

TOWARD SKILLED PARENTING & TRANSFORMED SCHOOLS
INSIDE A NATIONAL MOVEMENT FOR *EXCELLENCE WITH EQUITY*

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Seven years ago, Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips co-edited an influential volume entitled the *Black-White Test Score Gap*, published by Brookings Press. The author of the present paper had two chapters in that volume, one was on teacher perceptions and expectations; the second covered pre-school, class-size, grouping and tracking, teacher quality and matching of teachers and students by race.¹ The second chapter in particular, reviewed the best research-based evidence available at the time, bearing on whether policies on the list could help close black-white gaps in grades and standardized test scores.

There was evidence that high quality pre-schools could have lasting effects and that small classes *in the early grades* were beneficial, especially for blacks and the poor. The conclusion on grouping and tracking was that what really matters is the quality of instruction; children can be taught well using a variety of grouping arrangements, but homogeneous low-ability groups, where nonwhites are overrepresented, may frequently be taught poorly.² Regarding teacher quality, the answer was unambiguously that teacher skill matters a great deal and that poor and nonwhite children are often matched with weaker teachers both within and between schools. Finally, whether matching student and teacher race was an effective way to raise achievement turned out to have a complicated answer, in which both race and social class backgrounds came into play.³ Recent literature has added detail to these answers, but has not fundamentally changed them.

At the same time, civic and policy contexts have changed a great deal in seven years. Because of No Child Left Behind legislation in 2001, awareness of achievement gaps has penetrated the national consciousness. People in every community are aware that there are subgroup rules, and that performances on state exams by children in

particular subgroups determine whether their schools make adequate yearly progress—or for short, AYP.

While making AYP is a short-term concern in any given community, closing the achievement gap is a long-term challenge with long-term implications for the nation. There are reasons to be hopeful. There has been long-term progress in narrowing racial test score gaps since the early 1970s, when the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) began tracking test scores at the national level, by racial group.⁴ For example, the black-white reading score gap for 17-year olds narrowed by sixty percent between 1971 and 1988 (but then slightly widened)⁵ and there is new evidence that the black-white IQ gap is narrowing.⁶ The long-term experience of the nation establishes clearly that progress is possible. Now, for reasons addressed below, progress needs to continue and even accelerate. The present paper aims to affect how readers understand the longer-term challenge and suggests that each of us has a role in the social movement that is developing to meet it.

This paper argues that skillful parenting and deeply transformative community-level school reforms, are two important and feasible goals to pursue inside the broader national movement for *excellence with equity* that we need to keep building—a movement aimed relentlessly at high standards of achievement among children from all racial, ethnic and social class backgrounds. The first section expands briefly upon the “movement” idea and introduces some basic principles. The second reviews evidence on socioeconomic inequalities, disparities in parenting practices (some of which help predict achievement gaps) and the effectiveness of parenting interventions. Some aspects of the discussion in this section are unflattering for blacks and Latinos. As a black American, this author is

aware that bigots will cite these findings for racist purposes. However, we must not allow bigots to intimidate us into silence on issues we need to address. The point here is to look forward with hope at opportunities and responsibilities for progress, not backward to craft excuses or assign blame for the rights and wrongs that our ancestors of various racial groups imposed or suffered at one another's hands. The conclusion of this section is that parenting should be a serious focus of strategies to raise achievement and close gaps, *including for college-educated households.*

The third section concerns improving schools by transforming whole school systems, from within. Whole-school reform models and other types of programs that originate outside school systems have a role. Experimental evaluations show they often have positive impacts. But if achievement gaps are to close dramatically across the nation, school systems will need their own internal capacities and supportive political constituencies for long-term excellence. The paper highlights Union City, New Jersey. With no real change in its high-poverty racial-minority demographic profile, it rose from the second lowest performing New Jersey district in 1989, to become a model of high achievement where 80 percent proficiency rates on state exams are not unusual and many graduates matriculate to four-year colleges. The national movement to close achievement gaps can experience a great deal of success, if Union City is any indication at all of what is possible.

WHY A MOVEMENT?

A movement is a broadly diffuse collection of people mobilized by a common sense of purpose to change the world in a particular way. In the U.S., female suffrage and civil rights were the pivotal movements of the 20th century. Now, early in the 21st

century, there is an emergent movement to raise academic achievement and close skill gaps between children from different racial, ethnic and social class backgrounds.

Universities, governments and civic organizations around the nation are changing policies, launching institutes, developing projects and conceiving campaigns. In every one of these instances, raising achievement and closing gaps is the goal.

The focus on achievement gaps is inspired by concern for the nation's future. Less than fifty years from now, racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups that are over represented among low achievers, and under represented among high achievers, will be the majority of the population and workforce. Even more than today, technology and trade will pit workers head-to-head in competition with others around the world. The elderly will be a larger share of the population. When young parents lack reading, math and job skills to avoid poverty, they will compete with the elderly for public supports. Tax burdens on the nonpoor with earnings will be high. Internationally, the most elevated standards of living will obtain in nations where workers are most skilled and politics most stable. Where the U.S. will rank in the mix is uncertain. More than we might like to acknowledge, the social stability and vitality of the nation we leave our children depends fundamentally upon how relentlessly and effectively we pursue *excellence with equity* now and over the next several decades.

In crafting the messages that accompany strategies, policies, programs and projects, movement leaders should target all the many roles from which adults influence child learning and development. At base, these include roles as parents, teachers and leaders in the homes, classrooms, playgrounds and even doctors' and nurses' offices, where face-to-face experiences most directly produce learning and development.⁷ Beyond

individual settings, adults affect how multiple settings connect to achieve consistency and synergy for the children who move back-and-forth between them.⁸ Further, adults make decisions in workplaces, central administration offices and committees of various kinds in which children typically *do not* participate, but where adults shape many of the rules, resources and routines that apply in those settings where the children *do* participate.⁹ Finally, adults craft and maintain the “cultural blueprint” of laws, language, religions, property relations and norms, including ways that race, ethnicity and social class affect access to power and privilege.¹⁰ Adults affect children through each of these many roles. Leaders in the movement for *excellence with equity* should seek ways to involve them all.

SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES

A movement for *excellence with equity* should aspire to high quality learning opportunities for children and adults alike. Fortunately, there is substantial agreement on the types of experiences that children and adults need in order to learn and thrive and the conditions most likely to produce those experiences. The National Research Council Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth reviewed a wide range of youth development studies—quantitative, qualitative and theoretical—and found broad commonality in frameworks and findings (Eccles and Gootman, 2002). Semantics varied, but the ideas were consistent. The following eight “features of positive developmental settings” synthesize a great deal of research. While the committee was focused on youth, the list is universal. Hence, eight features that a movement for *excellence with equity* would do well to promote for every home, classroom or workplace where people learn and develop, are the following:¹¹

1. *Physical and psychological safety* (to prevent feelings of fear and anxiety that might interfere with concentration or motivate withdrawal from participation);

2. *Appropriate structure* (for example, rules to make clear what forms of individual initiative are to be rewarded or penalized, and to provide boundaries within and around which individuals can set and pursue goals);
3. *Supportive relationships* (to foster positive emotional states and willingness to take risks that might require social support);¹²
4. *Opportunities to belong* (with an emphasis on accommodating to individual skills and interests);
5. *Positive social norms* (to induce healthy behaviors and aspirations, avoiding incentives to be self-destructive or do harm to others);
6. *Support for efficacy and mattering* (to inspire and enable initiative and persistence toward individual and group goals and provide opportunities to make contributions that others value);
7. *Opportunities for skill building* (to support development of physical, intellectual, social, psychological and emotional skills);
8. *Integration of family, school and community efforts* (to reduce inconsistencies and promote supportive synergies across settings).

The more consistently children and adults encounter these conditions across multiple settings, the more they will develop the skills and proclivities that prepare them for success. Beware, however, that the list is not a blanket endorsement for peace and harmony under all conditions. As every parent knows, conflict and stress are sometimes necessary for achieving “appropriate structure” (the second item on the list). As well, conflict and stress are to be expected during periods of dramatic change, when vested interests or attachments to old ways pose resistance.

PARENTING

Especially when children are young, home is a very important place and parents are extremely important people. Parents have profound influence over how homes rate on the *features of positive developmental settings* listed above, some of which turn out to be

race and SES correlated. In particular, within racial groups, research is clear that higher SES parents provide more opportunities at home for academic skill building (item 7) and tend to be better at integrating family, school and community efforts (item 8). Similar differences obtain between racial groups, where home literacy practices contribute to produce higher achievement by whites and Asians, compared to blacks and Hispanics. This section reports on racial and SES patterns in parenting practices, reviews key findings on the relationship of parenting to achievement and summarizes evidence on the effectiveness of parenting interventions.

Resources

It is important to recognize, at the outset, that resource disparities are important to the story for why parenting practices and *opportunities* for effective parenting differ across groups. Compared to typical white parents, poor whites and nonwhites on average have lower incomes. They have fewer years of schooling and fewer academic skills for any given amount of schooling (Phillips et. al., 1998). They work fewer weeks per year, at lower average wages and have accumulated less wealth (Neal, 2005). They are more stigmatized by assumptions of inferiority (Loury, 2002) and have fewer social network ties to people and institutions that control information or have capacity to provide other forms of assistance (Dickens, 1999).

Resource disparities do predict achievement gaps. Further, policies and programs that raise income for very poor households have been found to boost achievement among young children.¹³ Duncan and Magnuson (2005) conclude based on a variety of studies that socioeconomic resource disparities predict about one-half standard deviation of the test score gap between whites, on the one hand, and blacks and Hispanics, on the other.

This magnitude is robust across a number of studies covering different age groups. One-half standard deviation is typically between one-half and two-thirds (occasionally more) of the total racial achievement gap in any given study.

Many mechanisms have been suggested (though causation is not always proven) for why income and other socioeconomic resources are such strong predictors of student achievement. For example, parents with more resources have access to safer neighborhoods with better schools and more studious peers (e.g., Hanushek, Kain and Rivkin, 2002; Orfield, 2005); teachers are more likely to welcome input from high-SES parents and treat them respectfully (e.g., Lareau and Horvat, 1999); high-SES parents can afford more learning tools and materials in the home (Brooks-Gunn and Markman, 2005); they may be less stressed by survival pressures and therefore have more patience in helping their children (e.g., McLoyd, 1998; Conger, Conger and Elder, 1997); they may have better and more reliable health services; and the list goes on. To help redress these inequities, policy and programmatic interventions over the years have endeavored to improve school quality in poor areas, increase access to better neighborhoods, improve parent teacher communication, supplement home learning resources, help parents with stress management, provide access to health care services, and more. All these things are expected to complement or substitute for parental resources. Experience has produced both successes and failures, with no magic bullets, but lots of helpful lessons to build on.¹⁴

Learning-at-Home Disparities

Epstein (1995) characterizes six types of parental involvement.¹⁵ Of the six, she argues that “learning at home” is the most reliably associated with gains in achievement. In an authoritative literature review on the contribution of pre-school parenting to racial

and ethnic gaps in school readiness, Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005) identify racial and ethnic differences on five dimensions of pre-school parenting. All involve learning at home; research has established that all five are contributors to school readiness. They include: *nurturance* (expressions of love, affection and care); *discipline* (responses to behaviors that parents regarded as inappropriate); *teaching* (strategies for transmitting information or skills to the child); *language* (the amounts and characteristics of verbal communication with the child); and *materials* (books, recordings and other materials to support learning). Note similarities to the eight features of positive developmental settings, summarized above from the NRC report. There is more evidence for black-white than for Hispanic-white comparisons, but in all instances, when the average for blacks or Hispanics differs from that for whites, whites rate higher on the measured practices. Generally, the best studies find racial differences in pre-school parenting ranging from one-fifth to three-fifths of a standard deviation, depending on the particular parenting practices (Brooks-Gunn and Markman, 2005). Programming that reduces these differences can shrink achievement gaps at kindergarten entry.

But should middle-class whites be the models? Many people question the validity of using standards from one group to judge the quality of parenting in another. Brooks-Gunn and Markman recount how their black graduate students resisted the standard two-way contrast between authoritative parenting (warm but with firm control) and authoritarian (negative, lacking warmth, harsh control) that had become a standard way of differentiating parental styles. The students suggested that some very effective black parents might be misclassified under this scheme, and they were correct. Brooks-Gunn and Markman explain:

We did an exploratory analysis using a sample of about 700 black and white mothers of toddlers, attempting to identify clusters of mothers based on our videotaped ratings on both domains [authoritative and authoritarian]. We identified not two but four groups of mothers—those who were high in warm, firm control and low in negative, harsh control (the classic authoritative behavior); those who were high in negative, harsh control and low in warm, firm control (the classic authoritarian behavior); those who were relatively high in both (what we termed “tough love”); and those who were low in both (what we termed “detached”). (p. 148)

The standard authoritarian group was dominated by teenage mothers of both racial groups and many were high school dropouts. In contrast, the “tough love” group was mostly older black mothers, with at least a high school education. The standard formulation would have cast them as authoritarian—typically the weakest form of parenting. But the children of these “tough love” mothers had higher IQ scores and larger vocabularies than the children of detached or authoritarian mothers.¹⁶

“Tough love” is an example where a given practice differs in prevalence and effectiveness across racial groups. Nonetheless, the general finding in this literature is that there are more similarities than differences, regarding which practices predict positive child outcomes. Closing racial and SES gaps in the prevalence of practices that are positively associated with learning can help close achievement gaps.

While much of the literature focuses on low-income and poorly educated parents, learning-at-home gaps appear at all levels of parental education and for students at all grade levels. In the nationally representative Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey, Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K), numbers of children’s books in the home for kindergarten children reported by college-graduate African American mothers were more similar to reports from high-school-educated than college educated whites. (See Table 1.)

--Table 1 goes about here and can be found now at the back of the paper.--

There were also black-white differences in reading to children, discussing nature and science, singing and playing games. Whites reported more reading and conversations about nature; blacks reported more singing, playing games and doing puzzles.¹⁷ (See Table 2.) Fryer and Levitt (2004) use the ECLS-K to explore how SES, books in the home and other measures predict scores as children enter kindergarten. After controlling for an index of standard SES measures, they find that adding the number of children's books to the equation reduced the residual black-white gaps in arithmetic and reading-readiness scores by an additional 0.13 standard deviations—equal to one fifth of the black-white arithmetic gap and one third of the black-white reading gap, in the ECLS-K data.¹⁸ Obviously, this does not mean that buying more books, *per se*, should be a prescription to any group for raising achievement. Surely, the associated literacy practices are what matter (including the ways that books are read *and discussed*).

--Table 2 goes about here and can be found now at the back of the paper.--

Fryer and Levitt (2004) note that when equations are estimated separately by racial groups, the payoff to higher SES in the form of higher school readiness scores is somewhat lower for blacks than for whites, but the basic patterns in the findings remain. Similarly, Sirin (2005) used 74 independent samples from which the relationship of SES to achievement had been estimated and published in journal articles between 1990 and 2000. The meta-analysis that he conducted found, as expected, that nonwhites have fewer resources than whites and thus lower predicted achievement among their children. However, like Fryer and Levitt, he found in addition that parental SES tends to be a stronger predictor of achievement for white students than for minorities. Why? Sirin suggested tentatively that “neighborhood and school SES, not family SES, may exert a

more powerful effect on academic achievement in minority communities, particularly in African American communities” (p. 441). This is one possibility, but not the only one.

For example, differences in the payoff to higher SES can exist among students of different racial groups living in the same community and attending the same school. Studies would tend to find this result if, for example, there are racial differences in peer culture or learning-at-home environments, among students from different racial groups who have the same measured SES.

I have estimated the relationship of SES to achievement for almost 40,000 middle and high school students from the 15 suburban districts (across six states) of the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN).¹⁹ On average, white and Asian students in these communities arrive at school with greater socioeconomic background advantages, compared to blacks and Hispanics. But they also attend the same schools and live in similar neighborhoods. These are not bad neighborhoods. Nonetheless, like Sirin’s meta-analysis, the MSAN data show a stronger relationship of SES to achievement for whites (and also Asians) than for non-Asian students of color. SES measures here include parents’ years of schooling, household structure (two-parents, stepparents, etc.), number of siblings and books and computers in the home.

Table 3 shows the distribution of households across four SES categories in the MSAN data;²⁰ most whites and Asians are in the upper middle and higher SES categories, while most blacks, Hispanics and mixed-race students are in the lower middle and low categories.²¹ These disparities alone would predict differences in achievement. In addition, however, Table 4 shows that achievement disparities in MSAN communities are greatest at the highest SES levels. Other data sets, as well, have shown greater racial

disparities at higher SES levels.²² Equalizing SES, at least by standard measures, would go only part of the way toward equalizing school achievement among racial groups if there are racial differences in parenting practices or peer dynamics, even within SES categories.

--Table 3 goes about here and can be found now at the back of the paper.--

--Table 4 goes about here and can be found now at the back of the paper.--

Last spring, I surveyed elementary school students in 29 public schools across a dozen school districts. Most were suburban districts similar to the MSAN districts discussed directly above, though some were inner city. Survey items included several pertaining to learning conditions at home. Table 5 shows selected items and percentages responding “yes” (instead of “maybe” or “no”), among Asian, black, Hispanic and white students. All were 1st through 6th graders in May of 2005. The table shows responses for both “advantaged” and “disadvantaged” students. “Advantaged” were defined as those who reported at least one computer and two adults in the home; “disadvantaged” lived in single parent homes or lacked a computer in the home, or both.

--Table 5 goes about here and can be found now at the back of the paper.--

Racial and SES patterns in Table 5 show interesting differences in learning-at-home environments.²³ Blacks, Hispanics and whites in Panel A of Table 5 appear to have more supportive home conditions than Asians. Compared with Asians, larger percentages of blacks, Hispanics and whites report that help with homework is always available if needed, that parents express curiosity about what they are learning at school and try to make learning fun. These are all conditions one would assume to support learning.

However, upon inspecting Panel B, one suspects that Asians (and whites) may nonetheless have the net advantage. Items in Panel B seem more related to home-learning time on task. Asians agree most that, “I read almost everyday at home.” Advantaged Asians are the only group more likely to have a computer than a television in their bedrooms. Both advantaged and disadvantaged Asians indicated less television watching than blacks and Hispanics (and far less watching rap videos). Moreover, a smaller percentage of Asians than other groups report becoming sleepy at school. This may partly explain why a smaller percentage of Asians than other groups agree that, “Sometimes my teacher says I don’t pay attention like I should.” Whites are similar to blacks and Hispanics in Panel A and to Asians in Panel B.

This constellation of findings should cause those of us who are parents of school-aged children to take notice. Having done so, there are several possible responses. One is simply to await more evidence. Another is to campaign against presenting such data in public because they might stigmatize and contribute to stereotypes. A more constructive response is to consider whether there are things we should be changing in our own homes, then act on what we decide. That would be a start.

Pre-School Parenting and School Readiness Interventions

According to Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005, p. 139), “When researchers measuring school readiness gaps control for parenting differences, the racial and ethnic gaps narrow by 25-50 percent. *And it is possible to alter parenting behavior to improve readiness.*” Brooks-Gunn and Markman report that center-based preschool programs that have parenting components tend to improve both parenting and school readiness among poor children. They report that family literacy programs can improve school readiness as

well. However, home-based parenting programs without a center-based child-care component tend to benefit the mother, but not the child, at least over the time span that most studies cover.

The encouraging findings that Brooks-Gunn and Markman report for pre-school programs with parenting components are mainly from high quality experimental studies. A National Research Council (NRC) review in 2001, entitled Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers, concluded, as Brooks-Gunn and Markman do, that *high quality* preschool programs with parenting components can have positive and lasting effects. However, the NRC report added that parenting components of most current programs would need to improve in order to be comparable to those that evaluations show are most effective. They write: “The extent to which program effects on children could be enhanced by improved parent involvement is unclear. Although the theoretical basis for efficacy is clear, many current efforts to work with parents do not appear to be effective. Given this apparent discrepancy, rigorous research aimed at identifying highly effective parent involvement strategies would be extremely valuable.”²⁴

Interventions with Parents of School-Aged Children

Policies and programs to involve parents in support of their school-aged children’s learning have proliferated over the past four decades, encouraged by findings from research (Epstein, 1996; Christenson et al., 1992; Moles, 1993; Fruchter, Galletta & White, 1993; Carey, Lewis & Farris, 1998). In the early 1990s, a publication of the U.S. Department of Education proclaimed: “Three decades of research have shown that parental participation improves students’ learning. This is true whether the child is in preschool or the upper grades, whether the family is rich or poor, whether the parents

finished high school . . .” (Ballen & Moles, 1994, p.2). In the often-cited report, *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement*, Henderson & Berla (1994) went so far as to claim: “The evidence is now beyond dispute. When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school but throughout life” (p.1).

While optimistic that parent involvement can help raise student achievement, some researchers are more cautious (Baker & Soden, 1998; Rutherford, Billig & Kettering, 1993; Christenson, Rounds & Franklin, 1992; Ascher, 1988). Baker and Soden (1998) critically analyze hundreds of studies and find “the lack of scientific rigor in the research informing practice and policy” has contributed greatly to the confusion faced by those who attempt to understand the field of parent involvement.²⁵ One reason research on parental involvement is often “messy,” is that programs cover a broad range of activities and most have multiple components. Further, complexity is compounded when programs are embedded in comprehensive school reform initiatives, such as the Accelerated Schools Project, Success for All, the School Development Program and others. Isolating effects of parent involvement in complex interventions is extremely difficult and seldom attempted.²⁶

There is a well-known saying by evaluation expert the late Donald Campbell, that one should, “Evaluate no program before it is proud.” So, quite appropriately, the vast majority of studies, books and articles on parent involvement focus not on evaluation of parental involvement programs, but on what it takes to make them work—to help them become “proud.” Challenges to becoming “proud” include: limited skills and knowledge on which to build collaboration; lack of resources (of all types); misperceptions between

parents and teachers about each other's motives and beliefs; low expectations and negative attitudes; cultural differences between families and schools; lack of interest; lack of trust; lack of systemic support; and problematic parent-professional interaction issues, such as negative communication around poor student performance. Implementation can be profoundly challenging, especially for schools serving middle and high school students in low-income neighborhoods.²⁷

Jeynes (2004) reports on findings from recent a meta-analysis of 53 studies of parental involvement. All measure effects on *secondary* students' academic achievement. The studies used a variety of methodologies, so the analysis is most accurately understood as showing a pattern of associations—estimated effects may or may not be causal. The expected positive correlation of parental involvement and student achievement was confirmed for most aspects of parental involvement that the studies covered, though relationships were statistically significant more often for grades than for standardized test scores. Based on his meta-analysis, Jeynes reports that effect sizes for “overall educational outcomes, grades, and academic achievement” averaged on the order of one-half standard deviation. Further, the magnitude was similar for whites and racial minorities.

Jeynes reports, “Parental involvement programs ... influenced educational outcomes, although to a lesser degree than preexisting expressions of parental support.” As Epstein (1995) suggested, Jeynes finds activities such as communication about school and participation in school functions, have smaller estimated relationships to achievement than do measures of parental style (e.g., authoritativeness and warmth) and expectations (e.g., for grades and years of schooling).

Turner, Nye and Schwartz (2004) report on a meta-analysis of parental involvement and academic achievement for students in grades K-5. To be included in their analysis, the following had to apply: (a) the treatment had to involve parental activities outside of formal schooling aimed at enhancing student achievement; (b) academic achievement had to be measured as an outcome, and (c) treatment and control groups had to be selected using random assignment. By the end of an exhaustive search, they had identified 19 such studies among hundreds of books and articles. Results were mixed, but the overall effect-size estimate was statistically significant and quantitatively meaningful, at 0.43 standard deviations. The average duration of programs in these studies was less than half a year of schooling. Since the studies were all randomized field trials, this effect size *can* be interpreted as causal. The final report with more details and a listing of the specific studies will be issued in the near future, at which time more can be learned about the specific treatments that produced these effects.

During 1999, my research assistant spent much of the year searching for studies that used random assignment or good quasi-experimental designs to test whether it was possible to change parenting in ways that enhanced achievement. At the time, she found only five that used these methodologies. The following is what they showed:

1. In comparison with a control group who received extra help neither at school nor at home, students' first- and second-grade reading achievement increased when parents listened to their children read school books at home 2-4 times each week. In comparison with an alternative treatment group given extra reading help at school, however, no improvement was found (Tizard, Schofield & Hewison, 1982).
2. An intervention including parental involvement for at-risk, urban fourth- and fifth-graders improved scholastic and behavioral self-concept ratings – *but not academic achievement* (Fantuzzo, Davis & Ginsberg, 1995).

3. A homework intervention for sixth graders entailed three alternative treatments: (a) neither the student nor the family received guidance for involving family members with mathematics assignments; (b) the student received guidance on how to involve a family member; and (c) both the student and the family received guidance on how to involve family with math assignments. The study found that such guidance did not increase student achievement (Balli, Demo & Wedman, 1998).
4. Low-achieving, inner-city seventh graders assigned to a reading group that included parents for ten weeks showed the largest gains in fundamental reading skills six months later, compared to (a) a control group with no treatment, (b) a reading class without parent involvement, and (c) a school-based tutoring group (Rodick & Henggeler, 1980).
5. Inner-city, elementary students whose parents participated in a program designed to teach tutoring skills in reading and mathematics demonstrated positive effects, with experimental students showing a significant increase in achievement over the students in the control group (McKinney, 1975).

The strongest support for the value of parental involvement comes from the three studies that focus on parents' involvement in reading (Tizard, Schofield & Hewison, 1982; Rodick & Henggeler, 1980; and McKinney, 1975). Balli, Demo & Wedman (1998), found that efforts to involve parents did not significantly affect mathematics achievement (estimated effects were positive, but not statistically significant). Evidence from a correlational study by Epstein (1991) lends support to the differential impact of parental involvement on reading versus mathematics achievement. Specifically, based on a survey of teachers and principals and using achievement test scores of 293 third- and fifth-graders, Epstein found a positive correlation between teachers' efforts to achieve parent involvement and students' reading achievement, but not mathematics.

Because experimental studies randomly assign people to be treated or not, there is no systematic difference at baseline between the treated and the untreated. This makes it very likely that any post-treatment differences are due to the treatment, not to something

else. People trained in evaluation research tend to dismiss nonexperimental studies as unreliable. I usually count my self among that number. However, some non-experimental studies are worth taking seriously. Operation Higher Achievement aimed at helping parents of 826 African-American children in one inner-city elementary school to create conditions in the home to promote academic learning. Results show that students intensively exposed to the program gained 0.5 to 0.6 grade equivalents more during the year than those who were less intensively exposed (Walberg, Bole & Waxman 1980).

In the end, evaluation studies find that some parenting interventions produce achievement gains and some do not. Further, any given program model does not produce the same effects in every application. Nonetheless, enough interventions have produced gains with at least moderately large effect sizes, even in rigorously conducted experimental trials, that further consideration of parenting interventions as achievement-gap interventions is warranted.

There is a great deal of activity already in motion around the nation that focuses on helping parents to be effective. This reviewer intends to learn more about them and to make them more central to both research and intervention efforts aimed at helping children achieve at higher levels. Strategies should differ depending upon the populations involved and their capacity to help themselves. Future work with middle class households, especially among blacks and Latinos, might best be pursued by asking organizations that blacks and Latinos control to take lead roles in designing, implementing and monitoring new efforts.

TRANSFORMATIVE SCHOOL REFORM

Over the past few decades, educators have designed and implemented a huge number of programs to help teachers become more effective. Most have not been widely replicated. Among those that have, a limited number have been evaluated rigorously for impact, and among these some have proven effective enough to justify broader replication. Though no program is guaranteed to work under all conditions and findings are almost always mixed, evaluation results have been encouraging for Success for All, Direct Instruction, Comer's School Development Program, First-Things-First, Talent Development, Job Corps and several others. Those with more finely specified components, better training for teachers and professionally managed implementation tend to show the most consistent results. Generally, implementation tends to be stronger when the program developer and his or her organization are directly involved. However, I argue in this section that state and local leaders in the movement for *excellence with equity* should depend upon such programs only as a means toward the longer-term goal of institutionalizing excellence in the people and social networks that are embedded in the everyday life of their districts.

Indeed, there is plenty of evidence that programmatic interventions *can* have positive impacts on achievement in schools and communities.²⁸ Whether they actually do in any particular case, depends upon a number of factors. For example, in a survey of teachers that I conducted last spring, I listed seventeen reasons that a program might have little if any impact on teaching or learning.²⁹ The survey instruction read: "Recall the last professional development program at your school that had little or no effect on teaching or

learning in your class. With that program in mind, please check all of the following responses that apply.” The four items teachers checked most often were the following:

- It was just too much, on top of everything else the school was trying to do (37%);
- There was too little support and training (30%);
- Teachers were not held accountable for doing it (25%); and
- The way it was introduced didn’t inspire me to try (25%).

All told, 67 percent of elementary school respondents and 88 percent of secondary school respondents checked at least one of these four responses. In contrast, only 7 percent checked, “I really tried to make it work, but it just didn’t help my students.” Only 8 percent responded that, “I never thought it could work with my students.” Instead, the pattern of responses suggests that the main reasons the programs did not work was that the teachers did not implement them. This highlights the importance of capacity and leadership in the selection, introduction, scheduling, support and training and overall management of professional development programs.

I recall comments by Professor Robert Slavin of Johns Hopkins University at a conference roughly ten years ago, about the importance of district-level instructional leadership. He lamented that especially in large and politically difficult cities, school systems cannot effectively design and manage their own professional development. Ideally, he argued, the most talented people should be in the jobs most directly connected with the core mission—in charge of curriculum, instruction and professional development. Unfortunately, he reported, superintendents almost always pull their most talented people out of such jobs and assign them to the management of political crises. The consequence, Slavin continued, is that the only way to keep highly talented people attending over time

to the important work of teacher professional development is to have it based outside the system in free standing intermediary organizations and program vendors.

If school systems could keep talented leaders in curriculum and instruction jobs for as long as a decade, with stable political support for long-term strategic planning and implementation, including frequent reviews and midcourse corrections, might the result be the wholesale transformation of teaching and instruction? Might labor relations function more smoothly? Might teachers be better trained and instruction better differentiated to meet the needs of all students? Might people hold one another more accountable for giving their best effort? Would achievement rise? Would gaps become narrow? Could districts become highly effective design and implementation organizations for achieving excellence with equity?

The Union City Story³⁰

Union City New Jersey serves a very disadvantaged population. Ninety-three percent of students are Latinos of various nationalities. Eighty-six percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. Spanish is the primary language spoken in seventy-five percent of students' homes. Thirty percent of households live below the official poverty line.³¹

In 1989, Union City was the second lowest performing school system in New Jersey and the state was about to take control of the district. Rather than relinquish control to the state, the board authorized a total revamping of the system. There were two district level supervisors at the time whose departments were in good standing. One was Tom Highton, principal of the Gifted and Talented school; the other was Fred Carrigg, supervisor of bilingual and English as a second language (ESL) education for 12 years. Carrigg, in particular, had worked with all the schools and was well known to teachers in

the district and highly respected. The district appointed Highton to be superintendent and Carrigg to be the executive director of academic programs.

Highton and Carrigg accepted their appointments under the condition that they would have virtually complete control over budget lines, appointments, curriculum, schedules and other levers of effective administration. Literacy was to be the initial focus, with staged design and implementation to unfold over a period of years. “During the first year, they conducted research and made plans for implementation. In year two, they focused on the new curriculum for grades K-3; in year three, for grades 4-6; in year four, for grades 7-8. In the fifth year, they began planning for change at the high school level. It took ten years to implement the plans that would transform the district. The phase-in strategy meant that no student schooled in the new methods would enter a new grade only to face old-style instruction” (Carrigg, Honey, and Thorpe, p. 8).

The principles that guided the district’s work over this period will seem quite familiar to readers who have followed school reform discussions in recent years:

- *There must be broad consensus that all students can learn.*
- *The design of successful programs should be tailored to local conditions.*
- *Reform requires a long-term process with commitment to annual review and revision.*
- *Continual communication between policymakers and implementers is essential.*
- *Effective implementation requires ongoing support for teachers.*

Compared to other districts, the difference in Union City is that they were able to take these principles seriously for an extended period of time.

This was not a simple top-down reform. Carrigg began by convening an elementary literacy committee on which teachers were well represented and deeply

involved. Under Carrigg's leadership, the committee examined local conditions and critiqued old methods. As they redesigned the curriculum, they responded to what the New Jersey State Department of Education identified as things that students should know and be able to do, but they also surveyed Union City teachers on the same question. The committee combined the state's and the local teachers' ideas to design a curriculum and approach to instruction that were new for the district and geared in major ways to the Latino children in their classrooms.

For example, literacy would be taught in ways sensitive to standard challenges faced by children coming from Spanish language backgrounds. Children's literature was selected for its use of particular sounds, such as "h" and "p," to give children practice with those sounds, but in the context of entertaining stories. An extensive analysis of standard textbooks found the books lacking with regard to the skills the committee wanted children to learn. The textbooks already in use in the district became supplementary material, as the district shifted to build literacy instruction around real children's literature. "The new curriculum immersed students in print-rich environments with literature-based instruction taught through thematic units that connected subject areas, freeing teachers from the problematic cumulative subskills model and allowing them to address individual students in their individual areas of need" (Carrigg, Honey, and Thorpe, p. 11). Annual turnover at the school level in 1989 was 44 percent. This helped justify instituting the same curriculum and instructional methods across the whole district. District wide, teachers who had always used basal readers would be trained to do literature-based instruction.

Implementation began with a test of the new curriculum in twenty-percent of each early elementary grade level. The district's Kindergarten and first grade scores doubled the first year, almost totally because of the pilot classrooms. Later:

In one seven year period, the percentage of students who received passing eighth-grade test scores jumped from 33 percent to 83 percent in reading, from 42 percent to 65 percent in writing, and from 50 percent to 84 percent in mathematics. By 2000, 80 percent of high school students passed the New Jersey High School Proficiency Test. By 2000, Union City's test scores ranked highest among New Jersey cities with populations of 50,000 or more. . . . In 1994, 25 students were enrolled in AP classes and 20 percent passed. In 2000, the number increased to 146, with 38 percent passing. In addition, from 1996 to 2002, the district witnessed a fivefold increase in the number of students gaining acceptance to first-tier and second-tier colleges and universities. Of the 1,613 Union City public high school students who graduated in the years 1999-2001, 763 (47 percent) went on to four-year institutions, and another 283 (18 percent) to two-year institutions. (Carrigg, Honey and Thorpe, p. 7).

In a video that can be watched on the Internet, Carrigg recounts that when the first wave of students who had been taught in the new methods from kindergarten reached the high school, teachers had to change.³² The students had never experienced standard “chalk and talk” classrooms. They were accustomed to lots of interdependence, use of technology, opportunities to be creative and permission to question their readings, lessons and teachers. The high school had to adapt; one might say the students were an irresistible force.

Union City's story is one of sustained and conscientious application of rather familiar principles, applied creatively over a period of time to make instruction fit local circumstances and students. The conditions that facilitated this success—particularly the crisis that caused the board to delegate so much control and the availability of guru Fred Carrigg for 12 years—are not easy to duplicate. Also, the district was unusually graced with an ample supply of resources. Union City is one of thirty *Abbott* districts in New

Jersey that receive special support from the state, by virtue of a series of court decisions played out over 30 years. Thus, Union City is not a template to be carbon copied.

However, it is an existence proof. It establishes that whole school districts, not simply individual schools, can be reformed. Fred Carrigg now works for the State Department of Education in New Jersey and is in the early stages of helping other Abbott districts to apply the principles that have proven so effective in Union City.

Larger Cities³³

The Council of Great City Schools is the membership organization for most large city school districts in the U.S. Four years ago, the Council convened an advisory committee of school superintendents and education researchers to help design a study. The committee would identify cities making the most impressive progress and try to understand the reasons for their successes. The research and evaluation firm MDRC would help design the study, do the site visits and write the main report.

The advisory committee scanned the data looking for districts that met the following three criteria:

- Improvement in both reading and math in all or nearly all grades from the beginning of their state's testing program through spring 2001;
- Faster rates of improvement than their respective states had achieved *for at least three years*; and
- Simultaneous narrowing of racial-ethnic achievement gaps.

The districts selected for case studies were Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Houston and Sacramento. For these three districts, positive trends in elementary school scores were quite evident, and better than the respective state averages. Progress was greatest for the lowest scoring groups, so gaps had narrowed. Middle schools had achieved some

progress as well, though not as much as elementaries, and high schools had made no progress at all.

The study was admittedly exploratory—it would not be definitive. Some members of the advisory committee (including this author) thought there would be no valid basis for any judgments about what district actions or policies might be contributing to achievement. Still, the committee selected two anonymous comparison districts that had not experienced much improvement, and proceeded. The MDRC researchers would look for political and managerial differences between the case study and comparison districts, and offer judgments concerning whether some of those differences might help explain why the case study districts had done better.

What the MDRC researchers found was more coherent than anyone had a right to expect. Similar to Union City, all three case study districts had begun from a very low level. Perhaps even more than Union City, each had a chaotic political history before the reforms that lead to improvement. There had been political factionalism on the school boards, infighting among school departments and bad relations between schools and central administration. District level operations were sometimes being managed by people promoted into their positions because of seniority instead of qualifications. There was no coherent focus on teaching and learning. Teacher recruitment and retention were difficult. The curriculum was not demanding, instruction was not aligned with state standards and professional development was in disarray. This is where the case study districts started.

By the time that MDRC arrived in the case study districts, conditions had changed. In a summary of the report, Casserly and Snipes (2005) distinguish what they call

preconditions for reform and *district strategies for reform*. Casserly and Snipes write that they found in place the following *preconditions for reform* (pp. 162-3):

- A new role for the school board, whereby a new board majority (or other governing unit) focused on policy-level decisions that supported improved student achievement rather than day-to-day operations of the district;
- A shared vision between the chief executive or superintendent of the school district and the school board regarding the goals and strategies of reform;
- An ability to sell the leadership’s vision for reform to city and district stakeholders;
- A focus on revamping district operations to serve and support the schools, including a capacity to diagnose instructional problems;
- Resources to support reform and improvement.

Grounded on the above “preconditions,” the case study districts were pursuing the following *district strategies for reform*:

- There were specific goals for student achievement at the school and district levels and these were associated with fixed schedules and consequences for failure—indeed, accountability systems held district and building-level staff personally responsible.
- District-level curricula and instructional approaches were developed and adopted, aligned with state standards.
- District-wide professional development supported the reforms, striving for consistent district-wide implementation of the curriculum and instructional approaches.
- There was a commitment to data-driven decision making about instruction, and investment in the capacity to follow through on that commitment.
- Lower-performing schools received special attention, including extra resources and an infusion of qualified teachers.

Like Union City, the emphasis in the early stages of reform was on elementary schools, and this may help explain why progress at the high school level had not occurred.

Officials in the two comparison districts said they were implementing many of the same reforms as seen in the case study districts, but as Casserly and Snipes (p. 164-5) describe it:

- They lacked consensus among key stakeholders about district priorities or an overall strategy for reform.
- They lacked specific, clear standards; achievement goals; time lines; and consequences.
- The districts' central offices took little or no responsibility for improving instruction or creating a cohesive instructional strategy throughout the district.
- The policies and practices of the central office were not strongly connected to intended changes in teaching and learning in the classrooms.
- The districts gave schools multiple and conflicting curriculum and instructional expectations, which they were left to decipher on their own.

Progress in the case study districts was not achieved easily. There was resistance. Principals and teachers complained as jobs became more demanding and stressful. Parents and students complained as more time on reading and math meant less time for music, art and field trips. Experienced teachers complained that the new approaches to instruction were inferior to what they were already doing, but test scores provided no justification for continuing old practices. Advocates for the gifted and talented complained that so much attention to low achievers was causing the highest achievers to be neglected. District officials responded to such complaints in a number of ways, some more effective than others. Some complaints had merit. But with strong *preconditions for reform* in place, the superintendent and other leaders had the incentives and clout to push ahead with the *district strategies for reform* that were beginning to make a difference in student achievement.

School-Level Transformation, without the District

Finally, the focus above is on districts, because transformative district-level reform may be the only way to make progress at the scale the nation needs. To date, most districts—city, suburban and rural—are only steps from the starting line (with some standing behind it), especially in comparison to Union City. In the mean time, there are many schools that have not waited for their districts, and that have pushed ahead, guided by the same strategic practices and principles that the Union City and Council of Great City Schools examples have in common.

For example, David Jacobson and I selected several schools from the Ohio State Department of Education’s “Ohio Schools of Promise” list.³⁴ These are schools that rank high on state standardized exams. From the longer list, we chose schools with relatively high concentrations of racial minority and free-lunch eligible students. What we are seeing in site visits to these high performing high poverty schools is the same basic pattern for achieving improvement that other researchers have reported in recent years.

Specifically:

- They analyze student work to identify particular weakness.
- Based on these analyses, they select a limited number of skills or topics to make priorities for improvement.
- They shop around (sometimes a teacher committee helps with this) to find (or eventually craft) instructional resources and practices to address their chosen priorities (for some schools, these resources and practices come from whole school reform vendors).
- They work in groups to learn the new teaching materials and procedures, sometimes with professional development support from outside the school.
- They plan the various logistics, especially scheduling, necessary to follow through with implementation.

- They monitor implementation, make midcourse corrections, assist teachers who need help and put pressure on teachers who seem not to be trying.
- They monitor student progress and repeat the cycle.

Whether a school can initiate and follow through on this type of process depends on the professional climate in the school and the available resources. It also depends on leadership. Recall from above the top four reasons from our survey for when professional development failed to be effective: (a) “It was just too much, on top of everything else the school was trying to do.” (b) “There was too little support and training.” (c) “Teachers were not held accountable for doing it.” And, (d) “The way it was introduced didn’t inspire me to try.” Considering each in turn, one would not be surprised to discover that effective school leaders manage professional development in ways that (a) make space in the schedule for new work, (b) provide adequate support and training, (c) monitor teacher participation for accountability and, (d) from the outset, introduce and develop ideas in ways geared to attract and sustain participation.

It would be ideal if every school principal was able *and inclined* to achieve excellence for students from all backgrounds and with minimal district interference. There would be no need for district-wide reforms that restrict school-level autonomy. After all, autonomy restrictions on schools that are already highly effective could do more harm than good. However, if lots of schools need help and districts lack capacity to support multiple school-level approaches to professional development, then district level approaches such as those discussed above make a great deal of sense.³⁵ It also follows then, that political movement-building efforts to mobilize and sustain the will to develop and protect such district level reforms and associated leadership, make a great deal of sense as well.

CONCLUSION

Individuals, families, communities and nations have *lifestyles*: routine ways of allocating time, effort, attention and resources to activities. In ways that the Union City and Council of Great City Schools examples begin to illustrate, progress in a national movement for *excellence with equity* will require *lifestyle* changes in the ways that the nation does schooling. Similarly, for most parents of any racial or social class background, it is not difficult to imagine lifestyle changes likely to raise their children's achievement (for example, required daily leisure reading, discussions in which children explain their homework answers to parents and appropriate bedtimes, firmly enforced).

No such changes will happen consistently without adults who take steps to commence and sustain them, often against initial resistance. Sometimes, adults can be induced by public policies that provide incentives or persuaded by the information gleaned from special programs or public information campaigns. Multiple means of influencing adults should be tried and studied for their effectiveness. Because in the end, developing and sustaining the collective will, skill and discipline of adults to effectively prioritize learning by children, *including other people's children*, is the central challenge we face in a long-term nationwide movement for *excellence with equity*.

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Table 1

Numbers of Children's Books (Panel A) and
Records, Audio Tapes, or CD's (Panel B).
(Standard deviation and sample size in parenthesis)

Mother's Years of Schooling	<u>African Americans</u>		<u>European Americans</u>	
	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
<u>Panel A:</u> "About how many children's books does your child have in your home now, including library books?"				
12 Years or Fewer	20	30 (33, 1304)	50	76 (55, 3099)
13 to 15 Years	30	46 (40, 826)	100	97 (59, 3042)
16 or More Years	50	65 (51, 258)	100	114 (59, 2777)
<u>Panel B:</u> "About how many children's records, audio tapes, or CD's do you have at home, including any from the library?"				
12 Years or Fewer	4	8 (13, 1306)	10	15 (18, 3114)
13 to 15 Years	8	13 (16, 827)	12	18 (18, 3072)
16 or More Years	10	16 (16, 260)	20	22 (19, 2814)
Source: Author's tabulations using ECLS-K Base Year Public Use File. This table also appears in Ferguson (2005).				

Table 2

Selected Family and Child Learning Practices, by Mother's Years of Schooling,

Fall 1998. (Row percentages.)

Mother's Years of Schooling	Never	Once or Twice a Week	Three to Six Times a Week	Daily	Total Row Percent	Sample Size
<u>African American</u> <u>Panel A: Family Members Read Books to the Child</u>						
12 Years or Fewer	2.0	38.0	29.1	30.9	100	1313
13 to 15 Years	0.6	25.5	36.6	37.4	100	828
16 or More Years	1.2	14.2	37.3	47.3	100	260
<u>European American</u>						
12 Years or Fewer	1.0	19.4	38.1	41.6	100	3118
13 to 15 Years	0.3	11.5	41.4	46.8	100	3074
16 or More Years	0.1	5.7	34.1	60.1	100	2815
Table 2, Panel B						
<u>African American</u> <u>Adults Discuss Nature or Do Science Projects with the Child</u>						
Mother's Years of Schooling	Never	Once or Twice a Week	Three to Six Times a Week	Daily	Total Row Percent	Sample Size
12 Years or Fewer	37.0	40.1	13.1	9.8	100	1311
13 to 15 Years	24.8	47.6	17.8	9.9	100	828
16 or More Years	16.5	53.9	20.0	9.6	100	260
<u>European American</u>						
12 Years or Fewer	22.2	48.4	20.2	9.2	100	3116
13 to 15 Years	14.6	51.2	23.7	10.6	100	3071
16 or More Years	8.5	49.5	31.0	11.0	100	2814

Table 2, Panel C							
<u>African American</u>	<u>Family Members Sing Songs with the Child</u>					Total Row Percent	Sample Size
Mother's Years of Schooling	Never	Once or Twice a Week	Three to Six Times a Week	Daily			
12 Years or Fewer	5.5	21.5	19.2	53.9	100	1313	
13 to 15 Years	3.1	18.0	24.4	54.5	100	829	
16 or More Years	2.3	18.9	24.6	54.2	100	260	
<u>European American</u>							
12 Years or Fewer	5.5	25.3	25.8	43.4	100	3118	
13 to 15 Years	3.6	21.9	30.7	43.8	100	3075	
16 or More Years	2.6	21.5	33.3	42.7	100	2815	
Table 2, Panel D							
<u>African American</u>	<u>Family Members Play Games or do Puzzles with the Child</u>					Total Row Percent	Sample Size
Mother's Years of Schooling	Never	Once or Twice a Week	Three to Six Times a Week	Daily			
12 Years or Fewer	6.5	36.3	27.0	30.2	100	1313	
13 to 15 Years	3.9	33.3	36.3	26.5	100	829	
16 or More Years	4.6	29.3	38.5	27.7	100	260	
<u>European American</u>							
12 Years or Fewer	3.6	36.7	39.8	20.2	100	3118	
13 to 15 Years	2.4	34.2	44.0	19.4	100	3076	
16 or More Years	1.7	30.4	48.6	19.3	100	2815	
Source: Author's tabulations using ECLS-K Base Year Public Use File. This table also appears in Ferguson (2005).							

Table 3

Percentage distribution of each race/ethnic group across four SES categories in Secondary Schools from 15 MSAN Districts

SES Category	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Mixed	Total
			Percentages			
Lowest SES	24	3	19	7	12	10
Lower Middle	55	25	59	39	44	40
Upper Middle	19	57	19	41	37	40
Highest SES	2	16	3	12	8	10
Column Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 4

Simulations by SES profile and race/ethnicity for three achievement measures*

SES Profile	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Mixed
<u>Panel A</u>					
	Simulated mean GPA (4-point scale)				
Lowest SES	2.38	2.52	2.61	2.66	2.30
Lower Middle	2.65	2.91	2.88	3.07	2.73
Upper Middle	2.88	3.36	3.13	3.36	3.17
Highest SES	3.18	3.68	3.34	3.67	3.49
<u>Panel B</u>					
	Simulated amount that the student reports “completely” understanding of teachers’ lessons (standard deviation units).				
Lowest SES	-0.38	-0.54	-0.44	-0.58	-0.59
Lower Middle	-0.23	-0.22	-0.21	-0.26	-0.26
Upper Middle	0.00	0.20	0.01	0.06	0.22
Highest SES	0.04	0.35	0.11	0.35	0.31
<u>Panel C</u>					
	Simulated amount that the student reports understanding “very well” of material read for school (standard deviation units).				
Lowest SES	-0.56	-0.59	-0.65	-0.64	-0.57
Lower Middle	-0.36	-0.15	-0.39	-0.29	-0.31
Upper Middle	-0.07	0.25	-0.06	0.17	0.17
Highest SES	0.06	0.44	0.17	0.41	0.36
* Simulations are for fixed SES profiles, where achievement predictions use regression coefficients estimated separately by race/ethnicity.					

Table 5				
Percentages of “advantaged” and “disadvantaged” first through sixth graders responding “Yes,” to selected statements about home life, by race/ethnicity. *				
Survey Items	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White
Panel A:	Percentages Responding “Yes” <i>(Advantaged, Disadvantaged)</i>			
1. At home, someone is always there to help me with my homework if I need it.	52,34	78,76	80,73	80,74
2. My parents want me to tell them what I learned in school.	46,45	65,62	61,61	62,61
3. Someone reads with me almost every night before I go to sleep.	9,18	17,20	19,32	22,23
4. At home, we try to make learning fun.	50,44	60,59	56,59	50,56
Panel B:				
5. I read almost everyday at home.	66,56	45,42	50,54	59,52
6. I have a computer in my bedroom.	45,29	30,18	33,15	23,20
7. I have a television in my bedroom.	36,46	81,83	70,69	39,53
8. At home, I watch television more than I do anything else.	13,22	30,36	14,27	13,22
9. At home, I watch rap videos on television.	11,19	55,61	35,50	15,24
10. On many days, I get very sleepy at school.	11,19	35,35	18,30	25,32
11. Sometimes my teacher says that I don’t pay attention like I should.	24,27	41,45	28,45	25,37
*KEY: “ Advantaged ” students have (by our definition) <i>at least one computer in the home</i> AND are <i>not from single parent households</i> ; others are labeled “ Disadvantaged. ”				
Source: Author’s tabulations using Tripod Project student surveys from spring 2005. Advantaged: Asian, N=458; Black, N=659; Hispanic, N=152; White, N=1364. Disadvantaged: Asian, N=63; Black=409; Hispanic=71; White=187.				

Endnotes

¹ See Ferguson, 1998a and b.

² In addition, the implications of particular grouping arrangements depend upon degrees of mobility between groups as children learn and appropriate placements change, and upon the instructional approaches with which those grouping arrangements are matched.

³ Two recent studies, one by Hanushek et. al. (2005) and the other by Dee (2004), have found evidence that matching teachers and students by race helps raise achievement. However, findings reported in Ferguson 1998b suggest that (at least for first graders) matching might not be helpful for black low-income children if their black teacher grew up in a white-collar home. At the same time, black teachers who grew up in white-collar households were more effective than white teachers with white children. It will be interesting in future studies to track such differences in teachers' SES backgrounds.

⁴ U.S. Department of Education. 2005.

⁵ See Ferguson 2005 for a discussion of possible reasons progress stopped at the end of the 1980s. Also see Neal, 2005.

⁶ Dickens and Flynn, 2005, find evidence that the black-white IQ gap has narrowed since 1972. See more in footnote 14 below.

⁷ Bronfenbrenner's (1979) micro-ecologies.

⁸ Bronfenbrenner's (1979) meso-ecologies.

⁹ Bronfenbrenner's (1979) exo-ecologies.

¹⁰ Bronfenbrenner's (1979) macro-ecology.

¹¹ These appear on pages 90 and 91 of Eccles and Gootman, 2002. The chapter in which they appear elaborates on each condition, with examples.

¹² In discussing the attributes of supportive relationships, the NRC report emphasizes the importance of responsiveness and fit: "On the surface these appear to be objective qualities, but research suggests that these qualities reside less in the adult than in the adolescent's perception of the adult and in the adolescent's experience of interactions with the adult . . . Inasmuch as there is an underlying essential element here, it consists of attentiveness and responsiveness to adolescents' subjective worlds" (p. 94-95). The same can be said of interactions of adults in training to be better parents or teachers, wherein parent or teacher receptivity to trainers or supervisors depends importantly upon subjective experiences of feeling valued and respected. It depends as well on perceptions of whether the trainer or supervisor is well meaning, competent and reliable.

¹³ See the discussion and references in Duncan and Magnuson (2005).

¹⁴ Standard assessments of how much socioeconomic resources affect achievement may be underestimates, if important resource variables (e.g., social network resources) are poorly measured or absent from the typical analysis. Conversely, estimates may be too high, if genetic differences correlate positively with SES. Specifically, if genetics contribute to parental income and education, and also to offspring's achievement levels, then contributions to achievement that we typically attribute to parental income and achievement may be at least partly due to genetics. Researchers tend to agree that genetics account for some within-race achievement disparities. However, the importance of genetics for between-race disparities remains a matter of considerable dispute. Some researchers have concluded that genetics account for much of the *correlation* between family resources and student achievement—even between racial groups. Most prominently, Rushton and Jenson (2005) conclude that fixed, immutable genetic differences, not resources, discrimination or environmental forces, account for half or more of racial IQ and achievement gaps. Supporting environmental (as opposed to genetic) explanations, Dickens and Flynn (2005) find that the black-white IQ gap narrowed between one-fifth and one-third (3-to-6 points) between 1972 and 2002. They attribute this narrowing to environmental forces, though their work to identify such forces is only beginning. Research leaves little doubt that environmental forces are critically important determinants of achievement levels as well as achievement disparities. Further, among environmental forces, parenting constitutes the most important cluster in children's lives (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000).

¹⁵ The six are: Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, and Collaborating with Community. Typologies by other researchers (Bamber, Berla & Henderson, 1993; Shartrand et al., 1997; Eccles & Harold, 1993) fit well with Epstein's.

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- ¹⁶ McCoyd and Smith (2002) find that spanking has less deleterious effects in black than in white households. The differential meaning “tough love” in black families may help to explain why.
- ¹⁷ “Playing games and doing puzzles” is a single category in the ECLS-K; puzzles are not distinguished from other forms of playing.
- ¹⁸ See Fryer and Levitt (2004), Table 2.
- ¹⁹ See Ferguson, 2002.
- ²⁰ I simulated achievement for each of the four standardized SES profiles. To form the SES categories, I began by using all of the SES measures in the data, but not race, to predict GPA. This multiple regression produced regression coefficients to use as weights in composite SES measures. The equation used a dummy variable for each value of each SES variable, in order to allow for non-linearity in estimated effects. The equation also included school-grade-level fixed effects and gender. Missing values for explanatory variables were handled using dummy variables. The adjusted R-square for the equation was 0.23. Using the results, some students’ SES characteristics (ignoring race/ethnicity) put them in the bottom ten percent of predicted GPAs. I labeled this group the “lowest SES” group. Others’ characteristics predict that they would be in the forty percent of the distribution from the 10th to the 50th percentile (labeled “lower-middle SES”) or from the 50th to the 90th percentile (labeled “upper-middle SES”). Finally, some would be in the top ten percent and this group is labeled “highest SES.”
- ²¹ Shaker Heights, Ohio, is one of these districts. Ogbu (2003) was incorrect when he suggested that blacks and whites in Shaker Heights have essentially equal SES.
- ²² See U.S. Department of Education, 1995. Here, there is greater racial disparity in NAEP reading scores among 17-year olds who say their parents are college graduates than among those who say their parents are high school graduates or dropouts.
- ²³ Future work may link the data in this table to achievement disparities. Currently, however, the data have not been combined with grades or test scores.
- ²⁴ *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers*, National Academy of Sciences, 2001, p. 149.
- ²⁵ Joyce Epstein, a leader in this field, writes, “Research about school, family, and community connections needs to improve in many ways. Early research was often based on limited samples, too global or too narrow measures of involvement, and limited data on student outcomes. As research proceeds with clearer questions and better data, measurement models should be more fully specified, analyses more elegant, and results more useful for policy and practice” (Epstein, 1996, p.218).
- ²⁶ For example, see: Wong, 1995; Madden, Slavin & Karweit, 1993; Hayes & Comer, 1993; Cook et al., 1998; Davies, 1993.
- ²⁷ See Christenson et al. (1992), Dauber & Epstein (1989), Davies (1989), Eccles & Harold (1993), Leitch & Tangri (1988), Moles (1993), Chavkin (1993b), Reglin (1993), Garlington (1992), Shartrand, et al. (1997), Swich (1991), Swap (1993), and Wolfendale (1983).
- ²⁸ For example, see the compendium of evaluation findings issued by the American Youth Policy Forum (James, Jurich and Estes, 2002). Also, see reviews in Molnar, ed., 2002.
- ²⁹ Responses were voluntary; 82 elementary teachers from 21 schools and 233 secondary teachers from 20 schools responded. None were deeply troubled schools, but all were schools in cities, towns and suburbs that have racial and ethnic achievement gaps that school officials are addressing with various types of professional development.
- ³⁰ This section draws on Carrigg, Honey, and Thorpe (2005), the Union City School Department web site, and an interview with Gordon MacInnes, Director of the Abbott Division of the New Jersey State Department of Education, for which Fred Carrigg now works.
- ³¹ Numbers in this paragraph come from Carrigg, Honey and Thorpe, 2005.
- ³² The video is a 9 minute segment embedded the text of an article found at http://ali.apple.com/ali_sites/ali/exhibits/1000599/The_Story.html Click in the word “play,” found at the bottom right corner of a roughly two-inch square box, located early in the article.
- ³³ This section is based on Casserly, Lewis, Jepson and Ceperich, 2002; Snipes, Doolittle and Herlihy, 2002; and Casserly and Snipes, 2005.
- ³⁴ The study with Jacobson applies our framework from the Tripod Project for School Improvement (www.tripodproject.org) to classify how leaders in higher and lower performing schools (a) introduce ideas to teachers; (b) balance administrative control with teacher autonomy; (c) get teachers to define and adopt school and personal goals; (d) manage resistance, especially following setbacks; and (e) celebrate success.

³⁵ Especially in large districts, the right answer may be to grant exceptions based on high levels of student performance, but there would remain equity concerns even with this idea, if schools work with different student populations, some more difficult than others.