

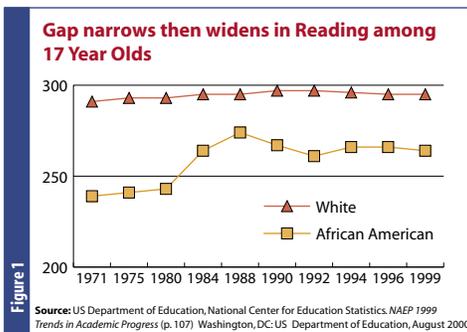


# African American Achievement in America

Achievement gaps between groups of students can tell us a lot about which students are given the preparation they need to succeed in college and work, and which ones continue to be left out.

## How far have we come?

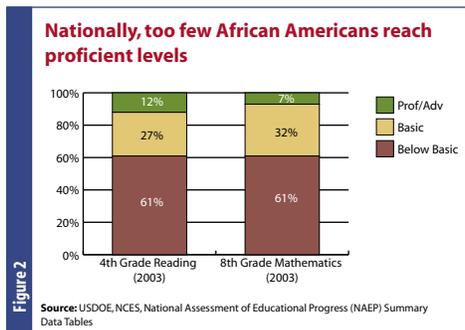
Reading achievement among African Americans climbed substantially throughout the 70s and 80s, and the achievement gaps between them and White students narrowed by more than half. But in the 90s, progress stopped and those gaps began to widen again. The patterns for mathematics achievement look very similar with significant gap-closing until the early 90s, then a gradual reversal of those gains. In fact, the White-Black gaps are approximately 10 points wider, about a year's worth of learning, than they were a decade ago.



## Where are we now?

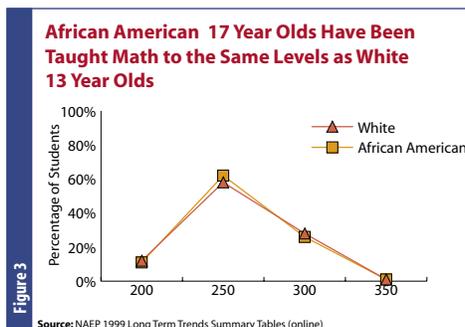
Nationally, too few African Americans read or do math at proficient levels. In reading, for instance, a mere 12% of African American 4th graders reach

proficient or advanced levels, while a heartbreaking 61% have not been taught to even the basic level. And, the story is worse in math. The same proportion of African American 8th graders fall below the basic achievement level compared to only 7% who reach the proficient level or above on NAEP.



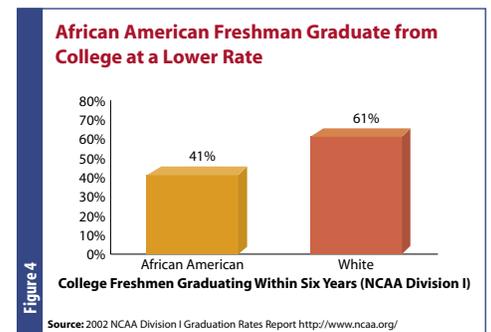
## Results by the end of high school

What does this all mean? By the end of high school, African American students have math and reading skills that are virtually the same as those of 8th grade White students.



## The gap's consequences reach beyond high school

In the last 20 years, the college enrollment rates of African Americans have steadily increased to the point that they now go to college at about the same rates as White students. However, African American college completion rates have not increased at the same pace, and a gap in college attainment remains.



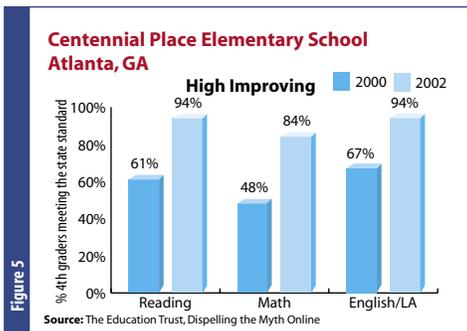
## But it doesn't have to be this way. . .

There are some schools, districts, and even whole states where African American students excel.

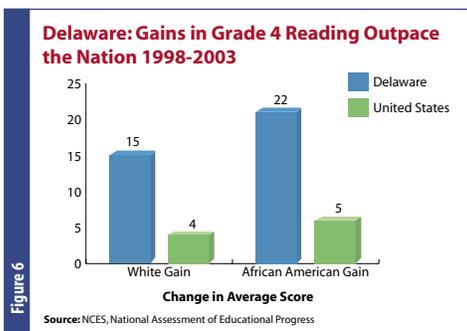
Centennial Place Elementary School in Atlanta, GA is 91% African American and 79% low-income and is in the top 10% of the entire state of Georgia in reading. Moreover, Centennial Place Elementary outscored 88% of other Georgia schools on the state's math test. (For high performing schools in your state, please visit [Dispelling the Myth Online](http://www.edtrust.org))



at [www.edtrust.org](http://www.edtrust.org).) Additionally, the Mount Vernon, New York, district has had tremendous success in reducing the Black-White gap while simultaneously raising achievement levels for all groups of children.



Moreover, there are whole states where African Americans excel. For example, Delaware outpaces the nation in reading gains for both African American and White 4th graders, and the greatest strides have been made by African American youngsters.



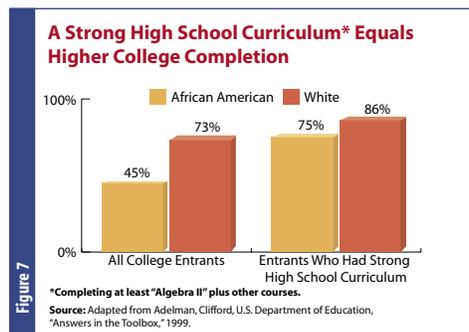
## What do we know about the places that are improving results?

### They have clear goals: the role of standards

Clear and public standards for what students should learn at benchmark grade levels are a critical tool for solving this problem. They are a guide—for teachers, administrators, parents and students themselves—to what knowledge and skills are critical for students to master. Moreover, standards represent a contract between schools and their communities that reaching these standards are the expectation for all their students.

### They provide all students challenging curriculums aligned with standards

New standards and assessments won't make much of a difference if they are not accompanied by a rigorous curriculum lined up with those standards. Yet in too many places, some students are taught rich and challenging subject matter, while others are relegated to a low-level curriculum—one that is better aligned with assembly-line jobs that are disappearing than with today's job market or college entry requirements. For example, even though Algebra 2 enrollments for African American high-schoolers have doubled, only one-half or fewer of such students take this high-level course compared to nearly two-thirds of their White peers. (For more information on the importance of a challenging curriculum, please see "A New Core Curriculum for All" available at [www.edtrust.org](http://www.edtrust.org).)



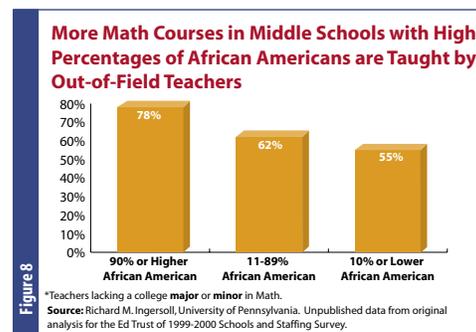
### They provide extra instruction to students when they need it

There is now ample evidence that all children can achieve at high levels if they are taught at high levels. Indeed, the simple act of putting students in more rigorous, college preparatory courses will improve achievement; the data are clear on that. But it is equally clear that for some students, passing the course—or the examination—will require extra time and support.

### They know that good teaching matters more than anything else

If we have learned anything over the years it is how much teachers matter. On this point, the research is unequivocal: the teacher is the single most important factor in whether young people learn or whether they don't. If they are going to learn to high standards, students need teachers who know both their subjects and how to teach them. Yet large numbers of students—especially those who are African American—are taught by

teachers who lack sufficient background in the subjects they are teaching. Across the country, we are giving the least qualified teachers to the kids with the greatest need for good teachers. (For more information on teacher quality, please see "Good Teaching Matters" and "Interpret with Caution" both available on [www.edtrust.org](http://www.edtrust.org).)



## How can we pay for all of this?

In most states, school districts that educate the greatest number of minority students receive substantially less state and local money per student than districts with the fewest low-income and minority students.

At a time when schools, districts and states are rightly focusing on closing the achievement gap, states can and must do more to close these funding gaps. (For state data on Funding Gaps, visit [EdWatch](http://EdWatch.org) online or the Funding Gap report both available at [www.edtrust.org](http://www.edtrust.org).)

## What would happen if we had the courage to change these patterns?

It only takes one school to teach African American kids at high levels to prove that it can be done. Well, there are hundreds of schools that are already teaching these kids at high levels all around the nation.

Underachievement among African Americans is a crisis, but raising African American achievement is not an insurmountable task. As schools across this country show us, it can and must be done. We have listed steps that states, districts, schools and communities can follow to replicate their success. What are we waiting for to make sure that all African American children receive the right education and thereby close the achievement gap once and for all?

