In 2004 the November issue of Educational Leadership focused on identifying some challenges in education by examining *Closing the Achievement Gaps*. The issue analyzed more than the usual comparisons of Black to White or Hispanic to Black or White to Asian on standardized tests. The issue looked at the overall complexity of achievement gaps in American schools. There were more than ten articles related to closing the achievement gaps. Which lead me to realize that America’s Education system has a gaping whole, that needs to be filled.

I felt it important to read and analyze five articles that related to culture, socioeconomic, race and ethnicity. I wanted to see and understand how the achievement gaps affect America’s schools, teachers, community and most importantly the students at multiple-levels. I wanted to know what common factors existed and are there common solutions.
What are some of Achievement **GAPS** you see in The American Education System?
Paul Barton’s article attempts to identify why after 50 years of ‘School Desegregation’ why the school achievement gaps persist.

He conducts his research in two steps:

1st - 14 life experiences and conditions that are associated with school achievement.

2nd- statistics that indicate whether children’s experiences with each factor differs by race/ethnicity or income.

His conclusion is that closing the gap is more complex than one simple answer. There are multiple conditions in and out of the learning environment interrelated in order to close the gap.
Barton's 14 Factors that Correlate with Student Achievement

**Before and Beyond School:**
- Birth-weight
- Lead Poisoning
- Hunger and nutrition
- Reading to young children
- Television watching
- Parent availability
- Student mobility
- Parent participation

**In School:**
- Rigor of the curriculum
- Teacher experience
- Teacher preparations
- Class size
- Technology-assisted instruction
- School Safety
Why Does the Gap Persist?

Paul Burton

The Development Environment

- **Low birth-weight**: risk impaired development; delayed motor and social development
  - In 2000- 13% Of Black were low birth-weight compared to 7% White infants

- **Lead poisoning**: Blacks are 3x more likely to live in homes built before 1946 (when lead paint was generally used).

- **Hunger and Nutrition**: Blacks and Hispanics children are 3x more likely to be malnourished compared to white children under the age of 18.
Why Does the Gap Persist?

Paul Burton

Home Learning Conditions

- **Reading to young children** provides them with advantages in literacy and language development.
  - Blacks and Hispanics are read to much less than their white peers.

- **Television watching**: must be monitored by adults
  - 46% of black 4th graders watch 6 or more hours of T.V. a day
  - That percentage is 3x more than that of whites.

- Parent(s) availability- plays a major role in the raising of the child. Family structures help the child to develop socially.
  - There are major differences between one parent homes and two parent homes. In 2000
    - 38% of black children lived with both parents.
    - 65% of Hispanic children lived with both parents.
    - 75% of White children live with their parents.
Why Does the Gap Persist?

Paul Burton

Student Mobility

- Students move for various and complex reasons- parent must find work in other locations or housing prices forces a family to move.
- Students have to adjust to new changes as well as the new learning environment.
- Students then may perform poorer on test; than students who do not move.
Joshua Aronson paints an important picture of the psychological effects directly related to intellectual performance based on stereotyping.

- Negative stereotypes reduce student achievement.
The Threat of Stereotypes
Joshua Aronson

• Stereotype Threat - the picture in the head that simplify our thinking about a group of people. Coping with unflattering stereotypes/personal group

• Unnerving expectations - Some worry the stereotype maybe true/may cause poor performance

• Test Stress - non-evaluative vs. evaluative

• Everyone is vulnerable: women, white males, elderly
The Threat of Stereotypes
Joshua Aronson

How Educators can Help:
- Provide cooperative classroom activities for students to engage in interdependently
- Provide students with opportunities for positive motivation
- Provide a place of security to help students believe in their own ability to learn.
Does Your School Have High Expectations for all students?

- What are examples of achievements and ideas of diverse authors, thinkers and historical figures woven into the curriculum?
- Do minority parents feel welcomed at conferences, or parent meetings?
Confronting the Racism of Low Expectations
Julie Landsmen

- Examines racism through her personal experiences and observations while working in affluent suburban schools.
- She addresses how racism is involved in the lack of minority students selected to gifted classes.
- In the report Julie identifies subdued and overt racist attitudes demonstrated by teachers and students.
  - Black students- easy questions
  - White students- more difficult questions
Confronting the Racism of Low Expectations
Julie Landsmen

- **Julie’s suggestions for change:**
  - Exploring issues Intellectually
  - Engage in Dialogue
  - Immersing Ourselves in Different Cultures
  - Create a Safe Environment for all learners
  - Committee Ourselves to Activism
  - Ask; Does your school have high expectations for all students?
The Achievement Gap: A Broader Picture
Richard Rothstein

- Rothstein insist that fixing failing schools is not enough to close the gaps.
- There are social-class differences
- All children must be furnished with better health care
- Increased low-income families’ access to stable housing.
- Rothstein suggest
  - invest in early childhood programs
  - develop after-school and summer programs equivalent to middle-class mainstream America.
How Schools Shortchange African American Children
Janice E. Hale

- What schools do Wrong
  - Pushing the Curriculum down- teaching more content at a lower grade
  - Ignorance About Student’s Backgrounds
  - Inequality in Preschool Experience
Steps Towards Equality:

- Start out right - grade level reading
- Teacher/ Administrator training
- Support African American Families
Conclusions

The November issue of Educational Leadership is a great way to look at the American Achievement Gaps. I liken this issue to going into a good mechanic shop, where the mechanics thoroughly look at the entire vehicle and then provides the customer with a detailed analysis of all the problems and then provides multiple solutions to each of the problems. Conversely, some people would prefer to look at one problem at a time and try to fix that one problem and worry about the other problems later. In effect that way of thinking can be very costly.
Conclusion

• If Achievement Gaps are to truly be fixed/closed and not just researched it is time for a complete overhaul of the educational system. This challenge is complex, therefore the solutions must be multiplexed.
• It is essential to know the important factors of the achievement gap and how they relate to low income families and minority children.
• Educators must address the negative stereotypes that hinder student performance.
• Minority students, who are cheated out of chances to participate in advanced classes due to racist attitudes held by educators must be confronted.
Conclusions

Recommended solutions for school and non-school entities must be an interwoven approach in an effort to be successful. The authors all identified varying factors that contribute to the widening of the achievement gaps however, some of their solutions to Closing the Achievement gap were similar approaches to teach the whole child and reach every child regardless of race, creed, socioeconomic or academic status.

Solutions for low income families the government and communities must address:

- Health care needs-nutrition, dental
- Adequate housing needs
- Financial needs
- Provide exceptional after-school/summer programs
A Recap of some Common Solutions:

- **Educators** must hold themselves accountable improving school environment, engage in cultural dialogues.
- **Parents/families** must also be held accountable and more involved in the educational process.
- **Government** must pay closer attention to social and psychological implications of governing policies.
- **Neighborhoods/Communities** must help to develop cognitive learning environment-community centers/daycares.
- **All concerned citizens** must engage in school, community and multicultural activities.
- **Interested citizens**, educators, leaders of community organizations, varying members of social class, must continue to discuss and work towards change and diversity.
- **All Schools**- must be a safe place where students want to come and take part a the maturing learning environment.
Works Cited

- Barton, Paul. (2004, November)“Why does the the gap persist?” Educational Leadership 62 (3)
Outline Completed by Diane Russell