CORRELATES OF THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

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Introduction

Research on the academic achievement gap identifies several school, student, and family/community variables or characteristics that correlate with high achievement for low income or minority students. The fact that there is no one single variable that accounts for high student achievement suggests that the achievement gap is a multifaceted problem that requires a comprehensive, planful approach to how schools teach, students learn, and families and communities involve themselves in their child's education.

Tables

What follows is three tables. One table focuses on personnel characteristics, one on programmatic issues, and one on before and after school characteristics that researchers have found to correlate with student academic achievement. In the right column of each table are the characteristics that correlate with student achievement. In the left column are brief descriptions of the research findings and the reference. A list of references follows the third table.

Definitions

Two terms may be unfamiliar to the reader:

a. *Effective schools/high performing schools* - Schools that are predominantly minority and poor, in which poor minority children achieve at the same high level as their white counterparts have been called "effective schools" (e. g., Edmonds; Lezotte) and "high performing schools" (Education Trust, 2003).

b. *90/90/90 schools* – Schools, that are at least 90% minority and at least 90% low income, and at which at least 90% of the students achieve challenging state standards, have been called "90/90/90" schools.

PERSONNEL VARIABLES CORRELATED WITH ACHIEVEMENT

PERSONNEL VARIABLES	RESEARCH FINDINGS
Hiring Practices (Education Trust, 2005)	In high performing high schools, principals seek and hire highly qualified faculty who will best support the school culture (Education Trust, 2005).
Teacher Preparation (Educational Testing Service, 2003)	"Researchers have found that the academic skills and knowledge of teachers made a difference in student achievement" (Educational Testing Service, 2003).
Placement of Qualified Teachers (Education Trust, 2005; Haycock, 1998)	In high performing high schools, (1) The neediest students are given the most qualified teachers so that struggling students get teachers who can best accelerate their learning, (2) Principals assign teachers based on student achievement needs versus seniority and teacher preference (Education Trust, 2005; Haycock, 1998).
Teacher Experience And Attendance (Educational Testing Service, 2003)	Researchers found that students taught by teachers with five or more years of experience made more progress than children taught by teachers with two years or less experience (Mayer et al in Educational Testing Service, 2003). Low-income students are more likely to attend schools with less experienced teachers, higher rates of teacher turnover, and higher rates of teacher absence (Educational Testing Service, 2003).
Support For New Teachers (Education Trust, 2005)	"In high performing high schools, support for new teachers is structured and focuses on curriculum and instruction." New teachers are given opportunities to observe master teachers, are paired with veteran teachers who teach the same class, and are given model lesson plans. In a spirit of collaboration, other teachers share effective curriculum and instructional practices with new teachers, and retired teachers may be hired as instructional coaches for new teachers (Education Trust, 2005).

Instructional Leadership (Lezotte, 1991)	In high performing high poverty schools, "administrators and teachers share leadership. The principal creates leadership opportunities for teachers and other staff members while keeping the school focused on results for students" (Lezotte, 1991).
Collaboration (Education Trust, 2005; Reeves, 2003)	In 90/90/90 schools, teacher collaboration was frequent, sometimes daily, and took up most of faculty meeting and staff development time. Teachers collectively scored student work and agreed on what "proficiency" really meant (Reeves, 2003). In high performing, high poverty high schools, teachers "had regular set aside time during which they worked together on curriculum and instruction" (Education Trust, 2005).
Professional Development (Region VII Comprehensive Center, 2004)	In effective schools, professional development and coaching by proven experts focuses on content students have to learn. In effective schools, "educators constantly seek out opportunities to acquire new content knowledge, instructional skills and other tools that will help their students" (Region VII Comprehensive Center, 2004).

PROGRAM VARIABLES CORRELATED WITH ACHIEVEMENT

PROGRAM ISSUES	RESEARCH FINDINGS
Safe and Orderly Climate/Discipline (Educational Testing Service, 2003; Lezotte, 1991; Townsend, 2000)	"In the effective [high performing high poverty] school there is an orderly, purposeful, businesslike atmosphere which is free from the threat of physical harm. The school climate is not oppressive and is conducive to teaching and learning" (Lezotte, 1991). "A general lack of student discipline and an atmosphere that produces fear in students is not conducive to student learning" (Educational Testing Service, 2003). Disciplinary practices often result in students being excluded from instructional time with qualified teachers, which can lead to lower achievement, and eventual dropout. Cultural conflicts and language and communication differences may result in over-representation of minority group students in subjective discipline categories, such as noncompliance, insubordination, defiance, and physical aggression (Townsend, 2000).
Clear and Focused Mission (Lezotte, 1991)	"In the effective school there is a clearly articulated school mission through which the staff shares an understanding of and commitment to the instructional goals, priorities, assessment procedures and accountability. Staff accepts the responsibility for students' learning of the school's essential curricular goals" (Lezotte, 1991).
Culture (Education Trust 2005; Townsend, 2000)	Cultural misunderstandings negatively affect the learning of African American students. Cultural conflicts, language and communication differences also affect the way the behavior of African American students are perceived may result in their over representation in categories of physical aggression, noncompliance, and insubordination. Students of color need to have positive relationships with teacher and peers, need to move, and need collaboration and cooperative learning groups (Townsend, 2000).
High Expectations (Lezotte, 1991; Ogbu, 2003)	At high performing high poverty schools there are high expectations for both teachers and students. "Staff believe and demonstrate that all students can attain mastery of the essential school skills, and [they as] staff … have the capability to help all students achieve that mastery" (Lezotte, 1991). Also, teachers have and use the instructional strategies, materials and other tools they need to help all students

	achieve mastery. The study by Ogbu in the Shaker Heights, Ohio, School District of the achievement gap between high-achieving black and white students from highly educated, high income families found that negative beliefs of white Americans about Black students' intellectual ability affected Black students engagement and motivation to do their best at school. Also, parents of Black students perceived that teachers who did not believe that Black students could achieve as well as White students did not push them to do so. In addition, peer pressure among some Black students was negative toward academic engagement because of a lack of acceptance of the White mainstream culture and because Black students did not perceive that they would get jobs and other rewards if they worked hard in school (Ogbu, 2003).
Gifted And Talented Courses And Other High Level Courses (Education Trust, 2005; Ogbu, 2003)	In high performing high schools, barriers to high-level courses (e.g., GATE, Honors, and AP courses) are removed. For example, any student may be allowed to enroll in a gifted and talented class. (Education Trust, 2005). Black students in Shaker Heights were over-enrolled in lower level classes beginning in grade school and under-enrolled in Honors and AP classes (Ogbu, 2003).
Counselors (Education Trust, 2005; Mitchell et al, 2003; Ogbu, 2003)	In high performing high schools counselors are part of the academic team, are responsible for monitoring student performance and, when needed, refer them for tutoring, summer school, etc. They encourage students to take rigorous classes (Education Trust, 2005). Counselors improve students' school experience when they help them improve their outlook on school and teach them conflict management strategies (Mitchell et al, 2003). The data collected in Shaker Heights, OH indicate it was commonly believed that school counselors did not encourage Black students to take Honors and AP classes. Black parents who were interviewed stated that on several occasions it was necessary for them to intervene in order to enroll their children in these classes (Ogbu, 2003).
Teacher-Student Relationships/ Caring Teachers (Townsend, 2000; Fletcher, 2003)	Good teacher-student relationships are important to the success of Hispanic and Black students (Townsend, 2000; Fletcher, 2003).

Strong teacher encouragement (Townsend, 2000)	Teacher behaviors that provide active support for success, such as staying after school to work with students, and teacher statements that the student has the ability to succeed, are important for the success of Hispanic and Black students (Townsend, 2000).
Class size (Education Trust, 2005; Educational Testing Service, 2003; Barnes, 2003)	Research shows that students in classes of fewer than 20 students tend to have higher achievement (Educational Testing Service, 2003). Classes of 20 or less are correlated with higher achievement for minority and disadvantaged students (Barnes, 2003). There are disproportionately more minority and limited English proficient students in larger classes (Educational Testing Service, 2003). In high performing high schools, class sizes are smaller for struggling students (Education Trust, 2005).
Opportunity to Learn and Student Time on Task/ Use of Time (Educational Trust; Lezotte, 1991; Reeves, 2003)	In the effective schools "teachers allocate a significant amount of classroom time to instruction in the essential skills. For a high percentage of this time, students are engaged in whole class or large group, teacher directed, planned learning activities" (Lezotte, 1991). The 90/90/90 elementary schools devoted two hours each day to reading and one hour each day to writing. Secondary schools doubled their periods for mathematics and English (Reeves, 2003). In high performing high schools administrators protect instructional time by limiting use of the PA system and student pull out, and requiring instruction to be "bell to bell" (Education Trust).
Curriculum and Instruction (Educational Testing Service, 2003; Education Trust, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Mitchell et al, 2003; Ogbu, 2003)	In high performing high schools, curriculum is "clearly focused on preparing students for life beyond high school—specifically, college and careers." The focus is on academics and achievement related career goals. Teachers and administrators clearly express achievement-related goals (Education Trust 2005). "Research shows that students' academic achievement is closely related to the rigor of the curriculum." In high performing high schools the curriculum is academically rigorous and prepares students for success in college and the work force (Education Trust, 2005; Educational Testing Service, 2003). "Interactive instructional strategies [that] emphasize student collaboration, open-ended problem solving, and peer support," work well for students of color (Gay, 1993 in Mitchell et al, 2003). Culturally relevant lesson planning incorporates "the experiences and contributions of African people throughout the Diaspora" (Ladson-Billings, 1995). "Cultural-enrichment activities and curricula [are] designed to enhance cultural knowledge through thought-provoking

	historical, socio-political, and biographical lessons" (Mitchell et al, 2003). While not using a traditional tracking system, Shaker Heights used *leveling*. Leveling is used when, according to school authorities, students enroll at their chosen level of a course for a given subject. Beginning in elementary school there was pronounced racial differences in enrollment for lower level and upper-level classes, with Blacks being overenrolled in lower level classes and under-enrolled in upper-level classes. Ogbu's suggestions for improving the academic achievement of Black students included (a) choice; (b) performance contracts; (c) cooperative learning; and (d) culturally responsive pedagogy (Ogbu, 2003).
Consistency in Course Content (Education Trust, 2005).	In high performing high schools teachers collaborate to make sure the course content is consistent, no matter who is teaching (Education Trust, 2005).
Technology-Assisted Instruction (Educational Testing Service, 2003)	Technology-assisted instruction is positively correlated with achievement, and the correlation is strongest for low achievers and students from low socio economic groups (Educational Testing Service, 2003).
Support for Students (Education Trust, 2005; Mitchell et al, 2003).	In high performing high poverty high schools. struggling students must attend a mandatory academic support program. Students often need help with study skill development, organization, and completion of class work (Education Trust, 2005; Mitchell et al, 2003).
Frequent Feedback to Students (Reeves, 2002)	In 90/90/90 schools, teachers provided feedback to students as frequently, in as much detail, and in as timely a fashion as each student needed, not just at report card time (Reeves, 2003).
Early Warning System (Education Trust, 2005).	High performing high schools have early warning systems. Counselors analyze 7th and 8th grade scores of entering students. Identified students are assigned mandatory summer school, freshman academy class, after school tutoring, or other academic supports (Education Trust, 2005).

Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress (Lezotte, 1991)	"In effective school student academic achievement is measured frequently through a variety of assessment procedures." The results of these assessments are used to improve individual student performance and also to improve the instructional program (Lezotte, 1991).
Standards, Monitoring, Common Assessments, and Testing (Lezotte, 1991; Reeves, 2003; Education Trust, 2005).	Constant monitoring of student progress is a trait of high performing high poverty schools. The monitoring focuses on content mastery and involves a variety of assessment tools (Lezotte, 1991; Reeves, 2003). In high performing high schools, teachers collaborate within departments to design common assessments tailored to state standards in order to raise student achievement and keep their teaching focused. They agree on texts and assignments and develop a common test for each unit (Education Trust, 2005).
Use of Data (Education Trust, 2005).	In high performing high schools, principals use data to keep informed about student performance. "They institute formal methods of analyzing data with teachers to determine course content, strengths and weaknesses in order to improve curriculum, or teacher assignment. Principals may review each student's transcript to ensure correct placement or to recognize students who have improved performance" (Education Trust, 2005).
Grade Retention Education Trust, 2005; .Jimerson, 1999; Jimerson et. al., 2002).	Grade retention is one of the best predictors of dropout (Jimerson et. al, 2002). A 21-year longitudinal study found that low achieving students who were retained in the early grades, compared to low achieving students who were not retained in the early grades, had lower levels of academic adjustment at the 11th grade and were more likely to drop out by age 19, less likely to get a diploma by age 20, less likely to enroll in a post secondary institutions, and were employed at a lower hourly wage (Jimerson, 1999). High performing high poverty high schools keep low achieving students at grade level and provide academic support outside the class room to help them master grade level classes. They do not retain students or provide remedial classes (Education Trust, 2005).
Parent Involvement (Education Trust 2005; Educational Testing Service, 2003)	In high performing high poverty schools, "educators reach out to parents,...explain what is happening in the classroom,...[and] enlist support at home (Education Trust, 2005). Students whose parents participate in their education have better academic and behavioral performance and enjoy school more

	(Educational Testing Service, 2003).
Partnerships (Educational Trust, 2005).	High performing high schools use business partnerships to promote student preparation for post-secondary opportunities and are usually in the students' fields of interest (Educational Trust, 2005).

BEFORE & AFTER SCHOOL VARIABLES CORRELATED WITH ACHIEVEMENT

BEFORE & AFTER SCHOOL VARIABLES	RESEARCH FINDINGS
Birth Weight (Educational Testing Service, 2003; Gordon, 2006; Osterweil, 2006)	Infants born at a birth weight of less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces (i.e., 2500 grams) are more likely to have a long term disability or impaired development, delayed motor and social development, to be more likely to be enrolled in special classes, to repeat a grade, or fail in school (Educational Testing Service, 2003). However, recent studies in Canada found that low weight infants were more likely to catch up with their cohorts, graduate from high school and do well as adults and attributed poorer findings reported by studies conducted in other countries to social and economic factors, and to Canada's healthcare system (Gordon, 2006; Osterweil, 2006).
Home School Relations/Parent Participation (Educational Testing Service, 2003, Fan and Chen, 2001; Lezotte, 1991)	"In the effective school, parents understand and support the school's basic mission and are given an opportunity to play an important role in helping the school to achieve this mission" (Lezotte, 1991). "Students whose parents are involved in their school tend to have fewer behavioral problems and better academic performance, and are more likely to complete secondary school than students whose parents are less involved in their schools" (Child Trends Data Bank in Educational Testing Service, 2003). Parental aspirations and expectations for their children's educational attainment have a strong relationship on student academic achievement (Fan and Chen, 2001).
Hunger and Nutrition (Educational Testing Service, 2003)	Research has shown that children given vitamins and mineral supplements improved their test scores more than a control group, and poor children given a free breakfast at school had better standardized test scores and attendance than eligible children who did not participate (Educational Testing Service, 2003).
Lead Poisoning (Educational Testing Service, 2003)	Lead levels that exceed the Center on Disease Control's standards have been found to reduce IQ and attention span and cause reading and learning disabilities and behavior problems. Poor and minority children are more likely to be exposed to lead in paint and water pipes in older homes and older school buildings (Educational Testing Service, 2003, p. 26).

Parent Availability (Educational Testing Service, 2003)	The absence of one parent from the family can reduce parent availability and family income, and negatively affect student achievement, health, educational attainment, school behavior, and psychological well being (Educational Testing Service, 2003).
Preschool Education (Barnett, 1995).	A review of 36 studies of model demonstration projects and large scale public programs indicated that "quality early childhood programs can produce large short-term benefits for children on intelligence quotient (IQ) and sizable long-term effects on school achievement, grade retention, placement in special education, and social adjustment" (Barnett, 1995, p. 25).
Racial Socialization (Bowman and Howard, 1985; Hughes and Chen, 1999; Stevenson, 1995 cited in Caughy et el, 2002)	African American parents who provided homes that were rich in African American culture had preschool children who had greater amounts of factual knowledge and better-developed problem-solving skills. African American parents who socialized their preschool children to be proud of their heritage reported fewer problem behaviors (Caughy et el, 2002). Racial socialization related to preparation for bias was associated with better socio-emotional and academic performance for African American adolescents (Bowman and Howard, 1985; Hughes and Chen, 1999; and Stevenson, 1995 cited in Caughy et el, 2002).
Reading to Pre-School Children (Educational Testing Service, 2003)	Pre-school children who are read to do better at learning the alphabet, reading comprehension, and school overall than pre-school children who are not read to (Educational Testing Service, 2003).
12. Student Mobility [and Homelessens] (Educational Testing Service, 2003)	Frequent school changes are not conducive to student learning. It lowers academic achievement levels and academic pacing, and increases the likelihood of a student not completing high school (Educational Testing Service, 2003).
Television Watching (Educational Testing Service, 2003)	Although results are uneven, "eighth graders who watched more than 5 hours of television per day had the lowest average mathematics scores in all countries participating in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 1995" (Educational Testing Service, 2003).

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