



## Black Parent Initiative Seeks To Close The Achievement Gap

BY APRIL BAER

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In Multnomah County, a new study is pointing the way to fixing inequity between black and white students. April Baer reports on the Black Parent Initiative's new report on the achievement gap.

Multnomah County's school districts are doing several things already to level the playing field.

Here at Faubion, a K-8 school in the Portland District, kids can stay late for after-school activities--some academic, some just fun--through a county-funded enrichment program.

These kids are learning to play chess, spilling supersized plastic pieces out onto felt chessboards. Down the hall another group's getting help with homework.

But the report released Wednesday suggests that while programs like this are important, kids must be reached before first grade. The study accessed an unprecedented pile of test scores, tracking what Multnomah County kids know, but also how they performed over time.

John Tapogna is the researcher contracted to crunch the numbers. He says the big finding is that African-American students aren't consistently losing ground over their school careers, compared to white classmates. But they are starting school less prepared.

John Tapogna "So if this were a running race, in essence what we have is two groups of runners, one that has started maybe 5 or 6 seconds ahead of the other group. And the two groups are running at the same pace around the track, and the first group is beginning to cross a finish line. And maybe half of that group has come across the line. But that pack behind, maybe only some of those students have got across that line."

The Black Parent Initiative commissioned the study, with funding from the Chalkboard Project, a statewide school research group.

BPI is roping together Chalkboard, other academic groups, and political leaders from around the county, to figure out what to do next.

Some of those gathered to hear the study's results were guarded in their optimism.

Grant Ewell: "It was nice that they compiled the data, but I think it's stuff they already knew."

Grant Ewell has four kids enrolled at Faubion, and is involved with the school. He's keenly aware how many times the achievement gap has been discussed, but not fully addressed in the past.

But even though schools still trying to work out how to fully fund the rest of 2009, district and county leaders insist they are in a position to extend best practices to more schools.

County chair Ted Wheeler. Ted Wheeler "From my own perspective as I read the report, going through my mind the entire time was the reality that it's completely doable. We have it in our ability to close this achievement gap, and we have the ability to do it relatively quickly."

The Chalkboard Project is interested in tracking other groups, like Latino students, in future studies. The Coalition's meetings will begin in March.

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