

A BROADER, BOLDER APPROACH TO EDUCATION

Full Statement

Overview

More than a half century of research has documented a powerful association between social and economic disadvantage and low student achievement. These achievement gaps are present before children even begin formal schooling. Despite the academic gains attained by some schools serving disadvantaged students, there is no evidence that school improvement strategies alone can close these learning gaps. There is solid evidence, however that policies aimed directly at education-related social and economic disadvantages can improve school performance and student achievement.

The NCLB Framework Cannot by Itself Meet the Challenge

The potential effectiveness of NCLB has been undermined by the assumption that bad schools are the major reason for low achievement, and that an academic program concentrating on standards, testing, teacher training, and accountability can offset the full impact of low socioeconomic status on achievement. Given NCLB's limitations this article argues that the time has come for U.S. policy makers to rethink their assumptions and adopt a broader, bolder approach to education- one that reduces the association between social and economic disadvantages and low student achievement.

Characteristics of the Broader, Bolder Approach

1. This new approach will continue to pursue school improvement efforts through high quality, ongoing research.
2. The new approach will increase investment in developmentally appropriate and high-quality early childhood, pre-school, and kindergarten education.
3. The new approach will also increase investments in health services to support adequate prenatal and pediatric care for all mothers and children.
4. The new approach should pay more attention to the time students spend outside of school. Research has shown that low-income students learn just as quickly as more-privileged peers during the school day but where they miss out is in their lack of educational stimulation after school hours.

Conclusion

We The increasingly inter-connected world of the 21st century places a premium on the preparation of all of our young people to take their places as effective workers, citizens and family members. For the sake of enabling all of America's children to pursue and realize their full potential, this article urges policy makers to embrace this broader, bolder approach to education.