



**Institute for
Student Achievement**

Exploring the Race and Gender Gaps

Remarks

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for the

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*Building a Philanthropic Movement for Systemic Change***

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On October 4th, 2008, Dr. Gerry House, CEO of the Institute for Student Achievement, addressed The Schott Foundation's National Opportunity to Learn Education Summit. The following are excerpts from Dr. House's speech:

Introduction

Good afternoon. It's a pleasure to join you today, and I would like to thank the Schott Foundation and its President and CEO John Jackson for envisioning and hosting this great education summit focused on ensuring that all students have the opportunity to learn.

From certain perspectives, education in America looks like Swiss Cheese Nation — full of holes. Those holes, or gaps, are indicators of disaster. Not only for the young lives (who have fallen through them), but for us as citizens of a thriving and vibrant nation in the 21st century. If we are to close these deadly gaps, we have to stop looking through them and past them and look AT them.

Today I want to talk to you about three of the most serious gaps in education: the Gender Gap, the Achievement Gap and a misapprehension we will

have to address if we want our children to be globally competitive that I call the Reality Gap.

Now, I'm not deluding myself (and you) to think that in twenty-five minutes I can go into much depth about any one of these gaps because each deserves its own speech. But, my intent here today is to point out the complexity and the urgency of the problems we face in education.

The time is long overdue for tackling each of these gaps — as well as all of them together. To allow even one group of students to be sucked into these gaps of lost opportunity and untapped potential is to endanger everyone.

We still have a Gender Gap. We have made much progress and attainment the past 25-30 years to close the gap, but it still persists.

More girls, overall and across minority groups, are going to college than boys. And more are graduating from both high school and college. Data from the National Center on Education Statistics show that in academic year 2002-03 women earned 58% of bachelor degrees compared to 42% earned by males.

Girls' grades are higher; their test scores are higher. They have higher GPAs. They function in school — academically and socially — better than boys.

But, when it comes to the end-game, the career pay-off for academic achievement, there is a huge discrepancy, and the gender gap translates to the economic gap we see in the workforce.

We can crystallize the far-reaching effects of the gender gap on women's careers with some stark figures:

- Women in the workplace earn about 75 cents for each dollar that men with comparable skills, education and responsibilities make.
- Women hold less than 2% of publicly-held corporate board seats and minorities in general hold less than 1%.
- A study published in the *Academy of Management Perspectives* predicts that women will make up only 6% of Fortune 1000 CEOs by the year 2016.
- And Catalyst, the non-profit research organization that studies and advocates for women in the workplace, claims that, at the present rate, it will take women 40 years to achieve parity with men as corporate leaders and 70 years to achieve parity as board members.
- And education is not immune. Teaching — a predominantly female profession — has been the entry point for the superintendency, but the

gender imbalance is reversed at the end point. Although more than 75% of classroom teachers are women, 87% of school superintendents — the highest career position you can reach in K-12 education — are male.

And even more dismal –

- Fewer than 7% of female superintendents identified by an American Association of School Administrators study are minority women and only about 1% are Latino women. These numbers in no way reflect the student populations — or the demographic trends — in our schools.

And no explanation for *why* this is can explain away *what this does*.

The ripple effects of this gender gap are felt in families, in the classroom, in the boardroom, in the pocketbook, in the satisfaction women can obtain from their careers, and in future generations of girls and boys who grow up without the role models and balanced leadership of a more equitable society.

We are wasting a lot of valuable talent. So, as we continue making strides to close the academic gender gap, we must also challenge the social and cultural biases that are preventing these accomplishments from being realized in the workplace.

Now, let's look AT the marquee issue —the one that is front and center in the national dialog about education. The Achievement Gap is no stranger to us in this room. We hear the term bandied about all the time.

We know it as the gap in student achievement that is exposed when test data are disaggregated by race, ethnicity and family income. No Child Left Behind helped shine a spotlight there.

While efforts to close the Achievement Gap since NCLB have produced some encouraging and incremental gains, the problem of disparity and missed opportunities for kids still loom large.

The Schott Report and the substantive discussions at this conference highlight the alarming differences in educational attainment between white and minority students —differences that persist after years of effort and millions of dollars that were supposed to “fix” the problem.

I'm a former English teacher so I attach a great deal of significance to semantics. And these days I am having a bit of trouble with the phrase “No Child Left Behind.” 53% of young Black men in our high schools are being left behind. 43% of young Latino men are being left behind. Now, when that many students

don't graduate from high school, our system has failed them. In some of our poorest urban communities, barely 25% — just one quarter! — of the Black and Latino male students make it through high school.

And some numbers that are equally disturbing come from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. Less than 4% of Black male students in our schools are enrolled in Gifted and Talented programs, compared to nearly 35% of White male students.

On the 2007 SAT, African American students, on the average, scored 105 points lower on the math test and 94 points lower on verbal than White students.

And there is so much more data to make the case. These data are particularly onerous when you consider the results from a study conducted by Dr. Hank Levin at Teachers College, Columbia University, entitled "The Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education for All of America's Children".

According to the study, "If the number of high school dropouts in each age cohort were cut in half, the government would reap \$45 billion in extra tax revenues and reduced costs of public health, of crime and justice, and in welfare payments" — per cohort.

This is a no-brainer — how does the government raise revenue? Educate and graduate all of its children. But look at the potential brain-trust we are throwing away!

There is no "Aptitude Gap," no "Intelligence Gap," no "Capability Gap." But there is a huge economic gap. There is an expectations gap. There is an opportunity gap. There is a gap in the place where we should be offering an equal and excellent education to every American child.

Even the children who don't seem to fit the failure profile are defeated by these failed systems.

When I was a superintendent of schools, I met with the devastated parents of a high school valedictorian who did not get accepted to college. The child had taken a full load of classes, studied hard and earned excellent grades. Her grade point average was nearly 4.0, but her ACT score was 15.

Not only did that young girl not get the scholarship assistance that would have made it possible for her to attend a top-tier college and work towards her dream of being a doctor, she wasn't even admitted to a single college of her choice.

Her peers in private and suburban high schools — with well-equipped labs, advanced math and science courses, a menu of foreign language classes and a rich and rigorous college preparatory curriculum taught by experienced and expert faculty — could see their efforts translate to college acceptance and eventual success.

But she and her parents discovered too late that she had poured her heart and soul into a third-rate school that falsely reassured her with high grades, even as it failed to prepare her to realize her dreams.

Now let's contrast that example with another one. This one I am really proud of because it highlights a high school that my organization — the Institute for Student Achievement — designed and developed. In this case, the story has a happy ending. I wish the happy endings weren't so rare.

Four years ago, ISA joined with the New York City Department of Education to design and create a small/ college preparatory high school in a section of the Bronx that serves some of the city's poorest and most underperforming and underserved students.

For generations, the students in this area were warehoused in huge factory-style high schools for four years — if they lasted that long — only 36% ever graduated — and then they were turned out to scramble for minimum wage dead-end jobs, or worse.

In school year 2001-08, the first 9th graders that entered Bronx Lab School were now seniors. They had behind them four years of a rigorous intellectually challenging curriculum and teachers who had high expectations for them and who provided the academic, as well as the social and emotional supports these students needed to achieve. 90% were college-bound.

From that senior class of 90 students, Bronx Lab recommended five students — the maximum permissible — for Posse Foundation scholarships. For those of you who don't know the Posse Foundation, it offers four-year scholarships — plus mentoring and other supports — to top colleges and universities in the U.S. The scholarships are *not* need-based. They are based on *academic merit and leadership*.

Of the 3,000 in the applicant pool in New York, including students from New York City's most prestigious high schools — only 140 would receive the awards. With those odds, even one Bronx Lab School senior reaching finalist would have been a major accomplishment.

In December, guess what? The school learned that not one *but all five students* were awarded scholarships. All five. For the first time in the Posse Foundation's history, a single school had all five nominees receive awards. Those students —boys and girls — are now freshmen at Middlebury, Lafayette, DePauw, Trinity and Brandeis.

Bronx Lab is closing the Achievement Gap! That's one high school. But there are others. It can be done and it must be done. Every student in a deficient high school today —or middle school, or elementary school — is out of time. The Achievement Gap is both an indictment and a wake-up call. We have failed those children who are being left behind and we have to move fast to fix that.

This country is at a critical point in history, when achievement gaps can become unbridgeable. Our sense of urgency about closing gaps is fueled by the realization that the world our children and our grandchildren inherit from us bears little resemblance to the one we grew up in.

I know when I was growing up there were no cell phones, I-Pods, DVDs, MP3s. We played hop scotch and monopoly (and I know I have a few hopscotch partners out there who can relate whether you want to admit it or not).

But the world is rapidly changing. It is now a technological, global society in which jobs are not contained by borders, and high school alone is not adequate preparation for a secure future. The kind of mind that can succeed in this new world requires a very different kind of education.

Daniel Pink, author of A Whole New Mind, has tracked the social and economic transition from the Information Age to what he calls the Conceptual Age.

Here's how Pink sums it up: "We are in an era that values new ideas, new designs, the ability to weave threads of the known into the as-yet unimagined. The abilities that matter most are now — creativity, empathy, seeing the big picture, and pursuing the transcendent."

So, if Pink is right — and there is a groundswell of accord on this — we not only must teach an entire cohort of American students their math and science and reading and social studies to pass tests, we also must provide the most basic of instruction — teaching them to think, to imagine, and to care.

And, this brings me to the third gap, the Reality Gap.

The Reality Gap is the chasm between a rigorous, intellectually, challenging curriculum — one that requires all students to think, to invent, to inquire, to create, to analyze and synthesize, to collaborate — and the repetitive, fact-based, test-

driven, rote approach to instruction that is commonplace in far too many classrooms, both urban and suburban.

But, the problem is worse in those classrooms that educate predominantly African-American and Latino children, where educators are so frantically trying to close the test score Achievement gap that they are losing sight of what they know as quality teaching and learning.

Certainly, all students must master the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. And, I know that many of our low-income African American and Latino students come to school with tremendous skill deficits that put them at-risk the minute they enter the schoolhouse door. But, just addressing these basic skill deficits is not enough. There is a set of new basics that all students must master.

They need to develop sophisticated thinking skills to manage the conceptual nature of the work they will do. They will need to be capable of recognizing patterns, creating narrative, imagining solutions to problems we have yet to discover. They will need to construct knowledge and pursue big ideas and major concepts.

The results from the 2006 PISA database, which is the international students assessment, bears this out. Less than 2% of US students scored a Level 6, which measures the capacity of students to apply what they've learned in the classroom to real-world situations.

Closing the gaps begins to resemble something like training kids for the Olympic pole vault. Our children's competitors are no longer the other schools in the district or the state or even the nation, for that matter. They are the technologically literate and inventive young people in Taiwan, India, Korea and every other developing nation in the world. The Internet is a web that brings Wuhan and Calcutta just as close as Washington, D.C.

To close the Achievement Gap *and* the Reality Gap, we need to do a lot more than incrementally raise test scores. Our expectations for all our students from the minute they enter school must go beyond the short-term goal of lifting the threat of academic failure to the long-range goal of preparing them for college graduation and for work and citizenry in the global economy.

Tony Wagner, author of the book, The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don't Teach The New Survival Skills Our Children Need said, "to be college ready is to be work ready is to be citizen ready."

Fortunately, it can be done. And a few people — albeit too few — have ignored the skeptics, the dire predictions and insufficient resources, and believed in the kids.

We have a human obligation to nurture and teach all children to their full potential. Fortunately, we do know how to do it.

First, we do it by creating schools where there are high expectations AND strong leaders, AND an intellectually challenging curriculum, AND high quality teachers, AND a safe, supportive physical and emotional environment, AND adequate resources, AND parent and community involvement. And we do it by caring about the kids so that none falls in the gaps.

Second, we create these schools, not by tinkering around the edges with a single focus program, such as a test-prep literary program, but with a well-thought and planned comprehensive transformation initiative, such as the process in New York City from which emerged the Bronx Lab school.

But, we also must acknowledge that schools can't do it alone. There are other gaps in students' lives which impact their education that are beyond the capacity of schools to close.

Some of the gaps are so obvious that understanding the disparities is a no-brainer. Of the 13 million children living in poverty in this country — 13.3 million children under the age of 18 to be precise — the largest percentages are Black and Hispanic. 40% of our children of color live below the poverty level.

These young people also are likely to lack health care, adequate housing and nutrition, stability, sometimes even families. And they almost always have terrible schools.

This issue of existing poverty and lack of opportunity was not created by educators. And, it will take policymakers at every level — federal, state, and local — as well as others, to take ownership and address it.

Whether it's a Gender Gap, an Achievement Gap or the Reality Gap — the space between will condemn a child on the wrong side of the gap to a hard life. And it will cost us the energy and creativity of that human being.

So, we have work to do — all of us: educators, philanthropists, corporate leaders, community organizers, community-based organizations, and public officials.

We are out of time in this world that is moving at warp speed, and so are our kids. We have to close the Achievement Gap. We have to address the Gender Gap.

We have to understand the Reality Gap. We have to build a literate, numerate, intelligent society in which nobody — not one single child — gets left behind.

Gerry House, Ed.D., President and CEO of ISA, is a nationally renowned non-profit leader, educator and author. Her in-depth knowledge of our nation's schools began in the classroom (as an English teacher) continued in the Superintendent's Office (Dr. House was superintendent in Memphis, Tennessee and Chapel Hill, North Carolina and was named National Superintendent of the Year in 1999 by the American Association of School Administrators for her extensive school reform efforts in the Memphis school system) and continues in ISA's 80 transformed high schools around the country. For more information about Dr. House or ISA, please visit www.studentachievement.org.