

CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP & PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Finally, it's official. The 2000 National Assessment of Educational Progress Report says that by the end of fourth grade, African American, Latino and poor students of all races are an average of two years behind other students. By the time they reach eighth grade, the gap has widened to three years. The bad news is that it's statistically true. The good news is that since we're actually talking about it, now we can do something to make that horrible achievement gap go away.

Closing the achievement gap between privileged and underprivileged children has become a major North Carolina and federal goal. As a matter of fact, a special section on the website for North Carolina Public Schools is devoted solely to this topic. North Carolina even has an annual spring conference on this major challenge. 4,000+ attended the most recent conference and the dates have already been scheduled for the 2005 and 2006 events. These conferences are open to anyone who registers early enough, so check them out.

The arts are a powerful tool in closing the gap. Recent research studies suggest that cutting school arts programs in an effort to boost student academic achievement will be counterproductive, and may be particularly damaging to young children and students from economically disadvantaged circumstances.

PTAs and PTOs are shifting their focus nationally from raising money to parent involvement in the schools. This can have a positive effect on closing the achievement gap, especially if parents, teachers and administrators start working together on smart, innovative approaches to getting kids involved in learning through the arts.

See www.ncpublicschools.org.