Illinois
CENTER for
SCHOOL
IMPROVEMENT

PROVIDING ACCESS FOR SUBGROUPS IN ILLINOIS

Exploratory Guides for District Assistance Teams for Delivery of Focus Services

Linking Research and Best Practices to Recommendations for Supporting Subgroups of Students in Illinois

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Purpose and Overview

When indicia of societal successes (employment rates, life expectancy) and societal challenges (unemployment rates, incarceration rates) are proportionately represented by the makeup of the citizenry, we will be closer to living up to the credo "with liberty and justice for all." As most educators know, large differences exist in the successes and challenges of various student groups, and one of the responsibilities of teachers and administrators is to determine how to minimize and eliminate the discrepancies. Persistent achievement gaps have multiple causes and must be addressed from multiple points. In 2001, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). For the first time, in an ESEA, NCLB required districts and states to separate their student data by various groups (e.g., race, poverty, special education, English language learners). Thus, states, districts, administrators, school boards, educators, legislators, and the public now attend to the achievement levels of the various student groups in their area. But there is additional work to be done in this country and in Illinois in terms of improving the academic achievement of all students in order to eliminate achievement gaps.

The Illinois Center for School Improvement welcomes the addition of districts receiving Focus services and Focus schools—those schools with pronounced achievement gaps in one or more groups of student populations—to our service line as we work together to eliminate achievement gaps. The Illinois Center for School Improvement supports Illinois districts through a research-based foundation for the delivery and execution of services known as the Core Functions and Indicators. The 29 indicators of high-achieving districts are divided into three core function categories: (A) management and operations, (B) learning or instructional infrastructure, and (C) district and school continuous improvement. Seven Core Functions and Indicators were selected for heightened scrutiny and support with our districts receiving Focus services and Focus schools because they have direct association with achievement gaps. Topics related to these indicators are evident throughout our *Providing Access for Subgroups in Illinois Exploratory Guide*. These indicators are as follows:

- A6. Equitable allocation of resources
- A9. Safe and effective learning environment
- B2. Classroom instruction and behavior management
- B3. Comprehensive system of learning supports
- B10. Family engagement
- C3. Data culture
- C4. Collaborative leadership teams

The *Exploratory Guides* use the following terms for groups of students: African-American learners (black), economically disadvantaged learners (low income), English language learners (students with limited English proficiency), Latino learners (Hispanic), and special education learners (students with an individualized education program [IEP]). Each section of the guide provides background information about a specific subgroup and a synthesis of best practices and research-based instructional practices to lead schools to improving student achievement. The document has been designed so that it may be used as a whole, or each section can be used individually. Each section

of the document includes a review of literature, recommendations, resources, and references to help determine starting points for embedding transformative practices in the continuous improvement planning process. Key findings derived from intentional data review and through co-interpretation[SM] serve as the basis for districts to determine root causes of the existing achievement gaps in identified subgroups. The sections, or individual guides, have recurrent themes throughout: the need for educators to examine and acknowledge their own personal experiences and potential biases, the need to have high expectations for students' learning, the harmful effects of inequitable distribution of resources, the importance of a school's culture and climate to learning, and addressing students' needs through family engagement and community services. Each guide provides a sampling of the academic literature on topics related to subgroup achievement and is not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, these guides will be useful as we work with our districts receiving Focus services and Focus schools to set worthy targets and determine actions and tasks to close achievement disparities, making this country and state closer to "liberty and justice for all."

As an accompaniment to our *Providing Access for Subgroups in Illinois Exploratory Guides*, learning snapshots of research and strategies on topics known to improve achievement are available to guide classroom instruction and to provide recommendations on specific actions educators can take to support student learning at the classroom level. Topics include (1) academic vocabulary instruction, (2) content area and disciplinary literacy, (3) culturally responsive teaching, (4) developing a growth mindset, (5) developing students' background knowledge, (6) providing effective student feedback, (7) student engagement, and (8) writing across the curricula.

SECTION 1

Exploratory Guide for Economically Disadvantaged Learners

Introduction

Approximately 45.3 million people in the United States live in poverty and about one third, 15 million of them, are under 18 years old (DeNavas-Walt, & Proctor, 2014). The original Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 created Title I, an educational equity federal priority, giving financial assistance to local schools serving economically disadvantaged students. Title I now serves more than 21 million children and provides funds to more than 56,000 public schools that meet the criteria of numbers of economically disadvantaged students (Education Policy Center at American Institutes for Research, 2015). According to the Southern Education Foundation, 51 percent of students in prekindergarten through 12th grade in 2012–13 were from low-income families (Suitts, 2015). In Illinois, with the huge metropolitan school district of Chicago Pubic Schools, 50 percent of the students are from low-income families (Layton, 2015).

In order to transform low-performing schools and to offer economically disadvantaged students high-quality education, it is imperative to identify best practices and processes that are recommended in the literature.

In order to provide economically disadvantaged students with appropriate education and services, it is recommended that funding from Title I and other sources be allocated in accord with recent best practice and research findings. Few high-quality research studies exist related to school success with a focus on the impact of discrete elements such as race, culture, ethnicity, gender, language, or school location on improved academic achievement. Students' socioeconomic status (SES) is one of the discrete elements associated with achievement; therefore, it is recommended that SES also be considered when planning for the success of all students (Burney & Beilke, 2008). It is imperative to identify best practices and processes that are recommended in the literature in order to transform schools and to offer economically disadvantaged students high-quality education. The Illinois Center for School Improvement has been collecting and analyzing research on the best practices to improve the achievement of students. This exploratory guide provides a synthesis of frequent recommendations and practical applications by the authors on review of a multitude of research and literature published in the last 20 years. Through analysis of the literature, this guide closely emphasizes the recommendations and practical applications offered in the research. The sections that follow examine what districts and schools can consider for improving the achievement of economically disadvantaged students and closing achievement gaps.

All of the recommendations are within the purview of the district or school; it is recommended that each of the following be considered when allocating resources for economically disadvantaged students:

- Highly qualified teachers

- Rigorous curriculum and high expectations
- Preschool programs
- Access to resources
- Parent and family involvement
- Wraparound and partner services
- A safe and disciplined environment

This information will be helpful as District Assistance Teams work with districts receiving Focus services and Focus schools as they set worthy targets and identify actions and tasks aimed at closing achievement gaps.

A Note on Terminology

Numerous terms are used in education and in the literature to describe economically disadvantaged students: students residing in poverty, students from low-income families, students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, students receiving Title I services, and students in the low tier of SES. These terms are used interchangeably throughout this section.

Highly Qualified Teachers

Research shows that high-quality teachers may improve the achievement gaps through their instruction (Center for Public Education, 2005; Clewell & Campbell, 2007). The level of instructional quality that students receive has long-lasting and cumulative positive effects on their overall achievement. In fact, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2013), teachers and principals are the single most important factor affecting student learning. Minority and economically disadvantaged students are disproportionately taught by underqualified teachers, including those who are inexperienced or have failed to meet their state's teacher licensing and certification requirements (Borman & Kimball, 2005). Borman and Kimball analyzed teacher evaluations in Nevada to determine possible correlations between instructional quality as determined by assessment ratings and academic outcomes. The analyses pointed out that students from poor, minority, and low-achieving backgrounds had significantly higher exposure to teachers of lower quality. Their study asserts that providing more experienced teachers in low-income schools could serve as a useful strategy for closing achievement gaps.

One way to meet the needs of economically disadvantaged students is to assign the best teachers to the most struggling students. It is recommended that this determination be made on the basis of teaching strengths of the educators, not on their seniority. It is further recommended that teachers be provided with continuing high-quality professional development coupled with non-evaluative instructional support (Bruce, 2008; Center for Public Education, 2005; Kannapel & Clements, 2005). Other studies have found that schools with high concentrations of low-income students tend to have: (1) the highest percentage of teachers with three or fewer years of teaching experience, (2) the highest percentage of students taught by out-of-field teachers, (3) the highest rate of teacher turnover, and (4) the most difficulty hiring new teachers (Barton & Coley, 2009; University of North Carolina Center for Civil Rights, 2005). Haycock and Crawford (2008) advise districts to review teacher assignment and turnover data, out-of-field teaching, and years of experience and

then use that information when allocating resources. They also recommend offering incentives to attract and retain the highest quality teachers to the lowest performing schools.

A second important point of improving teachers' ability to work with students from poverty is providing them with professional development and time for teacher collaboration to cultivate high-quality instruction. Because the quality of teachers' instruction has been identified as one of the most important school influences on students' academic achievement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Spradlin & Prendergast, 2006), differences in instructional quality can be a significant contributor to achievement gaps that exist among various groups of students. This may be due to a lack of opportunities for appropriate professional development for teachers—long-term, hands-on, experiential, coaching and modeling—as well as a lack of curricular choices for students (Haycock & Crawford, 2008). A qualitative study led by Levine and Marcus (2007) emphasized that collective efforts of teachers are imperative to meeting the needs of students underserved by schools. As such, time for teacher collaboration so they can review student progress, examine the effects of instruction, and change course when needed is a useful strategy for closing achievement gaps.

Rigorous Curriculum and High Expectations

Students in many low-income schools do not have access to advanced placement or honors courses. Studies on high-poverty schools indicate greater success when the curriculum is rigorous and aligned to standards and assessment (Center for Public Education, 2005). The key to schools' success is related to a rigorous curriculum, not on a particular program (Kannapel & Clements, 2005). Adelman (2006) indicated rigor and intensity of a student's high school curriculum as the most influential factor when predicting completion of a bachelor's degree. The study determined that curriculum matters—what is studied, how much of it, and how deeply matters for degree completion.

Specific to mathematics, Spielhagen (2006) reviewed mathematics tracking policies in which only some of the students had access to the study of algebra in eighth grade and found a disparity of access according to students' SES. The schools with the highest percentage of students with free or reduced-price lunch also had the lowest percentage of students in Grade 8 Algebra 1. Spielhagen concluded that students who took algebra in eighth grade scored higher in later standardized math tests than those who did not take algebra in eighth grade. Burris, Heubert, and Levin (2006) studied the potential impact of making available an accelerated math curriculum and analyzed the effects of universal acceleration on students in a suburban school district. The findings of the study indicated that, with the incorporation of accelerated classes into the curriculum, completion of advanced math courses increased significantly for all groups, including minority students, students of low SES, and students at all initial achievement levels. Furthermore, the performance of initial high achievers did not differ statistically in heterogeneous classes in which previously low-achieving students were now incorporated. The inclusion of accelerated math courses is a successful strategy for closing mathematics achievement gaps. Accordingly, increasing student access to more rigorous coursework, and including algebra coursework in middle grades may improve students' high school math achievement and eliminate achievement gaps.

As students navigate rigorous curricula, they must be equipped with strategies to persevere. This is true for all students, including economically disadvantaged students. Williams and Bryan (2013) describe resilience or grit as the set of characteristics that enable students to overcome adverse

conditions and succeed academically. Sternberg (2008) suggests grit is evident when students are willing to stand out or be different from their peers, when they are willing to take on challenges and exhibit passion to reach goals, and when they believe they have the ability to achieve their goals. Dweck (1999; 2006) states that resilience is an important part of motivation and academics, and she asserts that many human characteristics are alterable and malleable, including one's propensity toward resilience. As such, educators might view grit or perseverance as the "how" of learning, which Pappano (2013) suggests is of equal importance to the "what" of learning. Researchers have determined that students' resilience is cultivated when they have a positive perception of their classroom and school (Reyes & Jason, 1993), when they have positive ties to the school and feelings of belonging, and when they feel support for teachers as manifested by teacher feedback (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Reyes & Jason, 1993). Further, grit, perseverance, and passion for long-term goals have been identified as essential to high achievement (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Duckworth et al. (2007) also found that grit was responsible for an average of 4 percent of the variance in success outcomes of the groups they studied. When educational attainment was studied, grit had predictive validity of success. Based on the evidence they gathered, Duckworth and Seligman (2005) suggest that, in every field, grit may be as essential as talent to high accomplishment.

As students navigate rigorous curricula, they must be equipped with strategies to persevere. This is true for all students, including economically disadvantaged students.

Specifically, researchers contend that perseverance can be fostered through conditions and tasks in the classroom (Shechtman, DeBarger, Dornsife, Rosier, & Yanall, 2013). Sternberg (2008) asserts that educators can build students' resilience by creating challenging tasks for them to get through and by sharing personal stories of trying situations to help students reconceptualize what learning entails: confusion, multiple attempts at the same task, and struggle. And specific to writing, Graham and Perin (2007) suggest writing has the ability to help students transform their thoughts and experiences, and can increase their quest for learning. Bathina (2014) studied how narrative writing increased student engagement and motivation, and led to more student discussion. Of note, writing transformed students' feelings of optimism, increased their feelings of hope, and elevated their sense of control over events in their lives. These examples show how educators have the opportunity to help all students achieve their potential and narrow achievement gaps when attending to the fluid nature of grit.

Early Childhood Education

Research has noted that the disparities in academic achievement for economically disadvantaged students are evident before children enter kindergarten. High-quality early childhood educational programs generate learning gains, as shown in the research. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2013), access to high-quality preschool results in short- and long-term gains—including higher graduation rates, college attendance and completion, and higher reading and math skills—and encourages family involvement. Children who attend preschool exhibit higher levels of academic achievement and social skills, but only 65 percent of the lowest income 4-year-olds attend preschool while 90 percent of 4-year-olds from the highest income backgrounds attend preschool (U.S.

Department of Education, 2013, p. 15). Aikens and Barbarin (2008) looked at the impact of family, school, and neighborhood factors and how these factors account for the impact of SES on early literacy achievement. Family factors had the largest influence on reading disparities in kindergarten. The authors determined that interventions such as reducing parental stress, improving the literacy environment in the home, and center-based care prior to kindergarten may work against the effects of low SES on early literacy.

Furthermore, researchers also have concluded that as students advance in age and grade, neighborhood and school factors have more impact on achievement than family influences, which include SES. Given the short- and long-term positive effects of early childhood education opportunities, all students should have access to first-rate programs. Characteristics of high-quality preschool include teachers with specialized training, small class sizes, intentional teaching focused on deep learning of academic content though discovery and social interaction, use of developmentally appropriate standards-aligned curricula, recruitment efforts to enroll the students most in need, and accountability systems that ensure intended outcomes of the preschool programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Providing Access to Resources

Gorski (2007) states that schools that tend to struggle with student achievement often struggle with inadequate resources. This is often true for schools serving students in poverty because these schools are funded by property taxes and low-income areas yield few property taxes to put back into the schools. Gorski also posits that students from lower income families may have limited access to programs outside of school that provide lessons and enrichment, confidence in ability to learn new things, social interaction skills, and background information that may transfer to an academic setting. Involvement in school-related activities in general is associated with higher achievement (Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003). Opportunities to learn in group settings and exposure to information-rich environments have been found to be less available to children in poverty, placing them at a disadvantage relative to their more affluent peers in school. Relatedly, access to enrichment activities over the summer also may impact achievement. Summer learning loss may contribute to widening the achievement gap between students from affluent backgrounds, who tend to benefit from summer enrichment programs, and economically disadvantaged students, who are less likely to be exposed to learning opportunities during the summer. Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson (2001) measured the possible impact of summer learning loss across students of different socioeconomic backgrounds. Their analyses found that during the summer, more affluent children's academic skills continued to advance (although at a slower rate than during the school year), but economically disadvantaged children's learning gains, on average, fell flat. As such, a review of districts' resource allocation and enrichment opportunities during the academic year and over the summer is an important task. Providing summer reading materials is one powerful way to combat summer learning loss (Allington et al., 2007).

Family Engagement

Parental involvement is a key component of education, and districts and schools must find ways to encourage family involvement. LaRocque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011) reviewed the literature to

determine common barriers to school involvement for parents and proposed strategies for schools to incorporate families' experiences as a basis for learning. Not surprisingly, they found that, although many families appeared to have limited involvement with the school, this was not consistent with their actual desire to participate in the education of their children. Challenges for families include working more than one job, working an evening/night shift, managing a one-parent home, and lacking transportation. One way to increase participation of families as valued partners is to provide opportunities for them to give feedback on a variety of issues, including how to reduce barriers to their involvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Besides the provision of opportunities for feedback, LaRocque et al. (2011) recommend that schools establish parental-involvement committees, give teachers information about how to effectively engage families, create networks for parents to work collaboratively with each other, and provide families with information about specific things they can do at home to support learning. These suggestions for increasing the impact of the family/school partnership are especially important for educators and families serving students living in poverty.

Wraparound and Partner Services

Students from low-income families may have additional academic, health, or social needs to be addressed in cooperation with the school and the greater community. Accordingly, the U.S. Department of Education (2013) states that attending to students' physical and emotional needs and capitalizing on partnerships with community-based organizations helps ensure children's academic future. Schools and community partners can contribute to students' academic success through physical health services, through additional learning opportunities that support school learning, and through outreach to families about community services. In fact, when districts and schools partner with the entire community to provide wraparound services, the positive effects on academic achievement and higher quality learning programs can be even greater than when the focus is on families or partner organizations exclusively (Caplan, 1998; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). When district and school personnel are aware of community interests and needs, this facilitates collaboration with a variety of community partners to offer services in support of families and student learning (Sanders & Harvey, 2000).

Students' health—physical, emotional, and social—influences student achievement and thus becomes a crucial component of family engagement and community outreach programs. Positive correlations between student health and academic outcomes have been identified in relation to visual problems, attention-deficit-hyperactivity disorder, and asthma, all which impact children age 18 or younger (Basch, 2011). Even though many schools no longer have nurses on staff, district nurses, county health departments, and social workers are available to inform families' health care options and ensure follow-up to health care recommendations (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Budgetary restrictions in many school districts have resulted in the reduction or removal of physical education courses and athletic programs, which may affect student health. Districts and schools might consider providing information about community-based opportunities that contribute to students' level of physical activity. Finally, Basch (2011) conducted a review of current literature on adolescent health issues to develop a priority agenda for using health programs to help close achievement gaps, with the conclusion being that school health efforts:

- Be integrated into accountability measures and policy mandates.
- Be partnerships with the community to provide extended learning opportunities for students.

- Be partnerships that provide families with information about agencies such as community centers that provide homework help, reading opportunities at the library, or mentoring opportunities.

Alignment, integration, and collaboration between education and health also can help improve each child's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development. The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model—an expansion and update of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Coordinated School Health (CSH) approach—focuses on the child to align the common goals of both education and health. The WSCC model integrates the eight elements of the CSH program with the tenets of ASCD's whole child framework and supports a crucial role in ensuring the success of each school health component. To learn more about the new 10-component model, visit http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/wscc/index.htm.

Safe and Disciplined Environment

Disproportionate disciplinary practices based on student demographics are well documented. Written discipline policies and enacted practices adversely affect students from families with limited economic resources, students with disabilities, and minority students. Further, research indicates exclusionary discipline practices have serious implications on outcomes on standardized achievement tests (Losen & Skiba, 2010), and the implications may be greater for students with disabilities, who are at a greater risk for poor academic outcomes. According to Losen & Gillespie (2012), many districts resort to suspension for violations of minor school rules. Besides the obvious loss of time in the classroom, suspensions matter because they are among the leading indicators of whether a child will drop out of school and because out-of-school suspension increases a child's risk for future discipline problems. Many zero-tolerance policies are not supported with empirical evidence of effectiveness. The National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (Drakeford, 2004) offers evidence suggesting that exclusionary discipline policies result in more exclusion, school failure, and dropouts. Recommendations for addressing the problem of disproportionate disciplinary practices include providing staff members with "clear definitions of behaviors that warrant disciplinary actions, and the appropriate responses to be taken" (Drakeford, 2004, p. 9). It is further recommended that school districts evaluate the latitude given to staff when assigning disciplinary actions. Finally, staff members might review their own beliefs, examine biases they may have regarding students from economically disadvantaged families, and amend their practices if necessary.

Resources

National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP)

NCCP is the nation's leading public policy center dedicated to promoting the economic security, health, and well-being of America's low-income families and children.

http://nccp.org/about.html

Center for Public Education

This center's website provides an at-a-glance guide on high-performing, high-poverty schools.

http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Organizing-a-school/High-performing-high-poverty-schools-At-a-glance-

***Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty: Strategies for Erasing the Opportunity Gap* (2013) authored by Paul Gorski; published by Teachers College Press (New York, NY).**

This book seeks to provide educators with practical strategies for addressing the economic inequity within the classroom. Gorski describes the "opportunity gap" for low-income students, a phrase coined in direct contrast to the popular notion of an "achievement gap." He provides specific strategies for teachers working with children living in poverty, including regular assimilation of cooperative pedagogies in which students work in pairs or small groups.

***Teaching with Poverty in Mind: What Being Poor Does to Kids' Brains and What Schools Can Do About It* (2011) authored by Eric Jensen; published by ASCD (Alexandria, VA).**

This book focuses on the relationship between academic achievement and low socioeconomic status. The author shares how key factors that affect academic success can be addressed in classroom teaching and school and district policy. Drawing from research, experience, and real school success stories, Jensen explains what educators can do to improve the achievement of economically disadvantaged students.

http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/109074.aspx

***The Kids Left Behind—Catching Up the Underachieving Children of Poverty: A Synthesis of Research on What Works in High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools* (2007) authored by Robert Barr and William Parrett; published by Solution Tree (Bloomington, IN).**

The authors of this book have compiled the most important research on how low-performing, high-poverty schools have achieved radical improvements in learning for their most vulnerable students. Barr and Parrett also identify eight best practices, breaking them down into specific strategies, often using real-life examples from successful schools.

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SECTION 2

Exploratory Guide for Special Education Learners

Introduction

"Children placed in special education are general education children first," as stated in *A New Era: Revitalizing Special Education for Children and Their Families*, a report from the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2002, p. 9). This quote serves as a reminder that special education teachers and general education teachers share the same goal of providing quality education for all students. Yet a substantial achievement gap persists between the subgroup of students with disabilities and students without disabilities. In fact, of all subgroups targeted for achievement score disaggregation, the students with disabilities subgroup has been the least likely to meet previously legislated adequate yearly progress (AYP) thresholds. A study of three states found that schools most often failed to make AYP because of low achievement within the students-with-disabilities subgroup (Eckes & Swando, 2009). It is important to note that the subgroup of students with disabilities is highly diverse, and levels of academic proficiency and the potential to do so vary greatly within this subgroup. Students may be designated for special education services with identification of one or more of the following 13 categories of disabilities (http://www.understandingspecialeducation.com/special-education-law.html):

- Autism
- Blindness
- Deafness
- Emotional disturbance
- Hearing impairment
- Intellectual disability
- Multiple disabilities
- Orthopedic impairment
- Other health impaired
- Specific learning disability
- Speech and language impairment
- Traumatic brain injury
- Visual impairment

Students with disabilities who receive special education services as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) presently make up 13 percent of public school enrollment, with percentages in states varying from 10 percent to 19 percent (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, 2014). Special education students are disproportionately poor, minority, and English language learners. Research indicates that the majority of students receiving specialized services (80 percent to 85 percent) have the cognitive ability to meet the same

academic standards as students not receiving specialized services with instructional support, access, and accommodations as per IDEA (Hettleman, 2013).

Variations in achievement exist contingent upon the type of disability. Students with disabilities may not achieve to their potential for a many reasons: placement, instruction, assessment, and services. In their examination of elementary schools with diverse enrollment, Harry and Klingner (2007) found that several school-system-based factors tainted the special education placement process. Factors included lack of adequate classroom or specialized instruction (such as response to intervention [RTI]) prior to the students' referral, inconsistencies in policy implementation, and arbitrary or inaccurate referrals and assessment decisions. Significantly, students in poor neighborhoods proved at risk of receiving poor schooling, which increased their risk of being placed in special education programming (Harry & Klingner, 2007). As such, a thorough examination of the achievement gap between students identified to receive specialized services and students not receiving specialized services includes scrutiny of identification processes for special education services.

At the same time, there is concern over disproportionate placement of minority students, especially those who are African-American, Hispanic, and Native American. The inflation is evident as measured both by the percentage of special education program enrollments composed of students in minority groups and the percentage of students in minority groups enrolled in special education. Special education placement data collected by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) indicated disparities as early as 1968, and increased awareness since then has led to formal monitoring by OCR. Researchers Artiles, Harry, Reschley, and Chinn (2002) traced multiple factors contributing to overrepresentation of students in racial and ethnic subgroups in special education. Factors studied include those related to: poverty, including inadequate medical care; inequities in school quality and resources; qualifications of personnel; and cultural incongruence between teachers and students. Although placement disparities in special education appear mostly in the categories with the most subjective eligibility criteria, some researchers claim that disproportionate representation is due to racial and cultural misconceptions (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Cultural incongruence has proven significant in relation to placement assessments as well, and researchers suggest scrutiny of assessments as a method to reduce overrepresentation of minority subgroups (Artiles et al., 2002). Evidence also has indicated the importance of preservice preparation and ongoing professional development for educators related to student diversity (Artiles et al., 2002).

It is imperative to identify best practices and processes that are recommended in the literature in order to transform schools and to offer special education students high-quality education. The Illinois Center for School Improvement has been collecting and analyzing research on the best practices to improve the achievement of students. This exploratory guide provides a synthesis of frequent recommendations and practical applications by the authors on review of a multitude of research and literature published in the last 20 years. Through analysis of the literature, this guide closely emphasizes the recommendations and practical applications offered in the research. The sections that follow examine what districts and schools can consider for improving the achievement of special education students and closing achievement gaps. All of the recommendations are within the purview of the district or school, and it is recommended that each of the following be considered when allocating resources for special education students:

- Inclusion and access to the core curriculum
- Collaboration between and among general and special education teachers

- Data-based progress monitoring
- A multi-tiered system of supports with early interventions programs
- Family engagement

This information will be helpful as District Assistance Teams work with districts receiving Focus services and Focus schools as they set worthy targets and identify actions and tasks aimed at closing achievement gaps.

A Note on Terminology

Students with disabilities, students receiving specialized services, special education students, and diverse learners are terms that appear in the literature referring to students receiving special education services and are used interchangeably throughout this document.

Inclusion and Access to the Core Curriculum

Current research indicates that, given access to the appropriate curriculum, quality instruction, and effective supports, students with some types of disabilities should be able to perform at the level of their abled peers and higher in academic settings. Since the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2002, lawmakers have devoted particular attention to educational conditions concerning students with disabilities. Researchers argue that the majority of students with disabilities should be able to perform at grade level and graduate from high school with a regular diploma (Cortiella, 2007; Dillon, 2007), as most students do not have cognitive disabilities. Special education students in the United States make up 13 percent of public school enrollment. When special education students are given access to the core content, with specially designed instruction, supports, and accommodations when needed, the majority of these students will be able to meet the equivalent achievement standards met by other students (Thurlow, Quenemoen, & Lazarus, 2012). Schools must design, deliver, and monitor a well-articulated K–12 instructional program that is rigorous, consistent, and aligned with both English language arts and mathematics standards. In Illinois, the standards are the Illinois Learning Standards incorporating the Common Core State Standards. Instruction is to be differentiated to address the needs of the full range of learners' learning needs while incorporating students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and styles. Although a continuum of placement is still important—for example, from full time in the mainstream classroom to pull-out instruction for academic subjects—the goal remains for all teachers to understand that everyone is responsible for teaching all students and that all students can learn.

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Teachers' expectations for student achievement and provision of first-rate learning opportunities are paramount to the success of students receiving specialized services. Inclusion refers to the practice of including students with disabilities in the general education classroom with access to the core

curriculum. Research and case studies of successful districts have shown that collaboration and inclusion models between special education teachers and general education teachers has been effective in reducing achievement gaps and in reducing student absenteeism (Huberman, Navo, & Parrish, 2012; University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute, 2005). A study conducted in eight unified districts in California showed strong academic performance for special education students when compared with similar districts in the state (Huberman et al., 2012), with the following common practices:

- Use of inclusion program
- Student access to the core curriculum
- Collaboration between and among special education and general education teachers
- Continuous assessment
- Use of response to intervention (RtI)
- Targeted professional development
- Use of Explicit Direct Instruction (EDI)

Huberman and colleagues view these districts as models for districts struggling to improve the performance of students in special education. Similarly, a study by the Donahue Institute at the University of Massachusetts (2005) identified district- and school-level practices supporting the achievement of students with special needs in urban public schools, with the following common strategies:

- A commitment to an inclusion model
- Hiring of teachers holding dual certification in general and special education to best serve students in their full inclusion models
- Flexible student groupings that integrate most special-needs students into general education classrooms throughout the school day

The success of these models is instructive for future success because research on the instructional conditions in inclusive environments, teacher collaborative planning for inclusion, and the attitudes of general and special education teachers has generally revealed a lack of expertise, resources, training for general and special education teachers; insufficient resources; and lack of administrative support as the most evident barriers to effective inclusion models (Holdheide & Reschly, 2008). Support in these areas will improve outcomes for students receiving specialized services. One model of how to provide access to curricula and to positively influence instructional conditions in inclusive environments is universal design for learning (UDL). UDL is a "curriculum designed approach to increase flexibility in teaching and decrease the barriers that frequently limit student access to materials and learning in classrooms" (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2003, p. 2). UDL may make use of assistive technology to help students access the curricula. Universal design methods recognize that students with disabilities are first general education students, so the intent is that all students can gain access to the core curriculum. Universal design principles address policies and practices that are intended to improve access to learning and assessments for all students. The Illinois Center for School Improvement is not promoting UDL; however, some districts may wish to review the UDL process as it is a way of thinking about curriculum design that gives all individuals

equal opportunities to learn by how they receive information, how they show learning, and how they are engaged with the learning described as follows:

- **Principle I: Provide Multiple Means of Representation** (the "what" of learning). Learners differ in the ways that they perceive and comprehend information that is presented to them. Learning and transfer of learning occur when multiple representations are used because it allows students to make connections within, as well as between, concepts.
- **Principle II: Provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression** (the "how" of learning). Learners differ in the ways that they can navigate a learning environment and express what they know.
- **Principle III: Provide Multiple Means of Engagement** (the "why" of learning). Affect represents a crucial element to learning, and learners differ markedly in the ways in which they can be engaged or motivated to learn.

When curricula are designed for universal access, differentiated instruction allows all learners to effectively engage by providing a variety of strategies and student choice as they learn content and produce products of learning (Tomlinson, 1999; Tomlinson, 2000).

Collaboration Among and Between Special Education Teachers and Classroom Teachers

Several urban districts that are engaged in school reform have established successful special education programs utilizing different approaches to including students with disabilities in general school reform efforts. Such efforts require professional development and time for teachers to collaborate on what is best for students with disabilities. The Center on Education Policy (Mandlawitz, 2003) reviewed special education programing in Chicago, Cleveland, and Milwaukee and provided important insights about the successes and challenges of educating students with disabilities in large urban settings. Professional development and teacher collaboration time are evident in the study's findings:

- Chicago enhanced the identification and referral processes, staff training, and ongoing classroom assessment of students with disabilities.
- Cleveland general educators took on a greater sense of responsibility for students with disabilities, and access to regular curriculum and classrooms expanded for students with disabilities.
- Milwaukee improved staff collaboration and streamlined the individualized education program (IEP) process. (Mandlawitz, 2003)

In another study of special education services conducted by Huberman, Navo, and Parrish (2012), two emergent themes included (1) the need for collaboration between special education and general education teachers and (2) the need for targeted professional development on a variety of topics related to delivery of specialized services. Other researchers with similar findings see ongoing professional development for both general and special education staff as fundamental to improving the quality of instruction and specialized services for students with disabilities. The Center on

Education Policy suggests that professionals collaborate as a team and develop creative solutions to address students' needs, which requires ongoing cross-training of general education and special education teachers, administrators, related service personnel, paraprofessionals, parents, and support staff (Mandlawitz, 2003). Ongoing professional development focus areas include knowledge and understanding of the following:

- Characteristics of disabilities
- Regulatory requirements of IDEA
- Codeveloping and implementing the IEP
- Cultural and linguistic differences
- Development and implementation of pre-referral interventions
- Translation of new educational research into classroom practices
- Understanding of the influences of life events and family situations on student learning
- Collaboration between and among special and general educators, which may include various models of co-teaching, and collaboration with related services personnel and paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals also need professional development because they often tutor students with special needs, although ideally the teachers are spending as much time as possible with the students. A survey of literature by Giangreco, Suter, and Doyle (2010) concludes the following regarding paraprofessionals and their work with students receiving special education services: (1) a lack of availability and adequacy of training for paraprofessionals working with students with disabilities is a persistent problem; (2) attention should be given to the roles filled by paraprofessionals as well as autonomy, supervision, and boundaries; and (3) frequent assessment of the interactions between the paraprofessional and the student and the staff should take place, to prevent overdependence of the student on the paraprofessional or a reduction in peer interactions. It is recommended that districts also consider guidance provided by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) when considering the assignment of duties for staff working with students with disabilities: http://www.isbe.net/spec-ed/pdfs/work_load_plan_overview.pdf.

Data-Based Progress Monitoring

As with all areas of school and district improvement, reviewing achievement and other data is an important piece. Telfer (2011) advocates for districts and schools to disaggregate assessment and accountability data to increase the academic performance of students with disabilities as part of districtwide improvement. Data can be used to set measurable targets for student performance aligned to academic standards when writing students' IEPs. For information on setting student goals and developing IEPs using the New Illinois Learning Standards incorporating the Common Core, visit the ISBE Special Education Services webpage at http://www.isbe.net/spec-ed/Default.htm. After targets are set, effective progress-monitoring assessments are needed to gauge the progress of students receiving specialized services (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Experts also recommended the use of continuous monitoring of progress using brief (one- to two-minute) assessment measures, which research has shown enhance instructional outcomes and results for students with disabilities. Telfer (2011) summarized the process of using a variety of data to improve

outcomes for students with disabilities in five districts. Practices of the successful districts included the following:

- Collaborative approaches to support the learning of all students
- Use of assessment and accountability data to inform the system
- Redefinition of monitoring whereby professionals hold each other mutually responsible for students' progress
- Open dialogue regarding the data among educators in the interest of student progress

One way educators might monitor a group of students' progress is through the development of student learning objectives (SLOs). The main reason SLOs are developed is to improve student learning at the classroom level and to determine the impact of instruction. SLOs specify content-specific, grade-level learning objectives that are measureable, focused on growth in student learning, and aligned to curriculum standards. Although SLOs are not based on individual students, the goal establishment and monitoring process allows teachers to disaggregate data and determine the impact of their instruction on groups of students, including their students receiving specialized services. Monitoring SLO progress of groups of students can be an integral component of individual student progress (Holdheide, Browder, Warren, Buzick & Jones, 2012). For additional information on the complete process of developing SLOs, view ISBE's *Student Learning Objective Guidebook* at http://www.isbe.net/assessment/pdfs/bal-asmt/slo-guidance/slo-guidebook.pdf.

Multi-Tiered System of Interventions With Early Interventions Program

Early identification is the key to helping students with special needs be successful. Child Find, a provision of IDEA, requires school districts to have written procedures and a process in place to locate, identify, and evaluate students from birth through age 21 living within district boundaries who may require special education and related services (ISBE, 2009a). Further, school districts in Illinois are required to offer early childhood education programs for children aged 3 to 5 who have delays in physical development, language development, cognitive development, or behavioral development (ISBE, 2009b). Many emotional and behavioral difficulties identified through early universal screening can be ameliorated through classroom-based instruction and behavior-management approaches. Students with learning challenges will be more successful in school when potential learning difficulties are identified early and interventions are delivered as soon as possible. Early intervention is critical to accelerating student learning and closing achievement gaps (Juel, 1988; Katz, Stone, Carlisle, Corey, & Zeng, 2008).

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Because research suggests that early screening, intervention, explicit instruction, and development of foundational skills are promising strategies for enhancing academic outcomes for students with disabilities in both general and special education settings (Gersten et al., 2009; Powell, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2013), a comprehensive multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) model holds promise.

An MTSS provides academic and behavioral supports for all students and is designed to precede and prevent underachievement after students are enrolled in school. The MTSS model places emphasis on prevention and promotion for all students through development of strong core curricula and instructional practice. Within the MTSS model, appropriate interventions, services, and supports are then layered according to students' needs and monitored in an adaptable application that is responsive to progress. Ideally, student responses to interventions provided within an MTSS framework are closely monitored to more accurately identify students in need of special education services. Significantly, this is most effective when administered within a system of educators who believe in, support, and expect growth among all students. The effectiveness of an MTSS depends on the corresponding alignment of key infrastructures within an educational system, including but not limited to leadership, data and monitoring systems, funding, and professional development. For additional information on MTSS, visit the Illinois Statewide Technical Assistance Collaborative website listed in the Resources section.

One example of the effectiveness of strong core curricula and monitored interventions exists in the Reading First program in Oregon schools; this schoolwide reading model included the implementation of a coordinated system of research-based reading supports that integrated assessment, instruction, leadership, and professional development to improve student reading outcomes. Stanford, Park, and Baker (2011) examined the reading growth of second- and third-grade students in special education who had experience with the Oregon Reading First program. Their findings determined that experience with Reading First was connected with greater student reading growth, regardless of special education status. To close achievement gaps, the study's authors recommend providing additional instructional supports to students with disabilities, as well as specialized instruction that is more intensive than the instruction general education students receive. Furthermore, the study provides suggestions regarding the involvement of students in special education and the need for more intensive instruction and assessment for students in special education and those at risk for reading failure. Tenets of MTSS support these recommendations because the framework calls for early, increased interventions with progress monitoring as significant components of the framework.

An MTSS must be coherent and aligned to evidence-based instruction and interventions that support all learners. Professional learning enhances the effectiveness of an MTSS as it is applied. For example, educators increase their capability to apply the MTSS model in culturally responsive ways in order to alleviate overrepresentation of student subgroups in special education. Or, professional development can focus on evidence-based instructional strategies that promote positive outcomes in academics for all learners (Hayes & Lillenstein, 2015). Professional development also aids educators with understanding the relationship between MTSS and special education. In using an MTSS, students with disabilities are not automatically assigned tiered support because they have an IEP; the function of the IEP is to address specific and individual needs due to a disability. The MTSS consists of evidence-based core curricula and instruction, layered supports, progress monitoring, surrounding culture and high expectations—all supported by systemwide infrastructures that provide a formula for increased achievement for all students.

Family Engagement

Every child's education takes place within a relationship of families, communities, and professionals. Researchers Rosenberg, Lopez, and Westmoreland (2009) of the Harvard Family Research Project noted that family engagement is an obligation shared among schools, communities, and families. Benefits accrue to families, students, and educators in effective family and school partnerships. Family and school partnerships may lead to decreased apprehensions for families of children with disabilities. Such partnerships also allow educators to feel supported in their work to meet the needs of students with disabilities. So, in addition to the legal requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) that families be involved in the educational decision process for children receiving special education, effective family-school partnerships provide positive outcomes for students. One of the most critical ways of ensuring academic success for special education students is to engage families in their children's education. When educators and families work together as partners, it contributes to positive and successful learning experiences for students. Family engagement provides benefits for all students; however, students with disabilities can benefit tremendously from such partnerships.

Research on parents with children receiving special education services has found that parents often must play the role of advocate for their child (Rosenberg et al., 2009). In fact, families often are powerful advocates for inclusive services (Holdheide & Reschly, 2008). It is recommended that family concerns be acknowledged and acted upon through consistent and frequent information on the purposes and benefits of the specialized services received. Effective communication about processes and progress is necessary to best serve students receiving special education services. Home and school partnerships can at times be hindered, often leaving families and educators unable to convey appropriate and effective means of guaranteeing an optimal learning experience for the student (Ferrel, 2012). Parent perceptions of the referral and evaluation processes for special education are a critical factor in maintaining meaningful, ongoing home and school partnerships in their child's education. As such, it is recommended that families be provided with information regarding processes related to special education and data regarding their children's academic and social progress (Holdheide & Reschly, 2008).

Staples and Diliberto (2010) compared districts' efforts to promote constructive family and school partnerships and identified several essential components necessary for successful parent-teacher collaboration within a school environment. Components included building rapport with families, developing a communication system with a maintenance plan, and creating additional special-event opportunities for family involvement. The initial steps of building rapport may require schools to reach out with a personal invitation. Family involvement practices may include a wide range of activities such as family academic nights, family social events, parent support groups, students support groups, and parent-teacher activities (Staples & Diliberto, 2010). Similarly, Blue-Banning, Summer, Frankland, Nelson, and Beegle (2004) directed focus groups and interviews in Kansas, Louisiana, and North Carolina with professionals and parents in order to identify the components of positive family-school partnerships. They distinguished six indicators of professional behavior that facilitate collaborative partnerships: communication, commitment, equality, skills, trust, and respect. The emphases on mutual respect, frequent communication, and flexibility led them to conclude that "common sense and ordinary human decency are at the heart of positive partnerships" (Blue-Bannig et al., 2004, p. 181). Finally, in some instances, providing school personnel with information and

professional development on cultural competence may bolster family and school collaboration. As parents and schools enhance the value and means of collaboration, they can craft together an educational environment that supports the capabilities of all children to succeed (Hedeen, Moses, & Peter, 2011).

Resources

Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST)

CAST is a nonprofit research and development organization that works to expand learning opportunities for all individuals through universal design for learning.

http://www.cast.org/udl/index.html

Illinois Statewide Technical Assistance Collaborative (ISTAC)

ISTAC is an Illinois State Board of Education IDEA Part B discretionary grant-funded initiative, providing integrated technical assistance to school districts for the purpose of improving outcomes for all students. ISTAC promotes a districtwide prevention and wellness approach, a multi-tiered system of supports, and school partnerships with family and community stakeholders.

http://www.istac.net/

National Center on Universal Design for Learning

The National Center on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provides extensive information on UDL principles, resources for teachers, and implementation strategies.

http://www.udlcenter.org/

What Works Clearinghouse

This website offers information about effective education interventions.

http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/findwhatworks.aspx

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SECTION 3

Exploratory Guide for English Language Learners

Introduction

An English learner is defined by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE, 2015) as

> any student in prek, K, or any of grades 1–12, whose home language background is a language other than English and whose proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English is not yet sufficient to provide the student with: (a) the ability to meet the State's proficient level of achievement on State assessments; (b) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or (c) the opportunity to participate fully in the school setting.

Over the past 25 years, the number of students who speak a language other than English attending U.S. schools has grown dramatically, and the number will continue to increase. Over the past decade, the population of English language learners (ELLs) in the United States has grown by 32 percent, and they make up 9 percent of the student population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). The population of ELLs is diverse—for example, in Illinois, at least 140 languages are spoken among ELLs, and more than 200,000 students are identified as English learners (approximately 9 percent in prekindergarten, 57 percent in Grades K–3, 11 percent in Grades 4–5, 12 percent in Grades 6–8, and 10 percent in high school) (ISBE, 2015). ELLs face the challenge of acquiring English as an additional language, as well as acquiring content knowledge in English and perhaps in their native language. In addition, they are held to the same graduation requirements and college and career readiness standards as their peers who speak English as a first language. The laws of Illinois and the United States guarantee all students access to a quality education. Accordingly, every district is required to provide students equal access to full participation in the school setting (ISBE, 2015), so they have the opportunity to attain college and career readiness.

It is imperative to identify best practices and processes that are recommended in the literature in order to transform schools and to offer ELLs high-quality education. The Illinois Center for School Improvement has been collecting and analyzing research on the best practices to improve the achievement of students. This exploratory guide provides a synthesis of frequent recommendations and practical applications of extensive research and literature published in the last 20 years. Through analysis of the literature, this guide closely emphasizes the recommendations and practical applications offered in the research. The sections that follow examine what districts and schools can consider for improving the achievement of ELLs.

All five of the recommendations are within the purview of the district or school, as follows:

- Schoolwide focus on ELL achievement
- Curriculum aligned with state standards and assessments
- Appropriate ELL program model
- Ample professional development to meet the unique needs of ELLs
- Emphasis on family engagement

This information will be helpful as District Assistance Teams work with districts receiving Focus services and Focus schools as they set worthy targets and identify actions and tasks aimed at closing achievement gaps.

A Note on Terminology

Numerous terms are used in education and in the literature to describe students whose first language is not English. Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), refers to those students who have not yet achieved English language proficiency as limited English proficient (LEP). In this guide, however, we use the broader term English language learner (ELL).

Schoolwide Focus on ELL Achievement

Guaranteeing the academic success of ELLs requires the commitment of everyone in the school community. The role of principals and district leaders is to serve as advocates for ELLs by inspiring and sustaining a comprehensive commitment to the education of all students by developing and communicating a vision for improving instruction and services for ELLs (Stepanek, Raphael, Autio, Deussen, & Thomps, 2010). Administrators lead the school/district visions and mission statements in requiring all staff members to be responsible for all students and also know how they will be supported and monitored in doing so. If they are knowledgeable about ELLs, district and school leadership teams can be a dynamic force in creating and sustaining schoolwide, culturally and linguistically responsive educational environments that emphasize the academic, language, and cultural needs of their students.

Many educators assume that ELLs should be taught in English only, and that their first or home language will interfere with learning English. However, Goldenberg (2008) and other researchers have found that students' ability to read in their first language supports higher levels of reading achievement in English. This is due to their understanding of the task of reading, of comprehension, and other factors. Students also benefit from reading texts that represent their culture. Districts have the responsibility to ensure the availability of culturally and linguistically relevant resources for students learning English. In addition, district and school leaders also have to be knowledgeable about the research on effective instructional practices. One way to ensure this is through leaders' attendance at professional development sessions. Their knowledge base about current research will help them to effectively monitor implementation in the school (Stepanek et al., 2010). Additional information about professional development is included in the "Meeting the Unique Needs of ELL Students" section of this guide.

ELLs must perform double the work to acquire content knowledge in English and, at the same time, learn English as an additional language—all the while being held to the same requirements and accountability standards as their peers whose first language is English.

Curriculum and Instruction Aligned With State Standards and Assessments

The Illinois Learning Standards incorporating the Common Core State Standards set high standards for all students, including ELLs, to be college and career ready. Short and Fitzsimmons (2007) fittingly captured the challenge ELLs face meeting high standards in English with the phrase "double the work" (p. 11). ELLs must perform double the work to acquire content knowledge in English and, at the same time, learn English as an additional language—all the while being held to the same requirements and accountability standards as their peers whose first language is English.

The National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth (August & Shanahan, 2006) thoroughly surveyed the research on acquiring literacy in a second language. The panel's key findings and applications are as follows:

- **ELL students benefit from the key components of reading instruction.** These components are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension, but modifications to these approaches are necessary to have the greatest benefit for ELL students. For example, Spanish-speaking students learning to read in English could make the best progress when given additional practice to work with specific phonemes and combinations of phonemes in English that are not present in Spanish.
- **Extensive and intense efforts to develop oral proficiency in English are helpful.** Oral proficiency in English is linked with reading comprehension and writing skills; ELL students need daily opportunities to discuss content in pairs or in small groups and benefit from explicit teaching of content-specific academic vocabulary.
- **Oral proficiency and literacy in the ELL's first language facilitates literacy development in English.** Literacy in the first (or home) language is an advantage in the acquisition of English literacy; consider the transferability of some literacy skills. Instructional programs are most effective when they offer students opportunities to develop proficiency in their first language.
- **Individual differences contribute considerably to English literacy development.** English literacy development is a process, and language acquisition is influenced by multiple factors such as individual differences in general language proficiency, age, English oral proficiency, cognitive abilities, previous learning, and the similarities and differences between the first language and English. It is recommended that all of these things be considered when planning instruction for ELLs.
- **Assessments may not assess an ELL student's individual strengths and instructional needs.** The research on the development of English literacy indicates that acceptable assessments are critical for measuring the individual strengths and instructional needs of ELLs and for making program placement decisions. This includes using assessments that are normed on ELLs and that take into consideration students' language abilities.
- **Home language experiences can have a positive influence on literacy achievement.** Building on students' home language can enhance their motivation and engagement. Children benefit from reading texts in all languages they know. Further, culturally meaningful texts also facilitate comprehension because they build on students' background knowledge and experiences.

Effective approaches to help ELLs meet the demands of the Illinois Learning Standards incorporating the Common Core build on and add to methods that are applicable to all students. English language learners need additional supports because they are typically acquiring academic content knowledge and skills in a second language and in an environment that is culturally different from their own. Oral and written English language instruction can be integrated into content-area teaching (Baker et al., 2014). It is recommended that educators deliberately utilize instructional tools such as short videos, visuals, and graphic organizers and also provide regular writing opportunities to anchor instruction and improve students' understanding and application of content knowledge (Baker et al., 2014).

ELL Programming

School districts in the state of Illinois identify ELLs through the administration of a Home Language Survey to every newly enrolled student. When the survey indicates that a language other than English is spoken in the home, the district must then assess the student for English language proficiency within 30 days of enrollment to determine the student's eligibility for ELL services. Any student scoring not proficient, as defined by the state superintendent of education, is considered eligible for ELL services (ISBE, 2013). Section 14C-3 of the Illinois School Code (105 ILCS 5/14C-3) requires that all K–12 students identified as ELLs be tested each year for English proficiency in four language domains: aural comprehension (listening), speaking, reading, and writing (Illinois General Assembly, 2015). ISBE requires districts to use ACCESS for ELLs as the annual English proficiency assessment of ELLs. In addition, to support ELLs in becoming proficient in English, districts also are required to provide all PK–12 ELL students with one of two types of programs:

- **Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE).** Illinois school districts are required to offer a TBE program when 20 or more ELLs of the same language classification are enrolled in the same attendance center. TBE programs must provide instruction in the home language of students and in English in all required subject areas, as well as instruction in English as a second language (ESL). TBE teachers are required to be certified by the state of Illinois and possess the appropriate bilingual and/or ESL endorsement/approval. Bilingual teachers must demonstrate proficiency in the language(s) spoken by students and in English (ISBE, 2013).
- **Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI).** If an attendance center has an enrollment of 19 or fewer ELLs from any single non-English language, it may elect to offer a TPI program in lieu of a TBE program. TPIs must include instruction or other assistance in a student's home language to the extent necessary as determined by the student's level of English proficiency. TPI services may include, but are not limited to, instruction in ESL, language arts in the student's home language, and history of the student's native land and the United States. As with TBE teachers, TPI teachers must hold the proper teacher certifications and endorsements/approvals for their teaching assignments (ISBE, 2013).

The No Child Left Behind Act enables school districts in Illinois to apply for supplemental federal funding to support the educational needs of ELLs. This federally funded program for ELLs is called Title III: Language Instruction Programs for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students. Districts that provide at least five periods of TBE/TPI services a week to ELL students may apply for state TBE/TPI funding, which reimburses some of the costs of providing these services based on a prorated formula.

After a district or school determines how it will fulfill the state requirement to provide bilingual education using the TBE or TPI program type, it can select a model to deliver services to its ELL population. Although researchers have deliberated the advantages of bilingual program models and English-only program models, the quality of instruction has the greatest impact on academic achievement (August & Shanahan, 2006; Goldenberg, 2008). District leaders have the responsibility to provide processes to ensure that all stakeholders understand the program model or models and how they work within the district and in the schools. This responsibility includes clearly defining and communicating everyone's role in the model, which is important because ELLs with an appropriate consistent exposure to a coherent program do better than ELLs who are exposed to several different program models (August & Shanahan 2006; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006).

School districts have program model options by which they can provide instruction and support for ELLs. The way in which services are delivered varies. For example, transitional bilingual programs may have self-contained bilingual classrooms with ESL; self-contained, sheltered-instruction classrooms with ESL and native-language instruction; or general education classrooms with pull-out bilingual instruction and ESL. Examples of service delivery for transitional programs of instruction include self-contained, sheltered-instruction classrooms with ESL; general education classrooms and ESL with content-area tutoring; or general education classrooms with ESL. ELL students benefit from coherence, consistency, and personnel who are knowledgeable about the model and method of service delivery used. Of note, Illinois is one of three states to adopt a State Seal of Biliteracy, placed on students' academic transcripts and diplomas when they have demonstrated a high level of proficiency in one or more languages in addition to English (ISBE, 2014).

Districts have an obligation to establish and follow consistent practices and procedures to meet the needs of ELLs. Illinois outlines requirements and policies for the identification, placement, and exit criteria of ELLs. To ensure academic progress continues, the monitoring of students after they exit the ELL programs also is included. In fact, school districts must monitor the academic progress of former ELLs for at least two years to ensure their academic progress. It is recommended that teachers know which students recently exited bilingual programs, so they can provide extra supports if needed. Districts that have standardized, written criteria for their programs and procedures contribute to positive student outcomes from a variety of services and programs (Stepanek et al., 2010). It is recommended that a system of communication between families and staff about program procedures and goals be evident at the district and school levels, so all are aware of program procedures and goals. Developing and disseminating a district handbook that includes information about how students are identified and placed, as well as what knowledge and skills students need to develop in order to exit the ELL program, is an invaluable resource for educators and families. Regardless of the program model that a district adopts, district leaders have a responsibility to ensure that all stakeholders understand the program model or models. This includes clearly defining and communicating everyone's role in the model, and monitoring implementation.

Meeting the Unique Needs of ELL Students

Teaching ELLs requires distinct skills and training to successfully teach students English and help students meet rigorous standards. Most educators speak only English and have not had the training to respond to the unique needs of students developing a second language (U.S. Department of

Education, 2013). Researchers Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly and Driscoll (2005) studied 5,300 teachers in California and identified teachers' greatest challenges in educating ELLs. Such challenges included communication with students and their families, insufficient time to teach subject-matter content and English development standards, effectively teaching students with a wide range of English development and academic levels, and a lack of tools for instruction and assessments. The challenges were then analyzed to determine the extent to which they vary according to factors such as teacher experience, training, and student need. The researchers further identified the kinds of support teachers have—and need—for doing their jobs effectively. The study indicated that the most beneficial professional development focused on the following:

- Strategies for teaching a second language
- Strategies for reading and writing in English
- Learning about language development strategies unique to second language learners
- Stages of second language acquisition

When presented with choices of additional assistance, teachers most often chose the following:

- Paraprofessional help, despite the fact that the best teachers should be teaching those students that struggle the most
- More time to teach and collaborate with peers
- Better English language development materials (Gándara et al., 2005)

Cummins (1986) distinguished social language from academic language of second language learners. The distinction between conversational English or Basic Interpersonal Conversation Skills and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency is crucial to understanding and supporting second language acquisition. Academic language is defined as the language that draws on new vocabulary, more complex sentence structures, and rhetorical forms not typically encountered in nonacademic settings. This is important information for teachers as they plan and assess lessons because students' development in their second language can be misunderstood if educators are unaware of the well-documented stages of second language acquisition. In understanding second language acquisition, educators need to be aware that ELLs progress through a series of four or five levels of English language development (Goldenberg, 2008; Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Illinois, similar to many states, uses the WIDA (formerly known as World-class Instructional Design and Assessment) standards to determine students' levels of English language development. The six levels utilized are: entering, beginning, developing, expanding, bridging, and reaching. Studies from 25 years ago to current studies indicate that most students require five to seven years to become English proficient (Collier, 1987). ELLs progress more rapidly from beginning to intermediate levels in about two to three years (Goldenberg, 2008). However, progressing from intermediate to advanced designation can take three or more years.

There is an extensive body of research evidence on best practices for how to increase ELLs' opportunity to learn academic English. Districts have an obligation to provide ongoing and sustained professional development and information about how ELLs learn best. As previously discussed, teachers must have a thorough understanding of the program model being utilized by the school. In addition, school districts can support teachers' understanding of the key principles about how ELLs learn and the academic challenges they face. Furthermore, teachers need to use a comprehensive

framework for delivering academic instruction and to differentiate instruction to promote the success of all students. Middle school and secondary school teachers, in particular, need professional development and support in helping ELLs improve their reading comprehension—and their proficiency in academic English—through explicit instruction in literacy strategies, vocabulary, and through building students' background knowledge.

Collaborative planning time for general education teachers and ELL teachers and support staff provides opportunities for regular communication that builds the capacity of the adults to meet the needs of ELLs.

Providing ELLs with the best possible education requires thoughtful planning. The Center for Applied Linguistics convened a panel of experts to offer their expertise focusing on academic literacy for ELLs. The panel identified six challenges to improving literacy for ELLs and recommended strategies for overcoming the challenges (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). Recommendations include making changes to teaching practices, improving methods of professional training, applying findings from academic research, and crafting educational policy responsive to research findings. The professional development recommendation included providing professional development and/or coursework in second language and literacy acquisition, reading across the content areas, as well as sheltered instruction and ESL methods to teach content effectively to students who are learning academic English and content concurrently. Collaborative planning time for general education teachers and ELL teachers and support staff provides opportunities for regular communication that builds the capacity of the adults to meet the needs of ELLs. Finally, as part of a comprehensive long-term strategy to serve ELLs, it is recommended that districts recruit and hire teachers with the background, experience, and certifications to meet the needs of ELLs (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007).

Family Engagement

Research makes a strong case that meeting the needs of students encompasses meeting the needs of their families and building strong home-school connections (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). English language learners' education can be considerably improved by school-based efforts to strengthen family involvement. According to the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth (August & Shanahan, 2006), parents of ELL children are a valuable resource in the education of their children, although schools often are unsuccessful in involving or engaging ELL parents in effective partnerships.

Family involvement within the ELL population often includes complex sociocultural factors (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). Some families may face logistical problems such as work schedules and transportation difficulties that make it difficult for them to build relationships with their children's schools. It is recommended that schools consider the culture of the community and the community calendar of events when planning for ELL family activities. In addition, schools might offer avenues for family members to learn English, along with methods for families to support and encourage reading and writing with their children. The quality of outreach efforts varies and influences academic achievement of ELLs. Cosentino do Cohen, Deterding, and Clewell (2005) found key differences in parental outreach and support between schools serving high ELL populations and schools serving

low ELL populations. Specifically, high-ELL schools are more likely than low-ELL schools to provide interpreters, translate documents, offer family outreach activities, and other services (e.g., transportation or child care) to support involvement.

Other researchers have documented the importance of family involvement among the supports that benefit ELLs. Han and Bridglall (2009) analyzed school support in elementary school and found that ELL students made higher achievement gains with additional support through Title I services, family outreach services, availability of ESL aides, and teachers in the school who spoke the native language of the ELLs in addition to English. Relatedly, Niehaus & Adelson (2014) looked at how school support and family involvement contributed to positive academic and social-emotional outcomes among ELLs in elementary school, and they recommended that schools look for additional avenues for support to help encourage more involvement among ELL parents. This support includes providing qualified interpreters at parent-teacher conferences and school events as parents are entitled to meaningful communication in a language they can understand (ISBE, 2015), providing language assistance to families when requested, ensuring that all written communications are bilingual (or multilingual), offering special meetings to help ELL families become acquainted with the school, and providing opportunities for families to participate as valuable partners in their children's education.

Resources

A Framework for Raising Expectations and Instructional Rigor for English Language Learners

This document, published by the Council of the Great City Schools, presents a framework for concurrent English language and content learning. The framework details specific criteria that administrators and teachers can consider to determine whether instructional materials are appropriate for ELLs and correspond to the demands of the Common Core State Standards.

http://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/4/Framework%20for%20Raising%20Expectations.pdf

Framework for English Language Proficiency Development Standards corresponding to the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards

This document provides guidance on how to use the expectations of the Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards as a tool to create and evaluate English language proficiency standards.

http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2012/ELPD%20Framework%20Booklet-Final%20for%20web.pdf

WIDA's 2012 Amplification of the English Language Development Standards

This webpage provides the WIDA standards and assessments that are used in Illinois for assessing English language proficiency.

http://www.wida.us/standards/eld.aspx#2012

Google Translate

Google Translate provides free translation services for instant translations between dozens of different languages.

https://translate.google.com/

Illinois State Board of Education, Center for Language and Early Child Development

This ISBE division provides leadership, advocacy, and support to districts, policymakers, and citizens. It promotes equitable access to language support services for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who have been identified as English language learners.

http://www.isbe.net/bilingual/default.htm

Illinois Resource Center

This website, sponsored by the Illinois Resource Center, provides assistance to teachers and administrators serving linguistically and culturally diverse students.

http://www.thecenterweb.org/irc/

National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition: Webinars

These webinars provide an opportunity to hear expert speakers presenting research on all aspects of ELL education.

http://www.ncela.us/Webinars

Scaffolding Instruction for English Language Learners: Resource Guides for English Language Arts and Mathematics

The resource guides for English language arts and mathematics provide research-based instructional strategies for developing content and language for the Common Core State Standards. The resources were developed by experts in ELL instruction.

https://www.engageny.org/resource/scaffolding-instruction-english-language-learners-resource-guides-english-language-arts-and

New Video Series: Engaging ELLs in Academic Conversations

This video series focuses on the implementation of the Common Core State Standards with English language learners.

http://blog.colorincolorado.org/2014/10/30/new-video-series-engaging-ells-in-academic-conversations/

U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition

The Office of English Language Acquisition includes programs, reports, resources, news, and laws.

http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/index.html

Office of English Language Acquisition English Learner (EL) Tool Kit

This federal agency is producing the EL Tool Kit. Each short, useful chapter contains an overview, sample tools, and resources relevant to the topic of the chapter.

http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/english-learner-toolkit/index.html

Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL)

The home page of the Center for Applied Linguistics—a private, nonprofit organization promoting access, equity, and mutual understanding for linguistically and culturally diverse people—provides links to the CAL Resource Center and other ELL-relevant information.

http://www.cal.org

Understanding Language

The resources on this website correspond to the Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards. Resources provide teachers with strategies for high-quality instruction for ELLs across content areas.

http://ell.stanford.edu/teaching_resources

Intervention: Vocabulary Improvement for English Language Learners and Their Classmates

This What Works Clearinghouse report offers intervention to improve ELL vocabulary development through whole-class and small-group activities that focus on providing instruction on target vocabulary words with weekly assignments.

http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/intervention_reports/wwc_vip_101906.pdf

Teaching Diverse Learners

This website, sponsored by the Education Alliance at Brown University, is a resource dedicated to enhancing the capacity of teachers to work effectively and equitably with ELLs. It provides access to publications, educational materials, information on the work of experts in the field, and other resources that promote high achievement for ELLs.

http://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/teaching-diverse-learners/

Teacher's Guide to Diversity: Building a Knowledge Base

This two-volume guide from the Education Alliance at Brown University takes a critical look at the relationships among human development, culture, cognition, and language through a multicultural lens. It invites professional developers, teacher educators, and teachers to examine their beliefs, perceptions, behaviors, and educational practices with respect to diversity in education.

- **Volume I: Human Development, Culture, and Cognition**
  http://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/sites/brown.edu.academics.education-alliance/files/publications/tgd_humdevcult.pdf
- **Volume II: Language**
  http://indiana.edu/~pbisin/resources/TeacherGuideVol2.pdf

Professional Learning Communities Facilitator's Guide

This guide is aimed to assist teacher teams in applying the evidence-based strategies in the What Works Clearinghouse practice guide, T*eaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School*. It includes a five-step cycle for professional learning communities, activities, handouts, and readings. In addition, 23 videos show the practice guide recommendations and demonstrations by teachers putting them into practice in classrooms.

http://relsouthwest.sedl.org/resources/tools_products/reports_guides/plc_guide.html

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SECTION 4
Exploratory Guide for Latino Learners

Introduction

The number of Latino students enrolled in public schools between 2001 and 2011 rose from 8.2 million to 11.8 million students, increasing their percentage of enrollment from 17 percent to 24 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The number of Latino students is projected to increase from 12.2 million in 2012 to 15.6 million in 2023, which in that year will make up 30 percent of total student enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Latino students are the fastest growing ethnic group of all public school students (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013a). In Illinois, the number of enrolled Latino students in public schools has risen also. In 2001, 16.2 percent of Illinois students were identified as Latino; however, in 2011, 23.7 percent of the state's students were identified as Latino, representing a 7.5 percent increase (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

It is imperative to identify best practices and processes that are recommended in the literature in order to transform schools and to offer Latino students a high-quality education. The Illinois Center for School Improvement has been collecting and analyzing research on the best practices to improve the achievement of Latino students. This exploratory guide provides a synthesis of frequent recommendations and practical applications of extensive research and literature published in the last 20 years. Through analysis of the literature, the guide closely emphasizes the recommendations and practical applications offered in the research. Factors such as quality of coursework, conditions of schools, teachers' methodologies, allocation of resources, teacher preparation and perceptions of Latino students—all of which can be associated with academic achievement— must be considered when seeking to provide a quality education for all students (Madrid, 2011). Further, many Latino students are also English language learners (ELLs) and thus, the reader may want to carefully read Section 3: Exploratory Guide to English Language Learners.

This guide examines what districts and schools can do to ensure that Latino students have opportunities for a first-rate education. All of the recommendations are within the purview of school districts, and it is recommended that each of the following be considered when allocating resources for Latino students:

- Rigorous curriculum and instruction
- Culturally competent educators
- Culturally responsive curriculum and instruction
- Safe learning environment
- Wraparound and partner services
- Family engagement

This information will be helpful as District Assistance Teams work with districts receiving Focus services and Focus schools as they set worthy targets and identify actions and tasks aimed at closing achievement gaps.

A Note on Terminology

According to the Merriam-Webster (2015a) dictionary, the term *Hispanic* refers to "coming originally from an area where Spanish is spoken and especially from Latin America." However, *Latino* encompasses a broader meaning, extending to persons beyond Spanish speakers: "a person who was born or lives in South America, Central America, or Mexico or a person in the U.S. whose family is originally from South America, Central America, or Mexico" (Merriam-Webster, 2015b). The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) uses the word *Hispanic* when referring the group of students whose heritage can be traced to a country where Spanish is spoken (ISBE, 2015). The U.S. Census of 2010 defines both *Latino* and *Hispanic* as "a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race" (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, & Albert, 2011, p. 2). In order to extend this definition to a larger subgroup, this paper uses the term *Latino*. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 50.5 million people (or 16 percent of the entire U.S. population) were identified as Latino (Ennis et al., 2012).

Rigorous Curriculum and Instruction

All students need to receive instruction and curriculum that challenge them, pushing them one level beyond what they are able to achieve comfortably. Teachers will implement the Illinois Learning Standards, which incorporate the Common Core State Standards to ensure that curriculum is rigorous and relevant. The Center on Education Policy recommends that schools and districts "strengthen curriculum and instruction in schools with high enrollments of Latino children, such as broadening the availability of and enrollments in Advanced Placement classes and other rigorous courses" (Kober, 2010, p. 10) in order to improve academic achievement. Similarly, Nevarez & Rico (2007) suggest the following measures to increase student achievement for Latino students:

- Provide access to rigorous curriculum and instruction.
- Provide incentives to attract qualified teachers.
- Give financial rewards to schools that increase the number of Latino students who enter four-year universities.

Studies reveal that some educators have the inaccurate perception that Latino students have less academic potential than white students. Further, Latino students are less likely than white students to be enrolled in advanced programs (Flores, 2007). All students must receive challenging and rigorous instruction with student discourse as a method for learning and engagement. For Latino students who are also ELLs, academic discourse is especially important to emphasize because discourse is a way for students to develop academically and linguistically (Patchen, 2005). Teachers can encourage discourse participation of their Latino students by diversifying participation structures (individual, partners, small group, or whole group), by asking answerable questions, and by soliciting student feedback (Patchen, 2005). The Center on Education Policy (Kober, 2010) also recommends that schools and districts provide learning opportunities for students who may need additional support before school, after school, or in summer sessions. Afterschool programs provide the venue for cultural awareness activities and also emphasize academic achievement. Providing homework help, providing college and career information, and mentoring are key aspects to improving academic achievement (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013b).

Culturally Competent Educators

Research suggests that educators be culturally competent to promote Latino academic success (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013b). Cultural competence refers to understanding one's own cultural identity and views, having the ability to understand how every student is unique, and being able to build on the culture and identity of students and their families in ways that will advance learning. A culturally competent educator tends to view diverse students more positively and has an ability to distinguish between cultural differences, normal language developmental stages for second language learners, and learning disabilities (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013b). Culturally competent teachers are more likely to build positive relationships with students and have a better understanding of their students' specific needs (Patchen, 2005). Unfortunately, Latino students, along with African-American and low-income students, are "less likely to have access to experienced and qualified teachers, more likely to face low expectations, and less likely to receive equitable per student funding" (Flores, 2007, p. 29). A lack of cultural competency, lack of teacher experience, low quality of instruction, or unfair perceptions of diverse students contributes to a diversity rift: "The lack of cultural understanding between a teacher and students can create a *diversity rift*, where the students' culture and ethnic background are not incorporated into the planning and delivery of instruction and the implementation of behavioral supports" (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013a, p. 89). This disconnect of cultural understanding sometimes leads to unnecessary disciplinary actions and an overrepresentation of Latino students being referred to special education services for emotional and behavioral disorders (Guiberson 2009; Moreno & Gaytán, 2013a; Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011). The disconnect and lack of educator cultural competency may also lead to Latino students being tracked into coursework that does not challenge them or prepare them for college and careers (Nevarez & Rico, 2007).

Cultural competence refers to understanding one's own cultural identity and views, having the ability to understand how every student is unique, and being able to build on the culture and identity of students and their families in ways that will advance learning.

The Center on Education Policy recommends that schools and districts "attract and retain more experienced, well-prepared, and effective teachers to schools with high enrollments of Latino and low-income students" (Kober, 2010, p. 10). This includes culturally competent teachers. In order to be culturally competent, educators must be self-reflective of their own personal biases (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013b). Providing professional development and learning opportunities about culture and diversity is one way to ensure that the staff is culturally competent. In addition, recruitment and hiring more Latino teachers who can serve as role models to Latino students is another way to promote cultural competency (Kober, 2010).

Culturally Responsive Curriculum and Instruction

In order to improve Latino achievement, educators need to be culturally competent, and their instruction needs to be culturally responsive also. Culturally responsive classroom teaching "is often demonstrated by the delivery of culturally relevant curricula on a daily basis, the development

of culturally attuned behavioral interventions that reflect cultural understanding and values, and the genuine valuing by the educator of cultural and linguistic diversity" (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013b, p. 12). This culturally relevant curriculum provides "materials that reflect the diversity of the U.S. population, including the experiences of Latino students" (Kober, 2010, p. 10). It is also important for educators to understand and honor the diversity among Latino students as they provide culturally responsive instruction. Culturally responsive instruction embraces and builds on students' background, experiences, and interests. As an example, Lee and Buxton (2011) determined "equitable science learning opportunities" were found to be an effective strategy for culturally and linguistically diverse students, including Latino students, in the science classroom. These learning opportunities "occur when school science: (a) values and respects the experiences that students bring from their home and community environments, (b) articulates this cultural and linguistic knowledge with disciplinary knowledge, and (c) offers sufficient educational resources to support science learning" (Lee & Buxton, 2011, p. 278). These learning opportunities, which can apply to various types of classrooms and contents other than science, explore how students' everyday knowledge and experiences merge with scientific practices. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers incorporate students' lived experiences into science in order for the students' to make meaning of their learning (Lee & Buxton, 2011).

Incorporating life experiences, minority perspectives, students' identities, and individual needs into daily lessons is a way to promote culturally responsive curriculum and instruction.

In addition, Delgado Bernal (2002) states that minority students have unique life experiences that ultimately create and enhance their own ways of thinking and learning, or epistemologies. Such epistemologies are an asset or strength rather than a deficit, which has been the historical perspective. Delgado Bernal (2002) recommends that educators utilize the Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) when educating students. Critical Race Theory and LatCrit are frameworks that challenge the "dominant discourse on race, gender, and class as it relates to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups" (p. 109). Personal narratives or testimonies are pedagogical tools to help educators better understand and appreciate the unique experiences of students through deliberate and conscious listening to the responses of students (Delgado Bernal, 2002). As such, incorporating life experiences, minority perspectives, students' identities, and individual needs into daily lessons is a way to promote culturally responsive curriculum and instruction.

Safe Learning Environment

Latino students face the same conditions of overcrowded schools, unsafe schools, and poor quality of teaching that negatively affects the academic achievement of all students (Madrid, 2011). The Center on Education Policy suggests that schools and districts improve safety and climate issues in schools as required for the education of all students (Kober, 2010). This includes providing the funding needed to maintain safe environments and to hire high-quality and competent educators. In addition to the physical safety of students, Lee & Buxton (2011) recommend that teachers build trusting and caring relationships with Latino students in order to maximize student learning. Having a positive relationship with students not only engages them, but also positively affects academic achievement: "In a

meaningful relationship, the teacher would feel accountable for the students' academic progress; she would accept the students as they are; she would attend to the complex needs of her students; and her teaching style would be characterized by flexibility and individualization of instruction" (Madrid, 2011, p. 10). Nevarez & Rico (2007) also suggest that schools create climates where cultural diversity is celebrated and where Latino students' cultural identify is affirmed. Reviewing the Illinois 5 Essentials Survey (https://illinois.5-essentials.org/2015/) or other perception data can help school personnel understand, assess, and plan strategies to improve the feelings of safety and belonging for students.

Wraparound and Partner Services

Because some Latino students face multiple risk factors, such as poverty and school dropout (Nevarez & Rico, 2007), wraparound services and prevention programs may be provided in addition to academic and cultural services. Examples of wraparound services include health care or information about other community services (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013b). Full-service schools or community schools, which provide such a multitude of services through local partnerships, also can act as community centers for Latino families and community members, ultimately engaging families (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013b). In addition to wraparound services, schools and districts may adopt policies related to school assignments, housing, transportation, and jobs to reduce the isolation of Latino students in certain schools (Kober, 2010). Finally, Nevarez & Rico (2007) suggest that schools, communities, and families have processes in place for two-way communication, collaborative decision-making, advocacy, shared teaching responsibilities, learning about each other, and working together in support of children and their families.

Family Engagement

Studies have shown that some educators have the inaccurate perception that Latino families do not value education (Vega, 2010). However, Latinos have positive views of educational institutions (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013a). In fact, Latino students "spoke of their commitment to their families and communities as a source of inspiration and motivation to overcome educational obstacles" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 110), evidencing the positive interrelationship among families, communities, and education. In addition, statistics have shown that Latino families are engaged in their children's education, with 86.7 percent of parents attending school meetings, 80.2 percent of parents attending parent-teacher conferences, 65 percent attending a class event, and 31.8 percent volunteering in schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Gándara (2010) found that Latino parents want to be involved in their children's education, but they sometimes feel unable to help their child with academic tasks due to their own lack of English language skills and lack of general academic knowledge. Another study found that some Latino parents did not participate in educational activities because of working long hours, beliefs about the role of parents in schools, and deference to school authority, among other factors (Vega, 2010).

Districts, schools, and teachers must find strategies for outreach to family members so they know how invaluable their engagement is in their children's education. Approaches to increase family engagement include: providing communications in native languages (Delgado Bernal, 2002), offering English classes to Latino parents (Kober, 2010), and incorporating home culture into the school curriculum (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Participating in these activities allows Latino parents to stay

involved and better understand the process of their children's formal education. "Such involvement by families also nurtures the family and school relationship that is so important at all levels of formal schooling" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 117). For example, Marschall (2006) determined that Latino presence on local school councils played a critical role in building stronger, more supportive school-parent relations and encouraged higher levels of parental involvement in formal school activities. The study also found that increasing teacher awareness of the unique cultural needs of Latino students accounted for higher scores on mathematics and reading tests.

Resources

Critical Multicultural Pavilion

The EdChange website presents information on multicultural education. It is established and maintained by Dr. Paul C. Gorski.

http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/

Illinois Resource Center (IRC)

IRC provides support for culturally and linguistically diverse students in Illinois. A list of professional development opportunities is included on this website.

http://www.thecenterweb.org/irc/

Latino Americans

The website provides example lesson plans and activities of how to incorporate Latino and U.S. history (Grades 7–12).

http://www.pbs.org/latino-americans/en/education/

White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics

The website provides archived and live monthly webinars about issues related to Hispanic students and education. An electronic mailing list is provided.

http://www.ed.gov/edblogs/hispanic-initiative/monthly-webinar-series/

National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME)

NAME is a nonprofit organization that advances and advocates for equity and social justice through multicultural education.

http://www.nameorg.org/

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SECTION 5

Exploratory Guide for African-American Learners

Introduction

Schools are intended to be societal equalizers, but the history of education in the United States has not borne this out. Noguera (2005) asserts that American schools have not provided equal opportunities to learn or equal education outcomes for all students. He uses the term *second-generation discrimination* to refer to inequitable educator practices such as tracking, labeling, unfair discipline practices, and lack of resources afforded to minority students, including African-American students, that have occurred since the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court (1954) decision. The roots of achievement gaps are deep, extend to school culture and experiences, and have not been satisfactorily addressed. Even though African-American students as a group have made consistent academic gains and narrowed achievement gaps in most states since the 2002 implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, there is additional work to be done by states, districts, and schools to ensure all students have opportunities for college and careers of their choice (Kober, 2010).

In their report, *Parsing the Achievement Gap II*, Barton and Coley (2009) remind educators that high standards, rigorous curricula, qualified and supportive teachers, and orderly classrooms are all elements of school culture associated with high achievement and the fulfillment of students' potential. Further, Haycock (2001) states that achievement gaps are best addressed with clear benchmarks for success, challenging curricula, increased teacher quality, and individualized instruction—all practices evident in successful reform efforts dating back to the 1970s and 1980s. The impact of quality schools for all students is hard to overstate. In one telling example, Fryer and Levitt (2004) determined that the achievement gap between African-American and white students widened in reading and mathematics the longer the students stayed in school, providing a clear example of second-generation discrimination as described by Noguera (2005).

It is imperative to identify best practices and processes that are recommended in the literature in order to transform schools and to offer African-American students a high-quality education. The Illinois Center for School Improvement has been collecting and analyzing research on the best practices to improve the achievement of students. This exploratory guide provides a synthesis of frequent recommendations and practical applications of extensive research and literature published in the last 20 years. Through analysis of the literature, this guide emphasizes the recommendations and practical applications offered in the research and looks at the best practices for educators to consider for improving the academic opportunities of African-American students. The sections that follow examine what districts and schools can do to ensure African-American students have opportunities for a first-rate education.

All of the recommendations are within the purview of school districts, and it is recommended that each be considered when allocating resources for African-American students:

- Rigorous curriculum and instruction
- Culturally competent educators
- Culturally responsive curriculum and instruction
- Safe learning environment
- Wraparound services
- Family engagement

This information will be helpful as District Assistance Teams work with districts receiving Focus services and Focus schools as they set worthy targets and identify actions and tasks aimed at closing achievement gaps.

Rigorous Curriculum and Instruction

The adoption and implementation of a rigorous curriculum and accompanying instruction aligned to the New Illinois Learning Standards incorporating the Common Core State Standards exposes students to greater expectations for K–12 learning. However, this has not always been the case for all students. Chambers (2009) asserts that closing achievement gaps on the basis of race might be more aptly termed closing “receivement” gaps (a self-created term) because educational inputs for all students are not equal. This includes the negative effects of tracking, low expectations of teachers that can begin in elementary school, and limited access to rigorous coursework. For example, after researchers examined 1,400 student assignments in a large urban school district, it was determined that 70 percent of the work was not challenging to students; however, when students were given work that was more rigorous, the quality of their work and their standardized test scores improved (Schmoker, 2006). Researchers have determined that an expectations gap held by teachers is frequently evident when considering students completing high school coursework compared with students completing college-preparatory coursework (Kendall, Pollack, Schwols, & Snyder, 2007). And African-American students continue to be underrepresented among Advanced Placement (AP) test-takers, although, with new attention paid to the situation, the number of African-American students taking at least one AP exam has tripled between 2002 and 2012. Further, 15 percent of African-American high school students attend schools that do not offer at least one AP course in each of the four core subject areas: math, English, science, and social studies (The Education Trust, 2014).

According to Kober (2010), there is a need for schools with a high enrollment of African-American students to provide more advanced courses, as well as effective and rigorous instruction and curriculum. She recommends that schools also provide rich before-school, after-school, and summer learning opportunities for students who need additional support. The Southern Regional Education Board identified essential roles for educators to ensure that educational opportunities for all groups of students align with college and career readiness standards (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). Districts must define for principals and teachers a level of instruction that engages all students in intellectually challenging, authentic, and relevant assignments. There exist many examples of districts and schools successfully engaging students while attending to the receivement gap in educational opportunities. Evanston Township High School, Evanston, Illinois, focused on access

to and success in honors and AP courses in an effort to reduce achievement gaps (Bavis, 2014). Humanities and biology courses were restructured so that all ninth-grade students received rigorous instruction aligned with AP frameworks, ACT college-readiness benchmarks, and the New Illinois Learning Standards incorporating the Common Core. In addition, students at the school formed a team named Access and Success in Advanced Placement (ASAP team). The team's purpose was for students to support each other as they took AP courses. These actions resulted in an increased number of African-American students successfully completing AP courses and the opportunity for all students to earn honors credit in humanities and history. Providing students with information and action opportunities about their learning, as with the ASAP team, is in accord with the recommendations that, by the ninth grade, students understand what constitutes a college-level curriculum and use that information to help themselves prepare for college and careers (Tierney, Bailey, Constantine, Finkelstein, & Hurd, 2009).

Other studies support the benefits of accelerated coursework. Specific to mathematics, Burris, Heubert, and Levin (2006) determined that all students benefit from completing accelerated classes such as advanced math classes. Other researchers determined that attendance at high schools that focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) narrows achievement gaps (Wiswall, Stiefel, Schwartz, & Boccardo, 2014). The STEM research in the New York City schools found that African-American and Latino students performed better in STEM schools than Non-STEM schools and that their attendance at STEM schools narrowed achievement gaps when compared with all students in the STEM schools. Lessons learned from the research studies give educators an immediate starting point for narrowing opportunity gaps and the resultant achievement gaps.

The effects of rigorous instruction must be monitored to make sure all students are progressing at a pace that will prepare them for college and careers. The analysis and use of data are critical in determining student learning and the corresponding instruction and curriculum to close achievement gaps. Oberman & Symonds (2005) conducted a survey of 32 San Francisco Bay area schools and performed case studies on three of the schools that were successful in narrowing their achievement gaps. They divided the schools into two groups, "gap-closing" and "non-gap-closing," and compared the results. The frequency of administering assessments for diagnostic purposes was greater in the gap-closing schools: 91 percent of the teachers at gap-closing schools administered ongoing assessments of students at least monthly, with 55 percent of them administering assessments a few times a week. In non-gap-closing schools, 32 percent of the teachers administered assessments a few times a week. Not only did the teachers in gap-closing schools collect more data than those in non-gap-closing schools, but they discussed the data with their colleagues in professional learning communities. Seventy-seven percent of the teachers discussed student data with their colleagues at least a few times a month at gap-closing schools compared with 47 percent of the teachers at non-gap-closing schools. Administrators at gap-closing schools provided their teachers with professional development on how to link student data with effective instructional strategies on a monthly or weekly basis. Such professional development occurred a few times a year or never at non-gap closing schools. This example is instructive about the need to analyze and act upon student data to close achievement gaps.

The effects of rigorous instruction must be monitored to make sure all students are progressing at a pace that will prepare them for college and careers.

Culturally Competent Educators

Scholars have long known that achievement gaps exist for a variety of reasons related to resource allocation, structural issues of institutional racism, low teacher expectations, and cultural bias (Spring, 2006). Strategies exist to reduce these negative effects. One is for districts and schools to address opportunity gaps for attracting and retaining culturally competent educators (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The National Education Association (2015) defines cultural competence as an awareness of one's own cultural identity and view of cultural differences, coupled with the willingness and ability to learn about and use the cultural and community norms of students and their families to build educational experiences. Cultural competence also entails harmonious, comfortable interactions among people from different cultures and races. It is a key factor to providing all students with the opportunities to learn to their potential. When classroom learning is built on students' culture, students feel motivated and are more likely to feel part of a community of learners. Attainment of cultural competence requires educators to be reflective of their own practice, with a willingness to examine their own biases, and to invest the time to understand the cultural, social, and political worlds of their students (Pransky & Baily, 2003). Researchers maintain that despite efforts to implement tenets of cultural competence, polarities between theory and practice persist in many classrooms. The cultural and social worlds of students are routinely given short shrift or are seen as deficits.

In contrast, culturally competent educators operate from a strength-based approach to learning and understand that caring relationships, high expectations of students, and opportunities for meaningful communication are major contributors to student success (WestEd, 2012). As such, the California Department of Education recommends that districts and schools look at these three areas through climate and culture survey data to understand students', families', and community members' perceptions of what is taking place at school. When these data are understood, it can lead to insights that culturally competent educators will act on. For example, in one study of middle school African-American students, researchers found that students who experienced racial discrimination from teachers or from their classmates showed less interest in school, had declining grades, and had a decline in their self-concept (Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). The opposite is also true: When students feel respected, encouraged, and held to high standards, academic achievement is positively affected (Smith, 2005).

It is recommended that professional development be available to heighten cultural awareness and effectiveness of teachers and school leaders. Kober (2010) asserts that low expectations held by some educators about the achievement of minority students must be addressed and can be addressed through professional development. For example, in an effort to address the need for understanding cultural differences and to raise expectations for academic achievement, East Lansing Public Schools offered its teachers a yearlong professional development course titled "Teaching Across Cultural Differences" and created an achievement gap task force to focus on the issues of cultural inclusion and equity (Carter Andrews, 2014). As with any professional development, care and effort must be expended to follow up with new learning to bridge the gap between theory and practice of cultural competence in the classrooms.

Finally, it is important to know that the presence of uncertified and inexperienced teachers is more prevalent in minority and low-income schools in core curricula classes (Barton & Coley, 2009; U.S.

Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). The distribution of well-prepared and experienced teachers must be equitable among schools because high-quality instruction, the focus of the next section, is essential to improving student achievement (Kober, 2010).

Culturally Responsive Curriculum and Instruction

In addition to addressing the cultural competence of teachers, it is recommended that curricula and instruction also be culturally responsive. Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and frames of references of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective. Moll (1990) recommends that teachers be aware of students' funds of knowledge and incorporate aspects of students' home culture into the school setting. Culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogy empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impact knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Culturally responsive curriculum and instruction occur when educators are committed to equity and the academic, social, and emotional well-being of all students. Teachers who embrace culturally responsive instruction see themselves as part of the community (Ladson-Billings, 1997). Delpit (2012) describes instructional strategies for increasing African-American student achievement and for closing gaps for traditionally underserved students. Her study of low-income, high-performing, high-minority schools repeatedly found that students participated in meaningful learning experiences, were exposed to academic rigor, experienced lessons that made cultural connections, and participated in a learning environment that cultivated a belief in self. Meaningful learning experiences, as described by Delpit (2012), consist of literacy skills and vocabulary being taught in the context of real experiences, and requiring students to explain what they have learned to others. Academic rigor is seen in project-based learning where students are required to research a problem, synthesize the information, and then demonstrate their learning for a real-world audience. Learning opportunities that deal with real-world problems, community issues, and/or service projects can be developed; then students can construct meaning from their experiences and discuss their learning in the classroom (Michigan Department of Education, 2013). Cultural connections can be made in the classroom when teachers make deliberate associations between new information and the students' schemas and cultural backgrounds. Lastly, teachers in these high-performing schools had set high expectations for their students and supported them as they strived to achieve their goals (Delpit, 2012).

Culturally responsive curriculum and instruction occur when educators are committed to equity and the academic, social, and emotional well-being of all students.

Student engagement increases when students feel connected to their schools. When the curriculum is relevant to students' lives, students are more likely to feel connected and be engaged in their learning. Teachers can increase the relevance of their lessons for culturally diverse students by examining cultural assumptions underlying the curricula and considering students' backgrounds when planning lessons to make the learning relevant (WestEd, 2012). Culturally responsive instruction teaches to students' strengths with genuine care that empowers students. Gay (2000) asserts that care is evident in teachers' attitudes regarding academic expectations, academic performance, and

connections to students' culture and community. Assignments and assessments must reflect rigor and scaffolded instruction (Evans, 2005). Care is also evident when teachers differentiate instruction by providing options such as multiple texts, group projects, and supplementary materials. According to Tatum (2006), "Neither effective teaching strategies nor comprehensive literacy reform efforts will close the achievement gap in a race- and class-based society unless meaningful texts are at the core of the curriculum" (p. 47). Specific to African-American males, Tatum (2014) recommends that districts inquire as to whether or not the literacy instruction is responsive to the needs of African-American male adolescents. He suggests that teachers incorporate a wide range of texts such as poems, short stories, essays, speeches, and books into their lessons. The texts selected for reading need to be intellectually exciting and cognitively challenging, and to enable students to apply strategies and literacy skills independently (Tatum, 2006). In order to create meaningful literacy exchanges, Tatum recommends that teachers carefully consider why they want students to read certain texts, consider the social benefits from reading the texts, and consider how reading the texts might translate into students' action. Because a student's identity impacts reading achievement (Hall, 2012), culturally responsive educators understand the connection between culture, identity, and motivation as they plan literacy instruction.

Research has found that culturally responsive mathematics instruction also can be used to improve mathematics achievement (Howard & Terry, 2011; Nasir, 2000; Terry, 2010). Student-centered, culturally relevant mathematics lessons help students see themselves as mathematicians.

Safe Learning Environment

School climate is the learning environment as a result of human relationships, the physical setting, and the psychological atmosphere of the school (Perkins, 2006). In general, school climate is multidimensional and representative of shared perceptions (Van Houtte, 2005). A favorable school climate provides the structure within which students, teachers, administrators, and parents function cooperatively and constructively. States and districts are increasingly looking at how improving a school's culture and climate improves K–12 education and can be used as a schoolwide reform strategy (Ross, 2013). A safe learning environment contributes to educational equity and is characterized by high expectations for the success of all students with support for learning, attention to students' emotional and physical health, the presence of caring relationships among peers and adults, and multiple opportunities for meaningful student participation. Kalyanpur and Harry (2012) suggest that a school's culture be understood at various levels, including overt and subtle levels, to effectively attend to and improve school climate and culture. Attention to a school's climate and culture will increase academic achievement, owing to the influence on student engagement and students' level of perceived competence (Akey, 2006).

Establishing positive relationships between and among students and educators is paramount to learning. One way for teachers to build positive relationships with students is to understand the individual emotional needs of students. Knowing about students' cultural experiences can promote this understanding. According to Ladson-Billings (2009), many white, middle-class educators have had difficulty finding the right balance between care, support, and high expectations for learning as they teach minority students. Researchers assert that interventions designed to improve school connectedness can provide a pathway to improved academic outcomes (Catalano, Fleming, Haggerty,

Hawkins, & Oesterle, 2004). Students' perceptions of the teachers' level of care, seen as a well-structured learning environment with high expectations, have been associated with increased engagement, attendance, and academic achievement (Klem & Connell 2004; Voight, Nixon, & Nation, 2011).

Positive classroom management climates and well-conceived discipline policies have been associated with higher school connectedness (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002). This is important because discipline gaps contribute to achievement gaps among minority students (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Consider this example of disproportionate discipline in a middle school. The principal initiated discussions with teachers on the disproportionate suspension of African-American students who had missed valuable classroom time because of their suspensions. External facilitators were brought in, and teachers attended professional development sessions on classroom management, which helped the teachers realize the flaws and biases in their disciplinary systems. Awareness of inequities in disciplinary practices resulted in a decrease in the number of suspensions of African-American students by more than two thirds (Oberman & Symonds, 2005).

Although attention to school climate has risen in recent years, there remain opportunities to use information about school climate and culture as a strategy for sustainable school reform. Reviewing the Illinois 5 Essentials Survey (https://illinois.5-essentials.org/2015/) or other perception data can help district and school personnel understand, assess, and act to improve the feelings of safety and belonging for students.

Wraparound Services and Partner Services

Families and their children benefit from a variety of wraparound and partner services that include academic supports available in the community, extracurricular activities, or mentoring opportunities. Regarding academics, researchers Dobbie and Fryer (2009; 2011) determined that achievement gaps can be reduced with a confluence of teacher, school, and community supports that surpass what can be accomplished with any single support. Tierney et al. (2009) recommend that school counselors provide families with information about academic and other available supports. Such things include options to complete challenging projects with outside organizations (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). Mentoring and leadership opportunities provided by school staff, business, and community agencies can be cultivated by districts and schools (Michigan Department of Education, 2013). In a specific example of how a district supported students with leadership opportunities, East Lansing Public Schools, in East Lansing, Michigan, used the results of an 18-month study on school climate conducted through interviews with African-American students and parents, classroom observations, individual interviews with administrators, and an analysis of several years of school data to improve student involvement. Students attended a student leadership conference to develop a plan for change in their high school and were involved in planning and implementing a diversity conference. Community supports were integral in bringing about leadership opportunities. It is recommended that districts and schools capitalize on community partnerships by first becoming aware of offerings, perhaps even asking surrounding districts and schools what partnerships they have in place to help support learning (Michigan Department of Education, 2013).

Finally, the Center on Education Policy (Kober, 2010) suggests that schools, families, and community supports working collectively contribute to students' well-being. As such, student health needs may

be undergirded through community partnerships. Local governments and community health care providers can assist families with attending to the medical, dental, and vision care of their children.

Family Engagement

Family engagement is the long-term and reciprocal partnership between families and schools. A report from the Harvard Family Research Project (2010) suggests that students benefit academically, socially, and physically from the joint nature of the partnership. When partnerships among schools, families, and community groups are formed in earnest, students do better academically. The National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools reports that students with involved parents—no matter what their income or background—are more likely to earn high grades and test scores, participate in advanced coursework, have high rates of attendance and graduation rates, and enroll in postsecondary education (Ferguson, 2010).

Districts, schools, and teachers must find methods for outreach to family members, so they know how invaluable their engagement is in their children's education. Effective family engagement is characterized by trust, two-way communication, listening, mutual respect, and shared values for the advancement of students' education (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Easton, & Luppescu, 2010; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Further, the most effective communication occurs when school personnel have an understanding of what students' lives are like in their communities (Epstein, Croates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997). The positive effects of outreach and effective two-way communication are seen in one example where reading and math achievement increased 40 percent more in schools with varied outreach approaches that utilized two-way communication than in schools with low, nonstrategic outreach efforts (Dervarics, & O'Brien, 2011).

When communication with families is focused on academic achievement and home supports, it is an effective way to improve school outcomes (Christenson, Hurley, Sheridan, & Fenstermacher, 1997). Strengthening the home and school learning connection through supports for learning at home has been identified as an effective kind of family engagement (Epstein et al., 1997; Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). In fact, support for learning at home predicts increased academic achievement more so than any other form of family engagement (Downey, 2002; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendich, 1999). To realize the full advantage of school and family partnerships, educators must provide families with specific information about how they can assist in their child's education, beyond general recommendations. Dobbie and Fryer (2011) report that elementary and middle schools with high achievement provide multiple varieties of feedback to parents on a more regular basis than lower achieving elementary and middle schools. Epstein et al. (2009) state that family support for learning at home includes encouraging students, listening to what has occurred in school, and discussing school projects, assignments, and homework. Anguiano (2004) suggests that in order for families to fully support their children's education, schools and teachers can provide families with information about what is taking place in the classrooms, so they can support learning at home as described by Epstein et al. (1997; 2009).

Socioeconomic background and culture may influence family engagement. This may be more pronounced in urban areas, with low-income parents, with immigrant parents, and with minority and working class families. Brinson and Steiner (2012) state that diminished trust and ineffective communication can produce barriers to family engagement, while LaRocque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011) assert that language and cultural differences or conflicts with work schedules also can be

obstacles to family engagement and participation. Schools that seek to minimize such barriers will be more likely to involve families in ways that improve academic achievement. Increased collaboration on a variety of tasks among parents and school professionals may maximize family involvement (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006). It is important that opportunities for participation and collaboration reflect families' concerns and that school personnel show sensitivity to their concerns without condescension. Finally, it is suggested that strategies for engagement empower parents, such as through provision of information about school readiness and strategies for involvement that make use of family-oriented supports within the community setting (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006).

Resources

DuSable Museum of African American History

The DuSable Museum offers teachers lesson plans and resources, including these selections: African Women and the Origins of Mathematics, African Presence in the Americas Before Columbus, Women of the Civil War, The Economic Vestiges of Enslavement, Reparations and Bringing Visual Art into the Classroom.

http://www.dusablemuseum.org/education/lesson-plans#africanwomen

Michigan Department of Education, African American Young Men of Promise Initiative

This website provides support materials, webinars, presentations, and information on achievement gap work at the Michigan Department of Education.

http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-6530_30334-297206–,00.html

Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN)

MSAN is a national coalition of multiracial, suburban-urban school districts that have come together to understand and eliminate achievement/opportunity gaps that persist in their schools.

http://msan.wceruw.org/

My Brother's Keeper Initiative

President Obama launched this initiative to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color. The administration is joining with cities and towns, businesses, and foundations to connect young people to mentoring, support networks, and the skills they need to find a good job or go to college.

https://www.whitehouse.gov/my-brothers-keeper

NAACP

The NAACP is the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization that advances social justice for all Americans. The following publications are directly related to equity in education:

- **Year One: Toward Safe Communities, Good Schools and a Fair Chance for All Americans**
  http://action.naacp.org/page/4-/resources/YearOne_1.pdf
- **Framework for Providing All Students an Opportunity to Learn through Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act**
  http://action.naacp.org/page/-/resources/Framework_for_Providing_All_Students_an_Opportunity_to_Learn_21.pdf

National Council on Educating Black Children (NCEBC)

NCEBC is committed to academic rigor, relevant instruction, and improved assessments to prepare African-American learners for participation in a competitive global society.

http://ncebc.org/resources/2014-convention-resources/

National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME)

NAME is a nonprofit organization that advances and advocates for equity and social justice through multicultural education.

http://www.nameorg.org/

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