



## **How do we promote widespread academic achievement across demographic groups?**

Below is a brief synopsis of six studies that are uncovering strategies to improve academic achievement through infrastructure, programing, and student engagement. This bibliography spotlights useful studies evaluating tools and techniques that are working and can be used as a starting point for other districts looking to make systemic changes. Effective interventions include a focus on early childhood, encouraging strong peer and parental relationships, and fostering social belonging.

### **- LEARN Research Roundups -**

These are annotated bibliographies created through our “Ask a Researcher” program at the request of a district leader to inform a specific initiative.

## “Addressing Achievement Gaps School Finance and the Achievement Gap: Funding Programs That Work”

### Citation

*Yaffe, D. (2008). Addressing Achievement Gaps School Finance and the Achievement Gap: Funding Programs That Work. ERIC; ETS Policy Information Center Educational Testing Service.*

### Overview

Cost effective achievement-gap closing programs.

### Research Questions

Which programs are the most beneficial for students in the long run and are they sustainably priced?

### Methodology

Symposium of researchers discussing prior studies on the topic.

### Analysis & Results

The symposium discussed that preschool was actually highly effective in keeping achievement gaps small, with preschool students being more literate and needing less individualized help later down the line overall. All day kindergarten and reading recovery tutoring programs were significantly less successful. High school programs need more research overall, with minimal progress shown thus far.

### Conclusions

The conclusion from the symposium seems to be that early education programs can be the most beneficial in preventing the achievement gap from growing initially.

### Action Step

Focus on strong early intervention type programs with early literacy being a good primary goal.

### Source Link

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## “Experimental Effects of “Opportunity Gap” and “Achievement Gap” Frames”

### Citation

M. Quinn, D. (2025). *Experimental Effects of “Opportunity Gap” and “Achievement Gap” Frames*. Sage Journals.

### Overview

How 'achievement gap' vs 'opportunity gap' terminology impacts people's feelings regarding school policy or programs.

### Research Questions

Hypothesizes that adding 'opportunity gap' terminology will get more support for the issue of racial differences in education.

### Methodology

Online survey of American adults.

### Analysis & Results

The author created a table that graphs out the data collected, concludes "The [achievement gap] frame calls both types of explanations to mind, whereas the [opportunity gap] frame nudges non structural explanations out of mind. Consequently, we see weaker endorsement for individual explanations when the [opportunity gap] frame appears but no difference in endorsements for structural explanations."

### Conclusions

Participants supported closing the 'opportunity gap' more so than the 'achievement gap', which the author notes "in political discourse, [opportunity gap] frames may be more effective at building support for equity-focused efforts". One caveat- in a school setting, using 'opportunity' vs 'achievement' terminology may confuse people on how exactly 'opportunity' is measured (as 'achievement' is easily measured with test scores, etc).

### Action Step

For school policies that work to close academic differences between marginalized groups, being attentive to language can be useful in rallying support for these initiatives. Consider swapping “opportunity gaps” for “achievement gaps” for external audiences.

### Source Link

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## “Narrowing (Achievement) Gaps in Higher Education with a Social-Belonging Intervention: A Systematic Review”

### Citation

Chrobak, B. (2024). *Narrowing (Achievement) Gaps in Higher Education with a Social-Belonging Intervention: A Systematic Review*.

### Overview

Whether or not social-belonging intervention can reduce the achievement gap in higher education.

### Research Questions

"What is the efficacy of the social-belonging intervention in narrowing the achievement gaps in terms of performance and persistence in higher education? What other outcomes does the social-belonging intervention affect? What factors should be taken into account to implement this intervention efficiently?"

### Methodology

Searched through databases for pre-existing studies looking at the use and results of social-belonging intervention.

### Analysis & Results

Students who were attending a school with opportunities for connectedness and academic achievement did benefit from positive-outlook-related exercises, but those attending schools with an overly negative atmosphere or few opportunities for achievement didn't show significant growth, seemingly because of an inability to suspend disbelief given their circumstances.

### Conclusions

Fostering a sense of belonging can help students close their own achievement gaps, however it is important to check that the school environment does actively seek to meet those students and allow for growth opportunities.

### Action Step

Schools should focus not only on the individual student mindsets for overcoming disadvantage, but also ensure that there are programs in place for connectedness and academic opportunities for growth.

### Source Link

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## “The academic achievement gap between students with and without special educational needs and disabilities”

### Citation

Daniel, J. (2024). *The academic achievement gap between students with and without special educational needs and disabilities*. Taylor & Francis.

### Overview

This article examines how academic trajectories change over time for students with special educational needs and disabilities [SEND].

### Research Questions

"What is the average reading, maths, and writing gap between students with and without SEND?

To what extent does the achievement gap in reading, maths, and writing vary by the type of students' SEND identification? Do differences in achievement between students with SEND and their typically developing peers persist over time?"

### Methodology

Researchers examine data from the National Public Database for academic years 2015-2016 and 2018-2019, 360k~ students with SEND.

### Analysis & Results

The largest gap was in writing skills, reading was a constant gap across four years; however, the gap in maths widened considerably over time.

### Conclusions

Special education students also face continual achievement gaps that should be addressed by future policies, ideally that are more specialized to the different levels of need.

### Action Step

More support is needed for teachers and teaching assistants in special education areas, as the author states

"There is a clear need to develop resources that are easily accessible to educators as the lack of evidence-based resources hamper educators' ability to provide quality instruction".

### Source Link

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## “Academic achievement: Contextual influences”

### Citation

Benner, A., D. (2018). *Academic achievement: Contextual influences*. In R. J. R. Levesque, *Encyclopedia of Adolescence (2nd ed.)*. Springer Science+Business Media.

### Overview

Compiling influences on student achievement.

### Research Questions

What factors influence a student's academic achievement and how do they play a role?

### Methodology

Literature review compiling data from prior studies.

### Analysis & Results

Authoritative parenting style with educated two parent families and active involvement in/encouragement of education is optimal for student achievement. Smaller schools with diverse students, good funding, and less emphasis on academic tracking encourages the most academic achievement. Peers who also do well in school and stay in school are also beneficial to student learning.

### Conclusions

The causes of students' academic achievement are multifaceted, and involve their schooling, home life, and their peer relationships.

### Action Step

Programs looking to rectify the achievement gap ought to consider outside-of-school factors that influence a student's ability to succeed. Finding ways to encourage peer and parent relationships could be beneficial.

### Source Link

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## “The Role of Developmental Assets in Predicting Academic Achievement: A Longitudinal Study”

### Citation

C. Scales, Peter , et al. (2006) “The Role of Developmental Assets in Predicting Academic Achievement: A Longitudinal Study.” *Science Direct*

### Overview

Does student involvement impact their GPA?

### Research Questions

"Are developmental assets related to higher GPA in the same year? Are developmental assets related to higher GPA over time?"

### Methodology

Longitudinal study following 370 students for three years, looking at their developmental assets ("positive relationships, opportunities, skills, values, and self-perceptions") and their GPAs over time.

### Analysis & Results

Data were graphed showing a positive relationship between the number of developmental assets and students GPA in later years. This study has then been cited in other articles as proof for student involvement leading to better GPAs, therefore helping close achievement gaps.

### Conclusions

Students with better peer relationships, more activities, and more opportunity to develop skills do better in school than those who do not.

### Action Step

The more students are involved in both school and non-school related activities, the better they do. Schools should promote programs that focus on building peer relationships or civic involvements (examples- volunteer clubs/orgs or student body leadership).

### Source Link

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