**About the NAEP-** NAEP, or the National Assessment of Educational Progress, conducts an ongoing assessment to inform the public about the academic achievement of elementary and secondary students in the United States. Sponsored by the Department of Education, NAEP assessments have been conducted periodically in reading, mathematics, science, writing, U.S. history, civics, geography, and other subjects, beginning in 1969. The article below is an excerpt from the Policy Information Report, published by the Educational Testing Service and is based on 2008 NAEP data. The most recent NAEP data was collected in 2012. These latest results, while demonstrating some small changes for various groups, remain consistent with the 2010 analysis and summary presented below. Although the following discussion focuses on the Black/White educational achievement gap and while cultural variables are discussed, it must be remembered that discussions of education by race and ethnicity often overlap with discussions of education by socio-economic status, since the two concepts are interrelated in the U.S. (i.e. the effects of the underlying opportunity structures are most related to social class and are assumed to hold true for all ethnic and racial groups in or near poverty).

**An excerpt from the Policy Information Report – from the section: Adding It Up**
**Paul E. Barton & Richard J. Coley - 2010 - http://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/PICBWGAP.pdf**

## THE BLACK-WHITE ACHIEVEMENT GAP: WHEN THE PROGRESS STOPPED

The nation's attention has been — and remains — riveted on the persistent Black-White gap in the achievement of our elementary and secondary school students. Each year when the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) releases "the nation's report card," the front-page news focuses on whether scores are rising or falling and whether the achievement gap is changing. Given the magnitude of the question, and its many dimensions, we would not presume that we could develop a comprehensive research framework or program that would provide definitive answers, although we hope that scholars and think tanks might take this on. Our modest objective is to help an interested and thoughtful reader to come to some judgments of their own; the research community does not have a monopoly on insight.

This report discusses trends in the gap between Black and White educational attainment, school achievement, and contextual factors from the beginning of the 20th century to the present time. Based on data beginning in the early 1970s when nationally representative test scores for student subgroups became available, the trend line reveals a positive picture of a narrowing gap until the late 1980s. Since then, there have been small changes in the gap, up and down, along with periods of stability.

## The Gap-Closing Period

During those years when the gap was closing, research by David Grissmer and colleagues found that up to a third of the narrowing of the achievement gap could be explained by a set of factors that included parent education and income, characteristics of the parent(s), and race/ethnicity. During this period, the gap narrowed in family resources, such as parental income, education, and occupation. While research provided no solid findings beyond those, some additional factors appear to be important. There may have been some gap closing as a benefit of desegregation, but it would take some strong assumptions to reach this conclusion. There may have been some benefits from decreases in class size during this period, but we do not have separate trends by race. While there is some evidence to support these factors, it is largely suggestive, not conclusive.

## The Period When the Gap Narrowing Stopped

Next, the report reviews the period from 1990 to the present. Basically, the NAEP test score gap wobbled a bit up or down or experienced periods of no change. We have no basis for saying anything of importance about what explained the small changes or the lack of change. A lot was written about this period, however, with some useful information and speculations referenced in this report. However, reasons for gap changes or lack of them were not pinned down with solid evidence.

## The Longer View

As context for helping to understand and interpret the changes in the test score gap that were observed over the past four decades or so, we have the benefit of a substantial amount of data. These data reveal trends in education and demography that can provide important context for understanding changes in the gap. For example, Derek Neal used census data to document very little gain in terms of the gap in educational attainment between the Reconstruction period through the first decade of the 20th century, but found gains in attainment for birth cohorts after that. Using broader data sets, Neal established that there was a decline in the attainment gap in each decade from 1940 through 1990, both in terms of high school and college graduation. Then the gap closing came to a halt for those born after 1965. “It is ironic,” says Neal, “that the cohort of Black youth born immediately after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did not add to the previous period of progress toward racial equality and educational attainment.” Was there a shock, he asks, to many Black communities that would have affected the progress? The report addresses this question using a variety of data and from different disciplines.

**Areas to Explore**

From longitudinal studies such as ECLS-K, data are available to increase our understanding of cognitive development and school achievement — data that go beyond measures of socioeconomic status. The list of ECLS-K data is long, and includes such factors as birth weight, health, participation in Head Start, and — very importantly — data on five non-cognitive characteristics that relate to a child's approach to learning.

1. Approaches to Learning (motivation and work ethic)
2. Self-Control (most predictive of academic achievement),
3. Interpersonal Skills
4. Externalizing Problem Behaviors (acting out behaviors)
5. Internalizing Problem Behavior (anxiety, low self-esteem, sadness)

These new measures add considerably to the explanatory power of the research models used, and have become particularly important in new understandings of the importance of non-cognitive skills as predictors of later success, as well as their relationship to cognitive skills. In areas of concentrated poverty, the opportunity to acquire these skills is hugely reduced. Although there is important knowledge to be gained from these longitudinal data on the children, the focus of concern and investigation should extend to the health of the family — our "smallest school" — as a teaching institution.

In addition, we must look beyond the family to the neighborhoods. As William Julius Wilson puts it, the individual framework does not capture "the impact of relational, organizational, and collective processes that embody the social structure of inequality."

Areas of concentrated poverty where generations of Black children are growing up are bereft of many of the attributes and resources that are necessary to promote youth development. The family is not an island where all the opportunity resides; opportunity also depends on the social and economic capital found in the neighborhood. Are there libraries accessible to the children? Are there venues for positive interactions among children and parents, such as playgrounds that are safe to visit? Is quality child care available, with qualified teachers and staff? Is the quality of the schools (and the teachers in those schools) in these neighborhoods impacted by the low tax base that typically characterizes urban school districts? The list Adding to the problem of a family or a child growing up in such a disadvantaged neighborhood is the fact that successive generations are growing up in those neighborhoods. The results become cumulative and corrosive as one generation that is disadvantaged is raising the next generation, and that generation raising the next. The monumental study by Hart and Risley showed that how parents talk to their babies — the number of words the parents utter to the children through the first three years of life — is directly related to their vocabulary

development and other important educational outcomes. However, a very high proportion of children in families in areas of concentrated poverty have only a mother to talk to them — and many of those mothers have the vocabulary of a high school dropout. The babies are apt to acquire no more education than the mother has, because the mobility out of such areas is limited. As these disadvantaged children start school, they will enter a widespread culture and peer group that have arisen out of oppression, and these children are likely to perceive a lack of opportunity in their community and society. The data, though not definitive, increasingly infer that these children will be skeptical about the value of schooling as a route to success in life. There is sufficient concern about this issue that the National Research Council has called for more intensive research.

**The Decline of the Nuclear Family**

The nuclear family is disappearing in the Black community, and most particularly in areas of concentrated poverty. The proportion of children in one-parent families zoomed upward from the mid- 1960s, rising to a peak of 67 percent by 1995 and then leveling off to around 65 percent. While there was a smaller increase among White children, the gap between the two rates grew steadily, reaching a 43 percentage point difference, and then dipping a bit and leveling off. Data on out-of-wedlock births tell us that the rate for Black women under age 30 was 77 percent in 2003 – 2004, compared with 34 percent for White women and 16 percent for Asian American women. The fact that the highest rates are for women with the least amount of education is particularly disturbing. Although this understandably sensitive (and often avoided) subject has received considerable attention in this report, the plain fact is that in statistical terms, the fatherless family is increasingly the norm in Black communities — particularly in neighborhoods of concentrated deprivation of economic and social capital. This has tremendous implications. Family resources available to support and nurture children are lower, both because there is typically only the mother's income available — especially for children born outside of marriage — and because the research is clear that having two parents is very important for children's achievement. This extensive research is summarized in a recent ETS Policy Information Center report.57 It is very hard to imagine progress resuming in reducing the education attainment and achievement gap without turning these family trends around — i.e., increasing marriage rates, and getting fathers back into the business of nurturing children, matters that President Obama addressed in his 2008 Father's Day speech. The idea of a substitute for the institution for raising children is almost unthinkable, although stronger support for the family is not.

## The Forces at Work

The report summarizes the results of years of research that has focused on the consequences of children growing up in areas of concentrated poverty. While policymakers focus on improving the schools, neighborhoods also have to be changed — particularly since there is so little mobility out of them. Why are so many Black children raised in neighborhoods that are low in social and economic capital? How did these areas become so isolated from the mainstream of the community and remain that way for so long? William Julius Wilson provides a historical summary of how it happened, identifying some consequences of both well-intentioned policies and poorly-intended policies, such as redlining for loans in Black neighborhoods. Jobs, particularly in manufacturing, left the neighborhoods. Policies facilitated the movement of the White middle class out of central cities while Black people had no access to such housing. Then, when the Black middle class gained those opportunities, they also moved to the suburbs, leaving behind the poorer families. This all led to “blight” in the inner cities, and efforts at urban renewal and public housing made available only to low-income families concentrated the poverty in ever smaller areas. While jobs fled the central cities, the mass transportation systems were designed to bring the suburbanites into the city office buildings, not to transport workers to jobs in the suburbs. Interstate highway systems were either inadvertently or purposefully designed to split communities and sections of cities. Concentration of deprivation was reinforced when suburbs were allowed to segregate their financial resources and budgets from the cities — the result of explicit racial policies in the suburbs, says William Julius Wilson. All of these things were going strong in the lives of Black people born after 1965, the beginning of birth cohorts when progress in closing the achievement gap stopped.

## The Mobility Factor

An important dimension in understanding the impact of living in areas of concentrated deprivation is to see whether the generation born there is getting out, or whether generation after generation is stuck in the same neighborhood or the same kind of neighborhood. The question is whether the effects of deprivation and isolation are being passed down to subsequent generations. The data show that many Black people have been stuck in neighborhoods deprived of social and economic capital for several generations. Although only 5 percent of White children born between 1955 and 1970 grew up in high-disadvantage neighborhoods, 84 percent of Black children did so. There was very little change for children born between 1985 and 2000. Also, four out of five Black children who started in the top three income quintiles experienced downward mobility, compared with two out of five White children. As for upward mobility, three out of five White children who started in the bottom two quintiles experienced upward mobility, versus just one out of four Black children. In such circumstances, any generational improvement becomes a huge challenge.

## Restarting Progress

We take the investigation a step beyond the individual, the family, and the neighborhood to the larger perspective we call “ancestral heritage,” to see what children gain from family and economic capital over many generations. The history is that after slavery — even with freedom and eventual laws that gave equal rights — the Black population in the United States had to start growing the family tree from seed. The data we have reviewed show the effects of this in limited intergenerational mobility and low family net worth compared with the White population — much lower than the disparity that shows up when current income data are examined. Our objective has been to add to the understanding of changes in the achievement gap. We have explored the available research and data, and described some solid knowledge, some promising possibilities, some clues, and some remaining mysteries — which are considerable.

Approaches aimed at restarting progress will have to address the situation on several levels. Much has been learned about the importance of directing help to children at earlier and earlier ages through efforts such as early Head Start and preschool. There are promising approaches that extend to the family, the community and the neighborhood, such as the Harlem Children’s Zone. More difficult, however, is identifying approaches to uplift whole neighborhoods in terms of their economic and social capital, their school quality, and their recreational and health infrastructures. It may be that we don’t know how to do this, or we don’t have the public resources now to do so, or we lack the political will. The Great Society had its “Model Cities” efforts, or at least, it had the rhetoric. A counterpart would be “Model Neighborhoods,” perhaps through combined public, private, and nonprofit efforts. The scale of efforts that would be necessary to make a difference is formidable and the related knowledge base limited. It is similarly difficult to envision direct policy levers that might increase the marriage rate and get fathers more involved in home and family. While this is a sensitive matter, it is a matter that cannot be ignored. Leadership will have to come from both inside and outside of government, buttressed with the kind of employment opportunities that have not existed. There is no doubt that the design and scale of such an effort to change whole neighborhoods would be a daunting enterprise. The nation is, however, embarking on large-scale efforts to turn around the “worst” schools in the nation, and we have learned from the two-decade effort in Chicago to do this that building social capital in the neighborhood is critical to the success of school improvement efforts. Economic and social capital, “parent-pupil” ratios, jobs, and the effects of fear and crime get interwoven into living conditions that fail to meet any conventional definition of a “neighborhood.” We know that these “neighborhoods” of concentrated misery do not exist in a vacuum, although they are somewhat immune to changes in national policy. External events do affect what happens in our cities, and we see an ebb and flow that relates to the business cycles, like the recent national recession. In the current

economic climate, school personnel and school support services in these neighborhoods are being stretched, and nonprofits working there are cutting back or folding as sources of revenue dry up. Employment opportunities, already in short supply, are being lost, and children who may be getting free lunches at school are not getting evening meals and are going to school hungry. Interconnections exist on all levels of the economy and at all levels of government — health policies, income support programs such as food stamps, public school resources, public safety in neighborhoods — as does the need for personal responsibility for children brought into the world. The challenges to jump-start progress in reducing the Black-White achievement gap are indeed formidable. Single or simple solutions are suspect. No one finds it acceptable to maintain the status quo. Derek Neal's projection based on observed trends — that reaching equality will take from 50 to 100 years — is a clear warning of a possible future. Such a future is unacceptable.********

It is often the case that readers of a report like this will ask the authors for recommendations. This report has established that the problem facing the nation and the Black community is formidable. The insight and creativity required to frame effective solutions also is formidable and will require the involvement of government at all levels, reaching from communities and towns to the federal government, the school systems, the nonprofit sector, the private sector, the foundations, and families. Such large scale thinking and action will have to involve a lot of people, a lot of thinking, and a lot of resources. This will not happen unless there is first widespread understanding of the nature and magnitude of the problem, and a considerable degree of consensus about it. Understanding will have to occur in the nation as a whole and in the Black community itself. Solutions will have to be crafted with the involvement of that community, for that community, often by the community ... and not without it. Reversing these trends will occur only when there is culmination of communication, discussion, debate, disagreements, and the development of political and national will. . The trends will not be reversed by single or simple solutions. We have, advertently and inadvertently, spun a wide and sticky web of conditions that are holding back progress in closing the achievement gap. Getting over just one strand of that web will not allow an escape from it. It will be necessary to move forward with all deliberate thought, care, and speed.