

Narrowing the Achievement Gap

Perspectives and Strategies
for Challenging Times

Edited by

THOMAS B. TIMAR

JULIE MAXWELL-JOLLY

Harvard Education Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Copyright © 2012 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Library of Congress Control Number **[to come]**

Paperback ISBN **[to come]**

Library Edition ISBN **[to come]**

Published by Harvard Education Press,
an imprint of the Harvard Education Publishing Group

Harvard Education Press
8 Story Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

Cover Design: Sarah Henderson

The typefaces used in this book are Adobe Garamond and ITC Stone Sans

Contents

- 1 Introduction
Thomas B. Timar
- CHAPTER ONE
- 11 Slow and Uneven Progress in Narrowing Achievement Gaps on State Tests
Nancy Kober, Victor Chudowsky, and Naomi Chudowsky
- CHAPTER TWO
- 35 Reframing the Ecology of the “Achievement Gap”
Why “No Excuses” Reforms Have Failed to Narrow Student Group Differences in Educational Outcomes
Robert K. Ream, Sarah M. Ryan, and Jose A. Espinoza
- CHAPTER THREE
- 57 Narrowing the Multiple Achievement Gaps in the United States
Eight Goals for the Long Haul
W. Norton Grubb
- CHAPTER FOUR
- 77 The Achievement Gap in California and Beyond
Context, Status, and Approaches for Improvement
Eva L. Baker, Noelle C. Griffin, and Kilchan Choi
- CHAPTER FIVE
- 95 Accessing High-Quality Instructional Strategies
Edmund T. Hamann and Jenelle Reeves

CHAPTER SIX

- 111 Organizational Strategies for Addressing The educational Achievement Gap

Douglas E. Mitchell, Robert K. Ream, Sarah M. Ryan, and Jose A. Espinoza

CHAPTER SEVEN

- 141 Improving High Schools as a Strategy for Closing the Achievement Gap

Russell W. Rumberger

CHAPTER EIGHT

- 163 Teaching All Our Children Well
Teachers and Teaching to Close the Achievement Gap

Julie Maxwell-Jolly and Patricia Gándara

CHAPTER NINE

- 187 Narrowing Achievement Gaps in Tough Times
Rethinking the Roles of Money and School Resources

W. Norton Grubb

CHAPTER TEN

- 205 Partnering with Families and Communities to Address Academic Disparities

Nancy Erbstein and Elizabeth Miller

CHAPTER ELEVEN

- 227 Reframing Policy and Practice to Close the Achievement Gap

Thomas B. Timar

- 249 Notes

- 00 Acknowledgments

- 00 About the Editors

- 00 About the Contributors

- 00 Index

Terms of use for pre-publication material from the Harvard Education Press

Citation

Ream, R. K., Ryan, S. M., and Espinoza, J. A. (2012). "Reframing the Ecology of Opportunity and Achievement Gaps: Why 'No Excuses' Reforms Have Failed to Narrow Student Group Differences in Educational Outcomes." In *Narrowing the Achievement Gap: Perspectives and Strategies for Challenging Times*, edited by Thomas B. Timar and Julie Maxwell-Jolly (chapter 2). Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.

Permission

This is a Word version of a chapter from a forthcoming book entitled *Narrowing the Achievement Gap: Perspectives and Strategies for Challenging Times*. This material has been reprinted with permission of the Harvard Education Press for limited use by the tenure committee and is not intended for general circulation. Any other use, print or electronic, will require written permission from the Press.

Publication information

The definitive publisher-authenticated version of this chapter will be available January 2012. The book will be published in a paper edition and a cloth edition. An accessible version will be available upon request. For more information, please visit www.harvardeducationpress.org or call 1-888-437-1437.

Copyright

Copyright © by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. All rights reserved.

About the Harvard Education Press

The Harvard Education Press is the book publishing imprint of the Harvard Education Publishing Group, publishers of the *Harvard Education Letter* and *Harvard Educational Review*. HEPG's editorial offices are located at 8 Story Street, First Floor, Cambridge, MA 02138, tel. 617-495-3432, or email to hepg@harvard.edu.

CHAPTER TWO

Reframing the Ecology of Opportunity and Achievement Gaps

*Why “No Excuses” Reforms Have Failed
to Narrow Student Group Differences
in Educational Outcomes*

ROBERT K. REAM, SARAH M. RYAN,
AND JOSE A. ESPINOZA

How are we to understand the long-standing expectation that public schools, all on their own, can remedy deep-rooted racial, social class, and linguistic disparities in educational opportunity and achievement? Is it indeed the case, as so much discourse surrounding education would imply, that all the work that needs doing can occur solely within the schools? In this chapter we argue that the current agenda for the reform of primary and secondary education in the United States needs to be altered. Our present path offers school-centered formulations of the problems and possible solutions, most often without weighing how other social institutions influence educational results. To continue on this path is to remain complicit in the perpetuation of the very student group achievement gaps that decades of reforms have been framed as being designed to eliminate.

In making our case, we begin by measuring the incidence and causes of the gaps in educational performance, taking account of the fluctuation in these gaps over time. Next we offer an account of how these gaps affect the lives of disenfranchised minority and poor students, but we also suggest that society at large has increasingly come to experience the repercussions of the disparate outcomes for students who are economically and culturally enfranchised and those who are not. It is clear to us, after taking a hard look at decades of research on this matter, that even though the standards and accountability reforms of the past twenty years coincided with increased achievement for the overall student population, that same “no excuses” approach has failed to narrow the differences in educational outcomes persisting at the group level and may have contributed to the perpetuation of this phenomenon. We can only conclude that the current tactics of holding schools almost entirely responsible for closing gaps, or rather for failing to close them, amounts to a kind of scapegoating, revealing if only by accident the “soft bigotry of low expectations”—not as pertains to what we expect of children,¹ but rather as concerns what we expect of ourselves as a society.²

In preparing the ground for an honest discussion of the occurrences, sources, and consequences of the educational problems now commonly referenced by the somewhat contentious label “the achievement gap,” we first enter here into a discussion of the especially polemical issue of how it is that we as a nation find ourselves in this predicament.³ Since the early 1970s, analyses of nationally representative survey data have documented an enduring history of achievement differences, which reveals that whites and especially East Asians enjoy relatively high average student performance, while African Americans and some Hispanic and Southeast Asian subgroups experience relatively low average student performance.⁴ Moreover, children whose families are on the lower rungs of the social class ladder and/or speak a language other than English at home average far lower achievement and educational attainment levels than their wealthier, English-fluent counterparts. Thus, it is important to recognize that what is often characterized as a single

unyielding gap between white students and all minority students is more accurately portrayed as multiple gaps that fluctuate between and within racial, social class, and linguistic groups. Yet, despite decades of school reform designed to eradicate glaring inequities in education, the gaps in educational outcomes now appear not only intractable but also (at least to some educators and policy makers) all but ineradicable. It is not an overstatement to say that the persistence of this problem has begun to undermine Americans' faith in the ability of public schools to confront the disadvantages faced by poor and minority students and to somehow "level the playing field" for all.

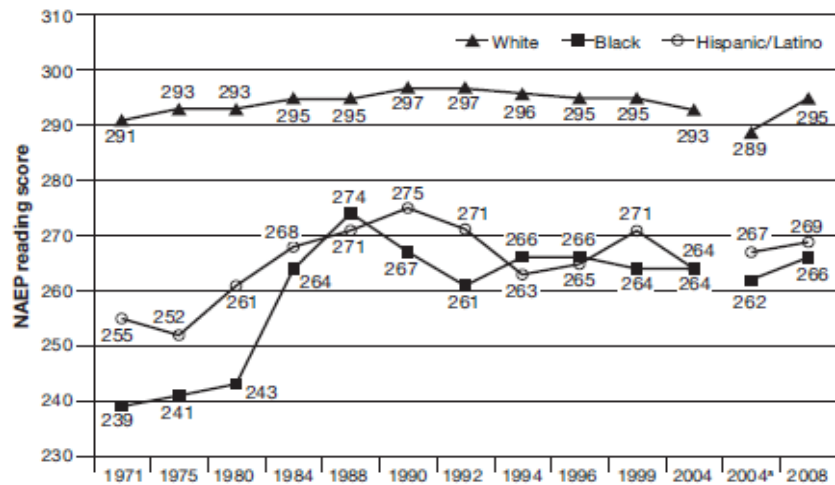
To shed light on what we see as the unrealistic expectation that public schools alone should be capable of remedying the gaps, we draw attention to how empirical evidence about the ebb and flow of educational inequities has shaped the education policy agenda. Such research goes a long way, we maintain, to dispelling some of the unrealistic expectations about what schools can do on their own, expectations that are deeply entrenched in the ways we talk about and have thought to bring about the convergence of majority and minority students' educational performance. Our ability to repair educational inequity will depend on an honest reckoning with evidence such as that presented here and may also require, we suggest, a thoroughgoing effort to mobilize the social institutions outside of school that play such a large—but still to this day often unacknowledged—role in students' educational experiences.

THE EBB AND FLOW OF THE GAPS ON THE POLICY AGENDA

James Coleman was a sociologist at Johns Hopkins University when his controversial 1966 report to the U.S. Congress, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, became the first national study to offer a systematic description of racial/ethnic differences in academic achievement among children of various ages. Prior to the Coleman Report, investigations of this nature had been focused on educational inputs: school effectiveness was measured by the resources that went into schools, not the quality of the students who came out of them.⁵ Coleman found that (1) although schools certainly influence student achievement—much of what tests measure must be learned in schools—and (2) although school quality varies widely in the United States, nevertheless, the large documented differences in the quality of schools attended by black and white children failed to explain most of the differences in average levels of achievement between blacks and whites.⁶ These rather controversial findings have been cross-examined by many researchers.⁷ Until very recently few, if any, disputed Coleman's fundamental claims.⁸ Soon after publication of the Coleman Report, the federal government allotted substantial resources across multiple jurisdictions in an attempt to close family, school, and community input gaps. In fact, school desegregation in the wake of the 1964 Civil Rights Act combined with the Great Society's War on Poverty programs (including Head Start, compensatory Title I funding, the Safe Streets Act, the Economic Opportunity Act, and the Model Cities program) helped reduce glaring resource inequities and coincided with nearly twenty years of steady and substantial progress in reducing both the black-white and Hispanic-white test-score gaps since 1971, per figure 2.1.⁹

Paul Barton and Richard Coley of the nonprofit Educational Testing Service recently summarized much of the research on this topic.¹⁰ They conclude that approximately one-third of the gap reduction during this twenty-year time period can be attributed to improved family conditions in minority households, such as increases in parents' education and income, relative to white families.¹¹ Nevertheless, it is clear that by the time U.S. Secretary of Education Terrel Bell released the landmark 1983 report to Congress, *A Nation at Risk*, concerns about inequality on the domestic front were pushed into the background, giving way to a growing preoccupation with educational efficiency, global competitiveness, and the politics of education productivity.¹² Thus, many targeted programs for the poor and compensatory education reforms were rolled back throughout the 1980s.¹³ Some programs were completely eliminated.¹⁴ By the late 1980s much of the progress in narrowing educational opportunity and achievement gaps had stalled.

FIGURE 2.1
Age 17 trends in average NAEP reading scores: 1971–2008



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2008: Trends in Academic Progress, Reading, 1971–2008 (Report: NCES 2009-479).
Note: *Revised assessment format baseline score

The Bell Curve

The widening of test-score gaps in the late 1980s went largely unnoticed until 1994, when experimental psychologist Richard Herrnstein and political scientist Charles Murray published *The Bell Curve* to much fanfare and subsequent controversy.¹⁵ Their conclusions about the genetic inevitability of the gap were deduced from the research of others and resurrected in particular the much-disputed claims of education psychologist Arthur Jensen, which were first published in 1969 in the *Harvard Educational Review*.¹⁶ When a special task force of the American Psychological Association reviewed the data used by Herrnstein and Murray, they arrived at a much different conclusion: the paucity of direct evidence of the black-white differential in psychometric intelligence simply could not support the genetic hypothesis.¹⁷ Richard E. Nisbett, a distinguished professor of social psychology at the University of Michigan, has charged the authors of *The Bell Curve* with having provided a “shockingly incomplete and biased” reading of the research.¹⁸ Today what all psychologists agree upon is that a person’s developed capacity for intelligent behavior often differs in predictable ways from his or her hereditary potential.¹⁹ So-called intelligence or aptitude tests measure the *development* of innate abilities.²⁰ The collective research of American psychology leads one to conclude that the quality of the world that a person lives in explains far more of the variance in achievement than the number of blacks or whites in a person’s family tree.²¹

The Standards and Accountability Movement

Though the effort to put achievement gaps on the policy agenda in the mid-1990s might once have seemed auspicious to educators, inequities in educational outcomes have persisted since that time. The shift to a policy focused on standards and accountability was already owing to, and since then has only been reinforced by, the belief that the work of

narrowing or altogether erasing achievement gaps belongs solely to the schools. Unfortunately, achievement gaps remain a priority on the agenda to this day because they have not been effectively redressed by the standards and accountability policy. As Harris and Herrington write:

*The policies implemented before 1990, and recommended in A Nation at Risk, were based on the idea that schools needed greater capacity and that students needed to be pressured to take more difficult courses. By the earlier 1990s, some argued that the NAR recommendations had failed and therefore reversed the logic, assuming instead that it is the schools that need to be pressured.*²²

But those who single out schools as responsible for the persistence of unacceptable gaps in educational outcomes at the group level seem too often to be ignoring the fact that children spend the vast majority of their time in any given year outside the classroom—at home, in extracurricular activities, hanging with friends in the neighborhood—in short, somewhere other than in the formal academic setting.²³

In taking account of the research on the gaps in outcomes and considering what might be done to eliminate them, in this chapter we draw on the work of developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner, whose *ecological systems theory* holds that the interconnectedness of several environmental systems, including families, peers, schools and communities, plays a major role in human development.²⁴ Educators and policy makers need not only to recognize the broad range of in-school and out-of-school factors that shape students' educational experience and their academic achievement, but they need also to deploy this knowledge, working collaboratively with persons from different but often overlapping social spheres of influence, to take action and alter the way we approach education in our society. The plain fact is that the gaps between minority or poor students and otherwise socially enfranchised children is already at roughly a year with regard to educational outcomes for math and reading by the time children enter kindergarten.²⁵ These differences at the group level remain fairly constant between the first and twelfth grades, so it is safe to say that it is not generally the schools themselves that create or even foster the inequity.²⁶ Indeed, while children are in school, the gap typically narrows, but when they're outside of the classroom, it widens.²⁷ In short, there is no getting around the fact that children are beings embedded in social networks, nested in families, navigating relatively complex social lives with peers, and functioning as members of neighborhoods and communities in which school is one important social institution among many shaping their reality. Schools may be charged with the formal education that is supposed to take place within the classroom, but the many competing and overlapping spheres of students' lives greatly influence their educational performance; and it is nearly impossible to isolate these spheres such that we might measure the influence of each as separate from the others.

INCIDENCE OF THE GAPS

However outcome gaps are measured—whether by preschool vocabulary, elementary school grades, middle school standardized test scores, or high school or college completion rates—the fact that there is a continuing history of race, social class, and linguistic differences in American education is not debatable.

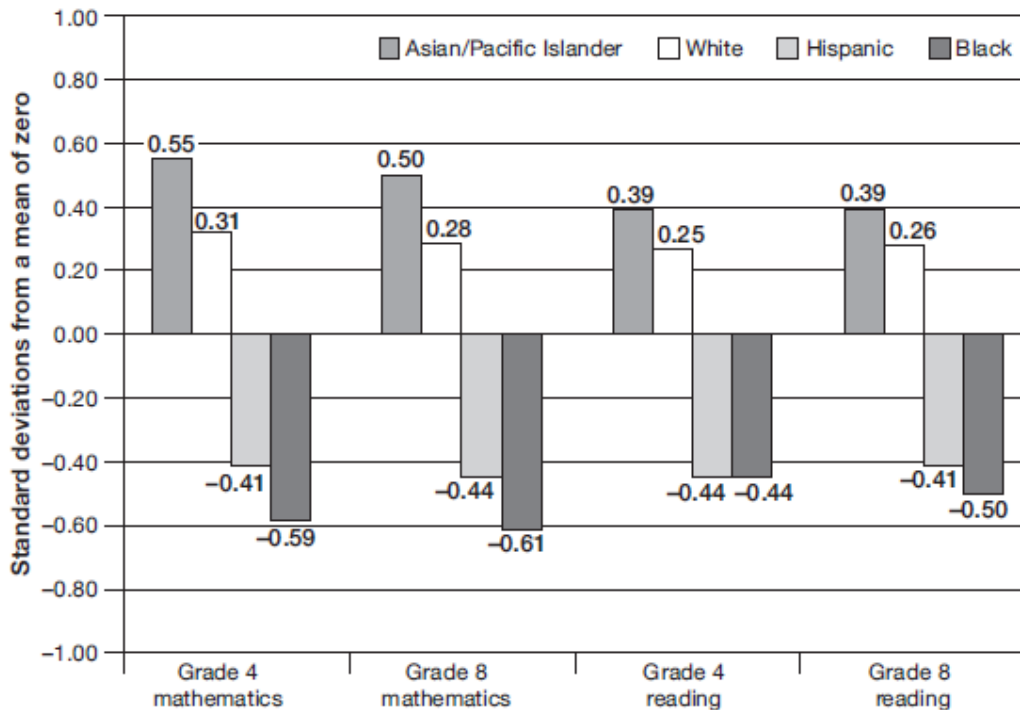
Further Evidence About Test-Score Gaps from NAEP

Perhaps the best evidence is derived from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), widely known as “the nation’s report card.” NAEP trend data demonstrate persistent, if somewhat fluctuating, racial test-score gaps going back to 1971. Although black-white and Hispanic-white gaps in mathematics and reading narrowed substantially between 1971 and 1988, trends toward test-score convergence reversed in the late 1980s. Some gaps stabilized and others actually widened throughout the 1990s.²⁸ Since 1999, however, black-white and Hispanic-white math and reading

test-score gaps have held fairly constant across age groups—with the exception of a slight convergence in the Hispanic-white math gap and the black-white reading gap among nine-year-olds. This convergence has been trumpeted by the U.S. Department of Education as evidence of the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001.²⁹

Figure 2.2 depicts cross-sectional analyses of fourth- and eighth-grade students' mathematics and reading results from the 2009 main NAEP. Asian Pacific Americans and whites score well above national averages at both grade levels. Asian fourth-grade students exceed the national math mean by .55 standard deviations (.50 SD approximates one year of academic growth), outperforming by .24 SD their white counterparts, who also score above the national average. Hispanics and African Americans score below the national average in fourth and eighth grade. The math gap is especially pronounced at approximately .60 SD for African Americans, whereas Hispanic students score approximately .40 SD below the national average in mathematics and reading at both grade levels.

FIGURE 2.2
Standardized NAEP mathematics and reading scores by race/ethnicity, grades 4 and 8, 2009

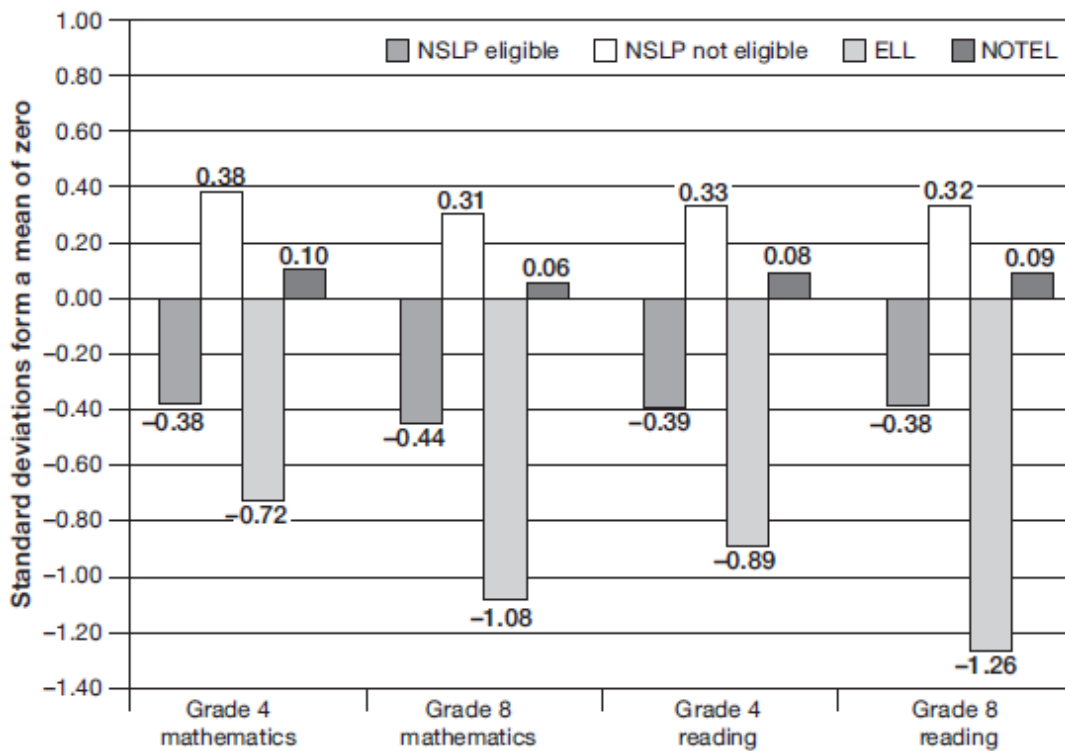


Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), 2009 Main NAEP Mathematics and Reading Assessments.

Note: Raw mean scale scores were used for all calculations. Each bar represents the number of standard deviations the mean achievement of each racial/ethnic group falls from (negative value) or exceeds (positive value) the 2009 national average at grades 4 and 8, respectively. Not accounted for in figure 2.2 are group variations according to factors such as social class, immigration status, English language proficiency, and gender. Adjusting the results accordingly would produce smaller mean NAEP test-score differences.

Figure 2.3 depicts NAEP test-score gaps in 2009 according to student eligibility for the federally assisted National School Lunch Program (NSLP). We also account for English language learner (ELL) status in the test-score comparisons in figure 2.3.³⁰ Children whose families earn so little that the federal government chips in to provide a healthy lunch score approximately .40 SD below the average in math and reading at both grade levels. Even more pronounced are the gaps for children not yet deemed proficient in English, most of whom (77%) speak Spanish at home.³¹ Fourth-grade ELLs lag the national math test score average by .72 standard deviations. For ELLs to match the average eighth-grade math scores of their English-fluent counterparts, it would require an additional two years (1.14 SD) of academic growth. Reading gaps for English language learners are especially conspicuous.³²

FIGURE 2.3
Standardized NAEP mathematics and reading scores by family income level and English learner status, grades 4 and 8, 2009



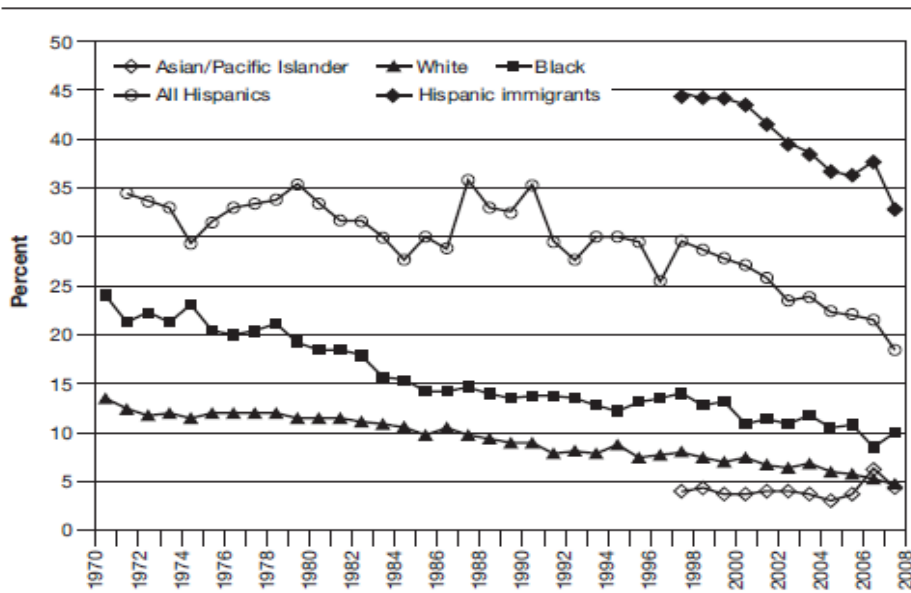
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), 2009 Main NAEP Mathematics and Reading Assessments.

Note: Raw mean scale scores were used for all calculations. Each bar represents the number of standard deviations the mean achievement each falls from (negative value) or exceeds (positive value) the 2009 national average at grades 4 and 8, respectively. Not accounted for in figure 2.3 are group variations according to factors such as race/ethnicity and gender. Adjusting the results accordingly would produce smaller mean NAEP test-score differences.

Gaps in High School and College Attainment

While standardized achievement data reveal students' relative mastery of specific knowledge and skills, still other data document differences in group-level educational attainment by alternative measures. For instance, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, high school dropout rates for Hispanics and blacks substantially exceed those for Asians and whites.³³ Although gaps in high school attainment have narrowed in the past thirty years, the disparity in the graduation rates of Hispanics versus other racial/ethnic groups persists at double-digit rates.³⁴ The alarmingly high Hispanic high school dropout rate—1.2 million Hispanics between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four were dropouts in 2008—is nearly twice that of blacks and more than three times that of Asians and whites (see figure 2.4).³⁵ It should be noted, however, that Hispanics are also making real educational gains over generations. These improvements are obscured by the continuing influx of new immigrants.³⁶ Illustratively, while almost one-third of sixteen- to twenty-four-year old Hispanic *immigrants* were dropouts in 2008, approximately 14 percent of U.S-born Hispanics had failed to complete a high school degree.³⁷ Nevertheless, these numbers also prefigure problematic trends in educational attainment at the college level, where between 1971 and 2009, the gap in bachelor's degree attainment between blacks and whites increased from 12 to 18 percentage points, while the gap between Hispanics and whites grew even more, increasing from 14 to 25 percentage points.³⁸

FIGURE 2.4
Status dropout rates of 16- through 24-year-olds, by race/ethnicity: October 1972–2008



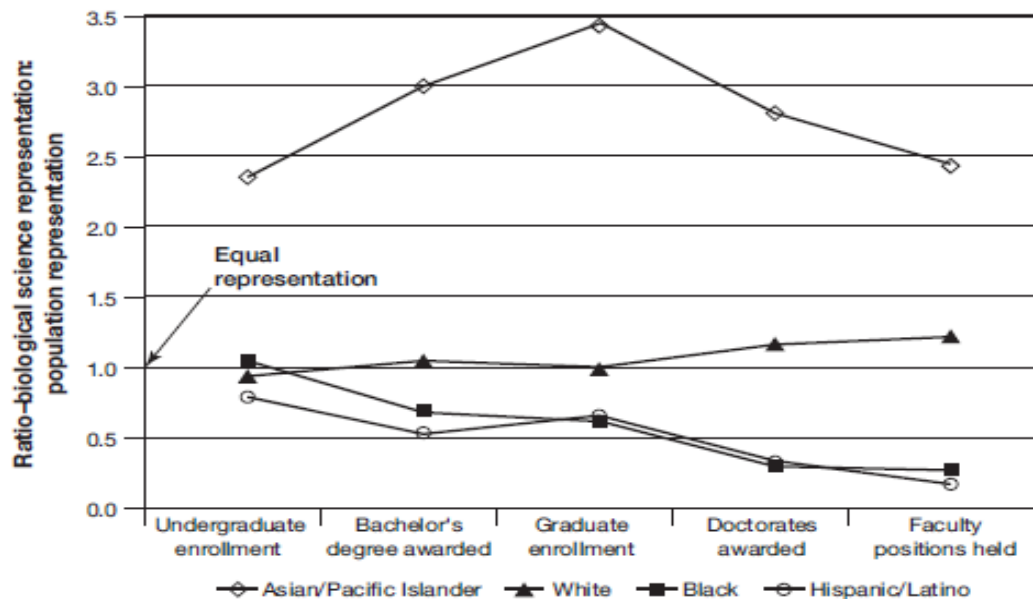
Source: Chris Chapman, Jennifer Laird, and Angelina Kewal Ramani, *Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972–2008 (NCES 2011–2012)*. National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C.

Note: The status dropout rate indicates the percentage of 16- through 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in high school and who lack a high school credential. High school credentials include high school diplomas and equivalent credentials, such as a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. Beginning in 2003, respondents were able to identify themselves as being two or more races. The 2003 through 2008 categories for white (non-Hispanic) and black (non-Hispanic) contain only respondents who indicated just one race. The Hispanic category includes Hispanics of all races and racial combinations.

Since taking office, President Barack Obama has continued to reaffirm the goal that the United States produce an additional eight million college graduates by 2020 and reclaim the world's top spot as the country with the highest percentage of college completers. Several recent reports, expanding upon decades of similar reports, echo this message.³⁹ Although this rising tide of education has arguably lifted all boats, overall higher college participation rates for all demographic groups have directed attention away from enduring inequities along racial/ethnic and socioeconomic lines.⁴⁰ While the “college for all” ideology may not align well with the jobs available in an increasingly segmented economy in which, by one recent estimate, a college degree is required for only half of the jobs landed by new graduates, it remains the case that those who do not enroll and do not complete college degrees are precisely the underrepresented black, Hispanic, and Native American youth who have always experienced limited educational and social mobility in this country.⁴¹ Therefore, before rapidly abandoning the goal for all students to be college educated, it is worth pausing to consider whether hastily doing so will further cloak unwarranted differences in *who* gets *what kind* of postsecondary education under yet more layers of rhetoric.

Consider, for example, the highly uneven distribution of college degrees in the biological sciences, where non-Asian minorities continue to be underrepresented despite a half century of national attention directed at strengthening and diversifying the scientifically and technologically trained labor force.⁴² In 2004, blacks enrolled in undergraduate biology programs in proportion to their numbers throughout the United States. Yet among graduate students, the proportion of biology doctorates awarded African Americans fell 60 percent short of their demographic distribution throughout the nation. This inverse relationship between rigor and prestige in the biological sciences and the representation of blacks in that field also held true for U.S. Hispanics, who in 2004 were especially underrepresented in faculty positions, as shown in figure 2.5. Clearly, rates of science attainment decrease precipitously as underrepresented minorities move from undergraduate education to more prestigious and remunerative levels of higher education, including graduate school, postdoctoral work, and academic positions.

FIGURE 2.5
Representation in the biological sciences pipeline by race/ethnicity, 2004



Source: James Lewis et al., “Rethinking Trends in Minority Participation in the Sciences,” *Science Education* 93 (2009): 961–977.

Note: All estimates are obtained by dividing the percentage of representation in the biological sciences by the percentage of representation in the U.S. population in 2004. Conceptualizing representation this way, a ratio equal to 1.0 indicates equal representation, a ratio greater than 1.0 indicates overrepresentation, and a ratio of less than 1.0 indicates underrepresentation. As a ratio departs from 1.0, the magnitude of under- or overrepresentation increases.

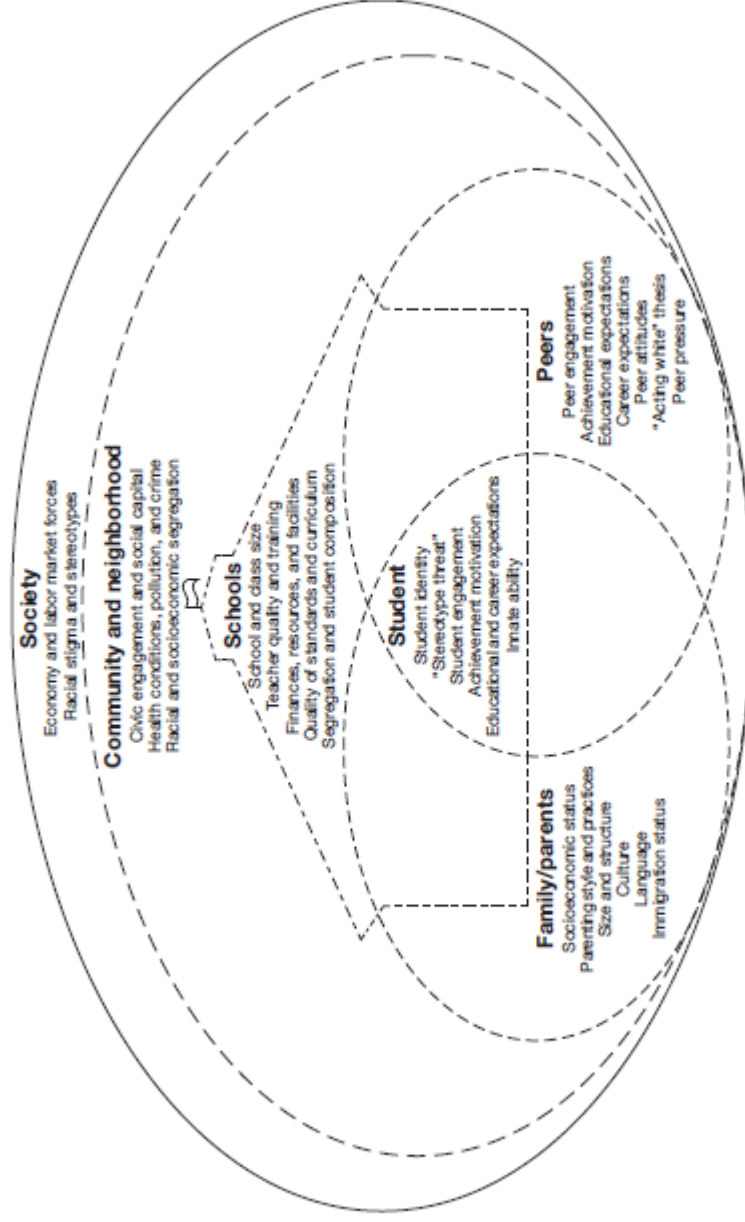
The rapidly increasing percentage of minorities in the U.S. population, with Hispanics constituting the vast majority of the growth, underscores the enormous significance of these gaps across all levels of education.⁴³ Thus, over the past two decades, many policy makers have redoubled their efforts (perhaps sometimes only symbolically) to achieve group-level equality of educational outcomes, if not inputs. Ironically, however, while official interest in these described gaps in American education may be at an all-time high, we have precious little to show for the past twenty years of reform efforts professedly designed to tackle the problem. Thus, America is confronted with a troubling reality: an increasingly significant portion of the eligible U.S. voting and working population is comprised of individuals drawn from groups whose academic achievement and educational attainment is significantly below the rest of the nation.⁴⁴ This presents a serious moral, civic, and economic challenge. Yet, before discussing in greater detail the implications of the vast inequalities we have depicted here, it is important to outline the manifold and overlapping sources of these disparities.

SOURCES OF THE GAPS

When we turn to an examination, then, of contextual factors contributing to gaps in education, the breadth and depth of their sources quickly becomes apparent. Since causes are layered and overlapping, they are best considered simultaneously across domains. From a top-down structural perspective, one might perceive broad economic conditions as being linked to, say, state and local tax rate policies that bear directly, if also differentially, upon community labor markets and housing values—which, in turn, dictate school finance schemes. There are indeed sizable gaps in educational resources in communities serving predominantly white and predominantly minority children.⁴⁵ From a less structural, bottom-up perspective, concentrated on student effort and family influence, one sees substantial variation in parents' approaches to child rearing. Whether children are talked at or listened to, how frequently they read and are read to, and whether or not they attend quality preschool and summer school are important factors that are conditioned by parents' effort and resources. Children's friends and peers pick up where families leave off, exerting increasing influence as students progress through schooling.⁴⁶ In short, there is a dynamic and sometimes transformative relationship between the practices of real people (including students, parents, peers, and teachers) and the structures of school, society, and even history.⁴⁷

In figure 2.6 we offer a nested, albeit by no means exhaustive, depiction of the many structural and individual-level factors that have been examined to understand the causes of the gaps. The embedded domains are not mutually exclusive categories. Rather, they are composed of related factors that act upon one another in complex ways that are often difficult to observe and quantify.⁴⁸ One challenge, therefore, is to determine the extent to which the attributes of formal institutional settings and those of less formal student, family, peer group, and neighborhood and societal-level influences contribute to the gaps. A few of the better documented causes of these gaps are noted below.

FIGURE 2.6
Nested sources of gaps in opportunity and achievement



Source: Robert K. Ream et al., "The Opportunity/Achievement Gap," in *Psychology of Classroom Learning: An Encyclopedia*, 1E, eds. Eric M. Anderman and Lynley H. Anderman (Gale, a part of Cengage Learning, Inc., 2008): 657–664.

Resegregation and the Distribution of Teacher Quality

In June 2007, a divided U.S. Supreme Court restricted the ability of public school districts to use race in determining which schools students can attend. Most voluntary desegregation efforts by school districts are now unconstitutional and most students are now assigned to schools based only on where they live. According to Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee of the UCLA Civil Rights Project, the resegregation of American schools has accelerated since the early 1990s and continues to grow in all parts of the country, most conspicuously among African Americans and Hispanics.⁴⁹ Not since President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act have schools been as segregated as they are today. When we ask what it is about segregated schools that contributes to racial achievement gaps, many point to course offerings, the composition of the student body, and perhaps especially the “instruction gap.”⁵⁰ In a 1991 study of nine hundred Texas school districts, Harvard University’s Achievement Gap Initiative director, Ronald Ferguson, found that nearly all of the school-level variation in the gap in achievement between blacks and whites was attributable to systematic differences in the skills of their teachers.⁵¹ The simple fact is that far fewer of the best-prepared teachers are teaching in schools where the vast majority of students are black and/or Hispanic. These disparities in access to high-quality teachers and teaching are large and growing worse.⁵² Yet recent research shows that when low-income students of color are given the opportunity to live in middle-class neighborhoods and partake of the privileges that accompany schools serving more well-off students, they make gains that reduce test-score gaps.⁵³

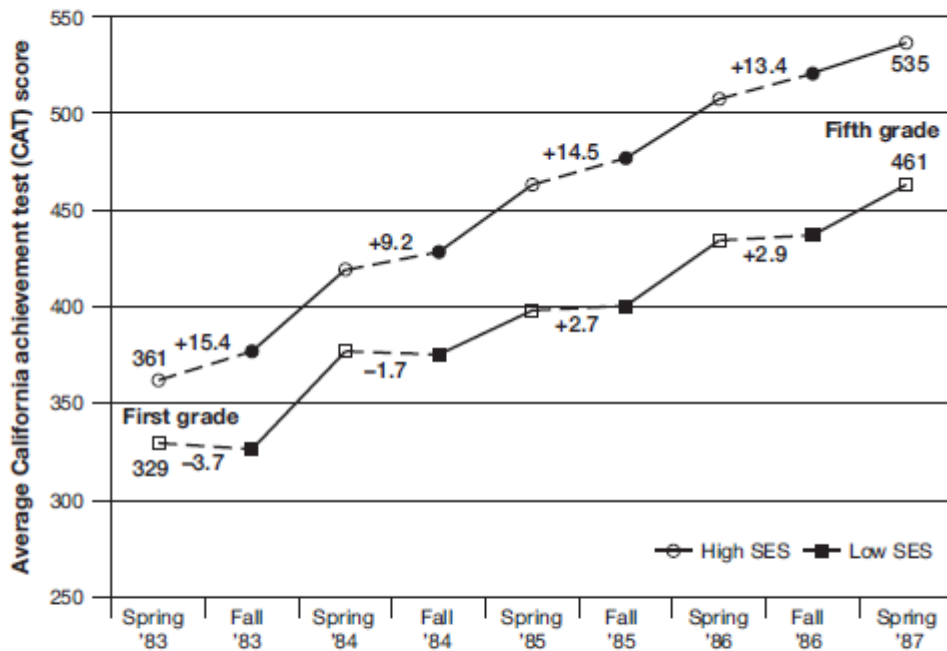
Although quality teachers are important, it is nevertheless the case that most of the group-level variation in student achievement outcomes can be attributed to factors outside of schools. As findings based on and replicating the Coleman Report have time and again demonstrated, other structured political, economic, and social conditions that envelope schools also impact gaps in achievement.

The Seasonality of Children’s Learning

Among a broad range of studies that contradict the notion that American education is a failed enterprise and public schools are to blame, research on the equity implications of summer learning stands out.⁵⁴ For decades the sociologist Karl Alexander and his colleagues at Johns Hopkins University have been tracking a large representative sample of youngsters who began first grade in 1982 in twenty Baltimore City Public Schools.⁵⁵ Each student in the elementary school sample took the California Achievement Test (CAT) in September, just after summer vacation, and again in June at the end of the school year. Thus, it became possible to disentangle school-year achievement gains between September and June from the out-of-school learning that occurred from June to September (with today’s proliferation of out-of-school programs, it would be much harder to reproduce a natural experiment like this). Figure 2.7 replicates a portion of Alexander’s findings disaggregated by family socioeconomic status. Although first graders from higher-SES families start out with a 32-point advantage over the first graders from the poorest homes, both groups make markedly similar school-year gains in reading throughout elementary school. During third grade, high-SES children learn more, while reading gains in grades 2, 4, and 5 advantage low-SES children. In the formal school setting through fifth grade, poor children actually “outlearn” higher-SES children 191 points to 187 points. Over the summer, however, the reading scores of the low-SES children fluctuate around a flat trend line, while wealthier students continue to make much more substantial gains. They may learn more during the school year, but when it comes to reading skills, poor kids fall further and further behind over the summer. Thus, by the end of fifth grade, the initial reading gap between low- and higher-SES children has more than doubled, from 32 points to 74 points. This pattern indicates, first, that group-level differences in achievement at the elementary school level reflect conditions outside school far more than those inside school. Virtually all of the reading advantage that higher-SES students have over poor students is the result of

differences they bring to school from home and the way that more privileged children learn when they are not in school.⁵⁶ Second, schools do not exacerbate unequal school performance across social lines. Instead, schooling mitigates inequality by limiting the expansion of the gaps as children progress through elementary school.⁵⁷

FIGURE 2.7
California Achievement Test (CAT) gains by season and socioeconomic status



Source: Karl L. Alexander, Doris R. Entwisle, and Linda S. Olson, "Schools, Achievement, and Inequality: A Seasonal Perspective," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 23 (2001): 171-191.

Note: Gains or losses in achievement made when school is in session are shown in solid-line segments, while gains or losses in achievement made when school is out of session (the summer months) are shown in dashed-line segments. The abscissa does not represent equidistant time intervals since fall to spring increments would present an 8-month time interval, while spring to fall would represent a 4-month interval. High-SES ($N = 150$) and low-SES ($N = 329$) groups are "relative to the sample's makeup" and represent a five-indicator composite that measures financial and intellectual resources available to each child. On average, mothers of students deemed High SES completed at least some college education (14.6 years of schooling), while very few High SES students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (13.1%). The mothers of students in the Low SES group averaged only ten years of schooling (did not complete high school), and almost all Low SES students (95.1%) qualified for free or reduced-price lunch.

Socioeconomic Status and Parenting

What is it about the out-of-school context that can account for summer advantage for some children and a summer slide for others? Myriad studies confirm that socioeconomic status as a measure of parental education, employment, and income is among the most powerful predictors of student achievement.⁵⁸ And many prominent social scientists have shown that the correlation between SES and race is inevitably linked to diminished access to quality education for underrepresented minorities, and thus, not surprisingly, to patterned racial inequality in educational outcomes.⁵⁹ While

only 7 percent of white mothers in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study of the Kindergarten Class of 1998–99 had failed to complete high school, a full 18 percent of black mothers and 35 percent of Latina mothers had failed to do so.⁶⁰ Likewise, only 15 percent of white children (and 11 percent of Asians) under the age of eighteen were living in poverty in 2005 compared to almost one-third of all black and Hispanic children.⁶¹ Not only are black and Hispanic children more likely to have parents who have not completed high school and are poor, but they are also more likely to attend schools with other poor children. To the degree that both family poverty and school poverty affect academic achievement, Hispanic and black students are twice disadvantaged.⁶²

Some understanding of how SES influences achievement is provided by psychologists who study the interactions between parents and children. The research of psychologist Laurence Steinberg at Temple University indicates that a lack of school-specific knowledge and a lack of opportunity (good parenting takes a lot of time) are what differentiate high- and low-SES parents in their parenting styles and approaches to raising children.⁶³ Other research conducted by Betty Hart and Todd Risley, child psychologists at the University of Kansas, links children's language development to parents' communication style. In a well-known 1995 study, they found that by age three the children of professionals had vocabularies of about 1,100 words—and the children of welfare parents had vocabularies of about half as many words.⁶⁴ Comparing children's vocabulary scores with their home life, Hart and Risley concluded that children's vocabulary correlated most closely to the number of words the parents spoke to their child. And the number and kinds of words that children heard varied markedly by social class. The most basic difference was in the number of prohibitions and words of disapproval heard by the child as compared with the number of encouragements or words of praise. Hearing fewer words yet many prohibitions had a negative effect on IQ, while hearing lots of words, especially affirmations and complex sentences, improved IQ. In short, early childhood parenting practices and communication styles matter greatly and are patterned along class lines.

To reiterate, only about one-third of the racial gap in achievement can be attributed to what goes on in schools. And there is an emerging research consensus that family socioeconomic status accounts for at least another third of the gap in educational outcomes.⁶⁵ While the effect of schools on a child's academic achievement is nearly impossible to isolate from other influences (including family SES), most researchers agree that even eliminating vast resource differences between schools and among families would not entirely close the racial gap in achievement. In fact, one of the most perplexing aspects of the racial test-score gap is its persistence among even middle-class students and among students at the top of the achievement spectrum—the very pool from which our nation's leaders are drawn.⁶⁶

Wealth and Future Aspirations

However, it is possible that this puzzling aspect of the racial test-score gap may be related to the fact that researchers have largely relied on income as an indicator of class status, while the relationships that achievement and other important student outcomes share with household *wealth* has received far less attention in this body of literature.⁶⁷ Various definitions of wealth, including assets, net worth, and ownership of financial products, regardless of how wealth is measured, ethnoracial wealth disparities are greater than those displayed by any other socioeconomic measure, and these differences persist at every income level.⁶⁸ Moreover, as Wei-Jun Jean Yeung and Dalton Conley assert, “there are ample reasons to suspect that race differences in family wealth levels may help explain differences in child outcome measures.”⁶⁹

Wealth may affect educational outcomes through a variety of mechanisms, in part depending on the sources of wealth and the age of the child. One way in which wealth may impact outcomes is by providing a safety net during times of income instability, underscoring the importance of liquid forms of wealth. It could also be that the social-psychological returns to wealth are just as influential through their effect on youths' sense of social class standing,

security, and future aspirations that derive from the presence of visible manifestations of wealth throughout the course of family life. Yeung and Conley, sociologists at New York University, found a stronger association between family wealth and cognitive achievement among school-age children than among preschoolers, and within the school-age sample, a stronger association with math scores than with reading scores. In their concluding remarks, the pair speculate that the presence of wealth over time in a family may have a stronger impact by promoting a sense of economic security and future orientation. Specifically, they remark, “It is plausible that in young adulthood, wealth may become an even more critical factor in shaping one’s path to college attendance, career success, or even the timing of marriage and choice of partners.”⁷⁰ This position is supported by studies that have linked wealth to years of completed schooling, college enrollment, and college completion.⁷¹ That being said, it should merit attention that at the same time that racial disparities in college completion have grown, so too have racial wealth gaps widened.⁷²

Individual Identity and Stereotype Threat

The work of Stanford social psychologist Claude Steele also helps to interpret the persistent achievement gaps even among students who are enrolled in our nation’s most competitive universities. In spite of the many obstacles that inhibit educational achievement among non-Asian minority students, many forge ahead to attain high levels of academic success. Some minorities within the academic vanguard, however, may encounter further achievement barriers corresponding to their relative identification with schooling. In his groundbreaking work on how stereotypes interact with students’ identities to shape educational performance, Steele explains what he calls “stereotype threat.”⁷³ According to Steele, stereotype threat arises when school-identified African Americans are in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one’s group applies and must therefore be disconfirmed. Thus, stereotypes become particularly threatening for those who associate their identity and self-worth with success in a domain where their own group has been obviously stereotyped. So above and beyond the K–12 instruction gap and the socioeconomic and wealth inequality noted earlier, stereotypes about groups can influence the cognitive functioning and identity formation of individual group members. And this burden of heightened awareness about stereotypes and social stigma affects especially test-score gaps among students of color who are otherwise apparently advantaged.

THE CONSEQUENCES, AND SOCIETY’S INTEREST IN ELIMINATING THE GAPS

Policy makers are increasingly aware that the reasons for closing the gaps we have been discussing go well beyond presumed links between the improved academic performance of minority students and their future job prospects. There may be a moral imperative to addressing this problem, depending on the nature of one’s political beliefs. But on a simply utilitarian rationale, we can also say that better educated students earn higher incomes, live healthier lives, pay higher taxes, and prove less likely to be involved in crime.⁷⁴ On the premise that high school graduation should serve as a minimal threshold for being considered adequately educated, Columbia University economist Henry Levin has investigated and forecast the costs to society should we fail to succeed in providing students with this base level of education.⁷⁵ His report focuses on individuals who at the age of twenty in 2005 were not high school graduates, a group of approximately seven hundred thousand. The cost to society, as measured across the hypothetical lifetime of a single one of these students, runs to over \$200,000, factoring revenue lost to society in federal, state, and local taxes and costs paid out in the public health-care and criminal justice systems. On aggregate, then, the fiscal consequences to society for

this single group of students without high school diplomas is projected at the staggering sum of \$148 billion—again, as measured by lost tax revenues and public expenditures for the care of these persons.

The implications of growing gaps in educational attainment beyond high school are equally troubling. Assuming no change in educational attainment gaps across racial/ethnic groups over time, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education forecasts a loss of \$395 in annual personal income (inflation adjusted dollars) between 2000 and 2020, with an annual decrease of 2 percent as opposed to the approximately 2 percent yearly *increase* between 1980 and 2000.⁷⁶ This decrease, impacting individual purchasing power, tax revenues, and demand for public services, would carry heavy consequences. Clearly it is in the nation's best interest to reduce dropout rates and to ensure that all children secure an adequate education.⁷⁷ Indeed, as job opportunities even for those with high school diplomas continue to decrease, the need to successfully complete some postsecondary education becomes paramount for young adults trying to increase their odds of finding work.⁷⁸

Despite ominous projections such as these, we remain incapable as a nation of articulating how we expect to make good on the promise of the American Dream for *all* of our children. It is our contention, in concluding, that the failure to comprehend and take to heart the social consequences of the gaps in educational outcomes leads to complacency among educational policy makers. We also contend that the singular and repeated use of “the achievement gap” idiom obscures the nature and history of educational problems, therefore limiting the imaginable policy moves directed toward the design and execution of solutions.⁷⁹ Unless our society can develop a discourse of educational reform attuned to the diverse factors contributing to educational inequality, one free of jargon and clichés, our policy makers will continue to use worn-out concepts based on inadequate data in order to persuade themselves that they have fairly and adequately grappled with the problems in our education system when in fact they have not. Such complacency in public rhetoric and educational policy making, if it persists, will come at a dreadful cost to the nation.

MOVING FORWARD

Among the wide-ranging educational challenges facing American society, perhaps no issue is more important to the nation's civic and economic well-being than the inequity in achievement among diverse racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic student groups. That test-score gaps, disproportionately high dropout rates, and low levels of college attainment among non-Asian minorities have reemerged on the policy agenda may seem relatively unsurprising in light of recent research demonstrating the steep costs exacted on the nation as a result of lost human capital productivity and associated forfeited tax revenues.⁸⁰ Baby boomers whose overall well-being depends on the productivity of subsequent generations are concerned that the population base of American voters and taxpayers will increasingly come to be made up of persons less educated than they themselves were. In response to the coincidence of dramatic changes in U.S. demographics and new information about gaps accompanying the standards movement, policy makers have increased pressure almost entirely on schools to demonstrate annual achievement progress for all students and to close “the achievement gap.” Still, regardless of all we know about the incidence, causes, and consequences of these gaps, government policy has only partially and inconsistently responded to this ongoing crisis. Lamentably, the positive picture of narrowing gaps from the early 1970s until the late 1980s (when for some cohorts the gaps were cut by as much as half or more) has since been replaced by relatively small up-and-down changes along with periods of stagnation.⁸¹

What manner of democratic people are we, and what sort of progressive republic can we possibly envision, if persistent gaps in educational inputs and outcomes continue to differentiate large and expanding groups of Americans from mainstream society and its benefits?

If we as a society are to be moved to intervene in this state of affairs, we must first be able to properly recognize the nature of social inequities both within and beyond schools, before we can begin to conceive of ways to resist and overcome them. A good start would be to curb our current tendency to scapegoat schools and to stop using buzzwords and stock phrases such as “no excuses” and “the achievement gap” to reinforce well-worn but imprecise notions about the work schools do and the way children perform in them. The pervasiveness of such rhetoric places inordinate blame on schools and is often echoed uncritically in the media. This simultaneously limits the scope of the reforms our policy makers are willing to undertake, restricting the range of choices they imagine as available to them, diverting their attention from the array of social institutions and practices that condition formal schooling and influence its effectiveness. Even as most contemporary efforts in educational reform continue to ignore the structured underpinnings of inequality and focus almost entirely on school-centered efforts to eliminate differences in group-level achievement, the finding of the Coleman Report bears repeating: *No more than forty percent of the racial gap in educational outcomes can be attributed to the schools themselves (in isolation from other non-school factors).*

We perceive a need for a much more strategic *alignment* between the larger social structures comprising the context in which schooling occurs and the goals for school reform as set forth in the preamble to the 2001 version of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act. These opening remarks explicitly state that the overarching purpose of NCLB is to finally bring an end to group-level differences in student achievement. We have here described many of the overlapping causes of the gaps (as depicted in figure 2.6) precisely because so many structural factors—from financial markets and the segmented economy, to deep inequities in health and nutrition, public safety, and transportation, to social environments and family circumstances—remain largely absent from the conversation about and therefore the scope of so-called comprehensive education reform. As we have insisted, then, the task of improving contemporary American schooling remains entirely necessary but not altogether sufficient for eliminating the gaps in outcomes.⁸² If we are going to proceed as optimistically as possible within the academic setting, working as if there were no limit to schools’ power to compensate for very real social disadvantage, we cannot pursue this course by putting on our blinders and refusing to respond simultaneously to a much more comprehensive range of factors that constitute the overall ecology of student development.⁸³

Some of the message we are imparting here has already been disseminated and begun to take root. Local grassroots organizations as well as more formal policy-making institutions have begun to revisit and develop alliances that foster the cooperation of institutional representatives from the public, private, and independent sectors as a way of building civic capacity as a ground for educational interventions.⁸⁴ The Obama administration’s Promise Neighborhoods competition puts federal monies to the issue, supposing that by meeting critical out-of-school needs we can begin closing the gaps in outcomes. In Massachusetts, city schools now compete for grants to establish “wraparound zones,” which link the school, students, and their families to services provided by state health and human service agencies. The reformative agenda of Geoffrey Canada’s Harlem Children’s Zone connects Wall Street and venture philanthropists to the public problems of government housing and transportation as well as public safety and recreation. Much of this bottom-up grassroots work has been credited as the catalyst for integrative approaches seeking to develop civic capacity in an effort to spur education reform at the state and national levels. Such grassroots endeavors can spur systems-changing movements that provide a new impetus to meaningful comprehensive school reform.⁸⁵ And such strategies seem increasingly feasible as our notion about just who is responsible for schooling focuses not only upward on federal government but also outward from local school boards to general-purpose government officials, including city mayors, county supervisors, and state legislators.⁸⁶

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have marshaled empirical data and theoretical arguments in order to puncture holes in both the public's and policy makers' overly rigid expectations about what is feasible, or *not* feasible, when it comes to options toward eliminating the very real gaps in opportunity and achievement. By challenging the characterization of these gaps as normal or natural occurrences somehow unrelated to societal inputs, we have grappled openly with how best to talk about the inequities that structure and perpetuate group-level differences, on average, with regard to diverse academic inputs and outcomes over generations. At the same time, we have attended to questions about the specific social institutions affecting students' disadvantages, while providing greater clarity about how and in relation to whom they are disadvantaged. Along these lines, we depicted those periods during the 1970s and 1980s in which gaps in outcomes narrowed significantly as encouraging, insofar as they give evidence of the pliability of the gaps. And yet we have argued that any significant progress in educational reform from here on will require us to talk about the problems differently, and we readily acknowledge that finding new language is always challenging. But it is imperative to reject Manichean and ahistorical and otherwise narrow conceptualizations of the sources of problems as well as the solutions if we wish, sincerely, to effect a rapprochement between the social structures shaping students' academic experience (often negatively) and the lofty achievement goals we continue to say we expect our schools to attain. Because the diverse causes of the gaps in outcomes overlap and are inextricably linked, we need an equally nuanced and integrative approach to solving these gaps (for a comprehensive review of organizational strategies that promise substantial impact on closing the gaps, see chapter 6). It is possible, we believe, to extricate ourselves from entrenched patterns of thought and policy practices that have worked, ironically, to perpetuate the inequality they were meant to redress. Our reflections here are offered in a spirit of optimism about what might be, not just what is, so that we can move toward greater alignment of what we expect of schools and what we expect of ourselves.⁸⁷ For what the democratic eruptions so far away in Cairo and Tunis and Tripoli portend about the essential unfairness in American education here at home, if nothing else, is that the capacity to conceive a newly structured reality is a powerful form of causation; and inequities in American education, no matter how firmly established and long-lasting, may give way before the will of people truly oriented toward changing such conditions.⁸⁸

Notes

1. Of course, when President George W. Bush coined that education slogan he was referring to our expectations of children and, in particular, eschewing low expectations of historically underrepresented minority children. See Nicholas Lemann, "Testing Limits: Can the President's Education Crusade Survive Beltway Politics?," *The New Yorker* (July 2, 2001):28-34.
2. It is not our intention to assert that effective schools that adopt promising practices cannot improve disadvantaged students' chances for success against steep odds. They most certainly can and do: see Ronald Edmonds, "Effective Schools for the Urban Poor," *Educational Leadership* 37 (1979): 15-18, 20-24; L. Scott Miller, *An American Imperative: Accelerating Minority Educational Advancement* (Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press, 1995); and Paul Tough, "What It Takes to Make a Student," *New York Times Magazine*, November 26, 2006. Nor are we inclined to make alibis for schools that do not work well and that do little to bolster student performance. Yet as debate over the series of Education Trust and Heritage Foundation reports asserting that there are plenty of what they call "high-flying" schools makes abundantly clear, the question of how to replicate ideal case schools on a meaningful scale is far from settled. See initial study by Patte Barth et al., "Dispelling the Myth: High Poverty Schools Exceeding Expectations" (Washington, DC: Education Trust, 1999); and critique by Douglas Harris, "High-Flying Schools, Student Disadvantage, and the Logic of NCLB," *American Journal of Education* 113, no. 3 (2007): 367-394.
3. In point of fact, "the achievement gap" idiom is considered a problematic misnomer—not only because this phrase implies just one inequity rather than many, but also because its emphasis on achievement outcomes works to deemphasize a long history of discriminatory gaps in educational inputs. Gloria J. Ladson-Billings, in her 2005 presidential address to the American Educational Research Association, asserted that the so-called achievement gap is more accurately portrayed as a historically accumulated "educational debt" still owed minority and poor students; see Gloria Ladson-Billings, "From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools," *Educational Researcher* 35 (2006): 3-12.

4. If U.S. Hispanics/Latinos are asked to choose between these pan-ethnic terms, Hispanic is preferred to Latino by a 3 to 1 margin. Thus, we tend to employ the term Hispanic, although we use both labels interchangeably. Neither adequately acknowledges the diverse ethnic and cultural heritage in the populations they describe, however. National Research Council, *Multiple Origins, Uncertain Destinies: Hispanics and the American Future* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2006).
5. Patrick McGuinn, "Swing Issues and Policy Regimes: Federal Education Policy and the Politics of Policy Change," *Journal of Policy History* 18 (2006): 205–240.
6. James S. Coleman et al., *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966); R. Rothstein, *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic, and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap* (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2004).
7. Adam Gamoran, "American Schooling and Educational Inequality: A Forecast for the 21st Century," *Sociology of Education*, extra issue: *Current of Thought: Sociology of Education at the Dawn of the 21st Century* 74 (2001): 135–153; Christopher Jencks et al., *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effects of Family and Schooling in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1972).
8. There were, of course, limits on the school-level data available for these early studies and in the statistical techniques that could be used to examine school-level data in concert with out-of-school characteristics. Gregory Borman and Maritza Dowling, "Schools and Inequality: A Multilevel Analysis of Coleman's Equality of Educational Opportunity Data," *Teachers College Record* 112, no. 5 (2010): 1201–1246, in a new study that reanalyzes data from the Coleman Report, report findings that contrast somewhat with Coleman's original findings about the impact of schools on student test-score performance. The results of the new study suggest that the joint effect of the fiscal and social resources found in families and schools appears to be much greater than either considered alone.
9. David Grissmer, Ann Flanagan, and Stephanie Williamson, "Why Did the Black-White Score Gap Narrow in the 1970s and 1980s?" in *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, eds. Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1998), 182–226.
10. Paul E. Barton and Richard J. Coley, "The Black-White Achievement Gap: When Progress Stopped," Educational Testing Service Report No. PIC-BWGAP (Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, 2010).
11. Explaining the large proportion of the narrowing gaps that are not accounted for by demographic and family variables proved much more challenging, however, since the causes must (1) have changed significantly for adolescents in 1970–1975 versus adolescents in 1990, (2) have significantly affected black and Hispanic test scores but not the scores of non-Hispanic whites, and (3) be disentangled from the aforementioned changes in family characteristics. See David Grissmer et al., *Student Achievement and the Changing American Family* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1994); Mark Berends and Roberto V. Penaloza, "Changes in Families, Schools, and the Test Score Gap," in *Steady Gains and Stalled Progress: Inequality and the Black-White Test Score Gap*, eds. Katherine Magnuson and Jane Waldfogel (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008); and Larry V. Hedges and Amy Nowell, "Changes in the Black-White Gap in Achievement Test Scores," *Sociology of Education* 7 (1999): 111–135.
12. James Cibulka, "The Changing Role of Interest Groups in Education: Nationalization and the New Politics of Education Productivity," *Education Policy* 15 (2001): 12–40; Larry Cuban, *Why Is It So Hard to Get Good Schools?* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2003). National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1983).
13. David Macarov, "Welfare as Work's Handmaiden," *International Journal of Social Economics* 8, no. 5 (1981): 21–30.
14. Linda Darling-Hammond, "The Flat Earth and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future," *Educational Researcher* 36 (2007): 318–334.
15. Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: Free Press, 1994).
16. Arthur R. Jensen, "How Much Can We Boost IQ and Scholastic Achievement?" *Harvard Educational Review* 39 (1969): 1–123, argued that programs like Head Start, which tried to boost the academic performance of minority children, were doomed to failure because IQ was so heavily genetic and therefore impervious to environmental influences.
17. Asa G. Hilliard III, "Excellence in Education Versus High-Stakes Standardized Testing," *Journal of Teacher Education* 51 (2000): 293–304.
18. Richard E. Nisbett, "Race, Genetics, and IQ," in Jencks and Phillips, *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, 86–102.
19. Richard E. Nisbett, *Intelligence and How to Get It: Why Schools and Cultures Count* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009).
20. E. Turkheimer, A. Haley, M. Waldron, B. D'Onofrio, and I. Gottesman, "Socioeconomic Status Modifies Heritability of IQ in Young Children," *Psychological Science* 14 (2003): 623–628.
21. Ibid.; U. Neisser et al., "Intelligence: Knowns and Unknowns," *American Psychologist* 51 (1996): 77–101.
22. Douglas N. Harris and Carolyn D. Herington, "Accountability, Standards, and the Growing Achievement Gap: Lessons from the Past Half-Century," *American Journal of Education* 112, no. 2 (2006): 227, citing John Chubb and Terry Moe, *Politics, Markets and Schools* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1990).
23. David C. Berliner, *Poverty and Potential: Out-of-School Factors and School Success* (East Lansing, MI: Great Lakes Center for Education Research & Practice, 2009); R. Stevens and J. Bransford, "The LIFE Center's Lifelong and Lifewide Diagram," in *Learning In and Out of School in Diverse Environments: Life-Long, Life-Wide, Life-Deep*, ed. J. A. Banks (Seattle, WA: UW Center for Multicultural Education, 2007).
24. Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).
25. Jencks and Phillips, *The Black-White Test Score Gap*; Roland G. Fryer and Steven D. Levitt, "The Black-White Test Score Gap Through Third Grade," *American Law and Economics Review* 8, no. 2 (2006): 249–281.
26. Meredith Phillips, James Crouse, and John Ralph, "Does the Black-White Test Score Gap Widen After Children Enter School?" in Jencks and Phillips, *The Black-White Test Score Gap*.
27. Karl L. Alexander, Doris R. Entwisle, and Linda S. Olson, "Schools, Achievement, and Inequality: A Seasonal Perspective," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 23 (2001): 171–191.
28. Ibid.; Jackyung Lee, "Racial and Ethnic Achievement Gap Trends: Reversing the Progress Toward Equity?" *Educational Researcher* 31 (2002): 3–12.

29. U.S. Department of Education, “No Child Left Behind Act Is Working (press release, December 2006), <http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/overview/importance/nclbworking.pdf>.
30. English language learner status indicates students who speak a language other than English at home and who range from students just beginning to learn English to students who are approaching proficiency in English but may need additional assistance in schooling situations. Among ELLs, Spanish is by far the most common home language. Second in frequency of use is Chinese, which is spoken by roughly 3.8% of ELLs, followed by Vietnamese (2.7%). While English skills obviously matter more for reading comprehension than for mathematics test score performance, research shows that lack of English proficiency also inhibits student performance on standardized math tests; see Jamal Abedi, Carol Lord, and Carolyn H. Hofstetter, “Impact of Selected Background Variables on Students’ NAEP Math Performance,” Center for the Study of Evaluation Technical Report No. 478 (Los Angeles, CA: University of California, National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, 1998). Being able to distinguish a math expression like “the sum of the numbers” from the phrase “some numbers” may perplex students who are simultaneously learning a second language while developing their skills in math; see Patricia Gándara and Russell Rumberger, “Immigration, Language, and Education: How Does Language Policy Structure Opportunity?” *Teachers College Record* 111 (2009): 750–782.
31. Jeanne Batalova and Margie McHugh, “The Languages Spoken by English Language Learners Nationally and by State” (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2010), http://www.migrationinformation.org/ellinfo/FactSheet_ELL3.pdf.
32. It would be negligent, at this point, not to acknowledge the fact that simple race, social class, and language status categories continue to be inadequate descriptors of socioculturally diverse individual and group identities. Skin color is much less clearly the social class indicator it once was: see Jencks and Phillips, *The Black-White Test Score Gap* and Paul Taylor et al., *Marrying Out* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2010). Pan-ethnic labels such as “Hispanic” or “Latina/o” tend to cloud important differences between, say, immigrant Mexican Americans and third-generation Cuban Americans, while bilingualism and other important language ability variations typically get overlooked when proficiency with language is reduced to a yes/no box to check off. Notwithstanding the reconfiguration and blending of what may have once been more distinctly bounded ethnoracial indicators, such categories remain powerful and sometimes divisive forces that bear mightily upon inequalities in schooling in the United States. See Samuel Bowles, Herbert Gintis, and Melissa O. Groves, *Unequal Chances: Family Background and Economic Success* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Jonathan Kozol, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* (New York: Random House, 2005); and Robert Ream and Gregory Palardy, “Re-examining Social Class Differences in the Availability and the Educational Utility of Parental Social Capital,” *American Educational Research Journal* 45, no. 2 (2008): 238–273. Thus, we are persuaded to attend to the necessity of employing descriptors such as “Hispanic” or “poor” or “English learner” even as we argue the importance of questioning whether these categories faithfully mirror the increasing complexity of the social world; see Mica Pollock, “Race Wrestling: Struggling Strategically with Race in Educational Practice and Research,” *American Journal of Education* 111 (2004): 25–67; Erik O. Wright, *Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997). In short, we employ common social categorizing in acknowledgement of outcome gaps as very real phenomena that have serious social, economic, and political consequences.
33. Chapman, Laird, and Ramani, “Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States.”
34. Christopher D. Chapman, Jennifer Laird, and Angelina Kewal Ramani, “Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972–2008,” NCES Report No. 2011-012 (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, 2010).
35. Ibid.
36. For example, a fairly recent study based on data gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau reveals impressive advances over the course of the twentieth century in Hispanic educational attainment from generation to generation. Mexican immigrants born during 1905–1909 averaged but 4.3 years of schooling. Their American-born sons, averaging 9.3 years, doubled the years of schooling. And their grandsons were high school graduates, averaging 12.2 years of schooling. See James P. Smith, “Assimilation Across the Latino Generations,” *American Economic Review* 93 (2003): 315–319.
37. Richard Fry, “Hispanic Youth Dropping Out of U.S. Schools: Measuring the Challenge” (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, 2003).
38. Chapman, Laird, and Ramani, “Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States.”
39. Both the K–12 and postsecondary systems of education in the United States have attempted to serve multiple and competing purposes through their histories. One purpose has always been to prepare youth to enter the labor force, and the importance of this role has been consistently emphasized and reemphasized over time, particularly during periods of uncertainty about the economic position of the U.S. globally. Over the past three decades alone, numerous influential reports have asserted the inability of the nation’s education system to adequately prepare the nation’s youth for “college and careers.” These include, among others, National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1983); William T. Grant Foundation, “The Forgotten Half” (New York: William T. Grant Foundation, 1988); and National Center for Education Statistics, “Dropout Rates in the United States: 2005” (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2005). In February of 2011, *Pathways to Prosperity* was published by the Pathways to Prosperity project of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, reiterating many of the claims and warnings issued in earlier reports; see William C. Symonds, Robert B. Schwartz, and Ronald Ferguson, *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Pathways to Prosperity Project at Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2011).
40. Sigal Alon, Thurston Domina, and Marta Tienda, “Stymied Mobility or Temporary Lull? The Puzzle of Lagging Hispanic College Degree Attainment,” *Social Forces* 88 (2010): 1807–1832; Fabian T. Pfeffer, “Persistent Inequality in Educational Attainment and Its Institutional Context,” *European Sociological Review* 24, no. 5 (2008): 543–565.
41. Jessica Godofsky, Cliff Zukin, and Carl Van Horn, “Unfulfilled Expectations: Recent College Graduates Struggle in a Troubled Economy” (New Brunswick, NJ: John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, Rutgers University, 2011); Regina Deil-Amen and Stefanie DeLuca, “The

- Underserved Third: How Our Educational Structures Populate an Educational Underclass,” *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* 15 (2010): 27–50.
42. National Research Council, *Rising Above the Gathering Storm, Revisited: Rapidly Approaching Category 5* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2011).
 43. According to an analysis of newly released 2010 U.S. Census data by the Pew Hispanic Center, the number of U.S. Hispanics—50.5 million—is larger and has grown more quickly and more dramatically than demographers had estimated. In fact, the U.S. Latino population, which was 35.3 million in 2000, grew 43% over the past decade. Hispanics now constitute 16.3% of the total population and 17.1 million Hispanics now make up nearly a quarter of children (23.1 percent, or 17.1 million) ages 17 and younger. See Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn, “Census 2010: 50 Million Latinos; Hispanics Account for More Than Half of Nation’s Growth in Past Decade” (Washington DC: Pew Hispanic Center, 2011). The rates of U.S. Hispanic children living in poverty, at 33%, are close to three times the rate of poverty for non-Latino whites (12%) and Asians (13%); see U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2009* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2009). Moreover, the incidence of poverty is much higher among English learners who are immigrants or the children of immigrants; see Daniel T. Lichter, Zhenchao Qian, and Martha Crowley, “Child Poverty Among Racial Minorities and Immigrants: Explaining Trends and Differentials,” *Social Science Quarterly* 86 (2005): 1037–1059. This overlap between poverty and nativity/language status is especially significant considering that between 1979 and 2008 the number of children between 5 and 17 who spoke a language other than English at home increased from 3.8 million to 10.9 million, or from 9% to 21%; see Chapman, Laird, and Ramani, “Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States”; and Passel and Cohn, “Census 2010: 50 Million Latinos.”
 44. William J. Baumol, Sue Anne B. Blackman, and Edward N. Wolff, *Productivity and American Leadership: The Long View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989); L. Scott Miller, *An American Imperative: Accelerating Minority Educational Advancement* (Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press, 1995); Robert Ream, *Uprooting Children: Mobility, Social Capital and Mexican American Underachievement* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2005).
 45. Jean Anyon, *Ghetto Schooling: A Political Economy of Urban Education Reform* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997); Linda Darling-Hammond, “What Happens to a Dream Deferred? The Continuing Quest for Equal Educational Opportunity,” in *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, 2nd ed., ed. James A. Banks (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 607–630.
 46. Shelley Hymel et al., “Academic Failure and School Dropout: The Influence of Peers,” in *Social Motivation: Understanding Children’s School Adjustment*, eds. Jaana Juvonen and Kathryn R. Wentzel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
 47. Sherry B. Ortner, *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
 48. Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*.
 49. Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee, “Why Segregation Matters: Poverty and Educational Inequality” (Los Angeles: Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles at UCLA, 2005).
 50. Coleman et al., *Equality of Educational Opportunity*; Ronald F. Ferguson and Jal Mehta, “The Legacy of Brown and the Narrowing of the Achievement Gap,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 85 (2004): 656–669; Heather Schwartz, “Housing Policy Is School Policy: Economically Integrative Housing Promotes Academic Success in Montgomery County, Maryland” (New York: Century Foundation, 2010).
 51. Ronald F. Ferguson, “Paying for Public Education: New Evidence on How and Why Money Matters,” *Harvard Journal on Legislation* 28 (1991): 465–498.
 52. Darling-Hammond, “The Flat Earth and Education”; James Lewis et al., “Con Cariño: Teacher Caring, Math Self-Efficacy and Math Achievement among Hispanic English Learners,” *Teachers College Record* 14, no. 7 (forthcoming).
 53. To test the educational benefits of economic integration in elementary schools, Heather Schwartz, who is now a researcher at the RAND Corporation, examined all the elementary-age children of mostly African American families who lived in public housing from 2001 to 2007 in Montgomery County, Maryland, where housing policies require developers to set aside housing for low-income families in more privileged neighborhoods. A critical aspect of this study is that some of the children who moved to new public housing nevertheless continued to attend higher-poverty but also *higher-spending* elementary schools, while others now attended low-poverty schools. Importantly, the difference in which type of school the students attend is random. After seven years in the district, the children in the lower-poverty schools performed 8 percentage points higher on standardized math tests than their peers attending the higher-poverty schools—even though the county had targeted them with extra resources. This lends fresh support to an idea critical to the Supreme Court’s 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board*: segregated schools are rarely as effective as integrated ones at educating low-income minority students (see Schwartz, “Housing Policy Is School Policy”).
 54. Harris Cooper et al., “The Effects of Summer Vacation on Achievement Test Scores: A Narrative and Meta-analytic Review,” *Review of Educational Research* 66 (1996): 227–268; Barbara Heyns, “Schooling and Cognitive Development: Is There a Season for Learning?” *Child Development* 58 (1987): 1151–1160.
 55. Karl L. Alexander, Doris R. Entwisle, and Linda S. Olson, “Schools, Achievement, and Inequality: A Seasonal Perspective,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 23 (2001): 171–191.
 56. Doris R. Entwisle, Karl L. Alexander, and Linda S. Olson, *Children, Schools, and Inequality* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).
 57. One recent study identified a troubling exception to the pattern whereby gaps in children’s cognitive skills widen less when elementary school is in session than when it is not. Using a nationally representative sample of 17,000 kindergartners in fall 1998 who were followed through the spring of first grade in 2000, Douglas B. Downey, Paul T. von Hippel, and Beckett Broh, “Are Schools the Great Equalizer? Cognitive Inequality During the Summer Months and the School Year,” *American Sociological Review* 69 (2004): 613–635 show that gaps in cognitive skills between blacks and whites grow faster than expected when school is in session. Their findings suggest that something about early schooling exacerbates black-white test-score gaps even while early schooling reduces gaps between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites. See also Downey, von Hippel, and Broh, “Are Schools the Great Equalizer?”; Gamoran, “American Schooling and Educational Inequality.”

58. Selcuk Sirin, "Socioeconomic Status and Academic Achievement: A Meta-analytic Review of Research," *Review of Educational Research* 75, no. 3 (2005): 417–453.
59. Rothstein, *Class and Schools*.
60. Gregory Duncan and Katherine Magnuson, "Can Family Socioeconomic Resources Account for Racial and Ethnic Test Score Gaps?" *Future of Children* 15 (2005): 35–54.
61. National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Educational Statistics: 2006* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2006).
62. Russell Rumberger, "Parsing the Data on Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools," *North Carolina Law Review* 86 (2007): 1293–1314.
63. Laurence Steinberg, *Beyond the Classroom: Why School Reform Has Failed and What Parents Need to Do* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).
64. Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley, *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children* (Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing, 1995).
65. Larry V. Hedges and Amy Nowell, "Changes in the Black-White Gap in Achievement Test Scores," *Sociology of Education* 7 (1999): 111–135; Barton and Coley, "The Black-White Achievement Gap."
66. Jencks and Phillips, *The Black-White Test Score Gap*.
67. Cecily R. Hardaway and Vonnie C. McLoyd, "Escaping Poverty and Securing Middle Class Status: How Race and Socioeconomic Status Shape Mobility Prospects for African Americans During the Transition to Adulthood," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 38 (2009): 242–256; Amy J. Orr, "Black-White Differences in Achievement: The Importance of Wealth," *Sociology of Education* 76 (2003): 281–304; W. Jean Yeung and Dalton Conley, "Black-White Achievement Gap and Family Wealth," *Child Development* 79, no. 2 (2008): 303–324.
68. Estimates from the Survey of Income and Program Participation indicate that in 2002, Latino households had a net worth of about \$8,000 while African American households had a net worth of only \$6,000. See Rakesh Kochhar, *The Wealth of Hispanic Households: 1996 to 2002* (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, 2004). White households, on the other hand, had a median net worth of approximately \$90,000. Stated in slightly different terms, 95 percent of Latino and black households have a net worth below the median level of white households. A growing consensus among scholars who study wealth is that a fundamental, and perhaps primary, source of wealth disparities is divergent access to inheritances and in vivo transfers. See Robert B. Avery and Michael S. Rendall, "Lifetime Inheritances of Three Generations of Whites and Blacks," *American Journal of Sociology* 107, no. 4 (2002): 1300–1346; and William A. Darity, "Forty Acres and a Mule in the 21st Century," *Social Science Quarterly* 89, no. 3 (2008): 656–664.
69. Yeung and Conley, "Black-White Achievement Gap and Family Wealth," 303.
70. *Ibid.*, 322.
71. Dalton Conley, "Capital for College: Parental Assets and Postsecondary Schooling," *Sociology of Education* 74, no. 1 (2001): 59–72; Pfeffer, "Persistent Inequality in Educational Attainment and Its Institutional Context."
72. Thomas Shapiro, Tatjana Meschede, and Laura Sullivan, "Racial Wealth Gap Increases Fourfold" (Waltham, MA: Institute on Assets and Social Policy, Brandeis University, 2010).
73. Claude M. Steele, "A Threat in the Air: How Stereotypes Shape Intellectual Identity and Performance," *American Psychologist* 52 (1997): 613–629.
74. McKinsey & Company Social Sector Office, "The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America's Schools," May 16, 2011, http://www.mckinsey.com/client-service/social-sector/achievement_gap_report.pdf; Chapman, Laird, and Ramani, "Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States."
75. Henry M. Levin et al., "The Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education for All of America's Children" (New York: Center for Cost Based Studies, Columbia University, 2007), www.cbsce.org.
76. National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, "Policy Alert: Income of U.S. Workforce Projected to Decline if Education Doesn't Improve" (San Jose, CA: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2005).
77. Levin et al., "The Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education for All of America's Children"; Cecilia E. Rouse, "Quantifying the Costs of Inadequate Education: Consequences of the Labor Market," in *The Price We Pay: Economic and Social Consequences of Inadequate Education*, eds. Clive R. Belfield and Henry M. Levin (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2007), 99–124.
78. Symonds, Schwartz, and Ferguson, *Pathways to Prosperity*.
79. As Kirkland (2010) documents, the history of this phrase, "the achievement gap," dates at least back to the early 1960s when Chicago's Hauser Report anticipated that desegregation and expanding educational opportunities would instigate "a major closing of the achievement gap." See Phillip M. Hauser et al., *Integration of the Public Schools: Chicago* (Chicago: Chicago Board of Education, Chicago Public Schools, 1964), 20–21, emphasis added; David E. Kirkland, "'Black Skin, White Masks': Normalizing Whiteness and the Trouble with the Achievement Gap," *Teachers College Record*, advance online publication, ID Number: 16116.
80. Levin et al., "The Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education for All of America's Children"; Elaine L. Chao, Emily DeRocco, and Maria K. Flynn, "Adult Learners in Higher Education: Barriers to Success and Strategies to Improve Results," in *Adult Education: Issues and Developments*, eds. Patricia N. Blakely and Anna H. Tomlin (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2008), 271–354.
81. Barton and Coley, "The Black-White Achievement Gap."
82. Miller, *An American Imperative*.
83. Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*; James Traub, "What No School Can Do," *New York Times*, January 16, 2000.
84. Robert L. Crowson, ed., *Community Development and School Reform* (Oxford: Elsevier Science Ltd., 2001); Ellen B. Goldring and Charles Hausman, "Civic Capacity and School Principals: The Missing Links for Community Development," in *Community Development and School Reform*, ed. Robert L. Crowson (Oxford: Elsevier Science Ltd., 2001), 193–209.
85. Lorraine McDonnell and Richard Elmore, "Getting the Job Done: Alternative Policy Instruments," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 9 (1987): 133–152.

86. Jeffery R. Henig and S. Paul Reville, "Why Attention Will Return to Non-School Factors," *Education Week*, May 25, 2011.
87. Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London: Verso, 2010).
88. Leon Wieseltier, "Post-Post Imperialist," *The New Republic* 242 (2011): 36.