

Executive Summary

A Deeper Look at the Black-White Achievement Gap in Multnomah County

Demystifying the Black-White Achievement Gap

Over the past ten years, Multnomah County schools have become increasingly diverse, yet the achievement gap between Black and White students has remained a constant and serious challenge.

In 2008, the Black Parent Initiative (BPI) approached the Chalkboard Project to develop a data-driven **"A Deeper Look at the Black-White Achievement Gap in Multnomah County: A Report to the Black Parent Initiative."** The purpose of the report is to focus the conversation around the achievement gap and mobilize the community to take precise action to eliminate it.

With a grant from Chalkboard, BPI commissioned ECONorthwest to develop a statistical portrait of Black students and their teachers spanning six school districts in Multnomah County. The research reveals that the gap is not primarily about the pace at which students learn, but where they start out. These findings serve as a critical launching pad for community discussion and swift action around one of the 21st century's greatest challenges.



Keeping Pace, But Not Catching Up THE REAL ACHIEVEMENT GAP DILEMMA

ECONorthwest's research shows that Black students are keeping pace with White students, but most schools are not helping them to close the gap. Where Black students exhibit high growth, White students are also doing well. Where Black students struggle, White students struggle too. Yet the gap persists.

The gap between Black and White students exists even before kids enter school. Once in school, the gap generally does not widen—Black students tend to stay about 1.5 grades behind their White peers.

Across all grades, Black students are significantly more likely than White students to change schools from one year to the next. In early grades, Black students are about 1.5 times more likely to change schools than White students. By high school, Black students are nearly twice as likely to change schools as White students.

Teacher turnover impacts Black students more frequently than White students. The middle school years see the greatest turnover as Black students have a 27% chance of having a teacher new to their school and Whites have

a 17% chance of having a teacher new to their school.

When controlling for income, about 40% of the achievement gap disappears. Income is defined as students enrolled in the federal free and reduced school lunch program.

Schools Making Gains

A key purpose of the project was to highlight Multnomah County schools that serve Black students especially well. Few schools have consistently positive or negative achievement gaps between Black and White students for reading and math. However, a handful of schools stand out for their progress. The schools listed below have Black students who learned at a higher rate than the countywide average for Black students and they closed the gap with White students in their own schools.

READING

Early Grades: Shaver, Sabin

Middle Grades: Dexter McCarty, Gray, Sabin, Mt. Tabor, George

MATH

Early Grades: Grout, Hollydale

Middle Grades: Hosford

High Schools: Reynolds, Grant

What's Next?

A ROADMAP TO STRONGER ACHIEVEMENT

The Black Parent Initiative will convene a coalition of stakeholders to address key questions and generate potential solutions: **Why are some schools closing the gap faster than other schools and what policies can be put in place to ensure the gap closes swiftly?**

- BPI and the Portland Schools Foundation will convene the coalition which will include: the Chalkboard Project, Stand for Children, Children's Institute, local unions, school districts and governments.
- Coalition leaders will include: Jackie Dingfielder, State Senator (District 23); Jeff Cogen, Multnomah County Commissioner; Lorenzo Poe, former PPS School Board member; and Preston Pulliams, PCC President.
- The coalition, funded by the United Way of the Columbia-Willamette and the NW Area Foundation, will meet for six months starting in March to create a community-led strategy to address the achievement gap. It will make formal recommendations by December 2009.
- As stakeholders in the political process, Black leaders must have a substantial role in school reform of any kind. BPI is committed to engaging Multnomah county's Black community, including historically Black faith institutions.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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United Way of the Columbia-Willamette / 503-228-9131 / unitedway-pdx.org

Portland Schools Foundation / 503-234-5404 / thinkschools.org



The Academic Achievement Gap

The Academic Achievement Gap describes **the difference in academic proficiency between low income or minority students and their peers.**

Traditionally, this is measured by comparing the students who meet or exceed state standards in reading and math with those who don't.

Why is this analysis different?

The traditional 'meet and exceed' portrayal of the achievement gap suggests a dramatic widening for higher grades simply because of where the 'meets' line falls. This report performs a deeper assessment of student-by-student learning gains from year to year, providing a more comprehensive look at how Black students are learning in the region's schools.

A snapshot of Black students in Multnomah County:

In the 2006-07 school year, **10,403 Black students were enrolled in six Multnomah county school districts, and 72% attended Portland Public Schools.**

Based on participation in the Federal School Lunch Program, **79% of Black students are economically disadvantaged.**