

The Balanced View:

Research Updates

Summary of new research on Balanced View topics

Winter 2001-02

Achievement Gap

According to a September 2001 study conducted by a research team from Vanderbilt University, schools operated by the Department of Defense (DOD) to educate the children of U.S. military personnel may hold the key to closing the achievement gap between white and minority students in the nation's public schools. The study, "March Toward Excellence," was commissioned by the National Education Goals Panel and cites 1998 data from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), the nation's report card. The NAEP results showed that African-American and Hispanic students enrolled in DOD schools outperformed their peers in nearly all states on 8th grade reading and writing tests. In addition, the achievement gap between minority students and their white counterparts was far smaller in DOD schools than it was in most states.

The authors attributed the success of DOD schools to a combination of factors—many of which they believed could be implemented to improve civilian public education:

- ◆ centralized direction-setting with local decision-making,
- ◆ policy coherence and regular data flow on instructional goals, assessment, accountability, and professional development,
- ◆ sufficient financial resources linked to instructionally relevant goals,
- ◆ staff development that is job-embedded, sustained over time, intensive, and relevant to school improvement goals,
- ◆ small school size conducive to trust, communication, and sense of community,
- ◆ teacher instructional autonomy,
- ◆ continuity of care for children in high quality preschools and after-school programs,
- ◆ academic focus and high expectations for all students, and
- ◆ a "corporate commitment" to public education that is material and symbolic, and that is visible and responsive to parents within the school community.

March Toward Excellence is available on the Web at: <http://www.negp.gov/reports/DoDFinal921.pdf>