

The Balanced View:

Research Update

Summary of new research on *Balanced View* topics

Spring 2004

Achievement Gap

The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act demonstrates a national commitment to closing the achievement gap. As part of that effort, Educational Testing Service's (ETS) Policy Information Center conducted a synthesis of the research to learn about the conditions that help create and perpetuate achievement gaps. Their findings are summarized in the recently released report, *Parsing the Achievement Gap: Baselines for Tracking Progress*. As a first step in the process to better understand the large and persistent differences in school achievement among subgroups of the population, ETS identified 14 correlates of educational attainment ranging from birth weight and hunger, to teacher quality, and parent participation in the schooling of their children. These 14 correlates fall into three major categories as shown below:

<i>Early Development</i>	<i>School Environment</i>	<i>Home Learning Environment</i>
◆ <i>weight at birth</i>	◆ <i>rigor of the school curriculum</i>	◆ <i>reading to young children</i>
◆ <i>lead poisoning</i>	◆ <i>teacher preparation</i>	◆ <i>TV watching</i>
◆ <i>hunger and nutrition</i>	◆ <i>teacher experience and attendance</i>	◆ <i>parent availability and support</i>
	◆ <i>class size</i>	◆ <i>student mobility</i>
	◆ <i>technology-assisted instruction</i>	◆ <i>parent participation</i>
	◆ <i>school safety</i>	

For each correlate¹ ETS then asked the question, *what do we know about the difference in experience among racial and ethnic groups and between students from lower- and higher-income families?* If, for example, low birth weight adversely affects achievement, is there a greater incidence of low birth rate among black and Hispanic children or poorer children? Or, if teacher quality—their subject-matter preparation and experience—is associated with school achievement, are minority or poorer children taught by less-qualified teachers?

The results were strikingly clear (see table on back). In every instance ETS found gaps between minority students and white students in the conditions and experiences associated with student achievement. Similarly, in the 12 cases where data were available by income, 11 showed a clear gap between students from lower- and higher-income families. In other words, minority students and poor students

¹ ETS makes the point that the correlates should be viewed as the *best researched representatives* of a group of related or similar factors. For example, lead poisoning is likely a marker for a set of environmental hazards to which children may be exposed. Similarly, school safety is likely related to other learning environment factors such as the general conditions of the school, teacher commitment, etc.

disproportionately face conditions in early life, schooling, and home circumstances that hinder their chances to achieve at levels reached by white students and those from higher-income families.

<i>Correlates</i>	<i>Are there gaps between minority students and white students?</i>	<i>Are there gaps between students from lower- and higher-income families?</i>
<i>Early Development</i>		
◆ <i>weight at birth</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>Not available</i>
◆ <i>lead poisoning</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
◆ <i>hunger and nutrition</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
<i>School Environment</i>		
◆ <i>rigor of the school curriculum</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>Not available</i>
◆ <i>teacher preparation</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
◆ <i>teacher experience and attendance</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
◆ <i>class size</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
◆ <i>availability of appropriate technology</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
◆ <i>school safety</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
<i>Home Learning Environment</i>		
◆ <i>reading to young children</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
◆ <i>TV watching</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
◆ <i>parent availability and support</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
◆ <i>student mobility</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
◆ <i>parent participation</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>

The report concludes that the achievement gap has deep roots—it is not only about what happens to children when they enter the classroom, it is also about what happens to them before and after school. Thus, any policy designed to remove achievement differences would need to be wide ranging, involving schools, homes, communities, and institutions of higher education. Closing the achievement gap will also require sustained research to further our understanding of where there is the greatest leverage in making a difference and where efforts would be most cost effective.

Parsing the Achievement Gap is available on the Web at: <http://www.ets.org/research/pic>