

A Plan to Close the Achievement Gap for African American Students



Submitted by the HB 2722 Advisory Committee
with support from the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning

“It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders, **without distinction or preference on account of race, color, caste, or sex.**”

Article IX, Washington State Constitution



Imagine . . .

Academic Success for All African American Students

Executive Summary



EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY: A GROWING CRISIS

In today's public schools, success for African Americans is too often elusive. Our society still bears the legacy of a long history of racism, exclusion and low expectations for African American children, and our public education system has not adequately responded to remedy this situation.

This persistent challenge is deeply harmful to the African American community, to our state, our nation, and our democracy. With every passing year, the damage mounts and the danger to our future grows more acute.

Lower rates of high school graduation lead to less employment, higher rates of incarceration, ill health, substance abuse, and intergenerational poverty. No failure is more costly than the failure to educate our African American children.

These are problems of our whole society – problems with deep roots in our nation's history. But while we cannot change the past, we can and must change the education system that shapes our future.

CREATING A PLAN TO CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

In 2008, the Washington State Legislature passed HB 2722, which called for the appointment of an Advisory Committee charged with creating a plan – which, when fully implemented, will close the education gap for African American students.

Beginning in May 2008, the newly appointed HB 2722 Advisory Committee took on this challenging charge. Early in the course of its work, the Committee identified five key areas of education that contribute to both the

challenges and the solutions of the achievement gap for African American students.

1. Teacher quality – *knowledgeable professionals who effectively meet the academic, cultural and social needs of students*
2. Teaching and learning – *structured, rigorous and culturally responsive curriculum and instruction*
3. School and district leadership – *a commitment to high achievement for all students that intentionally guides policies and practices*
4. Student support – *academic, social, psychological and cultural resources students need to succeed*
5. Family and community engagement – *partnerships that inform and support academic achievement*

Closing the achievement gap will require more than implementing a particular program or two. It will require commitment, political will, deliberate actions and the alignment of efforts across the education system. Ultimately, the Committee sees that this work is about changing the education system and the culture of schools for African American students.

WORKING TOWARD A MORE EQUITABLE SYSTEM

Recommendations for Policy and Systemic Change

Our public schools are based on an outmoded system that was not designed to ensure the success of the wide diversity of students that are currently enrolled. We must examine the systems in which our districts, schools and classrooms operate and ask what the systems themselves are doing to close the achievement gap for African American students. With this report, the committee presents the following recommendations, which will promote a shift to a more equitable system:

1. Include specific language in RCW 28A.150.210, the state’s Basic Education Act, that spells out the requirement for all Washington P-12 students to be provided an “excellent and equitable” education.
2. Expand the state’s definition of Basic Education to include early learning for three- to five-year-olds at risk of not meeting state learning standards, as recommended by the Joint Task Force on Basic Education Finance.
3. Revise the State Board of Education’s School Improvement Plan requirements under WAC 180-16-220 to require districts and schools to close achievement gaps.
4. Establish in the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning (CISL) in the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) an appointed, statewide achievement gap oversight committee to monitor the implementation of school and district plans to close the achievement gap for African American students.

5. Direct the Higher Education Coordinating Board, OSPI, State Board of Education, and the Workforce Training Board to collaborate in revising existing and in developing new agreements to increase college access and technical career opportunities for African American students.
6. Establish collaborations between higher education and school districts to co-create and co-deliver pre-service and in-service programs with an emphasis on school climate, engaging diverse classrooms, and instructional strategies for diverse students.

ASSUMPTIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

The recommendations, goals and strategies in this Plan to Close the Achievement Gap for African American Students are built on assumptions about statewide work currently underway or being proposed. These six assumptions, or their equivalent, need to be upheld for the successful implementation of this Plan.

1. The State Board of Education will continue to:
 - a. advocate for high standards for all children.
 - b. ensure that summative assessment instruments such as the Washington Assessment of Student Learning provide sufficient data to accurately and reliably report disaggregated student progress.
 - c. require a high quality curriculum, as in “Core 24,” that prepares students for global competitiveness.
2. The Professional Education Standards Board must continue to:
 - a. work with the Washington Association of Colleges of Teacher Education to ensure that the recommendations for educator preparation currently in place are successfully implemented and supported.
 - b. work to successfully recruit and retain African American educators.
3. The data systems for students and teachers to be included in the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System must be completed in full so that there can be easy access, efficient tracking and effective communication of data. Without completion of this data system, we will have no means of tracking the success of our recommendations.
4. The Department of Early Learning must continue to advocate for programs that support children birth through five, and for those that educate and inform parents.
5. OSPI must ensure that issues raised in this plan are successfully and fully integrated into the vision and work of the agency.
6. New policies must be developed to ensure that the most vulnerable students receive effective instruction from our most powerful teachers.

A PLAN TO CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Closing the achievement gap for African American students will require attention and action at every level of the education system. Statewide leadership must create the policies to guide expectations and provide the resources to support implementation. In response, local districts, schools and organizations must take thoughtful actions – building on assets and addressing needs appropriate to their community. To focus these efforts statewide, the HB 2722 Advisory Committee agreed on four key goals spanning 15 years to close the achievement gap.

GOAL 1

Teacher quality

By 2014, all school districts ensure that teachers, staff and administrators in schools with 20 percent or more African American students are qualified, trained and effectively meeting the academic, cultural and social needs of these students.

GOAL 2

Early learning

By 2014, provide all African American children, birth to five, with high quality and academically focused early education to prepare them for success in school.

GOAL 3

Graduation rates

Increase the on-time and extended graduation rates for African American students to reach parity with the highest-performing demographic group by 2014, and to achieve a 100 percent graduation rate by 2018. All graduates should be work- and college-ready without the need for remediation.

GOAL 4

Post-secondary education and job training

By 2018, increase the number of African American students entering and completing post-secondary education and/or job training to be at or above parity with the highest-performing demographic group, and to achieve 100 percent participation by 2024.

FIRST STEPS IN IMPLEMENTATION

Beyond the policy changes to provide guidance and direction to closing the achievement gap for African American students, the Committee is proposing two critical actions. After careful consideration, the committee determined a singular focus with two action steps would make a significant impact on the progress of African American students while being fiscally responsible in these economically challenging times.

Target school districts with 20 percent or more African American students, called “Achievement Gap districts” in this plan, and:

1. Authorize OSPI to provide resources to selected Achievement Gap districts to revise district improvement plans to include specific goals, strategies and monitoring benchmarks to close the achievement gap for African American students. Utilize current funding available through the Focused Assistance – School and District Improvement and Accountability program to support this effort.
2. Allocate a planning grant (\$100,000) to OSPI to develop a plan for the implementation of K-12 demonstration Millennium schools focusing on the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) areas. The demonstration Millennium Schools will showcase rigorous, structured and culturally responsive curriculum; strong leadership; high quality teachers; supplementary student support and parent training (see Appendix G, page 81).

These two actions will give local districts and schools the opportunity to address the four goals and implement strategies proven to reduce the achievement gap for African American students. A three-biennia (2009-15) implementation plan is presented in this report (page 38).

A VISION FOR SUCCESS

Taken together, the Advisory Committee believes these actions can turn the tide for African American students, and lead to higher educational attainment for the more than 57,000 African American children, preschool to graduation and beyond. This, in turn, will contribute to lowering costs for social services, health care, and criminal justice – the systems that now carry the burden of our past failures to educate young African Americans. But more important, success in educating African American young people will make a significant contribution to the health of our democracy and specifically to economic recovery and development. The intelligence, talent, and imagination of this generation of African American students are precious resources, and we are all called to invest in their fullest development.