socioeconomic features or rather to the culture of underperformance in the black community. The incentive for this discussion is that some conservatives desire to display that economic reforms are comparatively insignificant and that moral and cultural self-help is the best solution to low attainment. Conversely, some liberals desire to reject the idea that cultural attributes play a role, partially because of the confusion they make between cultural justifications with genetic ones. Yet it should be clear that the existence of historically entrenched cultural variances between black and white Americans does not in any way imply that blacks and whites have dissimilar genetic aptitudes (Rothstein 51).

Some liberals also claim that blacks would rapidly perform as well as whites in school, if only economic reforms were put into practice. These liberals fear that recognizing the role of cultural causes, regardless of their origin, suggests that problems of black students in U.S. schools are the responsibility of blacks, not whites, and consequently the larger society shoulders slight responsibility for resolving disparity (Rothstein 51). Things are evidently more complex if black students expect their educational endeavors to be unrewarded; it is because the consequence of historical experience has been that black endeavors in effect have been unrewarded. Nevertheless, black students' motivation and determination have to play a role in surmounting the burden of this history; teachers and schools cannot transfer drive and determination into students who are not yet ready to adopt it (Rothstein 51).

The argument about whether the low achievement of black students is entrenched in culture or economics is basically futile because socio economic status and culture cannot be detached. On the one hand, if black families undervalue education because their historical experience has been that education has not paid off in economic mobility, then the underestimating of education will unlikely be eradicated merely with cultural appeals, and social and economic reforms will also be required. Alternatively, even if a complicated measure of socioeconomic status could be devised and that encompassed, together with family income, measures such as family assets, savings for college, persistence of poverty, grandparents assets, and so on, and even if this measure completely accounted for all variations in educational results between blacks and whites, it would not remove the likelihood that cultural influences play a role (Rothstein 51-52).

In any case, if there were a culture of underperformance in the black community, that could direct families to collect less savings for college. If parents endeavor to attain less in

school, and this gave rise to lower family incomes, then a child's family income would be partly a cultural result, not totally a socioeconomic attribute. Correspondingly, the number of books in a child's home is deemed by many social experts as a criterion of social class. But parents can buy books not simply because the parents are well educated, and can pay for the purchases, but because parents estimate literacy greatly, a cultural feature (Rothstein 51-52). These connections between culture and social class make it tougher to interpret the studies representing that when other background features- such as parents' professional status; family size; parents' scholastic level; mothers' own test scores; amount of books in the home; and children's birth weight- are added to long-term family income in examining test scores, few dissimilarities persist between the attainments of socioeconomically comparable black and white students (Cameron and Heckman 455-499).

The *Bell Curve* stirred up a national debate, in 1994, by proclaiming that the black white achievement gap partly resulted from genetic variations between the races. Researchers Herrnstein and Murray reasoned that the black white achievement gap was so big that it could not be accounted for by social and economic dissimilarities (Herrnstein and Murray). Yet, their argument fell prey to the ordinary over-simplification of these dissimilarities. If black white social and economic circumstances varied only in present income and parental education levels, the social and economic gap might certainly appear too minor to clarify the achievement gap. But if the wide range of socioeconomic differences is taken into account, the credibility of the Herrnstein-Murray argument fades.

Regardless of the historic roots of underperformance, if some black students aim too low in school for motives that are unrelated to whites, average attainment of blacks will drop below that of whites. The culture of under-attainment should not be overstated in significance, above

social class features that apply similarly to blacks and whites. But neither should characteristics of black culture be repudiated as causal dynamics of the gap. Conservatives, both black and white, deduce from all this that community-based motivational campaigns can play a role in closing the gap. It appears reasonable, but there is yet no proof that such campaigns truly would have an outcome. Because cultural and socioeconomic forces are so interrelated, it would be unreasonable to expect motivational endeavors alone to succeed, but similarly thoughtless to refute their probable influence (Rothstein 56).

Whether cultural dynamics or socioeconomic forces, they are not the determinant explanations that laid the foundations for the black white achievement gap. They both merely constitute one of several other factors, which have already been discussed in the previous sections; namely racism and genetic factors together with black identity and oppositional culture. Taken altogether, they all represent probable explanations of the gap. However, school-based attributes or rather educational factors are to be deemed in this research as the most potential explanations and most determining factors that planted the seeds for the black white academic discrepancies in schools as they are more relevant to the issue under examination; that is the appraisal of the No Child Left Behind Act's effectiveness as a federal education measure that aims at bridging the black white achievement gap in U.S. public education.

F. Educational Factors

Indeed, the last but most significant explanations that account for the current and persistent achievement gap between blacks and whites in this research are educational factors- or what is commonly known as Educational Deprivation factors. Supporters of this view argue that efficient educational practices are able to outweigh all other external issues and proclaim that

offered pedagogical support is key to successful learning. They believe that children motivational problems can be sorted out by highly motivated teachers who are willing to set high standards of educational achievement and to provide good instruction accompanied with emotional acceptance and support. Educational explanations' advocates also assert that great teaching can overcome children's low economic status and that the educational achievement that children accomplish is linked directly to their school and the education they receive; for them it is the school's responsibility to ensure the provision of essential tools and skills for students to navigate the academic environment and that a school's racial climate is a factor in racial disparities in both achievement and discipline.

Exponents of school-based or educational deprivation factors perceive both of tracking and teachers' negative expectations as determinant attributes that lead inevitably to wide academic discrepancies between blacks and whites. For them, the practice of tracking can exacerbate achievement gaps as it inevitably translates into divisions across racial lines. Teachers' perceptions of race together with the lack of availability of sufficient guidance counseling also play a critical role in the achievement gap. In a word, the present research approves the argument that most proponents of the educational factors' theory support; "all children will learn at high levels when they are taught to high levels." Assessment of the No Child Left Behind Act as a new federal education reform that aims at bridging the black white achievement gap by taking into account various educational attributes that enhance black students' performance gives these explanations extra relevant credit.

Educational Deprivation is defined as a child's lack of basics necessary for sound cognitive development, most particularly, high expectations and great teaching (71). It is noted that those who hold such views find that most efficient educational practices can surmount all

other difficulties and that a child's economic conditions, their first language, and the scholastic level of their parents are far from being deterring barriers. It is actually found that all children can learn when supplied with the fitting pedagogical assistance (71-72).

The crucial fundamentals of the educational deprivation explanation are brilliantly pronounced by educator, psychologist, author, and chief contributor to the approach that won *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, Kenneth Clark. He places the blame for the huge educational failure of ghetto schoolchildren straightforwardly on teachers and administrations of ghetto schools. To him, every one of the suppositions related to the terms “cultural deprivation and cultural difference” is “primarily an alibi for educational neglect, and in no way a reflection of the nature of the educational process.” He proclaims that a basic constituent of the deprivation that affects ghetto children is that usually their teachers do not expect them to learn; the teachers perceive their job as being one merely of custodial attention and discipline. He confirms that the motivational issues of these children will be resolved when teachers can be stirred to teach efficiently. Effective teaching consists of setting high standards of educational performance and providing good instruction, along with emotional acceptance and backing (Katz 385).

Clark quite openly objected to the other explanations. He firmly insisted that the achievement gap is a phenomenon that can be surmounted by great teaching. The argument that great teaching can succeed to surmount children's low economic status has massive support. More lately, alumni of Teach for America (TFA) have allegedly adopted comparable views. TFA, an independent nonprofit organization whose task is to enlist America's most talented future leaders in the “movement to eliminate educational inequality,” achieves its task by constructing a national corps of exceptional recent college graduates- of all academic majors and career interests- who commit two years of teaching in inner-city and rural public schools in

America's lowest-income communities and become permanent leaders for broadening educational opportunity (Teach for America).

A 2005 survey of the TFA corps offers insight into the opinions of its members concerning the reasons of student underachievement. Three conclusions speak straightforwardly to the subject of education deprivation as a justification for the achievement gap: First, Educators have the authority to reduce the achievement gap. Second, expectations of students- from educators, schools, parents, the general public, and students themselves- are a powerful instrument and an influential hurdle alike. Corps members perceive low expectations as an important reason of the achievement gap. They proclaim that increasing a collective belief in the potential of underprivileged students and African American students is essential to close the gap. And third, the general public has an erroneous understanding of issues vis-à-vis the achievement gap. Corps members worry that the public wrongly lays responsibility for the gap on students and their families. They also claim that much of the public is merely ignorant of the presence of this gap or of the realities of poverty and discrimination. (“Equity Within Reach”).

The educational achievement one completes is linked directly to their school and the education they receive. Once a child is enrolled in school it is the school's duty to guarantee that it is supplying the indispensable tools and skills for students to navigate the educational environment (Horton A. 57-70). “Students, regardless of race, must perceive schooling as legitimate, respectful of them and deserving of their efforts if they are to invest in the forms of achievement expected by schools” (Mattison and Aber 9). Mattison and Aber also affirm that a school's discriminatory climate is an attribute in racial discrepancies in both attainment and discipline (1-12). Furthermore, schools and teachers have a huge influence on the learning environment children are positioned in. Teachers can recommend students for special education

services. Caucasians are far less likely than African American to be identified with learning disabilities and retained in obstructive educational settings where they are separated from regular classrooms and nondisabled counterparts (Stearns and Glennie 29-57). Moving students out of regular education classrooms into more limited settings can cause further separation of a minority student which can result in drop out.

Underprivileged students who have a special education label are more probably to be in a constrained, higher federal setting classroom than their Caucasian counterparts. Half of Caucasian students who are in special education spend eighty percent or more of their school day in a general education classroom setting in comparison to only one-third of African American students (Fierros 1-9). The National Education Association (NEA) reveals that the dropout rate for students in special education was twenty nine percent for the subgroup of students labeled EBD, the dropout rate is fifty three percent. Disadvantaged students are more likely to receive referrals to the office, expulsions and suspensions. Of all marginal groups, low income African American males are the most likely to be suspended and African American males are more likely to be severely punished for an identical offence as a Caucasian student (NEA). Besides, African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students who were obtaining special education services were sixty seven percent more likely than their Caucasian partners to be suspended from school by an officer on the basis that they were unsafe (National Education Association). A school with a huge number of minority students is five times more likely to have a low graduation rate in comparison to a majority Caucasian school. Thirty nine percent and 46 percent of Hispanic students and African Americans respectively go to schools where graduation is not the rule (Christie, Jolivette and Nelson 325-339).

Schools play a crucial role in the broadening of the black-white achievement gap. Researcher Diamond offers the subsequent aspects of the racialized terrain of their schools and classrooms: first, African American students are stereotypically educated by less experienced teachers; for instance, uncertified teachers and teachers with restricted experience, than their white peers (Uhlenberg and Brown 493-530). Second, black students are confronted with a wide array of educational handicaps in their schools and classrooms when likened to white students. For instance, they are jammed in inferior educational tracks, which offer students less stimulating course work and produce less learning (Hallinan 79-84). And third, the teachers of black students also hold inferior expectations for them than for other students.

A large array of schools devises pathways of achievement for some students and not for others via academic leveling and tracking. This practice can intensify achievement gaps because students are often separated according to their perceived ability, which, in practice, frequently transforms into racial divisions. While blacks are frequently, enrolled in lower-level courses, whites are often enrolled in upper-level ones (Ogbu *Black American Students in Suburb*). Moreover, African American students are inadequately placed in special education courses (Blanchett 24-28), which leads to decreasing their access to significant educational resources. Tracking frequently happens as early as elementary school, which becomes problematic and can account for the widening achievement gap as students continue through their secondary education. Tracking defines a particular pathway for students from which it is frequently tough to break out. Researcher Ogbu concluded that these mechanisms can also have an adverse influence on how students perceive their educational aptitudes: some African American students evaded taking honors and advanced placement courses because they felt the work would be too difficult

for them; accordingly, they never gave themselves an opportunity to attempt and succeed (*Black American Students in Suburb*).

Educators' perceptions of race play a crucial role in the educational expectations teachers hold for their students (Carter). Instructors' sensitivity to race can also have an impact on teaching and molding the experiences of students within their classroom (Kinchloe et al.). Teachers' lower academic expectations of students from a specific race or socioeconomic status can become a self-fulfilling prophecy and produce the reduced academic achievement of those students (Rosenthal et Jacobson "Self-fulfilling Prophecies" 219-253). Race constitutes also a factor in which students are considered as in need of corrective action and in the ways in which teachers attempt to interfere and assist their students (Gregory and Mosely 18-30). The absence of accessibility of adequate guidance counseling may also play an important role in the achievement gap. Counselors usually assist students to choose which courses to take and guide them to center on their academic futures, particularly college. Yet, in underfunded schools, counselors frequently have little time to provide help to students or boost them to take higher-level classes (Ogbu *Black American Students in Suburb*).

In 1968, an eminent study conducted by authors Rosenthal and Jacobsen, revealed the potent effect teachers have on student achievement. Students were selected to outperform by their teachers, and the students that the educators selected to excel outperformed their counterparts by the end of the school year. The students, who were selected by instructors to succeed, gained an average of fifteen points on their IQ tests. The authors concluded that the consequence could only be owing to teachers' expectations, attitudes and conducts toward the students. This study displayed that the treatment of students by teachers augmented test scores irrespective of race or family settings ("Self-fulfilling Prophecies" 219-253). Furthermore, researchers Uhlenberg and

Brown conducted a survey, in 2002, of fifty four public school teachers from fourteen dissimilar schools in North Carolina to search teachers' perceptions of the causes of the achievement gap. They reported that Caucasian teachers appeared less supportive of probable resolutions directed to change the behavior of Caucasian teachers, such as enlisting African American teachers or receiving different training. It was also revealed that Caucasian teachers find that recurrent misconduct of African American students led to their lack of learning. On average, the teachers surveyed consented that teacher quality has little to do with certification. Both African American and Caucasian teachers approved that certification of teachers does not influence the quality of teaching they offer (493-530).

Researchers Fram, Miller-Cribbs and Van Horn announce that high poverty and majority-minority schools have less-experienced, less-educated, and less-qualified teachers (309-319). Schools with typically minority students and a high rate of poverty are more likely to have jammed classrooms and less access to technology (Rothstein). In an attempt to magnetize teachers with more experience, more education, advanced subject specific preparation and advanced cultural proficiency, all combined with positive impact on students learning, schools may be required to offer motivations. For the time being, there are no incentives for highly-experienced and high performing teachers to change professions (Fram, Miller-Cribbs and Van Horn 309-319). Additionally, in an article written by authors Grossman, Beaupre, and Rossi and titled "Poorest kids often wind up with the weakest teachers," it was claimed that children who descend from underprivileged families frequently have the least qualified teachers. Virtually fifty percent of all Illinois public school teachers were part of the research that revealed that children in the highest performing, lowest poverty and lowest minority schools were five times less likely

to be educated by instructors who failed at least one teaching certification test than children in the lowest performing, highest poverty and highest minority schools.

A Washington D.C.-based independent nonprofit organization, named the Education Trust, is an extra foundation for the great teaching argument. It is actually an additional potent basis of backing for the insight that educational deprivations are a key cause of the achievement gap. One of the Education Trust's beliefs is: "All children will learn at high levels when they are taught to high levels" (The Education Trust). Its mission proclamation compels this independent nonprofit education organization to working "for the high academic achievement of all students at all levels, pre-kindergarten through college, and forever closing the achievement gaps that separate low-income students and students of color from other youth" (The Education Trust). Among the Education Trust's numerous contributions to scholastic equality is its effort in ameliorating teacher quality. Its leaders highlight that teachers matter most in the endeavor to narrow the achievement gap. During testimony before the Commission on No Child Left Behind, Russlynn Ali, Director of Education Trust West, called the attention of the commission by asserting that "the most effective teachers can teach even the most disadvantaged students up to high standards, but a couple of ineffective teachers in a row can hobble a student's education for years to come" (Russlynn).

In reality, there exists a large array of contradictory opinions to account for the black–white achievement gap. Each view is rather contingent on countless diverse variables but the whole issue is about whether or not one believes all children can learn. This is, in effect, the determinant of which justification of the gap's existence one finds most compelling. Researchers Paige and Witty are firm advocates of the educational deprivation theory- the main source of the

African American-white achievement gap is that low-achieving students have been denied the educational fundamentals which support learning to high levels (73-74).

Paige and Witty believe that every child has the capacity to study at high levels when they are educated at high levels. Their explanation for the black–white achievement gap is that the children placed on the undesirable side of the gap endure educational deprivation. They have not been instructed at high levels. Being educated to high levels equals educational backing from dynamics outside of the school. It encompasses the support and commitment from the whole teaching trio- home, school, and community. After reflecting on the cause of the gap’s existence, Paige and Witty raised a new question about the cause of the gap’s persistence. On the issue, they provided several grounds:

It persists because it has been allowed to. It persists because it's a problem that nobody owns. It persists because we, who should be the rightful owners of the problem, have yet to identify it as a problem worthy of our full attention. It persists because, failing to recognize its importance to the advancement of African Americans toward the twin goals of racial equality and social justice in America, we—the African American leadership community—have our heads in the sand.

(74)

Clearly, the black white achievement gap in U.S. public education is the outcome of diverse arguments and numerous theories, ranging principally from educational factors, socioeconomic attributes, sociocultural dynamics, and even from allegedly-objective or rather racist attitudes. In spite of the massive amount of deeply-conducted research and the considerable number of potently offered arguments in support of these theories, they remain mere potential

explanations, and there is no single universal explanation that accounts for the gap between blacks and whites in schools. In the present research, however, educational factors are much more relevant to the issue under examination and are deemed as the most probable, but never single, explanation of the black white discrepancies in U.S. public education. Furthermore, digging deeper into the American distant history of slavery, Jim-Crowism and discrimination helps put the black white achievement gap issue into its historical setting and thus provides further probable explanations or rather origins.

Conclusion

Many obstructive underlying forces present in the African American educational experiences contribute to the limitation of their opportunities of academic achievement. The federal government responded to grappling with the persistent achievement gap through the adoption of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. Upgrading academic achievement has been and is a point of debate under NCLB that raises many arguments on policy issues. There are numerous factors that affect academic achievement. While the relatively low achievement of African American students has been observed for several years, the enactment of the NCLB has brought a more potent focus on both assessing and grasping black-white achievement gaps. Indeed, scientists and theoreticians have scrutinized most features of human character, behavior, and endeavor to try to identify significant correlates and cures for the massive variance between African American and white student achievement. Included among the most distinguished recurrent explanations are racism, genetic factors, black identity, oppositional culture, socio-economic status and discrepancies, socio-cultural attributes, and educational factors.

Some investigators contend that academic achievement restraints confronted by African Americans as a result of the racial stratification of society are at the origin of the gap. Others argue that genetics simply did not bestow blacks with enough cerebral horsepower to compete scholastically with whites. Furthermore, the eminent American anthropologist John Ogbu believes that there are three forces within the African American community that account for low achievement among black students: black folk theories of effort and reward, black relational adaptations, black belief that school learning is “acting white.” Moreover, advocates of the socioeconomic disparities assert that educational performance correlates more intensely with economic status than with any other single variable. They claim that class and race are intimately linked and that attributes associated with class devise disparities in school and beyond. The Coleman report reported that discrepancy in school resources had very little to do with what is known as the test score gap between black and white children. As an alternative, the family backgrounds of black and white students, their widely dissimilar social and economic circumstances, accounted for most of the difference.

Furthermore, those who approve that sociocultural attributes explain the gap claim that there is a list of social ills that are inherent in the culture of African Americans and that militate against academic attainment. However, the debate about whether the low achievement of black students is entrenched in culture or economics is largely unrewarding because socio economic status and culture cannot be disjointed. The other cause for the gap is school-based factors or educational deprivation. Those who hold such beliefs believe that operational educational practices can surmount all other problems. They find that all children can learn when provided with the proper pedagogical sustenance. They affirm that the educational achievement one completes is linked directly to their school and the education they obtain. Thus, the practice of

academic leveling and tracking of students can exacerbate achievement gaps because students are often divided on perceived aptitude which frequently translates into divisions across racial lines. Teachers' perceptions of race also play a crucial role in the educational expectations teachers hold for their students.

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CHAPTER THREE

Planting the Seeds for the No Child Left Behind Act

Too many American children are segregated into schools without standards, shuffled from grade-to-grade because of their age, regardless of their knowledge. This is discrimination, pure and simple the soft bigotry of low expectations. And our nation should treat it like other forms of discrimination. We should end it. One size does not fit all when it comes to educating children, so local people should control local schools. (Bush, G.W. "End of Soft Bigotry of Low Expectations")

Introduction

Aiming at upgrading academic achievement in schools across the United States, raising the performance of disadvantaged students to the level of their more affluent cohorts and magnetizing qualified instructors to teach in every classroom, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is undoubtedly the most noteworthy federal education law in the United States' history. It is in effect the end product of a series of significant early embryonic and evolving key federal educational policies and reforms, recurring reauthorizations of previous laws, and suggested recommendations made out of a substantial number of educational commissions and summits, from the foundation of the American Republic up to the eve of its enactment in 2002. Key education events featured the end of the twentieth century and constituted supplementary grounds for the endorsement of the NCLB in spite of the crisis that hit the American realm of education by 1983. Moreover, one of the most important recent efforts to reform American schools was the historic meeting of President George Bush and the American nation's governors at the

Charlottesville Education Summit of 1989. Examination of the major educational events and federal policies that laid the foundations for the endorsement of the NCLB is thus indispensable.

I. Key U.S. Federal Educational Policies

A. Background

In an attempt to grasp well the linkage between the No Child Left Behind Act and the black-white achievement gap and to find out the extent to which was this Act successful in closing the existing gap, a succinct review of key educational events and policies that gave birth to this major federal measure is essential. Deemed as the most significant federal education law in the United States' history and the largest expansion of federal power over America's education system, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 is the latest progress in an evolving process in which the federal government has enormously augmented its role in K-12 education in the past half-century (Cross 1). The Act's declared object is to foster greater educational accountability at all levels by boosting school achievement and, thus, student achievement. In fact, a substantial assortment of key education events laid the foundations for the enactment of this newly-adopted federal measure, from the very early foundation of the American Republic to the era preceding the No Child Left Behind Act.

Ever since its beginning in the seventeenth century, the role of public education in American society has transformed significantly and the emphasis on education reform has primarily changed from increasing admission to improving quality of U.S. public education (Kress, Zechmann, and Mathew 187). America's greater prospects of the public education system have been boosted noticeably since the establishment of the first public school in 1635 ("Boston Latin School"). Yet, obligatory and free public education did not become main-stream in

America until approximately two hundred years later. The percentage of fourteen-to seventeen-year olds entering high school augmented distinctly from not more than ten percent to over seventy percent from 1890 to 1930, (Resnick, 3, 17-18). Over all, leaders have been applying numerous educational initiatives to advance the status of education (Bracey, 2003). The necessity for educational regularization became ostensible by the late 1800s, and a shared vision and assignment for education in the United States became the emphasis of the 1892 Committee of Ten that was created by the National Education Association (Altenbaugh, 1999). The Center for the Study of Mathematics Curriculum (2004) commented that this Committee of Ten designated school and college teachers of different subjects to reflect upon the following:

The proper limits of each subject, the best methods of instruction, the most desirable allotment of time for the subject, and the best methods of testing the pupils' attainments. Thus, the primary purpose in convening the Committee of Ten was to provide a national force for standardizing the secondary school curricula.

(1)

There were numerous key changes that the report from the Committee of Ten produced in secondary schools. The recommendations of the Committee of Ten were impracticable and started the pursuit for educational reform in America (Benson 17-18). Despite the nonexistence of an intelligible federal policy, federal assistance to education traces back to the second half of the eighteenth century and grew strikingly ever since succeeding the Second World War. While the federal role in education has widened largely since WWII, the fundamental idea of federal assistance to education is, basically, as ancient as the republic itself. The two Northwest Ordinances of 1785 and 1787; the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862; the Freedmen's Bureau of 1865; the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917; the federal grants and aids of the 1920s and 1930s; the

Lanham Act of 1940; and the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, are merely a few instances of the evolving involvement of the federal government in the field of education.

In 1785, the Confederation Congress passed the first of two Northwest Ordinances, which allocated 1/36th of the land given to every western township for the preservation of public schools within the mentioned township. Two years later, in 1787, the Constitutional Convention passed the second Northwest Ordinance, which reaffirmed the goal of the first. Besides, Congress passed the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 that extended the objectives of the Northwest Ordinances -land grants for school assistance- to higher education institutions. Furthermore, the Freedmen's Bureau started out three zones of federal assistance to education that would prevail up to the twentieth century: first, putting forward federal support to raise the educational level of the most disadvantaged members of society; second, propping up economic progress via the increase of admission to learning; and third, integrating new citizens into American society with the purpose of fruitful labor and social coordination. What is more, the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917 that supported vocational-technical education and other procedures of school-based job-training in numerous locations throughout America was a quick answer to the rising demands of WWI. Also, the Lanham Act of 1940 supported the building, operation, and preservation of school structures for children whose parents were hired by the federal government, chiefly on military bases. Finally, the Serviceman's Readjustment Act entitled veterans who had served a period of 90 days and over in the armed forces to a year of secondary or college education.

Though public education is chiefly an issue of state and local concern, the federal role in American schools has grown speedily in the period since the mid-twentieth century. State-federal collaborations in the sphere of education policy have turned out to be increasingly more

complicated as a result of a growing federal role in American schools (U.S.N.Y.Stat.Dept.of Educ.*Fed.Educ.Policy* 5). Evolving parochial reservations of rising federal control of schools, nevertheless, replaced primary local approval of federal backing. Subsequent to the Second World War, things started to change increasingly as parochial fears of federal regulation replaced significantly local approval of federal support. Efforts to offer overall assistance to public schools were doomed to dismal failure after a growing fervent disapproval to the threat of communistic federal interference in local schools and the view of federal support envisioned for local schools. Yet, the federal policy in education became more noticeable, succeeding Eisenhower's election in 1952, thanks to the foundation of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) that inspected the work of the current Federal Office of Education (U.S.N.Y.Stat.Dept.of Educ.*Fed.Educ.Policy* 8).

Nevertheless, by the early 1960s education administrators were confronted to a large array of pressing issues, which derived chiefly from the enormous and extensive demographic changes of the baby boom, and therefore compelled numerous local school districts to have recourse to federal assistance. On the other hand, federal aid to education was hindered throughout that period as a result of a considerable number of constraints. Countless parochial school districts began to resort to federal help when the baby boom hit in the early 1950s (Munger and Fenno). In reality, three main issues prohibited Eisenhower from increasing federal backing to education. The first concern was the fear that federal support to education may flow to local or religious schools; the second was a fear that federal aid to education may cause federal regulation of schools (Duran 166-177). The third and eventually most substantial hurdle was racial integration. Federal assistance was highly powerless to support the building of racially separated schools after

the common decision of the Supreme Court in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, in 1954 (U.S. N.Y. Stat. Dept. of Educ. *Fed. Educ. Policy* 9-10).

In the infamous *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896, the United States Supreme Court maintained that discrimination by race was not in violation of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments' safeguards (163 U.S. 537, 543, 748). In fact, a system of apartheid became entrenched through America, with distinctly substandard accommodations and fewer educational opportunities for non-white students. Through a number of corresponding lawsuits, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Legal Defense and Education Fund progressively waged war on "separate but equal" (*Brown* Kevin 773, 783). With Lucinda Todd and others as plaintiffs, *Brown* finally granted the NAACP its opportunity to eliminate the humiliating doctrine (Vincent 129).

Indeed, on May 17, 1954, a unanimous Court proclaimed that its "separate but equal" dictum, which had ruled for half a century, had no room in the realm of public education. If a state decided on offering public schooling, all students are eligible to enjoy that education on equivalent terms (*Brown v. Bd. of Educ.* (1954), 347 U.S. 483, 495, 493). In spite of the immense holding, the Court gave school districts an overall instruction to desegregate with "all deliberate speed," (*Brown v. Bd. of Educ.* (1955), 349 U.S. 294, 301) which gave birth to a drive towards egalitarianism that "was more deliberate than speedy" (Randall 363, 366). Civil rights and educational supporters, enraged by the slow advancement, resorted to Congress to help attain *Brown's* objectives. Thus started the federal government's involvement in public education, planting the seeds for the No Child Left Behind Act (Vincent 129). While sweeping in its breadth, the NCLB was a direct descendent of a long line of federal programs intended to better even out educational attainment in American public schools. Although education had

conventionally been a matter of state responsibility, the federal government progressively intervened all through the past fifty years. The federal government endorsed programs to provide educational opportunities to underprivileged students and strengthen the equal rights goals of *Brown* (Nash 239, 244).

Moreover, the emphasis of the federal program has soon shifted as an increasing stress on national security arose; the Sputnik Crisis (1957) symbolized an instant national menace to America's sovereignty and international supremacy after the Second World War and thus spurred the endorsement of the National Defense Education Act of 1958. Though a key part of the federal schedule emphasized primarily special education for students with disabilities in the 1950s, the launching of the Sputnik Satellite by the Soviet Union on October 4, 1957, at the apex of the Cold War, represented the commencement of a substantial effort in U.S. education and therefore changed considerably the role of federal government. The immediate challenge of the scientific, technological and military supremacy of the United States was basically the immediate catalyst for the endorsement of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958; "a short-term emergency legislation" that was intended to balance and improve more selectively aimed federal educational programs (*NDEA P.L. 85-864*). Keeping pace with Russian technology was conversely replaced with wrestling with the problems of failing urban schools at the turn of the 1960's. The federal agenda has shifted to grappling with African American and white children's inequalities on assessments as they were broadening strikingly.

B. Federal Compensatory Education Initiatives in the 1960's

Indeed, by the 1960's, approximately sixty percent of non-whites dropped out before completing the twelfth grade, and there were very few employment prospects for failed students (Jeffrey 8-9). Former President John F. Kennedy centered a specific focus on low-income states and urban areas by way of supplying funds for public school teachers' incomes and classroom building (Vinovskis, *The Birth of Head Start* 19). Yet, the federal government frequently played only an insignificant role in assisting states and local communities to develop K-12 education before the 1960's. Infrequently, as in the requirement of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 that provided that territories reserve land for common schools, the federal government did offer resources for instructing children. Nevertheless, the federal government often emphasized assembling, disseminating, and examining data about schooling rather than on supplying states or educationalists with supplementary monies or exceptional programs. Apprehensions about federal government interference into state and parochial education; fear that federal education monies might be utilized to desegregate southern schools; and resentment of any public monies for Catholic private schools constrained the willingness of many Washington decision makers to require increased federal participation in K-12 education (Vinovskis, "Gubernatorial Leadership").

The public finding out of poverty in the American society in the 1960's, connected with the election of former President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964, set the foundation for a chain of federal programs intended to assist underprivileged Americans. Amongst the most significant of these was the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965, which set up the Title I program supplying federal funds for deprived schoolchildren. Decision makers

in the mid 1960's expected that the ESEA, together with Head Start, the new program for early childhood progress, would allow the United States by the mid 1970's to eradicate poverty and offer equivalent opportunity for all children, a praiseworthy but obviously ambitious commitment that proved to be unattainable (Vinovskis, *the Birth of Head Start*). In fact, any examination of the No Child Left Behind Act involves inevitably a scrutinized review of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. Legislatively speaking, the NCLB is, in point of fact, the most recent reiteration or revision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, first endorsed in 1965 during the administration of Lyndon Johnson and amended and reauthorized periodically since then, namely in: 1966, 1967, 1973, 1981, 1988, and 1994.

As a matter of fact, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, race and inequity problems attracted the nationwide attention. Seeking corrective procedures to tackle such issues, politicians resorted to the schools, stressing education as a device for change. Former President Johnson proclaimed that “[T]he answer for all our national problems comes down to a single word: education” (qtd. In Bowles and Gintis 19). In spite of the existence of a considerable number of instances of federal funding for education, chiefly through the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (NDEA), such funding was limited to providing money to better teaching in the sciences, mathematics, foreign languages . Moreover, as its name suggests, NDEA was articulated in terms of exceeding and catching up with the Soviet Union in the Cold War competition for military supremacy.

Yet, the federal government did not make a notable commitment to public school financial backing until 1965; with the intention of supporting a more equitable society and improving every American's quality of life. Indeed, Congress enacted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) as part of President Johnson's Great Society

legislation platform; the Act provided federal funds to improve and increase the education of low-income and underprivileged children. The different titles of this act offered funding that its enactors supposed would enhance educational quality: grants to help states in strengthening their departments of education; grants for educational research and teaching; general fundamental assistance for underprivileged Children; grants for textbooks and other teaching resources; corresponding facilities which would produce extremely required educational initiatives not otherwise obtainable in quality or quantity and would create model school programs (« Floor Action » 575).

In spite of substantial bipartisan support for both the Title I program and Head Start, the initial outcomes of these programs in the late 1960's were unsatisfactory. Rather than backing a demonstrated set of particular involvements for the upgrading of education, the Title I compensatory education program functioned more like an overall funding device. While advocates continued to compliment the Title I projects and highlight their attainments, opponents commented on restricted developments and protested that part of the money was being diverted from helping underprivileged students to other usages. The 1969 debatable but significant Westinghouse Learning Corporations' assessment of Head Start indicated that the much advertised IQ advantages of participating students disappeared rapidly. Truly, in 1967, the Johnson administration devised Follow Through to aid Head Start students move into regular classrooms in an attempt to relieve the restrictions of early childhood preparation by itself (Palmaffy).

If the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Title I were less efficient than their advocates had initially expected, these programs set the stage for more help from Washington to states and parochial school districts. Numerous federal-aid supporters in the 1950's and early

1960's desired to direct funding for K-12 school building and teacher salary backing. Others would have favored common education resources divided through the states. But political requirement directed those federal grants into categorical programs to help underprivileged children. These decisions had significant, though frequently predicted, effects for the ensuing growth of compensatory education programs for the following forty years (Davies).

An additional important, but frequently ignored, outcome of the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is that state participation in parochial education was improved. Though state funding of parochial education had been growing considerably since the 1930's, state governments originally did not play a big role in defining how local schools should be structured and directed. As the Johnson administration drafted the ESEA, apprehensions were raised about whether most state education agencies (SEAs) were able to distribute and monitor Title I funds to parochial school districts. Directed by Keppel, an official of education, the verdict was issued that, under Title V of the ESEA, federal monies would be supplied to reinforce state education agencies. With support from the new Title V program together with other education projects, SEAs doubled the size of their professional personnel (Vinovskis, "Gubernatorial Leadership"). For instance, the California State Education Department had, in 2004, one thousand six hundred workers; three quarters of them were remunerated by federal funds (Wirt and Kirst). Therefore, the enactment of the ESEA opened new opportunities for federal involvement in state and parochial education and significantly improved the aptitude of state education agencies to take part in K-12 schools (Vinovskis, *From A Nation at Risk* 12).

The enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965 transformed the educational scenery of the United States, bringing a previously exclusive level of federal participation into the funding process. In the succeeding three years, the ruling was reauthorized

twice, each time changing at least slightly the parameters within which schools and school managers had to work in an effort to implement and assess the programs financially backed via the legislation (Sanders 58). What further laid the foundations for the No Child Left Behind Act were the diverse educational developments that featured the 1970s, and extended to the early 1980s.

C. Education Challenges in the 1970's

The period of the 1970s was replete with riotous incidents. In spite of the end of the Vietnam War, the severe domestic divisions it produced were not relieved quickly. There was a rising disillusionment with the social scientists that had failed to maintain their unrealistically positive pledges to resolve the growing urban and economic problems. Besides, public faith in the efficacy of the Great Society programs of the 1960s disappeared. The OPEC oil restriction in 1973 gave rise to huge inflation, and a large range of Americans underwent a painful and shocking decline in their actual salaries during these years. In spite of the existence of some development in numerous domains of civil rights, America was strongly divided over the strategy of involuntary busing to reach school desegregation, chiefly as growing numbers of whites escaped to inner cities (Jacoby).

The 1970s was as well a period for educationalists to experience the enactment of a number of programs. Federal compensatory education programs such as Head Start and Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) were significantly predictable but not yet attained (Vinovskis, "Do Federal Compensatory Education" 187-209). The contentious but noticeable Westinghouse Learning Corporation's evaluation of Head Start in 1969 suggested that the much-touted IQ benefits of the participating students disappeared quickly (Cicirelli, Evans

and Schiller 105-129). Correspondingly, inspections of the Follow Through programs, that were envisioned to help Head Start children transfer into regular classrooms, raised serious interrogations about their efficacy (Anderson, Richard B. et al. 161-170). Furthermore, it was not sufficient to reduce the widening gap with the non-Title I students or help those who were the most disadvantaged, while assessments of Title I like the Sustaining Effects Study in the late 1970s did find meager educational advances for those students, (Carter 4-14).

In 1973, Oregon introduced minimum compensatory testing in an effort to boost higher academic attainment in secondary schools. Six years later, thirty three states had some kind of minimum proficiency testing; eighteen of them made it compulsory for students to pass tests in an attempt to graduate- chiefly in reading, mathematics, and writing. While a considerable number of these tests originally were quite hard, states rapidly minimized their toughness as soon as it looked that a substantial percentage of high school students might fail. Finally, less than five percent of students did not pass, and the general influence on state and parochial education was negligible (Dee).

In numerous big northern cities which were unable to keep their white populations from fleeing in big numbers to the suburbs, much of the public's apprehension about education centered attention on the new attempts to desegregate schools by means of the judicial system. Court-ordered busing through city lines to tackle these demographic changes dissatisfied numerous parents and gave birth to a political counterattack in communities such as Boston and Detroit. Cities such as Atlanta progressively converted to theme-oriented magnet schools to appeal to a more varied student population after the Supreme Court decision against obligatory cross-district busing in *Milliken v. Bradley* in 1974, (Jacoby).

To end with, the increasing participation of the National Education Association (NEA) in American national politics laid the foundation for the establishment of the U.S. Department of Education by the Carter administration. Former President Carter and the ninety sixth Congress went forward and closely passed- by a vote of 210-206 in the House- legislation founding the U.S. Department of Education in 1979 in spite of numerous serious issues about the decision of founding a cabinet-level education office. Shirley Hufstedler, a federal judge from California, was designated the first Secretary of Education (Vinovskis, *The Road to Charlottesville* 4).

There has been substantial discussion about the determination to create the Department of Education. Some greeted the augmented discernibility and influence that the cabinet-level-office might offer for education in Washington; others were afraid of the likelihood or thought that such an agency was inefficient and needless. Whatever the case may be, the creation of the Department of Education did offer more management and consideration for education in the near-term decades by magnetizing outstanding persons to function as education secretaries and providing them with a national platform for supporting their suggestions (Vinovskis, *From A Nation at Risk* 14). Further education events featured the end of the twentieth century and constituted supplementary grounds for the endorsement of the No Child Left Behind Act in spite of the crisis that struck the American sphere of education by 1983.

II. A Nation at Risk and the Education Crisis of the mid-1980s

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was an overall apprehension that the United States educational system failed to meet the inherent objective of keeping American students better instructed than students all over the globe. Longtime American productions were becoming defied by high quality goods manufactured less expensively abroad; many supposed this was

attributed to the fact that American students failed behind their external cohorts in acquiring the skills required to keep the U.S. economy afloat (Center for the Study of Mathematics Curriculum *A Nation at Risk* 1).

A great number of the American public and decision makers assumed that, by the mid-1980s, America was menaced by an unparalleled, mounting crisis in education. A lot of Americans persisted to grant their own parochial public schools high grades for quality. Yet enthusiasm for the U.S. public schools all together dropped even further as public concerns about the quality of instruction outside their own community schools – particularly concerns about the circumstance of inner-city schools- persisted. And in spite of doubts about the quality of education in the late 1970s and 1980s, students usually achieved as well as before, though the gap between privileged and underprivileged students continued to exist (Campbell et. all).

Apprehensions about the connection between the declining U.S. economy and its education system gave birth to school reforms in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Progressively, decision makers together with the public related the rising economic issues to the inappropriateness of public schools. While the meticulous association between education and economic efficiency proved complicated and indefinable, numerous specialists and policymakers supposed that enhanced education was indispensable for the American nation's future economic welfare (Toch).

The South was regarded as principally underprivileged because of the general low academic attainment of its students and its comparatively regressive state education systems. Southern governors, concerned about urging economic growth forward in their states, supported upgrading in state and local education as an essential first step in the revival of their economies.

They called for the public and policymakers in their own states to back education reforms, assisted by the fact that teachers' unions, which frequently objected to more demanding education reforms, were inefficient in a great number of Southern states. A considerable number of these governors also became leaders of the nationwide movement to advance American schools, founded in great part on their knowledges of education reforms at the parochial level (Harvey). Their preceding experiences and constant relationship with fellow governors paved the way for the growth of federal participation throughout the last two decades of the twentieth century. Given the potent trust in both the Reagan and Bush administrations that education traditionally has been and should be principally a parochial and state responsibility, it was rational that the federal government would operate closely with the National Governors Association to reform American education (Conlan).

In light of rising public apprehensions concerning the public school crisis, the expectation of having education become a key conclusive issue between Republicans and Democrats in the 1980 presidential election, was supposed to be so high. Yet, it was not the case. During the fall campaign, former U.S. President Carter highlighted the federal role in education and supported the recently established Department of Education. Ronald Reagan, the former governor of California who gained the Republican nomination, objected towards mounting federal interference into state and parochial education and promised to eliminate the Department of Education. Generally, nevertheless, education issues were not predominantly significant to voters in the 1980 election (Pomper).

The new secretary of education, Terrel Bell, had been an early advocate of the creation of the Department of Education and was considered by many educationalists and decision makers in the early 1980s as an unwilling and unenthusiastic contributor in the effort to eradicate the new

cabinet office (Bell). Deemed as too moderate by numerous Reagan proponents and confronting a public that was progressively doubtful about federal participation in education, Bell personally established the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) as a cabinet-level operation in August 1982. The eighteen member NCEE panel comprised liberals, conservatives, Republicans, and Democrats who operated efficiently together to give birth to a common and very significant report, *A Nation at Risk: the Imperative for Educational Reform* in April 1983 (National Commission on Excellence in Education).

The general report painted an extremely gloomy image of American education, recurrently citing instances of current failures in student attainments. *A Nation at Risk* did admit that ordinary people at the time of publication were more knowledgeable and much better educated than their cohorts from a previous generation, but the report rapidly shifted to its more negative message (National Commission on Excellence in Education 11). The commission, in an exposed letter addressed to both the American people and to former President Reagan in April 1983, warned of the appalling state of American schooling and contended that this was undermining their economic competitiveness overseas:

Our nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. This report is concerned with only one of the many causes and dimensions of the problem, but it is one that undergirds American prosperity, security, and civility....If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.... (National Commission on Excellence in Education 5)

A Nation at Risk of 1983, a landmark U.S. Department of Education report, revealed that approximately thirteen percent of seventeen year-olds were functionally uneducated, Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores were falling down, and students required an augmented array of corrective courses in college. (U.S. Dept. of Education. *A Nation Accountable* 1). The National Commission on Excellence in Education divided outcomes amongst content, expectations, time, and teaching. Concerning content, it was disclosed that “curricula have been homogenized, diluted, and diffused to the point that they no longer have a central purpose” (61-62). As for expectations, it was revealed that time reserved for homework had decreased together with average student attainment in spite of the fact that grades were boosting (63). As regards time, the proof introduced to the commission indicated three alarming trends: “(1) compared to other nations, American children spent much less time on schoolwork; (2) time spent in the classroom and on homework is often used ineffectively; and (3) schools are not doing enough to help students develop either the study skills required to use time well or the willingness to spend more time on school work” (64-65). Finally, regarding teaching the commission revealed that “not enough of the academically able students are being attracted to teaching ; that teacher preparation programs need substantial improvement ; that the professional working life of teachers is on the whole unacceptable ; and that a serious shortage of teachers exists in key fields” (65-66). The Commission also made a series of recommendations relevant to its findings.

In spite of its pessimistic message, *A Nation at Risk* argued that the failures in education could be overturned, and suggested that state and parochial high school graduation course conditions be reinforced, higher academic benchmarks be set up, additional time be spent in school, the preparation of teachers be bettered, and that designated representatives across the United States be held responsible for making the required developments. The report concluded

with an acknowledgement that overcoming the deteriorations in education would be tough and time-consuming, but that this was indispensable if the American society was to flourish in the future (Vinovskis, *From A Nation at Risk* 16).

When *A Nation at Risk* first emerged, some education experts claimed that it was too gloomy and that it distorted the data on student attainment in an attempt to depict the existing deterioration in the quality of American schools (Stedman and Smith). Academics reviewing *A Nation at Risk* nowadays also frequently disapprove the NCEE's misuse of data. They indicate that the rhetorical style used by the NCEE produced a wrong and threatening sense of imminent doom, rather than offering a stable and impartial appraisal of American education in the early 1980's (Dehart). In spite of the emergence of a number of educational and academic critics of *A Nation at Risk* upon publication, most Americans and policymakers welcomed the report and approved many of its recommendations. The president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Albert Shanker, broke lines with numerous teachers and other union officers by approving the report and admitting the necessity to advance the quality of American education (Kahlenberg). Over half a million copies of the report were distributed, and during the first four months of its release, over seven hundred articles in forty five newspapers cited the report (U.S. Department of Education "A Nation Accountable").

A Nation at Risk met a prompt noteworthy response and was escorted by the publication of numerous other reports on education, strengthening the rising impression that American education was weakening (Ravitch). Many Regan White House conservatives objected to the NCEE and still preferred eliminating the Department of Education, but the unpredicted public victory of *A Nation at Risk* boosted Secretary Bell's trustworthiness and aided to hinder further assaults on the department. Although education did not become a key issue in the presidential

campaign in 1984, Reagan attended a number of the local assemblies about A Nation at Risk as part of his reelection policy (Bell).

Indeed, A Nation at Risk paved the way for the first wave of educational reforms that centered attention on increasing high school graduation provisions, setting up minimum proficiency tests, and allotting merit pay for teachers. While many states and parochial school districts replied positively to the different recommendations by augmenting graduation provisions and boosting the educational course offerings in schools, many education officials were dissatisfied by the absence of development in student performance scores. Therefore, A Nation at Risk was a significant dynamic in mobilizing public opinion in support of educational reforms. Besides, while the reforms that it aided to motivate were not sufficient by themselves to boost adequately student attainment in the 1980s, the report was succeeded by additional initiatives concentrated more on the reorganization of schools (Vinovskis, *the Road to Charlottesville* 11-12).

Ensuing the victory of A Nation at Risk, in 1984 Secretary Bell introduced the popular but debatable “wall chart,” which permitted states to be classified by their educational achievements. Given the scarcity of consistent state-level student attainment data, the wall chart used American College Testing and Scholastic Aptitude Test scores, although they assessed only the development of college-bound students and differed significantly amongst the states in the proportion of participating students. While numerous educationalists and state officials objected to the restrictions and missuses of the wall chart, Secretary Bell’s staff protected its significance in motivating educational upgrading (Ginsburg, Noell and Plisko). Yearly updates of the wall chart by Secretary Bell and his descendants for the following six years proved to be appealing to the media and to those who preferred state classification by educational attainments (Bennet).

Moreover, one of the most important events in recent efforts to reform American schools, and thus to plant the seeds of the No Child Left Behind Act, was the historic meeting of President George Bush and the American nation's governors at the Charlottesville Education Summit from September 27 to 28, 1989.

III. The Charlottesville Education Summit 1989

Though previously not known as a leader in the realm of education, former U.S. President Bush, from the very launch of the primary campaign, stressed his pledge to boost education. In January 1988, he informed a group of high school students in New Hampshire "I want to be the education President. I want to lead a renaissance of quality in our schools" (Walker). The comprehensive and extensive Republican program required more Head Start spending; recommended school choice; reinforced the Pledge of Allegiance in schools; and confirmed the primacy of the family and parochial schools in education. But the program did not require the growth of any national education targets (Goldenberg).

In spite of certain questions vis-à-vis both the implication of convening a summit as well as the direction, the Bush administration and the governors attained a friendly consensus on the organization for the conference (White House *The President's Education Summit*). Final dissimilarities were ironed out at the Boar's Head Inn the evening prior to the summit, and the President and the governors delivered a combined announcement restating the significance of education for boosting the American nation's economic welfare and establishing "an ambitious, realistic set of performance goals." These goals, if achieved, will safeguard the United States universal competitiveness. They are related to:

...the readiness of children to start school; the performance of students on international achievement tests, especially in math and science; the reduction of the dropout rate and the improvement of academic performance, especially among at-risk students; the functional literacy of adult Americans; the level of training necessary to guarantee a competitive workforce; the supply of qualified teachers and up-to-date technology; and the establishment of safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools (*A Jeffersonian Compact* 22).

The President together with the governors concluded their announcement by stating that “The time for rhetoric is past; the time for performance is now” (*A Jeffersonian Compact* 22). Though the public and policymakers had showed apprehension concerning lasting gains of an education summit, most of the members at the Charlottesville Education Summit were satisfied with the event and believed that it had made fundamental contributions to nationwide education reforms (Fiske). Governor Clinton noticed: “This is the first time in the history of this country that we have ever thought enough of education and ever understood its significance to our economic future to commit ourselves to national performance goals” (Weinraub).

Even unreserved detractors of the Bush administration’s conduct of education were excited about the summit. Keith Geiger, president of the NEA, proclaimed: “We [were] very pleased...when the president said he [would] take responsibility for getting kids to school healthy, and when the governors said they would restructure schools from the bottom up, not the top down” (Hoffman and Broder). Yet, such substantial admiration for the summit was far from being expressed by everyone. Disapproval emanated particularly from those who supposed the resolution to numerous existing educational problems was to offer more resources. Morton Kondracke, writing in the *New Republic*, attributed to Bush as well as the governors a grade of C

minus for being unsuccessful to stipulate how to attain improved accountability and extra funds for educational reforms (Kondracke).

On the basis of the made deliberations, six national education goals were established: First, all American children will begin school prepared to study. Second, the high school completion rate will rise minimally to ninety percent. Third, U.S. students will complete grades four, eight, and twelve having shown proficiency in demanding subject matter comprising science, mathematics, English, geography and history; and every school in the United States will make sure that all students learn to make a good usage of their minds, so they might be get ready for accountable citizenship, additional learning, and fruitful employment in the American modern economy. Fourth, American students will be ranked first worldwide in science and mathematics attainment. Fifth, every adult American will be well-educated and acquire the knowledge and skills required to compete in an international economy and enjoy the privileges and duties of citizenship. Finally, every American school will be free of violence and drugs and will provide a secure, orderly environment favorable to learning. These goals were first pronounced by President Bush in his State of the Union speech on January 31, 1990; six months later, the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) was formed to supervise development towards the fixed targets. In the 1990, the six national education objectives became one of the centerpieces of academic reform and were combined with the Goals 2000 legislation in 1994.

Responses to the six national education goals pronounced in the State of the Union speech were varied. Americans accepted the establishment of national education goals and supposed that educators and policymakers should be held responsible for enhancing student attainment. The president of the Thomas B Fordham Foundation, Chester Finn, named the idea of increasing national benchmarks and testing to all students “revolutionary.” Besides, Lamar Alexander

commented that “the goals won’t be hard to set. But we’ll have to see if everyone is bold enough to make the quantum leaps we need” in an effort to attain them (Tifft). Yet, some detractors still interrogated the Bush administration’s pledge to boosting education, particularly in terms of its readiness to rise federal funding. Keith Geiger of the National Education Association (NEA) noted, “The president has provided us with a hearty menu, but has left the cupboard virtually bare” (Harp). Jeanne Allen, an education expert at the Heritage Foundation, protested that Bush “needs to give us leadership on how to get there” (Tifft).

The momentous meeting of the American nation’s governors together with the President at Charlottesville, Virginia, on September 27-28, 1989, proved a media victory and set the foundation for the declaration of the national education goals four months afterwards. Though certain governors and the White House disapproved noticeably issues such as augmented federal expenditure on education, both parties eagerly collaborated at the summit. They delivered a combined declaration approving both the notion of national education goals and the formation of a panel to supervise them. But the fundamental tensions between establishing the goals and supplying the required sources to realize them remained unsettled and resurfaced in succeeding negotiations all through the 1990’s (Vinovskis, *From A Nation at Risk* 30-31).

In spite of the existing reservations about the Charlottesville Education Summit, the greatest number of observers acknowledged the symbolic and possible fundamental significance of that meeting. Only when the restricted influence of the first wave of school reform, which took place in the 1980s and highlighted student results, started to erode backing for education, the Charlottesville Education Summit renewed public devotion and involvement to carry on endeavors for American education reform. Simultaneously, however, the determined pledges to attain the six national education goals by the year 2000 generated idealistic expectations that

were doomed to dismal failure, in spite of the persistence of President Bush and the American nation's governors that they were to be held responsible for attaining those targets (Vinovskis, *From A Nation at Risk* 31).

Clearly, the No Child Left Behind Act is the fruitful outcome of a wide array of educational events, ranging principally between commissions and summits from the early 1990's up to the threshold of its enactment. National Commission on Time and Learning of 1994, Goals 2000, National Education Summits of 1996, 1999, 2001, National Commission on Teaching and America's Future of 1996, and National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century are key events that paved the way for the adoption of the NCLB. Considered altogether these events brought collectively the concepts that became the fundamental underpinnings of the No Child Left Behind Act which aims principally at redressing major flaws and eradicating existing racial inequities in U.S. public schools, notably between black students and their more affluent counterparts. Thus, closing the achievement gap became one of the major concerns of the NCLB which emerged as a result of a series of suggested recommendations that followed a considerable number of educational commissions and summits.

The *National Commission on Time and Learning of 1994* required a self-governing advisory body to conduct an all-inclusive appraisal of the connection between time and learning in America's schools. The established report of April 1994 elucidated that for about 150 years, U.S. public schools "held time constant and let learning vary." One new feature of the report was highlighting technology; the report requires not merely extra learning time but also innovative and improved ways of utilizing it. Besides, *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* identifies the general failure of previous, incremental educational reform endeavors and adopts a new method - systemic reform- which involves setting up challenging educational goals, and periodic

evaluations of student achievement. What is more, the *National Education Summit of 1996* briefing materials offered background on seven important questions that obviously defined the trends in education that had been developing and the focus that business leaders and governors were going to center on them to make sure that changes are brought about in state education systems. Similarly, the *National Commission on Teaching and America's Future of 1996* functioned on the ground of three premises: first, what teachers know and are able to do is the most significant effect on what students acquire; second, hiring, training, and retaining qualified teachers is the fundamental plan to ameliorate America's schools; and third, school reform cannot prosper without the focus on devising the circumstances under which instructors can teach well.

Additionally, the *National Education Summit of 1999* comprised three core principles: first, reform starts with a pledge to establish the highest academic benchmarks; second, quality evaluations are crucial to appraise progress against those benchmarks; and third, application of all-inclusive system is needed to secure full accountability for outcomes, beginning with real developments in student attainment. Moreover, the *National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century 2000*, known as the Glenn Commission, recognized important points and made key recommendations. Its targets were directed at the issues of quality, quantity, and a supporting work background for teachers of mathematics and science. Finally, the primary categories for the *National Education Summit of 2001* were public support, teaching, and learning as it connected them to narrowing the achievement gap and utilizing data to drive development from testing and accountability. The 2001 *National Education Summit* recommendations were the closest to forming what would become the No Child Left Behind Act.

Conclusion

Clearly, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) aims to foster greater educational accountability at all levels by enhancing school performance as well as student performance. Its chief goals are to boost academic achievement across the board and to wipe out the achievement gap among students from various backgrounds. The No Child Left Behind Act is not an overnight federal measure; it is in effect the rewarding upshot of a considerable number of striking early and embryonic developments that featured the American realm of education from the foundation of the United States up to the threshold of the 21st century. Though public education is primarily a matter of state and parochial responsibility, and in spite of the absence of a coherent federal policy, the NCLB is possibly the single largest expansion of federal power over America's education system as the federal role in American schools has enlarged swiftly in the period since the mid-twentieth century.

Indeed, *A Nation at Risk* paved the way for the first wave of educational reforms that centered attention on increasing high school graduation provisions, setting up minimum proficiency tests, and allotting merit pay for teachers. While many states and parochial school districts responded positively to the different recommendations by augmenting graduation requirements and boosting the educational course offerings in schools, many education officials were discontented of the absence of development in student performance scores. Therefore, *A Nation at Risk* was a momentous dynamic in mobilizing public opinion in support of educational reforms. Besides, while the reforms that it aided to motivate were not adequate by themselves to upgrade effectively student attainment in the 1980s, the report was succeeded by additional initiatives concentrated more on the reorganization of schools. Moreover, only when the

restricted influence of the first wave of school reform, which took place in the 1980s and highlighted student results, started to erode support for education, the Charlottesville Education Summit renewed public devotion and involvement to carry on endeavors for American education reform.

Commonly referring to the disparities among demographic groups on state and national academic tests, the achievement gap encompasses discrepancies between minority versus non-minority students; namely between black students and their more affluent white counterparts. Evidence on the national long-standing trend in racial achievement gaps is well documented by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and its measurement is far from being a new phenomenon. As a result of the black white achievement gap's growth, however, more focus has been centered on the issue. Therefore, the No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law in January 8, 2002 to grapple with issues of the achievement gap by defining the quality of schools as measured by how well students performed on state standardized examinations.

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CHAPTER FOUR

The No Child Left Behind Act and its Potential Impact on Students' Academic Achievement

...NCLB is an important way to make sure America remains competitive in the 21st century...the education system must compete with education systems in China and India. If we fail to give our students the [necessary] skills ...the jobs will go elsewhere. (Bush, G.W.)

Introduction

The declared purpose of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is to promote accountability for student performance; permit school choice for students attending inadequate schools; permit more suppleness for how federal education dollars are expended; and center a stronger focus on competent teaching. At large, the primary objectives of the Act are to upgrade academic performance across the board and to stamp out the achievement gap amongst students from dissimilar backgrounds. Moreover, the NCLB Act's legislation has a noteworthy effect on both academic achievement gaps in general and African American students' performance in particular. What is more, the NCLB has potential perverse incentives that might be held accountable for its failure to remedy educational black white inequities in U.S. public education. As a matter of fact, the NCLB has been applauded by some and criticized by others. Those who advocate the Act highlight its praiseworthy goals and applaud its hard accountability assessments. Yet, those who disapprove the Act condemn the heavy focus on testing. They also criticize the

federal government for intervening with state and parochial regulation of education while falling short of funding all of the costs related to the Act

I. The No Child Left Behind Act

A. Overview

As stated by the text of the law, Congress expected the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to “close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind” (115 Stat. 1425). From the time of the law’s enactment many of the concerns of the achievement gap have been remedied by imposing a system that penalizes those schools that fall short of meeting benchmarks. Researcher and author [Fusarelli](#) claims that the law symbolizes a key shift from the federal government being a principal source of funding for poor students to a main force in determining educational results (Gooden and Teresa 236).

Approved by a devastating majority in Congress, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is possibly the sole major growth of federal power over America’s education system. It reviews the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which was first passed in 1965 and has been reauthorized occasionally since then. The most significant and distinguished constituent of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is Title I, which is the federal government’s lone biggest educational assistance program and apparently is intended to help underprivileged students. In trade for federal financial backing, which all states obtain, states and parochial school districts must abide by different federal instructions (Ryan 937).

Since its enactment till fairly lately, Title I received less praise than criticism. Experiential studies commonly determined that Title I failed to meet its target of reducing the

achievement gap between low-income and more advantaged students (Natriello and McDill, 33-34). One issue was the manner federal money was utilized. Title I funding generally reinforced the appointment of teachers' assistants and the formation of corrective classes for underprivileged students, who stereotypically were expelled of regular classrooms and exposed to a diluted curriculum (Liebman and Sabel, 1721). Not astonishingly, this policy was far from being efficient in closing the achievement gap.

Since Title I was planned for reauthorization in 1994, many inside and outside of the federal government approved that the program required change. Congress and former U.S. President Clinton resorted to standards-based reform for motivation and direction (Elmore "Testing Trap" 36). Standards-based reform focuses on the modest notion that states must establish ambitious educational benchmarks and periodically evaluate students to measure their development toward meeting those benchmarks (Cohen, 99). The reform dates back to the 1983 publication of "A Nation At Risk" which contended in pessimistic language that U.S. schools' estimations were extremely substandard. Standards-based reform pledged to lift the academic bar by providing that all schools within a state have to meet constant and rigorous benchmarks. Along with endorsing excellence, standards-based reform also pledged to support equality by providing that all students, not just those in advantaged suburban schools, meet identical demanding benchmarks (Taylor, "Assessment to a Quality," 321-13).

In reauthorizing Title I in 1994 via the enactment of the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), Congress and former U.S. President Clinton combined the essential notions of standards-based reform (Elmore "Testing Trap" 36). Therefore, they basically altered the nature of Title I. As a substitute for supplying funds to back corrective teaching for underprivileged students, Title I funds now had to be utilized to establish benchmarks for all

students (Weckstein, 328-29). In an effort to obtain Title I funds, states had to devise more rigorous content and achievement benchmarks in at least math and reading, boost evaluations that were associated with those standards, and frame strategies to help and eventually sanction inadequate schools. Significantly, benchmarks and evaluations for Title I schools had to be similar to those set up for all other schools inside a state. Along these lines, the federal government wanted to make sure that states would bring all students to identical high prospects and hold all schools, irrespective of their student population, responsible for academic shortcomings (Ryan 938-39).

In reality, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act to plug apparent holes in the implementation of Title I funding under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Improving America's Schools Act. Under the NCLB, states and school districts have to conform to thorough requirements in an effort to deserve Title I funds. Former U.S. President Bush explained, "The era of low expectations and low standards is ending; a time of great hopes and proven results is arriving" (President's Remarks on Implementation of NCLB). To its advocates, the statute reflects the vision of *Brown* by lifting the prospects of Title I funding to highlight equity in educational outcomes. A main change initiated by the NCLB is that at the present time all students are tested, not only those attending Title I schools. Its outline is based on the ideas of state educational strategies, standardized testing, reporting outcomes, and holding schools and districts responsible for academic failures (Vincent 130-31).

The declared purpose of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is to promote better educational accountability at all levels by boosting school achievement and, thereby, student attainment. Its specified objective, briefly, is to: promote accountability for student performance; permit school choice for students attending inadequate schools; permit more

suppleness for how federal education dollars are expended; and center a stronger focus on competent teaching. In general, the primary goals of the Act are to increase academic performance across the board and to eradicate the achievement gap amongst students from dissimilar backgrounds. To achieve these targets, the Act calls for states to set up more rigorous academic benchmarks for all schools and to test all students on a regular basis to guarantee that they are meeting those benchmarks. The Act also provides that states and school districts hire competent and experienced teachers, implying that they have demonstrated some proficiency in the subjects they instruct (NCLB, § 1119).

Congress uttered the objective of the No Child Left Behind Act as follows: to make sure that all children have an impartial, equivalent, and important opportunity to acquire a high-quality education and attain, at least, competence on demanding state academic attainment benchmarks and state educational evaluations (§ 6301). The goal emphasizes reducing the achievement gap between the lowest and highest performing groups of students, particularly the gap between underprivileged and privileged students and between the deprived and the more affluent, applying local and school accountability and flexibility, as well as parent choice and involvement, so that no child is left behind (§ 6301). Under the Act, a school's persistent failure to make "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) toward reaching set up student proficiency objectives generates help and involvement, with parents of students in unsuccessful schools permitted to transfer their children to improved schools (§ 6316 (b)). If, following technical aid and parochial reorganization, the schools encounter persistent failure to meet Adequate Yearly Progress targets, then remedial measure might be applied, giving birth to state takeovers of parochial schools (§ 6316 (c)(10)) (Regina 688-89).

The No Child Left Behind Act presents twelve instruments to be used as the means of achieving its purposes (§ 6301). These tools include the application of state academic evaluations and accountability schemes with the purpose of measuring student educational performance with specific focus centered on the requirements of “low-achieving children in [the American] Nation’s highest-poverty schools, limited English proficient children, migratory children, children with disabilities, Indian children, neglected or delinquent children, and young children in need of reading assistance” (§ 6301 (1)-(2)). Accountability appraisals are meant at holding schools, parochial educational agencies, and states accountable for boosting the academic performance of all students and restructuring those low-achieving schools that fail to offer high-quality education and “[c]losing the achievement gap between high and low-performing children, especially . . . between minority and non-minority students,” and between the underprivileged and the advantaged (§ 6301 (3)-(4)). And lastly, the Act pledges a combination of endeavors of agencies offering services to “youth, children, and families” and endowment of parents with educational power by means of “substantial and meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children” (§ 6301 (11)-(12)) (Regina 689).

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, each state is permitted to devise and apply its own local accountability scheme (§ 6311 (b) (2) (A)). Though the Act indicates that a state system has to comprise benchmarks that are academically rigorous, each state establishes its own benchmarks and describes its own appraisals of performance levels (§ 6311 (b)). The NCLB Act’s key purpose is that all students within a state “meet or exceed the State’s proficient level of academic achievement on the State assessments” by 2014 (§ 6311 (b) (2) (F)) (Regina 690). The NCLB Act sets up an all-inclusive framework of benchmarks, testing, and accountability lacking in the preceding federal legislation, and eliminates some discretion from parochial education

officials in specifying what the objectives and results of education must be. Basically, “national report cards” will be distributed to each school and district in the United States. School districts will be granted recompenses- in the form of bigger federal dollars- for proven achievement, while unsuccessful schools and districts will be penalized through removal of federal funds, public school choice, and pressure for privatization. All students in Grades three through eight will be tested in math and reading, with testing in science added in 2005. All students have to demonstrate proficiency by 2014 (Fusarelli 72).

Not merely is student testing becoming compulsory but NCLB also provides that the outcomes be reported by student subcategories- disaggregated by ethnicity, special education, English-language learners, and economically underprivileged students. Parents will obtain yearly report cards comprising the following: student academic attainment divided by subcategories; appraisal of students at basic, proficient, and advanced levels of academic performance; high school completion rates; teachers’ professional qualifications; proportions of students not tested; and designation of schools requiring development. One of the specified objectives of disaggregating student achievement by subgroup is to allow districts to make usage of data as an indicative instrument displaying where schools require improvement, mirroring the concerns of federal policymakers over the broadening achievement gap amongst ethnic subcategories in American society. The legislation establishes a twelve-year schedule for reducing the achievement gap (Fusarelli 72).

In schools where students fall short of making adequate yearly progress (AYP) in two successive years, children will be granted the choice of transfer to another public school, either inside or outside the district, with transportation supplied by the district. AYP is described as the least level of development school districts must attain yearly with regard to the development rate

in the proportion of students who attain the state's description of academic proficiency. Every state will establish the Adequate Yearly Progress goals that each school must meet to attain one hundred percent proficiency by the end of twelve years. The NCLB Act stipulates that Congress obtain yearly state-by-state reports of student improvement and dictates that constantly low-achieving schools and school districts submit upgrading strategies for appraisal by the U.S. Department of Education. Constantly unsuccessful schools need to offer opt-out requirements to students and parents- public school choice option- or be reorganized as charter or magnet schools. Furthermore, the No Child Left Behind Act provides that districts supply teaching and other complementary facilities- facilities that might be offered by for-profit, public, or religious organizations- to students who do not succeed to meet the benchmarks (Fusarelli 72-73). Actually, the No Child Left Behind Act is endowed with the ability to affect academic achievement gaps and thus narrow the black white educational incongruities in U.S. public schools.

B. The Potential Impact of the NCLB's Legislation on Academic Achievement Gaps

Outstanding authors Reardon, Greenberg, Kalogrides, Shores and Valentino stated in their currently-conducted research in August 12th, 2013 that the No Child Left Behind Act might reduce achievement gaps by means of numerous mechanisms. First, the law calls for evaluation of approximately all students in grades three to eight, together with public reporting of outcomes, dissected by subgroup. Highlighting the achievement of students from historically low-achieving backgrounds- the so-called "informational aspects" of the strategy (Hanushek and Raymond 406-415) - might inspire schools and teachers to center their focus on reducing gaps (Rothstein 104-

110). Second, NCLB might narrow achievement gaps by linking accountability penalties to the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of every subgroup. At this point, a mounting cascade of sanctions might pressure schools to increase the academic achievement of student subgroups with substandard proficiency rates. After two successive years, a school that necessitates improvement must provide transfer choices to families; after four years, remedial actions need to be adopted to change school staffs or academic purposes; after six years, the school must be reorganized by substituting the administration, teaching personnel, or administration structure. If these measures, or the menace of these measures, boost performance amongst low-achieving student subgroups, achievement gaps might reduce markedly (Reardon et al.3-4).

Besides shedding light on discrepancy in achievement and enforcing accountability sanctions, the NCLB Act comprises other requirements that might affect current achievement gaps. For instance, its highly qualified teacher requirement provides that all teachers have a bachelor's degree, full state licensure or accreditation and documented acquaintance of the pertinent subject matter. In numerous states, lesser-competent teachers are predominantly present in schools serving poor and disadvantaged students (Clotfelter Ladd and Vigdor 377-392). If NCLB somewhat balances the distribution of competent teachers amongst schools, and if these qualified teachers are more efficient at rising student achievement than their less competent counterparts, then NCLB might narrow achievement gaps. Lastly, the law enlarged federal backing for additional education facilities and school choice options for children in underachieving schools. If more poor and underprivileged families utilize these requirements than others, and if these facilities and options methodically improve student performance, then these aspects of the No Child Left Behind Act may also reduce achievement gaps (Reardon et al. 4).

In spite of the federal enactment of NCLB, there are motives to conclude that its subgroup-particular accountability pressure, and thus its impact on achievement gaps, may differ amongst states (Davidson et al.). One cause of this difference is that NCLB does not provide that states hold schools responsible for the Adequate Yearly Progress of subgroups with a small number of students to furnish consistent information on their attainment. In such a school with a small number of African American students, for instance, NCLB might create slight or no inducement for educators to center focus on the achievement of the few African American students in the school- though African American students' scores would still be encompassed in calculations of the school's total proficiency rate. Undeniably, it might create an inducement to emphasize principally the achievement of low-performing white students. Accordingly, the NCLB incentive form might bring about no change in, or even a broadening of, the white black achievement gap in that school. Conversely, a school with a huge number of African American students will be held responsible for the achievement of its black students independently, creating a bigger incentive to increase their achievement and reduce achievement gaps (Reardon et al. 4-5).

One possible outcome of this aspect of the law is that NCLB may be more efficient at reducing achievement gaps in states where more underprivileged students attend schools necessitating subgroup-specific reporting of test scores. The percentage of African American or Hispanic students in such schools will rest on numerous attributes: first, the general percentage of African American or Hispanic students in the state; second, the amount of between-school racial discrimination- in extremely isolated states, more underprivileged students attend schools with huge numbers of same-race counterparts; third, the typical school size- when the greatest number of schools are small, less students will be in schools meeting the least subgroup threshold; and

fourth, the standards for defining what number of students is adequate to necessitate subgroup-particular reporting and accountability. These standards differ considerably across states (Davidson et al.). As a matter of fact, The No Child Left Behind Act encompasses several key components which need to be analyzed in an attempt to provide clear explanations to the question of the existing black white academic achievement gap.

C. The No Child Left Behind Act's Effect on African American Students' Achievement

Researcher Professor Gottlieb identified seven key components of the No Child Left Behind Act; they are namely as follows: closing the achievement gap; improving literacy by putting reading first; expanding flexibility and reducing bureaucracy; rewarding success and sanctioning failure; promoting informed parental choice; improving teacher quality; and making schools safer for the 21st century. In an attempt to account for the main reasons of persistent low academic performance among African American students in spite of the enactment of new policies and initiatives, Gottlieb examined the No Child Left Behind Act with respects to positive and negative probable impacts on African American students and dissected his analysis by each component of the Act (42-47):

Closing the Achievement Gap: Accountability and high benchmarks are what the Department of Education considers is necessary to boost academic achievement. Accountability means to recompense and discipline public school systems that are or are not executing their mission, on the basis of a nationwide benchmark. This strategy can have a positive effect on black students only if the punished public schools do not in any way punish their students. If this procedure does not punish students it can be an accessible technique to advance schools for all

students. Yet, unsuccessful or punished schools should also be granted additional backing to alter the fundamental attributes that have produced it to be disciplined in the first place. Furthermore, yearly academic evaluations represent the emphasis on boosting reading and math attainment. The notion of testing students on a regular basis to recognize their performance level is a valuable method to realize how well students are performing. Standardized testing can mirror areas and subjects that students may require assistance. Standardized testing might also help in identifying how well students are acquiring knowledge in the classroom. Nevertheless, uniform tests do not take into account, as part of their assessment procedure, such crucial attributes as attendance, transience, home responsibility and conditions, absence of interest and parental backing, fear of achievement, preoccupation with absence of necessities, organic reasons, work duties, a failure to master fundamental concepts, association with divergent subculture, and family morals.

Numerous African American students in urban public schools frequently undergo these exterior circumstances. Despite this, as the Principal of Thurgood Marshall Academy (TMA) in Washington D.C., Douglas Tyson, commented, “testing should be matched with what is being taught” (Gottlieb 43). If standardized tests do not comprehend what students have been educated, it is an unjust technique to use for whatever goal. An additional probable issue with uniform testing is if it takes away from the curriculum or lesson plan intended to teach students properly. Thurgood Marshall Academy’s NCLB Compliance Officer, Beth Bulgeron, believes standardized testing, as an analytic instrument is a positive endeavor towards boosting academic performance problems only if the test is remedied. Yet, Bulgeron articulated that standardized testing is “not a good way to teach material.” Whatever the case may be, standardized testing can be a positive method if it efficiently assesses student performance (Gottlieb 42-43).

Improving Literacy by Putting Reading First: Gottlieb also asserts that emphasis on reading in initial grades is an outstanding tactic to boost academic achievement of African American students. Programs such as Head Start have demonstrated to be very operative instruments in assisting academic achievement of students. Actually, if more focus were centered on helping African American students at early stages, there would be low academic attainment gap and a higher proportion in test scores. The new Reading First initiative seems to be an efficient program to enhance African American student academic performance (43).

Expanding Flexibility and Reducing Bureaucracy: Bigger funds to schools for technology, Title I flexibility, and decline in bureaucracy are all outstanding methods to boost academic achievement. African Americans together with all other students can take advantage of these endeavors. Schools will be granted better occasions to teach their students as they feel required. The highest dilemma to this endeavor is the shortage of funding that states are truly getting from NCLB. Numerous states are finding out that they must pay a higher proportion of the charges to remain within the restraints of the act. Schools that are capable of having admission to more facilities and resources to meet their necessities without a great deal of administrative paper work will certainly take advantage of NCLB. When facilities are required to back programs for students in need of special care schools at present will have the flexibility to bring about the corresponding changes (Gottlieb 44).

Rewarding Success and Sanctioning Failure: Recompensing schools that narrow the achievement gaps, holding states responsible for attainments and setting up penalties for schools that fall short of complying with the national benchmark is an outstanding tactic to academic development. Once more, it becomes a problem of financial backing. Schools that must

be compensated and schools that require backing are both powerless to function under NCLB due to a lack of existing funding. Inappropriately there is a direct necessity for financial backing in NCLB. Without funding provision facilities will not be supplied. If there is no cash to back the act, it will no more be efficient in boosting academic achievement on a national scale for African American students and other students (Gottlieb 44-45).

Promoting Informed Parental Choice: Professor Gottlieb announces that providing school reports to parents, charter school alternatives and further school choices, such as vouchers, might inspire public school establishments to ameliorate their courses to the requirements of their constituents. An elected Washington D.C. School Board member, Tommy Wells, considers that school choice as a very operative technique to challenge public schools to meet the requirements for success. Alternatively, Wells “believes [in] standardized testing so that we know where we are but it is pointless to have a voucher system” (Gottlieb 45). Pro-choice might be additional positive consequence on academic attainment amongst African American students, but it can be hard for African American parents to displace their children to other schools far from their homes in quest of improved academic chances. Parents should be endowed with choices that should be made within and involving their children’s public school. Those children who have a shortage of parental backing are similarly abandoned by this component of the act. If a parent is powerless or reluctant to put their child in an effective school then the student’s low academic performance is going to persist. Public schools must be held responsible and parents must be endowed with choice, but they have to be responsible and have choice to transform the organization of the public school. As a substitute of escaping to other schools in quest for an improved academic course, the schools with struggles and problems must be invested in (45).

Improving Teacher Quality: competent teachers, operational funding, and a reinforced academic curriculum are very significant and probably positive means to increase academic attainment. But the question that arises is what a qualified teacher is? Numerous teachers might be required to be greatly skilled, experienced and competent but is the NCLB Act going to reward these teachers for their endeavors and expenses in obtaining these experiences? The response at present is negative, African American students can certainly take advantage of high quality, competent teachers, but once more NCLB does not offer the financial motivation. There also should be competent guidance counselor on every public school's campus to remedy problems relating to academic achievement such as attendance, absence of interest, fear of achievement, home duties and conditions, organic grounds and association with deviant subcultures. Beth Bulgeron stated that demanding competent teachers is unjust because dissimilar areas require dissimilar things from teachers such as instructing more than a single subject. To supply funding is the only means to devise programs that function and reinforce academic curriculum requirements. Financial backing and support from parents, educators, communities, and the American as nation as a whole is equally crucial (Gottlieb 46).

Making Schools Safer for the 21st Century: Finally, author Professor Gottlieb affirms in his "Internal Colonization, African Americans, and No Child Left Behind" that Teacher security, endorsing school safety, rescuing students from insecure schools, and backing character education are crucial targets and a very positive endeavor that will definitely have an impact on numerous African American students who attend overfilled urban schools that are in extremely violent zones. "Data on homicides and suicides at school show there were 32 school-associated violent deaths in the United States between July 1, 1999 and June 30, 2000, including 24 homicides, 16 of which involved school-aged children" (Gottlieb 46). The lone defiance of

these endeavors is, another time, funding. Similarly, to displace students from insecure schools to substitutes can be problematic as well. Those underprivileged students in aggressive schools then become violently digested and even more unsafe. Instead, there should be helpful facilities that meet the needs of these challenging students (46-47). In fact, the NCLB has drawn its share of praise and criticism. In spite of its laudable goals and inarguably good intents, its potential perverse incentives and unintended consequences outnumbered its positive impact on the American system of education in general and on African American students in particular.

II. Potential Perverse Incentives of the NCLB

The No Child Left Behind Act has been applauded by some and criticized by others in the popular media and in scholarly journals, even though it has obtained little consideration in the legal writings. Those who approve the Act highlight its praiseworthy goals and applaud its hard accountability assessments (Casserly, 48). Those who disapprove the Act condemn the heavy focus on testing and the unavoidable “teaching to the test” that will ensue (Elmore “Testing Trap” 97). They also criticize the federal government for intervening with state and parochial regulation of education while falling short of funding all of the costs related to the Act (Hoff, 1).

Simply put, a considerable number of educators and civil rights specialists, while approving that NCLB is an inspiring measure, have expressed concerns about its application, particularly the school choice requirements and dependence on standardized tests, and the effect they will have on African American students. Some are concerned about the disciplines drawn under the Act, they fear that if they are not met with sufficient resources, will chastise black students who excessively attend constantly low-achieving schools and are under the most pressure to progress. Furthermore, due to the NCLB provision of allowing students transfers

only within school districts, those with numerous schools determined as requiring upgrading will be powerless to provide further choices (Rudalevige, 23). Yet, advocates of NCLB's school choice requirement proclaim that it offers opportunity to carry on school integration endeavors and endows parents with more authority, granting them a more conclusive standard by which to determine school quality (Taylor, "What Impacts of Accountability Movement?" 1751).

Others observe that over dependence on testing is a both positive and negative feature of NCLB (Nash, 240). Those who approve testing as an accountability measure note that it will boost classroom teaching and eradicate issues that can otherwise go unnoticed. Furthermore, testing supporters claim that low-income and African American students stand to profit the most from testing because it will make it impossible to disregard achievement gaps (Kucierick, 481, 484). On the other hand, numerous educationalists fear that states will utilize tests not merely as an accountability process, but as a measure to define grade advancement or graduation, generating high-stakes for students and aggravating the achievement gap.

Two years following its enactment, the impacts of the NCLB are starting to spread all through America's education system. The law has drawn its share of applause and disapproval. Starting with praise, advocates claim that current test scores demonstrate the NCLB's victory, as math scores are up nine points for students in the fourth grade and five points for students in the eighth grade nationally. Moreover, supporters argue that the greatest number of Americans approve ideas of ameliorating the quality of teaching and initial reading education. Other advocates applaud the NCLB's upgrading of a challenging educational environment and great attainment provisions for all students. As the failure of any racial, poor, disabled or ethnic group of students now generates accountability, protagonists contend that accountability makes sure that achievement discrepancies in public education will no more be overlooked. Actually, some

critics have even claimed that the NCLB's accountability requirements are some of the most potent legislative cures to racial disparity since the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Vincent 133). There are actually five potential perverse incentives of the No Child Left Behind Act that might be held accountable for its failure to redress the academic achievement gap between black students and their more affluent counterparts. Federalism is the first issue that was met with a scathing criticism.

A. Unilateralism

In addition to praise, the NCLB has drawn scathing criticism from educators and state government officials alike. A common criticism amongst education officials is that the federal government proceeded individually in enacting and applying the Act. Education specialists together with school officials argue that they were mostly left out from drafting and applying the law. Gary Orfield, co-director of the Civil Rights Project and author of a study on the NCLB, clarified, "A reasonable stance of the administration would have been one of consultation and flexibility together with assessment and feedback" (Orfield *Inspiring Vision* 4). Instead, opponents contend that the Department of Education has taken a "command and control posture" that offends educationalists who disapprove its approaches (Sunderman and Kim 7).

There is a central issue with federalism and devising a standardized educational system in that federal directives cannot be enforced federally if states are granted the right to describe federal directives. By permitting states to determine proficiency, a state is capable of manipulating the benchmarks for their particular state to meet proficiency, but it also implies that benchmarks are dissimilar in each state (Young 10). Virtually a third of the states' tests are founded on unchallenging benchmarks (Fusarelli, 81). States have started dropping their

benchmarks or are “creatively interpreting and evaluating school performance,” which is an unintentional policy outcome that has reversed federal targets. Yet, without the authority to compel states to determine a high benchmark level and yet devising financial sanctions for the failure to meet nationwide standards, federal policy has devised an unwarranted circumstance for itself (Fusarelli, 85).

The No Child Left Behind Act assumes that all schools in the entire states are able to teach students at a comparative benchmark level, and depends on six assumptions of state testing: first, tests evaluate the most suitable content to be instructed, acquired and tested; second, test content is comprised in the curriculum; third, school staff comprehend what is to be assessed; fourth, the test is not a least aptitude exam; fifth, funding is fair nationally so that low-income districts have adequate resources; and finally, adequate personnel development is supplied (Fusarelli, 84). Yet, though schools do meet “proficiency” everywhere, because proficiency varies by state, the attainment gap is still existent, and the measure is inadequate (Holland, 56). Furthermore, impartiality in education and opportunity is not capable of being attained without a national curriculum and with national testing associated to this syllabus. It is probable that due to the hurdles the NCLB Act has at the federal level that the Act might create an essential realignment of control and power within the educational system in the United States, moving authority away from school districts toward the federal level (Fusarelli, 83-4). Moreover, financial issues have added more opponents to the No Child Left Behind Act’s implementation.

B. Unfunded Mandate

Beyond disapproval of unilateralism, state legislatures and education officials of both political parties increasingly attack the NCLB as an unfunded mandate. Congress authorized

more than thirteen billion dollars for Title I education grants under the Act for fiscal year 2002. Over the ensuing five years, the authorized grants augmented to twenty five billion dollars for fiscal year 2007. Yet, opponents indicate that the Bush Administration has apportioned billions of dollars less than Congress authorized for the program. Though the Act grants states money to put into practice evaluation requirements, critics argue that it falls short of addressing the supplementary administrative costs needed. Together with state money issues caused by intense tax cuts and a national depression, detractors contend that the NCLB has intensely augmented costs to schools and the states that support them. Educationalists worry that during the previous few years, growth in federal education expenditure has dropped far below the level attained during the era preceding the adoption of the NCLB (Vincent 134).

The NCLB is replete with with financial issues. The costs of wholly putting the NCLB Act into practice are much greater than federal policymakers propose. Fusarelli appraises that the charges of conformity to the NCLB vary between \$84.5 billion and \$148 billion. These statistics are fairly over the supplementary one billion dollars the Bush administration joined to the Title I appropriations for fiscal year 2004 (Fusarelli, 83). Even the U.S. Department of Education asserts its shortage of commitment in supplying states with the appropriate means to comply with its benchmarks on the website of the Department of Education devoted to the NCLB: ‘No Child Left Behind is an unprecedented commitment that focuses *not* [italics added] on money but on results’ (Fusarelli, 88).

Since the federal government merely contributes approximately seven percent of overall expenditure on elementary and secondary schools and parochial school funding generates regional disparities in spending per pupil (Pinkerton), it would seem these figures reveal the need for greater and more stable federal funding in education. States spending the minimum per

student are typically southern and western states, where an unbalanced number of America's underprivileged and deprived students also live (Pinkerton). Unfair expenditure widens the gap among underprivileged students, and accordingly federal funds are more likely to reduce the outcome of imbalanced state/parochial spending. Moreover, the punishment for not making Adequate Yearly Progress or meeting NCLB guidelines is withdrawing funds. This penalty appears counterintuitive when it seems that unsuccessful schools are the schools that require the most appropriate and steady funding (Young 9).

Finn proclaims that every Act in Washington D.C. is theoretically 'under-funded,' implying that the funds every bill Congress passes specifies resources that are never completely allocated. He proposes that the amount of expenditure required is overstated and suggests that schools put up with what they already have (Finn). In an effort to reconcile Finn with other detractors it is more appropriate to raise the question about the impartiality of funding rather than the availability of money itself (Young 9). Observed from another angle, state officials contend that the NCLB is too expensive. In January 2004, the Ohio state legislature prepared a report appraising that the price of conforming to the Act surpassed the supplementary federal revenue by \$1.5 billion yearly (Orfield *Inspiring Vision* 5). In the meantime, the Utah legislature authorized a study to define the viability of forgoing federal education funds to evade conforming to the NCLB. Seventeen state legislatures validated bills objecting to the Act, and the National Governor's Association condemned the law as being an unfunded mandate (Vincent 134-135). Overemphasizing testing is an additional potential perverse incentive of the NCLB.

C. Teaching to the Test

Education officials are concerned about the likelihood that schools will respond to the NCLB by “teaching the test.” More precisely, educationalists contend that schools will focus on teaching exam methods and will teach solely the evaluated material, instead of boosting students to really acquire the subject matter. Antagonists indicate that research already demonstrates that schools are spending considerable time and money “teaching the test” to meet the Act’s proficiency requirements. Simultaneously, they claim that the cost of days wasted in test preparation and teaching not associated with general learning are countless (Vincent 135).

In actual fact, the NCLB put test-based accountability into federal law, consequently hardening the state standardized test as the only benchmark through which all schools are assessed. The outcomes of this cannot be undervalued. As the yearly progress of schools is arbitrated by lone standardized tests in reading and mathematics, the fear generated by such a policy has had a snowball impact of highlighting passing the test over the overall quality of the school experience: the more importance focused on test scores, the less focus centered on the general school experience. Once tests have such high stakes devoted to them, teaching time is replaced by test preparation bringing about a reduced and declining classroom experience. In a contemplative editorial from the previous few years, curricularist Peter Hlebowitsh highlighted this destructive outcome that high stakes uniform testing can have on the school syllabus:

We have known for years that school experiences in high-stakes-testing environments generally reduce themselves to what is being tested. The effect is that art, music, and such skills sets as critical thinking, creativity, cooperative behavior, and many others get short shrift in the classroom, primarily because such matters typically have little or no place on the exams (28).

In line with what Hlebowitsh opined, social studies educationalist Thomas Misco exposed the dire truth that "the change in educational culture also neglects the development of dispositions of life as a moral citizen, which is often considered an expendable luxury in an era of accountability" (267). NCLB's overemphasis on standardized tests has certainly tightened the school curriculum to what is assessed on the test (Schul 2). High-stakes testing does not merely have perverse curricular outcomes, but there is also a motive to believe that it distracts the devotion of school leadership from the educative assignment of the public school experience. Instead of concentrating on techniques to offer a quality civic preparation for students, school administrators all over the United States have been diverted by the requirement to evade the bite of the NCLB Act's high-stakes accountability provisions via what have been devised within the ring of education officials as "gaming strategies."

One such gaming approach that school districts have utilized to meet the NCLB Act's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) provisions is discharging students who are more likely to find taking the test a challenging issue. Discharge of this kind characteristically implies inserting students in special education where their test scores are not comprised in the school's AYP data. Since the schools are more likely to discount students who are low-achieving on high stakes-tests, deprived and the economically underprivileged are once more abandoned by the system (Booher-Jennings and Beveridge). Paradoxically, with districts making use of such gaming policies, the NCLB ends up harming the very students it envisioned to aid (Schul 2). Moreover, some of the provisions of the NCLB would shy good teachers away by both reducing their supply and reinforcing their unequal distribution. The requirement of "highly qualified" teachers may also be deemed as an additional deterrent as it depends primarily on state's requirements for certification or licensure.

D. Deterring Good Teachers

The larger benchmarks and testing program, to which the NCLB Act belongs, produces two distinct problems concerning teachers. First, it will make teaching a less pleasant career to some gifted individuals. Second, it will boost the tendency of high qualified teachers to select comparatively wealthy, white, and high-performing schools (Ryan 971). Local teachers, with some guidance from parochial officials, once specified not merely how to teach but what to teach. Nowadays the state, via benchmarks and tests, informs teachers of what to cover. Teachers basically preserve the liberty to decide how to teach material allocated by the state. In fact, confining the independence of teachers, while probably essential in some cases, might be counterproductive. Setting up benchmarks and demanding periodic testing can look after students against unenthusiastic teachers who would rather evade their duties. Simultaneously, however, decreasing their independence might render teaching less appealing to competent teachers. Those teachers who can be relied on to inspire and teach their students might find teaching less recompensing the more they are chained to state benchmarks and tests. Defending students against incompetent teachers can therefore concurrently discourage good ones from getting in or remaining in the profession (Ryan 971-72).

Together with state accountability systems, the NCLB makes life even more disagreeable for teachers because it increases the stakes devoted to test outcomes. Schools with lower test scores, or even those that usually have higher test scores but have one low-achieving subgroup, will be unable of making adequate yearly progress. Teachers in those schools will have to undergo the stigma of being related to unsuccessful schools, which might constrain upcoming profession opportunities (Archer 52). Teachers who stay in schools that constantly fall short of

making adequate yearly progress confront the likelihood of being dismissed or relocated to another school. Besides these punishments, enforced by the NCLB, some state accountability systems also generate the likelihood that teachers in low-achieving schools will be dismissed, or that they will confront the disheartening prospect of viewing their colleagues obtain advantages for good test outcomes (Clotfelter and Ladd 23, 46).

Ascribing penalties to failure might be essential to offer inducements to consider the tests seriously. But it increases the costs related to failure, which might make teaching even less appealing. It also puts more weight on teachers to ensure that their students pass the tests, which will necessitate more test-specific training. Teachers might dislike having to abide by state benchmarks, which provide overall instructions as to what material should be enclosed and which skills taught. But teaching to benchmarks must be comparatively liberating in comparison to having to teach to a particular test, specifically the kind of multiple-choice tests utilized most frequently by states. To the degree that spending time preparing for a sole standardized test is less stimulating or recompensing than is directing a consistent lesson, even one directed by state benchmarks, test-based accountability will compel teachers to spend time on responsibilities they would rather evade. This will make instruction less appealing to some teachers (Ryan 973).

Minimally, teaching will be less likely appealing in those schools where educators have to spend a huge amount of time getting ready for the tests. This gives birth to the second result of the NCLB on teachers, which is their distribution. Ascribing penalties to test outcomes produces apparent inducements for teachers to circumvent schools that are likely to create bad outcomes. Low-income and majority-minority schools already struggle to magnetize and retain good teachers. Repeated studies indicate that poor and underprivileged schools have less competent and less skilled teachers. Similarly, experimental studies constantly specify that, when granted

the opportunity to select, teachers automatically move to schools with fewer low-income, underprivileged, and low-performing students. The exact reasons behind shying away from high-poverty, high-minority, and low-performing schools, on the part of qualified and competent teachers, are tough to identify and most probably are linked to a combination of dynamics, comprising working circumstances, income, student conduct, parental backing, and administrative backing (Park 17). All of these dynamics both combined and separately, point teachers toward comparatively high-achieving, wealthy, and white schools. The NCLB will probably strengthen the trend of qualified teachers escaping challenging schools. (Ryan 974).

Therefore, the safest bet for instructors is to choose schools that are more likely to achieve highly under the NCLB's agenda. These schools are most likely majority white, middle class, and situated in the suburbs. Given that the most skilled and competent teachers will frequently have the broadest range of choices; these are the teachers who will have the chance and inducement to select already effective schools (Boger 1445-46). The most competent and most skilled teachers will therefore have an additional inducement to teach in schools that are already achieving highly (Ryan 975).

The NCLB similarly provides that all instructors in Title I schools be nominally "highly qualified." But the standards that render a teacher "highly qualified" for purposes of the No Child Left Behind are not faultless, or even very good, substitutions for real quality. For newly employed teachers to be deemed as "highly qualified" under the NCLB, they have to be licensed or certified by the state. Middle and high school educators also have to prove subject-matter acquaintance, either by passing a challenging state test or by having majored in the subject in college. All current teachers also have to be licensed or certified, and remaining middle and high school teachers have also to show subject-matter acquaintance. They can perform this either via

very similar means as newly employed teachers or via a high impartial state constant standard of assessment (Ryan 976).

Whether the NCLB's provision that teachers be "highly qualified" is a significant substitute for quality, thus, depends chiefly on the state's provisions for certification or licensure. Studies of these provisions do not arouse much sureness. In numerous states, teaching candidates have to pass a state test in an effort to be certified or licensed. Yet the cutoff scores for passing the exams are frequently noticeably low, permitting even those who score in the lowest tenth percentile to meet the requirements for a license or certification. Moreover, the tests themselves are not consistently demanding. Actually, four states really utilize a test for licensing that twelve other states utilize to define eligibility for teacher training programs (Center on Education Policy *From the Capitol to the Classroom* 94-95).

Undeniably, because of their absence of consistency, critics propose that present licensure or certification systems commonly deter solely the "weakest of the weak" from entry into the occupation and fail to guarantee teacher quality. Some claim that these methods also prevent some gifted individuals from entering the vocation because they necessitate laborious teacher planning courses as a requirement to sitting for an instruction exam. Licensure and certification accordingly might be both inadequate and needless to make sure that teachers are really "highly qualified" (Ryan 977). The last unintended consequence and potential perverse incentive of the No Child Left Behind Act is the promotion of segregation and exclusion of already disadvantaged and underperforming students.

E. Promoting Segregation and Exclusion

One of the most heralded features of the NCLB is the provision that schools meet achievement targets for different groups of students, comprising underprivileged racial and ethnic minorities (NCLB § 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II)). By dividing the scores of these students and holding schools accountable for their attainment, the NCLB pledges to shine a required spotlight on the achievement of conventionally deprived and underachieving students. Schools or school systems will no more be able to disguise the academic achievement of these groups within combined scores. Really, this very feature of the NCLB puts into practice the rhetorical promise to “leave no child behind.” Prominent Professor and author James E. Ryan claims in his outstanding article “Perverse Incentives of No Child Left Behind Act” that in spite of the exhaustively estimable objective of NCLB requirements and praiseworthy goals, it inadvertently endorses racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic discrimination and separation in at least three different ways; first, by devising inducements to segregate; second, through the Act’s own choice requirements; and third, by exasperating underprivileged students’ segregation (961-970).

The first means by which the NCLB endorses discrimination is offering administrators of white, middle class schools a motive to exclude African American students. The procedures are simple: these students conventionally do not achieve as well as their more affluent white cohorts on standardized tests. In their research, for instance, Professors Kane and Staiger revealed that schools that comprise an African American or an economically deprived subgroup are much less likely to make adequate yearly progress than those that do not (Kane and Staiger 152-158).

To increase the opportunities that a specific school or schools within a district make Adequate Yearly Progress, education officials have an incentive to reduce the number of African American or low-income students in a school or district. Significantly, education officials do have to push out all such students. The NCLB merely calls for the division of scores for a subgroup if it is adequately big to produce statistically consistent data (NCLB § 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II)). Since there is no sole method for defining this figure, the NCLB lets states to define the least size of subgroups. That number will differ, but it consistently will be over one. Whatever the exact number is, in numerous places it might become the separating line between schools that manage to make AYP and those that fail to do it.

Non–Title I schools might have an additional reason to evade transfer students, at least those from low-income backgrounds. The actual punishments of the NCLB are preserved for schools that obtain Title I funds. While schools that do not obtain Title I funds theoretically have to meet Adequate Yearly Progress and will have their test outcomes stated, they do not confront the public-choice, rearranging, or other accountability requirements that the NCLB enforces on Title I schools. Yet, if a non–Title I school admits Title I transfer students this may transform it into a Title I school. It is indistinguishable from the NCLB whether this would occur mechanically with even a single transfer, or whether it merely would occur if sufficient low-income students transfer to carry the poverty level of the selected school to the required level. In both cases, nevertheless, admitting transfer students produces the risk that a school once exempted from the severe accountability requirements of Title I would become dependent on them.

While the motive to exclude a number of students appears clear, it is less unambiguous how education officials can attain this target if they choose to follow it. In some examples, the

pathway is forthright. Numerous current desegregation strategies are voluntary; they are a kind of organized school choice, either within or across districts. Schools that admit transfer students who are low-income or African American merely may cease doing so. Parents will encounter comparable inducements, which is an additional means by which the NCLB will boost discrimination. Parents with alternatives will be unwilling to select schools that fall short of making Adequate Yearly Progress. In certain places, this will push those parents to draw back from more desegregated schools, given that racially and socioeconomically desegregated schools are more likely to fall short of making AYP than majority or wholly white and middle class schools.

A number of parents will be capable of following up on these incentives either by selecting a specific neighborhood or selecting a specific school. In states that suggest some or no public school choice, parents will have to move to the appropriate neighborhood in an attempt to put their children in middle class schools, which efficiently implies that using this procedure of choice will be limited to those who can meet the expense of living in the neighborhoods that host such schools. In states and districts that financially back school choice, the option to choose middle class schools might be more broadly obtainable, at least theoretically. But the parents who use this alternative will be unequally better educated and more affluent than those who do not (Viteritti 9). If the parents who do select schools are enthused, as proposed, to evade schools that fall short of making AYP, unrestricted public school choice might be helpful in promoting racial and socioeconomic discrimination.

This is not to propose that many white and middle class parents at present search for varied schools or districts. Formerly, however, some clearly did. Possibly in the years to come, even more would have selected to do so. Ostensibly, parents who selected desegregated schools

looked to many attributes to update their opinion as to which schools were best for their children. If more parents associate school quality with test scores, nevertheless, they might be less eager to look beyond those scores to determine the quality of a school (Ryan 965). Additionally, the NCLB's choice provision is the second means by which it unintentionally promotes segregation and exclusion of disadvantaged students.

The NCLB permits students in Title I schools that fall short of making AYP for two successive years to attend an alternative public school within a similar district (NCLB § 1116(b)(1)(E)). Only schools that have made AYP are qualified to accept transfer students. If these schools are not available within the district, the NCLB and its rules boost but do not oblige districts to arrange for students to attend school in an alternative district (NCLB § 1116(b)(11)). The NCLB guidelines also propose that absence of room in a good school within a similar district is not an adequate motive to deprive students of their right to select another school (NCLB § 200.44(d)).

Certain observers and supporters suggest that the choice requirements could bring about greater racial and socioeconomic desegregation. They proclaim that if underprivileged and low-income students disproportionately do not perform well on standardized tests, Title I schools with such students will be less likely to succeed to make AYP. Accordingly, many disadvantaged and low-income students will have the choice to transfer. The schools to which they move are more likely to be white and middle class. Therefore, the operation of the public school choice requirement in the NCLB might stimulate larger racial and socioeconomic desegregation (Rayan 967).

Prominent author James E. Ryan argues, however, that there are motives to be doubtful that the choice requirements will function in the way just defined. First of all, it is significant to know that inter-district choice is not demanded by the NCLB. In countless urban areas, discrimination happens between rather than within districts, and in these zones the NCLB choice requirement provides slight optimism of endorsing desegregation. Second, where there is mixture within a particular district, space restrictions will assuredly constrain the extent of movement. It is implausible that states and districts will conform to the directive that suggests an absence of room is not justification for falling short of guaranteeing school choice. Uttering that space is not a restriction does not make it so. To the extent districts are eager to disregard this directive; they also might be eager to manipulate space restrictions if doing so is advantageous to them. Put differently, if the incentives to uphold discrimination operate in the way just outlined, education officials of effective schools might argue that they lack enough room for transfer students (967).

Furthermore, there does not yet appear to be a big request for choice. More than 8500 schools were demanded to provide school choice in 2002-3, but merely very few parents opted for this alternative (Boger 1443-44). A shortage of information might partially account for that. The choice alternative is a new one, and it is time consuming that information disseminates to the public. But this basically indicates the likelihood that school administrators who are not enthusiastic about choice will have chances to constrain the flow of information and indirectly deter the exercise of choice (Ryan 968).

Finally, there is a little-observed requirement in the NCLB that makes the school choice provision dependent on state consent. The NCLB spells out that schools provide choice except if they are banned from doing so by state parochial law (NCLB § 1116(b)(1)(E)(i)). Though this can be a great move, Ryan confirms that it is likely that, if nothing else operates, states will pass

laws barring school choice. Taken together, all of these hurdles make it improbable that the NCLB provision of offering choice will be adequate to encounter the tough inducements to uphold or make grow racial and socioeconomic separation (968). Finally, excluding underperforming students is the third potential perverse incentive of the No Child Left Behind Act.

According to author James E. Ryan, an equally more serious danger to deprived students is the issue of student exclusion, which the NCLB menaces to worsen. All kinds of schools, whether elementary, middle, or high school, have to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Students who achieve poorly on state tests clearly harm schools aspiring to make AYP. This is the reason schools will do their best to circumvent accepting those students who are in danger of failing the exams. Similar pressure could lead schools to exclude low-achieving students, either by sending them to another available school or pushing them out of the school system completely. This inducement seemingly will be toughest at the high school level, both because students most characteristically drop out at this phase and because low-achieving high school students are most likely to be farthest behind. Given the tight relationship between academic achievement, socioeconomic status, and race, the students most probably to be targeted for marginalization will be low-income and/or underprivileged minorities. Just as these students will undergo any inducement to isolate them devised by the NCLB, they will also undergo, even more intensely, any inducement to expel them from school altogether (969).

The idea that high-stakes testing raises school dropouts has been discussed in the academic works for some time, and experimental studies have attained dissimilar conclusions on the issue. Nevertheless, the enticement to push low-achieving students out, exacerbated by the NCLB, can barely be ignored: One less student achieving inferior to the proficiency level

augments the general percentage of students who have hit that standard. The No Child Left Behind Act offers fragile defense against this enticement. It necessitates that graduation rates be comprised as part of a school's definition of Adequate Yearly Progress, but it does not mention what the rate has to be, nor does it require that the rate grows over a specific period of time (NCLB § 1111(b)(2)(C)(vi)). Furthermore, graduation rates might merely be counted against a school when determining AYP. In other words, a school with low test scores cannot point to a comparatively high graduation rate and thus make Adequate Yearly Progress.

Conversely, a school with good test scores but low graduation rates might be in danger of falling short of making Adequate Yearly Progress if the state sets a high objective for graduation rates (NCLB § 1111(b)(2)(D)(ii)). States therefore have little motivation to set up a challenging graduation rate. Certainly, the lower that rate is established, the easier it is for schools to exclude students. It is significant to indicate that the NCLB does necessitate that information about graduation rates be publically disseminated (NCLB § 1111(b)(2)(C)(vi)). Publishing this data is far from inadequate, but it remains to be seen whether merely disseminating graduation rates will offer adequate defense for students at risk of being excluded. If it does not, and if dropout rates grow up, the NCLB could result in further hurting those students who visibly require the most assistance- leaving them, quite accurately, behind (Ryan 970).

Beyond these broad disapprovals of the NCLB, numerous features of its statute and application remain at the source of a considerable number of individuals' concern. A good number of antagonists disapprove the NCLB's accountability requirements as biased; excluding significant indicators of educational attainment. First, educationalists contend that graduation rates are disregarded. The Department of Education's guidelines permit graduation rates to be lower than any specific group without generating federal interference (Losen 246). In fact, as

detractors indicate, Secretary Paige issued guidelines asserting that graduation rates did not have to be categorized into specific subgroups. Along with disregarding graduation rates, antagonists claim that the Act does not hold schools responsible for the test scores of students who are absent for the whole year. Opponents of the NCLB argue that the inability to account for students who are absent the whole year inspires schools to pressure low achieving students out of school to improve achievement on evaluations (Losen 283-84). Others are concerned that the Act weakens public schools in an attempt to accelerate privatization of the educational system. In the meantime, in the legal realm discussion rages as to whether the NCLB disrupts the separation of church and state and violates school desegregation orders. Lastly, administrators apprehend that the evaluations are significant to school districts while unimportant to students (Vincent 135-36).

Conclusion

The NCLB may reduce achievement gaps through a variety of mechanisms. First, the law requires assessment of approximately all students in grades three to eight, together with public reporting of results, disaggregated by subgroup. Second, NCLB may narrow achievement gaps by binding accountability sanctions to the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of each subgroup. The law also enlarged federal support for additional education services and school choice options for children in underachieving schools. Lastly, the NCLB may be more operational at closing achievement gaps in states where more underprivileged students attend schools requiring subgroup-specific reporting of test scores. In fact, two years after its passage, the consequences of the NCLB are beginning to ripple throughout America's education system.

The No Child Left Behind Act has drawn its share of praise and criticism. Beginning with praise, advocates contend that current test scores exemplify the NCLB's achievement, as math

scores are up nine points for fourth graders and five points for eighth graders nationwide. Additionally, proponents argue that most Americans support concepts of ameliorating teacher quality and early reading education. Other protagonists praise the NCLB's promotion of a challenging educational environment and high achievement provisions for all students. Since the failure of any racial, low-income, ethnic, or disabled group of students now triggers accountability, supporters claim that accountability makes certain that achievement gaps in public education will no longer be overlooked.

Along with praise, the NCLB has elicited scathing criticism from education officials and state government. A common objection among educationalists is that the federal government acted unilaterally in passing and applying the Act. Experts in education and school officials argue that they were largely left out from drafting and implementing the law. Moreover, the NCLB is increasingly condemned as an unfunded mandate by state legislatures and educationalists of both political parties. Antagonists point out, however, that the Bush Administration has apportioned billions of dollars less than Congress authorized for the program. Furthermore, education officials are concerned that schools will react to the NCLB by "teaching the test." More specifically, educators argue that schools will concentrate on teaching exam methods and will teach only the assessed material, rather than inspiring students to really learn the subject matter.

Besides, the larger benchmarks and testing movement, of which the NCLB is a part, generates two separate problems concerning teachers. First, it will make teaching a less attractive career to some gifted individuals. Second, it will reinforce the tendency of high-qualified teachers to pick out relatively wealthy, white, and high-achieving schools. Finally, despite the admirable purpose of NCLB requirements, namely those of disaggregating the scores of underachieving students and holding schools accountable for their performance, the Act inadvertently promotes

racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic segregation and exclusion in several ways: through the Act's own choice provisions; by creating incentives to segregate; and by exacerbating the exclusion of underprivileged students.

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CHAPTER FIVE

The No Child Left Behind Act and the Reality of the Black-White

Achievement Gap

We have an educational emergency in the United States of America. Nationally, blacks score lower on reading and math tests than their white peers. But it doesn't to be that way. We need to collectively focus our attention on the problem...We have to make sure that every single child gets our best attention. We also need to help African-American parents understand how this historic new education law [NCLB] can specifically help them and their children. (Paige)

Introduction

Appraisal of the changing rate of segregation against black students, throughout the different levels of the K-12 Education, both before and after the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002, helps answer the question of whether the NCLB lived up to the promise of closing the black white achievement gap. Scrutiny of data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress together with the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS-K) helps grasp the reality of academic disparities between blacks and whites and digs deeper into further questions: How large is the gap? How does the existing achievement gap evolve as students move through the grades? And is it shrinking or widening over time? Therefore, the performance of the black white students in both reading and math as they evolve through the Pipeline and postsecondary institutions is explored together with differential rates of participation in higher education. Moreover, reporting researcher Greene's analysis of high school graduation rates is

equally significant as it provides accurate relevant percentages of black and white high school “college ready” graduates and college enrollment rates.

I. The No Child Left Behind and the Black White Achievement Gap

As accounted for in the previous chapter, the primary objective of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is to boost academic achievement of all students in U.S. public schools and to rise the performance of underprivileged students, notably blacks students being among the largest minorities in the United States, to the level of their more affluent peers. These goals are obviously laudable. Nonetheless, in an attempt to enquire into the effective implementation of these objectives and probe into the question of whether the NCLB lived up to the promise of closing the achievement gap between blacks and whites, we need to appraise the changing rate of segregation against black students throughout the different levels of the American educational system, both before and after the adoption of the No Child Left Behind Act as a significant federal measure in 2002. This assessment is to be done via the presentation of facts or rather statistics that would help trace a clear image about the reality of the black white achievement gap in the United States’ public schools, particularly after the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act. Therefore, the present chapter would be full of data, in the form of dates, numbers and percentages, which may be boring to follow but doubtlessly efficient to find out the reality of the black white achievement gap in the U.S. and its relationship with regard to the implementation of the NCLB.

Conceptually speaking, the achievement gap commonly refers to the variations amongst demographic groups on state and national academic tests. The achievement gap comprises dissimilarities between underprivileged versus privileged students, poor versus well-off students,

students with disabilities versus those without disabilities, and so on. (Anderson, Medrich, and Fowler 547). Achievement gaps are of specific concern because academic attainment in the K-12 grades is a precursor to college admission and achievement in the labor market. Though it was possible to earn a middle-class income in the United States without holding a college degree in the 1950s and 1960s, the current American economy has few such low-skills, high-income jobs remaining (Goldin and Katz); consequently, a college degree has become more and more significant in the labor market, and has become evenly imperative for economic mobility. Simultaneously, admission to college, namely to more selective colleges, has become ever more contingent on students' test scores and academic success (Bastedo and Jaquette 318-339). Because of the rising significance of academic attainment, the white-black test score gap today account for nearly all of the white-black variations in college enrollment- comprising enrollment at the greatest colleges and most selective universities- and most or all of the white-black dissimilarities in incomes (Posselt et al.). Eradicating racial achievement gaps is then crucial for decreasing broader racial disparities in the American society.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) documented well evidence on the nationwide lasting trend in racial achievement gaps. Achievement gaps in both math and reading between white and African American students have reduced considerably over the previous forty years (Hemphill et al., 2011). Despite this improvement, gaps persist widely, varying from two-thirds to roughly less than one standard deviation, depending on the subject and grade. Significantly, both the magnitude of achievement gaps and their trends over time differ noticeably across states (National Center for Education Statistics).

The achievement gap measurement is actually far from being a new phenomenon, but due to the gap's widening, more focus has been centered on the issue. The achievement gap in the

United States started to reduce in the 1970s and 1980s. Between 1970-1988 a remarkable improvement in reading and math achievement for African Americans was shown, thus reducing the black-white achievement gap, but in 1988, the gap started to rise again unaccountably, to the extent where the achievement of minority students is actually below that of a decade ago (Young 2-3). For the purpose of tackling issues of the achievement gap, the No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law in January 8, 2002 and was required to determine the quality of schools as measured by how well students achieved on state standardized assessments.

Data from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) provides startling statistics about the black-white achievement gap by the eve of the adoption of the No Child left Behind Act in 2001. It reveals that African American and poor students are two years behind their white counterparts by the fourth grade, they are about three years behind by the eighth grade, and are slipped nearly four years behind by the twelfth grade. This indicates that the scholastic level of the average 17-year-old African American student is at an equivalent academic level as a 13-year-old white student. Analogous startling statistics are provided about the large black-white gap in graduation rates. Because of the intimate linkage between race and poverty, the academic achievement gap has also to be weighed up within the context of the income gap between poor African Americans and well-off whites. Aiming at boosting academic achievement of all students from all backgrounds, the NCLB encompasses several noteworthy provisions specifically targeted at minorities and is highly accounted for bridging the achievement gap between African American students and their white cohorts in U.S. public schools.

By virtually any measure of results, poor and underprivileged students underachieve in the American educational system. African American students, for instance, are twice more likely to drop out than their White peers (Hill and Holly 23). In actual fact, for the enormous majority

of ethnic and racial minorities, high school graduation rates average virtually sixty percent, as opposed to about eighty three percent for their white counterparts. Worse, the graduation rate for African American students attending high-poverty schools is even lower as it averages about fifty percent. In fact, National Assessment of Education Progress data reveal that between 1971 and 1999 the gap between white and African American students in reading reduced in every age group. It has broadened slightly at ages 13 and 17 since 1988. The gap between white and black students in math reduced between 1973 and 1999 in every age group. Some widening is obvious since 1986 at age thirteen, and since 1990 at age seventeen. The gap between white and African American students in science broadly reduced since 1970 for nine- and thirteen-year-olds, but not for seventeen-year-olds.

The proof of how the American educational system has failed poor and African American students is perceived at every grade level. For instance, in mathematics, less than ten percent of fourth grade White children's score was inferior to basic proficiency levels, as opposed to African American students whose score varied between twenty nine percent and thirty six percent. Similarly, while only between twenty one percent and twenty six percent of White students from fourth to twelfth grade were under proficient in reading, over half of African American children- virtually between fifty percent and fifty four percent- did not meet this standard. These discrepancies grow with every extra year of public education. For instance, in terms of vocabulary, African American students start elementary school just one year behind their White peers- but by the twelfth grade, African American students are four years behind their White counterparts (American Psychological Association 14, 16).

Achievement gaps establish important indicators in educational and social development. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the so-called nation's report card of

student attainment, offers information on the achievement gaps among dissimilar racial and socioeconomic groups in central academic subjects. In the 1990s, there were important impediments in the national progress toward reducing the achievement gaps. Few states were capable of improving the average achievement and reducing the gaps instantaneously. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), aims at boosting both educational excellence and equality by offering new opportunities and challenges for states to meet the objective of reducing the achievement gap (Lee 10).

By some measures the achievement gap has relatively reduced but at a very slow rate. According to the most recent data from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) a white student average reading score was 266 out of 500 total points in 1992; as opposed to the average reading score for an African American student which was 238- a difference of twenty eight points. A decade later- in 2012- that difference had reduced by only five points, to twenty three points (American Psychological Association 14). At this speed, it will take many more decades before inequalities of result- and the profound adverse effects they have on the lives of millions- are unimportant (The Leadership Conference 9). These facts are remarkably alarmist as the disparities of outcome between blacks and whites in U.S. public schools remain visibly wide at every grade level about a decade after the enactment of the No Child left Behind Act. This reality rings alarm bells vis-a-vis the presumably laudable goals of the NCLB, namely of closing the achievement gap among all students.

These adverse academic consequences frequently influence students for the rest of their lives. For instance, African American students have a considerably lower college-going rate than their White peers. The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) 2010 data reveal that about more than half- 55.7 percent- of African American students and only below two-thirds-

63.9 percent- of Latino high school graduates enroll in postsecondary education, in comparison to 71.7 percent of White graduates (Farkas 105). Additionally, because African American students are frequently inadequately prepared by their schools, their college graduation rates are inferior as well: for full-time students attending a four-year institution for the first time, only 20.4 percent of African American students graduated in four years, in comparison to 41.1 percent of their White counterparts (National Assessment of Education Progress). Lastly, the unemployment rate of young African American men without a high school degree is more than fifty percent- as opposed to African American men who graduate college and have an unemployment rate of only nine percent (American Psychological Association 17).

The No Child Left Behind Act is constituted of hundreds of pages of ambiguous provisions but modest and clear objectives. It expresses President Bush's pledge to end the "soft racism of low expectations" by eliminating racial achievement gaps and making all students proficient by 2014. It devises unmatched measurement of academic growth in two subjects- with science being added later- through required annual tests in elementary and middle school and prescribes that all children from all racial and ethnic backgrounds reach 100% proficiency. Schools are compelled, under risk of severe penalties, to increase achievement each year in math and reading and to eradicate the achievement gap by race, ethnicity, language, and special education status.

The literature on the educational achievement gap between white students and their African American counterparts is both numerous and various and evidence shows that the gap is wide and persistent. An average African American student at all educational levels- elementary, middle, or high school- currently attains at roughly the same level as the average white student in the lowest quartile of white attainment (Chubb and Loveless 1). In reading for instance, the

performance of the average African American seventeen year-old equals the performance of white thirteen year-olds (Rothman). The achievement gap has continued for decades and has serious effects for high school graduation, secondary degrees' earning, together with earning a living (Chubb and Loveless 1). In the 1970s and 1980s, the gaps essentially reduced but at the threshold of the late 1980s, improvement slowed down and the lasting achievement gap dissimilarities persisted widely (Rothman). Some students' achievement gaps become apparent even before children go to kindergarten and last up to adulthood.

Overall achievement gaps persist as a reality in American public education system though they appear to have reduced in instances. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) testing data from 1992 to 2000, one year before the adoption of the No Child Left Behind act, the National Assessment Governing Board- a self-governing, bipartisan, executive branch agency of the federal government charged with watching national and state advancement toward the National Education Goals and offering policy direction for NAEP- revealed that the overall student attainment levels to be promising, but it reported that no important growth has been made in narrowing the performance gaps underwent by underprivileged and poor children (Whirry). Furthermore, the NAEP revealed, in an August 2000 report, that African American students had lower reading and math scores than their white peers in 1999. What is more, the overall gap between African American students and their white counterparts had reduced in reading, math, and science since 1973, yet, it has broadened for a number of age groups since nearly 1986.

Moreover, on the 2000 NAEP reading assessment, the United States Department of Education reveals that forty percent of white fourth graders scored at or beyond proficient, in comparison to only twelve percent of their African American counterparts. Achievement also

lagged in math: thirty five percent of white fourth graders scored at or beyond proficient, as opposed to only five percent of African Americans who had the same high score. It has been noted that if all students nationally were held to universal class standards on completion tests, as are enforced in NAEP's assessments, virtually forty percent of all students would repeat the grade, and the rate for underprivileged students and students with disabilities could reach as high as eighty percent (Heubert).

In fact, the No Child Left Behind Act mandates students' test scores to be integrated by subgroups to make certain that the whole students are making satisfactory improvements and no child falls behind. An article published by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) reveals that a great number of schools are starting to center closer focus on the achievement gaps of the different subgroups. The United States Department of Education expects the gap in educational attainment to reduce significantly as more attention is paid to underprivileged students. Research backs the necessity for extra attention to minority students and their lower student attainment as opposed to their more affluent counterparts Benson 26).

Outcomes from a research conducted by researcher Jehlen display that there has been a reduction in the achievement gap between African American and white students since the No Child Left Behind Act implementation. Yet, his study revealed that the achievement gap was narrowing at a higher rate before the endorsement of the NCLB. Jehlen assessed the attainment gap between the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores of African American and white students from 1971 to 1988 and likened them to 1998-2007. Jehlen concluded that student scores may rise when high stakes are placed on a test, irrespective of what the student knows- a phenomenon called Campbell's Law. Accordingly, he declares that in an attempt to assess the efficiency of the No Child Left Behind Act one must assess the scores of

students on a test they do not get ready for. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is, in effect, an assessment given to big arbitrary samples of students. The scores from the NAEP are counted for the individual student rather than for an individual school. From 1971-1988, the achievement gap between African American and white students reduced with the progress of the years. Between 1998 and 2007, however, the gap in educational achievement had merely a minor reduction, less reduction than the preceding years.

The Center on Education Policy (CEP) published its research concerning student achievement and No Child Left Behind Act in June of 2007. The research revealed that over a five-year period the gap in educational achievement between students has been reducing. The key conclusions for the research were as follows: first, in most states with three or more years of analogous test data, student attainment in reading and math has increased since 2002, the year NCLB was enacted. Second, since the year of NCLB passage, there is more indication of achievement gaps between groups of students reducing than of gaps broadening. Still, the magnitude of the gaps is often substantial. Third, in nine of the thirteen states with adequate data to define pre- and post-No Child Left Behind Act trends, average annual improvements in test scores were better after the implementation of NCLB than before. Fourth, it is very hard, to define the extent to which these trends in test outcomes have taken place because of NCLB. Since 2002, states, school districts and schools have concurrently put into place many diverse but unified policies to increase attainment. Finally, while NCLB highlights public reporting of state test data, the data required to attain final conclusions about attainment were sometimes tough to find or unobtainable, or had holes or incongruities. More focus should be centered on issues of the transparency as well as the quality of state test data (7).

This study delved deeper into the academic achievement gap and the No Child Left Behind Act in an attempt to ensure that it was all-inclusive and took into account a considerable number of variables. These variables encompassed recent data, valid test outcomes that could not be explained by other attributes, such as a variation in standardized test usage, and a statistical measure utilized to unify the meaning of proficiency as specified by various states. This study also took into consideration variations that were occurring in different states before the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act. For these states, the study examined the achievement rate and the likelihood of its increase or decrease after the NCLB implementation (Benson 28).

In contrast, researcher Lee's study revealed that the No Child Left Behind Act has not importantly reduced the academic achievement gap. The main conclusions are as follows: First, NCLB did not have a noteworthy influence on increasing reading and math achievement throughout the United States. According to the NAEP findings, the nationwide average attainment is still flat in reading and rises at the same rate in math after the implementation of NCLB than before. In grade four in math, there was a provisional development following the NCLB, but it was ensued by a return to the pre-reform progress rate. Accordingly, persistence of the present trend will leave the United States far behind the NCLB goal of 100 percent proficiency by 2014. Only twenty four to thirty four percent of students will meet the NAEP proficiency by target in reading and twenty nine to sixty four percent meeting that math proficiency goal by 2014. Second, NCLB has not assisted the American states considerably to reduce the achievement gap. The racial and socioeconomic achievement gap in the NAEP reading and math attainment continues to exist after NCLB. In spite of some progress in narrowing the gap in math after the adoption of NCLB, the improvement was not constant. If the

present trend persists, the proficiency gap between affluent White students and their underprivileged minority counterparts will barely reduce by 2014. The study expects that by 2014, less than twenty five percent of disadvantaged and African American students will attain NAEP proficiency in reading, and less than fifty percent will attain proficiency in math (10-11).

Third, NCLB's endeavor to increase the assumed success of states that espoused test-driven accountability policy before the No Child Left Behind Act- so-called first generation accountability states- such as Florida, North Carolina, and Texas, was fruitless. It neither improved the first generation states' previous academic development nor transmitted the impact of a test-driven accountability system to states that embraced test-based accountability under NCLB, the second generation states did not manage to reduce National Assessment of Education Progress reading and math attainment gaps after NCLB. Fourth, the No Child Left Behind Act's dependence on state assessment as the foundation of school accountability is confusing as tests administered by states tend to considerably increase proficiency levels and proficiency improvements as well as decrease racial and social attainment gaps in the states. In fact, the very high stakes of state assessments gave rise to very large differences between National Assessment of Education Progress and state assessment outcomes. These inconsistencies were chiefly huge for deprived, African American, and Hispanic students (Lee 10-11).

Further research has stressed concerns vis-à-vis the No Child Left Behind Act's test-based accountability and its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) provision, counting its potential to worsen countless issues such as racial, economic, or geographic disparities among schools. A study conducted by Northwest Evaluation Association concluded that student progression in ethnic groups has decreased to some extent since the enactment of NCLB. though the research is mixed regarding the manner by which the No Child Left Behind Act affects the achievement gap;

the reality is that the achievement gap is existent and has persisted for a considerable period of time. African American students belong to the key minority groups that have been affected by the achievement gap. NCLB is analogous to other reform initiatives with regard to applying numerous strategies with the aim of reducing the achievement gap between African American students and their white counterparts. Researchers have disclosed different motives, of which a considerable number falls within the parameters of the No Child Left Behind Act, for the achievement gap between African American and white students (Benson 30- 31).

The No Child Left Behind Act is a vital issue because of both the past and present conflict American children has experienced with learning within the U.S. public education system. Ameliorating academic attainment has always been and is still a conflictual point under NCLB that engenders many discussions on policy issues. A key challenge to the U.S. public education system has been the disparities in academic achievement between diverse groups of children. In spite of the existence of significant inequalities within the public education system a wide range of Americans are persuaded that education is a key resource to guarantee a good future not only for their children but for the United States as well. Author Richard D. Kahlenberg claims in his *All Together Now* that “the central argument made in favor of free, universal, and compulsory education is, of course, that the public has a strong interest in ensuring that all of society’s children are educated. Virtually every state constitution provides for public education to create productive workers, self-governing citizens, and loyal Americans” (Kahlenberg, 12). In spite of the aspiration to offer universal education to all children, a considerable number of children are frequently ill-educated by the public school system and complete high school incapable of competing in the labor force for suitable jobs that offer decent salaries and welfares. This issue

has given rise to and continues to be a source of great concern for the future of the American labor force.

Clearly, the federal government reacted to remedying the existing achievement gap through the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 that was intended to boost public schools across the United States. As the appellation of the Act suggests one of the numerous objectives of NCLB is to increase the achievement of all students while concurrently reducing the achievement gap that exists between underprivileged students and their more affluent white counterparts. An appraisal of the No Child Left Behind Act itself discloses requirements unambiguously targeted at disadvantaged students. A crucial self-stated goal is to narrow “the achievement gap between high and low performing students, especially gaps between minority and non-minority students ...” (P.L. 107-110, § 1111 (3)). The NCLB provides that states devise accountability systems that guarantee the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of main racial and ethnic groups towards eradicating this gap (P.L. 107-110, § 1111 (b)(2)(C)(v)). In reality, it involves parochial educational agencies (LEAs) to define how they will eradicate the existing achievement gap when applying for Title I funds (P.L. 107-110, § 2122 (b)(2)) It rises transparency by demanding that the yearly assessments of student attainment be sub-divided and announced by ethnicity, among other attributes.

Regarding teacher quality, the No Child Left Behind provides that states devise education strategies mirroring the measures that the “state educational agency will take to ensure that poor and minority children are not taught at higher rates than other children by inexperienced, unqualified, or out of field teachers ...” (P.L. 107-110, § 1111 (b)(8)(C)) It provides that local educational agencies obtain state support for local educational strategies that guarantee this outcome through the usage of “incentives for voluntary transfers, the provision of professional

development, recruitment programs, or other effective strategies...” (P.L. 107-110, § 1112 (c)(1)(L)). The No Child Left Behind Act authorizes once again the usage of magnet schools to boost diversity in education, noting the persistent segregation between disadvantaged and advantaged students and the target of attaining voluntary desegregation (P.L. 107-110, § 5301). It asks local educational agencies to put into practice programs, activities and techniques for including parents, in programs funded by the No Child Left Behind Act, with specific emphasis on parents of any underprivileged background (P.L. 107-110, § 1118 (a)(2)(E)). It also approves donations to non-profit organizations that assist the parents of disadvantaged children enrolled in elementary and secondary schools (P.L. 107-110, § 5563 (b)(9)). It asks the Secretary of Education, in 2006, to revise evaluations adopted for state accountability targets, scrutinizing the influence of academic examinations on disadvantaged children (P.L. 107-110, § 1503 (d) (3)).

As a conclusion, it is essential to center focus on the fact that the United States falls far behind a wide range of other industrialized nations in academic competitiveness. On the Program for International Student Assessment of 2009 (PISA), the United States achieved at or below average out of the thirty six assessed industrialized countries. It ranked fourteenth in reading, seventeenth in science, and twenty fifth in math (U.S. Dept. of Educ., *Graduation rates*). However, if African American and Latino students achieved at the level White students achieve on similar assessments, the status of the United States would climb radically. Remarkably, state- and district-level NAEP data display that African American students perform better in certain states than others and in certain districts than others. Consequently, the size of the gap differs from state to state. For instance, in 2007, the black white achievement gap in fourth-grade reading was seventeen points in Arizona, but thirty three points in Pennsylvania. Among eighth graders, the size of the gap varied from seven points in Hawaii to thirty eight points in Wisconsin.

What about the commitment and promise of the No Child Left Behind Act of reducing the achievement gap between African American students and their white cohorts; was not this newly-adopted federal measure deemed as the most far-reaching initiative in the U.S. public education system? In attempt to grasp better the depth of the academic disparities between black and white students, a detailed scrutiny of the black white achievement gap is essential before and after the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002.

II. Tracking the Progress of Black and White Students in U.S. Public Schools

At the very beginning, it is crucial to identify and clarify the exact meaning of the “achievement gap” in this research as it can hold several different definitions that vary according to the changing contexts. In this study, the achievement gap refers precisely to the discrepancies between the achievement of black students and their white cohorts on academic assessments such as Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores- a test taken in the United States to measure students’ aptitudes before admission into college- and American College Testing (ACT) scores- a standardized test for high school achievement and college admission in the U.S., and graduation rates. In spite of the existence of the achievement gap amongst other racial and ethnic minorities in the United States, specifically Asian and Hispanic students, the focus of the present research is to probe into the variations in academic performance particularly among African American students, in comparison to their white cohorts, as their underachievement is so noticeable and falls far behind the achievement of white students.

In order to probe into the research question of the issue under examination, that is: to what extent was the No Child Left Behind Act successful in closing the black white achievement gap?

A deep examination of the black white achievement gap is necessary and further questions arise: how large is the gap? And is it shrinking or widening over time, notably after the enactment of the NCLB? Unquestionably, the core issue would not be about the likelihood of the existence of the achievement gap, but rather about its persistence. It is almost taken for granted by a large array of Americans that there is an achievement gap between African American and white students. This reality does not arise out of nowhere; the vestiges of the legacies of bondage and discrimination are still persistent in the American society and in the American people's mind alike. The problem, however, is that a great number of people are unaware of the magnitude of this thorny issue as they are unclearly conscious that African American and white students, averagely, achieve differently in schools. Furthermore, in spite of the knotty debate of the black white attainment in the K-12 academic community, astonishingly few people have centered much focus and attention on this issue (Paige and Witty 23).

Even people who are aware of the reality of the discrepancies in academic achievement and are equally conscious of its greatness frequently believe that the gap cannot be closed unless poverty is eliminated and all vestiges of discrimination in the United States are eradicated. Implicitly, these people deem the gap as a must-be accepted destiny, and consider all endeavors to address it as unrewarding. For instance, in an issue of *Forbes* magazine, in the December 12, 2005, author Dan Seligman, considered all the efforts to reduce the achievement gap as "a fool's errand" (Seligman 120-122). Likewise, author William J. Mathis, depicted any endeavor to close disparities in academic achievement as "an exercise in ritualistic magic" in his "A Bridge Too Far," a *Phi Delta Kappan magazine's* special section on the achievement gap (Mathis).

What is more, there are even people who are quite uncertain of the existence of the black-white achievement gap. They believe that these racial disparities in the academic achievement are

not that wide, and that they rather stem from biased and prejudiced tests (Paige and Witty 23). For these very reasons and in an attempt to eradicate all kinds of doubts that surround the black white achievement gap, we need to dig deeper into this issue and provide exact data that help remedy these persistent racial academic discrepancies in U.S. public schools. As author Jim Collins declares in his *Good to Great*, “One thing is certain: You absolutely cannot make a series of good decisions without first confronting the brutal facts” (Collins 70). Thus, the sections that follow probe into the performance of the black white students in both reading and math as they move through the K- 12 educational system and postsecondary institutions. Differential rates of participation in higher education and college completion are evenly explored and reported.

A. School Readiness

It has been broadly stated that the achievement gap between African American students and their white counterparts is commonly more noticeable by the twelfth grade as African American students’ score is averagely far below their white cohorts educationally. But this problem, as prominent researchers Paige and Witty assert, does not emerge out of nowhere (24). In fact, it is highly required to track the evolution of children and students as they progress through school beginning from school entry or kindergarten. A national assessment program directed by the United States Department of Education- namely the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999 (ECLS-K) - has been tracking the evolution of a national sample of children who went to kindergarten during the 1998-99 school year. The findings account for the likelihood of the existence of an achievement gap between African American children and their white peers when they enter school, and explain children’s progress when they grow older (Princiotta, Flanagan and Hausken).

Researchers examining the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class (ECLS-K) data have revealed that there is a difference in the skills of reading and mathematics between African American children and their white peers at the point of school entry, but the discrepancies are minor (Paige and Witty 24). In reality, appraisal of the achievement gap between African American and white children can be conducted in numerous diverse ways. The most widely utilized means is by calculating the different percentages of African American and white children who prove to be proficient in two elementary and particular skill areas, namely reading and math (see Figure 1 in the appendix).

As demonstrated in Figure 1, at the school entry white kindergarten children are far ahead of their African American peers by fifteen percent as regards both letter recognition skills (74 versus 59) and the comprehension of the correlation between sounds and letters occurring at the beginning of words (36 versus 21). Regarding the knowledge about the sounds occurring at the end of words, the gap narrows to ten percent (21 versus 11). Yet, the disparity in these three basic reading skills noticeably narrows, at the end of the first grade, perceptibly as follows: one percent for the first skill and six percent for the two other skills as both African American and whites grasped well these skills. Concerning the last reading skill area-recognition of sight words- that is relatively a more challenging area, the achievement gap between African American and white children has broadened discernibly to seventeen percent (88 versus 71) though it was virtually close to zero at the school entry where both white and African American children experienced equivalent difficulty in identifying common words in text by sight.

Consequently, assessment of the achievement gap between African American children and their white cohorts at two fundamental and specific reading skill areas: basic skills and more challenging skills, reveal noticeably that the gap reduced markedly from school entry to the first

grade concerning the basic skills, but broadened remarkably, over the year, with a more challenging skill area as African American children proved less proficient in sight word recognition in as opposed to their white peers. In other words, the gap has grown from non-existent at kindergarten to seventeen percent at the end of the first grade in reading skill areas. In the second fundamental area- mathematics- the achievement gap is appraised by means of assessment of three particular mathematical skills (see Figure 2 in the appendix).

African American children were nearly equally proficient to their white cohorts as regards the comprehension of numbers and shapes with a minor variation of five percent (96 versus 91) at their school entry. This insignificant disparity disappeared completely at the first grade. In the second area of identifying comparative size, however, the gap between African American and white children was as large as twenty four percent at their school entry (67 versus 43), but narrowed noticeably to become virtually close to zero at the first grade (99 versus 98). That is to say, the black white achievement gap reduced markedly in the two basic mathematical skill areas as the African American students grasp well such skills at the first grade.

Nevertheless, examination of the third mathematical skill area; that is addition and subtraction, offers quite dissimilar outcomes as the area is considered fairly more challenging to African American children. The gap in academic achievement between African American and white children at their school entry is roughly non-existent; about four percent (5 versus 1) as both children find it hard to make addition and subtraction. Yet, the disparity broadens noticeably to attain twenty three percent (82 versus 59) at the first grade. In other words, the gap evolves and gets larger, all along the school year, with the evolution of more advanced areas.

B. Elementary School

In addition to the assessment of the percentages of students who had particular skills, researchers have utilized the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class (ECLS-K) data to make a comparison of the overall reading and math attainment of several groups of students. In an attempt to do so, they make use of scale scores, which offer a norm-referenced measure of achievement. Scale scores enable the comparison of the performance of a specific group of students- in this research white students and African American students- with that of the student population as a whole. Therefore, for instance, a high scale score mean for a specific group demonstrates that this group's achievement is high as compared to other groups. This does not mean, however, that the whole members of the group have grasped a specific set of skills (Paige and Witty 25). As African American and white children evolve through their elementary school years, their gap in achievement can be appraised by examining both their mean reading and mathematics scores (see Figure 3 in the appendix).

During the fall of 1998 and on a scale ranging from zero to 186, the average reading scores for African American children at their school entry was twenty five in comparison to twenty eight for their white kindergarten counterparts- that is to say a gap of three points. This gap widens persistently through the differing grades to attain seventeen points by the fall of the fifth grade (143 versus 126). In other words, the gap in black white achievement broadens by fourteen points from the school entry to the fifth grade- from three to seventeen. This means that in terms of gains achieved, the average reading score of African American children was relatively lesser than 101 points in comparison of white children whose gains rose to 115 points between the fall of their kindergarten year and the spring of fifth grade.

Regarding average mathematics scores for white and African American children, the pattern was virtually comparable with relatively a minor broader gap (see Figure 4 in the appendix). On a scale from zero to 153, the achievement gap between African American kindergarteners and their white counterparts is five points (23 versus 18) and it increases progressively to attain nineteen points at the fall of the fifth grade (117 versus 98). As for achieved gains, African American children made smaller gains and scored eighty points, as their average math score, between the fall of their kindergarten year and the spring of fifth grade, as compared to their white peers who made bigger gains by scoring ninety four points.

So the discrepancies in the educational attainment of African American and white children in reading and math appear as early as kindergarten. Recognizing these evidences and the central role of early childhood knowledges in school readiness, numerous school districts, nonprofit organizations, and other groups have been focusing on offering all students- chiefly those from disadvantaged backgrounds- access to good-quality early childhood learning experiences. Head Start was the first of countless initiatives with this objective. Researchers Paige and Witty assert that there is a constant debate between academics as regards whether Head Start gives birth to long-term benefits, or whether its benefits fade away by the time children reach third grade, a phenomenon frequently known as “fade-out” (28). In sum, the data in this thesis demonstrate that the achievement gap between African American and white children in reading and mathematics is existent as early as kindergarten but the minor gap in kindergarten persists to widen and grow larger over the school year as the students evolve through the grades.

C. K–12 Education

As reported in the previous sections of this thesis, the assessment of the achievement gap among African American and white children in reading and math at kindergarten and throughout their early elementary school years drew important findings and data that assert the existence of a growing gap which evolves with students' progress through the grades. Thus, the next step in this conducted research is to explore further these findings as students move through the K 12 educational pipeline. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), funded by the U.S. Department of Education, provides data that probe into one of the main questions of this study: how does the existing black white achievement gap in reading and math evolve as students move through the grades?

To answer this question the present research relies on the NAEP data that are drawn after the examination of national samples of students in reading, math and other subjects. Outcomes are provided in terms of average proficiency scores (by means of a 500-point scale) as well as in terms of the percentages of students attaining consecutive levels of proficiency- that is: basic, proficient, and advanced. The average reading scores of African American students and their white cohorts are tracked all over a period of fifteen years from 1992 to 2007. That is to say, assessment of the black white achievement gap is conducted both before and after the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002. Actually, the five years that succeed the NCLB adoption –from 2002 to 2007- is of a relevant significance to the present research. Yet, the years that precede this period serve as a comparison with the evolving achievement gap before and after the NCLB.

1. Reading Proficiency

Average scores of white and African American students between 1992 and 2007 in reading proficiency for both fourth graders and eighth graders are provided in the following demonstrated figure. (See Figure 5 in the appendix). According to statistics from the National Assessment of Education Progress (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, “The Nation's Report Card (Reading)”):

Grade 4

The average reading proficiency of white students from the fourth grade increased from 224 in 1992 to 231 in 2007, demonstrating a gain of seven points all through the fifteen-year period. As regards the average reading proficiency of African American students from the fourth grade, it dropped between 1992 and 1994, then wavered for a number of years before mounting to 203 in 2007, for a general gain of eleven points throughout the whole fifteen-year period. Therefore, the black white achievement gap in fourth-grade reading somewhat reduced by six points, between 2000 (thirty four points) and 2007 (twenty eight points).

In order to find out the extent to which the No Child Left Behind Act was successful in closing the black white achievement gap, we have to dissect data by dividing them into two phases: phase I- before the enactment of the NCLB from 1992 to 2000 and phase II- from 2002 to 2007 after the adoption of the NCLB. Assessment of both the black white achievement gap together with black and white gains is first considered in grade four in reading proficiency.

At phase I (1992-2000), it is noticed that the average reading proficiency of African American fourth graders decreased from 192 in 1992 to 190 in 2000, this signifies zero gains for

African Americans. Regarding whites the average reading proficiency persisted unchanged at 224. Consequently, the black white achievement gap in that period grew by two points (from thirty two in 1992 to thirty four in 2000). At phase II (2002- 2007), however, the average reading proficiency of African American fourth graders increased from 199 in 2002, the year of the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act, to 203 in 2007, five years after its adoption as a federal measure. This symbolizes a gain of four points. As regards whites the gains were by two points, from 229 in 2002 to 231 in 2007. Accordingly, the black white achievement gap in that period reduced slightly by two points, from thirty in 2002 to twenty eight in 2007, the variation is not statistically significant.

Grade 8

The average reading proficiency of white students from the eighth grade rose slightly between 1992 and 2002, from 267 to 272, and then declined by one point to 271 in the 2005 assessment. As for the average reading proficiency of African American eighth graders, it increased from 237 in 1992 to 245 in 2002, and then persisted comparatively stable at 245, until 2007. Though the black-white achievement gap seems to have reduced slightly in eighth-grade reading between 1992- when it was thirty points, and 2007- twenty seven points, the difference is not statistically significant.

Similar procedure is to be adopted for black and white eight graders. Data have to be divided into two phases: Phase I- before the enactment of the NCLB from 1992 to 1998 and phase II- from 2002 to 2007 after the adoption of the NCLB. Assessment of both the black white achievement gap together with black and white gains is first considered in grade eight in reading proficiency. At phase I (1992-1998), the average reading proficiency of African American eighth

graders grew from 237 in 1992 to 244 in 1998, representing a gain of seven points. As for whites, it increased from 267 to 270 during the same period, representing a gain of three points. Accordingly, the black white achievement gap declined by four points, from thirty in 1992 to twenty six in 1998. At phase II (2002- 2007), the average reading proficiency of both African American and white eighth graders remained stable during the period that followed the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act- 245 points for African Americans and 272 for whites. Likewise, the black white achievement gap remained steady as well all through the five years that succeeded the endorsement of the NCLB; from 2002 to 2007.

Average assessment outcomes are useful for making comprehensive generalizations, but they fall short of capturing fundamental patterns and trends. For instance, the average scores of a group may rise because larger numbers of students at the low end of the achievement spectrum are progressing, or because more students are attaining the higher levels of proficiency. Therefore, it is imperative to dissect the National Assessment of Education Progress findings to examine variations over time in the percentages of white and African American students who have achieved at different levels of reading proficiency. Researchers Paige and Witty simplified things by centering focus on two thresholds: the percentage of students achieving at or above the *basic level* of reading proficiency, referred to by NAEP as “partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at a given grade,” and the percentage achieving at or above the *proficient level*, referred to as “solid academic performance” (30-32).

In fourth grade, forty six percent of African American students achieved at or above the basic level of reading proficiency in 2007; this was a growth from thirty five percent in 2000 (see Figure 6).

GRADE 4 READING

		Black Students	White Students	Gap
2000	Basic level	35	70	35
2007	Basic level	46	78	32
2007	Proficient level	14	43	29

GRADE 8 READING

		Black Students	White Students	Gap
2002	Basic level	55	84	29
2007	Basic level	55	84	29
2007	Proficient level	13	40	27

FIGURE 6 Percentage of white and black students performing at each level of reading proficiency, 2000–2007.

All through the same period of time, the percentage of white students achieving at or above the basic level rose from seventy percent to seventy eight percent. In spite of the achieved gains between 2000 and 2007, only fourteen percent of African American fourth graders were proficient readers in 2007, in comparison to forty three percent of their white counterparts. Therefore, what is observed from these data is that the gains made by African American students have been incremental, and comparatively few are attaining the level of reading identified as “proficient.” In eighth grade, fifty five percent of African American students achieved at or above the basic level of reading proficiency in 2007, representing zero change since 2002. Throughout the same time period, the percentage of white students in this category also persisted steady at eighty four percent. Only thirteen percent of African American eighth graders, as opposed to forty percent of their white cohorts, were proficient readers in 2007.

2. Mathematics Proficiency

Average scores of white and African American students between 1992 and 2007 in math proficiency for both grades four and eight are demonstrated in the following figure. (See Figure 7 in the appendix).

According to the most current assessment data from the National Assessment of Education Progress, shown in Figure 7 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, “The Nation's Report Card (Mathematics)”):

Grade 4

In grade four, the average math proficiency of white students climbed from 220 in 1990 to 248 in 2007- a gain of twenty eight points. All through the same period of time, the average proficiency of African American students raised from 188 to 222, a growth of thirty four points. Consequently, the twenty-six point math achievement gap between white and African American fourth graders in 2007 was slighter than in any previous assessment year.

As done previously in this section, data are divided into two phases: phase I- before the enactment of the NCLB from 1990 to 2000 and phase II- from 2003 to 2007 after the adoption of the NCLB. Assessment of both the black white achievement gap together with black and white gains is first considered in grade four in math proficiency. At phase I (1990-2000), the average math proficiency of African American students augmented from 188 in 1990 to 203 in 2000, making a noteworthy gain of fifteen points. This gain is somewhat close to that of whites during the same period-fourteen points, from 220 to 234. Thus, during that period, the black white achievement gap reduced insignificantly by a single point- from thirty two in 1990 to thirty one

in 2000. As for phase II (2003-2007) after the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act, the average math proficiency of African American children mounted to six points, from 216 in 2003 to 222 in 2007. This pattern is virtually analogous to whites as they made a gain of five points, from 243 in 2003 to 248 in 2007. As a result, the achievement gap between African American and white students, nonetheless, persisted roughly unchanged during the five years that followed the adoption of the No Child Left Behind Act- from twenty seven in 2003 to twenty six in 2007, a statistically insignificant point.

Grade 8

In the eighth grade, the average math proficiency of white students rose by twenty one points between 1990 and 2007, from 270 to 291. All through the same period, the average math proficiency of African American eighth graders increased by twenty three points, from 237 to 260. As a result of these variations, the thirty one-point achievement gap between white and African American eighth graders was less important in 2007 than in 2005 (thirty four points) but was not considerably different from the thirty three-point gap in 1990.

Similar procedure is to be adopted for black and white eight graders. Assessment of both the black white achievement gap together with black and white gains is considered in grade eight in math proficiency. At phase I (1990-2000), the average math proficiency of African American students rose from 237 in 1990 to 244 in 2000, a gain of seven points. As for whites the gains are much more important as they jumped to fourteen points, from 270 in 1990 to 284 in 2000. As regards the black white achievement gap, it increased by seven points, from thirty three in 1990 to forty in 2000. For phase II (2003-2007), however, the average math proficiency of African American students during this period- after the enactment of the NCLB- augmented slightly by

eight points, from 252 in 2003 to 260 in 2007. In the same way, white students' math proficiency did not rise considerably as it scored three points only, from 288 in 2003 to 291 in 2007. As for the black white achievement gap, in this period that succeeded the endorsement of the NCLB, it reduced slightly but not significantly from 36 in 2003, one year after the NCLB to thirty one in 2007, five years after the No Child Left Behind Act. This variation of five points is statistically insignificant.

In an effort to identify the patterns that underlie the averages, percentages of white and African American students attaining different levels of math proficiency are crucial. (See Figure 8).

GRADE 4 MATHEMATICS

		Black Students	White Students	Gap
2000	Basic level	36	78	42
2007	Basic level	64	91	27
2007	Proficient level	15	51	36

GRADE 8 MATHEMATICS

		Black Students	White Students	Gap
2000	Basic level	31	76	45
2007	Basic level	47	82	35
2007	Proficient level	11	42	31

FIGURE 8 Percentage of white and black students performing at each level of math proficiency, 2000–2007.

As shown in Figure 8, it is noticed that in grade four, forty six percent of African American students achieved at or above the basic level of math proficiency in 2007-remarkably higher than the thirty six percent who performed similarly in 2000. Amongst white students, ninety one percent achieved at or above the basic level in 2007 (up from seventy eight percent in 2000). Merely fifteen percent of African American fourth graders achieved at or above the proficient level in math in 2007, in comparison with approximately half (fifty one percent) of white fourth graders. In grade eight, virtually half (forty seven percent) of African American students achieved at or above the basic level of math proficiency in 2007, up from thirty one percent in 2000. Amongst white students, eighty two percent achieved at this level in 2007 (up from seventy six percent in 2000). Only eleven percent of African American eighth graders achieved at National Assessment of Education Progress' proficient level in math in 2007, as opposed to forty two percent of their white cohorts.

To sum up, African American students in grades four and eight have made strides in reading and math all through the years since the National Assessment of Education Progress started its assessment program. The black white achievement gaps have been contracted in a wide array of areas. In spite of the evolution, nonetheless, brutal achievement inconsistencies continue to exist. White students are far more likely than their African American cohorts to be proficient in reading and math- the pillar of success in school and in life. Researchers Paige and Witty assert that on a national scale, and in numerous states and districts, the black white achievement gap has shrunk over time as a result of the larger gains made by African American students in comparison to their white counterparts. They affirm that, on average, the math and reading proficiency of African American eighth graders in the United States is rather much closer to that of white fourth grade students than it is to that of white eighth graders (36). Additionally, these findings are

merely for the students who are remaining in school. Dropouts, who are comparatively likely to be minority- as demonstrated in the following section- tend to have even more restricted skills.

D. High School Graduation Rates

After the examination of the achievement gap among black and white students as they evolve through K 12 education, appraisal of the gap in high school graduation rates is complementary to the issue under examination. The Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) commissioned researcher Jay Greene of the Manhattan Institute, in 2000, to conduct a pioneering research on the issue of low graduation rates in United States public education, chiefly among African American students. Greene commented at the time, “Unless we have reliable information about graduation rates we cannot begin to consider the severity of problems or make comparisons about the effectiveness of schools in different areas or for different groups of students” (Greene 9).

Greene's examination revealed that nationally the high school graduation rate for white students in the class of 1998 was seventy eight percent. For African American students, it was fifty six percent. That is to say, over 2 out of every 10 white students and over 4 out of every 10 African American students left high school before graduating. Researcher Greene has since renewed the study for succeeding classes of students. Like the National Assessment of Education Progress research, Greene's studies also display that graduation rates differ extensively from state to state for both African American and white students. By the enactment of the No Child Left Behind act, the states with the highest school completion rates for African American students in the class of 2002 were Rhode Island and Oklahoma (seventy percent) and Maryland (sixty nine

percent). New York remained the state with the lowest graduation rate for African American students (forty two percent).

In the class of 2002, the graduation rate for African American students was fifty percent or less in the five following states: Wisconsin, Nebraska, Georgia, Florida, and New York. The comparison of the graduation rates for white and African American students within numerous states offers striking disparities. For instance, the graduation rate for white students was eighty one percent as opposed to the graduation rate for African American students in New York that was forty two percent. In other states, however, the black white gap in graduation rates was slighter. In Maryland, for example, the graduation rate for African American students was sixty nine percent as compared to their white cohorts which was eighty one percent. Therefore, the gap in graduation rates between white and African American students is still, at best twelve percent, excessively large. For the class of 2002, national graduation rates were fifty six percent for African American students versus seventy eight percent for white students- almost similar to those for the class of 1998 (Greene).

E. College Readiness

Probing into the percentages of black and white high school graduates who are both prepared and willing to continue with their education- deemed as college ready- is equally pertinent and essential to the present research. Greene's research enabled the comparison of both high school dropout rates together with college readiness rates amongst white and black students. In order to be deemed as "college ready," students had to meet three conditions: they have to complete high school, they must have taken a number of courses in high school that colleges necessitate for the attainment of essential skills, and they must demonstrate fundamental literacy

skills. Data reveal that forty percent of white students but merely twenty percent of African American students were counted as “college ready” for the class of 2002 nationwide. As with high school graduation rates, college readiness rates for both racial groups differed considerably from state to state.

1. SAT and ACT Scores

The two most widely used college admission exams are the American College Testing (ACT) and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). As previously defined in this chapter, the SAT is a test taken in the United States to measure students’ aptitudes before admission into college and the ACT is a standardized test for high school performance and college access in the United States, and graduation rates. Data from these programs display that, historically, black students were underrepresented among SAT and ACT test takers as opposed to white students who were overrepresented. That is to say, the percentage of African American ACT and SAT test takers was significantly inferior to the percentage of black high school students. Yet, throughout time, the percentages of white and black students taking these college admissions tests have been growing. According to comparatively current data, while African American students represent about sixteen percent of the public school student population, (U.S. Census Bureau), they represent eleven percent of SAT test takers (College Board) and represent thirteen percent of ACT test takers (American College Testing Incorporation).

Assessment of Scholastic Aptitude Test scores offers one measure of high school students’ preparedness for college-level work (see Figure 9). This figure demonstrates that while the average composite score of African American students dropped by four points (from 860 to 856), the average composite SAT score of white students rose by eleven points from 1998 (1054) to

2008 (1065). Accordingly, the gap in average SAT combined scores between white and African American students rose from 1998 (194 points) to 2008 (209 points), six years after the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act.

	1998			2008		
	White	Black	<i>Difference</i>	White	Black	<i>Difference</i>
SAT-Verbal/Reading	526	434	<i>92</i>	528	430	<i>98</i>
SAT-Math	528	426	<i>102</i>	537	426	<i>111</i>
SAT-Combined	1054	860	<i>194</i>	1065	856	<i>209</i>
ACT Composite	22.7	17.9	<i>4.8</i>	22.1	16.9	<i>5.2</i>

FIGURE 9 Average SAT and ACT scores for white and black students, 1998 and 2008.

Sources: College Board, 1998 Profile of College-Bound Seniors, Table 4-1; College Board, College-Bound Seniors, 2008, Table 8; U.S. Department of Education, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 132; ACT, ACT High School Profile, Graduating Class of 2008, Selections from the 2008 National Score Report.

Historical findings disclose that the broadening of the SAT score gap between white and African American students is part of a longer-run trend. A research conducted, in 1976, by the College Board reported an existence of a gap of nearly twenty percent or rather 240 points between the average SAT composite score of African American students and that of their white counterparts. The gap dropped to 189 points by the late 1980s (“Large black-white Scoring Gap” 72-76). Since then, nonetheless, it has climbed fairly progressively, reaching the present gap of 209 points.

The American College Testing scores differ by race as well as presented on Figure 9. In the high school graduating class of 2008, African American test takers attained an average ACT

score of seventeen, in comparison to twenty two for their white cohorts- a gap of five points. Thus, about more than five years after the adoption of the No Child Left Behind Act as a federal measure that aims at closing the achievement gap among all students from different backgrounds, the ACT gap broadened from forty eight in 1998 to fifty two in 2008, reflecting further a paradoxical outcome of the NCLB's presumably laudable goals.

Taking the ACT and SAT tests does not mean essentially college readiness. To measure racial and ethnic gaps in college readiness, researchers have made a comparison of the percentages of students in different groups who achieved benchmark scores that they describe as indicating college readiness. In the 2008 graduating class, while merely thirty seven percent of African American students met the college readiness benchmark score of eighteen on the English portion of the ACT, more than two-thirds (sixty eight percent) of all students, and seventy seven percent of white students, did. On the ACT math test, only eleven percent of black students met the benchmark score of twenty two, as opposed to about forty three percent of all students and forty nine percent of white students did so (American College Testing Incorporation 16-17).

F. College Completion Rates

College enrollment rates have boosted over time in reaction to the growing focus centered on higher education, and to the high awareness of the benefits associated with a college degree amongst people. Not astonishingly, the percentage of students who enrolled in college directly after graduating from high school, between 1972 and 2006, mounted from forty nine to sixty six percent. This figure has remained comparatively stable since the late 1990s (Paige and Witty 40). In actual fact, college enrollment rates have climbed for white and African American students over time, but a gap persists. In 2006, about sixty nine percent of white students enrolled in

college immediately after high school graduation, representing a significant increase from the nearly fifty percent who did so in the 1970s. Between 1984 and 1998, the rate of college enrollment increased quicker for African Americans than for whites, reducing the gap between the two groups. In 2006, approximately four years after the adoption of the No Child Left Behind Act, sixty nine percent of white students enrolled in college right after high school; amongst African American students, the equivalent figure was fifty six percent (U.S. Dept. of Educ., *Digest of Education Statistics* 284-285).

The core issue is about the way students perform once they are enrolled in college. Historical data disclose that the percentage of African Americans earning a college degree has ascended significantly over the years, from only one percent in 1940- fourteen years before the adoption of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision- to nineteen percent in 2006- four years after the No Child Left Behind Act. Figure 10 (see the appendix) examines, by race, the percentage of young adults- those between the ages of 25 and 29- earning a college degree from about 1971- three decades before the endorsement of the No Child Left Behind Act to 2007- five years after its enactment.

Findings reveal that in 1971, 18.9 percent of young white adults earned a college degree, as opposed to only 6.7 percent of their young black peers. A little more than three decades later and a year after the NCLB, in 2003, 17.5 percent of young African American adults had earned a college degree, in comparison to 34.2 percent of their white cohorts. Five years after the No Child Left Behind Act, by 2007, the statistics were 19.5 percent versus 35.5 percent, correspondingly. Therefore, young white adults are roughly twice as likely as their African American counterparts to earn a college degree (U.S. Dept. of Educ., *The Condition of Education* 145).

In summary, researchers Paige and Witty rightly reported that the narration of the achievement gap between black students and their white cohorts is a mixture of both good and bad news. In spite of a progressive noteworthy growth in a number of areas, equality in educational accomplishment remains an intangible objective (41). The findings and data provided in this thesis potently reveal that there is one coherent fundamental truth: “On academic matters, African American students have continuously achieved significantly below their white counterparts, on average” (Paige and Witty 41-42). The debate on the achievement gap in the scholastic literature, newspaper tales, and education trade periodicals is becoming so heated, and in some cases has become so far-reaching that its persistence is beginning to be taken as destiny, even by some African Americans (Paige and Witty 42). As state and federal education policies progressively encompass testing and accountability as a part of their school upgrading initiatives, namely through the adoption of the newly-federal education measure- No Child Left Behind Act, the black white achievement gap is becoming more and more noticeable.

Conclusion

Data show that black students are twice more likely to drop out than their white cohorts and more than four out of every ten black students left high school before graduating in comparison to approximately two out of every ten white students. Moreover, College enrollment rates have climbed for white and black students over time, but a gap remains, and young white adults are roughly twice as likely as their black peers to earn a college degree. Above all, the reading and math proficiency of eighth-grade African American students in America is, on average, much closer to that of white fourth graders than it is to that of white eighth graders.

Yet, by some measures the achievement gap has narrowed but at a very slow rate. Data from the NAEP reveal that in 1992, the average reading score for a White student was 266 out of 500 total points; by contrast, the average reading score for a black student was 238- a difference of twenty eight points. A decade later -in 2012- that difference had reduced by only five points, to 23 points. Researchers analyzing the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS-K) data have disclosed that the reading and mathematics skills of black and white children do actually differ at the point of school entry, but the disparities are minor. Yet, the gap grows and broadens, over the school year, with the development of more advanced areas. The assessment of the achievement gap among black and white children in reading and math at kindergarten and throughout their early elementary school years drew significant findings and data that confirm the existence of a mounting gap which evolves with students' progress through the grades. Besides, black students in grades four and eight have made strides in reading and math over the years since NAEP initiated its assessment program. The black-white achievement gaps have been contracted in a number of areas. Despite the advancement, however, brutal achievement differences persist.

Researcher Greene's analysis displayed that nationally the high school graduation rate for white students in the class of 1998 was seventy eight percent. For black students, it was fifty six percent. As with high school graduation rates, college readiness rates for both racial groups differed significantly from state to state. Historical data disclose that the percentage of black Americans earning a college degree has mounted considerably over the years, from just one percent in 1940 to nineteen percent in 2006, four years after the espousal of the No Child Left Behind Act. These facts are strikingly alarmist as the disparities of outcome between blacks and whites remain discernibly wide at every grade level about a decade after the enactment of the NCLB.

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CHAPTER SIX

Closing the Black White Achievement Gap and Recapturing Students Left

Behind

Because economic progress and educational achievement go hand in hand, educating every American student to graduate prepared for college and success in a new work force is a national imperative. Meeting this challenge requires that state standards reflect a level of teaching and learning needed for students to graduate ready for success in college and careers. (Obama, Barack)

Introduction

In reality, closing the black white achievement gap in U.S. public schools becomes the main concern in the United States. There is a wide array of effective strategies that were implemented in an effort to reduce the widening achievement gap among all students in general and African American students in particular. Such measures proved to be significantly effective in narrowing the black white achievement gap in a number of states; namely Delaware; Florida; Illinois; and New Jersey. Exploration of the miscellaneous practices that were put into place to diminish the black white achievement gap is thus essential. Five different strategies for closing the black white achievement gap proved to be effective; they are respectively as follows: early childhood education; summer school programs; teacher quality and support; parental support and finally effective schools for minority students. Assessment of the effectiveness of the implementation of some of these strategies in the four aforementioned states is evenly significant. These very states have been identified by the National Center of Education as being significantly successful in closing the academic achievement gap between black students and their white peers.

I. Effective Practices to Reduce the Black Achievement Gap

Raising the academic achievement of all students to the level of their more affluent counterparts is far from being an easy task without the eradication of the hurdles that are positioned on their educational equity path. The identification of the different challenges that hinder students' educational progress is necessary for the adoption of relevant and effective strategies that can be utilized to boost the achievement of all students.

There is little argument that highly effective teachers tend to be concentrated in low-poverty schools more than in high-poverty schools. A relevant study was conducted on the issue to weigh up teacher effectiveness in 10 school districts across seven states and data showed that the least effective teachers in both math and English language arts are much more concentrated in the highest poverty middle schools. The situation is different, however, in elementary schools where teachers were more equitably distributed than in middle schools (National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance). The role of state departments of education, in this context, is very significant in founding a structure of constant enhancement and equity in schooling; developing and distributing resources; promoting state and community partnerships; and providing comprehensive leadership that supports equity and accountability (Equity Alliance, a). State departments' collaboration with schools and districts to improve the equal distribution of effective teachers is prerequisite. The implementation of specific strategies_ such as rewarding teachers with monetary incentives; providing new teachers with support structures, namely mentoring and professional development; hiring well-experienced educators; and setting up concrete hiring timelines and practices (Goe, 73-92)_ helps maintain highly qualified professionals in high-poverty schools and thus raise the academic achievement of all students.

Another potential effective practice to close the achievement gap for all students is high quality and targeted instruction. Some analysts assert that “achieving equity in student outcomes means having a laser focus on, access to, and meaningful participation in rigorous high-quality instruction.” They also proclaim that a constant examination of “beliefs, attitudes, and practices” will inevitably provide students with considerable opportunities that enable them to be engaged in their education and learn from instruction (Equity Alliance, b). In sum, systems of support for high expectations; student engagement; teacher quality; and teacher relationships with students are critical strategies for closing the achievement gap among all students (Stone, Barton and Finch 5-6).

Classroom engagement is crucial in closing achievement gaps among all students. In reality, there are three most commonly-known categories of classroom engagement: behavioral, cognitive, and affective (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris, 59-109). Though these three types are distinctive, they are equally interconnected. American professors and researchers Boykin and Noguera documented the three-dimensional engagement as “a precursor to achievement and even growth in achievement levels over the years” (50), particularly for low-achieving and minority students.

In their article “Closing the Achievement Gap,” authors Salam and Sanandaji summarized Heckman’s research findings on the issue of closing achievement gaps. James Heckman, an education researcher and economist, recommends that interventions occur at the beginning of a student’s educational career in order to effectively address academic deficiencies at an early age. He also proclaims that social behavioral norms have to be targeted first because they are “more malleable than cognitive skills” and “more susceptible to the influence of well-designed educational programs.” Finally, Heckman contends that the most cost-effective strategies are

those specifically targeted toward truly minority and disadvantaged students (Salam and Sanandaji).

Monitoring student achievement, conducting teacher and staff development, and implementing basic structures_ namely schedules; planning times and interventions_ are critical mechanisms to most school improvement endeavors and to schools' daily functioning. An implementation plan, moreover, drives successful schools' and districts' staff development, meetings and initiatives. Authors Kaufman, Grimm, and Miller highlighted the importance of the implementation plan by asserting that "low or moderate levels of implementation of a program or initiative yields very little in student improvement." They also contend that "without a firm commitment to a consistent practice from the district and across schools, the high levels of implementation required to deeply impact student learning remain absent" (Kaufman et al. 14). Therefore, teacher training and best practices are ineffective unless they affect the way students and teachers interact with the content. Many restructuring efforts, reform programs, and all other initiatives are unable to improve student achievement due to a lack of continuity and consistency. In an effort to close achievement gaps and succeed in teaching all students, schools should have an implementation plan that comprises short-, medium-, and long-term goals and an operative process for monitoring these objectives (Stone, Barron and Finch 5-6).

There are also other policies and practices that can be used in order to boost the achievement of all students. The implementation of all these measures at once, however, is far from pragmatic. Educators should rather select methods that seem more appropriate and operative, according to the context. Closing gaps' procedures between students can be comprehensibly long and challenging; therefore, districts and school leaders should put into practice strategies that they have the capacity to uninterruptedly support (Stone et al. 5-6).

Closing academic achievement gaps between racial minorities and their affluent peers is a challenging issue that states have to confront. Researchers Bowling and Cummings highlight the magnitude of the achievement gap by asserting that it is much more than discrepancies in test scores among subgroups. They indicate that “this gap in achievement can also include access to opportunities (advanced mathematics, physics, and higher education) and attainment (high school diploma, college degree, and employment)” (1). Furthermore, in his article “An Approach to Eradicating the Achievement Gap,” researcher and author David Campos proclaims that academic inequalities take place early in the elementary school years and continue through high school. He further documents that black white inequities are not solely apparent in students’ grades, SAT scores, and class rank, but also have a negative impact on minorities’ chances to “to finish high school and enter college to earn a degree, which can affect their lifetime earning potential” (25).

Clearly, tackling the black white achievement gap is a significant issue, as more opportunities for higher education and employment are directly impacted by increased academic achievement (Robertson). Addressing the minorities’ needs requires cultural sensitivity, a real commitment to educate all students equitably, and an understanding of a wide array of social issues. In his article “Eradicating the Achievement Gap,” author Robertson proclaims that the most effective strategy to improve student achievement is “belief in success.” He further asserts that teachers must trust their students’ ability to improve and succeed, because their confidence is necessary to boost and stimulate students’ learning.

Moreover, author’s Noguera research_ “Closing the Racial Achievement Gap: the Best Strategies of the Schools we Send them to”_ identifies five fundamental strategies to educate students regardless of their race or class. These measures include the following: 1) engaging

parents as partners in education and assigning explicit roles to both parents and educators; 2) adopting strong instructional leadership by emphasizing a coherent program for curriculum and instruction that teachers must follow; 3) having the willingness to assess reforms and interventions in order to guarantee quality control; 4) adopting discipline practices that are linked to educational objectives and that aim at re-joining troubled students to learning; and 4) being committed to meet poor students' nonacademic needs (Noguera).

II. Effective Strategies for Closing the Black-White Achievement Gap

A. Early Childhood Education

In an attempt to compensate for black students' lower achievement rates, preschool programs should be adopted to allot more learning time to children at an early age. Research documents that when students start first grade there is no significant gap in children's test scores based on family income (Davison et al. 19). Since the achievement gap is still manageable, educators should adopt effective strategies to prevent disadvantaged children from falling behind. Little exposure to age-appropriate learning activities, limited access to healthcare, and poor nutrition constitute some of the most common hardships, suffered by low-income children, that early childhood programs are intended to combat. In fact, research indicates a child's readiness to succeed in kindergarten is greatly determined by high-quality early childhood care and education programs (National Gov. Assessment Center 46).

The black-white readiness gap is in effect accountable for the current academic achievement inequalities between black and white students. In fact, disadvantaged black children from low-income families are less likely to start primary school, to learn the alphabet and numbers, as well as appropriate social skills at an early age in comparison to their middle-class

white counterparts. Studies have shown that this gap in abilities at the start of school is more likely to persist throughout later schooling (Fryer and Levitt 249-281). Early childhood education, which consists of several pre-K programs, is, therefore, highly required to close the academic achievement discrepancies between black students and their more affluent white peers (Miksic 8). Indeed, conducted research on the issue revealed that growing access to preschool and quality of care for three-and four- year old poor children could narrow the black white school readiness gap by as much as 20% (Magnuson and Waldfogel (169-196).

Indeed, one of the most effective strategies to narrow academic achievement gaps is to provide access to high-quality, early child care and pre-K programs. Research has documented that the investment in early childhood care, education, and health is deemed one of the best strategies to increase the productivity of both children and adults, to improve children's educational achievement as well as well-being, and to decrease social problems such as crime. Researchers have also found that children's academic skills acquired by age 5, when they enter kindergarten, are intimately related to their subsequent achievement in school and thus success in the labor market (Reardon "The Widening Academic Achievement Gap"). American economists Douglas Almond and Janet Currie documented that child and family characteristics at the beginning of formal schooling account for labor-market outcomes the very same way as educational achievement does (54-55). Regarding the great importance of a child's first five years to both success in the workplace as well as all subsequent years of formal education, an inclusive set of early childhood care and education programs is highly required to close academic achievement disparities (Lynch and Oakford 10-11).

Three long-term studies were conducted in an attempt to highlight the importance of investing in early education as a strategy to reduce the achievement gap for black children. The

studies tracked children who enrolled in a high-quality early-education program into adulthood and compared their life paths with those of a matched control group. The outcomes of these studies: namely the Perry Preschool study, which tracked a group of disadvantaged black children in Michigan in the mid-60s; the Abecedarian study, which enrolled children of low socioeconomic status in Chapel Hill in the early 1970s; and the Chicago Longitudinal Study, which started collecting data on children from its poorest neighborhoods at the Chicago Child-Parent Centers in the 1980s have been significantly positive (Kirp).

Assessments of high-quality early education programs have revealed that children enrolled in such programs are more successful in kindergarten through grade 12 and in life after school than are non-participating children (Shonkoff and Philipps). It was established that blacks who attended Head Start tend to score higher on math and reading achievement tests; have greater language abilities; and are significantly less likely to repeat a grade or be placed in special education classes. They have higher levels of schooling attainment, lower dropout rates, and graduate from high school and attend college at higher rates (American Academy of Pediatrics 405-420). They also yield lower crime rates, are less reliant on welfare and more likely to have some work experience, and have higher employment and income rates (Kirp). Moreover, children who attended high-quality programs experience less child abuse and neglect, are less likely to be teenage parents, and are more likely to have better health thanks to the behavioral and health screenings—including dental, vision, and hearing screenings— offered by these programs (American Academy of Pediatrics 405-420).

Clearly, the school readiness gap would be reduced significantly if more three and four years-old disadvantaged children, notably blacks, could have access to and participate in such high-quality, center-based early education programs. These programs have well-educated staff, low child-staff ratios, and strong supervision. In addition to their emphasis on developing

cognitive skills, and in order to serve more disadvantaged children, these programs should incorporate the following five features: 1) high-quality learning environments_ B.A. level teachers should deliver a cognitively stimulating curriculum in small classes with high teacher-student ratios; 2) Identifying children’s behavioral problems – teachers should be trained to identify and solve children’s significant behavioral problems and improve their emotional and social skills; 3) Parent training – to involve parents in boosting their children’s development at home; 4) Home visits – to organize periodic visits to families’ homes in order to identify health children’s health problems and assist parents in getting health care for their children; and finally 5) Integration with kindergarten – to make sure that pre-K programs are relevantly aligned with the kindergarten programs to facilitate children’s successful transition (“School Readiness”).

Though these high-quality early childhood care and education programs are open to all children equitably, public provision of such programs would disproportionately benefit disadvantaged children, notably blacks. These very children do not make any gains from these specific programs as they are less likely to attend any early child care or education programs, and the programs in which they do enroll are more likely to be of very low quality (Magnuson and Waldfogel 169-196).

B. Summer School Programs

The achievement gap between Black children and their white peers widens markedly during summer vacations, as middle-class children reinforce their school-year learning through several constructive activities such as reading books, traveling, visiting museums, and going to camp, as opposed to lower-class children who fall behind (Rothstein “Reforms that Could Help Narrow the Gap” 7). In reality, summer programs are necessary contributions that aim at

providing extra opportunities for academic work and also non-academic activities that boost students' personal skills (Lareau 747-776). In his article "Reforms that Could Help Narrow Achievement Gaps" American researcher Richard Rothstein asserts that children have different abilities, interests, and skills and that those who may not excel in math may be successful in music, drama, or sport. According to him "Self-confidence gained may carry over to academics" (7). Rothstein further highlights the importance of summer programs to closing the achievement gap between disadvantaged low-income students and their more affluent middle-class peers. He proclaims that:

An education that hopes to narrow the achievement gap, therefore, should provide comparable summer experiences — not only extra drills in reading and math and not even a summer school only of more advanced academic skills. Art, music, drama, dance, and physical education teachers should be more numerous in summer than in the regular year. ("Reforms that Could Help Narrow the Gap" 7)

Summer school programs have traditionally been an alternative for local school districts to raise the academic achievement of disadvantaged students. Local school districts are allowed the discretion, by most states, to implement these programs through different statutes. Mandatory attendance to these programs, however, is rarely imposed by these. Louisiana and Massachusetts, for instance, both allow school districts to offer summer school programs, but while Louisiana allows parents to opt out of compulsory adherence, Massachusetts prohibits a demand for the requirement (Biernat 79-82).

The acceptance of mandatory summer school attendance might be attributed to the fact that these new statutes are an extension of a state's authority to mandate students' attendance to schools in order to meet certain educational requirements (Geel 19). Moreover, though most

parents would find that these summer school programs beneficial for their children, other parents would believe that these programs interfere with their rights to raise their children the way they wish and thus may legally challenge these mandatory school programs (Woodruff). Establishing mandatory or voluntary summer programs is primarily based upon fund allocation to the local district. Thus the lack of enough resources is the first hurdle positioned on the way of many school districts to operate summer school programs (Oliff and Leachman).

Mandatory summer school programs' requirements, however, is not equivalent to students' attendance; students who do not attend do not take advantage of the programs. In spite of the state's ability to fund summer school programs, the programs remain insignificant if the state is unable to ensure student attendance. Statistics from North Carolina from 1997 through 2000 revealed that 76,319 students attended summer instruction because they were performing below grade level, with 76% (57,681) reaching grade level by the end of the program. However, 165,196 students below grade level did not attend the summer program and were kept from progressing to the next grade (Denton 6). Though some students may have lagged too far behind to take advantage of a short summer program, summer school may be the last resort for students aspiring to avoid grade level retention (Denton 3).

Due to the lack of conducted research regarding the effectiveness of summer school progress, local school districts are unable to entirely comprehend the significance of these programs. Whether summer school programs are effective in narrowing the academic achievement gap has yet to be determined by studies which examined the relationship between the quantity of required school time and student learning. Such studies rely on correlational data and there has never been a study directly measuring the impact of an extended school year on student achievement (Aronson 2).

Without summer school, the academic achievement discrepancies between children from low-income families and those from middle-classes may widen significantly during the summer (Boss and Railsback 16). Clearly, it is “increasingly apparent that a long summer vacation does not represent just a pause in student learning, but actually causes many students to forget what they have learned” (Denton 8). The three-month summer gap has a negative impact on children from low-income families, who rely solely on schools to provide them with academic learning; as opposed to middle-class children, who rely partially on school for their learning and are more likely to acquire intellectual stimulation during the summer (Boss and Railsback 8-9).

There are several offered theories that account for the academic improvements of middle-class students during the summer vacation. First, middle-class parents are more likely to have time to be more active in their children’s lives than lower-income parents, and thus they are better able to respond quickly to their children’s failure when it occurs and to track effectively their children’s progress as well. Second, middle-class parents tend to understand better the functioning of the learning process; they have time to actively take part in the learning process, and they boost activities that stimulate their children’s learning. Third, middle-class families are more likely to spend money on learning supplements, such as books, computers, travel, and tutoring. Finally, entertaining family activities and leisure time has a crucial role in boosting education, something that lower income households cannot afford (Boss and Railsback 8-10).

Several studies were made to assess the impact of summer learning loss on students’ test scores. One study demonstrated that students taking the full summer off from studies have an average of one-month learning deficit, when returned to school, in comparison with their counterparts who attended one month of in-class summer school. The study also concluded that summer learning loss was less pronounced in reading than it was for mathematics as students

were more likely to have opportunities to practice reading skills than mathematics during the summer break (Denton 8).

Another research was conducted to examine the impact of summer learning loss over a five-year period between high socioeconomic groups and their low socioeconomic counterparts during their elementary education. The study revealed that during the school year, the gains between the two socioeconomic groups were less than five points in both reading and math. The study also demonstrated that during the five summers without summer school, however, the high socioeconomic group gained forty-six points in reading comprehension and about twenty-five points in math. The lower socioeconomic group, on the other hand, demonstrated no progress in reading, and either gained or lost a little in math during the same five summers without summer school (Alexander and Entwistle 78- 79).

A likely conclusion is that both socioeconomic groups demonstrated equivalent improvement during the school year, but because the lower socioeconomic group started at a significantly lower achievement level, the academic achievement gap enlarged by the end of the year. The study concluded that in spite of the academic improvement of both groups, the higher socioeconomic group progressed faster during the school year. The academic achievement discrepancies between the two groups is thus exacerbated by the lack of summer instruction; while middle-class children continue to be stimulated, the lower socioeconomic group's progress is stalled (Alexander and Entwistle 77- 79).

Moreover, a study of the Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota eighth-grade summer program revealed that summer school enhanced enrolled students' test scores by roughly six to nine percentage points. This was an insignificant improvement, however, as students' scores were still

twenty to twenty-five percentage points below the passing score (Davison et al. 19). In other words, summer school alone does not compensate for the students' lower achievement rates and, thus, is not the ideal solution for reducing the achievement gap. Indeed, the gains made by students of all socioeconomic backgrounds during the short summer period, usually three to six weeks, is not sufficiently significant. The small increase for lower socioeconomic students is far from being enough in comparison to the greater summer increase made by their higher socioeconomic peers. Thus, the achievement gap becomes so wide by the time these students reach high school, that a supplementary amount of time to the school year remains insignificant to reduce the academic achievement gap (Entwisle et al. 47).

C. Teacher Quality and Support

Research states that teachers have a great impact on what students learn and how much they learn, and that schools are crucial sites for young Black children as they enable them to understand their roles and to identify themselves among other students. As a result, teachers' beliefs of students impact students' beliefs of themselves vis-à-vis academics. Good teachers leave behind them lasting effects on student achievement that may remain for a considerable number of years (White).

Researcher White H. referenced a 2001 study that examined three main culturally responsive strategies utilized by highly qualified black teachers with majority black students: holistic, culturally communicative, and skill building. The study reveals that teachers who manage to obtain the best results with African American students have high expectations for all learners and are culturally relevant and generally respectful of black students. Therefore, White's study recommended for teachers to incorporate strategies in their lesson plans that enable black

students to make use of their language, communication, and discussion skills. Via this skill building strategy, black students are helped in boosting their abilities as well as their academic knowledge base.

Increasing teacher quality is tightly linked to improving teachers' professional experience, certification, education as well as other traditional measurements of teacher quality. Clearly, all parents would opt for a highly-qualified teacher for their children. However, children from high poverty and racial minority backgrounds are more likely to have new teachers with less professional experience; with low ACT and SAT scores; teachers who teach outside of their subject area of specialization; and uncertified teachers. Moreover, these children are more likely to experience a higher turnover rate among their teachers than their more affluent counterparts (Miksisc 5).

In fact, teachers' cognitive ability together with specific teaching skills regularly developed in the classroom correlate with improved academic outcomes (Hanushek et al.), chiefly among low income students. According to researchers Borman and Kimball, teachers' mastery of four areas linked to planning and preparation and instruction, as observed by evaluators, produced stronger test results in students. These teachers were able to adopt various pedagogical practices, show solid content knowledge, design coherent lesson plans, engage students in dynamic activities, and meet the diverse needs of students. Yet, in spite of the tight linkage between these skills and the slightly higher average classroom performance on tests, the within-classroom achievement gaps remain wide (Miksis 5).

Given the tight link between teacher quality and student performance, researchers Hanushek and Rivkin highlighted the definition of high-quality teachers by asserting that teachers

cannot be deemed highly qualified unless their students consistently make higher than predicted gains on standardized tests. They also documented that having a “good teacher” versus having an “average teacher” for three and a half to five years in a row is more likely to reduce, and even entirely close, the black white academic achievement gap (Miksic 5-6).

D. Parents Support

There is a body of evidence that parents are deemed the first teachers as they expose their children to various experiences, that qualify them to better connect with the curriculum. Research reveals that parents are well positioned to instill confidence in their children by adopting very simple practices such as spending quality time with children, giving them attention, hugging them, and telling them they can be successful. Such parental support is important for children as it increases their confidence in their academic abilities (Prager 1-16).

Moreover, researcher White asserts that African American students are more likely to be successful in school when their parents are actively involved in their children’s schooling. Therefore, parents can support their children in school by monitoring homework, by regularly communicating with teachers and other school officials, by taking part in their children’s academic activities and interests, and by limiting unhealthy and unproductive activities (Webb and Thomas).

Research shows that the amount of time parents spend with their children can influence academic achievement, lower high school dropout rates, improve emotional well-being, and decrease teen pregnancy (Thomson, Hanson and McLanahan 221-242). Therefore, specific strategies to support parents may be efficient at narrowing educational achievement gaps. For

instance, the emotional and physical health of infants and their ability to learn are affected by the health of pregnant mothers and the practice of breastfeeding (Almond and Currie). Therefore, inclusive prenatal and postnatal care for pregnant mothers and their infants is highly required to have healthier babies and children who are better equipped to learn (World Health Organization). Moreover, a number of practices that enable parents and children to spend more time together could help decrease achievement gaps: family medical leave policies and paid sick days that allow workers to care for their children; paid vacation time; and flexible work schedules might be effective (Lynch and Oakford).

A wide array of studies found that children's development, ability to learn, and educational attainment is highly affected by parents' health and stress levels. Stress during the early childhood years, such as that brought on by parental unemployment or mothers' pregnancy may reduce children's subsequent academic and labor-market accomplishments (Thomson, Hanson and McLanahan 221-242). The expansion of health care coverage for physical and emotional health, particularly for low-income families, would thus be helpful to decrease achievement gaps. The Affordable Care Act provides this kind of coverage, and the expansion of Medicaid at the state level would particularly help some of the most stressed out parents (Lynch and Oakford 12-13). The Affordable Care Act (ACA), also known as the Obama Care, is an American federal decree signed into law by current U.S. President Barack Obama on March 23, 2010. It represents the most noteworthy controlling overhaul of the U.S. healthcare system since the passage of Medicare and Medicaid in 1965. Under the Act, hospitals and chief physicians would alter their practices fiscally, technically and clinically to drive better health results, lower charges and develop their systems of distribution and accessibility

Equally important, the adoption of public policies that support higher employment, higher wages, and higher family incomes could markedly reduce educational achievement gaps. Research shows that increases in family income boost the educational outcomes of children and may thus reduce achievement gaps. Other studies revealed that such public policies as expansions of the Earned Income Tax Credit or other welfare programs increase family income, which, in turn, improved test scores remarkably (Reardon “No Child Left Behind”). Indeed, higher incomes enable families to ameliorate their children’s learning environment through growing participation in early education programs and higher-quality child care (berger, Paxon and Waldfogel).

E. Effective Schools for Minority Students

A number of studies highlighted the relationship between black students’ beliefs and perceptions and their academic achievement. Researchers Butler, Shillingford, and Alexander-Snow suggested that black students are more likely to be successful academically when they feel a sense of belonging in the school community. Their study revealed that students who feel a sense of connectivity within the school community tend to show higher self-esteem and display significant educational improvement in the classroom. It was also established that when black students’ differences are respected and valued, and when students recognize similarities in cultural distinctions within the school community, they feel more accepted and appreciated, and thus become more involved in school activities (Butler et al. 174-184).

Researchers documented that academics significantly benefitted when teachers formed strong social bonds with black students and when students showed substantial progress in engagement and self-esteem. It was found that teachers must believe they can teach and reach Black students, and they must believe in these students and have high expectations for them in an

attempt to facilitate their growth in math. Moreover, educators must hold black students accountable for their academics and learning and must pay close attention to their specific needs (Butler et al., 174-184).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, additional instructional time is deemed as an effective classroom measure in boosting students' academic achievement. It was established that institutions that consistently manage to find ways to provide supplementary instructional time for their students, particularly in the areas of reading and math, have been the most successful. Furthermore, schools have to integrate classroom strategies that draw meaningfully on the languages, culture, and experiences black students bring to school each day in an attempt to enhance their engagement and academic achievement (White).

Previous assessment studies and research have identified a number of fundamental features of schools that are effective in boosting the academic performance of low-income and minority children and thus in closing the achievement gap. These schools have to incorporate the following five core elements:

Focus on Instructional Time: Schools have to maintain a strong and constant focus on teaching and learning. In other words, the instructional program has to be at the center of what the school is about and instructional time has to be protected against intrusions and other distractions during the school day (Kannapel and Clements).

Challenging and Realistic Curriculum: In order to even out large racial disparities in academic achievement, all students need to be offered instruction and challenging, but realistic, curricula beginning in elementary school so that they are prepared to take more advanced courses

as well as advanced placement coursework in high school. Moreover, Teachers' expectations influence highly students' effort and performance (Williams, Kirst, Haertel, et al.).

Alignment of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment: The implementation of the curriculum in the classroom and the assessment of students' progress toward the standards of performance they are expected to attain must be aligned in an attempt to channel efforts toward the same objectives and make those goals clear to teachers, students, and parents (Muijs, Harris, Chapman, et al. 149-175).

Teacher Professional Development Program: Teacher professional development is a core element of a strong curriculum and instructional program. Professional development has to be focused on effective implementation of the curriculum in the classroom. Components of an efficient and operative teacher training program comprise both theory and practical application to the classroom, demonstration, and coaching and feedback as educators implement the curriculum (Snipes and Casserly 127-141).

Effective Use of Test Results: Regular assessment of students on a taught curriculum, and use of student performance data in decision-making are fundamental features of effective schools. Test results can be utilized to guide or adjust instruction as they help identify gaps in learning. Therefore, training and support have to be provided to teachers in order to efficiently use test data (Corallo and McDonald).

1. Class Size Reduction

Small class size is a further strategy that needs to be used in schools to make them more effective for minority students. In fact, class size reduction is deemed as one of the costliest

education policy measures available. Most of the research supports class size reduction intervention in the early years of schooling as children benefit from small class size, roughly between 17 and 20 students per class, particularly in kindergarten through third grade. In order to take advantage of this policy, however, children need to be in smaller classes at least two years during the early elementary grades (ERIC Digest).

Tennessee's Project STAR (Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio) study is the most famous, well-designed randomized large study on class size. The study revealed that smaller class sizes, about 15 students to one teacher, in early elementary school benefited all students, mainly African American students and students from low-income and inner-city backgrounds. In comparison to their more affluent counterparts, students from the smaller classrooms demonstrated better performance on tests, earned better grades, and fewer dropped out or had to repeat classes (Biddle and Berline 3, 86, 95).

Clearly, class size reduction is synonymous with higher students' engagement; fewer discipline problems; and students' reception of more individualized attention from their teachers (ERIC Digest). These benefits were observed immediately and were consistent and carried throughout high schooling. Students who attended smaller classes were more likely to take more challenging, rigorous or advanced level courses in secondary school, including foreign languages, and were more prepared to take the ACT or SAT tests (Biddle and Berliner 3, 86, 95). Relying on the Tennessee Project STAR Study data, researchers estimated that if class size reduction policy were implemented in schools from kindergarten through third grade, and this policy persisted for one to four years, the black white achievement gap would reduce by as much as 38% in grades K-3 and the benefits would last, after third grade, but only at 15% (Miksik 6).

In reality, there is a huge argument about the potential impact of class size reduction later on in schooling, particularly in high school (Biddle and Berliner). Researchers Fowler and Walberg conducted a study on the issue in 1991 and found that beyond the percentage of low-income students and their socioeconomic status, higher class size had a considerable negative effect on secondary school outcomes, such as standardized tests, student retention, suspensions, and post-school employment. That is to say, large class sizes is equivalent to bad school outcomes (189- 202).

In addition to the use of small class size as a potential educational intervention to close the academic achievement gap between black students and their white peers, attending smaller schools is a supplementary measure that might be fruitful to make schools more effective for minority students. In fact, students who attend small schools _elementary enrollments of 150-250, middle school enrollments of 300-400, high school enrollment of 450-600_ tend to have higher academic achievement. Although low-income and minority students in urban areas are more likely to attend large schools, the benefits of attending small schools appear to be greater for these students. A relatively recent strategy called “schools within a school” aims to devise small-school features within larger public schools, by dividing them into smaller independent groups. In spite of the absence of conclusive outcomes on the potential impact of this approach on minority students in comparison to small schools, proponents believe that the benefits will be similar (Deweese).

2. School Choice

School choice is an additional education policy with the aim of making schools more effective for minority students and thus reducing the black white achievement gap. In fact, there are two popular strategies: charter schools and scholarship tax credit programs. Charter schools and scholarship tax credit programs provide low-income parents, who are unsatisfied with the quality of their children's schooling and cannot afford to pay tuition for private schools, or move to better neighborhoods, with the possibility of finding a high-quality school for their children (Miksic 7).

Charter schools are publically funded schools that function outside the ordinary school district structure. They are seen as "mini-experiments," as they enable instructors to devise and put into practice non-standard curriculums and educational philosophies. The Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) conducted one of the largest research studies on charter schools in 2013 and has come out with the result that charter schooling is beneficial to minority and low-income children. In comparison to students enrolled in traditional public schools, Black students in charter schools obtain, on average, an equivalent of 14 additional days of learning in reading and math. Moreover, for low-income black students, the numbers jump to roughly 29 additional days of learning in reading and 36 in math (CREDO).

In 2012, an average of 245,854 children took part in school choice programs throughout the United States, and more than half of them _148,300_ were enrolled in a scholarship tax credit program. There are over 20 scholarship tax credit programs in 13 states and Washington D.C. These programs offer scholarships to eligible students so they can attend private or parochial schools. The scholarships are funded through a tax credit program, by which individuals and/or

organizations can benefit from a tax credit by making charitable donations to the scholarship program (Miksic 7-8).

Though there are no conclusive conducted studies on the impact of scholarship tax credit programs on the black white achievement gap, supporters of tax credits rely on school sector research that demonstrates positive results for disadvantaged children who attend private schools (Miksic 7-8). Moreover, because of the newness of these programs as well as their autonomy and independence, the research on these scholarship tax credit programs is limited. There are two recent studies; however, of Florida's scholarship program, conducted respectively in 2010 and 2014, that found that the program was beneficial for the low-income students who participated in it (Figlio et al. 301-317, Figlio and Hart 133-156).

III. Some Success in Reducing the Gap

Considerable efforts have been furnished to close the academic achievement gap among white students and their African-American peers (National Center for Educ. Stat. *Top 4 States*). A number of schools managed to decrease the black white achievement gap by focusing on early childhood education as at risk students are already left behind by the time they progress from kindergarten ("Strategies for Children" 1). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, a long summer vacation without educational opportunities is an additional hurdle that hinders the performance of minorities and disadvantaged students (Biernat 589-90).

Four states have been identified by the National Center of Education as being significantly successful in closing the academic achievement gap between black students and their white peers. These states have all focused on the identification of both the specific needs of

African American students and the barriers that hinder their achievement in an effort to close the achievement gap (National Center for Educ. Stat. *Top 4 States* 40). The achievement gap is measured via the standardized data provided by the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), which compares the difference between the average scores of the two student subgroups (National Governors Assessing Center). The conducted research measured comparisons between African-American students and white students in fourth through eighth grade. Improvements encompassed achievements in reading and mathematics and were recorded over four years. The study revealed a remarkable progress among students from low-income backgrounds (U.S. Dept. of Educ. *Again, the First State* 3-5).

A. Delaware

Delaware is the first of the four states praised for its success in closing the black white achievement gap. The state has set up clear educational objectives and expectations; its primary goal is to place highly qualified teachers in failing schools in an attempt to support them. Delaware aims particularly to reduce the black-white achievement gap by 50%, and to raise the performance of all students, by 55%, to a proficient level by 2015. Being one of the most successful states in closing the achievement gap, Delaware has made a noteworthy improvement towards attaining its established goals (National Center for Educ. Stat. *Top 4 States* 1). The state's curriculum was aligned to statewide standards, in 2005, and teachers' assessments were reviewed according to the Danielson principles (U.S. Dept. of Educ. "Again, the First State" 3-4, 6).

The Danielson principles "are a research-based set of instructional components grounded in a constructivist view of learning and teaching" (Council of Chief State School Officers). These

principles are aligned with the ten principles of the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (“INTASC”) which comprises state agencies that make teachers’ professional development a priority (Danielson). Delaware’s achievement plan focuses on rating teachers according to their effectiveness with regard to student improvement and progress (U.S. Dept. of Educ. “Again, the First State” 8-10). In other words, in order to deserve an effective rating, teachers have to demonstrate student progress (U.S. Dept. of Educ. *Again, the First State* 9). Following the plan, high school graduation requirements were aligned with university admission requirements in 2006 and a year later, in 2007, the “Delaware STARS rating system”_ Delaware Institute for Excellence_ for early childhood education centers started (U.S. Dept. of Educ. “Again, the First State” 4, 47).

Delaware achieved significant accomplishments between 1997 and 2008. It has made noteworthy progress towards meeting its goals by increasing instructional time for students through focusing on early childhood development and post-graduation preparation (U.S. Dept. of Educ. *Again, the First State* 3, 7). Between 1997 and 2008, Delaware ranked third nationally for improvement of fourth grade math scores and ranked sixth in eighth grade scale scores on National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP). Moreover, within the same year, the state’s schools improved eighth grade NAEP reading scores, and were placed with the top four for overall fourth grade improvement. Delaware ranked as one of the top four states in closing the achievement gaps in both mathematics and reading on NAEP between 2003 and 2007. Finally, the state was recognized as a leader “in driving improvements in closing the achievement gap” by both the Education Center for Education Statistics and Education Trust (U.S. Dept. of Educ. *Again, the First State* 5).

B. Florida

Florida is identified as the second state that has had significant success in closing the achievement gap between black students and their white peers. In 2009, Florida boosted its education system and accomplished a noteworthy progress in the achievement of its African American students as they scored fourth highest in the American nation. This accomplishment is of a great significance as Florida managed to reform and improve the education system in spite of the constraints of a limited education budget, namely in financially challenged school districts (Lander). Researcher Lander asserted that:

Florida is near the bottom of states in per-student spending, and their K-12 population is majority minority and almost half is also free and reduced lunch-eligible. It did not take hundreds of millions in additional spending or require an affluent student population to radically improve student learning.

Jeb Bush, Florida's former governor, implemented a considerable number of education reforms that constituted a significant part of the "A+ Accountability Plan." Promulgated in 1999, the plan called for the abrogation of social promotion which refers to the practice of advancing students to the next grade level in spite of their failure to accomplish the academic requirements of the previous grade. Governor Bush linked pay incentives to performance and put an end to salaries based on tenure. Moreover, the governor introduced annual student testing for students from third to tenth grade, and ranked school attainments accordingly in an attempt to measure progress (Lips and Ladner 2, 10-12, 18).

Florida implemented a variety of supplementary measures in an effort to improve student education and close the black white achievement gap. Parents of children in failing schools were issued vouchers to transfer the student to a passing school. Besides, improving the quality of teachers was an additional strategy to close the achievement gap; the “Just Read, Florida” program, for instance, aimed to train teachers and reading coaches. In 2002, a noteworthy ballot initiative was approved by Florida voters to provide state funding for pre-kindergarten programs, allowing four-year old children to take part (Lips and Ladner 2, 10-12, 18).

C. Illinois

Illinois is another successful state in closing the black white achievement gap. Illinois’ schools were greatly distinctive; they were known as “Golden Spike” schools. These institutions are defined as high poverty schools with high performing students. Impoverished schools basically include schools with more than half of the students coming from low-income families. According to Illinois’ standards, low-income students are those receiving a free or reduced-price federal lunch. Illinois used this “low-income” definition to measure data and report on student attainment. In 2001, an average of 25% of Illinois’ student population_ roughly 919 schools_ met the definition of low-income students and high poverty institutions.

A study conducted by researcher McGee made use of a total sample size of fifty nine schools, or 6.5% of the high poverty schools and revealed important facts (McGee 6, 19-20). Study results showed that there were common features in more than 90% of the Golden Spike schools that are summarized as follows: “1) strong leadership advocating high learning standards and expectations for all; 2) an emphasis on early literacy; 3) Good teachers; 4) More academic

learning time; 5) Extensive parental involvement” and 6) effective principals who lead their schools by example (McGee 25, 26).

Further results were shown in at least 50% of the Golden Spike schools: 1) extensive use of data to drive instructional decisions; 2) an internal capacity for accountability; 3) high quality professional development (on a school wide basis); 4) ready access to early childhood education programs; and 5) attention to health and safety needs of students” (McGee 25). Moreover, all of the Golden Spike schools encompassed continuous academic learning time during the day, after-school programs, and a quality summer school program that adds four to six weeks to the traditional academic year (McGee 31-32).

D. New Jersey

The last of the four states that have been identified by the National Center of Education as being successful in closing the black white achievement gap is New Jersey (National Center for Educ. Stat. *Top 4 States* 5). New Jersey’ success plan was based primarily on a significant investment in early childhood education to reduce the gap (Mead). The state boosted pre-kindergarten services for disadvantaged, struggling and at-risk students as well as for children from low-income backgrounds. Researcher Mead highlighted the significant effort the state has furnished for the sake of reducing the black white attainment inequities for these students by asserting that:

New Jersey . . . has done more than perhaps any other state in the country to link these early learning investments with early literacy reforms in the K-12 system, creating a seamless, high-quality PreK-3rd early learning experience for the state's most disadvantaged youngsters. (Mead)

Moreover, New Jersey put in place a series of successful education measures to boost the academic achievement of disadvantaged students. These strategies are fundamental for creating high-quality Pre-K 3rd early learning experiences and implementing relevant reforms. They include the following: 1) imposing both strong state-level as well as district leadership; 2) addressing pre-K expansion in conjunction with broader school reform schedules; 3) targeting pre-K by geography, rather than family income, in an attempt to implement quality programs on a smaller scale before heading for a universal pre-K; and finally 4) requiring constant commitment from instructors and policymakers at all levels (Mead).

Conclusion

Tackling the academic inequities in U.S. public schools is of an enormous significance. The identification of the different challenges that hinder students' educational progress is necessary for the adoption of relevant and effective strategies that can be utilized to boost the achievement of all students. Closing academic achievement gaps between racial minorities, in particular, and their more affluent peers is a challenging issue that states have to confront. There are five effective strategies that are recommended to narrow the black white achievement gap: first, early childhood education is of a great significance to compensate for black students' lower achievement rates as pre-school programs allot more learning time to children at an early age. Second, summer-school programs help narrow the achievement gap that widens remarkably

during summer vacations between middle-class and lower-class children. These programs reinforce minority students' school-years learning through several constructive activities.

Moreover, teacher quality and support is an additional effective strategy to reduce the gap; teachers have a great impact on what students learn and how much they learn, and schools are crucial sites for young black children as they enable them to understand their roles and to identify themselves among other students. Fourth, parents' support is another fruitful strategy as African American students are more likely to be successful in school when their parents are actively involved in their children's schooling. Finally, effective schools for minority students are the last recommended strategy to close the black-white achievement gap.

Previous assessment studies have identified a number of fundamental features of schools that are effective in boosting the academic performance of low-income and minority children and thus in closing the achievement gap. These schools have to incorporate the following five core elements: focus on instructional time; use of challenging and realistic curriculum; alignment of curriculum, instruction and assessment; adoption of teacher professional development programs; and finally effective use of test results. In addition to these key elements, class size reduction and school choice are additional education policies that aim to make schools more effective for minority students.

In reality, considerable efforts have been made to close the academic achievement gap among white students and their African American peers. A number of schools managed to decrease the black white achievement gap by focusing on early childhood education as at risk students are already left behind by the time they progress from kindergarten. Four states have been identified by the National Center of Education as being significantly successful in closing

the academic achievement gap between black students and their white peers. These states- namely Delaware; Florida; Illinois; and New Jersey- have all focused on the identification of both the specific needs of African American students and the barriers that hinder their achievement in an effort to close the achievement gap.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

The NCLB's Failure to Bridge the Achievement Gap and Mending the Act's Broken Provisions

Of course, we also have to fix the broken promises of No Child Left Behind. Now, I believe that the goals of this law were the right ones. Making a promise to educate every child with an excellent teacher is right. Closing the achievement gap that exists in too many cities and rural areas is right. More accountability is right. Higher standards are right. (Obama, Barack)

Introduction

The educational discrepancies in U.S. public schools between black students and their more affluent white counterparts are far from being inconsequential. Indeed, the black white achievement gap has dire and inevitable consequences on both individuals as well as the American society as a whole. Closing this gap, therefore, becomes a high priority in the United States. Amending the No Child Left Behind Act should then be envisioned to meet its lofty provisions. In fact, the very idea of 100% proficiency needs to be revisited; it is an unattainable goal that should be replaced with a more realistic objective. Likewise, maximum endeavors must be accomplished to magnetize, develop, and retain highly qualified teachers especially in the schools attended predominantly by low-income and minority students. The Act should comprise a mechanism to safeguard consistent rigor in the state benchmarks that define the targeted levels of achievement. The current system of assessments employed in measuring the alleged proficiency needs to be overhauled. To eradicate achievement gaps, substantial additional funding for vital

educational resources will be required. While utopian in its articulated objective, the NCLB falls desperately short of its goal of achieving 100% proficiency by 2014. To build instructional capacity in low-performing schools requires more parochial assistance and less federal regulations.

I. The Outcome of the NCLB's Failure to Bridge the Black White

Achievement Gap

In reality, academic achievement gaps between minority students and their more affluent counterparts inevitably contribute to large disparities in life chances. Employment and earnings inequalities soon become the end result of these differences in educational outcomes as educationally underrepresented minorities are more likely to hold low-wage jobs and have less opportunity to pursue well-paying professional careers. These discrepancies in opportunities would provide few chances for advancement for minorities (Miller 1). Though eradicating the black-white test score gap would not necessarily eliminate the black-white earnings gap, the effect would inarguably be substantial (Jencks and Phillips 46).

Because of the underlying educational discrepancies and the tight linkage between performance on tests and outcomes later in life, disparities in test scores are really troubling (Stiefel, Schwartz, and Ellen 7). A wide range of researchers and experts in the issue under examination perceive the academic achievement gaps as opportunities offered to some students and missed to others (McGee 13); they argue that gaps incline the playing field rashly and negatively for many minority and low-income students (McGee 7). Therefore, in an attempt to have a more equitable access to future education, jobs and a better quality of life, inequalities in academic achievement outcomes have to be eradicated (Chatterji 48).

The academic achievement gap has soon become a direct cause of socioeconomic inequity rather than being an indicator of educational inequality. This is due to the growing importance of education in the postindustrial world and the intimate connection between income and class which are becoming increasingly determined by educational success (Harris and Herrington 210). Achievement gaps contribute significantly to educational attainment, opportunity structure, individual wages, and employment opportunities. In short, academic achievement gaps hold dire consequences for individuals' life trajectories (Seiler and Elmesky 394); they give birth to dissimilarities in high school graduation rates and in income and socioeconomic status (Salvin and Madden 4). Black students are much more likely to drop out and much less likely to graduate from high school, acquire an advanced degree, or pursue a well-paying professional career (Chubb and Loveless 1).

On the educational level, achievement gaps are intimately related to growing risks, for minority and low-income students, of falling behind and momentous challenges as they move through the K-12 education system (McGee). Lower college attendance and graduation rates, higher enrollment in lower-ranked universities, higher dropout rates and reduced opportunities for higher education are a few out of many dire consequences of the black white academic educational gap on black students (Murphy 5-6).

Clearly, low-achieving students have different and more limited career paths; they earn less than their higher-achieving counterparts once they get into the workforce due to narrow career and employment opportunities (Ceci and Papierno). In his article "Racial Patterns in How Teacher Quality Affect Achievement and Earnings", Harvard professor and researcher Ronald Ferguson argues that "People with higher scores tend to have higher earnings.... Disparities in reading and math achievement, as measured by test scores, explain a larger share of the

differences between the races in average weekly earnings for young adult males” (1, 20). Other researchers proclaim that the current scores’ gap accounts for a bigger percentage of the income gap between the races than it did in the 1960s (Clotfelter et al. 377) and that “A test score gap of a given size involves a greater cost today than was the case in the past” (Murnane and Levy 402).

The black white earnings gap is a well-documented issue; a considerable number of studies and research was conducted and the data provided are really alarming. A 2003 study, for example, reveals that during the 1990s, the wages of African American males were roughly 25 percent lower than those of white males, and that the gap widens as people get older. It was also revealed that gaps existed also for women but these gaps were comparatively not very significant (Carneiro, Heckman and Masterov 99-136).

Moreover, conducted research finds that disparities in measured cognitive skills plant the seeds for the entire disparity in the hourly wages paid to African American women who hold full-time jobs at some point during a calendar year. 1990-93 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth ("NLSY") data reveal that twenty-six- to thirty-one-year-old African Americans earned 17% less than their European American counterparts (Johnson and Neal 480-87). The data are similar for African American men as research suggests that two-thirds or more of the disparity in hourly wages between white and African American men is associated with disparities in measured cognitive skill. Additionally, the same study reveals that the wages of white males in their late twenties were 30% higher than those of black males (Johnson and Neal 481).

In spite of equivalent measured cognitive skills, however, the actual annual earnings of African American men remain strikingly lower than those of whites. In the same survey just mentioned, African American men earned only 73% of what white men with equivalent test

scores earned (Johnson and Neal 481). The reason is that African Americans are less likely to work a full year than are whites with analogous measured skills, with the exception of college graduates. Another national survey_ the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey_ of individuals aged twenty-six to fifty nine shows that 54% of African American men are more likely to be unemployed than their European American counterparts in spite of constant measure of prose literacy, document literacy and quantitative literacy (Stephen and Raudenbush 33, 56-57, 63-64). In other words, less-educated and lower-scoring white men are much less likely to be unemployed than their African American counterparts (Olneck 98-99).

The income gap, however, may be more the result of a skills gap given birth to by educational discrimination than the consequence of employment discrimination. Research economists Carneiro, Heckman, and Masterov provide a relevant argument; they assert that “Minorities may bring less skill and ability to the market. Although there may be discrimination or disparity in the development of these valuable skills, the skills may be rewarded equally across all demographic groups in the labor market” (100).

In their book *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, authors Jencks and Phillips assessed the data on income and basic academic skills and their research revealed that the income gap tracks the educational gap closely. They contend that “the disparity in hourly pay between young blacks and whites can largely be traced to a gap in basic skills that predates their entry into the labor market” and further proclaim that “Black teenagers lag well behind their white counterparts in reading and mathematics, and this skill deficit explains most of the racial differences in wage outcomes among young adults” (480).

Devising ways to improve African Americans' cognitive skills and academic achievement while they are in school is highly significant for reducing racial disparities in economic outcomes (Nan 249- 61). Equalizing measured cognitive skills could similarly reduce the wage gap between African American and white men by one-half to two-thirds or more (Neal and Johnson 869, 874) and the entire gap between African American and white women (Murane et al. 311). Equally important, leveling years of education acquired would be quite helpful to narrow these gaps by only one-fifth and one-sixth, respectively (Neal and Johnson 869-95).

As a matter of fact, employers reward African American workers according to what they bring to the labor market. African Americans with a bachelor's degree or higher would undoubtedly benefit from higher average income than high school graduates who, in turn, would be rewarded higher than high school dropouts. The average yearly income of African American high school dropouts over the age of twenty-five is \$22,795. For high school graduates, the average income is \$34,614_ an additional \$11,819 every year compared to dropouts. For those with some college experience but no degree, the average income is \$46,960—a difference of \$12,346 over high school graduates who never entered college. And for those with a bachelor's degree or higher, the average income is \$75,901— \$28,941 higher than those with some college but no degree (US. Census Bureau “Current Population Survey 2007”).

In fact, education brings African Americans into the labor force and puts them into jobs. It is worth explaining, at the outset, that the labor force includes both people who have jobs and people who do not have jobs but are looking for them. Among African Americans with bachelor's degrees or higher, 88 percent are in the labor force, which refers to people who are either working or looking for a job. For those with some college, it is 79 percent, and for high school graduates it is 74 percent. Conversely, only 54 percent of African American high school

dropouts over the age of twenty-five are in the labor force and the remaining 46 percent do not have jobs and stopped looking for them (U.S. Dept. of Educ. *Digest of Educ. Stat. 2005* table 368). Moreover, among African Americans who are in the labor force, 87 percent of dropouts are employed, compared to 92 percent of high school graduates, 93 percent of those with some college, and 97 percent of those with bachelor's degrees (U.S. Dept. of Educ. *Digest of Educ. Stat. 2007* table 368). Clearly, if the high percentage of African American dropouts would lower down, and be rather substituted for higher percentages of high school graduates and students with bachelor's or higher degrees, African Americans' employment rates would increase substantially and thus government unemployment assistance would decrease markedly as well.

The academic achievement gaps have perverse consequences and deep implications on the larger society as a whole; they do not only threaten the economy of the state, but profoundly affect its well-being as well (Gandara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly and Callahan 3). Therefore, on the economic level, remediating school failure or preventing it from happening is a coherent economic choice (Ceci and Papierno 150). A number of American analysts proclaim that the magnitude of the academic achievement discrepancies and their persistence represent a real jeopardy to the long-term competitiveness of the United States as well as to the health of the American democracy (Braun, Wang, Jenkins and Weinbaum 7). In his "An American Imperative: Accelerating Minority Educational Advancement (1995)," author Miller declares that:

If these disparities are allowed to continue, the United States inevitably will suffer a compromised quality of life and a lower standard of living. Social conflict will intensify. Our ability to compete in world markets will decline, our domestic economy will falter, our national security will be endangered. (2)

Closing achievement gaps has a wide range of social and economic benefits. First, high academic achievement of minority students is crucial for the competitiveness of the United States of America as well as for its long-term productivity. Second, minorities are in need of “formal-education-dependent knowledge and skills much closer in quantity and quality to those held by whites” in order to enjoy their full civil rights; and third, minorities’ educational equity with their white counterparts will ease the preservation of a harmonious society (Miller 4).

On the social level, closing the black white achievement gap is fundamental for tackling the everlasting issue of racial discrimination. Authors and researchers Jencks and Philips proclaim that narrowing the black-white test score gap would probably be much more efficient to foster racial equality than any other measures that require “broad political support” (45). Indeed, combatting racial educational inequities in the United States would favor “the building of strong cultural bridges between the groups” and the maintenance of a socially stable nation that is void of crime, social differences, and conflicts that intensify the racial tensions (Miller 380, 12).

Economically speaking, however, experts relate academic achievement to the state of economy of the country and its financial health. They perceive academic achievement gaps as high hurdles to the American productivity performance and they held them accountable for the declining economic status of the United States (Miller 5). According to these economists, devoted efforts for the sake of boosting the education of minorities is deemed as “public investment that yields benefits in excess of investment costs” (Levin et al. 2).

Finally, tackling the academic inequities in U.S. public schools is of an enormous importance for the whole society as it helps endow citizens with all the basic skills and knowledge that enable them to exercise their legitimate rights efficiently (Miller 10). Moreover,

given the intimate relation between educational performance and the capacity of minority students to succeed and progress in life, public schools' primary task is to provide children with appropriate opportunities and chances of success through hard work. Unless public schools' role is largely played, the low educational achievement level of minority students would be in a real conflict with the basic principles of U.S. public education (Maruyama 655).

II. Mending NCLB: Recommended Revisions and Proposed Solutions

A. More Emphasis on Effective Teaching and Student Learning

The very notion of 100% proficiency should be reexamined. It is an unachievable objective that should be substituted with a more reasonable goal. Congress should instead permit the right specialists- educators themselves- in education to set up prospects and rules so that schools are about the business of teaching and students are learning- learning to be systematic and logical intellectuals; learning to solve problems; and learning through attempts and mistakes that it is tolerable to fail because there is a message in the failure essential for future achievement (Kohn 55-59).

Irrespective of a child's race, ethnicity or socio-economic status, in an attempt to learn and succeed in school he or she have to be dynamically involved- cognitively, socially, and emotionally (National Research Council *Engaging Schools* 1, 13). While students might obviously be more likely to self-motivate to a certain extent, schools and teachers must exert themselves to boost students' aspiration to learn. When teachers make students conscious that they have the cerebral competence to be successful and educational achievement is expected of them, students have an extra instigator (National Research Council *Engaging Schools* 33-37). Teachers can also assist students to be more involved by making sure they comprehend the personal recompenses and short as well as long term advantages of education. Debating with

students how their short and long term life and vocation objectives related to their academic achievement is significant in reaching those objectives and inciting students' desire to learn (National Research Council *Engaging Schools* 39-40).

It ought to be noticed that students have no difficulty in expressing where their interests lie. Consequently, schools' core curriculum should start to restructure, integrating those concerns, benefits, and activities that the students believe most magnetic and pertinent. Personalizing teaching in this way will be helpful in providing students with a sense of belonging by displaying an attention to their lives and offering a compassionate loving learning environment (National Research Council *Engaging Schools* 2-3).

The No Child Left Behind Act has instigated schools to center more attention and stress on reading and math to the detriment of other subjects, which are not compulsory constituents of the high-stakes tests (Jennings and Rentner 110-11). Nationwide studies by conducted autonomous researchers have revealed that at least forty four percent of America's public school districts have granted more time for English and math and have reduced the time allotted to other subject areas such as social studies, science, music, and art. These decreases have characteristically arisen to a reduction of a minimum of seventy-five minutes per week in the impacted subject areas (Center on Education Policy *Instructional Time*). In this technology-centered information era, language arts and math are not sufficient to expect American children to be successful. Such restricted focus on curriculum represses, rather than encourages learning, and falls short of challenging students. Accordingly, students are obtaining a degree that in numerous cases promotes a wrong belief of their aptitude to be successful in the Information Technology Age (Alliance for Excellent Education 1, 4).

It is intolerable that a lot of students are graduating from high school in U.S. public education system merely to learn that they have not been adequately prepared for higher

education. Very frequently children attending schools in underprivileged areas have curricula that are substandard in subject matter content and coverage in comparison to that of schools in more advantaged neighborhoods. Forty two percent enroll in at least one remedial course of community college freshmen as opposed to about twenty percent who enroll in at least one remedial course of university freshmen. That is to say, over one third of all freshmen begin higher education with insufficient preparation to endure the inflexibilities necessary for enrollment. The prices connected with remediating these students are very expensive. Besides the student expenses linked to remediation are the prices funded by their families, the colleges, and, above all, the taxpayer. Yet, the most expensive price is the great number of these students that quit college (Alliance for Excellent Education 104).

In order for students to have real educational achievement, schools are required to reassess the quantity of classroom time being dedicated exclusively to language arts and math and attempt to devise means to include and incorporate these skills into other courses that ought to be taught, such as science and social studies to make sure that students are getting a more comprehensive education. More schools may think about the possibility of making the school day longer, a technique not broadly used, (Center on Education Policy *Choices, Changes, and Challenges* 2, 9-10) in place of giving up learning in one subject for another. Art, music, and physical education are ordinary and vital constituents of a really comprehensive demanding curriculum. Restraining or reducing the curriculum does nothing to profit the student that eventually has to compete in a universal marketplace (Deye 34-38).

In addition to offering a demanding curriculum are extra classroom attributes that play vital roles in offering schools that are ideal learning settings. Teacher training, knowledge, and attendance, class size, accessibility and quality of technology in the class room are some of these attributes. Teacher experience and preparation have a discernible effect on their students'

educational achievement. Furthermore, recruiting teachers that are qualified and devoted is equivalent to teacher efficiency. Schools should make use of inducements, such as retention bonuses, to retain and magnetize these types of instructors, chiefly in underprivileged and predominantly majority-minority schools, which are more frequently characterized with high rates of low academic performance (Barton 10-17).

Research reveals what parents and students are already acquainted with, that the most indispensable source a school can offer to any student is a really competent teacher. The No Child Left Behind Act admits this, and, hence, the law comprises a provision that every child be educated by a teacher who is “highly qualified” as its only resource input directive. Thus, the act intends to establish a new bar for the United States’ teaching personnel. Yet, under the act’s meaning, states can and do consider teachers with merely the least proficiency as “highly qualified.” In most state certification systems, this is the functioning benchmark, and an instructor who responds to state certification benchmarks is, broadly speaking, approved as being “highly qualified” under the NCLB Act. These conditions appear to have given birth to development in the obtainability of insignificantly competent teachers, but they do not do much to make sure that all students will, actually, be educated by teachers with the academic skills, knowledge, and depth of subject-matter acquaintance required to offer the type of training that will bring about proficiency in meeting state benchmarks and the growth of higher-order intellectual skills (Rebell and Wolff “A Viable and Vital Agenda 271).

In an effort to offer all students a significant educational opportunity to encounter challenging proficiency benchmarks, maximum endeavors have to be made to magnetize, develop, and keep teachers who are really efficient particularly in the schools attended mainly by majority poor and underprivileged students, which historically have been difficult to staff. Such

endeavors are complex- and possibly impeded by the complication that the No Child Left Behind Act now devises concerning teacher qualifications. The present classification makes it hard to distinguish how many teachers are truly extremely competent and efficient because all of those who are just insignificantly competent are granted similar labeling. Furthermore, persistent public backing and investment in quality education might be threatened if nearly all teachers in American schools are mistakenly categorized “highly qualified” and student attainment does not significantly increase (Rebell and Wolff “A Viable and Vital Agenda 271).

If states are to supply all of their students with teachers of a great competence, state certification provisions have to be challenging and graduated. States must differentiate between primary entry-level provisions and advanced competent teaching classifications that are founded on suitable evaluations. They must use assessment and rating systems that take into account potent learning advantages for students, steady classroom comments, and feedback directed by numerous sources, and that use authenticated assessment rubrics. The schools of education that states recognize must be asked to focus on curricula that are entirely associated with the state content benchmarks, to instill in their students teaching skills pertinent to a progressively varied student population, and to stimulate students to get themselves ready to instruct the subjects, such as science, math, and special education, together with the schooling levels, such as middle schools, that currently have the highest deficiencies and the utmost needs (Rebell and Wolff “A Viable and Vital Agenda 271-72).

In spite of the common agreement that competent teachers have a great effect on student achievement, there is slight indication that one can expect in advance from certification status on educational degrees which individuals will actually demonstrate to be efficient. States should, consequently, center attention not merely on recruiting teachers with potent fundamental

credentials, but also on working with parochial districts to support efficient training, mentoring, and specialized growth programs that will improve a great number of teachers who are highly competent on the job, chiefly in boosting the achievement of disadvantaged, poor and underprivileged students (Rebell and Wolff “A Viable and Vital Agenda” 272).

The states must be required to deliver pertinent information on the consistency of their certification provisions, the accreditation benchmarks for their schools of education, and their induction, counselling, and proficient progress practices in their yearly report cards to the public and in the state strategies they send to U.S. Department of Education. The Department of Education and the concerned public alike would then be in a position to measure the procedures being adopted by each state to progress and impartially distribute their teachers with the development they are achieving over time in student learning results. They would also have the fundamental information they require to compare the state’s endeavors and accomplishments in this respect with the achievements of other states (Rebell and Wolff “A Viable and Vital Agenda” 272).

Definitely, the No Child Left Behind Act must be reviewed to differentiate among three classifications of teachers: “provisionally qualified teachers,” “qualified teachers,” and “highly effective teachers”: first, “provisionally qualified teachers” should be distinguished as teachers in preparation who meet the state’s substitute certification provisions. Second, “qualified teachers” must be defined as those who possess a college diploma with a major in an area directly linked to the subject field in which they are instructing, and who meet the state’s entry-level certification provisions. And finally, “highly effective teachers” have to be distinguished as teachers who are deeply knowledgeable about a specific subject-matter, have an exhaustive comprehension of state educational content benchmarks and proficiency provisions, and have a proved aptitude to

instruct efficiently the knowledge and skills needed by state benchmarks to students from various backgrounds and with dissimilar needs (INTASC). NCLB's present provisions for equal distribution of "highly qualified" teachers must be implemented to all of these categories; this implies that poor and underprivileged students should not be inequitably assigned to inexperienced or less qualified teachers (Rebell and Wolff "A Viable and Vital Agenda" 273).

B. Establishing Challenging but Attainable Achievement Targets

Much of the equality strength in the No Child Left Behind Act originates from its call that affirmative academic outcomes be proved for all racial/ethnic, language, and economic groups. Paradoxically, however, this stress on disaggregated results has become counterproductive. The Adequate Yearly Progress goals that schools have to meet are calibrated from NCLB's requirement that all students reach 100 percent of proficiency in demanding state benchmarks by 2014. This directive calls for rates of growth that no school has ever attained and the likelihood of which has never been proven (Rebell and Wolf "A Viable and Vital Agenda" (265-66).

While previous announcements of nationwide objectives chiefly functioned as inspiring rhetoric, the No Child Left Behind Act's one hundred percent proficiency goal is a lawful requirement that pushes the laws' entire accountability structure. Schools and districts that do not succeed to meet the yearly growth goals calibrated from this provision encounter particular penalties. Almost, no knowledgeable parent, educator, administrator, researcher-or legislator-believes this requirement can be met. Senator Edward M. Kennedy, one of the congressional architects of the statute, lately recognized that "the idea of 100 percent proficiency is, in any legislation, not available" (Paley A1). But as Senator Lamar Alexander commented, Americans do not require from legislators to lower benchmarks, and, thus, no one in Congress is nowadays

pushing to amend the 2014 proficiency date. If the proficiency-for-all goal were simply an inspiring objective, this could be an inoffensive stand. But as huge number of schools all over the United States are being categorized “in need of improvement”- which the public perceives as “failing”- because they have demonstrated to be unable of making enough growth toward a difficult objective, this unreasonable feature of the law is producing substantial detriment. The commonly acknowledged but undeclared inability of meeting the law’s challenging objectives also implies that, in reality, implementation of the law’s provisions and enforcement of its specified sanctions have been restrained, thus further declining the reliability of the entire enterprise (Rebell and Wolff “A Viable and Vital Agenda 266).

Though unachievable, both politicians and the public have been unwilling to abandon the 2014 one hundred percent proficiency target. According to many, it functions as a significant drive, as stimulus and assurance of entirely comprehensive academic achievement. It articulates a strong national pledge and a public compact to promote the education of all students-and particularly of African Americans, Latinos, students with disabilities, and underprivileged students whose necessities have been abandoned in the past. It functions as a rallying call that states that Americans have to surmount the impairments of poverty and discrimination and lastly achieve identical educational opportunity. Specified in this phrase, “proficiency for all by 2014” is, basically, a declaration of a transformed national involvement to put into practice Brown’s dream of educational opportunity within the subsequent few years (Rebell and Wolff “A Viable and Vital Agenda 267).

This strengthened pledge to attaining Brown’s dream has to be upheld and full educational opportunity must finally be reached in reality. To do so, nevertheless, the motivational proficiency-for-all requirement must be changed before the motivation of the act is

damaged by the hindrance of rising disappointments and either Congress abolishes the act or the U.S. Department of Education completely stops implementing it. Challenging achievement targets should be replaced, that will create a practical achievement of the vision of *Brown v. Board of Education*, and that, together with noteworthy national endeavors and investments, can be attained (Rebell and Wolff “A Viable and Vital Agenda 267).

Does this imply that the No Child Left Behind Act has to give up its promise to high attainment for all students? If the real objective is to boost great attainment development for all students, challenging but significant achievement goals should be set and the law should be reviewed to ensure that all students are able to meet them. To do this, NCLB should identify two central achievement targets. First, it should require that the attainment curve for students from each ethnic or racial group be equal, with equivalent proportions of students from all racial, ethnic, and income groups achieving at the high, middle, and low ends of the unavoidable bell curve of human operation. That is to say, though student results will vary, a student’s racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic background should no more envisage his or her admission to educational opportunity or level of attainment. Second, NCLB should require that, over a realistic period of time, the average attainment range for all groups should increase to a considerable but possible extent. This implies that the average achievement level of students of all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups should advance by great, assessable amounts over particular periods of time (Rebell and Wolff “A Viable and Vital Agenda 267- 268).

To boost improvement toward academic attainment for all students, the No Child Left Behind Act must comprise a device to safeguard reliable consistency in the state benchmarks that outline the targeted levels of attainment. Given the exigencies of today’s competitive worldwide economy, high regional mobility rates, and fast communication amongst all Americans,

America's schools can no more expect or admit extensive differences in the quality and in the caliber of the skills and knowledge that students acquire. Undeniably, numerous features of the traditional funding, core curriculum, and evaluation functions of parochial school boards have already been replaced by national devices (Rebell and Wolff "A Viable and Vital Agenda 268).

The No Child Left Behind Act's deference to parochial control in the establishment of state benchmarks and proficiency levels, while affirming federal control over result goals and penalties, obviously has not functioned. It has generated obstinate inducements that have directed states to put down their proficiency benchmarks, over which they have unconstrained control, if their schools have trouble meeting inflexible Adequate Yearly Progress provisions, over which states have no command. Reporters from both ends of the political spectrum now approve that NCLB is unable to attain its objectives unless some mechanism for guaranteeing tangible potency in state standards is quickly espoused (Miller M.).

To safeguard such constancy, the Aspen Institute's Commission on the No Child Left Behind Act has required the establishment, by a panel of specialists, of exemplary nationwide content and achievement benchmarks and tests founded on National Assessment of Education Progress agendas. The Commission suggested that states be granted a choice of (1) espousing the model national benchmarks and tests as their own, (2) constructing their own evaluation devices founded on the model national standards, or (3) preserving their current benchmarks and tests or overhauling them in response to the model national benchmarks and tests, dependent on appraisal by the U.S. Department of Education. States utilizing substandard benchmarks or establishing irrationally inferior proficiency provisions would then be asked to approve the model benchmarks or bring their own benchmarks up to an acceptable level of excellence (Rebell and Wolff "A Viable and Vital Agenda 268-69).

Adding to the recommendations of the commission, the model benchmarks should widely spread beyond the basic subjects of English language arts, math, and science. An elementary agreement has arisen from the state court cases on education equality and adequacy about the real scope of knowledge and skills that students require to be ready for competitive jobs and to work effectively in a democratic society: First, adequate aptitude to read, write, and speak the English language and enough knowledge of basic mathematics and physical science to allow them to work in a multifaceted and speedily changing society; second, adequate necessary knowledge of geography, history, and elementary economic and political systems to allow them to make knowledgeable choices with respect to issues that have an impact on them individually or on their communities, states, and nation; third, enough intellectual devices to assess multifaceted issues and adequate social and communication skills to function well with others and transfer ideas to a group; and finally, enough academic and professional skills to allow them to compete on an equivalent footing with others in additional formal education or profitable employment in modern society (Rebell and Wolff *Moving Every Child Ahead* 70).

The No Child Left Behind Act should espouse this compromise to offer a firm ground of quality for the proficiency provisions and to protect against a constricted interpretation of the scholastic opportunities that schools require to offer. Furthermore, benchmarks and state assessments must correctly highlight the high intellectual skills that students require to be successful in both college and employment. The NCLB Act must remedy the present disparity in subject-matter highlights between elementary skills and advanced theoretical thinking by stressing the significance of students acquiring profound knowledge and skills in a wide array of subject areas by the time they complete high school (Rebell and Wolff “A Viable and Vital Agenda 269).

The No Child Left Behind Act's integrity depends on impartial and precise evaluation of student achievement and growth. If the approaches utilized to appraise evolution toward proficiency are imprecise or dependent on extensive manipulation, the legitimacy and reliability of the whole enterprise is damaged. Inappropriately, nowadays a huge number of state tests utilized to appraise progress under NCLB are neither compatible with state content benchmarks nor lawful in agreement with appropriate proficient benchmarks. "[p]erformance targets are made out of whole cloth" (Koretz 19), and not much is known about the real meaning of test outcomes. A specific concern area is that nearly none of the subject-matter tests being utilized to assess content knowledge of students with restricted English proficiency have been authenticated for usage with the American population, with the consequence that there are virtually no precise data on the real proficiency of these students (Garcia, Kleifgen, and Falchi).

As a result, the No Child Left Behind Act should be reviewed to compel each state to experience an exterior appraisal of the rationality of its tests and of the measures for establishing achievement goals and cut scores by the U.S. Department of Education- an official self-governing agency with proficiency in this area. Given the current limited existence of valid tests for English language learners, the U.S. Department of Education should devise model tests in all required subjects and grade levels in Spanish and minimally five additional languages most frequently utilized in American schools (Rebell and Wolff "A Viable and Vital Agenda 270).

The No Child Left Behind Act's narrow emphasis on standardized testing in a restricted number of subject areas has to be reformed. State courts that have interpreted legal provisions for a passable education in the twenty first century have recurrently held that schools have to get students ready to be proficient citizens and skilled workers in a worldwide society. These results necessitate, minimally, high school-level functioning in math, reading, and science, but they

necessitate as well a dense education in foreign languages, social studies, the arts and technology. Students should be measured in all of these areas, and states' development toward proficiency must be assessed in these comprehensive terms (Rebell and Wolff "A Viable and Vital Agenda 270).

Such appraisal of the wide array of student capabilities will necessitate numerous indicators of student attainment, comprising procedures that measure higher-order intellectual skills and understanding such as presentations, essays, projects, and portfolios, in addition to surveys that disclose the proficiency of graduates on the job or taking part in real public activities (Rothstein Jacobson and Wilder). Though the integrity and equivalence of nationwide and state evaluations must be upheld, authenticated various measures of student advancement in all areas, and not merely numerous standardized tests, ought to be part of NCLB's evaluation scheme. The testing load on states, schools, and districts ought also to be reduced by permitting them to measure students yearly in particular grades, instead of homogenously requiring testing in reading and math in grades three to eight and high school annually. Given the significance of the National Assessment of Education Progress scores as nationwide standards for proficiency, NAEP's content and aptitude levels must be reassessed and validated (Rebell and Wolff "A Viable and Vital Agenda 270-71).

C. Evaluation and Assessment of Learning Instead of Test-Taking Ability

The current system of evaluations employed in assessing supposed proficiency should be overhauled. The legislative structure of the No Child Left Behind Act, which relies heavily and totally on standardized test scores to define educational proficiency, sets the American public education system up for impending failure. As numerous researchers have witnessed, such an

evaluation system, which links progression and recompenses to students' achievement on a standardized test, has given birth to the extensive "teaching to the test, elimination of subjects [from schools' curricula] that are not tested, narrowing of subjects that are taught to what is on the test, and corruption of instruction" (Neill et al. 16, 39). Additionally, children, who would have an opportunity to have a significant educational experience, are stigmatized as unsuccessful and kept in one grade until a considerable number of them abandon and drop out. Though students are not openly punished, they obtain an indirect undesirable effect following the labelling and sanctioning of lower-achieving schools as conformable to the Act (Neill et al. 42-43).

This strategy of evaluating a school's success on the basis of outcomes from one test score has its effect on deteriorating school quality instead of upgrading it (Wood 2). By reason of the high focus and importance centered on high-stakes tests, schools' curricula have reduced to emphasize test preparation (Wood 38-39). Instead of enriched materials students are in need of, more school materials are being dedicated to test preparation resources (Hursh 82). A considerable number of learning practices, such as projects, activities and other different learning tools that were formerly utilized to involve students, such as field trips and comprehensive discussion of up-to-date events have been substituted for "kill and drill" practices linked to a student's aptitude to answer on cue, which are far from being appropriately linked to learning and long-standing achievement (Hursh 42). Subjects that are not assessed are being removed from schools (Hursh 82). Particularly, in a wide array of schools "art, music, shop and other 'elective programs' -often the very programs that keep kids connected with and in school"- have been eliminated (Wood 42-43).

An additional key problem with an educational system determined by standardized test outcomes is a mistaken and inappropriate emphasis on how well a student achieves on an

examination rather than on what the student has acquired as knowledge. Such focus “(1) undermines students’ interest in learning, (2) makes failure seem overwhelming, (3) leads students to avoid challenging themselves, (4) reduces the quality of learning, and (5) invites students to think about how smart they are instead of how hard they tried” (Kohn 28).

Advocates of high-stakes standardized tests’ arguments basically do not seem correct. Particularly, exponents have contended that these tests were applied to “eliminate the unequal system of tracking that permit[s] some students to slide through and graduate from high school without a rigorous education” (Hursh 72). They also proclaim that high-stakes tests “are more objective and rigorous than portfolios and other forms of teacher-developed assessment” (Hursh 72). As opposed to these arguments, educational inequity has augmented as an increased number of students- chiefly deprived and underprivileged students- are dropping out of school; additionally, these tests have given birth to diluted curricula with less focus on depth and more focus on breadth (Kohn 59-61).

An educational evaluation system that assesses quality learning- in both depth and breadth-should substitute the current appraisal construction that simply assesses the amount of information. The current high-stakes, test-based accountability scheme has to be substituted for an accountability construction that has at its essential goal student learning and offers the necessary flexibility for such learning (Kohn 115-58). So, what evaluation procedure should substitute the current strategy of standardized tests directed by outside agencies? A system that believes in the teachers’ aptitude and competence permitting them to assess their own students’ academic growth should be constructed (Kohn 199). In the end, the teachers are the persons who perceive and interrelate with the students all through the academic course and can best decide whether learning is taking place (Regina 706-7).

Certainly, this return to teachers' devised evaluations must essentially involve a restructuring of the educational model implemented in a wide range of American standardized tests-driven teaching spaces nowadays. As a replacement for training students with intangible facts and asking them to preserve this information by means of rote memorization and to repeat it by completing bubbles or replying in five-sentence paragraphs to writing prompts- otherwise identified as "drill and kill test-prep curriculum" (Hursh 131) teachers should put into practice more advanced methods for higher-order learning: "The goal is to create a learning experience that arouses and sustains children's curiosity, enriching their capacities and responding to their questions in ways that are deeply engaging" (Kohn 130).

D. Eliminate Ineffective Penalties and Sanctions and Provide Appropriate

Funding

Tough sanctions are enforced for schools failing to meet Adequate Yearly Progress standards set up by the Act. Particularly, these schools are labeled, consecutively, as "[in need of] school improvement," for "corrective action," and for "restructuring." The No Child Left Behind Act, apparently, seems to offer parents of children attending these "failing" schools better alternatives for "substantial and meaningful opportunities to participate in [their children's] education" by providing training and funding facilities in addition to transfer alternatives. In reality, numerous parents have become aware that these so-called choices are equal to unmet promises (Neill et al. 83-84). Frequent impediments, such as remoteness of other schools from home, absence of space at higher-achieving schools, choice of schools that are virtually equal to the schools students already go to, and feeling unwanted at the new schools, reveal to parents that they actually do not have existent options (Neill et al. 86-9). In other words, the punishment

requirements, which theoretically were supposed would stimulate schools to improve are simply not functioning and will not be effective because of the inconsistent principles and idealistic requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act itself. Yet, revising the Act, to transfer emphasis from test achievement to teaching and learning should unavoidably comprise modifications that eliminate tough penalties, substituting them with impartial funding and resources for all schools in addition to real motivations that recompense a scholastic culture of quality exhaustive learning over amount of intangible superficial information (Regina 707-8).

Besides, impartial funding does not essentially translate into a need for equivalent funding. As researchers have noted, if the achievement gap is to be reduced for those children described by the No Child Left Behind Act as falling behind their more privileged peers, dollars are required to remedy, not merely the problems afflicting American inner city schools but also, the countless other problems with these children must encounter. Central problems, such as inferior living circumstances, insufficient nutrition, and uneven health care, continue to exist and cannot be settled by schools and teachers. Yet, these issues immediately influence these children's education (Neill et al. 124). "Simply teaching children will have little effect if they return to bad neighborhoods, single-parent homes, foster care, inadequate health care and a general lack of support" (Mathis 679). Any real endeavor at impartiality must essentially include interferences in schools as well as in the houses and societies where these children reside (Mathis 679).

Paradoxically, in the United States, the children that really require quality education- namely the underprivileged and disadvantaged- are those children that are most frequently shortchanged. "Across the country, \$907 *less* is spent per student in the highest-poverty districts than in the most affluent districts," and "\$614 *less* is spent on students in the districts educating

the most students of color as compared to the districts educating the fewest students of color” (Educ. Trust 2).

The children who attend schools with disproportioned and inadequate resources cannot be supposed to have equivalent educational opportunity and admission. One of the main motives these children attend schools with insufficient resources is linked to the way in which income is generated at the parochial level to back the public education system. Much of a school district’s funding is linked to income from property taxes measured in the community. Commonly, schools in high-poverty districts are incapable of raising sufficient money from property taxes to sufficiently assist the parochial school system (Educ. Trust 2). Accordingly, both of schools as well as children in the less affluent districts are agonizingly affected.

Though the federal government issues instructions to the states, ordering them to instruct America’s youth, federal government involvement in the supply of indispensable fiscal backing is negligible at best (Neill et al. 120-22). For instance, the National Center for Education Statistics data of 2005 displays that the federal government contributed approximately nine percent to financial backing for parochial school systems in comparison to virtually forty seven percent from state governments and forty four percent from parochial governments (U.S. Dept. of Educ. *Revenues and Expenditures* 4). Certainly, schools should be liable to their citizens; nevertheless, the federal government should also more vigorously shoulder the responsibility. Instead of uninterruptedly punishing schools that fail to progress, largely because they ignore or misunderstand the types of changes required to attain such development, more federal dollars should be expended on research and expansion of both effective strategies and operative programs. What is more, federal fiscal backing is required to raise motivational pay for those highly qualified and competent teachers that are ready to teach in less affluent and/or predominantly majority- minority schools. Federal dollars also have to be addressed toward

boosting the number of high-quality schools, instead of leaving states bearing the whole responsibility (Rotherham and Mead).

All through its history, the United States has principally relied on the public school system to resolve its social and economic inequity issues. Yet, the paradox of the American education system is that poor and underprivileged children who attend school with the highest educational discrepancies have the least resources and minimum proficiency dedicated to their necessities and, consequently, the lowest opportunity to boost their futures. The No Child Left Behind Act, though apparently designed to address these serious discrepancies, does not adequately face the obstructions to learning generated by the circumstances of poverty (Rebell and Wolff “A Viable and Vital Agenda” 273).

Low-income children encounter drawbacks and impediments that deeply impact their opportunities and aptitude to learn. There are countless ways by which poverty affects children’s academic attainment. Low-income children are more likely than other children to be in need of suitable health care and, consequently, to endure health-connected hurdles to learning. Poor children usually are in need of the initial experiences of linguistic enhancement and cultural motivation, “the scaffolds for learning” (Gordon 322) that are the standards of more advantageous children, and these shortages explain a considerable amount of the achievement gap between low-income and more affluent children entering kindergarten.

The state courts have measured exhaustively the particular resources that students require for a significant opportunity to gain a fundamental quality education. They classify, by virtual agreement, the subsequent school-based resources as crucial for obtaining the elementary knowledge and skills students require to become skilled citizens and competing workers: competent teachers, principals, and other personnel; fitting class sizes; satisfactory school

services; a broad platform of facilities, comprising leadership services, summer and weekend programming, training, and extra time on task for less affluent and underprivileged students; suitable programs and facilities for English language learners and students with disabilities; instrumentalities of learning, comprising, but not restricted to, current textbooks, libraries, laboratories, and computers; and a secure, systematic learning setting (Rebell and Wolff *Moving Every Child Ahead*).

This constitutional educational basics' list is, doubtlessly, founded on the facilities students require throughout the years and the times they are in school. Yet, in order to attain the American nationwide target of boosting attainment for all children and reducing the achievement gaps, conception of educational basics ought to be widened. In an effort to offer a significant educational opportunity to underprivileged children from concentrated poverty backgrounds, these students must be offered particular out-of-school educational basics, comprising: physical and mental health care; High-quality early childhood education; essential levels of nutrition and physical activity; home, family, and community backing for student academic attainment; and admission to arts, cultural, employment, community service, and civic experiences (Rebell and Wolff "A Viable and Vital Agenda" 274).

The No Child Left Behind Act should be reviewed to oblige states to submit "adequacy and equity" strategies that prove that proper resources and opportunities in all of the aforementioned in school-based and out-of-school resource areas are being offered to all students. This method would permit the states comprehensive discretion to create approaches for recognizing the most important issues and the most profitable means of meeting them. The supply of these facilities will also essentially include a various cooperative measures with community and governmental agencies; comprehensive discretion will permit states and

parochial school districts to create a research with the most operational ways to meet the large array of children's most necessary educational necessities (Rebell and Wolff "A Viable and Vital Agenda" 274).

Though financial backing for elementary and secondary education programs covered by the No Child Left Behind Act has augmented since the law's endorsement, states and school districts have claimed that this sum does not even cover the law's additional charges for testing and administration. The financial impartiality and education competence proceedings that have been decided in a large array of states all over the United States in recent years have revealed that, to reduce or eradicate achievement gaps, considerable supplementary funding for indispensable educational resources will be compulsory. In reflecting on the amount of resources essential to encounter the achievement gap, Congress has also mainly disregarded the reality of the influence of poverty on children's learning and the requirement to offer an all-inclusive array of school-based and out-of-school resources to decrease it (Rebell and Wolff "A Viable and Vital Agenda" 274-75).

Even though the No Child Left Behind Act enforces a large range of requirements on the states and parochial school districts, and it supplies some supplementary funding, the law wholly disregards the need to make sure that appropriate levels of funding are in place to enable students to have a significant opportunity to make efficient academic development, much less the unprecedented outcomes that are being required. Consequently, the federal government should be accountable for detecting the real costs of conformity with the NCLB Act and defining an impartial allocation of funding accountability between the federal government and the states (Rebell and Wolff "A Viable and Vital Agenda" 275).

To determine the real costs of offering all students a significant educational opportunity, Congress should approve inclusive studies of the costs to states and parochial districts of abiding by the NCLB Act, reducing achievement gaps, and attaining performance targets. This examination should take into account the charges not merely of school-based resources but also of the out-of-school resources most significant for the academic achievement of disadvantaged students. The studies should include best strategies to encounter achievement gaps in a cost-efficient way. Once the real prices of supplying significant educational opportunities are specified, schools should be offered the essential levels of funding on a state parochial basis; if scholastic opportunity is really a nationwide priority, children's learning cannot be dependent on economic cycles (Rebell and Wolff "A Viable and Vital Agenda" 275).

States should be held accountable for guaranteeing that school districts with substandard tax bases and high necessities obtain adequate state assistance to meet the fundamental needs for supplying all of their students with a significant educational opportunity. Federal assistance to the states should, minimally, make sure that states that are short of adequate resources to guarantee the accessibility of indispensable resources and services to all of their students obtain adequate federal help to meet these requirements. The No Child Left Behind Act should also necessitate state strategies to comprise information on current and predictable funding levels and to define states' endeavors to safeguard impartiality in funding (Rebell and Wolff "A Viable and Vital Agenda" 275).

E. Eliminate Unrealistic Timetable and Foster Successful Capacity Building in Low-Performing Schools and Districts

Being deemed as too ideal in its expressed requirements, the No Child Left Behind Act fails hopelessly to attain its laudable targets. Schools are not only falling short of meeting the Adequate Yearly Progress provisions, the expectation of reaching one hundred percent of proficiency by 2014 is simply not realistic (Neill et al. 13). Not only is the NCLB Act not reducing the achievement gap, it is producing a generation of children that are “left behind” and totally “left out.” Even if the one hundred percent proficiency target were ever achievable, which is in effect far from being the case, at what cost would it be achieved in the current No Child Left Behind Act’s accountability system? The cost is rather paid by the huge loads of children recurrently retained due to their low achievement on standardized tests and eventually expelled out of school (Swanson).

In place of punishing failing schools with deterrents, such as school takeovers, scarlet labels, and closures, federal financial backing, chiefly in schools in need of development, should be augmented so that efficient administration by the schools in endeavors at conformity with the NCLB Act is not weakened by the additional responsibilities related to school systems’ accountability provisions (Jennings and Rentner). Instead of holding states, districts, and schools responsible for being unsuccessful to meet arbitrary Adequate Yearly Progress standards toward unachievable target- one hundred percent proficiency by 2014- the NCLB Act should compel schools to put into practice universal changes required to efficiently educate all children (*Forum on Educ. Accountability*). Furthermore, states, districts, and schools should be supplied with the resources essential to bring about such changes. Particularly, backing in the areas of proficient

progress for educators in addition to research and advancement for school reform are significant constituents (Regina 710).

Leadership combined with cooperative setting up of accurate educational goals should be carried out as constituents of a system that promotes learning that will be evaluated utilizing authentic appraisals of accountability (Neill “Leaving No Child Behind” 101, 104-105). Besides, educational evaluations and measurements should not merely be about student achievement but should incorporate all features of the scholastic environment. “Accountability requires the use of multiple forms of qualitative and quantitative evidence from both academic and nonacademic areas....” Appropriate evaluation of a child’s educational development and achievement essentially must comprise nonacademic effects, such as home care, diet, health, among other things. For a child to really progress and improve all pertinent constituents must be taken into account and remedied (Neill “Leaving No Child Behind” 107). Finally, both in-school together with out-of-school attributes- such as race, culture and socioeconomic status- that immediately influence how well students perform in school should be taken into account as part of these measurements and assessments (Regina 710).

While a more active federal role in the supervision of the quality and integrity of state educational content and attainment benchmarks is stimulated, the federal government has obviously exceeded its fitting controlling role in its aid on an inflexible cascade of penalties for schools that are not meeting their Adequate Yearly Progress objectives. To construct instructional aptitude in low-achieving schools needs more parochial support and less federal guidelines (Rebell and Wolff “A Viable and Vital Agenda” 275-76).

There is no evidentiary foundation for the huge load of consequences and penalties today enforced in low-achieving schools or the calendar for executing them- there is no track record

preceding or since the No Child Left Behind Act to demonstrate that these procedures are helpful to increase student achievement. Therefore, the present huge load of sanctions should be removed and substituted for an efficient system of state-based technical support and accountability for both school and district capacity construction (Rebell and Wolff “A Viable and Vital Agenda” 276).

The school upgrading business is still more art than science, necessitating proficiency, time, tolerance, patience, and both human and material resources. Schools must be promptly provided with suitable resources for progress, but, once these are prepared, the inflexible calendars that today order beforehand how speedily schools must grow through each stage of progress should be substituted for flexible, long-lasting achievement targets (Rebell and Wolff “A Viable and Vital Agenda” 276).

The No Child Left Behind Act should describe and publicize top practice models and boost states to put these practices into practice in the entire schools and districts that require them. Moreover, all state education departments must possess the financial backing and the aptitude to complete these tasks. NCLB should safeguard as an essential provision that fruitful state support is entirely financed and truly carried out at all schools in need of development. The particular forms of support that the state representatives offer should, nonetheless, be established by each state, on the basis of the requirements of the specific school community and on an evaluation of the best way to function with the individuals in that community (Rebell and Wolff “A Viable and Vital Agenda” 276).

Conclusion

In sum, the black white achievement gap has perverse aftermaths and deep implications on both African American students and the larger U.S. society as a whole. Educationally speaking, the achievement gap is intimately correlated with mounting risks, for black students, of falling behind and noteworthy challenges as they move through the k-12 education system. Furthermore, this gap inexorably contributes to large disproportions in life chances and becomes a direct source of more restricted career paths and thus socioeconomic disparity. The achievement gap does not only jeopardize the economy of the United States but intensely affects its well-being as well. According to many American analysts, the magnitude of the achievement inconsistencies and their persistence menace the long-term competitiveness of the United States as well as the health of the American democracy. Thus, tackling the academic inequities in U.S. public schools is of an enormous significance.

Schools and teachers should deploy substantial endeavors to advance students' desire to learn. If states are to provide all of their students with teachers who are really highly competent, state certification provisions have to be challenging and graduated. If the factual target of the NCLB is to uphold maximum achievement development for all students, challenging but expressive achievement goals should be defined and the law should be revisited to ensure that all students can meet them. The NCLB should offer a firm ground of quality for the proficiency provisions and to guard against a constricted interpretation of the educational opportunities that schools need to supply. The NCLB should, thus, be reviewed to require each state to undertake an external review of the cogency of its tests and of the measures for setting achievement targets and cut scores by U.S. Department of Education - an official independent agency with expertise in

this realm. An educational evaluation system that assesses quality learning- in depth and breadth- must substitute the current assessment structure that plainly appraises the quantity of information.

Amending the Act, to redirect emphasis from test performance to teaching and learning, however, should essentially comprise changes that eliminate harsh penalties, substituting them for impartial funding and resources for all schools as well as true inducements that reward an educational culture of quality in-depth learning over quantity of abstract superficial information. The NCLB should be reviewed to compel states to submit adequacy and impartiality plans that demonstrate that proper resources and opportunities in all in school-based and out-of-school resource areas are being offered to all students. The federal government should be accountable for determining the factual costs of compliance with NCLB and defining a fair allocation of funding accountability between the federal government and the states. As a substitute for penalizing failing schools with disincentives, federal funding, chiefly in schools that need improvement, should be augmented. Additionally, an operational system of state-based technical support and accountability for school and district capacity building should be utilized. The NCLB should define and disseminate best practice models and inspire states to apply these practices in the entire American schools and districts that require them.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

The NCLB: Contextualizing Obama's Education Agenda

The philosophy behind the law [NCLB] is pretty straightforward: local schools remain under local control. In exchange for federal dollars, however, we expect results. We're spending money on schools, and shouldn't we determine whether or not the money we're spending is yielding the results society expects? (Bush, G.W.)

Introduction

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) set the stage for education reform in the Obama presidency. With the NCLB information, the federal government and states pushed school districts to attempt a wide variety of approaches to progress. By far, the most momentous and dominant feature of the education agenda put forward by the Obama Administration was Race to the Top (RTT). Moreover, the Obama administration gave its approval to a set of Common Core standards established by a consortium of state school officers and tied Race to the Top dollars to implement these benchmarks. In fact, there was much in RTT that was intended to redress factors that were found to be problematic with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and had been specifically problematic with respect to its latest iteration, NCLB. Yet, there is a central flaw in the competitive strategy behind RTT that seems to have upturned the logic of a compensatory education policy. In March 2010, the Department of Education released its blueprint for ESEA reauthorization and delineated the three key areas for federal action. A year later, President Obama and Secretary of Education Duncan announced the application of new

guidelines that would be employed to grant waivers to states that were out of compliance with ten central requirements of the NCLB, comprising the provision that all students be proficient in reading and math by 2014.

I. The Obama Education Agenda

In reality, the No Child Left Behind Act set the platform for education reform in the Obama presidency. Substituting a system that was formerly consigned to data-free debates of believed-to-be unsuccessful schools, NCLB compelled schools and school districts to assess and report student attainment disaggregated by demographics. With the No Child Left Behind Act provided information, the federal government and states urged school districts to endeavor a large array of different approaches to progress. Some of these involvements functioned; others were fruitless, and most were merely evasions of the provisions of the law. Still, NCLB was rather a positive measure as it disclosed hidden data relative to the academic black white discrepancies and highlighted the successes of a considerable number of public schools that managed to reduce achievement gaps (Maranto and Mcshane 73).

The Obama administration was incapable of getting Congress to review or re-enact the No Child Left Behind Act in spite of its several years into tenure. Yet, the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* (ARRA) that was approved in early 2009 to rouse the national economy in the middle of a severe depression comprised more federal funding for education than had ever been offered by Congress (*American Recovery Act of 2009*). Accordingly, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan was given more discretion, which he utilized pointedly, to determine plans for elementary and secondary schools than any federal officer in American history. *The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* encompassed the following allocations: five billion dollars for early education, comprising Head Start, Early Head Start, child care and children with special

needs; seventy seven billion dollars for reforms to improve elementary and secondary education, containing \$48.6 billion to boost state education funds that were destabilized by the financial recession; and five billion dollars for competitive resources to create novelty and improvement that would reduce the achievement gap (“Education”).

A. Race to the Top (RTT): Introducing Competition for Federal Dollars

By a long way, the most substantial and core characteristic of the education agenda set forth by the Obama Administration was Race to the Top (RTT). The program devoted \$4.35 billion for a competitive grant program that would be assigned merely to states that fulfilled particular criteria set up by the Department of Education to prove that state decision makers would conform to the guidance set by Secretary of Education Duncan. Announcing the program on July 24, 2009, current U.S. President Obama affirmed:

This is one of the largest investments in education reform in American history. And rather than divvying it up and handing it out, we are letting states and school districts compete for it. That’s how we can incentivize excellence and spur reform and launch a race to the top in America’s public schools. (“Remarks by the President on Education”)

In debating the criteria established by the administration in revising state suggestions, the President further clarified:

This competition will not be based on politics or ideology or the preferences of a particular interest group. Instead, it will be based on a simple principle- whether a state is ready to do what works. We will use the best evidence available to determine whether a state can meet a few key benchmarks for reform- and states

that outperform the rest will be rewarded with a grant. Not every state will win and not every school district will be happy with the results. (“Remarks by the President on Education”)

The draft criteria that the Secretary of Education established for assessing state strategies comprised four comprehensive policy goals: espousing globally benchmarked criteria; ameliorating the employment, retention, and recompense of teachers and school administrators; amending data collection; and applying plans to turnaround unsuccessful schools (McNeil, *Rich Prize 1*). Any state with a ruling that rejected the usage of student attainment data for assessing teachers or principals- which comprised at the time New York and California, amongst others- was automatically excluded from competition. Amongst the plans defined for compensating teachers and principals was merit pay. Among the turnaround policies identified was a bigger provision of high quality charter schools. States were also deprived of points if they had regulations that enforced a cap on the number of charter schools (McNeil, *Rich Prize 1*).

Forty states and the District of Columbia applied for Race to the Top funding (McNeil, “*Rich Prize A3*”). To the dissatisfaction of several governors, the Department of Education made grants to only two states- Delaware and Tennessee- in March of 2010, but also declared sixteen qualifiers whose strategies stayed under reflection. In August, nine states together with the District of Columbia were given awards (Duncan). When delivering the news, Secretary Duncan was eager to comment that during the progression of the competition thirty-five states together with the District of Columbia “have adopted rigorous common, college- and career-ready standards in reading and math, and thirty-four states have changed laws and policies to improve education,” signifying that the new regulation already had a visible outcome (Duncan). The

Education Secretary proclaimed, in May 2011, that a minor fund of money would be distributed among nine states that had barely missed being designated (McNeil “New Race to Top” 18).

With the completions of two rounds of competition, Race to the Top received its share of tribute and disapproval. Praise has derived from Race to the Top’s victories in boosting expressive policy debates concerning the education reform environment at a comparatively low cost to taxpayers (Brooks 2009), while opponents have interrogated the application procedure together with its aptitude to generate considerable results (“Race to the Middle” 2010).

Establishing and financing Race to the Top was far from being undebatable. First, though declared as costing just \$4.35 billion, it was coupled with an unmatched growth in federal expenditure for education. Apparently to stave off huge public sphere job deficits, the Obama administration reserved seventy nine billion dollars in K-12 education expenditure in the incentive package. The greatest part of this budget went either to enlarge funding to current programs, such as Title I, or to states to cover money deficits. In addition, the administration also defined the other federal awards that it would utilize to drive its reform program. In his “\$100 billion and No Change Back” (2009), Richard Cohen, *Washington Post* columnist, emphasized the prospect of this expenditure: “After all, without all the extra cash, the likelihood is that teachers across the country will be laid off. That gives the president some leverage: Take my money, take my reforms.” Actually, the United States government supplied an exceptional fifteen percent of public K-12 expenditure, in 2009, concealing the preceding record of ten percent and therefore expanding the power of the federal government (Guthrie and Pend 2010).

B. Common Core Standards Initiative (CCSI)

Education standards codify the objectives and prospects a community holds for its students. In her influential book on the issue, education historian Diane Ravitch (1995) defined the three kinds of education standards. *Content standards* name and define what is supposed to be instructed and what students are required to learn. *Performance standards* refer to the levels of acquisition or accomplishment of the information or skills presented in the content standards. Finally, *opportunity -to- learn standards* are prospects of the accessibility of facilities for students. As historian Ravitch notices, all of these are interconnected. “Content standards without performance standards are meaningless” she contends (13), because what does not get assessed is not taken into consideration. Correspondingly, without the outline of the content standards or the evidence collected from the implementation of the performance standards, officials have are ignorant about the facilities students require in an effort to have the opportunity to be successful. As the data derived from the No Child Left Behind Act-mandated testing reveals, the United States is in a strong need of such national standards, implying that formally equivalent educational accomplishment is extremely unequal (Hirsch 2009).

Conventionally, as education has been a state and parochial issue, state and district boards of education have been assigned the task of boosting and applying these standards. However, in current years, federal officers, professional organizations, private philanthropies, and think tanks, have endeavored to devise a national set of educational standards. As a result of the legal constraints positioned on the Department of Education, the department is unable to, as education professor and blogger Jay P. Greene commented:

exercise any direction, supervision, or control over the curriculum, program of instruction, administration, or personnel of any educational institution, school, or

school system, over any accrediting agency or association, or over the selection or content of library resources, textbooks, or other instructional materials by any educational institution or school system, except to the extent authorized by law.

To evade this problem, the Obama administration gave its endorsement to a set of Common Core standards established by a group of state school officers and linked Race to the Top dollars to executing these standards. Beginning in 2008, a group of parochial-level education administrators started to build a series of benchmarks in math and language arts to submit to the National Governors Association as well as the Council of Chief State School Officers. As stated by the Common Core Standards Initiative (CCSI), more than ten thousand comments were provided. In June of 2010, the CCSI released the last version of the benchmarks and announced that the Standards: are associated with college and work prospects; are unambiguous, comprehensible and reliable; comprise demanding content and presentation of knowledge via high-order skills; constructed upon strengths and lessons of present state benchmarks; are knowledgeable about other high achieving countries, so that all students are ready to achieve highly in US worldwide economy and society; and are evidence-based.

As a matter of fact, former president George W. Bush openly evaded the establishment of national standards in the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act. In the legislation, Bush was clear in permitting states to establish their own standards, devise their own evaluation patterns, and establish the definition for proficiency. In March 2009, the current American President Obama, alternatively, made an unambiguous case for consistency in standards in a speech to the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce:

Today's system of 50 different sets of benchmarks for academic success means 4th grade readers in Mississippi are scoring nearly 70 points lower than students in Wyoming- and they're getting the same grade. Eight of our states are setting their standards so low that their students may end up on par with roughly the bottom 40 percent of the world. That's inexcusable. That's why I'm calling on states that are setting their standards far below where they ought to be to stop low-balling expectations for our kids.

While Race to the Top could impartially be defined as a hostile endeavor by the federal government to lead education policy, the Obama administration made a considerable attempt to match it with substantial activities that were concurrently happening in the states. In 2009, in an effort to remedy the current extensive disparities in standards amongst the states, the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers convened English and math experts from all over the United States to set up benchmarks for a nationally-taught curriculum in each grade (Lewin A1, A3). One year later, the two organizations diffused a set of common core standards that states are voluntarily free to approve. In order to push forward the process, the Obama administration specified that states approving to espouse the English and math benchmarks would be accorded points in the grant competition for Race to the Top funding (Lewin A1). About two months after the dissemination of standards, thirty-nine states declared their strategies for implementation particularly with the approach of the August 2, 2010 deadline for the first round of competition (Gewertz "States Adopt Standards" 1, 18).

Under Race to the Top, the U.S. Department of Education also provided money for groups of states and private parties to work collectively in an attempt to devise grade-by-grade evaluation patterns that were corresponding to the curriculum standards (Gewertz "Common

Assessment Consortia” 8). This initiative was intended to tackle a key flaw in testing policy that had become apparent due to the No Child Left Behind Act. In order for a test to become valid, it should be associated with a specific curriculum so that there is balance between what students learn and what they are tested on. A huge number of states, if not most of them, had set testing patterns well ahead of the teaching curriculum; that is to say directing standardized exams prior to having approved a national curriculum. The new policy would expectantly not only permit testing to match teaching, it would also boost the benchmarks for both by means of universal standards (Gewertz “Common Assessment Consortia” 8).

Secretary Duncan declared that two groups had gained grants for the development of common national assessments on September 2, 2010. The Partnership for Assessment and Readiness for College and Careers (PARC), with an involvement of twenty-six states, gained a \$170 million award; the Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium, with a thirty-one state involvement, gained \$160 million (Dillon “US Asks Educators” A11). Twelve states were participants in both groups. Altogether, forty-four states together with the District of Columbia took part in either or both (Dillon “US Asks Educators” A11). The groups are supposed to devise their strategies by the 2014-2015 school year. In reporting the awards, Education Secretary Duncan named the new progress “an absolute game-changer in public education.” He added:

An assessment system and curriculum can only be as good as the academic standards to which the assessments and curriculum are pegged. We *want* teachers to teach to standards— if the standards are rigorous, globally competitive, and consistent across states. Unfortunately, in the last decade, numerous states dummed down their academic standards and assessments. In effect, they lied to parents and students. They told students they were proficient and on track to college success, when they were not even close (“Beyond the Bubble Tests”).

The partnership between the federal and state governments that emerged from the Race to the Top initiative was not merely important from a policy viewpoint; it also represented a milestone in the development of the concept of federalism as regards education. The federal government is utilizing its authority and means to rouse the United States toward national standards planned cooperatively by the states, rather than compelling states to track federal benchmarks derived from Washington (Viteritti 2105).

Not all parties approved the Common Core Standards Initiative's (CCSI) assessment, however. Sandra Stosky, a member of CCSI's authentication committee, criticized scathingly the initiative, in a declaration in front of the Texas House of Representatives. First, she claimed that the standards were not as challenging as they were formerly supposed to be, asserting, "Common Core's 'college readiness' standards for English language arts and reading do not aim for a level of achievement that signifies readiness for authentic college level work." Moreover, she specified, "States adopting Common Core's standards will damage the academic integrity of both their postsecondary institutions and their high schools precisely because Common Core standards do not strengthen the high school curriculum" (Stosky 2011).

Second, she criticized the nonexistence of transparency as regards the drafting of the standards, stating that, "The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers never explained to the public what the qualification were for membership on the standards-writing committees or how it would justify the specific standards they created." After the release of the standards' drafters' names, Stosky asserted that most of them were staffs of testing companies. She also affirmed that she was on the authentication committee, a twenty five-member group of "national and international experts" that was solicited into service to appraise the work of the drafters, but, besides four other members of the committee, she had declined to sign off on the definitive draft of the standards (Stosky 2011). While Stosky is largely deemed as

conservative, many on the left similarly criticized the comparatively closed and corporate structure of the drafters of the standards.

In sum, standards cannot be evaluated in a vacuum. With standards come assessments and with assessments come evaluation. When school systems underachieve, citizens require improvement. So conservatives who believe that the federal government will be firm on prospects but tolerant with permitting schools and school districts flexibility to get there essentially misinterpret the sub-governmental environment. If the federal government intends to get involved in the accountability issue, measures to be adopted are unambiguous. If they are going to establish accountability requirements, they must be unmistakable about what students require to acquire as a basic knowledge. If they desire to retreat and let market-based forces control, they should neither establish standards nor devise accountability rules. Since the federal government will possibly play a role in accountability for the predictable future, Common Core Standards are a stride in the right way as they are intended to boost transparency. They also match President Obama's aspiration to expand the control of the national government for equity attributes (Maranto and Mcshane 125-126).

II. Assessing Race to the Top

In reality, there was much in Race to the Top that was intended to remedy issues that were found to be challenging with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and had been precisely knotty regarding its latest iteration- the No Child Left Behind Act. Despite mounting complaints at the local level about the excessive focus centered on testing, a national agreement had been attained and highlighted that valid tests were required to measure progress, that upper standards were required to make grow the United States, that assessments had to be adjusted to a national curriculum, and above all, that the states would play a direction role to boost reform.

Race to the Top's emphasis on quality teaching also underlined a vital ingredient of the reform agenda that had not been a main concern during the Bush administration. And the request to boost unsuccessful schools traced federal education policy far back to the democratic seeds former President Lyndon Johnson had planted with the unique passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965; for, educational failure was commonly existent among deprived communities that had an unbalanced number of African American and Latino children (Viteritti 2105).

Yet, the competitive strategy behind Race to the Top that appears to have overturned the logic of a compensatory education policy is basically flawed. The competitive provision of resources could be advantageous to those states and districts with the utmost capacity, rather than those jurisdictions that required the most help and served the most disadvantaged students. This approach can be highly debatable. One of the unceasing criticisms of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, all through the years, is that it had inappropriately invested money, advancing programs and delivery systems that were recurrently deteriorating (Cohen and Moffitt 17-44). Federal decision makers had been impelled to back achievement rather than failure; to recompense those schools, administrators and teachers that were performing a deserved-to-be congratulating job. On the other hand, the competitive approach has its disadvantages. Component groups that could typically be considered within the camp of the Democratic Party, particularly with America's current first African-American president in the White House, defied the course the administration was following (Viteritti 2106).

Led by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Urban League, a group of civil rights organizations, delivered its own education policy outline on the eve of the latter's yearly conference, in July 2010, requesting revisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and asking Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to

dismantle crucial features of his central agenda as defined in *Race to the Top* (McNeil “Civil Rights Groups”). They claimed that depending on competitive funding implies that the majority of poor and underprivileged children who live in the states that lose it will not take advantage of the new funds. They also condemned the administration’s wide dependence on charter schools as a resolution for improving unsuccessful schools in urban areas (McNeil “Civil Rights Groups”).

In spite of the acknowledgement of the President and Secretary of Education of the condemnation raised by the aforementioned organizations when they spoke at the conference of the National Urban League, the administration did not make any noteworthy policy revisions to respond to the criticism (“Remarks by the President on Education Reform at Urban League”). A number of civil rights groups have similarly showed dissatisfaction and have argued as well that the United States Department of Education was unable to center adequate focus on learners of English language when appropriating money for *Race to the Top* (Zehr 18).

What is more, the proposal of utilizing standardized tests to assess, recompense and retain teachers drew tough criticism from the teacher’s unions. Equally important, the two national organizations that represent teachers were not satisfied with the stress placed on charter schools as well (Sawchuk, NEA, AFT 1). Representatives of the National Education Association (NEA), a large organization with virtually more than two million members, actually approved a vote of “no confidence” vis-à-vis *Race to the Top*. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT), a smaller organization with a million and a half members, took a more reasonable attitude. Under the leadership of its more compromising president Randi Weingarten, the AFT argued that under specific circumstances, the union could take into account the use of student test scores for assessing teachers if the method utilized comprised due process protections (Sawchuk, NEA, AFT 1). Certainly, the provisions required to please the American Federation of Teachers’

president together with her members were a high instruction and went to the core of the issue many found integral in the administration's tactic to reform (Viteritti 2107).

In spite of the pledges by current President Barack Obama that grants for Race to the Top would be made irrespective to politics or ideology, there were deep apprehensions that a number of the main priorities behind RTT were far from being research-based. The administration gave the impression of making progress with more certainty than was necessary. This does not essentially imply that the priorities established were wholly inspired by politics, particularly since the White House was eager to take initiatives that opposed the preferences of important political allies. Yet, given the importance of the actions engaged under Race to the Top flag, these concerns are praiseworthy (Viteritti 2107).

The National Academy of Sciences disclosed, in May 2011, the outcomes of a nine-year research commissioned at the request of the National Research Council that elevated serious suspicions about the effectiveness of test based motivations to increase educational attainment (National Research Council, *Incentives and Test-Based Accountability*). Supervised by an eminent group of researchers, the study examined test-based incentive schemes, high school exit examinations, experiments in teacher merit salary, and other testing and accountability systems all over the United States (National Research Council, *Incentives and Test-Based Accountability 1-6*). The group attained two key findings. First, test-based incentive programs, as intended and applied in programs that have been prudently studied, have not improved student accomplishment sufficiently to move the United States ahead and bring it close to the levels of the most successful countries. Second, the appraised data indicate that high school exit exam programs, as presently applied in the United States, reduce high school graduation rate without boosting academic performance (National Research Council, *Incentives and Test-Based Accountability 84-85*).

In sum, Race to the Top was a reform of policy moderates, sustained by secretary of education Arne Duncan who looked-for providing both cash and support to states. RTT was objected to, however, from opposite sides. Conservatives are usually against the growth of the federal role in education; therefore whatever national policymakers do to enlarge their effect or role will encounter the anger of conservatives and libertarians. Conversely, the more liberal Congress members, the academe, and the media both disapprove the competitive type of the program, asserting that dollars should only be granted to states to back programs, and disapproved the content of the reforms. Yet, a small number could disagree with its aptitude to establish a reform program. Race to the Top, though imperfectly implemented partly because of time of austerity, was an idea that publicized competition for big federal grants and could truly drive change. Indisputably, RTT rendered, and still renders, the debate on education reform at the state and parochial levels, less difficult. It also compelled policymakers, educationalists, and interest groups to debate relevant education reforms. Second, RTT inspired significant reforms at the state levels at comparatively low costs to taxpayers (Maranto and Mcshane 109).

Finally, Race to the Top might, in effect, be more advantageous than former President Bush's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in that it is much more flexible with pertinent changes. Since RTT has not been a key fiscal investment, so far, fine-tunings and reassessments of the system are still feasible options. The flaws of the first round of RTT are justifiable if they bring about the required changes. Public disapproval and the call for neutrality will eventually enable changes toward more operative and significant reforms for states' education systems. In other respects, not only will the integrity of Race to the Top assessment remain debatable, its ability to bring about significant changes will become less plausible (Maranto and Mcshane 110).

Assessment of independent data, instead of the statements made in an application would equally be an improvement. An appraisal of suggestions and pledges does not have an identical

impact as doing more to recompense outcomes. This method would do more to upgrade significant reform than simply taking states at their word. In reality, this concern has already made itself ostensible with the big number of pretended claims already unknotted in the first round of applications (Center for Education Reform 2010). In short, in spite of its shortcomings, Race to the Top was rather much more positive than negative (Maranto and Mcshane 110).

III. Reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

From its initial endorsement as part of former President Johnson's Great Society, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) has directed federal participation in local public schools. Johnson, who started his career as a teacher in an impoverished community, asserted that education was vital to the war on poverty and that the Great Society would be one in which "no child will go unfed, and no youngster will go unschooled" (Johnson 1964). Yet, from 1965 to nowadays, education critics, policy makers, and policy entrepreneurs have questioned the accurate federal role in education. This problem, unsurprisingly, was less of an issue when ESEA merely implied the federal government throwing money into failing school systems. Nevertheless, the No Child Left Behind, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act's most recent iteration, combined evaluation and accountability with those dollars, leading school district officials to withdraw (Maranto and Mcshane 127). In current President Obama's thrust to reauthorize ESEA, he will be, basically, charting the progression for federal participation in education for the predictable future. From his rhetoric and his actions alike, it seems that President Obama will enhance both spending and accountability while offering some independence for public schools. In his introduction to ESEA's Reauthorization President Obama declared:

We must do better. Together, we must achieve a new goal, that by 2020, the United States will once again lead the world in college completion. We must raise the expectations for our students, for our schools, and for ourselves- this must be a national priority. We must ensure that every student graduates from high school well prepared for college and a career. (*A Blueprint for Reform* 2010)

A. The Blueprint

The U.S. Department of Education released its blueprint for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization in March 2010. In it, the department outlined the three key areas for federal action: First, backing college- and career-ready standards, training college and career-ready students; second, recompensing improvement and achievement; and finally boosting the lowest-achieving schools (7).

Under the topic of backing college- and career-ready standards and students, the blueprint clarified that states are required to:

Either choose to upgrade their existing standards, working with their 4-year public university system to certify that mastery of the standards ensures that a student will not need to take remedial coursework upon admission to a postsecondary institution in the system; or work with other states to create state-developed common standards that build toward college-and career-readiness. (8)

As with Race to the Top, this implies that states will be highly motivated to take part in the Common Core Standards initiative. These standards would require to be combined with “rigorous and fair accountability and support at every level” (8). Furthermore, these above-

mentioned evaluations would require assessment of evolution rather than total levels of proficiency. There are grave perverse inducements related to using a bright-line proficiency deadline to assess schools and school districts, so to remedy that, the blueprint requires accountability systems founded on student academic development. As under the provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act, the blueprint requires student data to “be disaggregated by race, gender, ethnicity, disability states, English Learner status, and family income” (9). The blueprint adds a requirement for supplementary data on student and teacher attendance, discipline, and school experience surveys.

As was indicated by current President Obama in the introduction to the blueprint, the objective of all standards and evaluations will be worldwide graduation with college- and career-ready skills by 2020. Though somewhat more realistic than perceiving universal proficiency in reading and math by 2014, as was provided by the No Child Left Behind Act, all students’ graduation from high school is a lofty objective. At this time about seventy percent (Greene 2005) of students complete high school, and that is with standards that are not too difficult. It might be a tough clash to inconsistently boost both graduation rates and standards. Nevertheless, there is some indication from the most underprivileged, high achieving schools literature that establishing high standards and compelling teachers and students to fulfill them can unite a school, actually boosting attendance and graduation rates (Maranto and Shuls 2011). The blueprint requires achievement targets to be advanced to measure growth toward the objective of wide-reaching graduation with the essential skills, and to reward successful districts and assist schools that fail to reach that goal.

Successful states, districts, and schools will be categorized as “reward” states, districts, and schools, while the failing ones will be considered as “challenge” states, districts, and schools.

Correspondingly, current U.S. President Barack Obama defined the proposal: “Under these guidelines, schools that achieve excellence or show real progress will be rewarded and local districts will be encouraged to commit to change in schools that are clearly letting their students down” (qtd. in Dillon “Obama calls for Change”).

“Rewards” would comprise augmented funds to improve pioneering programs, monetary recompenses for staff and students, or flexibility in the usage of Elementary and Secondary Education Act funds. “Challenge” schools would be separated into those that represent the lowest five percent, which would be compelled to put into practice fundamental turnaround models and those that are not succeeding but are not in need of such radical involvements. In the latter situation, schools and districts would be required to “implement strategies such as expanded learning time, supplemental educational services, public school choice or other strategies to help students succeed,” not different from the interventions encompassed in No Child Left Behind. Fundamentally, schools and districts not succeeding to make satisfactory improvement would be less autonomous in the way they use their ESEA dollars (Maranto and Mcshane 131).

The lowest five percent of schools would obtain exceptional consideration under the education department’s re-envisioning of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. These schools would be aided by distinctive grants provided to states to improve their achievement. In what seems to be a nod to the concerns of extreme flexibility in reconstructing schools in the ambiguous language of the No Child Left Behind Act, the blueprint recommends four firm turnaround models: First, transformation model: substitute the principal, reinforce staffing, apply a research-based teaching program, offer prolonged learning time, and put into practice new governance and flexibility. Second, turnaround model: substitute the principal and rehire less than fifty percent of the school staff, apply a research-based teaching program, offer prolonged

learning time, and put into practice new governance construction. Third, restart model: transform or close and open again the school under the supervision of an active charter operator, charter supervision organization, or education supervision organization. And finally, school closure model: close the school and enroll students who joined it in other more successful schools in the district (Obama *ESEA Reauthorization* 12).

B. Revisiting The No Child Left Behind Act

Current U.S. President Barrack Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan declared the enactment of new strategies, in the fall of 2011, which would be utilized to grant waivers to states that were not complying with ten principal requirements of the No Child Left Behind law, comprising the provision that all students be proficient in reading and math by 2014. Announcing the ten-year-old law “broken” and noticing that eighty percent of the schools nationwide would not attain the expected annual yearly progress (AYP), Education Secretary Arne Duncan also drew a set of requirements that states would necessitate to meet in an effort to succeed (McNeil and Klein 1). The requirements were very much paralleled with the priorities established in the Race to the Top initiative, with which a considerable number of states had already been complying.

Recognizing that forty-four states together with the District had already approved the adoption of common standards and that forty-six states together with the District of Columbia are in the course of increasing high quality evaluations, the administration additionally required that apart from meeting these provisions, states would be required to center attention on boosting the lowest achieving five percent of their schools and devise rules for teacher assessments linked in part to student achievement (McNeil and Klein). Along with having waived the 2014 proficiency

deadline, states would be allowed to set a new bar for adequate development and plan their own accountability systems. States would equally be exempted from having to offer after school teaching at failing schools or supplying bus transportation to better-performing schools (Dillon “Obama to Offer Waiver” A19). While waiving the 2014 goal of worldwide proficiency could be thought to be “realistic,” it is also equivalent to a dropping of prospects, the burden of which is bound to fall on the most disadvantaged students.

Though the No Child Left Behind Act ‘s language permits the Secretary of Education to grant waivers, some have interrogated whether his establishment of new terms for such waivers was equivalent to utilizing administrative discretion to revise and write again the law in violation of the separation of powers dictum. John Klein, a Republican Representative of Minnesota complained, “In my judgment, he is exercising an authority and power he doesn’t have” (Dillon, “Obama Gives States Voice” A1, A13). John Klein carried on protesting, “We all know the law is broken and needs to be changed. But this is part and parcel with the whole picture with this administration: they cannot get their agenda through Congress, so they’re doing it with executive orders and rewriting rules. This is executive overreach” (Dillon “Obama Gives States Voice” A1, A13).

The Secretary of Education Arne Duncan granted waivers from crucial requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act to ten states, in February 2012, containing the condition of getting all students to be proficient in reading and math by 2014 (Hu A13). Before long, twenty-six supplementary states together with the District of Columbia submitted requests for a second round of waivers to be approved (McNeil, *26 States*). In the intervening time, Congress and the President remained powerless to make considerable development toward renovating the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

To summarize, the current Obama administration has pushed the borders of federalism considerably, allowing the federal government to have a noticeable impact on elementary and secondary education nationwide. It has completed this in a manner that upgrades the key goals of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), preserving a commitment to test-based data that permits education officials to supervise the growth of states, school districts, and diverse populations of students, even while granting waivers to circumvent some of the law's provisions. It has implemented funding innovatively to involve the states in an accommodating process that moves the United States closer to setting up benchmarks that are aligned with international standards. The ongoing emphasis on evaluation is significant because it will not be possible to advance school achievement generally or reduce the achievement gap for underachieving students without unambiguous information about where progress is required (Viteritti 2118).

Given the tentative requirement of state benchmarks and assessments, together with the excessively hopeful timelines that the current Obama administration has set for transforming them into reliable instruments for teaching and assessment, the present call for holding teachers accountable on the foundation of student achievement must be very cautious. What seems to be comprehensive policy might unravel as school administrators at all levels endeavor to implement these requirements. So as long as the growth of comprehensive evaluations is still an evolving work, the usage of student tests to assess the achievement of teachers is filled with troubles (Viteritti 2118).

The administration's emphasis on unsuccessful schools and its resolution to either invert their course or close them down appears to be very much compatible with the unique objectives of the Education and Secondary Education Act, which precisely was endorsed to tackle the educational needs of underprivileged students. Well-planned tactics to improve such schools should be a direct priority for all education managers. When such involvements fail, parents

should be provided with alternatives. Because less affluent districts have comparatively few efficient schools, it is rational to enlarge the array of options via the application of well-monitored choice programs (Viteritti 2118).

Additionally, the Obama administration's transformation of federal funding into several competitive grant programs is extremely risky. Its perception on this topic is comprehensible. All through the years, the federal government has received much merited criticism for devoting billions of dollars in programs that are fruitless. Yet, there has also been constant indication throughout the years demonstrating that federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act dollars are not intended for the most underprivileged and needy students. A competitive plan that recompenses states and school districts that show the most capacity might in effect make sure that federal dollars are granted to the least needy schools. A new report realized at Stanford University reveals that the attainment gap between well off and underprivileged students has increased considerably over the previous three decades, in effect surpassing the gap identified by race (Reardon 91). This new indication should be deemed as a cold reminder that former President Lyndon Johnson's resolution to target school reform endeavors at disadvantaged students was well-grounded, and that Americans have a lengthy path to follow before redirecting their attention (Viteritti 2119).

In sum, the No Child Left Behind Act was a positive policy for its time. In spite of the imperfect measurement and the inappropriate regulation, it was still light years ahead of the status quo of 2001. The government had permitted schools to fail their students for a very long time and interference had become essential. NCLB was, in effect, a 2002 policy to resolve the troubles that were existent in its time. It is, therefore, unreasonable to believe that the No Child Left Behind Act would still be capable of solving education issues eight to ten years later without thoughtful amendments. Once more, the crucial question of any policy is whether it was rather more positive

or negative. As a matter of fact, the No Child Left Behind Act was undoubtedly successful. In spite of the existence of a wide array of terrible stories of school districts avoiding the provisions of the law, it is significant to indicate that most probably those districts would still have shortchanged students without the law, so the remaining outcome is at worst zero. NCLB at least devised data systems and interest appropriate to announce school- and district-level fraud and failure. Indeed, current U.S. president Barack Obama received this policy context by inheritance. The No Child Left Behind Act aided America to determine precisely the low performance of a large array of its schools. It gave the Obama administration huge amounts of data upon which to found its upcoming verdicts. The mission of the Obama administration has, then, become replying to this enormous amount of data and developing a comprehensible set of policies to remedy the countless issues presented therein (Maranto and Mcshane 91).

Conclusion

Race to the Top initiative (RTT) drew its share of praise and criticism. Praise has stemmed from RTT's achievements in promoting significant policy discussions vis-à-vis the education reform environment at a comparatively low cost to taxpayers, while detractors have questioned the application process together with its aptitude to generate substantial outcomes. Establishing and funding Race to the Top did not emerge without controversy as well. Yet, RTT facilitated and continues to ease the debate of education reform at the state and parochial levels. Furthermore, it may in effect have an advantage over President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in that it consents greater flexibility for ad hoc alterations. Since this initiative has not been a chief financial investment, reassessments of the system remain viable alternatives.

While RTT could impartially be labeled as an aggressive endeavor by the federal government to drive education policy, the Obama administration made a serious effort to

synchronize it with noteworthy activities that were concurrently taking place in the states. In order to grapple with the wide disparities in benchmarks existing among the states, standards for what students should be learning from grade to grade were set up. This initiative was designed to tackle a core flaw in testing policy that had become apparent as a result of the NCLB. Common Core Standards are basically a step in the correct direction by leveraging what the federal government is in the best position to do, by boosting transparency. They also fit President Obama's aspiration to enlarge the power of the national government for motives of impartiality. As was stated by current U.S. President Obama in the introduction to the blueprint for ESEA reauthorization in 2010, all benchmarks and assessments will operate toward the goal of worldwide graduation with college-and career-ready skills by 2020. While slightly more pragmatic than achieving universal proficiency in reading and math by 2014, as was required by the NCLB, seeing all students graduate from high school is a lofty target.

Furthermore, declaring the ten-year-old law broken and reporting that eighty percent of the schools nationwide would not attain the adequate yearly progress (AYP) expected of them, Secretary Duncan also delineated a set of requirements that states would need to meet in an attempt to qualify. Although the language of NCLB allows the Secretary of Education to grant waivers, some have questioned whether his establishment of new terms for such waivers was tantamount to employing administrative discretion to rewrite the law in violation of the separation of powers dictum. As a matter of fact, the Obama administration has moved the borders of federalism considerably, empowering the federal government to have a noticeable effect on elementary and secondary education nationally. It has done so in a way that upgrades the major goals of NCLB, retaining a commitment to test-based information, even while granting waivers to circumvent some of the law's provisions. What is more, the ongoing emphasis on

assessment is significant because it will not be feasible to advance school achievement generally or close the achievement gap for underperforming students without unambiguous information about where development is required. In sum, the No Child Left Behind was, in effect, a 2002 policy to resolve the problems that were existent in its time. The NCLB at least devised data systems and interest likely to publicize school- and parochial-level chicanery and failure. Indeed, President Barack Obama inherited this policy context; the NCLB aided America to find out accurately how poorly many of its schools were performing.

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CONCLUSION

After *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling of 1954 was approved and its application codified in the numerous desegregation consent decrees, segregation in general, and unequal educational openings in particular, were significantly reduced, and as such became less potent hurdles to African American educational development. In fact, it can be contended that after the mid-1970s, racism and racial discrimination, though still obstructions to African American educational advancement, were no longer the major impediments precluding African American students from performing at high levels. The actualities of slavery and its legacy are historical evidences that cannot be disregarded, but neither should they be employed to rationalize the persistent existence of the achievement gap.

In fact, the history of African American education in the U.S. is distinctively unlike the experiences of any other racial and ethnic groups. Under the threat of diverse harsh statutes and ruthless strategies against the teaching of slaves to read and write, literacy was far from being the norm for African Americans in the slavery epoch. Most southern states enacted laws barring the teaching of slaves and in northern non-slave states, very few blacks were privileged to obtain a formal education in wholly separated schools. Even at the antebellum era, the scarce public education accommodations that existed for African Americans were dilapidated, underfunded, and frequently staffed by barely literate instructors. All such tough circumstances indubitably have inexorable consequences on the present black white academic discrepancies in U.S. public schools. Indeed, comprehending the detrimental upshot of knowledge and literacy on the institution of slavery and fearing that educated slaves would be impacted by enlightenment ideas and would subsequently challenge their owners' supremacy and ask for freedom, slave masters resorted to the most despotic tactics; namely the enslavement of the African Americans' mind.

They utilized their authoritarianism and violence against the human mind. This intellectual bondage was intended to denigrate the slaves' sense of self-worth and generate in their minds a strong feeling of inferiority and approval of their subordinate status in comparison to whites. Slave owners sought to make slaves believe that both their color and African descent were badges of degradation.

With the many hindrances blacks undergo by dint of a racially stratified society, in conjunction with the hurdles they may construct for themselves through internalization of racist beliefs, the black-white achievement gap is predictable. Moreover, racism is not the only probable barrier that stood on the way of African Americans' success in U.S. public schools; genetic explanations, though scientifically discarded, are very commonly offered to account for the persistent black white achievement gap. Though mainstream anthropologists and psychologists seem to offer merely slight backing for such explanations, the notion still remains profoundly entrenched in the minds of a large part of the American population. Moreover, despite the abundant deeply-conducted research and constructive studies on black identity and oppositional culture issues as potent dynamics to the current black white achievement gap, the arguments provided remain merely inconclusive with the emergence of further theories that rather center more focus on socio-economic status and economic discrepancies between the black white ethnic communities.

Socioeconomic status is in no way a hurdle to success; low socioeconomic status presents challenges, but it does not impede economic nor academic achievement. Actually, approaching the issue of the potential impact of socioeconomic status and disparities on the black white achievement gap would be far from exhaustive without the discussion of the landmark Coleman Report of 1966 that helped transform educational theory, reform national education strategies,

and impact public and scholarly opinion concerning the role of schooling in defining equality and productivity in the United States. The report reveals that family backgrounds of black and white students in common with their widely different social and economic circumstances, accounted for most of the test score gap between black and white children. Though the Coleman report is extensively cited in the realm of sociology of education, it fueled debate about school impacts that is still pertinent today. In reality, socioeconomic grounds might play a substantial role in the assessment of the black white achievement gap, but they are far from being the conclusive dynamics.

In other words, approving the Coleman report implies declining all further education reforms, namely the No Child left Behind Act, which aims primarily at bridging the academic disparities between blacks and whites at schools. Moreover, lower test scores for black students are not merely attributable to race-neutral socioeconomic features, but also to the culture of underperformance in the black community. The fact that many African American children do highly achieve academically despite the impediments presented by societal circumstances undermines the sociocultural explanation. Moreover, cultural influences and socioeconomic dynamics are so tightly linked to each other to the point that it is very hard to distinguish which of the two factors overweigh the other as a potential upshot on the black white achievement gap. Yet, school-based attributes- accounted for by the Educational Deprivation theory, are considered as the determinant factors that laid the foundations for the black white achievement gap in US public schools.

While sweeping in its breadth, the NCLB was a straight descendent of a lengthy track of federal programs intended to better even out educational attainment in American public schools. Even though education had conventionally been a bastion of state autonomy, the federal

government progressively stepped into the fray all through the previous fifty years. The federal government endorsed programs to grant educational opportunities to underprivileged students and buttress the equal rights' goals of *Brown*. Indeed, by the 1960's, around sixty percent of nonwhites dropped out before completing the twelfth grade, and there were meagre vocation prospects for dropouts. Former U.S. President John F. Kennedy gave a specific consideration to low-income states and urban areas by means of supplying funds for public school teachers' wages and classroom building. Nevertheless, the federal government did not make a notable commitment to public school funding up to 1965, this time with the purpose of upgrading a more egalitarian society and promoting every American's quality of life. Congress enacted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) as part of former U.S. President Johnson's Great Society legislation package; the Act provided federal funds to improve and boost the education of low-income and disadvantaged children. The passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965 transformed the educational landscape of the United States, bringing a previously sole level of federal commitment into the funding process.

The 1970s was also a decade for educationalists to experience the application of a number of programs. Federal compensatory education programs such as Head Start and Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) were momentarily expected but not yet attained. In 1979, former U.S. President Carter and the ninety sixth Congress went forward and narrowly approved- by a vote of 210-206 in the House- legislation creating the U.S. Department of Education in 1979 in spite of several serious reservations about the wisdom of forming a cabinet-level education office. The creation of the Department of Education did offer more leadership and consideration for education in the future decades by enticing eminent individuals

to serve as education secretaries and allotting them a national platform for backing their proposals.

In spite of its alarmist message, *A Nation at Risk* argued that the declines in education could be upturned, and recommended that state and parochial high school graduation course requirements be reinforced, higher academic benchmarks be set up, more time be spent in school, the preparation of teachers be upgraded, and that elected officials all through the United States be held accountable for making the required developments. The report concluded with an acknowledgement that reversing the declines in education would be tough and time-consuming, but that this was crucial if the American society was to flourish in the future.

Although the public and policymakers had expressed apprehension vis-à-vis the long-standing advantages of an education summit, most of the contributors at the Charlottesville Education Summit were satisfied with the event and felt that it had made practical contributions to national education reforms. Yet, not everyone provided such substantial approval for the summit. Criticism came particularly from those who supposed the solution to numerous existing educational problems was to supply more resources. Responses to the six national education objectives proclaimed in the State of the Union speech were mixed. Americans approved of establishing national education goals and thought that educators and policymakers should be held accountable for upgrading student achievement. Some critics, nevertheless, still interrogated the Bush administration's pledge to boosting education, particularly in terms of its willingness to increase federal funding. In spite of some reservations about the Charlottesville Education Summit, most observers acknowledged the emblematic and potential substantive significance of that meeting. Just when the restricted effect of the first wave of school reform, which took place in the 1980s and emphasized student outcomes, started to erode backing for education, the

Charlottesville Education Summit rekindled public attention and pledge to continue endeavors for American education reform. Clearly, key education events paved the way for the adoption of the No Child Left Behind Act and brought collectively the concepts that became its fundamental underpinnings.

Congress articulated the objective of the NCLB Act as follows: to ensure that all children have a impartial, equal, and noteworthy opportunity to acquire a high-quality education and achieve, at a minimum, proficiency on more advanced state academic achievement benchmarks and state academic assessments. The goal highlights bridging the achievement gap between the lowest and highest performing groups of students, particularly the gap between minority and nonminority students and between underprivileged and the more privileged, employing state and school accountability and flexibility, in common with parent choice and participation, so that no child is left behind. Under the Act, a school's constant failure to make "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) toward meeting established student proficiency objectives gives birth to assistance and intervention, with parents of students in failing schools permitted to transfer their children to more achieving schools. If, after technical support and parochial restructuring, the schools experience persistent failure to meet AYP targets, then remedial action may be applied, leading to state takeovers of local schools.

The NCLB may reduce achievement gaps through numerous mechanisms. First, the law requires evaluation of virtually all students in grades three to eight, together with public reporting of results, disaggregated by subgroup. Illuminating the achievement of students from historically low-achieving backgrounds might inspire schools and teachers to center their focus on reducing gaps. Second, the NCLB may narrow achievement gaps by binding accountability sanctions to the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of each subgroup. A mounting series of consequences may

pressure schools to advance the academic achievement of student subgroups with inferior proficiency rates. After two consecutive years of failure to improve, a school must provide transfer alternatives to families; after four, corrective actions must be taken to change school staffs or academic functions; after six, the school must be restructured by substituting the administration, teaching personnel, or governance structure. If these actions, or the threat of these actions, improve performance among low-achieving student subgroups, attainment gaps may reduce.

Along with shining a bright light on differential performance and reinforcing accountability sanctions, the NCLB comprises other requirements that may affect current achievement gaps. For instance, its highly qualified teacher provision provides that all teachers have a bachelor's degree, full state accreditation or licensure, and documented acquaintance of the pertinent subject matter. In several states, lesser-competent teachers are over-represented in schools serving poor and deprived students. If the NCLB equalizes moderately the distribution of experienced teachers amongst schools, and if teachers with these qualifications are more operational at boosting student achievement than their less qualified cohorts, then the NCLB may narrow achievement gaps. Finally, the law enlarged federal backing for additional education facilities and school choice options for children in underachieving schools. If more less-affluent and non-white families make use of these requirements than others, and if these services and options systematically upgrade student achievement, then these aspects of the No Child Left Behind Act may also reduce achievement gaps.

Two years after its enactment, the impacts of the NCLB began to ripple throughout America's education system. The law has drawn its share of praise and criticism. Beginning with praise, advocates contend that current test scores exemplify the NCLB's success. Other

proponents praise the NCLB's advancement of a challenging educational environment and high performance requirements for all students. Since the failure of any racial, poor, ethnic, or disabled group of students triggers accountability, exponents contend that accountability makes certain that attainment gaps in public education will no longer be disregarded. Indeed, some commentators have even argued that the NCLB's accountability requirements are some of the stoutest legislative remedies to racial disparity since the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Additionally, supporters of the NCLB argue that most Americans support concepts of upgrading teacher quality and early reading education. Besides, those who advocate testing as an accountability measure assert that it will boost classroom instruction and eradicate problems that can otherwise go unnoticed. In addition, testing proponents claim that low-income and black American students stand to profit the most from testing because it will not render it possible to disregard achievement gaps. Likewise, advocates of the NCLB's school choice provision declare that it offers opportunity to carry on school desegregation endeavors and authorizes parents, giving them a more conclusive standard by which to determine school quality.

In conjunction with tribute, the NCLB has provoked scathing disapproval from officials in education and state government. A common criticism amongst educators is that the federal government acted singly in enacting and implementing the Act. School officials and experts in education argue that they were mainly disqualified from drafting and applying the law. Instead, detractors contend that the Department of Education has taken a "command and control posture" that offends education officials who disapprove its approaches. Moreover, the NCLB is increasingly condemned as an unfunded mandate by state legislatures and education officials of both political parties. Opponents highlight, however, that the Bush Administration has assigned billions of dollars less than Congress sanctioned for the program. While the Act provides states

with money to put in place assessment requirements, antagonists argue that it fails to grapple with the supplementary administrative costs required. Additionally, unequal spending widens the gap among underprivileged students, and consequently federal funds have the potential to reduce the effect of imbalanced state and parochial spending.

Overstressing testing is a supplementary potential perverse incentive of the NCLB. Educators are concerned that schools will respond to the NCLB by “teaching the test.” More precisely, education officials contend that schools will focus on teaching exam methods and will teach merely the assessed material, rather than inciting students to really learn the subject matter. Antagonists indicate that research already displays that schools are spending valued time and money “teaching the test” to meet the Act’s proficiency levels. Simultaneously, they contend that the cost of days lost to test preparation and training not associated with general learning are countless; the more focus centered on test scores, the less stress placed on the general school experience. Once tests have such high stakes devoted to them, instructional time is supplanted by test preparation giving birth to a reduced and debilitated classroom experience. The NCLB’s overemphasis on standardized tests has unsurprisingly reduced the school curriculum to what is assessed on the test.

Furthermore, some of the requirements of the NCLB would shy highly qualified teachers away by both reducing their supply and strengthening their imbalanced distribution. The requirement of “highly qualified” teachers may also be deemed as an additional deterrent as it is contingent primarily on state’s requirements for certification or licensure. The larger benchmarks and testing movement, of which the NCLB is a part, generates two separate problems concerning teachers. First, it will make instruction a less attractive occupation to some gifted individuals.

Second, it will bolster the tendency of competent teachers to select comparatively wealthy, white, and high-achieving schools.

Furthermore, the NCLB endorses segregation by endowing administrators of white, middle class schools with a motive to exclude African American students. These students conventionally do not achieve as well as their white and more affluent cohorts on standardized tests. Schools that comprise an African American or economically underprivileged subgroup are much more likely to fail short of making adequate yearly progress than those that do not. To advance the likelihoods that a specific school or schools within a district make AYP, administrators have an incentive to diminish the number of African American or low-income students in a school or district. Moreover, parents will confront analogous incentives, which is another means by which the NCLB will boost segregation. Parents with alternatives will be unwilling to choose schools that are failing to make AYP. In certain places, this will push those parents to shy away from more desegregated schools, given that racially and socioeconomically integrated schools are less likely to succeed to make AYP than majority or wholly white and middle class schools. An even more serious menace to underprivileged students is the issue of student exclusion, which the NCLB threatens to aggravate. All kinds of schools, whether elementary, middle, or high school, have to make AYP. Students who do not achieve highly on state tests evidently endanger schools aspiring to make AYP. This provides schools with a good motive to circumvent enrolling those students who are at risk of failing the exams. The same pressure could push schools to shy low-achieving students away, either to another school or out of the school system completely.

By some measures the achievement gap has reduced, but it has done at an extremely slow rate. Findings from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reveal that it will

take many more decades before disparities of outcome and the profound negative influences they have on the lives of a great number of African American students fade away. These facts are noticeably alarmist as the discrepancies of achievement between blacks and whites in U.S. public schools remain perceptibly wide at every grade level about a decade after the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act. This reality rings alarm bells as regards the presumably laudable goals of the NCLB, namely of closing the achievement gap amongst all students from all backgrounds.

The No Child Left Behind Act is a significant issue because of the historical and present-day struggle American children has had with learning within the public educational system. Boosting academic attainment has been and is a point of contention under NCLB that engenders many arguments on policy issues. A key challenge to the public education system in the United States has been the academic performance gaps between dissimilar groups of children. Although there are extensive disparities within public schools, numerous Americans believe that education is a vigorous resource to safeguard healthy prospects not only for their children but the country as well. In spite of the aspiration to offer universal education to all children, a considerable number of children are frequently poorly educated by the public school system and graduate from high school impotent to compete in the labor force for proper jobs that offer decent incomes and benefits. This dilemma has produced and continues to cause an enormous concern for the future of the American labor force.

Researchers investigating the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS-K) data have found that the reading and mathematics skills of black and white children do, in effect, vary at the point of school entry, but the disparities are minor. The gap, nevertheless, raises and broadens, over the school year, with the growth of more advanced and demanding areas. The assessment of the achievement gap among black and white children in reading and math at kindergarten and

throughout their early elementary school years drew significant findings and data that assert the existence of a mounting gap which progresses with students' advancement through the grades.

African American students in grades four and eight have made strides in reading and math over the years since NAEP began its evaluation package. The black-white achievement gaps have been shrunk in several areas. Despite the advancement, however, brutal achievement disparities persist. Black students are far less likely than their white counterparts to be competent in reading and math- the spine of achievement in school and in life. On a national scale, and in a wide array of states and districts, the black white achievement gap has reduced over time owing to the greater gains made by black students in comparison to white cohorts, but in no place is the achievement gap anywhere close to zero. The reading and math proficiency of eighth-grade black students in America is averagely much closer to that of white fourth graders than it is to that of white eighth graders. Furthermore, these data are only for the students who are staying in school. Dropouts, who are excessively likely to be minority, tend to have even more restricted skills.

Researcher Greene's analysis disclosed that nationally more than two out of every ten white students and more than four out of every ten black students left high school before graduating. As with high school graduation rates, college readiness rates for both racial groups fluctuated meaningfully from state to state. The critical question is how do students perform once they are enrolled in college? Historical data reveal that the percentage of black Americans earning a college degree has ascended considerably over the years, from just one percent in 1940- fourteen years prior to the implementation of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka ruling of 1954- to nineteen percent in 2006- four years subsequent to the endorsement of the No Child Left Behind Act.

The academic achievement gap has soon become a direct root of socioeconomic inequality rather than being an indicator of educational disparity. This is attributable to the rising prominence of education in the postindustrial world and the intimate relation between income and class which are becoming progressively determined by educational achievement. In short, academic achievement gaps hold dire effects for individuals' life courses; they give rise to discrepancies in high school graduation rates and in income and socioeconomic status. Black students are much more likely to drop out and much less likely to complete high school, obtain an advanced degree, or pursue a rewarding professional career. Clearly, low-performing students have dissimilar and more restricted career paths; they earn less than their higher-performing cohorts once they get into the workforce due to constricted vocation and employment openings.

Devising ways to improve African Americans' cognitive skills and academic achievement while they are in school is highly significant for reducing racial disparities in economic outcomes. As a matter of fact, employers reward African American workers according to what they bring to the labor market. African Americans with a bachelor's degree or higher would undoubtedly benefit from higher average income than high school graduates who, in turn, would be rewarded higher than high school dropouts. In fact, education brings African Americans into the labor force and puts them into jobs.

Closing achievement gaps has a wide range of social and economic benefits. First, high academic achievement of minority students is crucial for the competitiveness of the United States of America as well as for its long-term productivity. Second, minorities are in need of formal education and skills that are analogous in both quantity and quality to those acquired by whites in order to enjoy their full civil rights. Similarly, minorities' educational equity with their white counterparts will ease the preservation of a harmonious society. On the social level, closing the

black white achievement gap is fundamental for tackling the everlasting issue of racial discrimination. Narrowing the black-white test score gap would probably be much more efficient to foster racial equality than any other measures that require broad political backing. Economically speaking, however, experts relate academic achievement to the state of economy of the country and its financial health. They perceive academic achievement gaps as high hurdles to the American productivity performance and they held them accountable for the declining economic status of the United States. Finally, tackling the academic inequities in U.S. public schools is of an enormous importance for the whole society as it helps endow citizens with all the basic skills and knowledge that enable them to exercise their legitimate rights efficiently.

The black-white readiness gap is in effect accountable for the current academic achievement inequalities between black and white students. Early childhood education, which consists of several pre-K programs, is, therefore, highly required to close the academic achievement discrepancies between black students and their more affluent white peers. Indeed, conducted research on the issue revealed that growing access to preschool and quality of care for three-and four- year old poor children could narrow the black white school readiness gap by as much as 20%. Indeed, one of the most effective strategies to narrow academic achievement gaps is to provide access to high-quality, early child care and pre-K programs. Research has documented that the investment in early childhood care, education, and health is deemed one of the best strategies to increase the productivity of both children and adults, to improve children's educational achievement as well as well-being, and to decrease social problems such as crime.

Without summer school, the academic achievement discrepancies between children from low-income families and those from middle-classes may widen significantly during the summer. Clearly, it is increasingly ostensible that a long summer vacation does not signify merely a pause

in student education, but essentially leads many students to disremember what they have learned. The three-month summer gap has a negative impact on children from low-income families, who rely solely on schools to provide them with academic learning; as opposed to middle-class children, who rely partially on school for their learning and are more likely to acquire intellectual stimulation during the summer.

Good teachers leave behind them lasting effects on student achievement that may remain for a considerable number of years. Increasing teacher quality is tightly linked to improving teachers' professional experience, certification, education as well as other traditional measurements of teacher quality. In fact, teachers' cognitive ability together with specific teaching skills regularly developed in the classroom correlate with improved academic outcomes. Moreover, African American students are more likely to be successful in school when their parents are actively involved in their children's schooling. Therefore, parents can support their children in school by monitoring homework, by regularly communicating with teachers and other school officials, by taking part in their children's academic activities and interests, and by limiting unhealthy and unproductive activities. Research shows that the amount of time parents spend with their children can influence academic achievement, lower high school dropout rates, improve emotional well-being, and decrease teen pregnancy. Therefore, specific strategies to support parents may be efficient at narrowing educational achievement gaps.

A number of studies highlighted the relationship between black students' beliefs and perceptions and their academic achievement. It was shown that black students are more likely to be successful academically when they feel a sense of belonging in the school community. It was revealed that students who feel a sense of connectivity within the school community tend to show higher self-esteem and display significant educational improvement in the classroom. It was also

established that when black students' differences are respected and valued, and when students recognize similarities in cultural distinctions within the school community, they feel more accepted and appreciated, and thus become more involved in school activities. In sum, effective schools have to incorporate the following five core elements: focus on instructional time, challenging and realistic curriculum, alignment of curriculum, instruction and assessment, teacher professional development program, and effective use of test results.

Delaware is the first of the four states praised for its success in closing the black white achievement gap. Delaware's achievement plan focuses on rating teachers according to their effectiveness with regard to student improvement and progress. In other words, in order to deserve an effective rating, teachers have to demonstrate student progress. Florida is identified as the second state that has had significant success in closing the achievement gap between black students and their white peers. It implemented a considerable number of education reforms that constituted a significant part of the "A+ Accountability Plan." Promulgated in 1999, the plan called for the abrogation of social promotion which refers to the practice of advancing students to the next grade level in spite of their failure to accomplish the academic requirements of the previous grade. Governor Bush linked pay incentives to performance and put an end to salaries based on tenure. Illinois is another successful state in closing the black white achievement gap. Illinois' schools were greatly distinctive; they were known as "Golden Spike" schools. These institutions are defined as high poverty schools with high performing students. The last of the four states is New Jersey; its success plan was based primarily on a significant investment in early childhood education to reduce the gap.

The draft criteria that the current U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, set for assessing state strategies revolved around four broad policy targets: espousing internationally

benchmarked standards; refining the recruitment, retention, and recompense of teachers and school administrators; ameliorating data collection; and applying plans to turnaround failing schools. RTT received its share of praise and criticism. Praise has stemmed from RTT's achievements in promoting significant policy discussions apropos the education reform environment at a comparatively low cost to taxpayers, while detractors have questioned the implementation process along with its aptitude to generate substantial outcomes. Establishing and funding Race to the Top did not come without argument as well. Nevertheless, RTT eased and is still easing the discussion of education reform at the state and parochial levels. If nothing else, RTT compelled policymakers, instructors, and interest groups to debate relevant education reforms. It also inspired noteworthy reforms at the state levels at comparatively low costs to taxpayers. Furthermore, RTT may actually have an advantage over former U.S. President Bush's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in that it permits greater flexibility for ad hoc modifications. Since this initiative has not been a crucial financial investment, revisions of the system remain viable options.

While RTT could be labeled as an aggressive endeavor by the federal government to drive education policy, the Obama administration made a serious attempt to match up it with noteworthy activities that were concurrently occurring in the states. In order to tackle the extensive variations in benchmarks existing amongst the states, standards for what students should be learning from grade to grade were set up. Under Race To the Top, the Department of Education also made money accessible for consortia of states and private parties to operate together to upgrade grade-by-grade assessments that were corresponding to the curriculum benchmarks. This initiative was intended to grapple with a key flaw in testing policy that had become apparent as a result of NCLB. In reality, the cooperation between the federal and state governments that ensued from the RTT initiative was not just momentous from a policy

standpoint; it also marked a landmark in the development of federalism as it is related to education. The federal government is employing its power and funds to move the United States toward national benchmarks planned cooperatively by the states, rather than compelling states to follow federal benchmarks coming from Washington. Common Core Standards are actually a step in the right trajectory as they are designed to boost transparency. They also fit President Obama's aspiration to augment the power of the national government for motives of equity.

As was specified by current U.S. President Barack Obama in the introduction to the blueprint for ESEA reauthorization in 2010, all benchmarks and assessments will function toward the target of universal graduation with college-and career-ready skills by 2020. While slightly more realistic than achieving worldwide proficiency in reading and math by 2014, as was required by the NCLB, seeing all students completing high school is a lofty goal. The blueprint calls for achievement goals to be developed to measure progress toward the target of universal graduation with the essential skills and for the compensation of districts that succeed and assisting of schools that fall short of attaining that objective.

Declaring the ten-year-old law broken and remarking that eighty percent of the schools nationwide would not attain the annual yearly progress (AYP) expected of them, Secretary Duncan also delineated a set of requirements that states would need to cover in an effort to qualify. Even if the language of NCLB allows the Secretary of Education to grant waivers, some have questioned whether his outline of new conditions for such waivers was equivalent to employing administrative discretion to revise the law in violation of the separation of powers principle. As a matter of fact, the Obama administration has moved the borders of federalism considerably, empowering the federal government to have a manifest influence on elementary and secondary education nationwide. It has done so in a manner that progresses the main

purposes of the NCLB, preserving a commitment to test-based information that permits education officials to monitor the advancement of states, school districts, and diverse populations of students, even while granting waivers to circumvent some of the law's provisions.

What is more, the ongoing emphasis on assessment is significant because it will not be possible to advance school achievement generally or shrink the achievement gap for underachieving students without unambiguous information about where enhancement is required. So long as the development of comprehensive evaluations remains an effort in progress, the usage of student tests to assess the performance of teachers is fraught with difficulties. The Obama administration's transformation of federal funding into a sequence of competitive grant programs carries huge risks. A competitive strategy that recompenses states and school districts that prove the most aptitude may, in effect, make certain that federal dollars are granted to those schools that need them the least. In sum, the No Child Left Behind was actually a 2002 policy to sort out the problems that were existent in its time. The NCLB at least devised data systems and interest apt to broadcast school- and district-level duplicity and failure. Indeed, Barack Obama inherited this policy context. The NCLB helped the United States find out precisely how unwell many of its schools were achieving.

Regardless of a child's race, ethnicity or socio-economic status, in an effort to learn and achieve in school he or she must be vigorously involved- cognitively, behaviorally, and emotionally. Schools and teachers should operate to advance students' longing to learn. When teachers make students conscious that they have the mental competence to prosper and academic achievement is expected of them, students have a supplementary motivator. If states are to supply all of their students with instructors who are really competent, state certification requirements must be challenging and advanced. Specifically, the NCLB should be reviewed to differentiate

between three categories of teachers: provisionally qualified teachers; qualified teacher; and highly active teachers.

If the factual objective of the NCLB is to foster maximum achievement development for all students, challenging but significant achievement goals should be determined and the law should be reexamined to ensure that all students can attain them. To do this, the NCLB should identify two central achievement objectives. First, it should require that the achievement curve for students from each ethnic or racial group be tantamount to identical proportions of students from all racial, ethnic, and income groups achieving at the high, middle, and low ends of the predictable bell curve of human functioning. Second, the NCLB should require that, over a practical time period, the average performance range for all groups should advance to a considerable but viable extent. The NCLB should offer a firm ground of quality for the proficiency provisions and to protect against a tight interpretation of the educational opportunities that schools need to offer. Moreover, benchmarks and state examinations must appropriately highlight the higher-order cognitive skills that students require to achieve in college and in the world of work. The NCLB should, thus, be reviewed to call for each state to experience an external revision of the validity of its tests and of the measures for establishing achievement goals and cut scores by the U.S. Department of Education. An educational evaluation system that assesses quality learning must substitute the current assessment structure that simply appraises the quantity of information.

Amending the Act, to redirect emphasis from test achievement to teaching and learning, nevertheless, should ineludibly comprise changes that eliminate harsh penalties, substituting them for impartial funding and resources for all schools as well as factual incentives that recompense an educational culture of quality comprehensive learning over quantity of intangible surface information. The NCLB should be reviewed to require states to submit competence and

impartiality plans that validate that fitting resources and opportunities in all in school-based and out-of-school resource areas are being offered to all students. The federal government should be accountable for determining the accurate costs of conformity with the NCLB and identifying an impartial allocation of funding responsibility between the federal government and the states. Instead of chastising failing schools with deterrents, such as scarlet labels, school takeovers and closures, federal funding, chiefly in schools that need upgrading, should be augmented so that active administration by the schools in attempts at compliance with the NCLB Act is not undermined by the additional responsibilities related to school systems' accountability provisions. Moreover, an efficient system of state-based technical aid and accountability for school and district capacity building should be employed. The NCLB should determine and disseminate best practice models and inspire states to implement these performs in all of the schools and districts that require them.

In a word, this research has appraised the No Child Left Behind Act from the angle of the Observational Learning Theory that is related to learning in general. This theory has been found pertinent to the issue under examination. The Theory of Observational Learning asserts that children learn from observing models around them. They respond not merely to the model's behavior, but also to the manner it is met by the society. Behavior that harvests commendation is therefore more likely to be simulated than behavior that is not well perceived by the community. In this way, teachers operate as examples and have the aptitude to model for their students the same behavior they display, if that behavior is seen as effective. In addition to behavior models, the theory also highlights the need for schools to offer students advantageous circumstances for learning. According to the large array of sources employed in this thesis, the NCLB has created a tense atmosphere for educators and students alike, where the major emphasis is moved from learning to accountability and enhanced proficiency. Teachers lament the fact of having no

enough time to prepare their lessons owing to paper grading and course requirements. Getting through the day rather than holding stimulating lessons is many educators' objective. Consequently, the NCLB reality is not in line with this theory's main requirements.

What is more, the black white achievement gap has been considered in this research by casting light on the Educational Deprivation Theory- or what is commonly labelled as school-based factors. Indeed, the achievement gap between black students and their white cohorts in U.S. public education is the outcome of diverse arguments and numerous theories, ranging principally from educational factors, socioeconomic attributes, sociocultural dynamics, and even from allegedly-objective or rather racist attitudes. In spite of the massive amount of deeply-conducted research and the considerable number of potentially offered arguments in support of these theories, they remain mere potential explanations, and there is no single universal explanation that accounts for the gap between blacks and whites in schools. On the other hand, the Educational Deprivation Theory or educational factors are to be deemed in this research as the most potential explanations and most determining dynamics that planted the seeds for the black white academic discrepancies in schools as they are more relevant to the issue under examination; that is the appraisal of the No Child Left Behind Act's effectiveness as a federal education measure that aims at bridging the black white achievement gap in U.S. public education.

Further research needs to be conducted in the area of student achievements and the No Child Left Behind Act. Research regarding the specific components of the NCLB that are effective or ineffective in upgrading student achievement would be beneficial in further assessing the NCLB. Additional research employing other grade levels would be evenly helpful in determining how the NCLB is impacting all grade levels. Besides, all states are required to

address the NCLB, but are granted flexibility in their approach. To augment validity across states further research is required in all states. Furthermore, the NCLB mandates that all children make adequate yearly progress. There are many diverse subgroups that fall under the umbrella of all children. While this research probed into the achievement gap between white and black students, it did not address any of the other subgroups. Continued research comparing other subgroups is required to assess the effect of NCLB on all students. Finally, the current research indicated that the achievement gap is nowhere close to zero. In an effort to begin bridging the achievement gap, educators must determine which schools are making progress in reducing the achievement gap between subgroups. Research then needs to be conducted comparing those schools with schools that are not making progress to identify what is impacting the student achievement.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Figure 1

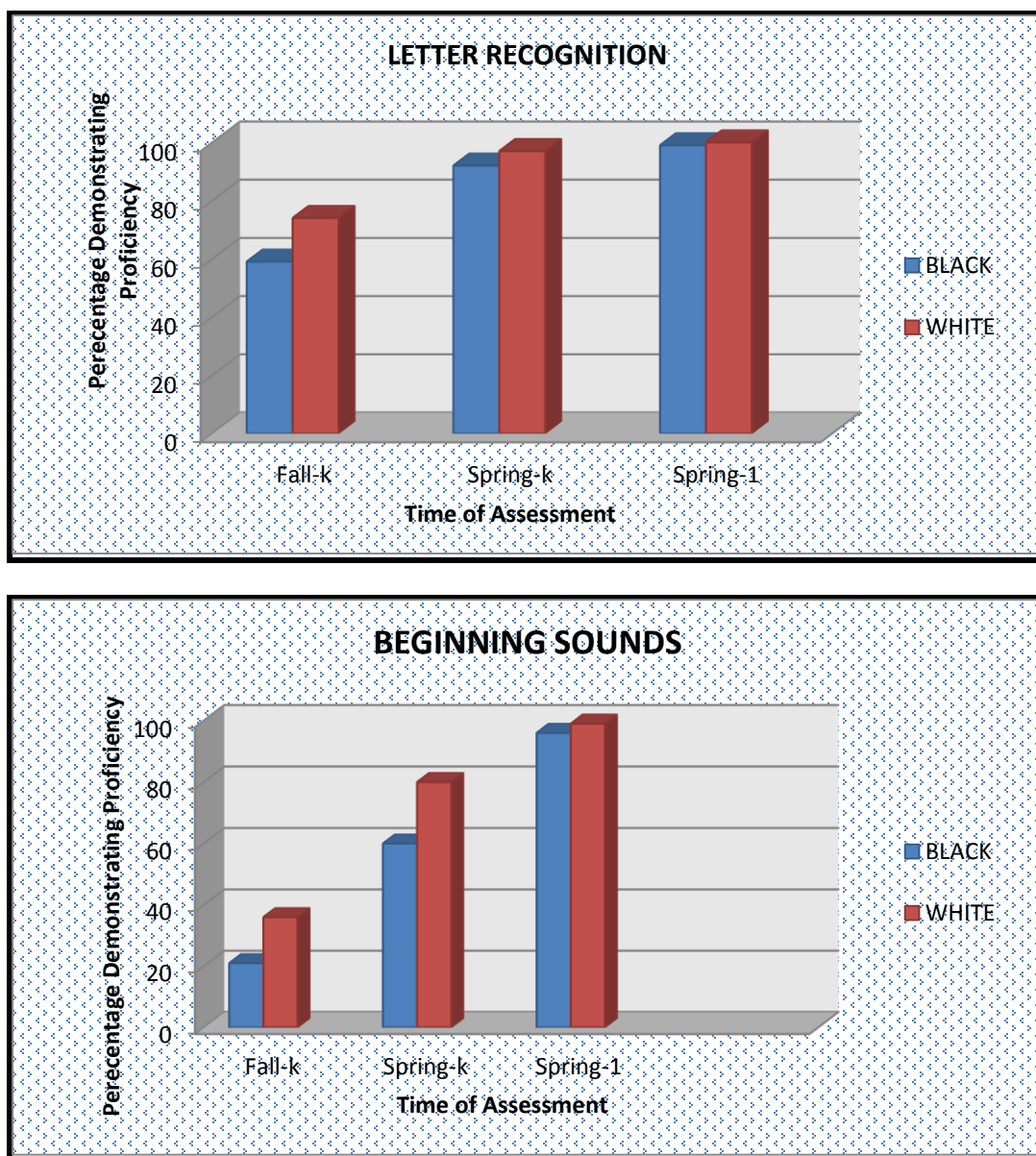


FIGURE 1: Percentage of black and white children demonstrating proficiency in specific reading skill areas

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Data, Kindergarten Class of 1998–99.

Figure 1

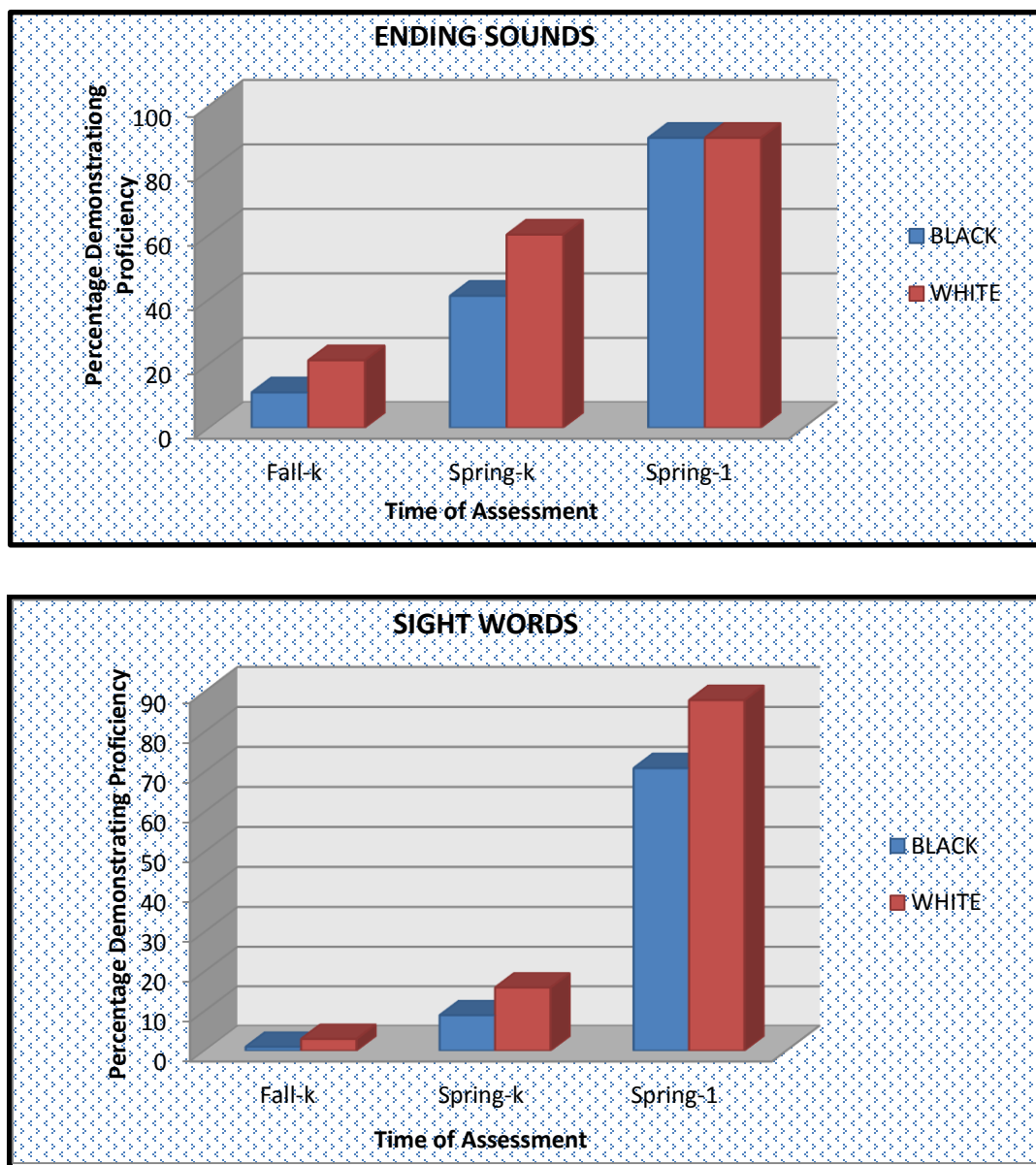


FIGURE 1: Percentage of black and white children demonstrating proficiency in specific reading skill areas

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Data, Kindergarten Class of 1998–99.

Appendix 2: Figure 2

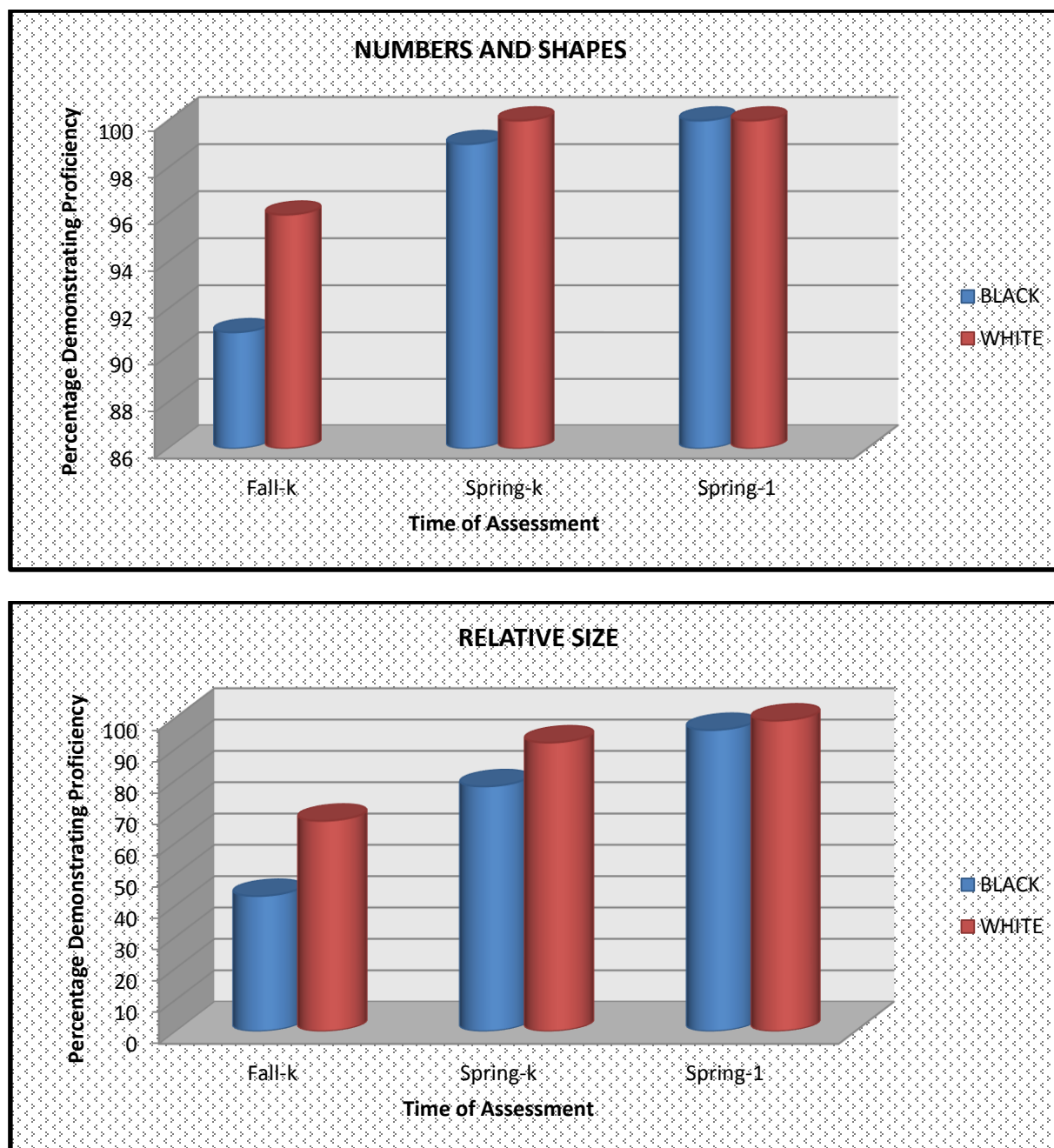


FIGURE 2: Percentage of black and white children demonstrating proficiency in specific mathematical skill areas

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Data, Kindergarten Class of 1998–99.

Figure 2

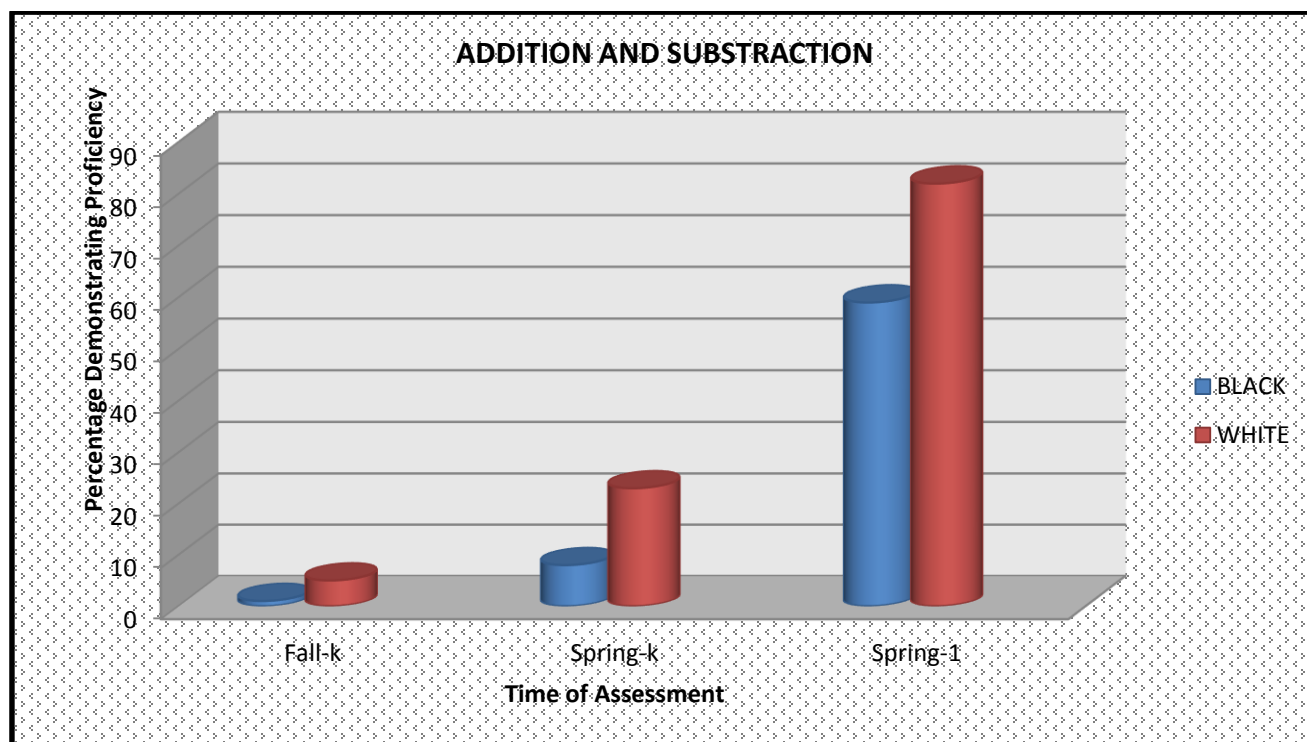


FIGURE 2: Percentage of black and white children demonstrating proficiency in specific mathematical skill areas

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Data, Kindergarten Class of 1998–99.

Appendix 3: Figure 3 and Figure 4

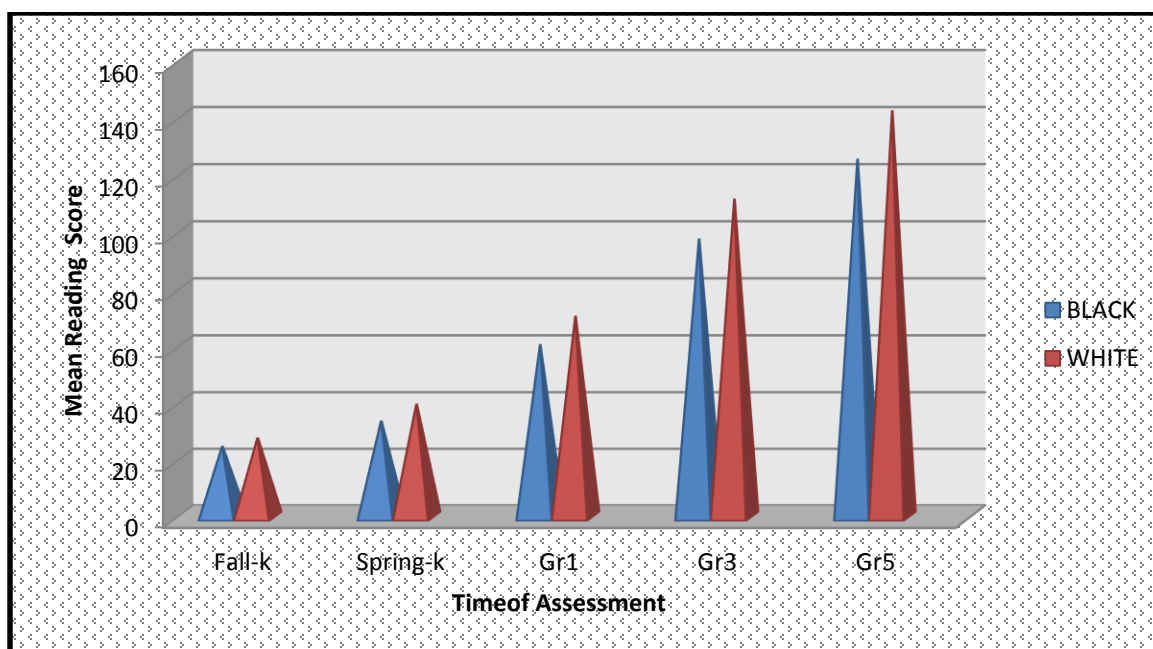


FIGURE 3: Average reading scores for white and black children

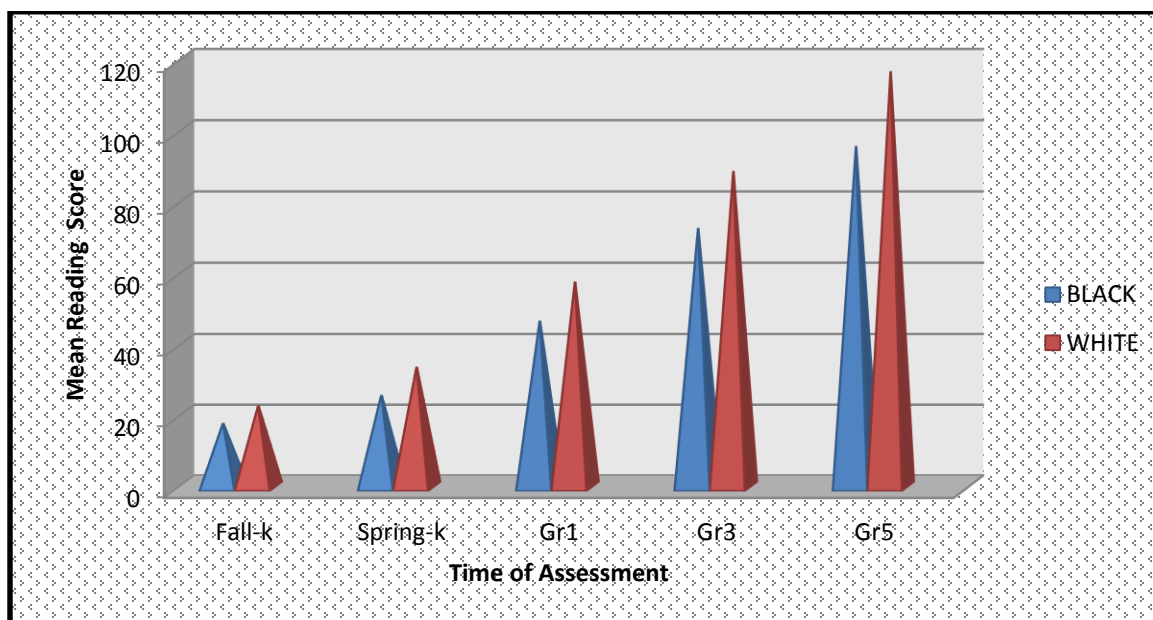


FIGURE 4: Average mathematics scores for white and black children

SOURCE: US. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Data, Kindergarten Class of 1998–99.

Appendix 4: Figure 5

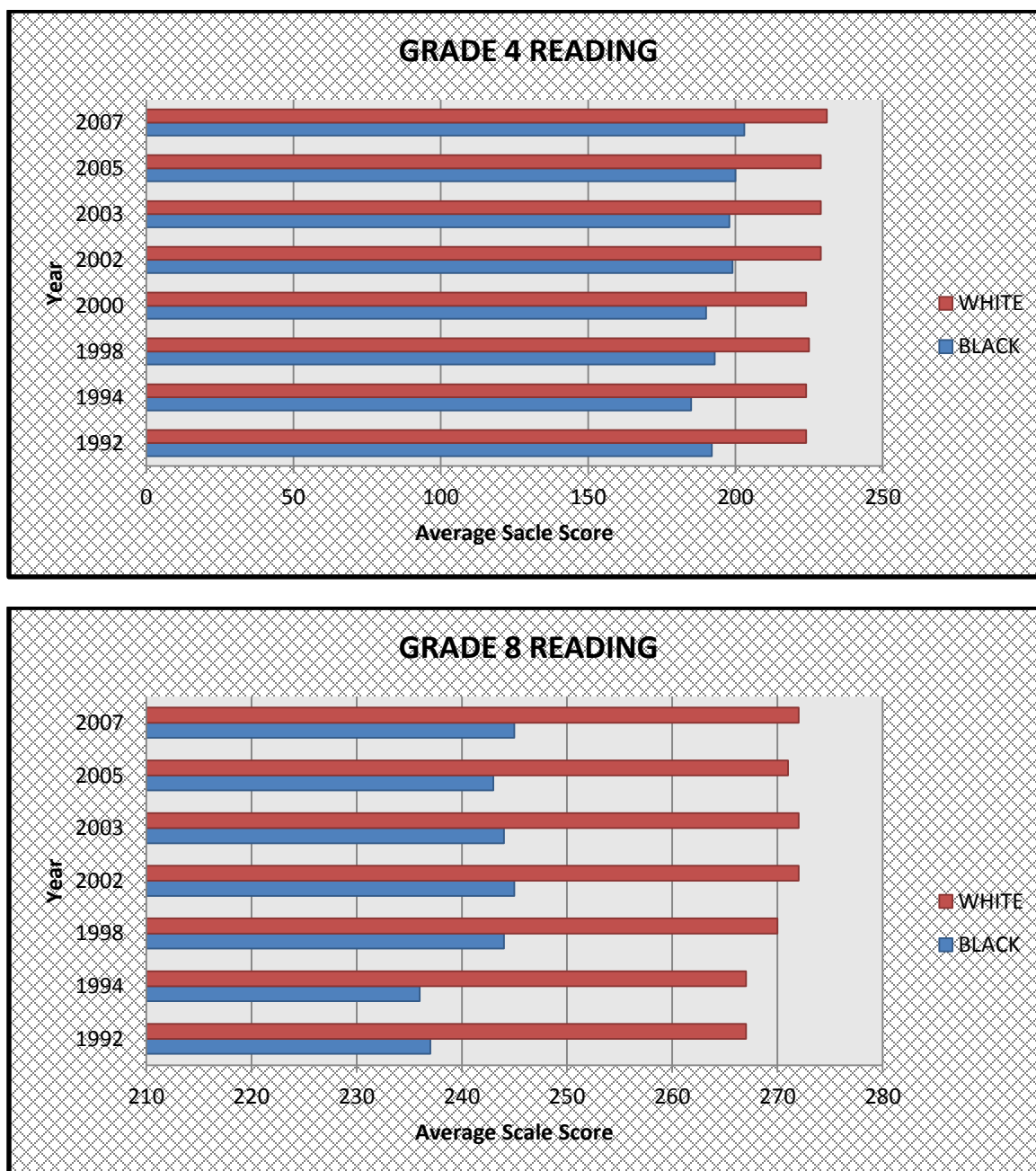


FIGURE 5: Average reading scores of white and black students, 1992-2007.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).
<http://nationsreportcard.gov>.

Appendix 5: Figure 7

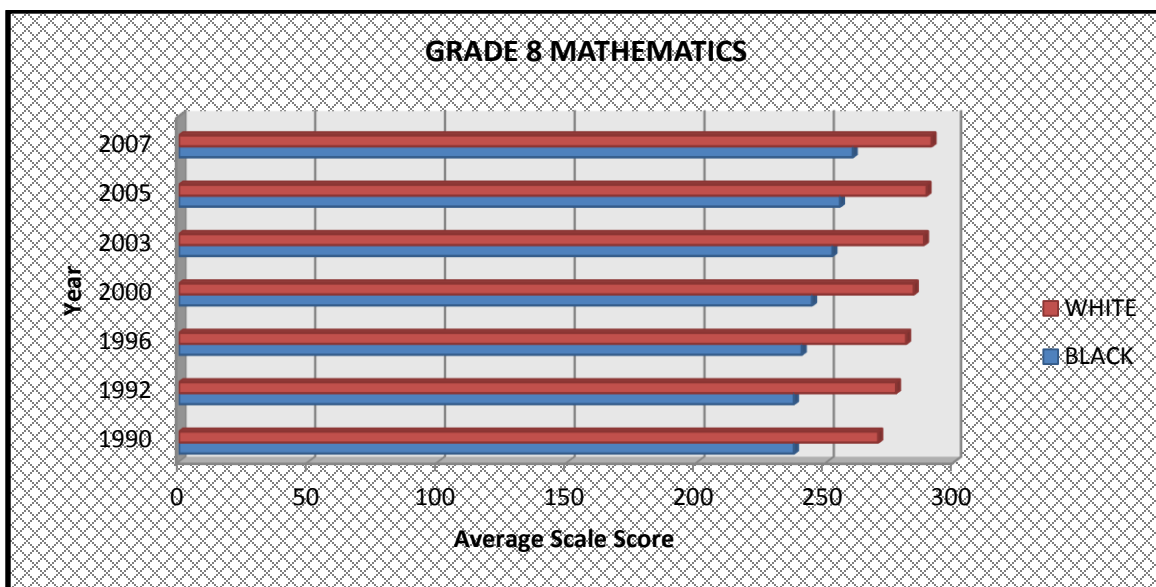
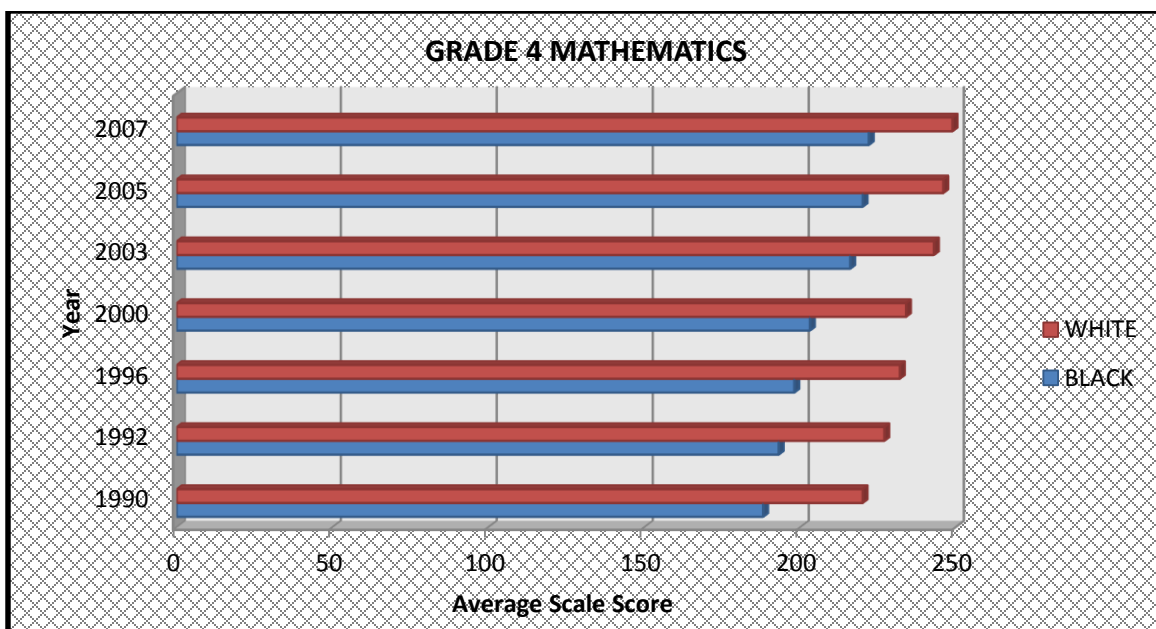


FIGURE 7: Average math scores of white and black students, 1990-2007.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). <http://nationsreportcard.gov>.

Appendix 6: Figure 10

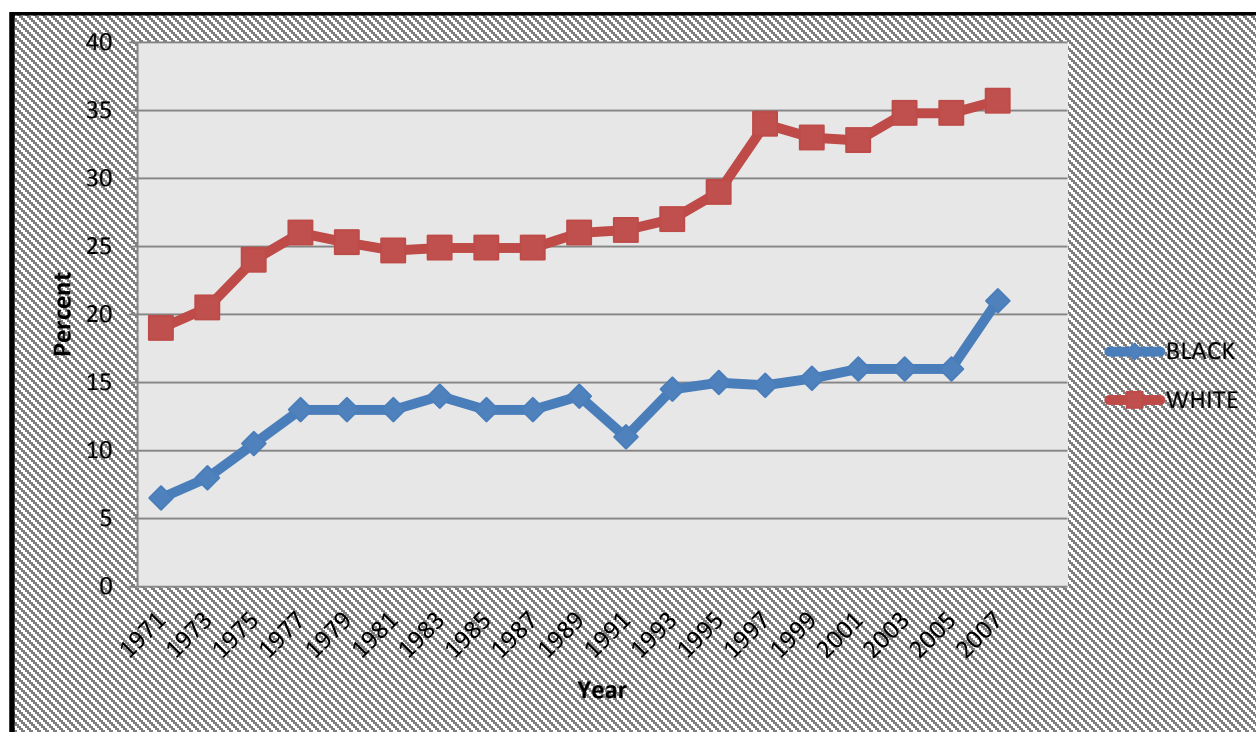


FIGURE 10: Percentage of Adults (age 25-29) Earning a College Degree, by Race, 1971-2007.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), March Supplement, 1971–2007.