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### Document

#### **The Black-White Achievement Gap: Do State Policies Matter?**

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Braun, H.I., Wang, A., Jenkins, F., & Weinbaum, E. (2006). The Black-White Achievement Gap: Do State Policies Matter?, Education Policy Analysis Archives, 14(8).

##### **Abstract :**

The goal of this study conducted by a team of American researchers was to document and assess the relationship between educational policies implemented and the academic achievement gap observed between white and African-American students for the 1992-2000 period.

##### **States participating in the study and measurement of academic achievement**

Based on very precise criteria, the ten following states were selected to participate in the study: California, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, North Carolina, South Carolina, New York, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia.

The trajectory of student achievement was estimated based on the NAEP mathematics scores (1992, 1996, 2000) of eighth graders.

##### **State classification according to educational policies**

Educational policies implemented in each state (1988-1998) were analyzed according to an analysis framework based on five policy levers: 1) reform governance, 2) education finance, 3) curriculum and standards, 4) teacher quality and 5) assessment and accountability. A standard profile was developed for each state and validated with experts. These profiles were then used to compare the different states and place them into three categories.

Only the state of North Carolina was placed in the first category for its commitment to the implementation of educational policies with regard to the five policy levers. Five states (California, Kentucky, New York, South Carolina and Texas) were placed in the second category of commitment to reform implementation, but with regard to only one or two policy levers. Lastly, four states (Maryland, Michigan, Tennessee, Virginia) fell into the last group, given their low commitment to policy implementation.

##### **States ranked according to achievement gap among socio-economic and ethnic groups**

In each state, schools were ranked according to three criteria: 1) location, 2) percentage of ethnic minority students and 3) percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. Two strata were defined based on these criteria: 1) lower poverty (S1) and higher poverty (S2).

Analysis of the achievement gaps between the strata for each state in 1992 and 2000 revealed a single statistically significant change, i.e. the closing of this gap in the state of New York.

The most significant increase in the achievement gap between white and African-American students was observed in North Carolina, whereas the most significant closing of the gap was observed in the state of New York.

By assessing the achievement gap between white and African-American students based on the strata (S1 and S2), it was observed that New York and California succeeded in closing this gap with regard to the two strata.

Following this analysis, the different states were classified according to their success in increasing African-American student achievement and closing the achievement gap between the groups (increase of African-American student achievement in the S1 stratum, increase in their achievement in the S2 stratum, closing of the achievement gap in the S1 stratum, closing of this gap in the S2 stratum). The state of New York showed the best performance in the overall categories, while Tennessee showed the least progress in this regard.

**Main Results**

During the period studied, average achievement increased for the two strata and in the ten states for all the students. However, variations among the states were observed with regard to the scope of this increase.

On the whole, for all the states studied, achievement gaps remained the same between the S1 and S2 strata, and between white and African-American students. In most states, the situation changed very little, except in particular states where changes in achievement gaps were observed.

Can these changes be related to educational policies implemented in these states? Results revealed that the ranking of the states based on educational policies correlates only moderately with the ranking of the states according to the increase in African-American student achievement. There is no correlation between the ranking of states based on policies and that based on achievement gap closing.

No particular educational policy levers showed any significant effect. However, the lever that seemed to exert some influence, although not significant in terms of statistics, was teacher quality.

The states that showed poorer performance with regard to educational policy implementation (Michigan, Tennessee, Virginia) were also those that showed poorer performance in achievement gap closing for the S1 and S2 strata.

For all the states, the achievement gaps between white and African-American students were greater in the S1 stratum (lower poverty). For most states, these gaps were less significant in the S2 stratum (higher poverty).

Variations in policy implementation can explain variations in achievement gap closing, but in modest proportions only.

**Links :**

This journal is also available in electronic format.

**Key Words :**

Ethnicity, Achievement Gap, School Reforms, Socio-economic Status, Mathematics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Educational Inequalities, Newsletter1

**Monitored Countries :**

United States