

# Legislative Report

## Closing Achievement Gaps



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# State Board of Education

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## **LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENT IOWA CODE 256.9.48**

Prepare and submit to the chairpersons and ranking members of the senate and house education committees a report on the state's progress toward closing the achievement gap, including student achievement for minority subgroups, and a comprehensive summary of state agency and local district activities and practices taken in the past year to close the achievement gap.

## POPULATION CHANGES

The racial makeup of the United States is rapidly changing. By 2050, less than 35 years away, experts predict that Whites will make up less than half of the total population in the United States (ACT's Center for Equity in Learning, 2017). Iowa's student population also continues a pattern of change (see Table 1). There has been a significant increase in the minority population particularly Hispanic and African American students. In addition, a growing trend of socio-economic diversity and an increased number of students who do not speak English as their first language is occurring in Iowa schools. Such large shifts in the student population make it a priority to implement effective education programs for English learners. The large education equity gaps that already exist must be addressed.

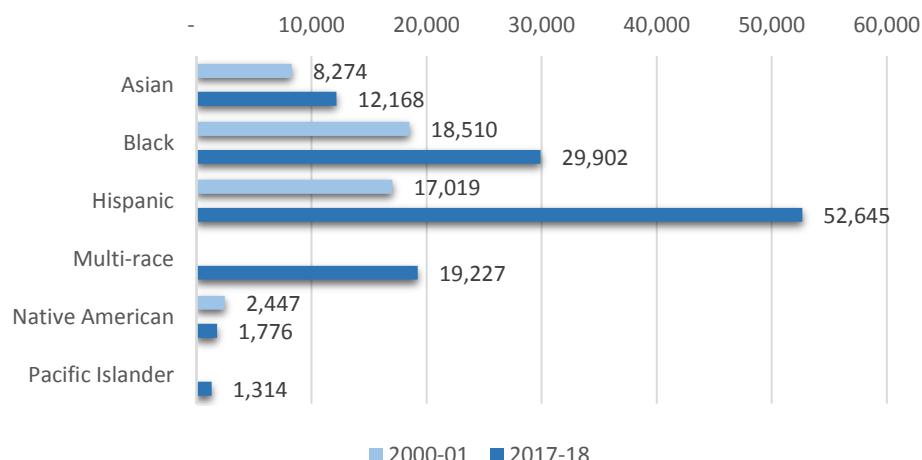
Recent data from the 2017 fall count shows that approximately one in four Iowa students is part of a racial/ethnic minority group compared to one in 10 students during the 2000-01 school year. During this same time period, the overall student population has increased just over one percent statewide and the percent of White students has decreased from 90 percent to 76 percent in 2017-18.

**Table 1: K-12 Statewide Enrollment**

School Year	Minority	White	Total	Percent Minority	Percent White
2017-18	117,032	365,459	482,491	24.3%	75.7%
2016-17	113,076	368,512	481,588	23.5%	76.5%
2015-16	108,345	371,717	480,062	22.6%	77.4%
2014-15	104,052	373,370	477,422	21.8%	78.2%
2000-01	46,250	430,677	476,927	9.7%	90.3%

In the 2017-18 school year, the largest race/ethnic groups were Hispanic and Black students. Both of these student groups have grown significantly since the 2000-01 school year. The Hispanic student population has tripled during this time period.

**Figure 1: Minority Students Trend in Iowa**



## ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

The achievement gap is a persistent disparity in academic performance between groups of students, particularly between minority and their White counterparts or between students from low-income families and their more affluent counterparts. Education has often been considered a path to break the cycle of poverty. While this sounds cliché, the premise of the American dream has been founded on the notion that anyone can rise up, innovate and become successful. Educators' schools can be difference makers in student's lives, helping to provide a pathway to success in life. The education system must provide a foundation of opportunities for all students, including student groups that are behind. The focus is on improving learning for all students by utilizing research and data to improve practice. Attention must be centered on what really matters: high standards, a challenging curriculum, and good teachers.

An important goal of Iowa's education system is to prepare students for life after high school. The achievement gap can be found across multiple student outcome measures, such as assessment results, course selection, dropout rates, and college-enrollment rates. This report examines two important education metrics, statewide results on large scale assessment and postsecondary enrollment information. This analysis concentrates on Hispanic and Black students who make up the two largest race/ethnic minority student groups in Iowa schools.

## ASSESSMENT RESULTS

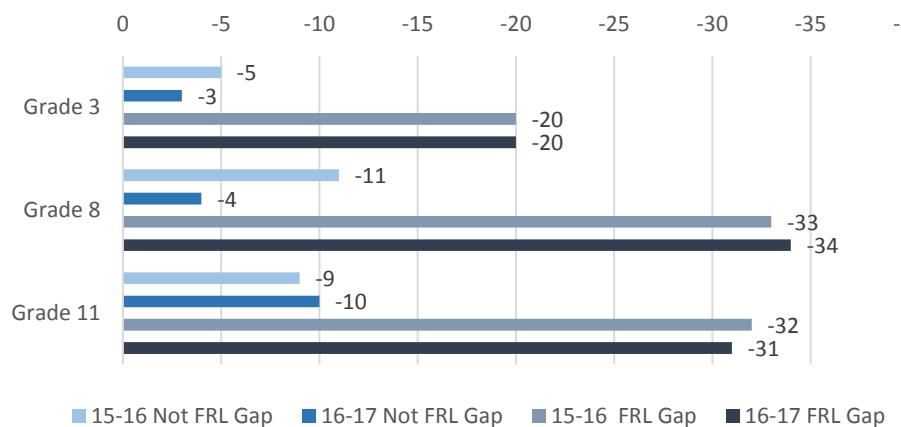
In order to assess the current status of achievement gaps, an analysis was completed examining the average assessment scale scores between Hispanic, Black and all student groups. The all students group represents the entire population of students across all race/ethnic groups combined. We examined one elementary grade (grade 3), middle school grade (grade 8) and high school (grade 11) to determine if gains or losses could be found. Lastly, these analyses were also broken out by students eligible for free or reduced priced lunch

to understand the impact of poverty on assessment results. The goal is to determine how student groups are performing compared to the state average achievement of all students.

Figures 2 and 3 show the differences between Black and Hispanic students eligible for free or reduced priced lunch and those that are not eligible, and the state average for achievement. For example, in 2016-17 in grade 3 reading the average scale score for all students was 194 while the average for Black student's eligible for free or reduced priced was 174. This would yield a negative 20 (-20) scale score point difference in the achievement between these groups. The difference in average scale scores between 2015-16 and 2016-17 are presented in Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5.

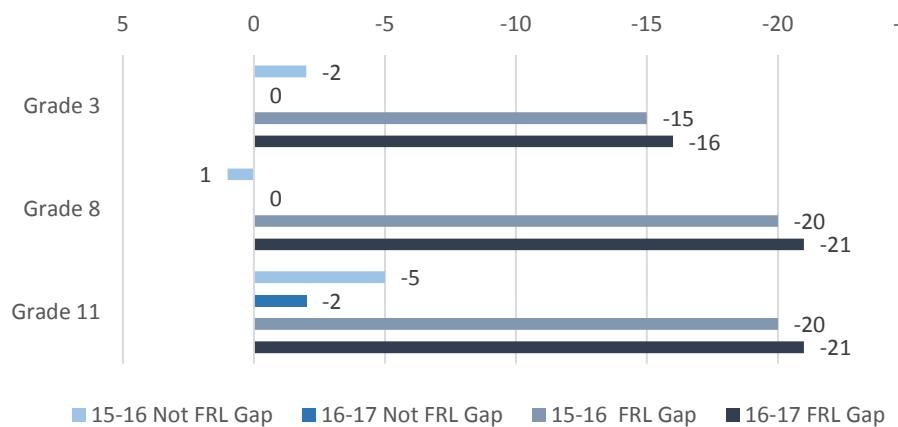
These results clearly show the role poverty plays in student achievement between race groups. The gap in average scale score between Black students eligible for free or reduced priced lunch and their peers was between two to three times the size of the gap between students who were not eligible for free or reduced priced lunch. Gaps also tended to increase from earlier grades into middle school and high school. This suggests the gaps are smaller in earlier grades and grow and are maintained in later grades.

Figure 2: Reading Black and State Average Achievement Gap on the Iowa Assessments



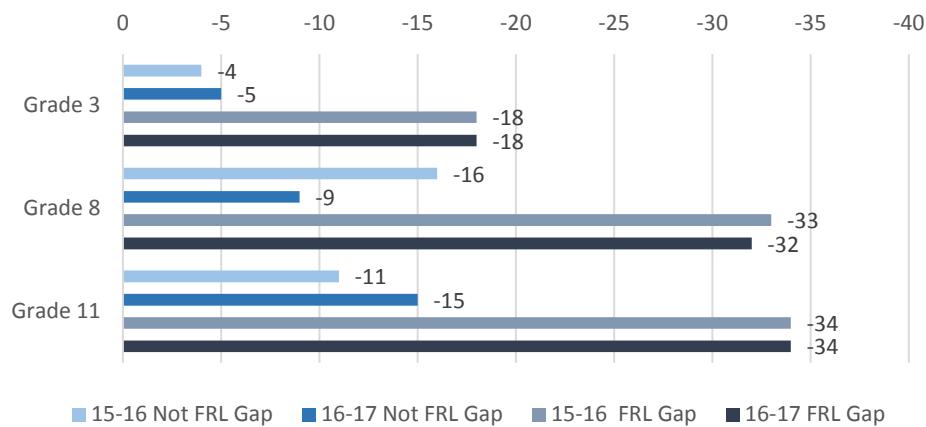
The gap in average scale score in grades 3, 8 and 11 for Hispanic students was not as large as the gap for Black students. Figure 3 shows the pronounced difference in performance of students in poverty versus students who are not. Hispanic students not eligible for free or reduced priced lunch in grades 3 and 8 actually closed the gap with the average statewide student performance. This suggests that when controlling for poverty, Hispanic students perform the same as or close to their peers.

**Figure 3: Reading Hispanic and State Average Achievement Gap on the Iowa Assessments**



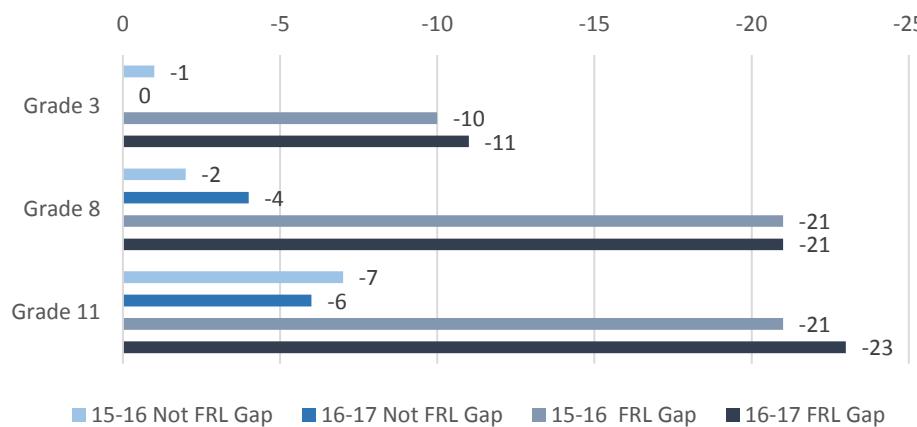
Figures 4 and 5 display the average scale score difference in mathematics between Black and Hispanic students and the average statewide scale scores for all students in grades 3, 8 and 11. Math performance shows similar trends to reading for both Black and Hispanic students. The average gap in scores was between two to three times between students eligible for free or reduced priced lunch versus those not eligible. Gaps were significantly smaller in grade 3 compared to grades 8 and 11.

**Figure 4: Math Black and State Average Achievement Gap on the Iowa Assessments**



Similar to the trends found in reading, the average scale score gap between Hispanic students was smaller than that for Black students. For students not eligible for free or reduced priced lunch, the gap had closed in grade 3 math and was -2 scale score points in grade 8. On the other hand, significant gaps were seen in both grade 8 and 11 for students eligible for free or reduced priced lunch.

**Figure 5: Math Hispanic and State Average Achievement Gap on the Iowa Assessment**



## POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT

In 2017, the Iowa Department of Education along with the Iowa Board of Regents, Regent Universities and Iowa Workforce Development released the Iowa Postsecondary Readiness Reports. The purpose of these reports is to provide information about the preparedness of Iowa high school students for postsecondary education. Table 2 shows the percent of students who enrolled in a postsecondary institution either in state or out of state one year after completing high school in Iowa.

**Table 2: Percent of Students Enrolled in Postsecondary Average Enrollment for Graduation Classes 2013, 2014 & 2015**

Group	Percent	Gap
All HS Graduates	70.8%	--
Black	61.5%	9.3%
Hispanic	56.3%	14.5%

The achievement gap can be seen across multiple student outcome measures. Therefore, it is not surprising to see large gaps exist between the enrollment rate of Black and Hispanic students compared to rates for all students across the state. An interesting trend can be found by examining the college enrollment rates between Black and Hispanic compared with the average achievement results. In student achievement results, the gap between Hispanic and all students was smaller than the gap for Black students. College enrollment rates, however, show an opposite trend where Black students have a smaller achievement gap than Hispanic students.

## EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY FOCUS

In order to address persistent achievement gaps, it is essential to examine current education reform efforts and district initiatives. There are multiple state level programs that are designed

to focus on issues of access and equity. These programs can help support struggling students by addressing student needs with the goal of raising achievement for all while closing the achievement gap between students.

The following list highlights several key state initiatives focused on equity. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of all programs with an equity focus across all of K-12 education, but rather to showcase a handful of state-level programs that can help address the achievement gap. Many Iowa school districts have these programs and funding streams available today. It is important for local school leaders to examine each program and its purpose to determine if changes can be made to strengthen and focus efforts to better address equity and close achievement gaps.

### STATEWIDE VOLUNTARY PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

Research tells us that early childhood and prekindergarten programs have visible effects including reducing grade repetition, disability diagnoses, and health problems, while increasing high school graduation, college attendance, and employment. Evidence also is beginning to accumulate that greater exposure to early childhood programs increases impact (Van der Ploeg, A. and Lazarev, V., 2013).

The Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP) for four-year-old children was established on May 10, 2007 (IC 256c). The purpose of Iowa's SWVPP is to provide an opportunity for all young children in the State of Iowa to enter school ready to learn by expanding voluntary access to quality preschool curricula for all four-year-old children. The allocation of funds for the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program is intended to improve access to quality early childhood education and provide a predictable, equitable and sustainable funding method to increase the number of children participating in quality programs. The four-year-old preschool funds are intended to increase the number of children participating in quality programs.

SWVPP is intended to provide a bridge to kindergarten so students are better prepared and ready for formal schooling. Iowa districts should utilize this program to reach minority students and provide opportunities to poor families. This program can also be used to identify students who are already behind.

Several Iowa districts have worked with other early childhood programs such as Early Childhood Iowa or Head Start preschool to integrate with SWVPP. The intent of these programs is to blend multiple programs, extend programming and reach as many students as possible with high quality preschool programming.

### EARLY LITERACY FOCUS

Hart and Risley (2003) found that students from lower-income families heard 30 million fewer words compared to children from higher income families by the time they were 4 years old. This word gap puts children at a significant disadvantage compared to their peers. This deficit highlights the importance of providing early opportunities to increase school readiness so that students can be identified early and provided support to be successful in school.

The 2010 Casey Foundation report highlights the importance of reading by the end of third grade as a contributor to later life outcomes including graduation from high school and securing higher wage jobs. Research shows that early reading skills in first grade are a strong predictor of later reading outcomes in 10<sup>th</sup> grade (Spark, Patton, Murdoch, 2014). It is clear that providing children a fast start in reading and support in reading skills leads to higher achievement later in life. Gaps must be addressed early to get students on track for later success.

In 2010, the Iowa Legislature adopted a comprehensive early literacy law (IC 279.68) that focuses on making sure all students are reading at grade level by the end of third grade so they are prepared for academic success in fourth grade and beyond. In order to support this early literacy focus, the Iowa Department of Education created a Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS).

The Iowa MTSS framework is made up of five components: 1) evidence-based curriculum and Instruction provided for all students; 2) universal screening of students; 3) evidence-based, instructional interventions; 4) progress monitoring of students to guide instruction; and 5) data-based decision making. Districts and schools need to implement the full range of practices associated with each of these components with fidelity.

A core component of MTSS is that Iowa schools assess all students enrolled in kindergarten through grade three at the beginning of each school year to ascertain their level of reading or reading readiness on locally determined or statewide assessments. If a student is not reading proficiently and is persistently at risk in reading, the school district provides intensive reading instruction to the student until the student is reading at grade level.

Significant within year gains have been found in closing the reading gap between students. Results show over 5,000 kindergarten through third grade who had fallen short of benchmarks in reading in the fall of 2016 met or surpassed benchmarks by the spring of 2017. This is an increase of 3.0 percentage points of within year gains. Increases in the highest-growth school districts ranged from 19.0 to 25.5 percentage points.

## ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

A growing segment of our school age population consists of students with limited English proficiency (LEP) (see Figure 6). According to Iowa Code section 280.4, a LEP student is defined as follows: "a student's language background is in a language other than English, and the student's proficiency in English is such that the probability of the student's academic success in an English-only classroom is below that of an academically successful peer with an English language background." Each student identified as an English language learner (EL) who is participating in an English language program receives an additional .33 in weighted funding. In fiscal year 2018, this is an additional \$2,199 in addition to the \$6,664 in regular funding generated per student. This additional funding can be spent in a variety of ways to support EL students. In 2018 \$29.9 million was generated for district EL programs.

In addition to the Iowa weighted funding, the US Department of Education Title III Part A English Language Acquisition program assists states and school districts in providing funding for English language learners. The goal of the program is to help students meet the same

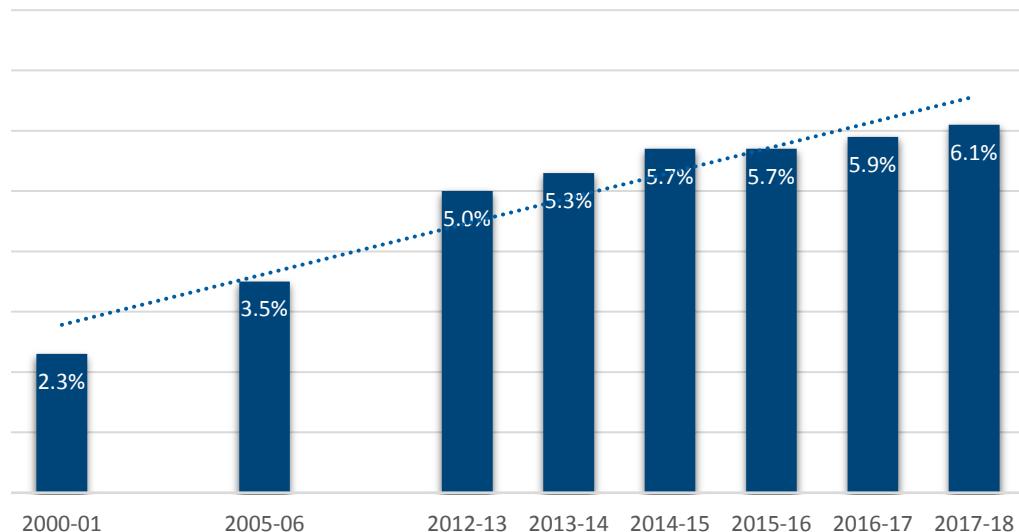
challenging academic standards expected for all students. Iowa districts received an additional \$1.89 million through the Title III program in fiscal year 2018.

These funds are to be used for:

- increasing English proficiency by providing programs based on scientifically based research demonstrating effectiveness in increasing English proficiency and achievement in core academic subjects, and
- providing high-quality professional development to teachers, principals, administrators, and other school and community-based organization personnel.

EL students need language instruction educational programs that allow them to progress academically while they are acquiring English language skills. Both the state supported EL funding and federal Title III program can help school districts close the achievement gap between EL students and their peers. These programs accomplish this by providing funds to school districts to address the language and achievement needs of ELs.

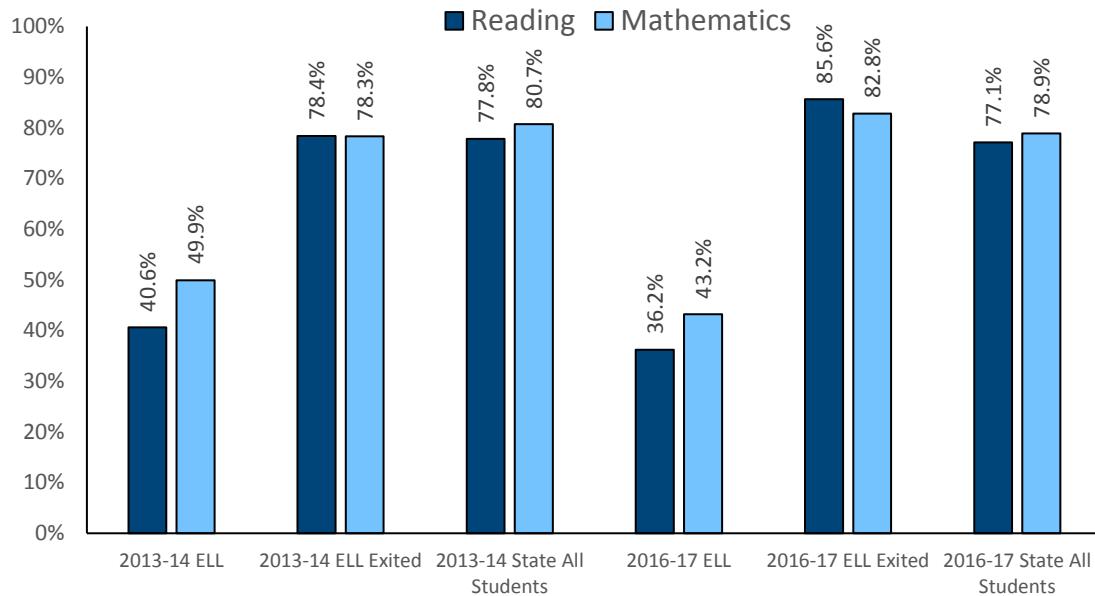
Figure 6: English Language Learners in Iowa Schools



There are several different program models for EL students; however, all include both academic content and English language development components. The specific model a school district implements will depend on the composition of the student population, resources available, and the school district's preferences. While EL students currently receive a variety of instructional programs, English as a Second Language (ESL) is, almost without exception, a component of every program that serves ELs in Iowa.

When students leave EL programs they are ready, on average, to learn with their non-EL peers (see Figure 7). An analysis completed by the Iowa Department of Education shows the effectiveness of EL program in helping close the achievement gap and effectively eliminating the difference in proficiency levels between EL students and all students. Figure 7 shows the proficiency levels of EL students compared with the proficiency levels of all students who exited EL programs.

Figure 7: Percent Proficient in Reading and Mathematics on the Iowa Assessment



## TEACHER LEADERSHIP AND COMPENSATION

The results of the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), released by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), notes the challenges experienced by American teachers and provides insights into what might be done to foster better teaching and learning. The survey showed that American teachers today work harder under much more challenging conditions than teachers elsewhere in the industrialized world. Teachers also receive less useful feedback, less helpful professional development, and have less time to collaborate to improve their work (Darling-Hammond, 2014).

The Iowa Teacher Leadership and Compensation (TLC) System rewards effective teachers with leadership opportunities, attracts promising new teachers, provides support, and fosters greater collaboration for all teachers to learn from each other. The philosophy of the program is to improve student learning requires the infusion of support to achieve enhanced instruction. There is no better way to do this than to empower Iowa's best educators to lead this effort. Through the TLC system, teacher leaders take on extra responsibilities, including helping colleagues analyze data and fine tune instructional strategies as well as coaching and co-teaching. Through better instruction and teacher support, there can be improved outcomes that will create equity and can assist in closing gaps.

Research shows that factors in a student's life such as personal, family, and neighborhood factors contribute to a student's academic performance. It has also been well documented that the classroom teacher is the most important school related influence on a student's academic performance. Further, research finds that highly effective teachers can also have significant influence on student's gains (Kane, T., et al, 2013).

The Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University issued a report of how leadership teams were able to provide critical feedback to teachers to improve instruction, which leads to increased achievement and narrowing gaps between students (AGI Conference Report, 2009). The report examined 15 high school case studies and identified key strategies that lead to exemplary outcomes for their students. A key component identified in these schools was the development of instructional leadership that developed strategies and plans for effectively supporting teachers.

Several key findings have been found in TLC programs in Iowa schools (AIR, 2017). Teachers reported improved learning and instruction through access to coaches, effective collaboration, participation in weekly collaboration, professional development tailored to their unique needs, and found teacher leadership roles effective in their school. These results suggest that TLC has been successful in infusing leadership and collaboration into schools. It is important for Iowa districts to examine their TLC program as one critical component of sustained improvement focused on increasing achievement for all while at the same time narrow achievement gaps between student groups.

## CONCLUSION

Iowa schools are rapidly changing with significant shifts in the student population over the past two decades. A significant increase in the number of students of color has occurred with the most growth in the number of Hispanic and Black students. During this same period, the overall student population has increased, however the percentage of White students has declined. Iowa schools need to adapt to this change in student population.

In reviewing the data on two important outcome measures including state assessment results and college enrollment rate, significant gaps can be found between student groups. Gaps are two to three times larger between students in poverty compared to students who were not. Gaps tended to be smaller in the earlier grades, but by middle school the gaps were sizeable and continued into high school. Race/ethnicity gaps closed in reading in grades 3 and 8 for students not eligible for free or reduced lunch. This demonstrates the impact poverty has on student outcomes. While poverty does not completely explain the differences in performance, it does account for much of the effect.

Significant gaps also exist when examining gaps in postsecondary enrollment between Hispanics, Blacks and their peers. An opposite trend was found with Hispanic student gaps larger than Black students in the percentage of students enrolling in postsecondary education.

The report examines several state level programs in Iowa that can make a difference and assist in closing the achievement gaps between student groups. Each of these programs support students as they prepare for kindergarten and during their school years. SWVPP is intended to provide early learning opportunities and assist students in preparation for school. MTSS with early literacy focus identifies students early, then provides supports and intervention to help students get back on track. Additional funding for EL students provides additional resources to districts in supporting one of the fastest growing student groups in Iowa schools. This program has shown that students who participate and gain language proficiency close the achievement gaps and perform similar to their non-EL peers. Lastly, the TLC system is intended to build pathways for educators and build a system to improve the instructional support and collaboration in each school across the state. The goal of all of these program is to assist in creating equity and opportunity and to help close achievement gaps.

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