

**AWARENESS TO ACTION 2006:
TRACKING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP
IN DELAWARE SCHOOLS**

JANUARY 2007

KELLY L. SHERRETZ, M.P.A., EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHER
AUDREY J. NOBLE, PH.D., DIRECTOR

WITH ASSISTANCE FROM

VICTOR SANTOS, GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT
KRISTYN RAFFAELE, UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT
KATIE SOJA, UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT



Delaware Education Research & Development Center
University of Delaware
Newark, DE 19716

T2007.01.01

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was generously sponsored by the Delaware State Board of Education.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Report Background	4
Calculation of the Achievement Gap	5
Understanding the Data Source	6
Format of School Report	7
Summary	9

Introduction

One priority of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is to improve the academic performance of our most disadvantaged students and move towards closing the existing achievement gaps. NCLB has increased accountability at the state, district, school, and student levels. States are responsible for creating plans to address the disparity of achievement among groups so that all students become proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014.

This report is an attempt to exhibit the progress of each Delaware school in regards to the achievement gap. It contains district and school portrayals of comparative achievement in reading and mathematics. The authors hope that this report will spark further dialogue within the school community that will help improve understanding and ultimately lead to effective strategies for closing the existing gaps in Delaware schools.

Report Background

In 2001, the Delaware State Board of Education assembled the Achievement Gap Task Force, a group of key educational leaders to take on the challenge of addressing and understanding the state's achievement gap. In the fall of 2004, the original Task Force was reconfigured and renamed the Achievement Gap Action Group. The group decided to recreate a reporting mechanism to track the achievement gap in all Delaware schools.

A subcommittee of members from the Achievement Gap Action Group met to discuss various methods of illustrating the gap that would be meaningful to Delaware educators and citizens. This process included an examination of methods used by other states and national educational organizations. The group decided that the report should be longitudinal and disaggregated by district, school, and grade in both reading and mathematics. In addition, it should be based on the percentage of students who 'Meets or Exceeds the Standard' in reading and mathematics on the Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP). After discussing how the gap was to be represented, the group decided that the report should graphically portray the progress as well as the gaps among subgroups along with a table that reflects the differences.

The subcommittee defined which “at-risk groups” performance should be tracked within this report. These groups are aligned with those required by NCLB guidelines. The target groups include:

- » American Indian,
- » African American,
- » Asian American,
- » Hispanic,
- » White,
- » Limited English Proficient,
- » Low Income¹, and
- » Special Education.

This is the fourth in a series of annual reports designed to examine achievement gaps in Delaware school.

Calculation of the Achievement Gap

CAVEAT: In 2006, the DSTP performance level cut scores were revisited and revised. All tables, figures, and comparisons reported here are the percentages of students meeting or exceeding the performance standards at that point in time. Caution is recommended when looking at comparisons of 2006 and previous years’ school and district results. For more information see the Delaware Department of Education website at: <http://www.doe.state.de.us/AAB/Cut%20Points%202006%20Marked%20Changes.pdf>.

For the purposes of this report, the achievement gap is calculated by subtracting the percentage of students at or above the standard in the ‘reference’ groups (i.e., Caucasians, non-low income, not-LEP, or not-Special Education) from the percent of students at or above the standard in the ‘target’ groups (i.e., African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics, Low-income, or Special Education). This calculation provides an indication of the distance the “at-risk” group is from the reference group. A negative number indicates that the target group performed below the reference group; a positive number indicates that the target group out performed the reference group.

¹ Low income for this report is defined as students who are eligible to participate in the free and reduced lunch program.

Understanding the Data Source

The data that serve as the basis of this report come from multiple sources at the Delaware Department of Education. The DSTP achievement data come from the Delaware Department of Education DSTP Online Reports Page.² The school and district demographics, 2006 Rating Status, and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) information come from each school's or district's School Accountability Profile Page, also accessed through the DDOE web page.³ All data were collected between September and December 2006.

The DSTP Online Reports provide accountability data for students who took the test at each school. The DSTP is an annual assessment taken by students in grades 3, 5, 8 and 10 to measure their performance in reading, writing and mathematics. Performance is categorized based on students' scale scores that equate to one of five levels related to the standards. These categories are 'well below,' 'below,' 'meets,' 'exceeds,' or 'distinguished.' The online reports do not take into account how long students have been in the particular school. In other words, it does not factor in student mobility.

For consistency of reporting, these guidelines were followed:

- » Eighth grade scores that appeared in high schools' reports were not included in this report;
- » Intensive Learning Centers, Early Childhood Centers and other special education schools were not included; and,
- » Schools that consistently enroll less than 15 students were not included.

² <http://login.doe.k12.de.us/DSTPMART/SummaryStep1.asp>

³ <http://issm.doe.state.de.us/profiles/>

Format of School Report

The following overview is designed to familiarize the reader with the information presented in each school report. Figure 1 illustrates the overall school demographics, the most recent school rating, and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status as provided on the Delaware Department of Education website.

Sample School A			
2006 School Rating: Superior		2006 AYP Progress Status: Above Target	
<i>Student Demographics:</i>			
American Indian	0.2 %	Limited English Proficient:	1.2 %
African American	27.9 %	Low Income:	27.1 %
Asian American	6.4 %	Special Education:	16.6 %
Hispanic:	4.1 %		
White:	61.5 %		

Figure 1: School Demographics

Figure 2 represents the percentages of students within each group that “Meets or Exceeds” the standard for reading or mathematics in 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006. “Meets or exceeds” means that the student scored at performance levels 3, 4, or 5 on the reading or math portion of the Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP). When the number of students in a given group is less than fifteen, results are not presented. This is done to protect the identity of individual students in small populations. Hence, some graphs have fewer data points.

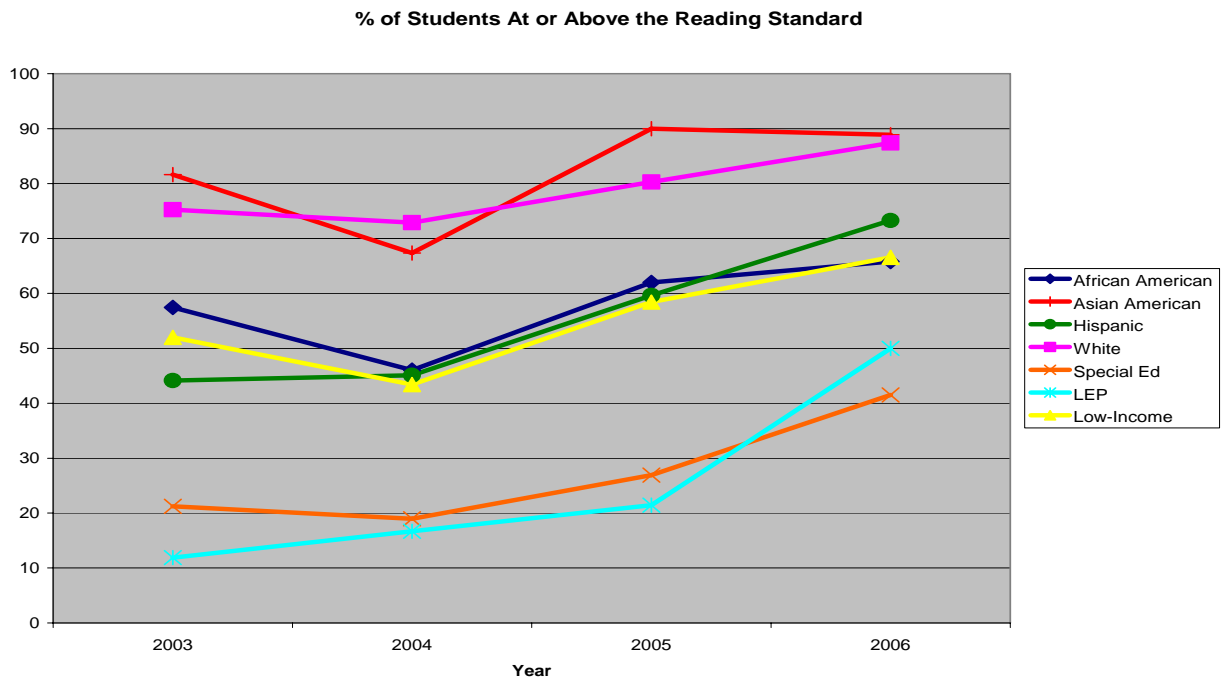


Figure 2: Extent of Achievement Gap for School A - Reading

The presence and extent of achievement gaps are also represented in tables. Table 1 below compares performance of students by race. To determine the extent of the gap by race, we use white students as the reference group. The percentage of students in the reference group that “meets or exceeds” the DSTP standard was subtracted from the percentage of students in the target group (i.e., American Indian, African American, Asian American and Hispanic) that “meets or exceeds” the DSTP standard. A negative percentage indicates that the target group performed lower than the reference group. For example, see that in 2006 the figure is -21.59% for African Americans. This means that the gap between African American students who met (or exceeded) the reading standard as compared to their white peers was 21.59 percentage point. An achievement gap exists between the two groups. A positive percentage indicates that the target group had a higher percentage of students at or above the standard than the reference group. Groups with less than 15 students were not included in the analysis and are represented by “N/A”.

Table 1: Comparison to White Students

Difference in Percentage Compared to White Students				
Group	2003	2004	2005	2006
American Indian	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
African American	-17.79	-26.85	-18.32	-21.59
Asian American	6.39	-5.52	9.7	1.49
Hispanic	-31.1	-27.78	-20.68	-14.11

Table 2 represents the achievement gap by special education, Limited English Proficient, and low-income status. To determine the extent of the gap, the DSTP scores of the following groups were compared: special education was compared to regular education, Limited English Proficient was compared to non-Limited English Proficient and low-income was compared to not low income.

Table 2: Comparison to the Reference Group

Difference in Percentage Compared to Reference Group*				
Group	2003	2004	2005	2006
Special Ed	-50.1	-44.98	-47.88	-39.17
LEP	-55.39	-42.71	-49.62	-27.2
Low-Income	-24.48	-24.92	-20.78	-18.19

* Reference group here means: special education compared to regular education, LEP compared to non-LEP, low-income compared to not low-income.

Summary

This report is designed to make the educational community and the Delaware public more aware of achievement gap trends in Delaware schools. The numbers alone do not fully explain the achievement gap. Hopefully, these reports will empower schools and districts to look critically at their progress toward closing the achievement gap among all Delaware student groups.