

NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

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FOR ALL

CONFERENCE SUMMARY

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CONFERENCE SUMMARY

Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education

Timothy Ready, Christopher Edley, Jr., and Catherine E. Snow, Editors

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Contents

Preface	ix
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PART I CONFERENCE SUMMARY

1	Introduction	3
	Separate and Unequal: Historical Antecedents of Contemporary Disparities, 3	
	Systemic Education Reform and Targeted Efforts to Eliminate Disparities, 6	
	Overview of This Volume, 7	
2	Education and the Changing Nation	13
	Demographic Change, 13	
	Education and the Changing Nation, 16	
	Challenges That Remain, 24	
3	How People Learn	29
	Cognition and Learning, 30	
	Young Children: Eager to Learn, 37	
	Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children, 42	
	Building Instructional Capacity, 48	
	Summary, 50	

4	Social Dimensions of Learning	52
	Social Context of Educational Change, 52	
	Social Psychological Perspective on Race, Ethnicity, and Learning, 55	
	Disidentification with Schooling, 59	
	Immigrant and Language-Minority Children, 62	
	Sociodemographic Variables and Children's Learning, 66	
5	Policy and the Education of Minority and Disadvantaged Students	68
	Rights and Resources, 69	
	Funding Equity and the Right to an Adequate Education, 73	
	Making Money Matter, 79	
	Standards-Based Reform, 81	
6	Linking Research and Practice	86
	Progress Toward Educational Innovation, 86	
	Technical Assistance for Research-Based Instructional Reforms, 91	
	"Sweating the Details", 94	
	Baked Apple Versus Chocolate Soufflé, 98	
	Creating School Environments That Foster Learning and Intelligence, 98	
	References	102

PART II PERSPECTIVES OF THE CO-MODERATORS

Overview	117
<i>Catherine E. Snow</i>	
Getting Smarter, 118	
Using Research-Based Knowledge, 118	
Putting New Practices in Place, 119	
Ensuring the New Practices Work at Scale and in Context, 120	
Beyond New Practices, 121	
Knowledge and Will, 122	

Education Reform in Context: Research, Politics, and Civil Rights	123
<i>Christopher Edley, Jr.</i>	
The Context, 123	
How Strong Is the Research Foundation for Change?, 130	
Speculations and Further Work, 134	
Conclusion, 139	
References, 140	

PART III CONFERENCE PAPERS

Trends in the Educational Achievement of Minority Students Since Brown v. Board of Education	149
<i>Kim M. Lloyd, Marta Tienda, and Anna Zajacova</i>	
Why Racial Integration and Other Policies Since Brown v. Board of Education Have Only Partially Succeeded at Narrowing the Achievement Gap	183
<i>Ronald E. Ferguson with Jal Mehta</i>	
Education Adequacy, Democracy, and the Courts	218
<i>Michael A. Rebell</i>	

APPENDIXES

A Conference and Workshop Agendas	271
B Biographical Sketches of Conference Presenters	279

Preface

Achieving high educational standards for all students is a critical and, to date, unmet goal of the greatest importance for the continued development of human and social capital in the United States. When approached by the U.S. Department of Education with the request to convene a conference on this subject, the National Research Council (NRC) recognized it as a vital opportunity to bring scientific perspectives to bear on one of the most difficult national challenges. The conference brought together leading experts on such subjects as the demographics of the school-age population, issues in access and opportunity, learning research, teaching methods, reform efforts in high-poverty urban schools, and effective technical assistance. They were asked to apply their own research data, as well as the findings of NRC reports, to the question of racial and ethnic disparities in K-12 education, identifying key issues for policy and research. The audience included educators, researchers, and policy makers at the national, state, and local levels. The NRC's Division on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education (DBASSE) was the convening body.

The Millennium Conference: Achieving High Educational Standards for All and two preconference workshops, the Technical Assistance Workshop on Building Instructional Capacity and the Role of the Law Workshop, examined the following questions:

- What progress has been made in advancing the education of mi-

nority and disadvantaged students since the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision nearly 50 years ago?

- What does research say about the reasons for successes and failures?
- What are some of the strategies and practices that hold the promise of producing continued improvements?

To address them, DBASSE drew on a significant literature related to the social and economic status of racial minorities in the United States, as well as a number of important NRC reports, described in Chapter 1, that have synthesized scientific research in education. This large body of previous work and the experts who were involved in this series of studies represent a rich resource on which we called in planning the conference, deciding on discussion priorities, and identifying paper writers and speakers. In particular, we used these intellectual resources to support one of the main goals of the conference: showing that there is strong scientific evidence to support the idea that all children can learn and, as a corollary, that schools can influence learning.

The Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education and the editors are grateful to the conference sponsors at the U.S. Department of Education: the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, the Office for Civil Rights, the Office of the General Counsel, the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs, the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, and the Office of the Secretary. In addition, many Department of Education staff members contributed in important ways to bring the conference about: Norma V. Cantu, Rebecca Fitch, Richard Foster, Judith Johnson, Jeanette Lim, Kent McGuire, Scott Palmer, Pat O'Connell Ross, Mary Schifferli, and Judith Winston. In addition, for their efforts we thank Art Coleman, Louis Danielson, Laura Emmett, Ricardo Hernandez, Kimberly Jenkins, James H. Lockhart, Patricia McNeil, Charles Talbert, Bouy Te, and Rob Wexler.

We also thank the many people who participated in the workshops, which were valuable discussions in themselves as well as laying the groundwork for the conference. Agendas for the workshops are in the appendix. The Technical Assistance Workshop on Building Instructional Capacity was chaired by Cora Marrett and Catherine Snow. Presenters included Wende Allen, David K. Cohen, Barbara Foorman, Louis Gomez, Phyllis Hunter, C. Kent McGuire, Annemarie Palincsar, Sheila Sconiers, Sally Goetz Shuler, Robert Slavin, and Robert Tinker.

The Role of the Law Workshop was chaired by Jacob Adams and Jay Heubert. Presenters included Art Coleman, Lois Gray, Betsy Levin,

Lorraine McDonnell, Margaret J. McLaughlin, Jennifer O'Day, Scott Palmer, Michael Rebell, James Smith, William Taylor, William Trent, Julie Underwood, Ken Warlick, and Paul Weckstein.

The conference paper authors, discussion leaders, and other presenters established an intellectual content and a tone of the highest quality from beginning to end. We would like to thank them all: Christopher Edley, Jr., and Catherine E. Snow, the co-moderators, and the presenters, who were Jacob Adams, Barbara Bowman, John Bransford, Diane Briars, Ronald Ferguson, Barbara Foorman, Patricia Gándara, Eugene Garcia, Antoine Garibaldi, Edmund Gordon, Jay Heubert, Michael Klentschy, Diana Lam, Brian Lord, Samuel Lucas, L. Scott Miller, Gary Orfield, Craig Ramey, Michael Rebell, Lauren Resnick, Bertha Rubio, Carmen Varela Russo, Robert Slavin, Claude Steele, Samuel Stringfield, Marta Tienda, Judith Winston, and Min Zhou.

NRC staff who worked on the conference included Suzanne Donovan, Michael Feuer, Anne Marie Finn, Janet Garton, Karen Mitchell, Faith Mitchell, Timothy Ready, Nat Tipton, and Alexandra Wigdor.

This report has been reviewed in draft form by individuals chosen for their diverse perspectives and technical expertise, in accordance with procedures approved by the Report Review Committee of the National Research Council. The purpose of this independent review is to provide candid and critical comments that will assist the institution in making the published report as sound as possible and to ensure that the report meets institutional standards for objectivity, evidence, and responsiveness to the study charge. The review comments and draft manuscript remain confidential to protect the integrity of the deliberative process.

We thank the following individuals for their participation in the review of this report: David Grissmer, RAND, Arlington, VA; Meredith Phillips, School of Public Policy and Social Research, University of California, Los Angeles; Barbara Rogoff, Department of Psychology, University of California, Santa Cruz; and Russell Rumberger, Department of Education, University of California, Santa Barbara. In addition, Richard Elmore, Harvard University; Margaret Goertz, University of Pennsylvania; Robert Hauser, University of Wisconsin; Paul Minorini, Boys Hope Girls Hope; and Gary Natriello, Columbia University Teachers College provided helpful comments on the three conference papers included in this volume.

Although the reviewers listed above have provided many constructive comments and suggestions, they were not asked to endorse the final draft of the report before its release. The review of this report was overseen by Cora B. Marrett, Senior Vice President, Academic Affairs, University of Wisconsin. Appointed by the National Research Council, she was responsible for making certain that an independent examination of

this report was carried out in accordance with institutional procedures and that all review comments were carefully considered. Responsibility for the final content of this report rests entirely with the authoring committee and the institution.

Neil Smelser, Chair
Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education

ACHIEVING
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Part I

Conference Summary

Introduction

The transition to the new millennium was an opportune time to reflect on a challenge as difficult and fundamentally important to America as any: ensuring that students from all backgrounds achieve to high educational standards. To this end, the National Research Council (NRC), with support from the U.S. Department of Education, convened leading educators and researchers for a Millennium Conference and two pre-conference workshops that focused on the theme “Achieving High Educational Standards for All.”

The conference focused on groups of students that historically have been disadvantaged in terms of educational opportunities and outcomes—especially students from racial and ethnic minority groups. Some speakers discussed research and reform strategies that were applicable for students from all backgrounds, and others focused on research and reforms specifically relating to the education of minority students, low-income students, or both. Whether a speaker emphasized general research and reforms or more targeted strategies, all presentations focused on the implications of various policies and practices for the education of students from the segments of society that historically have been least well served by schools.

SEPARATE AND UNEQUAL: HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS OF CONTEMPORARY DISPARITIES

One could pick any number of times and places to begin this very brief discussion of race, class, and education in America, but the charge to

conference participants was to discuss the education of minority and disadvantaged students from the time of *Brown v. Board of Education* to the present. Hence, we begin with the Supreme Court's decision in the landmark 1954 case and the economic and social milieu from which it arose. (This discussion draws primarily on the presentation of Ronald Ferguson and to a lesser extent on remarks by William Taylor, Jay Heubert, Michael Rebell and Gary Orfield.)

The Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) (USSC+), that schools segregated on the basis of race are inherently unequal. To understand contemporary disparities in the education of minority and disadvantaged students, it is helpful to consider some of the historical facts that informed the Court's ruling. Writing for the Court majority, Chief Justice Earl Warren stated:

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. . . . It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.

We must consider public education in the light of its full development and its present place in American life. . . . Segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race deprives children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities, even though the physical facilities and other "tangible" factors may be equal.

These excerpts indicate that by 1954, the Supreme Court understood the pivotal importance of education not only for the well being of individuals, but also for the continued functioning of American society and democracy. The Court also recognized the injustice of denying equal educational opportunity to any segment of the population.

The Court found racially segregated schools to be inherently unequal, "even though physical facilities and other tangible factors may be equal." In particular, the Court cited the adverse psychological effects of policies and laws supporting segregation, as they were assumed to convey "the inferiority of the Negro group." Writing for the Court, Chief Justice Warren went on to note, "a sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn."

From a strictly logical, ahistorical perspective, one might wonder how the Supreme Court came to the conclusion that racially segregated schools inherently were unequal and why legally sanctioned segregation neces-

sarily conveyed a judgment of inferiority upon black students. However, it must be understood that the legally required segregation of Southern schools was but a part of the South's pervasive system of Jim Crow laws, traditions, and the ideology of white supremacy (National Research Council, 1989:58-60; Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 1997:25-52). (Note: Throughout Part I, references to publications and research findings that were mentioned or alluded to by conference and workshop presenters are included for the reader's convenience.) While segregation and other forms of racial discrimination were also common in Northern states (National Research Council, 1989:60), approximately two-thirds of black Americans lived in the South at the time of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, and at least three-quarters lived south of the Mason-Dixon line prior to World War II (National Research Council, 1989:60-61).

In *An American Dilemma*, the Nobel prize-winning economist and sociologist Gunnar Myrdal described school segregation in the context of the wider caste-like system of economic and social oppression that existed in the South from the end of Reconstruction in 1877 into the middle of the 20th century (Myrdal, 1944). Throughout most of this period, the "physical facilities and other tangible factors" related to the schooling of black students seldom were equal (National Research Council, 1989:59). Indeed, separate schools were maintained explicitly for the purpose of perpetuating the racial stratification that was the cornerstone of the Jim Crow system (Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 1997:36-52). It was not until the 1930s that the courts began to pay any attention to the word, "equal," in the "separate but equal" doctrine that was derived from the Supreme Court's 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. In the two decades prior to the *Brown v. Board* decision, the physical resources made available to black and white schools became more equitable due to the courts' interventions (Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 1997:37). Nevertheless, the role that segregated schools played in maintaining the established system of racial inequality that had been documented by Myrdal and others remained clear. Thurgood Marshall, lead attorney for the plaintiffs in *Brown v. Board*, extensively cited Myrdal's work in his arguments against the "separate but equal" doctrine.

Although the deliberate segregation of schools by race has been illegal since 1954, Ronald Ferguson, Michael Rebell and Gary Orfield noted during the conference that the government did not take decisive steps to desegregate schools until 10 years later. Key to this was the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and a series of strong court rulings between 1968 and 1973. Despite the progress in reducing the segregation of black students, little was ever accomplished in reducing the very substantial segregation of Hispanic students.