

# Foreword

Since 1993, the America Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) has studied and highlighted strategies and reforms that provide youth with high quality education and preparation for fulfilling careers. Part of AYPF's mission is to publicize best practices in the education and youth development fields to help policymakers and practitioners make informed decisions. As a non-partisan professional development organization, AYPF explores many options supported by a variety of philosophical underpinnings. Central to our approach is our focus on whether positive outcomes are achieved by young people. Our focus has not been explicitly on "high performing schools," "high performing programs" or "high performing administrators and staff" but on high performing *young people*. We consider schools, programs, administrators and staff to be high performing when they have positive effects on young people.

Understanding this focus of AYPF's work on high performing youth provides an important guide to using this volume. AYPF has spent five years collecting empirical *evidence* of youth *outcomes* and compiling them into readable volumes. This report continues our commitment to placing sound research and evaluation at the service of policymakers and practitioners as they wrestle with some of America's most enduring challenges—achieving true equality of educational opportunity and equity in educational outcomes.

In 1997, AYPF published its first compendium of summaries of evaluations of programs and practices that were found to be successful in propelling youth to rewarding careers and postsecondary education, reducing risky or illegal behaviors, and providing opportunities to youth who had dropped out of school or were leaving the juvenile justice system. That report, called *Some Things DO Make a Difference for Youth: A Compendium of Successful Youth Practice and Programs*, was so well received that AYPF produced a second volume, *More Things That DO Make a Difference for Youth* in 1999. In this era of increased national attention to academic

achievement, many of the profiled programs in these two volumes were able to document *academic achievement* gains, as well as other positive outcomes.

Funding from the William T. Grant Foundation allowed for a re-analysis to determine exactly what the evaluations in the previous compendia could tell us about outcomes related to academic performance. This analysis is published in *Raising Academic Achievement: A Study of 20 Successful Programs* (2000)—programs with both the strongest achievement gains and the strongest evaluations. Five of the 20 programs directly addressed the question of minority student success. In particular, Alliance for Achievement (no longer in operation) and Gateway to Higher Education (currently expanding) illustrated (1) the long way minority students still have to go to eliminate the academic achievement gap, because despite their intellect and initiative, they are underrepresented in higher level courses, SAT test-taking, college enrollment, and other avenues to higher achievement; and (2) how much these programs helped increase the numbers of minority students at higher and higher levels of achievement.

Again with William T. Grant Foundation support, a much longer journey was begun to find evaluations of educational programs that are working to raise the academic achievement of minority students. On this journey there were a few surprises, including that many well-known programs we had hoped to document had no evaluations. Often, we found evidence of success from other, less well-known programs. We learned of the width of the academic achievement gap between African American, Latino and Native American youth and their white and Asian peers, yet were encouraged by the many programs that recognized the gap and were working hard to increase academic achievement for their young people.

Since beginning this volume, we have witnessed an escalating concern about the "minority achievement gap." Some have even called it *the* education issue of the new millennium in policy circles and the media. We hope that this volume can help provide

guidance on what works for minority youth to reach higher levels of academic achievement.

### A Few Words about our Focus on Academic Achievement

This report focuses only on *academic achievement*, not on the broader range of indicators of the first two compendia, such as employment and earnings data and reductions in risky behavior. In our compendia, the focus is on “hard data” primarily to “prove” the effectiveness of these programs, especially to those who are skeptical of softer measures. This decision coupled with the presentation of brief summaries of each evaluation, means that much rich information about other outcomes for youth may have been omitted.

In the first two compendia, information was provided on a range of *strategies* used by successful programs. The report, *Raising Academic Achievement*, narrowed the focus to what the program evaluations had to say about one set of outcomes. The current volume narrows the focus further to *academic* outcomes for *minority* students. Yet, within this academic achievement category, the focus is deep, seeking outcomes along an optimal pathway of academic achievement we wish all young people could take.

It is our hope that all young people will—

- ♦ *attend school, arrive on time, go to all classes*
- ♦ *read at grade level or above*
- ♦ *do well in the sciences, mathematics and technology*
- ♦ *persist to high school graduation*
- ♦ *be appropriately identified and served for any special needs*
- ♦ *obtain good grades (C or higher)*
- ♦ *have access to and do well in academically challenging courses*
- ♦ *have opportunities to apply their knowledge while in school (through work-based learning or service-learning)*
- ♦ *follow a coherent course sequence leading to postsecondary education*

- ♦ *take standardized and college entrance exams (e.g. Stanford 9, California Achievement Test, SAT, ACT, Achievement, and Advanced Placement tests) and obtain competitive scores*
- ♦ *make thoughtful guided decisions about college attendance and financing*
- ♦ *enroll in college*
- ♦ *have no need for remedial education in college*
- ♦ *sustain academic achievement and good grades in college*
- ♦ *sustain financial aid (reapply as needed)*
- ♦ *sustain college enrollment*
- ♦ *graduate from college*
- ♦ *and successfully pursue graduate/professional school degrees or fulfilling work in their chosen career.*

Information was sought for each level of educational achievement along this pathway. Information was also sought in the youth development literature about youth that are not in school, but there was little data on academic achievement to be found here. There was however, a great deal of writing on the topics of minority over-representation in special education, misidentification for special education, under-representation in gifted and talented programs, Advanced Placement, Honors and other advanced classes, and over-representation in the juvenile justice and adult penal systems. The research being conducted on these areas of concern is of great importance to the issue of minority academic achievement. However, summarizing the research on these topics was far beyond the scope of this report.

Additionally, within the pool of evaluations that met our rigorous criteria, there were few that provided detailed descriptions of the programs evaluated and the strategies used. So, while it is possible to identify strategies believed to be effective, practitioners wishing to implement these strategies or seeking to influence other types of youth achievement should use the contact information provided in each of the program summaries.

# Executive Summary

## Background

*Raising Minority Academic Achievement: A Compendium of Educational Programs and Practices* reports on a 22-month effort to identify, summarize and analyze evaluations of school and youth programs that show gains for minority youth across a broad range of academic achievement indicators, from early childhood through advanced postsecondary study.

## Purpose

The purpose of this report is to inform policymaking and funding decisions by providing easy-to-read, accessible, concrete, research-proven evidence of academic achievement gains for minority youth and information on successful program strategies. The report also aims to provide information that

researchers, practitioners (school administrators, youth program directors, teachers, counselors, youth workers), families, community members and young people can use to evaluate, design, implement and advocate practices shown to be effective in raising minority academic achievement.

## Programs

An exhaustive search of journals, research databases, and other sources yielded over 200 documents pertaining to education programs. To be included in the report, these documents had to use sound methodology and have measurable academic achievement data on racial or ethnic minorities. Those documents that met the criteria for inclusion were summarized in three to five pages and subjected to a review process that resulted in 38 being chosen for final inclusion:

Abecedarian Program – Chapel Hill, NC	GE Fund College Bound – in 12 states
Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) – nationwide	Head Start & African American Children – nationwide
Alaska Onward to Excellence & Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative – AK	Head Start & Latino Children – nationwide
Boys & Girls Clubs of America – CA, FL, NY, OH, TX	High School Punte – CA
Calvert – Baltimore, MD	High Schools That Work – in 23 states
Career Academies – nationwide	High/Scope Perry Preschool – Ypsilanti, MI
Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools – NC	Historically Black Colleges and Universities – in 20 states
Chicago Arts Partnership in Education – Chicago, IL	I Have a Dream – Chicago, IL
Chicanos in Higher Education – nationwide	KIPP Academies – Houston, TX & Bronx, New York
Child-Parent Centers – Chicago, IL	Project GRAD – CA, GA, NJ, OH, TN
City Schools – nationwide	Puerto Rico Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation – PR
Class Size: Project SAGE – WI	Sacramento START – Sacramento, CA
Class Size: Project STAR – TN	Sponsor-A-Scholar – Philadelphia, PA
Class Size Reduction – CA	Success for All – nationwide
Compact for Faculty Diversity – nationwide	Texas District-Wide Initiatives – TX
Dare to Dream – FL, IN, MN, TX	Tribal Colleges – in 10 states
Emerging Scholars Program – nationwide	Upward Bound – nationwide
Equity 2000 – CA, MD, RI, TN, TX	Urban Elementary Schools – GA, IL, MA, MD, MI, TX, WI
Gateway to Higher Education – New York, NY	Vouchers – DC, NY, OH

## Outcomes

- ◆ **Early Childhood**—Evaluation findings were particularly strong and positive at the early childhood level. When compared to control groups, minority children who attend early childhood development programs are more likely to remain in school, complete more years of education, and require less special education.
- ◆ **Elementary Through Middle School**—The elementary through middle school evaluations were almost exclusively focused on test scores. In most cases, improvements were incremental and even where minority academic achievement increased, the disparities in achievement between minority and white youth were highly apparent. Texas is probably the only state where achievement gaps between minorities and white students are being halved or cut even more. However, Texas students are measured on passing rates on only a minimum competency test. The question of whether higher levels of achievement are eventually reached remains unanswered.
- ◆ **District or State Initiatives/K-12**—The report reviews several district or state initiatives, including class size reduction and voucher studies. Additionally, reforms in Texas, North Carolina and Alaska are reviewed. These evaluations tend to focus more on increased attention to accountability than on specific strategies used to increase minority academic achievement.
- ◆ **High School/Transition**—Because they focus on more than test scores, the high school/transition programs offer a better perspective of what is actually happening with their minority students. Among the positive findings from these programs were one or more of the following: increased high school graduation, more high school credits earned, higher GPAs earned or maintained, more college prep and Advanced Placement courses taken, increased enrollment in higher level mathematics and

science classes, more college entrance exam-taking and higher scores, less need for remediation in college, higher levels of college enrollment at two- and four-year colleges, higher levels of college retention and graduation, and continuation in science-related majors or professions. Success is a relative word for most programs. Students may be entering college at a higher rate but their GPAs may be similar to peers in regular classrooms, or more students may be enrolling in academically challenging courses but also failing these courses in higher numbers. Evaluations of *Upward Bound*, *Sponsor-A-Scholar* and *Career Academies* show that improvements were most significant for those with higher risk of school failure and/or lower initial expectations, especially as they stayed in the program longer and participated more intensely. However, selective programs, such as *Gateway for Higher Education* and *High School Puente*, also indicate that high achieving students can perform at still higher levels when challenged.

- ◆ **Postsecondary**—Fewer quality evaluations were available at the postsecondary level with data disaggregated by race or ethnicity. The postsecondary programs included in the report show African American, Latino and Native American youth succeeding in demanding careers and postsecondary education. However, their numbers are still quite small.

## Strategies

The school initiatives and youth programs included in this report provide concrete examples of efforts to increase achievement for minority youth. However, no “magic bullet” was found, that is, no one strategy was found to guarantee program success. Rather, it is recommended that practitioners implement a **comprehensive set** of the following strategies and continuously evaluate their effects. The ten most frequent strategies identified in this report are listed below from most to least frequently cited in the program evaluations.

- ◆ **Program quality.** Quality of implementation, leadership and accountability are three essential components of effective strategies that help ensure high program standards.
- ◆ **Academically demanding curriculum.** All early childhood programs included in this report provide preschool-aged children with challenging educational activities that are also developmentally appropriate. Concern with challenging curricula was equally apparent in K-12 programs.
- ◆ **Professional development.** Many of the evaluations report professional development activities including staff orientation, summer sessions, ongoing training during the school year and/or when changes in curriculum or school structure are implemented. Programs that rely on tutors or mentors offer them training and supervision.
- ◆ **Family involvement.** Approximately 40% of the evaluations report activities geared toward improving communication with families, or increasing family involvement with the programs. Although such efforts are concentrated on initiatives for young children, at least two high school programs also include activities to promote greater involvement of families.
- ◆ **Reduced student-to-teacher ratios.** Many programs showing academic gains for minority students include a range of strategies to reduce student-to-teacher ratios, including smaller classes, small learning communities, teacher aides, team teaching, tutoring, mentoring and other ancillary supports.
- ◆ **Individualized supports.** For students who are struggling academically, individualized support may be the difference between falling behind and moving ahead. Many programs utilize community members, college students, employers and other groups as tutors and mentors to address the academic needs of specific students, or offer support, feedback and encouragement.
- ◆ **Extended learning time.** Several programs use longer school hours, extra school days, Saturday and summer courses to provide students with more learning time.
- ◆ **Community involvement.** Several programs involve communities, both individuals living close to the program and the larger community such as employers, museums and artists. Community participation takes many forms, from reinforcing cultural traditions and knowledge, to advocating for improved academic achievement of minority students, to offering work-based learning opportunities for students.
- ◆ **Long-term (multiple-year) supports for youth.** Several programs encourage long-term, stable relationships between participants and knowledgeable adults, from two to five years in most cases.
- ◆ **Scholarships and/or financial support.** Several K-12 programs offer financial help to students who demonstrate high academic performance.

## Recommendations

Based on AYPF's reflections on the reported evaluations, following are actions policymakers, practitioners, researchers, parents and community members can take to improve minority academic achievement.

### 1. Focus on Improved Academic Achievement and Outcomes for All.

- ◆ **National leaders should continue to build consensus around acceptable achievement gains** and require that these gains be shown for all student groups. National attention should focus on achievement differences among the states and ways to eliminate these differences.
- ◆ **States should create benchmarks for improving academic achievement for all student groups** and provide resources for school districts to attain those benchmarks.

- ◆ ***States and school districts should support and maintain high quality leadership*** and ensure the adequate implementation of programs to enhance minority academic achievement.
  - ◆ ***School districts and schools should expect high achievement from all students*** and provide academically demanding curricula that are meaningful and available across schools and grade levels to bring all students to higher levels of knowledge and achievement.
  - ◆ ***States and localities should develop a multi-layered “check” of achievement*** using a variety of test measures, such as NAEP, state-mandated tests, Stanford-9 or ITBS; and also use indicators that provide a broad perspective about students, such as classroom-based assessments, attendance, behavior (disciplinary incidents), course enrollment and passing rates, types of courses completed and graduation rates, among other measures.
  - ◆ ***School districts and schools should provide professional development and support*** to ensure that teachers (and other involved adults, as appropriate) have a deep understanding of curriculum, are familiar with innovative instructional methods, and have knowledge and interpersonal competence with cultures other than their own.
  - ◆ ***Schools should provide students, families and communities with specific information on what constitutes high academic standards*** and support their expectations for excellence in the educational system.
  - ◆ ***Families, youth advocates and communities should hold schools accountable*** for high levels of achievement for all students, reinforce academic skills learned both at home and at school, and ensure that every child has an advocate outside of the school system or program.
2. **States and Localities Should Provide the Necessary Supports to Ensure Student Success, including:**
- ◆ ***Reduced student-to-teacher ratios.*** A range of strategies should be employed by schools and programs to provide more personal teaching and learning environments to foster higher levels of academic achievement. These strategies may include smaller classes, small learning communities, teacher’s aides, team teaching, tutoring, mentoring and ancillary supports.
  - ◆ ***Extended learning time.*** To accelerate and reinforce student learning, programs should encourage or require additional time and opportunities (such as longer days, weekends and summer courses).
  - ◆ ***Long-term supports.*** Programs should encourage student participation over an extended time (two years or more) to create and sustain stable relationships between participants and knowledgeable adults, and to help youth make successful transitions as they progress up the educational ladder.
  - ◆ ***Scholarships and/or financial support.*** Programs should provide financial support to youth as needed to motivate participation and persistence in quality educational experiences. Programs should also provide continual guidance to youth and monitor the impact of the funds on student achievement, retention and graduation.
3. **Start Early, Don’t Stop.**
- ◆ ***National leaders, states and school districts should prevent minority students from falling behind*** by expanding early childhood programs and providing continuous guidance and supports through the elementary and high school years.
  - ◆ ***National leaders, states and school districts should boost efforts to increase minority students’ entry into and graduation from postsecondary education.***

## A Note on Educational Research

The introduction to Section II, in which the Evaluation Summaries are presented, describes the obstacles and discoveries along the way to selecting the 38 evaluations included in this report. Observations garnered from the work of creating this report include the following:

- ◆ Finding useful evaluations of educational programs is a difficult task, particularly when criteria for assessing quality are used.
- ◆ The most useful research is based on simple but methodologically sound design and provides information that is clear and easy to understand.
- ◆ Without rigorous research, program practitioners may be perpetuating failing or mediocre interventions whose long-term consequences are costly to young people and society.
- ◆ Disaggregating data for analysis is essential to highlight areas that require improvement, as well as areas of proven success. Programs that claim overall success without disaggregating their data may be helping one group of students while masking the low achievement of other groups.
- ◆ Evaluations frequently “spin” results into “success” or hide less than successful results, rather than present a thoughtful and balanced analysis of what worked and what did not.

Based on the experience with this and the previous compendia, recommendations for improving educational research in the area of program evaluation include:

- ◆ ***A large-scale, national and comprehensive educational research agenda should be developed*** to (a) determine which strategies and policies have resulted in the most benefit, for whom, and at what cost, (b) provide guidance to evaluators on what type of research would be

most useful to policymakers and practitioners and (c) provide guidance to practitioners on how to initiate and use program evaluation.

- ◆ ***Public and private funding sources should require and support high quality program evaluations*** and utilize findings to improve policy and practice.
- ◆ ***Data should be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, limited English proficiency, disability status, gender and poverty level and be made publicly accessible*** to researchers, educators, policymakers, families and the public at large.
- ◆ ***Researchers should look into a range of achievement indicators*** including, numbers of students enrolled and dropping out, attendance, test scores, GPAs, graduation, suspensions, expulsions, and special education referrals. They should also translate their findings into language that is accessible to policymakers, practitioners, educators, families and students, so that research findings can be translated into more effective education policies and practices.

## Conclusion

At almost every educational level, schools and community-based programs across the country are reporting good news about the academic achievement of the minority students they are serving. Although gaps overall are still large, and most reported achievement gains are small, these programs have proven there is every possibility of succeeding in raising achievement for all. Implementing the recommendations above could help the nation move beyond a feeling of helplessness regarding achievement gaps by providing specific information on program design and strategies about “what works” to enhance academic achievement. The larger challenge is creating the ***national will*** to set in place mechanisms that will eliminate differences in academic achievement among students correlated with race or ethnicity.



# ***Section I***

