

A BROADER, BOLDER APPROACH TO EDUCATION, Background Papers

Overview

A broader and bolder approach to education is one which deals aggressively with the issue of low student achievement and strives to insure that all students succeed, especially those from socially and economically disadvantaged families. This article examines five areas that need to be addressed in order to achieve this success.

The Five Areas in Need of Attention

- 1. Contextual Factors** – All of the contextual and background characteristics (family, community, social, and economic) influencing achievement operate collectively. Even with equally high-quality instruction, children from disadvantaged families will achieve at lower levels than those from families without these disadvantages. Research suggests that improving lower-class children's performance will be more effective if school improvement efforts are combined with policies to narrow social and economic inequalities.
- 2. School Improvement Efforts** - There has been substantial research done on the potential for smaller class sizes, improvements in teacher quality, and school-based accountability to reduce achievement gaps.
- 3. Benefits of Quality Preschool** – For low-income children, participation in quality education programs prior to entering formal schooling has shown to have positive cognitive and social impacts on their lives. Disadvantaged children can also benefit more from these programs than more advantaged children. Therefore, such programs can play an important role in closing achievement gaps.
- 4. Child and Adolescent Development** – The strong emotional bonds that children develop with competent caretakers (usually parents) goes far in facilitating development. Many kinds of development, in social, psychological, emotional, moral, linguistic, and cognitive areas are critical to future academic learning. The attitudes, values, and behavior of the family and its social network strongly affect such development.
- 5. Immigrants** - While immigrant students' ambitions are often quite high, their actual access and attainment are all too frequently frustrated and disconnected from their goals. Furthermore, the majority of newcomer immigrants face the challenge of mastering English while keeping up with their native-speaking peers on other academic subjects. English language learners also face the challenge of performing well on standardized tests designed for native-born speakers.

Conclusion

The achievement gap between students from low-income families and their peers from higher-income backgrounds continues to grow. In order to address this issue we need to consider a broader, bolder approach to education that deals directly with each of these five areas in need of attention.