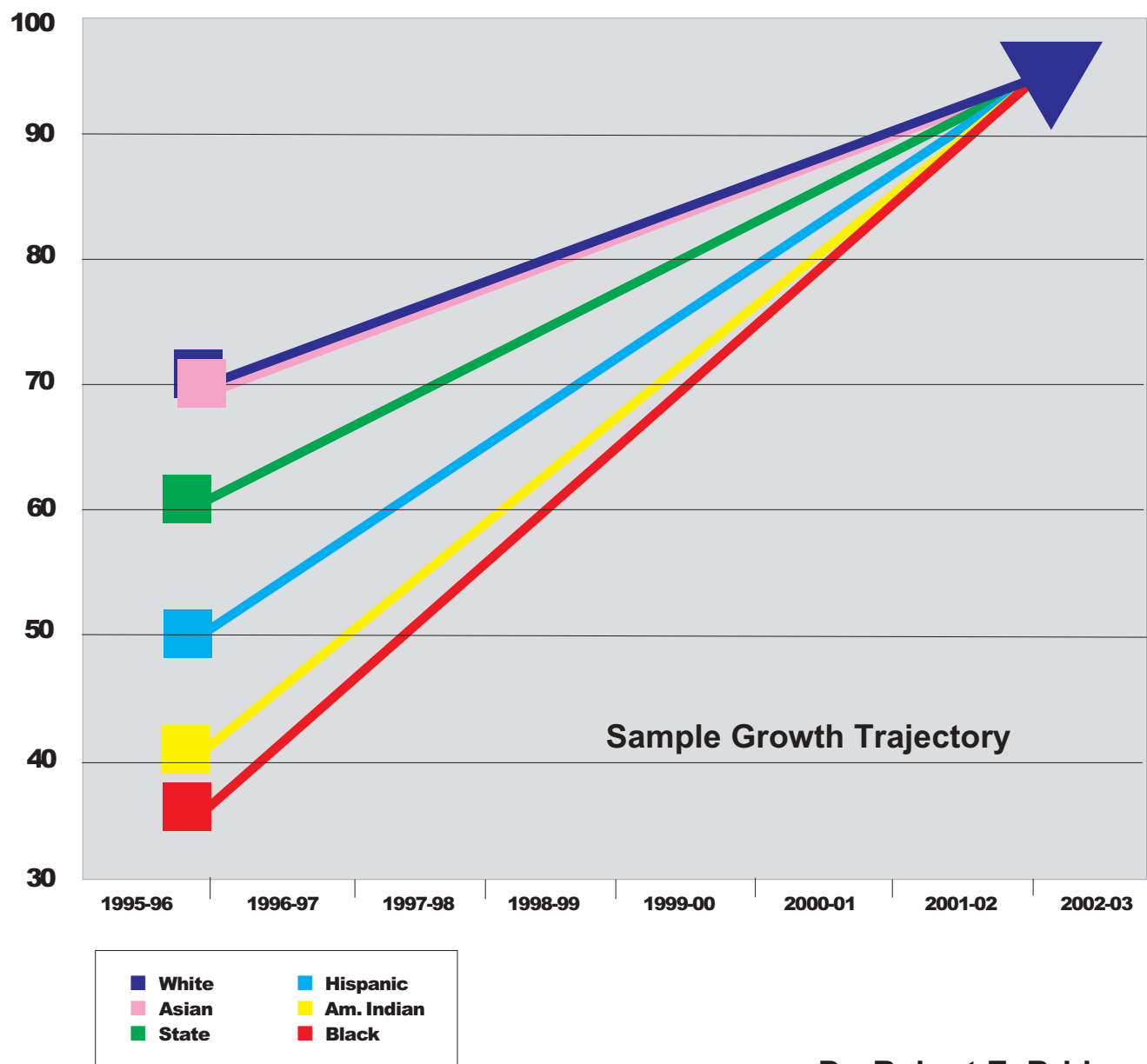


THE NORTH CAROLINA COMMISSION ON RAISING ACHIEVEMENT AND CLOSING GAPS

**First Report to the State Board of Education
December 2001**



**Dr. Robert E. Bridges
Commission Chair**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Cautions and Encouragements from the Commission:	
A Way of Thinking about the Issues	3
1—Findings and Beliefs Statement	
Student Participation and Exclusions	5
Recommendation One	6
Recommendation Two	7
2—Findings and Beliefs Statement	
The Role of Home and Community	7
Recommendation Three	8
Recommendation Four	10
3—Findings and Beliefs Statement	
Teacher Preparation and Support	10
Recommendation Five	12
Recommendation Six	13
Recommendation Seven	13
Recommendation Eight	13
Recommendation Nine	13
4—Findings and Beliefs Statement	
Law and Policy	14
Recommendation Ten	15
5—Findings and Beliefs Statement	
The History of Educating Minorities in North Carolina	19
Recommendation Eleven	20
Summary Statement	21
Exhibits	
EXHIBIT ONE	25
EXHIBIT TWO	26
EXHIBIT THREE	27
Works Cited	31

ADVISORY COMMISSION ON RAISING ACHIEVEMENT AND CLOSING GAPS

Ms. Catherine S. Allen

Northeast Regional Director
N. C. Model Teacher Education Consortium

Dr. Robert E. Bridges, Chairman

President and CEO
Education Initiatives, Inc.

Ms. Aura Camacho-Maas

Founder & Executive Director
Latin American Resource Center

Dr. Karen Campbell, Vice Chair

Superintendent
Asheville City School System

Mr. Tom Campbell

Teacher/Maestro Pre-K
Paul Braxton Center

Dr. Sammie Campbell Parrish, Dean

School of Education
North Carolina Central University

Mr. Robert L. "Bob" Davis, Jr.

President
North Carolina Black Leadership Caucus

Mr. Edwin Dominowski, Teacher

Dorothy B. Johnson Elementary School

Ms. Lucy Edwards, Principal

Gaston Middle School
Northampton County Schools

Ms. Brenda Greene, Board Member

Northampton County Social Services

Dr. Judy Grissom

Associate Superintendent
Alamance County Schools

Mr. Peter Leousis

Assistant Secretary
NC Department of Health & Human Services

Mr. Anthony Locklear, Executive Director

GEAR UP NC
UNC General Administration

Ms. Ann McColl

Attorney at Law

Ms. Olivia H. Oxendine

English/Language Arts Consultant
Sandhills Regional Education Consortium

Mr. Leonard Peace, Board Member

Granville County Board of Education

Dr. Sharon Pennell, Board Member

Caldwell County Board of Education

Ms. Faye Riner, Director

Exceptional Children Programs
Cumberland County Schools

Ms. Gladys Ashe Robinson

State Education Chair, NAACP

Ms. Tammie Sligh, Principal

Morton Elementary School
Onslow County Schools

Mr. Virgil Smith, President & Publisher

Asheville Citizen-Times

Mr. John D. Stokes, Education Consultant

Dillard Academy Charter School
Wayne County

Dr. Forrest Toms

President
Training Research Development, Inc.

Mr. Mitch Tyler

Superintendent
Hoke County Schools

Mr. Calvin Wallace

Assistant Superintendent
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

Ms. Mildred Wilson, Teacher

Brawley Middle School
Halifax County Schools

DPI Staff Members:

Mr. Marvin R. Pittman

Senior Assistant
State Superintendent's Office

Ms. Mary Anne Tharin

External Consultant
State Superintendent's Office

Ms. Lou L. Martin

Executive Assistant
State Superintendent's Office

Ms. Dee Brewer

Policy Analyst
SERVE

Raising Achievement Closing Gaps

THE NORTH CAROLINA COMMISSION ON RAISING ACHIEVEMENT AND CLOSING GAPS

First Report to the State Board of Education

December 2001

INTRODUCTION

The Advisory Commission on Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps was appointed in the late summer of 2000. It was charged with preparing to advise the State Board of Education, the State Superintendent, and local school systems on ways to raise achievement for all students and close the number of gaps that exist in student achievement outcomes and student participation in the instructional process. The Commission's members come from all across the state and bring a wide range of experiences and involvement in the education arena. Teachers, school administrators, parents, school board members, community organizations, and others close to the schooling process are included. The dean of a public university school of education, an attorney who specializes in school law and policy, a researcher/consultant on diversity matters, advocates, and a newspaper editor add to the diversity of the Commission. A former school superintendent serves as chairman.

As the Commission began its work, it was determined that a deliberate and probing approach would be taken to learn more about the gaps in question and why they present such stubborn resistance to change. It was felt that a disciplined search would be undertaken for causes that may have been overlooked, considered to be politically or socially off limits, or simply viewed as too difficult or

.....
"Deep-seated root
causes have obviously
held this long-standing
discrepancy in place."
.....

expensive to approach. Deep-seated root causes have obviously held this long-standing discrepancy in place. While the Commission supports the many efforts being made to address this issue, it is believed that these root causes must be recognized and accepted as such before effective practices and strategies can be put in place to bring about sustainable progress.

While the Commission's pursuit of a closer look at this problem and ways to attack it continues, a statement of significant findings and beliefs to date are offered in this report along with some recommended direction in key areas where major cause has been recognized. The Commission's focus has been in five primary areas believed to harbor cause.

- ◆ The preparation and support of teachers as they assume today's demanding responsibilities which include teaching an increasingly diverse student population under the strain of stricter accountability measures.
- ◆ The underachieving student and his or her condition for learning.
- ◆ The role of home and community in facilitating and supporting high achievement.
- ◆ The influence of legislation and policy (existing or needed) related to raising achievement and closing gaps.
- ◆ The participation of minority students in the instructional process.

The discovery process over the past year has been comprehensive and informative. The search for answers is being conducted in school districts, communities, and states around the nation by researchers, practitioners, and others close to education. The Commission has examined a number of current and highly credible studies, reports, and research documents dealing with the achievement gaps and would encourage education leaders and other stakeholders to consider these findings and recommendations in future planning and policy making. These references are appended to this report.

The Commission has spent many hours reviewing and discussing research and the results from numerous studies

.....
"It is, however, still difficult
to judge the level of 'real'
belief that things can be
different . . . that
struggling minority
students can be brought
to perform academically
on par with their white
counterparts. And the
Commission strongly
believes that building and
feeding this belief is "Job
One. . ."

.....

on this subject. School faculties, researchers, and community organizations have presented their practices, findings, and opinions to the Commission at its regularly scheduled meetings. Visits to classrooms and administrative work sessions have added candid and practical input to the discovery process. The State Department of Public Instruction has provided relevant data requested by the Commission in a variety of forms and conditions. However, the greatest resource to the Commission has been and continues to be its own membership of involved and experienced individuals. After many hours of interaction and moving about the state for a year, it can clearly be stated that recognition of this problem is at an all time high. It is talked about more openly by the leadership, and most schools around the state have established action plans to address gaps in achievement outcomes. It is, however, still difficult to judge the level of "real" belief that things can be different . . . that struggling minority students can be brought to perform academically on par with their white counterparts. And the Commission strongly believes that building and feeding this belief is "Job One" as we seek to raise achievement outcomes for all while more fully maximizing the untapped academic potential of African American, Native American, and Hispanic or Latino students in our schools.

CAUTIONS AND ENCOURAGEMENTS FROM THE COMMISSION: A Way of Thinking about the Issue

- We must remain diligent and steadfast in our effort and commitment to raise achievement outcomes for all students throughout the state. Much progress has been made in this regard over the past decade, which must be continued. We must, at the same time, recognize that closing the gaps that exist in achievement outcomes between specific minority groups and white students presents an extraordinary challenge. The goal must be to raise achievement for all students while accelerating

.....
“ A rising tide will lift all
boats but their physical
relationship to each other
will not change without
some additional
intervention.”
.....

.....
“We can no longer afford
to avoid the discomfort
often associated with
recognizing that ethnic
culture (race) is somehow
associated with this
failure.”
.....

the progress of those who are seriously underachieving (*EXHIBIT 1*). History would suggest that deep and hidden roots are anchoring this condition and keeping the gaps in place. Continuing or even ratcheting up traditional and routine school improvement practices alone probably will not produce significant and sustained improvement in this case. A rising tide will lift all boats but their physical relationship to each other will not change without some additional intervention. We must create new traditions in this case and go beyond the routine . . . and in some cases, beyond our comforts if we are to succeed in this endeavor.

- While coming to grips with our failures in this area and searching for an acceptable approach to dealing with the challenge, it is helpful to recognize that the issue is not really so much about the gaps that exist as it is about the undeveloped academic potential of thousands of young people who are present for instruction in classrooms across the state. And disproportionately, they are minorities (*EXHIBIT 2*). We can no longer afford to avoid the discomfort often associated with recognizing that ethnic culture (race) is somehow associated with this failure. The evidence is compelling. In every analysis of EOG test data from the ABCs program presented to the Commission over the past year, the factor of race was dominant in differentiating levels of achievement. ***When poverty is factored out, middle class white students still score significantly higher than middle class African American students. The Commission believes that only through recognizing this association and a willingness to think and talk responsibly but openly and candidly on the subject, can we begin to understand and effectively address the situation.***
- We should not expect to eliminate these gaps overnight or that change will occur through patching a few holes in the system or even by realizing that the credibility and ultimate survival of our public schooling system

.....
"Sustained success in this
case will require
fundamental changes in
the way we do business
in the village."
.....

.....
"The percentage of
Indian male students
who dropped out of
school in 2000 was
greater than for each
other race and gender
group. The percentage
in this case was 3.98%."
.....

may hang in the balance. Sustained success in this case will require fundamental changes in the way we do business in the village. The current checks and balances for the system's operation will simply not effectively protect against continuing failure where minority students or students who live in poverty are concerned. Political persuasion as a primary influence on school operation, majority culture expectations, preparation and practice as the standard for operation, and reliance on the individual dispositions of professionals where the issue of race or ethnic culture is concerned. These are some of the costly elements in the way our public schooling system works.

1—FINDINGS AND BELIEFS STATEMENT

STUDENT PARTICIPATION AND EXCLUSIONS

A central question was raised by the Commission as it began deliberations. How involved are minority students in the full range of course offerings and how does their level of participation compare to that of white students? It was determined early that missed instructional opportunity occurred far more frequently for African American and American Indian students than for any other group due to suspension and dropout activity. More than half of the long-term suspended students from 1997-98 through 1999-2000 were black or multiracial. Blacks make up about 33% of the public school population. A disproportionate loss of instructional time for American Indian students occurs through dropouts. The percentage of Indian male students who dropped out of school in 2000 was greater than for each other race and gender group. The percentage in this case was 3.98%. Asian students posted the lowest percentage with 1.74% for males and 1.23% for females.¹

While time out of school is significant, the broader and much more defining response to the earlier question has to do with the great majority of minority students who

.....
“The Commission believes
that minority students must
be fully exposed to the
instructional content and
level of knowledge
required if they are to meet
expectations or better
when tested.”
.....

remain in school and participate at some level in the instructional program. Where do they participate? Statewide data clearly establishes that minority students are seriously over-identified and placed in special programs for the mentally- and behaviorally-handicapped. It can also be observed and documented that black, Indian, and Hispanic students are underrepresented in gifted and advanced placement classes around the state. More subtle and difficult to examine is the degree to which a majority of minority students participate in the more rigorous and elevated courses in the standard K-12 curriculum. Visits to schools and the review of a state-funded independent study of conditions strongly suggest disproportionality with minority students populating lower track classes more frequently.² Informal observation and reporting have shown a disproportionate number of minority students (especially blacks) are being served in alternative schools and programs across the state. The level of instruction offered in these programs is being studied further by the Commission.

The Commission believes that minority students must be fully exposed to the instructional content and level of knowledge required if they are to meet expectations or better when tested. For whatever reasons (and a number probably apply), minority students in the three ethnic groups in question are both out of school and in less rigorous classes disproportionately when compared to white students. A root cause for the achievement gap, therefore, must be identified with the minority student's reduced opportunity to participate in high-level course offerings. Numerous researchers have recognized that students should not be expected to know or demonstrate what they have not had the opportunity to learn.³

RECOMMENDATION ONE

That the state take steps to reduce, then eliminate the disproportionate number of minority students assigned to special education programs. As a part of the ABCs reporting process, require that schools provide

.....
“... the serious state of
disconnectedness that
exists between a large
percentage of minority
families and their schools
must be recognized as a
significant root cause of
the achievement gap
between minority students
and their white
counterparts.”
.....

descriptive data, in table format, that will allow for comparisons between the percentage of students assigned to the various categorical special education programs in school districts with state averages in those same categories; and with the rates of incidence of the various handicapping conditions in the general population of our nation.

Reduce the tendency to over identify minority students for assignment to special education by requiring that those who assign them make public their data and stand accountable.

RECOMMENDATION TWO

That the state recognize its obligation to ensure that students have an equal opportunity to learn by promoting, encouraging, and funding instructional approaches that expose minority students currently functioning at or near grade level to advance content, challenging strategies, and quality work thus increasing the number of minority students who perform at the highest levels on standardized and end-of-grade tests.

There are sizable numbers of minority students who are capable of learning and achieving at the highest levels, but who are caught in well-intended programs and/or expectations that deny them this opportunity.

2—FINDINGS AND BELIEFS STATEMENT

THE ROLE OF HOME AND COMMUNITY

Parental involvement has been thoroughly recognized as a powerful force in a child's school experience. Social and academic skills development are key elements of the overall development process. They must happen to varying degrees in both the home and the school settings. This being the case, the serious state of disconnectedness that exists between a large percentage of minority families and their schools must be recognized as a significant root cause of the achievement gap between minority students and their

.....
"Schools that have
made substantial
progress in closing the
achievement gap have
first been successful at
closing the
communication and
interaction gap
between home and
school."
.....

white counterparts. Under the most strained nonrelationships examined by the Commission, both parents and school officials typically adopt an independent and sometimes hostile attitude toward each other while becoming convinced that better achievement outcomes can only be realized when the other party does his/her job. Even when there is no significant friction or conflict, there is still enough discomfort with interaction to inhibit effective and productive communication.

Schools that have made substantial progress in closing the achievement gap have first been successful at closing the communication and interaction gap between home and school. School personnel are very clear about what middle class white parents can and wish to do to be involved in schools and in their students' education. They are not as clear about minority parents and are often reluctant to press for answers in this regard. In most cases, the absence of knowledge and understanding of minority cultures gives rise to this reluctance.

RECOMMENDATION THREE

That a professionally designed public information campaign be initiated statewide to get the attention of parents (especially those with consistently underachieving students) and local communities. The primary purpose should be to raise awareness of attitudes and practices that are critical to raising student achievement to elevated levels. Attitudes and practices believed to be hindering academic achievement and detrimental to positive youth development should also be featured. While the overall message and primary themes should be distributed statewide, they should be designed in such a way as to be readily adaptable to local communities without great expense. Each LEA should be at least encouraged to connect to the campaign.

A number of outlets or vehicles must be used to get the message of the campaign out to the priority audience. Major media outlets will be useful in getting the general

citizenry to take note and begin talking about the message. However, the legwork of the campaign must be done closer to the priority population in comfortable settings and through trusted avenues of communication and interaction. The Martin Luther King Center, churches, Greek fraternities and sororities, the Latin American Resource Center, the neighborhood grocer, and a variety of local service organizations should be invited to participate in getting the word out with encouragement. They should be provided user-friendly campaign materials to facilitate local community interaction.

The following thoughts should be considered in building the message and themes of the campaign.

- Parents must begin early and continue helping their children think and feel positively about themselves as academic achievers. They must be convincing in this effort by whatever means necessary.
- Home and school must be on the “same page” with the child if the child is to read and compute well when it is time. When parents have a problem with the school, they should define it and “work it out” rather than withdrawing and becoming adversarial.
- An overdose of TV time can be deadly where a child’s development is concerned. Highly credible studies have shown that too much TV can negatively affect learning on the part of children. African American children have been shown to be overexposed to TV at home. This minority group is experiencing the lowest achievement level of all ethnic groups.⁴
- School/community mentoring programs are providing adult partners for young people in need of guidance and someone who cares and is available to advise and encourage. Such programs are organized jointly by schools and communities and are typically operated by the community organization or agency. Mentors are carefully recruited, trained, and supported in the mentoring process.

.....
"Most policymakers,
parents, educators, and
researchers now
generally agree that
nothing is more closely
tied to student
achievement and
underachievement than
the preparation, support,
and quality of classroom
teachers."
.....

RECOMMENDATION FOUR

That each LEA be directed to request the following from each school in its district.

- An annual action plan for creatively seeking to improve the school's image with parents and to raise the level of connectedness to parents in general but specifically to those not usually involved with the school. The plan should include methods used to assess involvement and feelings about the school on the part of parents and should be filed with the local superintendent's office by August 1 annually.
- Parent involvement records should be kept identifying parents who come to school to assist and support the school and the child in the teaching and learning process. Attendance at mass meetings such as PTA, public forums, etc. should not be recorded for this purpose.
- Voluntary home visits by teachers and administrators should be considered for the simple purpose of building a trusting relationship between home and school. When such visits are taken, the results in terms of opinions held and conclusions drawn should be recorded and used for faculty orientation and training.

3—FINDINGS AND BELIEFS STATEMENT

TEACHER PREPARATION AND SUPPORT

Most policymakers, parents, educators, and researchers now generally agree that nothing is more closely tied to student achievement and underachievement than the preparation, support, and quality of classroom teachers. It follows then, that nothing is more critical to our efforts to close the achievement gap than making certain that every student, especially those who have been traditionally underserved by public schools, has access to competent, caring, qualified teachers in schools organized for success.

• • • • •
“A better way to know
how much professional
development is
sufficient is when we
can no longer predict
the academic
performance of groups
of students based on
ethnicity.”
• • • • •

This was the position taken by the Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, and it is this Commission’s strong belief, as well.

Development of highly competent, caring teachers is no easy task. It’s not something that you do once and it’s done forever more. Colleges and universities, private and public, traditional and non-traditional must be held accountable for graduating excellent beginning teachers as measured by whatever indicators have been deemed appropriate by the public, policymakers, and professionals.

Just how much teacher professional development is enough is anyone’s answer. Should it be no better than that provided heretofore, perhaps teachers have already had enough! But assuming that new professional development is based on national models and standards and centered on the achievement problems that teachers face each day, one measure of sufficiency will be when teachers are successful in teaching groups of diverse learners, as outlined in the six core standards developed and adopted by the North Carolina Teaching Standards Board and the North Carolina Association of Educators representing the teachers of our state. The State Board of Education adopted these same standards for North Carolina’s teachers in November 1999. Standards, without the means of reaching them, however, are a travesty.

A better way to know how much professional development is sufficient is when we can no longer predict the academic performance of groups of students based on ethnicity. Certainly this is a tough measure, but one that we believe is justified, as this is our task—to recommend means of closing the gap.

But even the beginning teacher is more likely to be successful in teaching all children when they themselves have been taught by teacher educators who model what we want them to be. University teacher educators themselves must have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to successfully teach diverse student populations. And, they themselves must be comfortable addressing the

.....
“Because most often
university faculty
members are selected
based on knowledge of
their discipline and not
on their knowledge of
how to teach their
discipline to culturally
different audiences,
teacher preparation
candidates have been
put at a
disadvantage.”
.....

uncomfortable issues of race, religion, and ethnicity in the classroom and in society. Because most often university faculty members are selected based on knowledge of their discipline and not on their knowledge of how to teach their discipline to culturally different audiences, teacher preparation candidates have been put at a disadvantage. More excellent university teaching models are needed and university faculty are entitled to and should receive greater support and opportunities for growth.

Finally, preliminary information raises questions about the assignment of a disproportionate number of the least qualified teachers to our most needy student populations. All of these topics will be studied and addressed in future Commission update reports. To paraphrase the late Dr. Ron Edmonds, we already know more than enough to improve the quality of teacher preparation and teacher support and to meet the nation’s audacious goal. The question remaining is how we feel about the fact that we haven’t yet applied what we know to better serve all students, but most especially to raise achievement and close the gap.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE

That the State Board of Education and the Superintendent immediately make a public commitment to design and fund a required, but flexible, professional development initiative that will ensure that classroom teachers acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to be successful in teaching a diverse population of students. A new core standard was adopted by the North Carolina Teaching Standards Board, endorsed by the North Carolina Association of Educators, and adopted by the State Board of Education in November 1999 addressing this need.

Raising the bar just increases the problem if we don’t coach those who must reach the new heights. Thus, standard setting for teachers will fall woefully short and fail to close the achievement gap unless the state provides increased opportunities for teachers to learn.

RECOMMENDATION SIX

That the state provide the substantial TIME that classroom teachers need to update their skills and gain new skills in working with diverse populations by requiring that veteran classroom teachers accept paid 11-month contracts once during every four-year period.

Teachers have long said that time not commitment and desire is the problem when it comes to improving results.

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN

That the State create, fund, and support special seminars and course development for existing university teacher education faculty designed to ensure that they command and model the specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to prepare preservice teachers to be successful in teaching diverse student populations.

How can university professors who teach teachers model what they themselves have not had opportunities or a need to learn?

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT

That the State Board of Education seek the support of the President of the University of North Carolina and the various chancellors to require all search committees for new teacher education faculty members to assess and rate applicants as to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they will need to teach preservice teachers to work successfully with diverse student populations.

We must adopt personnel policies and practices at all levels that support the goal of closing the achievement gap.

RECOMMENDATION NINE

That the State demonstrate seriousness about resolving the shortage of qualified classroom teachers in North Carolina prepared to be successful with diverse populations. Design and implement a specific preparation delivery system that provides monetary

.....
“Closing the gap must
be achieved by
accelerating the
achievement of the
lower-performing
groups, not by
reducing the rate of
growth of the higher-
performing groups.”
.....

incentives then identifies high school and community college graduates who want to teach; preparing, graduating, and placing them in high need schools and teaching areas.

Acknowledging the problem and doing something about it are two different things. Only a well-crafted system stands a chance of addressing a problem as critical as the teacher shortage across this state and nation.

4—FINDINGS AND BELIEFS STATEMENT

LAW AND POLICY

The State Board is required by legislation passed this year to incorporate a “closing the achievement gap” component in the state’s accountability system and to implement this component for the 2002-03 school year. (G.S. 115C-105.35, SB 1005 sec. 28.30a). The question, then, is not whether to address closing the gap, but how. As the Commission has considered this issue, it has been guided by the following belief statements, many of which evolved through discussions of research that was presented to the Commission.

1. Closing the gap must be achieved by accelerating the achievement of the lower-performing groups, not by reducing the rate of growth of the higher-performing groups.
2. The performance standard for all groups should be challenging but obtainable.
3. The closing the gap model should provide clear standards and incentives as well as additional tools for measuring progress.
 - Closing the achievement gap by raising achievement levels will not occur across the state if current patterns continue. The closing the gap model should encourage those practices known to significantly increase minority student performance.
4. The closing the gap model should help in recognizing the benefits of diversity in the student population, and,

at the very least, it should not unintentionally create incentives for segregation.

5. The closing the gap model should also be useful in helping educators, community leaders, and parents better understand the distinctions between socio-economic factors and cultural factors as reasons why the gap exists. It should reinforce the fact that with this increasingly diverse student population comes cultural differences that must be understood, respected, and addressed.⁵

RECOMMENDATION TEN

That the State Board adopt a closing the gap component to the accountability system that sets a universal standard and sets measures and incentives at the school district level.

Universal Standard

The Commission recognizes that one possible approach to incorporating a closing the gap component in the accountability system is to simply disaggregate data already generated at the school level by various race/ethnic groups and socioeconomic groups. However, this approach does not address the strongly held beliefs of the Commission that it is important to set clear standards and measures for closing the gap. The ABCs model best shows whether growth expectations, based upon historical data have been met. It is not designed to set a standard for closing the gap or measure progress towards ending the gap. Put another way, requiring growth of all students is positive and essential, but it does not meet the Commission's belief that more accelerated growth is necessary in order to close the gap.

The Commission recognizes the value of the ABCs as the fundamental approach towards improving student performance. In terms of closing the gap, the Commission encourages the State Board to look beyond the ABCs model to other approaches that may be better suited to meeting the goal of closing the gap. More specifically, the Commission

recommends that the State Board explore setting a “universal standard” by which to measure the performance of racial/ethnic populations and socioeconomic groups. This is accomplished by setting a goal and a timeframe for meeting that goal. For example, the one standard studied by the Commission is for 95% of all ethnic/racial and socioeconomic groups to reach grade level proficiency by the year 2010. This approach sends some clear messages about goals:

1. Closing the gap is important enough to set very clear measures that can easily be understood.
2. Following historical growth patterns will not be sufficient to close the gap and more concentrated policies and practices will be necessary to accelerate the growth of lower-performing groups.
3. A part of the strategy for closing the gap is to set high goals and incentives for reaching them.

District-Level Model

While the Commission has tried to focus on policy, rather than technical issues, the two, as the State Board knows well, are at times inextricably linked. This is the case with the issue of small group size. Both a disaggregated model of the ABCs or a universal standard may suffer from having group sizes that are simply too small to be reliable. The smaller the group size, the more measurement error is inherently involved. This could result in wild variations in results that are not related to the actual performance of students so that at a particular school, results could zig-zag from year to year with no apparent reason or some schools are unfairly identified for rewards while more deserving schools are overlooked. This would have serious consequences for the reliability and credibility of the model. Researchers have written in fairly stark terms about the unreliability of disaggregated data at the school level for the purpose of an incentive program.⁶ These concerns would either need to be adequately addressed or it would appear to be reason enough not to pursue a school-level model.

What is the option to a school-level model? A school district-level model would address the technical issues. It may also create incentives for strategies that reach beyond the school-level efforts for addressing the gap. The Commission has heard extensive research on issues related to resource allocations, teacher assignment patterns and student assignment patterns, and the impact these policy choices have on minority student achievement. A district-level model is the best choice for directing incentives and measures at these types of policy choices. In this manner, it also complements the ABCs, a school-level accountability program. It also could provide a key role for the Local Taskforce on Closing the Achievement Gap that is encouraged in legislation and State Board policy. Note that school-level data can still be used as an analysis tool, especially when used in concert with other measures of student performance and indicators of successful programs.

The Commission recognizes developing a closing the achievement gap model is difficult and that any model will have its benefits and disadvantages. The Commission recommends the district-level universal model as offering the most to what we currently have in place through the State Board's accountability program. The Commission urges the State Board to consider the issue of validity of disaggregated school-level data as a threshold question before further exploring either of the school models. In regard to the policy implications of the models, the Commission offers the following brief comparisons.

ABCs Disaggregated Data

ABCs Pilot Model Approach

BENEFITS

- Could hold schools accountable for growth in all groups
- ABCs approach already understood—and therefore easier to communicate

DISADVANTAGES

- It is not designed to set standards or measure progress toward closing the gap
- Adjusting the awards system to account for closing the gap when there is a great range of diversity in schools may be difficult and disruptive

- Easier to create technically—and familiarity with technical issues
- Disaggregated school-level data may not be reliable enough for an accountability program

SCHOOL-LEVEL UNIVERSAL STANDARD

Standard such as 95% at grade level by 2010 is set and in each school, a trajectory is set for each identified group to show the slope/growth needed to reach the standard.

BENEFITS

- Sets clear standards for closing the gap
- Make it possible to compare progress across the state
- Could complement the ABCs standard

DISADVANTAGES

- May be difficult to set standard of “challenging but obtainable”
- Disaggregated school-level data may not be reliable enough for an accountability program

SCHOOL SYSTEM LEVEL UNIVERSAL STANDARD

Same approach as school level except the data is at the school system level or combinations of grade levels (i.e., grades 3-5, 6-8)

BENEFITS

- Could create incentives to address system-level resources and policies
- Could create a focal point for the system-level Closing the Gap Taskforce
- All bullets under school-level universal standard also apply

DISADVANTAGES

- Would require the most communication about its purpose and relationship to the school-level ABCs model
- Would need to provide safeguards to ensure that underserving schools are not recognized

The Commission has considered issues important in the successful implementation of a closing the gap component. These issues also are briefly addressed in EXHIBIT 3.

5—FINDINGS AND BELIEFS STATEMENT

THE HISTORY OF EDUCATING MINORITIES IN NORTH CAROLINA

There does not appear to be an inclusive and credible written history accurately profiling the education experiences of American Indians and African Americans in North Carolina. Where and how were they educated from the onset of publicly funded schooling in the state? How has the state assumed its responsibility for the academic training of these two cultures that represent the original and the largest minority groups in the population? A few historians and scholars have written books focused on the cultures with some attention given to formal education. However, most have approached the topic with an investment in a particular perspective or bias and were not inclined to attend the education history in any depth or detail. And North Carolina history books are still inadequate in this respect.

.....
“... North Carolina's
supreme need is the
education of all the
people.”
.....

As our nation approached the Civil War, a very young system of “common schools” was gaining respect throughout North Carolina and impressing other states with its local attendance rates and the level of financial support generated through the state’s “Literacy Fund.” Some 65,000 students were in attendance in the late 1850s; and the Fund, from which school expenditures were drawn, had a balance in the two million dollar range. The war was to do considerable damage to the fledgling system of schools and would influence the path that public education would take into the future.

Calvin H. Wiley, credited by many with establishing North Carolina’s first network of schools, was a fearless and influential force for maintaining the system during the war. His favorite pitch with those in position to help protect his creation was “... North Carolina’s supreme need is the education of all the people.”⁷ When the war ended, this very concept and how to realize it was at the heart of the issue facing the new governing body. With the influential

• • • • •
“The Commission finds
that the state has
struggled with its
responsibility to
educate all of its
citizens from the
beginning.”
• • • • •

Republican Party led by mostly carpetbaggers and newly-freed Negroes pushing for “mixed race” schools, the legislature refused to solidly get behind public school funding, laughing over a century of state-supported segregated education.

The Commission finds that the state has struggled with its responsibility to educate all of its citizens from the beginning. It must, therefore, be recognized that some cause for the current gaps in achievement between majority and minority students is “rooted” in that struggle. The Commission further believes that accurate and complete information about the history of minority education in North Carolina can serve a major purpose as we seek to prepare and encourage today’s generation of professionals and stakeholders to pursue accelerated minority achievement outcomes with higher expectations. As we know, knowledge about the past helps us interpret the present and plan more effectively for the future.

RECOMMENDATION ELEVEN

That a study be commissioned by the state to examine and profile the history of organized education for American Indians and African Americans in North Carolina. The primary purpose should be to generate a document that factually tracks the formal academic training of these two cultures from the onset of public schooling to present practice. Specific attention should be given to the state’s assumption of responsibility for educating these two groups within the public schooling system. Schooling experienced by Indians outside the influence and support of the state should also be included as it occurred. As much as can be documented about the instructional approach and management practices employed by the segregated system serving minorities should be recorded. Since no organized effort was made to examine the strengths of the segregated system that had served African Americans for a century, oral accounts from credible sources should be pursued. Much of the history of American Indian’s schooling

experience can be studied in settings that still exist today.

The results from this study will hopefully contribute to what should become a broader effort to build a credible body of knowledge about minority cultures that can be used to prepare professionals, especially teachers, to more comfortably exchange or interact across ethnic/cultural lines in the classroom and beyond. With the state's teaching ranks becoming less diverse annually, we can no longer expect majority culture teachers to be either comfortable or effective with an increasingly diverse student population while relying solely on their own personal experiences with minorities, with what they see on TV, or with what they learn during Black History Month. Ignorance in this case can breed fear and force decisions made without accurate information.

SUMMARY STATEMENT

The Commission has taken a yearlong look at issues and conditions associated with academic achievement in North Carolina and finds that student achievement outcomes have followed positive trend lines over the past decade. Clear standards and expectations have been established holding both professionals and students accountable for student performance. State results a decade ago were dismal. Even with consistent progress, there is still room for considerable improvement.

Throughout the decade of progress, disaggregated annual testing results have shown little improvement in closing achievement gaps that exist between ethnic groups within the student population. The most pronounced differential exists between the white student group with 82 percent achieving at or above grade level on the 2000-2001 EOG testing, while only 52 percent of African-American students were at or above grade level. Hispanic and American Indian students scored above blacks but considerably below whites and Asians.

It must be recognized that raising achievement while closing the existing gaps presents a formidable challenge at all levels and to all stakeholders in the teaching and learning process. Business as usual, even with heightened intensity and commitment, will probably not achieve the desired goal. We must first believe that it can be done—that struggling minority students can score on par with their white counterparts—before we can expect it to happen. The Commission believes that building and nurturing this belief is “Job One.” We are failing to maximize the academic potential of thousands of young people who sit in classrooms around the state. And disproportionately, they are minorities. The resulting achievement gaps have remained in place and relatively stable over the past decade.

The Commission has been studying what it believes to be “Root Causes” of this problem which were found in some very familiar places.

- The home and community
- Participation in the learning process on the part of minority students
- Relevant laws and policies
- Preparation and support of the classroom teacher
- The underachieving child’s condition for learning

In this initial report to the State Board of Education and the State Superintendent, the Commission offers its beliefs to date and recommends some approaches to dealing with the problem.

Home and Community—There is a serious disconnect between most minority families and their schools. A professionally-designed statewide public information campaign should be launched to get the attention of parents and local school officials and to build awareness of the need to get involved with underachieving students. The campaign should highlight appropriate practices for home and community and identify those that can be harmful to youth development.

Student Participation—In addition to being out of school disproportionately through dropouts and

suspensions, minority students in school are too often not exposed to challenging higher level courses in the curriculum. Schools should be required to record data in chart format comparing the percent of minority students placed and maintained in special education classes with state averages and the rates of incidences of handicapping conditions in the general population. The state should encourage and fund creative efforts to systematically assign more minority students to rigorous upper-level classes for greater exposure.

Teacher Preparation and Support—Obviously, teacher preparation and support are crucial to accelerating achievement outcomes for minority students. A proper disposition or mindset for teaching diverse student groups must be developed in most cases and strengthened in others. The state should assume responsibility for developing a training program to assist teachers in gaining the knowledge, skills, and disposition to work effectively with diverse student groups. Changes and new initiatives in the state's teacher education programs should be pursued that would result in better prepared beginning teachers for today's classrooms. Additionally, the state should set in place an aggressive plan for recruiting and developing teachers and to provide adequate time for appropriate professional development.

Relevant Laws and Policies—The state's ABCs model best shows whether growth expectations have been met by students and schools. It is not designed to set a standard for closing the gap or to measure progress toward this goal. A closing the gap component should be developed to complement the current accountability system.

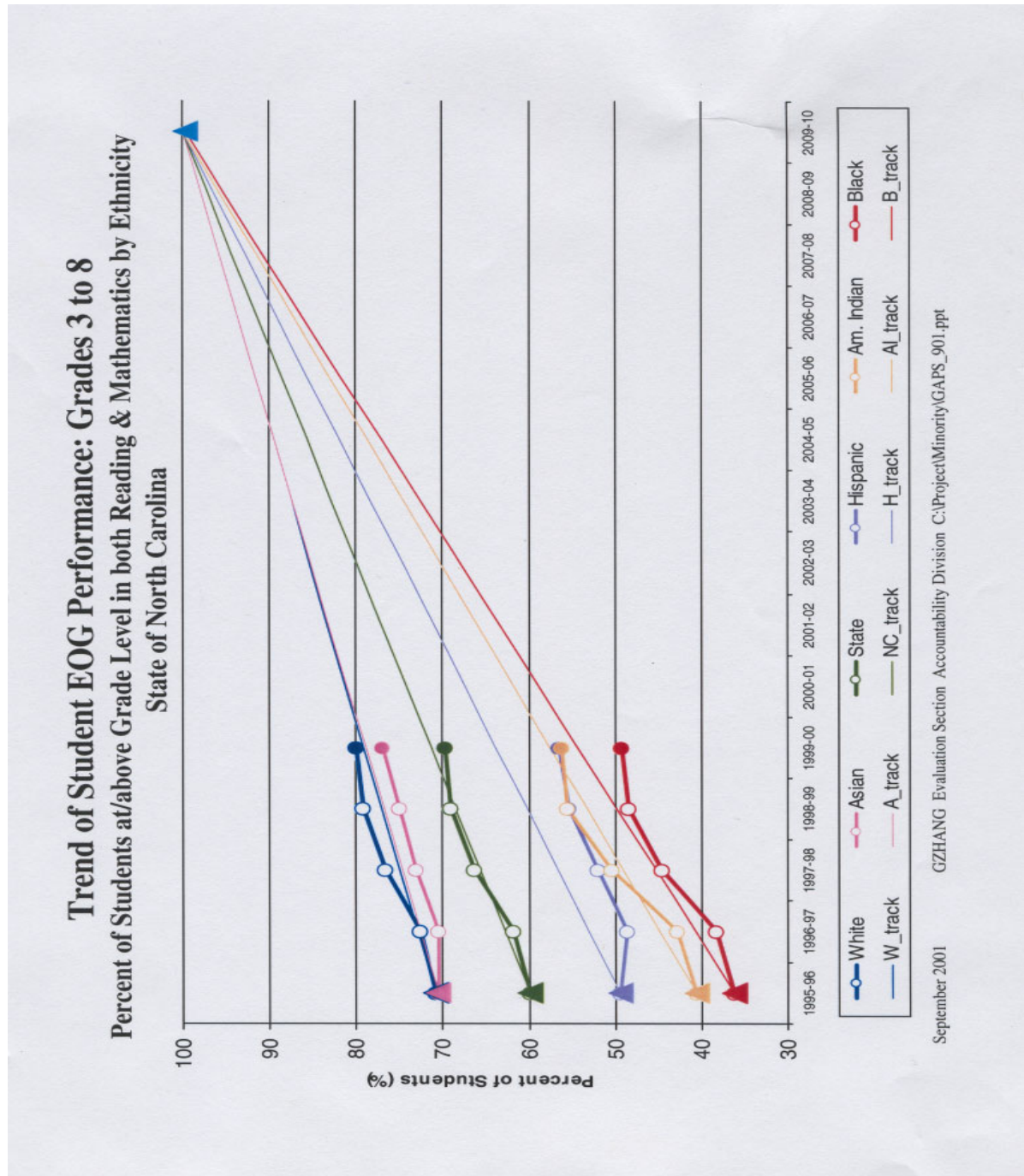
As the Commission continues its work, a closer look will be taken at the consistently underachieving student in search of a better feel for this child's mindset or personal vision of self as an academic achiever. It is believed that a better understanding on the part of parents and school

personnel will prove valuable in unlocking potential and accelerating achievement for this child. Teacher deployment and match-up with students is another area of considerable interest to the Commission. There is some evidence that minority students are disproportionately exposed to less qualified and poorly prepared teachers. It has also been documented through nationally recognized research that students exposed to poor teaching for a year are negatively influenced by the experience over the next three or four years.⁸ The Commission will study North Carolina practice in this area to determine what factors are involved and how they can be influenced.

Finally, the Commission has observed a trend toward the resegregation of school systems around the state. While only limited time was devoted to this area during the past year, a return to past conditions judged to be detrimental to the mission of providing quality education for all students is of concern to the Commission. Racially segregated schools can present challenges to the state's goal of raising achievement and closing gaps. The Commission will work with the State Superintendent to explore possible ways to intervene in this local policy initiative and responsibility.

RAISING ACHIEVEMENT AND CLOSING GAPS

EXHIBIT ONE

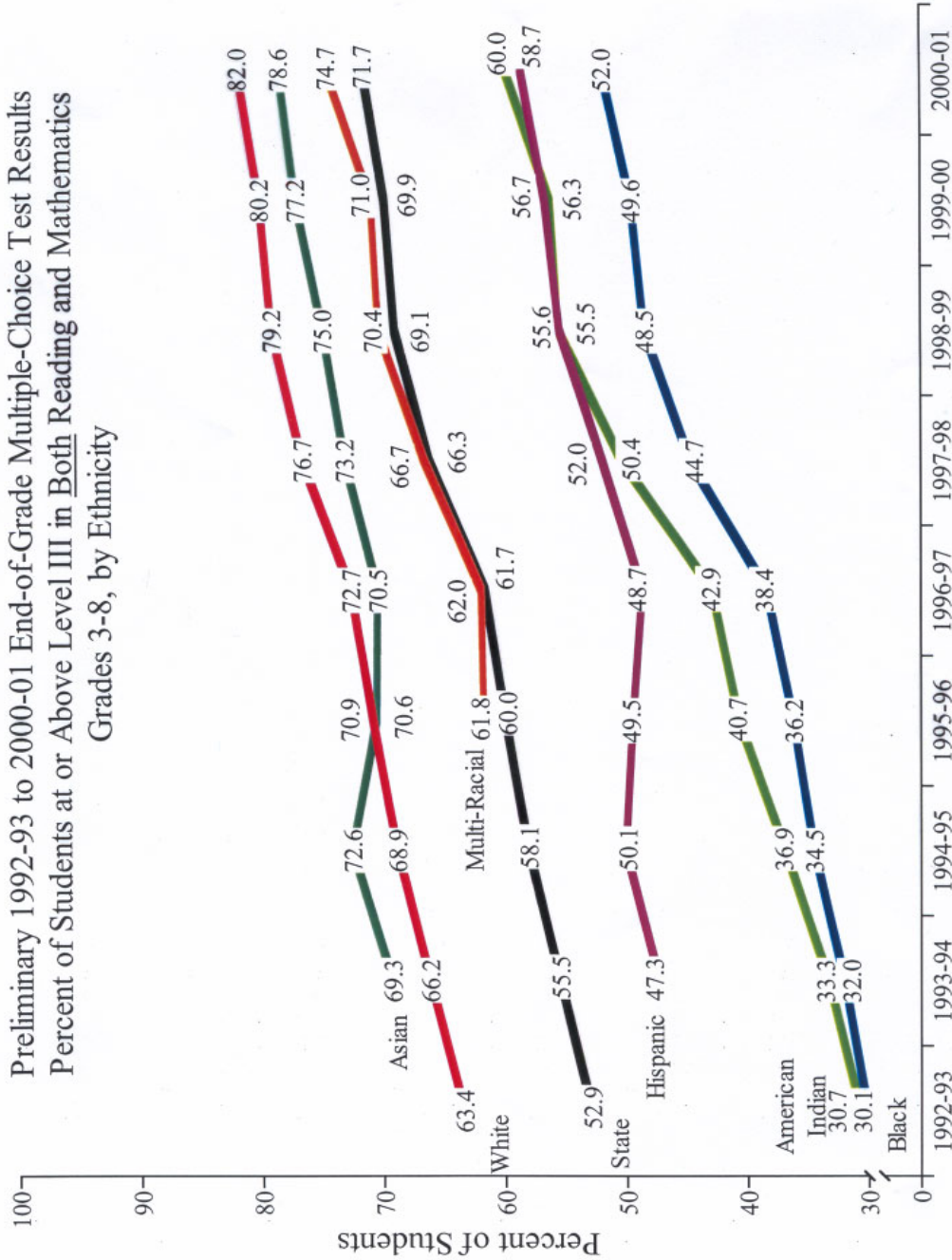


Sample Growth Trajectory Chart

RAISING ACHIEVEMENT AND CLOSING GAPS

EXHIBIT TWO

Preliminary 1992-93 to 2000-01 End-of-Grade Multiple-Choice Test Results
Percent of Students at or Above Level III in Both Reading and Mathematics
Grades 3-8, by Ethnicity



Notes: *N counts equal the number of students at or above level III in both reading and mathematics for 2000-01. Previous years are comparable.
Asian and Hispanic results were not reported in 1992-93. Multi-Racial results were not reported in 1992-93, 1993-94, and 1994-95.
Data received from LEAs and charter schools after August 2001 are not included in this figure.

RAISING ACHIEVEMENT AND CLOSING GAPS

EXHIBIT THREE

School or District Level Model

Setting a “challenging but obtainable goal.”

There are, of course, policy implications that must be considered in setting a universal standard. First, if the standard is set based upon policy goals rather than historical growth, then we really do not know what is “challenging but obtainable” and need to be prepared to adjust standards if necessary. If the goal is set too low, it must be raised. If the goal is so high as to be impossible to reach, it must be adjusted if it is going to serve to encourage rather than discourage educators. It also is important to recognize that the standard is not being created in a vacuum. The tests upon which it is based will routinely be changed to adjust to changes in curriculum and even the standards of what constitutes grade level proficiency could be altered as a policy statement of the State Board. For whatever reason, if the meaning of the universal standard is changed over time, the goal may need to be adjusted as well.

Relationship to the ABCs

A universal standard is a different approach than the ABCs but should complement it. For some racial/ethnic groups, the absolute standard may be more or less challenging than the ABCs growth model standard. The standards should work together to ensure that all students make a year or more of growth while also achieving the absolute standard of grade level proficiency (or other universal standard) in a challenging, but obtainable timeframe.

School or District Level Model

Much of the Commission’s discussion of a closing the gap model has assumed a school-level model. This approach would seem to be the most responsive to the issue of making sure that at every school, all children are being provided with the resources they need to progress academically. Put another way, it would appear to best address the potential in the ABCs model for the performance of lower-performing groups of students to be masked by the performance of higher-performing groups.

There are, however, some substantial drawbacks to a school-level model for setting standards for racial/ethnic and socioeconomic groups.

1. The numbers in the different groups at the school level simply may not be large enough to produce valid results. (See main report.)
2. Another statistical issue is that schools with greater diversity will have more difficulty meeting the universal standard for all groups than those with less diversity. It is important to recognize that this does not necessarily mean that diverse settings are less educationally sound. Rather, it is possible that it is a statistical phenomenon that is exacerbated in settings where there are small numbers of students and consequently more variability in scores. This was the conclusion of a study of California's accountability system.¹ To avoid unintended consequences of encouraging segregation, the school level model would need to be weighted in some manner to create a level playing field among schools.
3. It is difficult for a school level model to fairly address the differences in resources available to schools for closing the gap. It also does not directly provide incentives for policy-makers and educators with system-wide responsibility to make sure policies and practices will create a system of effective schools. Closing the gap will take more than the resources at the school. It requires broader community support as well as the full backing of the school district and local board.

The Commission recognizes the attractiveness of a school level model and encourages the Board to request the Department of Public Instruction to determine whether the concerns cited above can be adequately addressed. The Commission also believes that it would be useful to explore the viability of a district level model as an alternative approach. The advantages of a district model include the following:

1. District level data, even if separated by grade level or some grouping of grade levels, should provide sufficient numbers of students in ethnic/racial groups and socioeconomic groups to produce reliable results.
2. The model could complement legislative initiatives for a system level closing the gap task force. The model could help focus the efforts of the taskforce and serve as a tool for involving the community.
3. The model should create incentives for local boards of education and system level educators to set policies and practices that are aligned with the closing the gap goals. With the ABCs' focus on school level accountability, the two models, taken together, could create balance in the needed incentives to improve student performance.

The most significant drawback to a district model is that it does not, by design, recognize differences in school efforts or successes. Thus, unless the model specifically addressed the issue, it could be possible for a school that has not succeeded in closing the gap to get undeserved recognition as a part of a system that has done well. Before a district level model is adopted, the Commission believes it is important to create an incentive model that can provide adequate safeguards. There may be different ways to achieve this, including the type of school level data taken into account in disseminating any school district financial award to the school level.

Implementation Issues

Development of the Model

The Commission's recommendations create some of the parameters for a closing the gap model. The Commission further recommends that the State Board direct the Department of Public Instruction to use its expertise to develop the model based upon these parameters as approved or modified by the State Board and to submit the fully developed model to the State Board for approval. These recommendations do not address the incentives element of the model since they may be different based upon whether a school or school district model is used.

The Commission can continue to provide an advisory role in this process.

Professional Development and Capacity Issues

Schools (principals, teachers and other key staff) need professional development on the use of disaggregated data and effective strategies for raising achievement of all students. A successful program will result in a school's taking ownership of its closing the gap efforts and adopting beliefs that it can, through use of its own research, continue to learn and develop successful strategies. Careful consideration must be given to how to effectively provide sustained professional development on these issues statewide, including addressing the issue of strategically scheduling time for training and continued learning. Other parts of the Commission's report more fully address professional development.

Professional development and other capacity issues should be explored to make sure that schools are able to implement those practices known to significantly increase minority student performance, including:

- raising the expectations held by educators, students, parents and the community of what students are capable of achieving;²

- implementing sound educational practices that are responsive to the needs of students;
- implementing teacher and principal assignment practices that will provide opportunities for quality instruction for all students;
- emphasizing reading skills in the early grades;³
- placing and supporting minority students in challenging courses;⁴ and
- reducing dropouts and providing students with engaging learning opportunities.

Communication

Communication with all stakeholders – educators, parents, students, and the community — is essential for effective implementation. The communication should affirm the goals of the model and the underlying beliefs, explain the model and underscore the relationship with the ABCs. The Commission encourages partnerships with education and community organizations in efforts to effectively reach all stakeholders.

Building Community Support

The State Board and DPI's role in communicating the significance and importance of community stakeholders in closing the gap is critical. Building community-based support through effective closing the gap committees may prove to be one of the most significant long-term and sustainable ways to close gaps.

Refinement of Model

Implementation should allow for refining the model. For example, for the first two years of implementation, no financial incentives could be attached to recognition as a Gap Closer. After there has been an opportunity to evaluate and refine the model, financial incentives could be included.

¹ Kane and Staiger (2001).

² A summary of the research on this issue is provided in Charles Thompson and Sam D. O'Quinn III, *Eliminating the Black-white Achievement Gap* (2001).

³ New legislation requires schools to establish plans for preparing students to be able to read at grade level by the time the child enters the second grade. (G.S. 115C-105.27, SB 1005 sec. 28.30(c)). There is extensive literature on the importance of a K-3 literacy initiative including, Askew, B.J., Fountas, I.C., Lyons, C.A., Pinnell, G.S., & Schmitt, M.C. (1998). *Reading Recover Review: Understandings, Outcomes & Implications*. Reading Recovery Council of North America; Dyer, P.C. & Binkney, R. (1995). Estimating cost-effectiveness and educational outcomes: Retention, remediation, special education, and early intervention. In R.L. Allington and S.A. Walmsley (Eds.). *No quick fix* (pp. 611-67). Neward, D: International Reading Association; Levin, H. (1989). Financing the education of at-risk students. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 11, 47-60.

⁴ Darity, Jr. William, Domini Castellino, and Karolyn Tyson. (May 2001). *Increasing Opportunity to Learn via Access to Rigorous Courses and Programs: One Strategy for Closing the Achievement Gap for At-Risk and Ethnic Minority Students*. Raleigh, NC: Report submitted to the State Board of Education.

Other research is described in Thompson & O'Quinn III (2001).

WORKS CITED

1-Pathways to the 21st Century

State Advisory Council on Indian Education, 2000-2001.

2-Increasing Opportunity to Learn via Access to Rigorous Courses and Programs: One Strategy for Closing the Achievement Gap for At-Risk and Ethnic Minority Students

William Darity, Jr., UNC-Chapel Hill; Domini Castellino, Duke University; and Karolyn Tyson, UNC-Chapel Hill, March 2001.

3-Eliminating the Black-White Achievement Gap: A Summary of Research

The North Carolina Education Research Council, Chapel Hill, NC, June 2001.

4-Effects of Reducing Children's Television and Video Game Use on Aggressive Behavior: A Randomized Controlled Trial

Thomas N. Robinson, MD, MPH; Marta L. Wilde, MA; Lisa C. Navracruz, MD; K. Farish Haydel; Ann Varady, MS, 2001.

5-Subverting Swann: First- and Second-Generation Segregation in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

Roslyn A. Mickelson, UNC-Chapel Hill, 2001.

6-Volatility in School Test Scores: Implications for Test-Based Accountability Systems

Thomas J. Kane and Douglas O. Staiger, 2001.

7-History of North Carolina: North Carolina Since 1860
Volume 3, The Lewis Publishing Company, 1919.

8-Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Academic Achievement

William Sanders and June Rivers, University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center, Knoxville, Tennessee, 1996.

9–Closing the Achievement Gap: A Vision for Changing Beliefs and Practices

Edited by Belinda Williams, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1996.

10–Minority Student Achievement Report: A Study and Recommendations

Anne Arundel County Public Schools, Annapolis, Maryland, 2000.

11–Immigration Reform and the Browning of America: Tensions, Conflicts and Community Instability in Metropolitan Los Angeles

James H. Johnson, Jr., UNC-Chapel Hill; Walter C. Farrell, Jr., University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee; and Chandra Guinn, UNC-Chapel Hill, Vol. 31, Winter 1997.