Annotated Bibliographies

Closing the Achievement Gap

Bohrnstedt, G., Kitmitto, S., Ogut, B., Sherman, D., & Chan, D. (2015). *School composition and the Black–White achievement gap* (NCES 2015-018). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/studies/2015018.aspx

Although achievement gaps have been studied extensively, additional research is needed regarding racially isolated schools. In this report, the authors reference "recent concerns about the growing resegregation of schools" (p. 1). Accordingly, this federally funded project provides descriptive information regarding the percentage of Black students at a school (density), the Black-White achievement gap, and overall student achievement. The population in this study included eighth-grade Black and White students from across the United States who sat for the mathematics portion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 2011.

The researchers gathered both eighth-grade mathematics scores and student and school characteristics data from the 2011 NAEP data, pulled from the Common Core of Data 2010–11, which were collected by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. They categorized schools, then analyzed the location of racially isolated schools, and inspected achievement scores and achievement gaps. This study found that schools with the highest percentage of Black students were typically located in the South. White students attended schools that were, on average, 9% Black, while Black students attended schools that were, on average, 48% Black. Schools with a greater percentage or higher density of Black students had lower achievement overall, but the researchers found that the achievement gap between Black and White students "did not differ significantly from the achievement gap among the lowest density schools" (p. 12). However, when considering factors such as socioeconomic status, the achievement gap was larger in schools with higher percentages of Black students, especially for Black males. Furthermore, about half of the achievement gap between Black and White students was attributable to factors within the school, such as low expectations for Black students, tracking of students, and unqualified teachers. The scope of this analysis does not include proposed solutions for reducing academic gaps within schools.

Hoff, E. (2013). Interpreting the early language trajectories of children from low SES and language minority homes: Implications for closing achievement gaps *Developmental Psychology, 49*(1), 4–14. Retrieved from http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4061698/

Many children from lower socioeconomic and multilingual homes underperform in school compared with their middle-class monolingual counterparts. Arguments have been made as to how differences in English language skills among these children may be a reason for achievement gaps compared with children from middle-class backgrounds who are native English speakers. Some "question whether developmental differences should be interpreted as deficits to be remedied or as differences to be embraced..." (p. 2). Children of low socioeconomic strata and children who come from homes where English is not the only language spoken are the focus of this paper. The author also reviewed the literature on early language developmental trajectories of low socioeconomic strata and language-minority children. Research is reviewed and explained separately for each group of children, and discussed together in the conclusion of the review. Findings from the literature review indicate that the language trajectories of low-socioeconomic and language-minority children are insufficient and contribute to the lower levels of academic achievement. Language trajectories include the development of oral language skills as well as reading comprehension. The author concludes that the development and implementation of interventions to remedy these deficits are necessary to close the achievement gaps.

Conditions for Learning

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development, 82*(1), 405–432. Retrieved from https://novofoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Meta-Analysis-Child-Development-Full-Article.pdf

Social and emotional learning (SEL) programs have been gaining traction in schools as a way to enhance student learning by focusing on skills beyond academics. The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of SEL programs on students' behavior and their academic achievement, and to add to the academic research about the contributions of SEL programs to a variety of student outcomes.

The researchers reviewed 213 studies on school-based SEL programs that involved 270,034 students from kindergarten through high school. All programs reviewed were universally offered to the entire student body. The authors performed a meta-analysis to identify studies that met identification criteria and allowed for calculation of the effect size of the intervention. Studies were than analyzed using the independent variables of the intervention format, practices related to SEL skill development, problems reported with implementation, and six identified student outcomes as the dependent variables: (1) social and emotional skills, (2) attitudes toward self and others, (3) positive social behaviors, (4) conduct problems, (5) emotional distress, and (6) academic performance.

Overall, the meta-analysis of the research indicated that students who participated in the SEL programs showed significant improvement in the development of their social and emotional skills, attitudes, and behavior. These students also showed a significant improvement in academic achievement over their nonprogram peers. In addition, the researchers determined that school personnel and classroom teachers were able to deliver effective SEL programs to their

students. In conclusion, although more research is needed on the impact of targeted SEL programs, the correlation between evidence-based SEL programming and academic achievement is positive, and students have benefited from these programs in a variety of ways.

Elias, M. J. (2004). The connection between social-emotional learning and learning disabilities: Implications for intervention. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 27*(1), 53–63. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ704973.pdf

Social-emotional learning (SEL) principles help to guide the kinds of interventions that students with learning disabilities need, such as caring relationships with teachers and fellow students, awareness of emotions and impact on learning, and the importance of goal setting and problem solving. The review of literature suggests that students with learning disabilities are more likely to benefit from interventions that are comprehensive, explicitly link SEL with academic learning, and incorporate multiple intelligences. For example, teachers can make available a variety of technology-based interventions to assist students who struggle with both specific learning disabilities and SEL, or they might provide students with tools for planning and following through with classroom projects or reports. In addition, the article emphasizes the importance of maintaining a positive, supportive culture within the classroom for all students.

In conclusion, students with learning disabilities benefit greatly from an inclusive classroom where they can learn with their peers. However, these students also may need additional support in the social-emotional aspects of interacting within general education classrooms.

Osher, D. M., Poirier, J. M., Jarjoura, C. R., Brown, R., & Kendziora, K. (2013). *Avoid simple solutions and quick fixes: Lessons learned from a comprehensive districtwide approach to improving conditions for learning.* Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from http://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/Avoid_Simple_Solutions_and_Quick_Fixes_Osher_January_2013_0.pdf

Researchers have consistently established the importance of safe and orderly schools for learning. However, policymakers, community members, concerned parents, and educators need additional information about how improved school culture, climate, safety, and conditions for learning can be achieved without relying on suspensions and expulsions. The recommendations from this study are useful when planning for inclusive schools. In this paper, the authors examined districtwide efforts in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) to improve school safety and conditions for learning. The district used data to inform a three-tiered approach to improve conditions for learning: (1) social and emotional learning in the elementary grades, (2) student support teams and early indicators data for timely student support, and (3) nonpunitive disciplinary measures that emphasize self-discipline and social and emotional learning. The researchers examined data from CMSD, which has 41,000 students (68% African American, 14.6% White, and 13.2% Latino), and 100% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

In this study, the researchers analyzed 3 years of data gathered from perception surveys administered annually to students in Grades 5–12 regarding conditions for learning, academic achievement, attendance, discipline, and school safety data. The surveys were designed to determine the value of the three-tiered approach to improving districtwide conditions for learning. In addition, school principals rated the degree of implementation of the three-tiered approaches at their schools so researchers could see the relationship between interventions and implementation.

It was determined that there was value to implementing the three-tiered approach to improving conditions for learning and reducing the need to rely on expulsion policies. As a result of implementation of the three-tiered approach, students and teachers reported improved conditions for learning, increased attendance rates, and decreased disciplinary incidents. For example, out-of-school suspensions decreased 58.8% districtwide in 3 years. Furthermore, the degree of positive impact of each of the three approaches was influenced by the quality of implementation as measured by the principals' self-reporting of implementation (high, medium, or low). Finally, the researchers provided six recommendations to improve conditions for learning and reduce discipline disparities, none of which are a quick fix.

Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2013). A review of school climate research. *Review of Educational Research*, *83*(3), 357–385. Retrieved from http://rer.sagepub.com/content/83/3/357.full.pdf+html

Interest in school climate reform has increased over the past century, especially as a potential strategy to use in school improvement efforts. This is noted by the authors in the following statement: "In the United States and around the world, there is a growing interest in school climate reform and an appreciation that this is a viable, data-driven school improvement strategy that promotes safer, more supportive, and more civil K–12 schools" (p. 357). The researchers consulted 13 national experts in school climate research for feedback on essential components of school climate, and, as a result, narrowed the focus of their school climate research to these five elements: (1) safety, (2) relationships, (3) learning and teaching, (4) institutional environment, and (5) the school improvement process. The authors reviewed papers, books, and reports recommended by these experts related to school climate research over a 43-year timespan (1970–2013). From this body of research, they selected 200 references for a comprehensive literature review, including a range of correlational studies, literature reviews, descriptive studies, and Google Scholar search results.

The authors found that school climate reform has supported violence prevention efforts, noting, for example, the Safe and Supportive Schools project through the U.S. Department of Education and current efforts in bullying prevention, including 49 states that have bullying prevention laws. Schools would benefit from being able to use evidence-based, best-practice interventions to help their students. In conclusion, although there is not a national consensus on the definition of school climate or what factors within school climate research are essential, the field is evolving. The authors determined that "local, state, and federal interest in school climate reform as an effective, data-driven, and evidence-based process is emerging" (p. 371).

Yoder, N. (2014). *Teaching the whole child: Instructional practices that support social-emotional learning in three teacher evaluation frameworks.* Washington, DC: Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from http://www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/TeachingtheWholeChild.pdf

Teachers support the academic and social-emotional learning (SEL) needs of their students. "To bridge the connection between social-emotional learning and the work that educators are already doing, educators need access to tools, supports, and resources…that are integrated into existing teacher evaluation and professional development systems…" (p. 1). This research brief identifies the critical teaching practices that support students' SEL and demonstrates how three professional teaching frameworks include teaching practices that support students' social and emotional needs. The researcher included literature from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning 2013 research guide on social-emotional programs and specifically analyzed six SEL programs and the works of eight SEL scholars.

This study collected and analyzed data from the literature on strategies that enhance students' social-emotional competencies, then determined 10 teaching practices that were most frequently evident in the SEL programs and referenced by the SEL scholars. The teaching practices identified by the researcher promote positive learning environments, social-emotional competencies, and academic learning. In addition, the scholar provided a crosswalk between the 10 named practices—(1) student-centered discipline, (2) teacher language, (3) responsibility and choice, (4) warmth and support, (5) cooperative learning, (6) classroom discussions, (7) self-reflection and self-assessment, (8) balanced instruction, (9) academic press and expectations, and (10) competence building-modeling, practicing, feedback, coaching—and three professional teaching frameworks: the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), Danielson Framework for Teaching, and Marzano Protocol.

The findings from the study showed alignment of the identified teaching practices that enhance social-emotional development to the teaching practices described in the professional teaching frameworks. As such, SEL practices are not an additional undertaking for educators, but work in tandem with current professional teaching frameworks. Hence, SEL practices are already part of an educator's role in educating children, not an additional mandate.

Leadership

Finnigan, K. S., & Daly, A. J. (2012). Mind the gap: Organizational learning and improvement in an underperforming urban system. *American Journal of Education, 119*(1), 41–71. Retrieved from http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/667700

Complex issues exist for improving underperforming schools and sustaining school improvement efforts. Researchers remain curious about whether schools under accountability sanctions have the processes, relationships, and social climates necessary to make organizational learning and improvement part of school culture. This mixed-methods study was designed to contribute to this research base through the collection and analyses of both district and school data. Two hundred forty teachers and administrators, from three high schools in a large urban district serving 32,000 students, participated in this study. Quantitative data were collected by having participants

complete a school-level survey, with fixed-response items on school climate, organizational learning, and social network questions. Qualitative data were collected by researchers interviewing 10 educators from each of the three buildings; responses were audiorecorded and transcribed verbatim. Researchers analyzed data, then coded results based on their theoretical framework of exploration, reciprocity, or trust as essential components of school climate.

In comparing schools, researchers found that staff in the two schools under accountability sanctions for the longest period were most likely to rely on previously established perspectives and assumptions about students and student learning. Staff in the newly sanctioned school provided more time for information sharing through structured meetings and vertical teams, allowing discussion and exploration of ideas, student work, and concepts. Data indicated positive responses in regard to school climate, but researchers found a wide degree of variability in perception data across all three schools, with no collective norms of respect, support, and trust. Findings suggest that "the structure and quality of social relationships within schools and districtwide play a crucial role in schools' capacities for organizational learning and improvement" (p. 65). The authors recommend that by developing norms and cultures that are trusting and supportive, schools may facilitate interactions that permit complex knowledge to flow, and thereby strengthening the entire system by supporting collaboration and idea exchanges that result in shared, sustained improvement.

Lash, A., Tran, L., & Huang, M. (2016). *Examining the validity of ratings from a classroom observation instrument for use in a district's teacher evaluation system* (REL 2016-135). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory West. Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/west/pdf/REL_2016135.pdf

New evaluation systems designed for teachers can have high stakes; therefore, reviewing the quality of the instrument is important. This study examined the validity of ratings within 22 components of four teaching domains (planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities) on a classroom observation instrument adapted from the Danielson Framework for Teaching. This study examined four assumptions underlying the proposed interpretation of ratings from the classroom observation instrument:

> "Ratings from the instrument differentiate among teachers.
>
> Each of the four domain ratings measures a single, cohesive area of teaching practice.
>
> Each of the four domains is distinct from the others.
>
> Ratings from the instrument indicate teacher effectiveness in promoting student learning" (p. i).

The study participants included 713 elementary, middle, and high school teachers from one district in Reno, Nevada. Researchers conducted a statistical analyses using Cronbach's alpha to summarize the internal consistency of ratings. In order to test specific hypotheses regarding relationships among component ratings, a confirmatory factor analysis was utilized. Pearson correlations were used by the study team to determine the relationship between teacher ratings

from the classroom observation instrument and student achievement growth in mathematics and reading assessments. The findings also were compared with results and methodologies from other researched investigations. Research findings indicated that "principals discriminated among teachers, but they did not use the full range of the rating scale. Specifically, principals discriminated among those they thought to be effective and highly effective…they rarely identified teachers as minimally effective or ineffective" (p. 15). Similar average ratings in each domain and component did not allow for measurement of distinct aspects of teaching skills. All component ratings across domains had a positive correlation with student reading and mathematics achievement. In conclusion, there was a positive relationship between teacher rating and student growth score; however, researchers indicated that the district may want to further compare results with expectations and examine factors that led to little evidence of distinct aspects of teachers' skills. This finding limits the potential of the classroom observation instrument to differentiate professional learning based upon ratings of teacher skills within a domain.

Matlach, L. K. B., & Poda, J. (2016). *Looking outside education: What school leaders can learn about professional learning from other industries*. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from http://www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/Professional_Learning_Other_Industries.pdf

In this paper, a collaborative project of the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at American Institutes for Research and Learning Forward, researchers examined various industries' professional development practices, claiming that lessons learned from industries can enhance educator professional growth when contextually relevant. Researchers summarized professional learning strategies from multiple fields, including psychology, business, medicine, law enforcement, and the military, and organized their findings within four conceptual approaches. These included (1) culture and organizational mindset (including growth mindset and deliberately developmental organizations), (2) elevating practice using technology (including simulation and video review with coaching), (3) relevance to role and context (including ongoing, role-specific, and context-specific training), and (4) using professional growth opportunities to target and support a diverse workforce (including mentoring, sponsorship, and employee resource groups). Researchers provided case studies to practically illustrate these conceptual approaches and their increasing relevance to education. For example, technological advances have made the video-recording and reviewing of teaching practices a more easily scaled and efficient reflective tool. In one randomized controlled trial spanning four states, 46% of teachers reported that feedback from a virtual coach who watched videos of their teaching was "quite helpful" or "extremely helpful," and 59% reported that they made a specific change in practice as a result of the feedback (Kane, Gelbach, Greenberg, Quinn, & Thal, 2015). Considering this and multiple other studies cited in this paper, the researchers asserted that leveraging insight from professional development strategies in various fields can positively impact the recruitment, support, and retention of highly effective educators.

School and District Turnaround

Klute, M., Cherasaro, T., & Apthorp, H. (2016). *Summary of research on the association between state interventions in chronically low-performing schools and student achievement* (REL 2016–138). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Central. Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=448

This report synthesizes multiple studies conducted over a span of 20 years (from 1994 to 2014) that examined the association between state interventions, chronically low-performing schools, and student achievement. This literature review builds policymakers' and education leaders' awareness of the research base that addresses the question: "What does research suggest about the interventions and implementation features associated with improving student achievement in chronically low-performing schools?" (p. 2).

For the literature review, 25 studies were the focus, all of which examined a state intervention that included chronically low-performing K–12 schools in the United States, and targeted student outcomes. The research team used a five-step screening process and expert consultation that yielded 25 studies for their review of articles fitting the research criteria. These studies employed three main types of research designs: descriptive (no comparison group), quasi-experimental (comparison group selected using a nonrandom process), and retrospective (compares schools that improved under the intervention with those that did not).

Seventy-two percent (18 out of 25) of the studies examined state interventions that involved work with an external school turnaround partner. The findings suggest that four factors are likely associated with improved student outcomes: (1) strong leadership, (2) data-informed instruction, (3) positive school culture, and (4) higher expectations for students.

Few of the studies compared schools that received an intervention with schools that did not (quasi-experimental design). Final indications were that future research on the impact of state interventions should consider the use of more rigorous research designs to better measure the effectiveness of these interventions in relation to student achievement.

Le Floch, K. C., Birman, B., O'Day, J., Hurlburt, S., Mercado-Garcia, D., Goff, R., et al. (2014). *Case studies of schools receiving School Improvement Grants: Findings after the first year of implementation*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20144015/pdf/20144015.pdf

With the passing of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and the federal School Improvement Grant (SIG), school policy and funding went through major changes, including the targeting of funds to the consistently lowest performing schools and requiring those schools to implement specific intervention models. This report focused on the case studies of 35 schools receiving SIGs and examined the school improvement process over a 3-year period, from

2010 to 2013. The sample for this study included 60 schools that used one of the three SIG models: Turnaround (replacement of principal and 50% of teachers), Restart (school is reopened as a charter), or Transformation (replacement of principal, new leader and teacher evaluations, and instructional reforms) schools. Of the 60 schools, researchers gathered data from states, districts, and schools receiving SIG funds in 2010. Twenty-five schools were selected as the core sample for the focus and collection of data. Subsamples were selected from the base sample, which included a rural sample and schools with an increased population of English language learners (ELLs).

Researchers used teacher surveys, budget data, site visits, interviews, and focus groups to learn about the dynamics of the schools. The leadership styles of the school administration and the types of school improvement strategies that were used to support district schools using SIG also were investigated. Findings from these case studies indicated that a majority of the core sample schools replaced the principal during the first year of the SIG, and approximately half of the sample schools replaced at least 50% of the teachers during the 3-year period of the study. The three most cited improvement actions across schools included "increasing professional development activities, replacing the principal, and increasing learning time" (p. viii). Results from the teacher surveys indicated that teachers participated in professional development on literacy, mathematics, and the use of data, but less on special education, classroom management, and ELL instruction. The core sample schools further reported being supported by their districts and external partners, and the subsample schools engaged more in building human capital in the first 2 years of the SIG. These findings represent only initial efforts supported by SIG funding in the first year of this 3-year study of schools receiving SIG grants.

Mayer, A., & LeChasseur, K. (2013). Caught in the middle: Urban principals' attempts to achieve school autonomy and devolve decision-making. *Journal of Urban Learning, Teaching, and Research*, *9,* 32–41. Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1027014

This paper examines the role that principals play during the implementation of the Together Initiative (TI), a turnaround model for schools with at least 2 consecutive years of not meeting adequate yearly progress. TI is designed to increase schools' autonomy from districts, expand the decision-making influence of teachers, and deepen involvement of parents and community members in schools. The authors investigated four urban K–8 schools in one Northeastern state during the first 2 years of the TI implementation and employed a comparative case study method to analyze TI implementation processes and adoption of leadership roles. This method examined the data of each school in relation to other schools. The data that informed the analyses were derived from interviews, site observations, and surveys. Researchers concluded that all principals in the study took on a *catalyst* role, where they initiated a vision for change and helped teachers make sense of policies that originated outside of the school building. Two of the four principals took on the *developer* role, where they promoted teacher leadership and a student-centered school culture. "School leadership in decentralized, autonomous schools requires not only enough trust in teachers to allow them to try new things…, but also the skill to protect the school from district pressures" (p. 39).

Yatsko, S., Lake, R., Bowen, M., & Cooley Nelson. E. (2015). Federal School Improvement Grants (SIGs): How capacity and local conditions matter. *Peabody Journal of Education, 90*(1), 27–52. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2015.988523

Since 2007, the federal government has invested more than $3 billion in School Improvement Grants (SIGs) to turn around the lowest performing schools in the nation. To be eligible for SIG funds, a school's academic performance must be in the bottom 5% of a state's schools. In this study, the authors examined school-level and district-level changes in the first year of grant implementation to see if improvement was realized. This study included personnel from 18 low-performing schools (rural, suburban, and urban) in Washington state that received SIG funding. The study also included state and district officials responsible for administering and/or supporting the grants.

A team of researchers conducted a field study through interviews beginning in approximately the fifth month of grant implementation. They visited all SIG schools and interviewed the principal, vice principal (if there was one), and two or three teachers, as well as state, district, and union officials. Forty-four 1-hour interviews were completed to capture information about district support and early implementation. Overall, districts and schools treated the SIGs as an add-on to what they were already doing, not as a new opportunity for school change and improvement. The researchers reported the findings by state, district, and school levels, and included recommendations for the U.S. Department of Education and states for avoiding pitfalls and overcoming obstacles to school turnaround in the future. Finally, the authors noted the need for districts to establish a clear theory of action for improvement, implement measures of school accountability, and provide firsthand learning opportunities from those with turnaround expertise.