

# Closing Florida's Achievement Gaps

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### Introduction

Fifty years after the Supreme Court ruling that segregated schools are unconstitutional, and forty years after passage of major civil rights legislation in Congress, many researchers have shown that inequities exist in several aspects of schooling. A search for causes underlying the performance disparities continues (Ogbu, 1994; 1999; 2002). One of the primary goals of Florida's *A+ Plan* has been to reduce and—as much as possible—eliminate achievement gaps among different student groups.

The purpose of this brief is to present in detail how different groups of students within Florida have fared in comparison to one another and how Florida students compare to those in the nation on selected state and national tests. Florida has achieved some success in narrowing achievement gaps on some tests, but major challenges remain. The brief concludes with suggestions for continuing progress toward this important goal.

Trends in student achievement across grade levels and subject areas since the inception of the *A+ Plan* in 1999 are summarized in a separate policy brief in this series, “The *A+ Plan* and Student Achievement in Florida” (Johnson, 2005), and another recently published document (Chatterji, 2004).

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### Legislation and Reforms on Closing Achievement Gaps

Starting in the mid-1980s, the standards-based education reform and accountability movement significantly raised expectations of performance for U.S. schools (Buttram & Waters, 1997). To improve K-12 education in Florida, Governor Jeb Bush instituted the *A+ Plan* in 1999, a standards-based accountability system that focuses on improving the performance of *all* students, irrespective of their ethnicity, gender, poverty levels, native language or disability status. The main premise of the *A+ Plan* was that “every child can learn and no child should be left behind” (Executive Office of the Governor, n.d.).

The *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 (NCLB, 2001) followed the passage of Florida's *A+* legislation by a couple of years. The parallels in the two laws are unmistakable.

The NCLB Act was approved by a bipartisan Congress. For the first time in the history of national reforms, NCLB places an emphasis on achievement by *all* groups of students, particularly those who are historically low-achieving, such as socio-economically disadvantaged or special-needs students. The premise is that similar achievement outcomes in students will lead to more equitable access to future education and jobs, as well as a better quality of life.

In both the *A+ Plan* and NCLB Act, the main strategy for school improvement hinges on challenging academic standards coupled with high-stakes testing and accountability. Like the *A+ Plan*, NCLB mandates disaggregated reporting of test scores to ensure that historically low-achieving students receive much-needed attention. The NCLB legislation also sets high expectations for individual school progress, with a 2014 deadline for

schools to close achievement gaps among various groups of students. Achievement gaps among students are calculated based on the percentage meeting proficiency standards on state tests in reading, mathematics, and—eventually—in science. Meeting NCLB's pre-set target will be a challenge for many schools because of the variations in their starting points, the changing demographics of their students, and the sheer size of gain that they will need to show.

In both the NCLB Act and the *A+ Plan*, consequences for poorly performing schools vary in severity and are enforced over 2- to 5-year periods. Initially, below-par schools are provided with technical assistance from the state or funding for supplemental instructional services to raise student achievement levels. Eventually, shifts in staffing, options for transfers and public school choice to students, and school take-overs and/or governance changes could occur. Public release of information on poorly performing schools is intended to motivate schools to improve and can cause anxiety for students, parents and school personnel.

Statistical projections of the rate at which schools in different states should improve suggest steep rates of growth in the next 10 years; for example, 5% gains *every* year for *every* low-performing school. Researchers have noted that NCLB's expected rates of improvement lack any precedent (Linn, Baker, & Betebenner, 2002). Under current provisions of the Act, even hard-working and effective schools that make small but definitive gains will likely face the prospect of sanctions.

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## **National Trends in Achievement Gaps**

Before examining achievement gaps in Florida, it is useful to examine U.S. trends as a framework for comparison. Nationally, gaps among ethnic groups show similar patterns over time on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the SAT. Between the early 1970s and late 1990s, ethnic achievement gaps first narrowed and then widened again on these two major national indicators (Lee, 2002).

### ***NAEP Gaps: Elementary and Middle School Students***

NAEP data show that, overall, reading and mathematics achievement for U.S. students improved moderately between the early 1970s and 1999 (Loveless, 1999). However, substantial differences were found among different racial groups across all grades and in both subjects (Lee, 2002). The African American-White gap narrowed between 1971-1988, when African American students improved in all age groups, but White students showed flat performance. Between 1989 and 1999, however, the gap widened as African American students dropped in performance while White students gained. The trend in the

Hispanic-White gap on the NAEP was quite similar in the late 1980s, although the narrowing was not as great as in the African American-White gap (Lee, 2002).

### *SAT Gaps: College-Bound Seniors*

For the same years, patterns on the SAT verbal and mathematics tests were very similar to those on the NAEP. Remarkably, both the African American-White and Hispanic-White gaps narrowed significantly in the late 1980s. The former narrowed more than the latter, but the gaps in both cases widened again in the next 10 years—from a 70+ point difference in the late 1980s to a 100+ point difference in 2000 (Lee, 2002).

What school conditions in the past caused the gaps to first narrow and then widen on the national tests? Lee (2002) speculated that after an emphasis on basic skills instruction through the 1980s, standards-based reform focused instruction on more challenging material in the 1990s and that this shift may have caused the achievement gaps to increase. Factors such as increased school expenditures, more resources for compensatory education programs, or high school course-taking patterns would be expected to make a difference. But Lee (2002) concluded that these factors did not fully account for the observed differences in achievement in his analysis.

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## **Achievement Gap between Students in Florida and the Nation**

### *Florida to U.S. Gaps: Elementary and Middle School Students*

For the most part, national tests such as the NAEP show Florida's public school students gaining on their national peers from 1992-2003. The exception is in 8th-grade reading. Table 1 shows these results.

On the NAEP, Florida has shown visible success in 4th-grade reading. Historically, Florida's deficit relative to the U.S. has been greatest in this area (-9% in 1994), but by 2003, the percent of Florida students scoring at the Basic level and above exceeded the nation's. Unfortunately, similar improvements have not been realized at the middle school level. Florida's 8th graders still fare poorly in reading relative to their national peers on the NAEP.

In math, gaps have closed between elementary students in Florida and the nation. In the 1992 math NAEP testing, 5% fewer 4th-grade students in Florida were scoring at the Basic level and above as compared to the U.S. By 2003, there was no difference in performance in this category, i.e., the percentages were the same for Florida and the nation. In 8th grade, however, Florida students still lagged in 2003, but the gap between Florida and the U.S. was narrowing slightly (-8% in 1992 and -5% in 2003).

In writing, in contrast, Florida's students have fared well relative to students in the nation. NAEP results are available since 1998. It should be noted here that Florida's

standards-based writing assessment program was established around 1993, a good ten years ago. By 2003, Florida's 8th graders equaled national performance percentages, while Florida's 4th graders slightly exceeded the percents of U.S. students at or above the Basic level.

**Table 1**

**Florida vs. Nation from 1992-2003:  
Percent Scoring at the Basic Level or Above on NAEP**

Subject	Year	Florida	U.S.A	Gap
<b>Grade 4</b>				
Math	1992	52%	57%	-5%
	1996	55%	61%	-6%
	<b>2003</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>0%</b>
Reading	1992	53%	60%	-7%
	1994	50%	59%	-9%
	1998	53%	58%	-5%
	2002	60%	62%	-2%
	2003	63%	62%	+1%
Writing	<b>2002</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>+1%</b>
<b>Grade 8</b>				
Math	1990	43%	51%	-8%
	1992	49%	56%	-7%
	1996	54%	59%	-5%
	<b>2003</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>-5%</b>
Reading	1998	67%	71%	-4%
	1002	72%	74%	-2%
	<b>2003</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>-4%</b>
Writing	1998	78%	83%	-5%
	2002	84%	84%	+0%

\* A plus (+) sign indicates that Florida surpasses the nation; 0 indicates that Florida is on par with the nation; a minus (-) sign indicates that Florida is below the nation.

Gap = Difference in percent of Florida students scoring Basic and above, minus percent of U.S. students scoring at same level). Data Source: NAEP State Profiles, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states/>

### **Florida to U.S. Gaps: College-Bound Seniors**

Because both the *A+ Plan* and NCLB Act aim to equalize educational opportunities for all groups of students, it is relevant to study gaps and trends in Florida's college-bound seniors. Florida is primarily an SAT state; that is to say, most college-bound students in Florida elect to sit for the SAT rather than the ACT assessment, although Florida's state universities and community colleges accept both for admission or placement purposes.

Mean SAT verbal scores in Florida slowly increased from 493 in 1992 to 500 in 1998, settling at 498 in 2003. However, the gap between U.S. and Florida college-bound seniors has widened in both quantitative and verbal areas. In mathematics, the gap is large: an 11

point difference in 1998 growing to a 21-point difference in 2003, with Florida at the disadvantage.

SAT performance should be evaluated cautiously, taking into consideration the percentage of students who choose to take the test and their characteristics. For example, in 2004 a higher percentage of students took the SAT in Florida (61%) compared to the nation as a whole (48%). Also, minorities (who score lower than Whites, on average) comprised 43% of SAT test-takers in Florida in 2004 compared to 36% of test-takers nationally (Miller, 2004). For these reasons alone, one would predict lower average scores in Florida compared to the nation. Moreover, Florida's lower performance on the SAT relative to the nation is not surprising given NAEP results for Florida's 8th graders, who still lag behind their national peers in reading and mathematics.

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### Achievement Gaps within Florida's Students

#### *NAEP: Gender Gaps in Florida*

The NAEP data also give a picture of gender gaps within the state (Table 2). Disparities in performance between males and females begin in elementary school and widen in middle school. Males perform slightly better in mathematics, while females show a clear advantage in reading and writing. Boys tend to post a small advantage in mathematics over girls in both grades 4 and 8, with the largest gap found in grade 8. In reading the trend is reversed, with girls doing significantly and consistently better than boys in both grades.

#### *NAEP: Ethnic Gaps in Florida*

In Florida, the NAEP data show that the gaps between Whites and Blacks are larger in all subjects and grades than the gaps between Whites and Hispanics (Table 2). White-Black gaps have decreased slightly over the last decade in elementary-level mathematics, but have remained the same in other grades and subjects. The White-Hispanic gaps also have declined in mathematics, but have increased in 4th-grade reading and in 8th-grade writing.

Table 2

**Florida Students in Grades 4 and 8:  
Gaps in NAEP Scale Scores by Gender and Ethnicity**

Subject	Year	Male-Female	White-Black	White-Hispanic
<b>Grade 4</b>				
Math	1992	+2.6	+34.4	+16.0
	2003	+1.9(Same)	+28.1(Decrease)	+11.0(Decrease)
Reading	1992	-6.1*	+32.9	+14.6
	2003	-8.5*(Same)	+31.3(Same)	+18.3(Increase)
Writing	2002	-19.3*	+20.4	+10.9
<b>Grade 8</b>				
Math	1990	+0.5	+36.3	+26.0
	2003	+3.9(Increase)	+37.0(Same)	+21.7(Decrease)
Reading	1998	-13.5*	+28.1	+16.8
	2003	-12.5*(Same)	+29.1(Same)	+17.3(Same)
Writing	1998	-21.7*	+23.8	+13.7
	2002	-25.1*(Increase)	+25.5(Same)	+19.0(Increase)

Data Source: NAEP State Profiles, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states/>

Note: Increase, decrease or same status is based on differences of 3.0 or more points between 1992 and 2003.

***FCAT: Gaps in Florida***

Florida's criterion-referenced achievement test, the FCAT, provides a clearer picture of achievement gaps and how they have changed since the inception of the *A+ Plan*.

On the FCAT, Whites consistently have the highest percentage of students scoring at Level 3 and above in reading and mathematics; Blacks show the lowest percentages in these categories; Hispanics fall in between. This pattern is consistent across all grade levels (Table 3).

As of 2004, the gaps in achievement between Whites and these two ethnic minority groups were substantial. The size of the gap ranged from 16% to 37%, depending on the subject and grade level tested and the ethnicity of the students compared. For example, in 8th grade, 32% more Whites than Blacks scored at Level 3 and above on the FCAT reading test in 2004 (Table 3).

**Table 3**

**Achievement gaps between Whites and ethnic minorities on the 2004 FCAT**

	2004 FCAT Percent scoring at Level 3 and above	2004 White-Minority gaps*
READING		
Grade 4 White	79%	
Grade 4 Black	53%	White-Black gap=26%
Grade 4 Hispanic	63%	White-Hispanic gap=16%
Grade 8 White	57%	
Grade 8 Black	25%	White-Black gap=32%
Grade 8 Hispanic	35%	White-Hispanic gap=22%
Grade 10 White	44%	
Grade 10 Black	16%	White-Black gap=28%
Grade 10 Hispanic	25%	White-Hispanic gap=19%
MATHEMATICS		
Grade 5 White	64%	
Grade 5 Black	31%	White-Black gap=33%
Grade 5 Hispanic	46%	White-Hispanic gap=18%
Grade 8 White	69%	
Grade 8 Black	34%	White-Black gap=35%
Grade 8 Hispanic	50%	White-Hispanic gap=19%
Grade 10 White	75%	
Grade 10 Black	38%	White-Black gap=37%
Grade 10 Hispanic	55%	White-Hispanic gap=20%

\* The gap is the percentage of Whites scoring at Level 3 and above, minus the percent of Blacks or Hispanics scoring at Level 3 and above. Minority refers to Black and Hispanic subgroups only.

Trends in gaps over time in the three different ethnic groups are shown in Figures 1-6. The White-minority achievement gaps are closing in 4th-grade reading. In grade 4, all three racial/ethnic groups have been improving, but the percentage scoring at the proficient level or better (3 and above) has been increasing at a faster rate for minorities than for Whites (Figure 1). In contrast, reading achievement gaps have not narrowed at the secondary level. In 8th-grade reading, the gaps have held steady (Figure 2). In 10th-grade reading, the gaps have also remained the same (Figure 3).

Figure 1

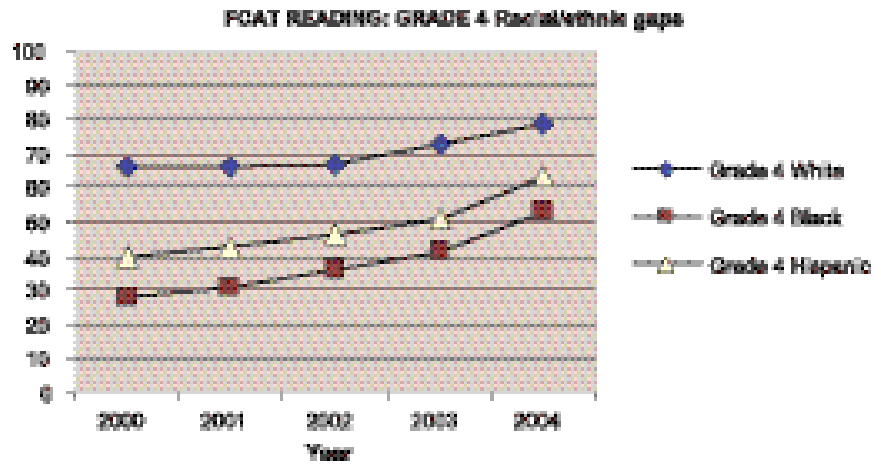


Figure 2

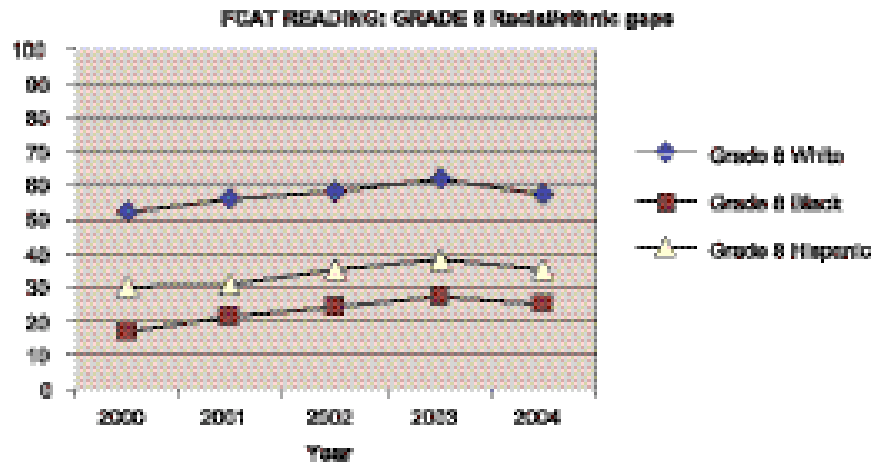
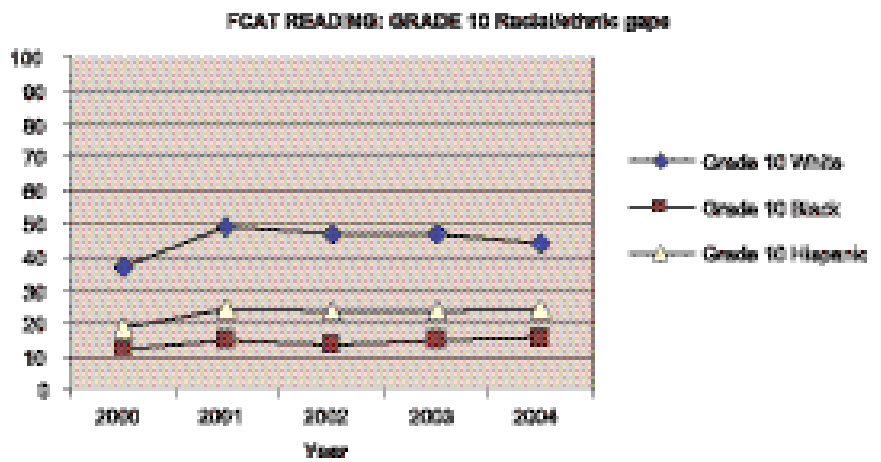


Figure 3



In mathematics, all three ethnic groups have been slowly improving since 2000 but at about the same rate. So the gaps between Whites and minorities have remained fairly

constant over time (Figures 4-6). In 2004, there were early signs that gaps were beginning to close at the secondary level (grades 8 and 10). Time will tell if this pattern will be sustained over time.

Figure 4

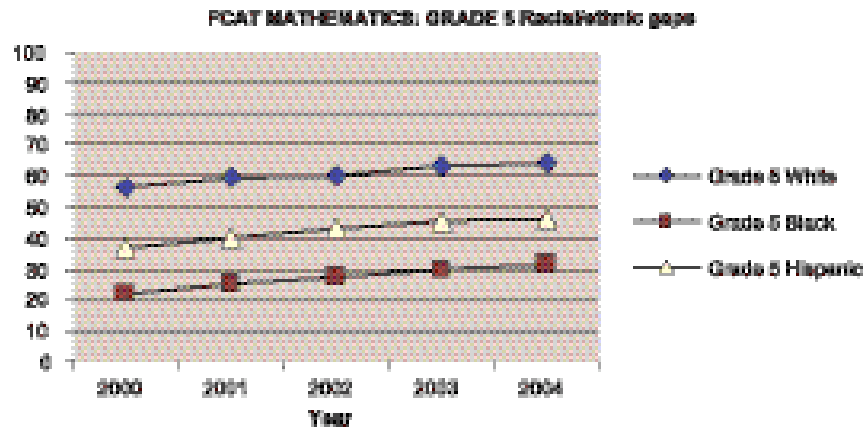


Figure 5

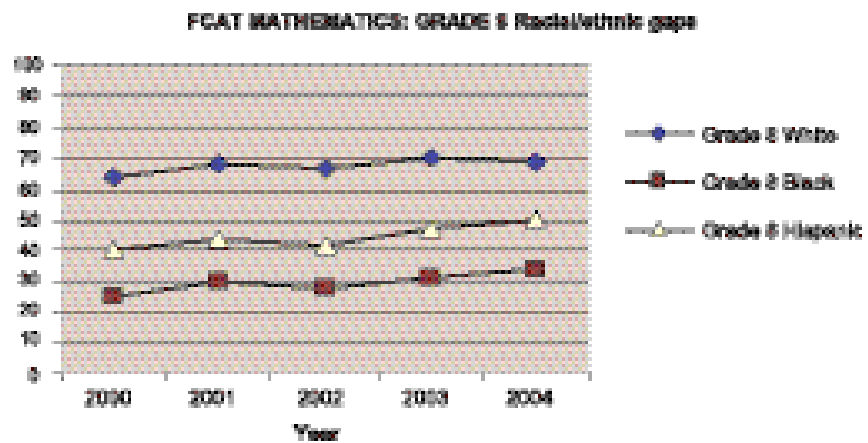
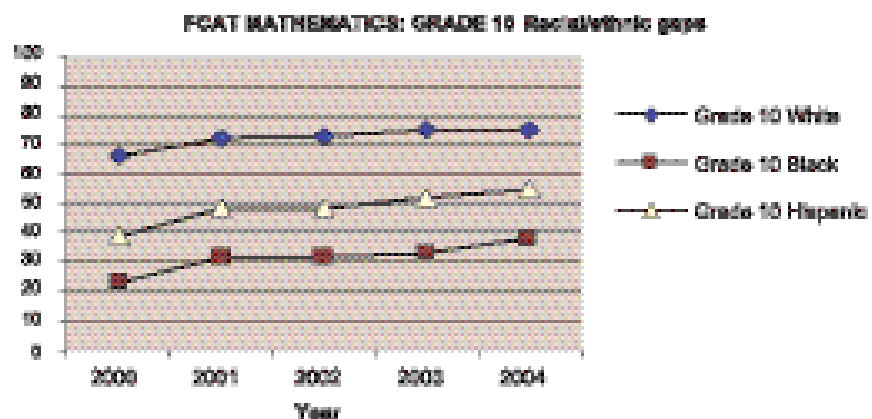


Figure 6



The test score percents on which Figures 1-6 are based are given in Table 4. While the lines in the figures show trends, Table 4 gives the differences over time in actual percentage of students scoring at Level 3 and above on the FCAT. Differences of less than 5% should be viewed with caution, as they may reflect minor instabilities in students tested from year to year. The gap status descriptors in Table 4 were computed based on the percentage differences between 2004 and 2000.

**Table 3**

**Ethnic Achievement Gaps\* from 2000 to 2004: Differences between Whites and Minorities on Percent of Students Scoring 3 and Above on the FCAT**

	2000	2001	2001	2003	2004	Gap Status/ Direction
<b>FCAT READING</b>						
<b>Grade 4</b>						
Black - White gap	38%	35%	31%	32%	26%	Declining by 12%
Hispanic - White gap	26%	23%	21%	22%	16%	Declining by 10%
<b>Grade 8</b>						
Black - White gap	35%	35%	34%	35%	32%	Declining by 3%
Hispanic - White gap	22%	25%	23%	24%	22%	No change
<b>Grade 10</b>						
Black - White gap	25%	34%	33%	32%	28%	Increasing by 3 %
Hispanic - White gap	18%	24%	23%	23%	19%	Increasing by 1%
<b>FCAT MATHEMATICS</b>						
<b>Grade 5</b>						
Black - White gap	34%	34%	33%	33%	33%	Declining by 1%
Hispanic - White gap	19%	19%	17%	18%	18%	Little change
<b>Grade 8</b>						
Black - White gap	39%	38%	39%	39%	35%	Declining by 4%
Hispanic - White gap	24%	24%	25%	23%	19%	Declining by 5%
<b>Grade 10</b>						
Black - White gap	43%	40%	41%	42%	37%	Declining by 6%
Hispanic - White gap	27%	24%	25%	23%	20%	Declining by 7%

\* The gap is the percentage of Whites scoring at 3 and above, minus the percent of Blacks or Hispanics scoring at 3 and above.

### SAT Ethnic Gaps in Florida

Wide gaps among ethnic groups also exist for college-bound seniors (Chatterji, 2004). In Florida, White-Black gaps in verbal and mathematics SAT scores have remained at about 90 points (with Blacks scoring close to one standard deviation unit below Whites). The White-Hispanic gap is about 40 points (with Hispanics scoring close to half a standard deviation unit below Whites).

It is important to note, however, that Florida's Hispanic and African American students compare favorably to their national peers on average SAT scores, when verbal and quantitative scores are combined. In 2004, Florida's Hispanic students had a +37 point advantage over U.S. Hispanic test-takers on average composite scores (verbal plus math). On average, Florida's African Americans scored about the same as their national peers. In contrast, Whites and Asians in Florida had average scores 23 to 43 points lower than those of U.S. students in the same ethnic groups (Miller, 2004).

**Table 4**

**Florida-U.S. Gaps by Ethnic Group: 2003 SAT Composite Scores\*  
(Verbal plus Math)**

Ethnicity	Florida	US	Gap (Florida minus U.S.)
White	1036	1059	-23
Black	856	857	1
Hispanic	953	916	+37
Asian	1041	1084	-43
Other	970	997	27

\*Based on test-takers indicating ethnicity.

Data Source: Miller, M. (2004). *SAT Trends: Florida and the nation*. Tallahassee, FL: Department of Education.

### Conclusions

Generally, Florida's achievement trends over time have shown steady improvement on state and national tests since the A+ legislation was passed (Chatterji, 2004). However, the news is mixed on achievement gaps.

#### *Good News on NAEP Reading and Writing*

- **Florida is on a par with the U.S. at the elementary level on the NAEP.** As of 2004, Florida's 4th graders equaled or slightly surpassed their national peers in reading, mathematics and writing.
- **The best news for Florida is 4th-grade reading performance on the NAEP.** In 2004, Florida's 4th graders slightly exceeded their national peers for the first time

after a decade of poorer performance. Within Florida, achievement gaps between Whites and Blacks and Whites and Hispanics have been closing since 2000.

- **Writing performance is also a success story for Florida on the NAEP—at both the elementary and middle school levels.** As of 2004, Florida's 4th graders slightly surpassed their national peers in writing, while Florida 8th graders performed as well as the nation's students.
- **Florida students show slow but steady progress on NAEP mathematics scores.** In 4th grade, Florida has closed its gap with the U.S. in mathematics achievement. In 8th grade, Florida is steadily gaining ground. Over the last decade, achievement gaps between Whites and minorities have narrowed, specifically for Blacks in the 4th grade and for Hispanics in 4th and 8th grades.

#### *Achievement Gaps on FCAT: Areas of Concern*

- **Substantial disparities in achievement still exist among ethnic groups in all grades.** In Florida, large gaps in achievement between Whites and African Americans and Whites and Hispanics continue to exist in both reading and mathematics at all grade levels. Clear progress toward closing these gaps is evident only in 4th-grade reading. Wide gaps among ethnic groups also exist for Florida's college-bound seniors.
- **Reading gaps have shown no improvement at the secondary level.** Florida's 8th graders still lag behind their national peers in reading. Within Florida, Hispanics and, particularly African Americans, still lag behind Whites in 8th and 10th grades. Moreover, the gaps show little or no sign of closing at these grade levels. Beginning in the early grades, boys have lower reading achievement than girls, and the gap widens in middle school.
- **Improvements in mathematics gaps are modest at best.** Florida's middle school students (8th graders) are gaining on their U.S. counterparts in mathematics achievement, but still lag behind. Although Florida's White-minority achievement gaps in mathematics have narrowed somewhat over the last decade, little change has occurred in the last four years (since 2000). Girls have lower achievement than boys at the elementary level, and the gap widens in middle school.

### Looking to the Future

What might be done to continue Florida's positive achievement trends (Chatterji, 2004), while attempting to close the achievement gaps?

#### ***Continue to Help Teachers/Leaders Make Better Use of Data.***

School leaders and teachers need better understanding of *why* some students in particular classrooms and schools struggle or fail, while others succeed. They need the training and support systems to make better use of *proximal* data on students—close to where teaching and learning occurs. Better capacity to use data will empower them to take local actions that can reduce achievement gaps. State testing and accountability will help monitor outcomes from the top-downwards. Learning and school improvement, however, need to be strategically shaped from the bottom-upwards. Careful study of data—not just state test results, but also data on classroom/school practices and outcomes, along with data on student backgrounds and resources—will help schools make more timely and effective adjustments to their practices. The story goes that when the number of rice shoots drops from 16 to 9 in a given year in rice plants, Japanese farmers know exactly what went wrong in terms of their farming practices. In the same way, teachers and leaders need to be able to assess, quantify, diagnose, evaluate, and change practices that fail to effectively close student achievement gaps. The subject area in which to begin would be reading and writing at the secondary level, where the achievement gaps among different groups of students are largest. The next priority would be mathematics.

The Progress Monitoring and Reporting Network (PMRN, [fcrr.org](http://fcrr.org)), created to support K-3 teachers and school leaders in their efforts to improve reading, provides an excellent model for efforts to begin at other grade levels. The PMRN provides tools for teachers to monitor student progress in reading in order to tailor teaching to meet individual student needs. The system also provides summary data for school leaders to use in pinpointing curricular and instructional areas for development. Data from proximal assessments need to be used in such systems, along with data from external assessments.

#### ***Continue to Recognize Sound Practices.***

Rewards for higher state test scores are encouraging, but scores can go up without real learning taking place, particularly under high-stakes conditions. Teachers and school leaders who are consistently demonstrating use of sound, evidence-based practices should be supported even when short-term gains are not visible—particularly when serving challenging student populations. Information on research-based practices should be disseminated widely. The state should continue to identify and better understand measures that under-performing schools can realistically undertake to improve achievement.

***Continue Efforts to Align State Standards with Curriculum and Instruction.***

An American Federation of Teachers study showed that Florida was slow in aligning its curriculum with state standards as of 2000 (AFT, 2001). In writing, where the standards-based program began a decade ago, Florida's evidence is clear: *sustained standards-based instruction yields sustained performance outcomes*. The state could continue to expand efforts for aligning of curriculum and instruction in schools with state standards in *all* grades. Caution should be taken to avoid excessive sanctions and accountability regulations that might create or reinforce a "test-prep" syndrome in schools. Policies should focus on creating conditions that reduce the amount of test preparation and lead to real engagement of teachers and students in learning activities tied to standards. The tail (state tests) should not wag the dog (teaching and learning); rather, standards should drive both (Sobol, 2003). Florida's standards-based program began in the latter spirit in 1992 and should continue along the same lines.

***Continue to Support Schools with Challenging Student Populations.***

The aim to close the achievement gaps for all student groups within inflexible timeframes may not be an achievable aim. In 2004, only 23% of Florida's schools met all of the state criteria for adequate yearly progress under the NCLB Act (Florida Department of Education, 2004, June 15). Although 64% of schools met 9 out of 10 criteria, much work remains to be done in schools and classrooms to ensure that all groups of students meet proficiency expectations by 2014.

Florida's leaders and teachers need to consider sensible measures, while continuing to seek amendments at the federal level. Because individual schools serve students with variable needs, their resource needs also will vary. The goal should be high standards for all, but under reasonable conditions. One factor to keep in mind is that groups of students are not mutually exclusive—just as a White child can be poor and have exceptional needs, a Hispanic child can be poor and be LEP. In working with individual children, schools must align resources and practices in different ways to meet students' diverse needs.

***Reconsider Sanctions and Policies that Have No Research Support.***

There is plenty of research evidence that grade retention is ineffective as a strategy for improving student achievement (Shepard & Smith, 1989). Florida, in fact, determined in 1990 that the state's 1980s back-to-basics movement, with grade retention used as a measure to raise achievement standards, was not effective (Morris, 2001). The evidence is still unclear about vouchers as a means for improving student achievement. There are concerns about the best students in under-performing schools choosing to use vouchers, leaving these schools with an even steeper hill to climb. In light of new and past research,

these and other sanctions must be carefully monitored, and if necessary, reevaluated as strategies for educational reform

### ***Support Research on Factors Impacting High Achievement.***

Trend studies show patterns in data, but give limited or no information on the reasons for the patterns. To identify which reforms influence student achievement, longitudinal research is needed which focuses on individual students as they are actually found, nested in particular schools and classrooms. School and teacher variables should be studied along with student outcomes. The state should continue its ambitious research agenda to better understand factors behind performance variation and to validate promising practices. The state has remarkable data and should continue to make the data available for use by researchers throughout the public and private sectors, respecting issues of confidentiality for students.

Florida's reform and accountability movement has led to improvements in the last 10 years, but achievement gaps remain. The suggestions are offered to address the continuing achievement gaps in the subjects and grade levels documented in this brief.

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