



# By the People

## America in the World

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## WHO IS ACCOUNTABLE FOR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION?

A century ago there was no doubt as to who was responsible for the education of children in our society, their parents. With the establishment of mandatory public education responsibility has shifted into the public sector and become a national, state, and local issue. In 2002 President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act, holding schools accountable for educating children to mandated standards, leaving no child behind. So, whom do we hold accountable for the education of our children? The teachers? The schools? The parents? The community? How do we as a region hold each of these systems accountable for providing quality education to the next generation?

### SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY:

Some say government should take the lead in holding schools accountable for students' educational success. Well defined standards and testing, like those in the recent "No Child Left Behind" legislation, are the best way to create and teach a quality curriculum.

Supporters of this approach think schools work best when teachers and students know what is expected of them and society has a way to measure how well those expectations are being met. Schools that lag behind have clear goals for improvement, and when goals are not met there are consequences.

Critics of this approach think it makes schools focus too much on teaching to the test. As a result, schools may drop or de-emphasize subjects that aren't on the test like art, music, foreign languages, and creative writing. They also say some local control is sacrificed to state and national governments.

Some critics believe that government can offer suggestions or guidelines, but should not tell local communities how to run their schools. Others believe local communities, including parents and school officials, should decide on their own what is best to teach—and whether and how to test—their local student body.

- Missouri currently has over 100 schools in the second year of failure to meet standards of adequate yearly progress, 53 of these schools are located in districts in the St. Louis region.
- Of the eight Missouri schools placed in the corrective actions phase, for three consecutive years of failure to meet adequate yearly progress, five are St. Louis Public Schools.
- Of all Illinois schools located within the St. Louis region, 22 have not met adequate yearly progress for at least one year.

## **THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT (NCLB)**

Signed into law in 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act is viewed as the most sweeping federal education bill in more than 40 years. The law is based on four main principles:

1.) States must develop their own academic achievement standards and benchmarks, to which the federal government will hold them accountable. A number of tests are already, or will soon be, federally required, including ones for reading, math and science, at various points in grades 3-12. 2) Failing schools are designated as such, and parents may transfer a student out of a low-achieving or unsafe school to another public school. 3) States can transfer federal dollars between different grant programs to improve school progress. 4) Education programs must be based on NCLB-sanctioned scientifically based research.

Supporters of the law say it reforms a failing education system. As evidence the law is working, supporters point to a recent study that shows black and Hispanic students are catching up with their white counterparts in reading and math at the elementary level. But critics say many of the gains could have come from changes made before the law was put into place. They further note that the law is bureaucratic, squelches creativity in favor of teaching to the tests, and is expensive to maintain.

### **SOME ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES:**

- Utilize “standards based reform” which is part of No Child Left Behind and includes specific expectations for students, assessments measuring performance and progress, and a system with consequences, holding educators at all levels responsible for student achievement. High stakes testing and disaggregated data are used to measure student achievement, holding schools accountable for testing results. Schools not meeting standards are mandated to offer students a transfer and may be subject to restructuring of the schools infrastructure including staff, teachers, and administration.
- Schools should be held accountable for the quality of curriculum and effectiveness of instruction they provide. If the curriculum and instructors behind it are sound then so should be the outcome of student achievement. Using tests, however, to measure achievement is unfair due to a number of uncontrollable circumstances that may affect student performance.
- Schools should be accountable to the parents and neighborhoods. Let communities decide what standards must be met, and how to measure this. Parents and neighborhoods then become responsible for implementing the change they would like to see in their schools.



## TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY

With the passage of No Child Left Behind accountability has become an issue to be addressed at all levels of education from the school board and school system down to the individual classroom and teacher. In order to have successful schools it is clear that we must have quality leadership in our schools and effective instructors in our classrooms. We must create a quality teaching force and to do this we must consider new ways of training our teachers, new approaches to accountability, new means for developing leadership, and ways to institute reward systems for teachers who have shown improvement and continued success in the classroom.

While policy makers, parents, and educators agree that teachers must be held accountable in some way for student achievement, there are many concerns about how to do this. Both Missouri and Illinois, like most states, use standardized tests to measure student achievement, but many argue that these tests are not accurate measures of true student achievement. In states such as Tennessee and Texas portions of teacher's evaluations are based on student performance using data from achievement tests.

Opponents of these systems cite that these tests do not represent a fair picture of the teacher's ability due to a number of uncontrollable outside factors that effect student learning.

Teacher accountability has always had the negative connotation of punishment. However, many approaches now focus on professional development and personal growth as a way to foster success in the classroom.

These are just some of the approaches to ensuring that quality teachers are present in every classroom. Unfortunately the accessibility to these programs vary from state to state, district to district, and school to school leaving some teachers with limited opportunities to develop their skills.

### **SOME POSSIBLE APPROACHES:**

- Evaluate teacher preparation programs on a continual basis. Re-evaluate educational standards in teaching programs to meet the demands of today's school children, including increased demands in areas of science and math. Require teachers to specialize in what they are teaching.
- Encourage performance-based evaluation in all states, districts, and schools. Develop measures that will accurately gauge the teacher's effectiveness as an instructor. Develop reward programs and incentives for successful teachers. Use salary levels as a means for attracting quality instructors and ensuring continued success. Use evaluations to cite low performing teachers for necessary training.
- Institute peer review systems and teacher mentoring programs. Peer review and teachers teaching teachers is a way to encourage new instructional techniques and continued progress and learning in the classroom.



## FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Research has shown time and time again that family involvement in a child's education leads to increased test scores, higher graduation rates, and more opportunities for higher education.

How can the schools and the parents work together to form a partnership aimed at providing the best education for the individual child? This is especially a concern for homes with single parents, when parents are employed in second and third shifts, work several jobs, and/or when parents are immigrants not accustomed to the American public school system. Many challenges exist in keeping parents involved in their child's education.

Most parents work full time and with additional activities and commitments may spend only an hour or two a day at home with their children. How then can a school compete for the parent's attention, and keep that parent abreast of all that is going on with their child in the school setting? How can parents stay involved with their child's school and maintain effective communication with their child's teachers and school administrators? With increased focus on school accountability, school

administrators and teachers are now relying more heavily on parents and families to do their part in boosting achievement.

In recent years parent and family involvement has been a top concern for educators. School districts are beginning to look at ways in which they may be able to encourage parental and family involvement in the child's education. Many now view it as the school's responsibility to work with parents and make them an integral part of the school and their child's education.

Others maintain that parental involvement is the responsibility of no one but the parent. Schools face many obstacles in trying to meet the needs of each family, and encouraging involvement from all parents. Working to meet the diverse needs of each family system requires the devotion of already limited staff time, resources, and money. However, with the increased demand for student achievement, schools are now looking at parental involvement as a necessary component in meeting educational goals for each child.

## SOME POSSIBLE APPROACHES:

- Families should be assisted in developing home environments conducive to learning. This may include schools and teachers providing suggestions, workshops/trainings, parent education, family support programs, and home visits at important transitional periods for students.
- Schools should ensure communication with all parents, not just those who can attend meetings and conferences. Improve not only school-home communication, but also home-school communication. This is done through conferences with every parent once a year, even if it means hosting conferences at non-traditional times and places, and regular use of phone calls, memos, and newsletters to parents, requiring parent review of student's work to be returned to teacher, and parent student pick up of report card.
- Parents should be consulted in all decision-making processes regarding their child's school policies. Develop ways for parents to serve as school leaders and representatives. Parent organizations, school advisory councils, and committees for parent participation are good ways of doing this.
- Include parents in important school decisions and answer any questions they have, including referrals to outside agencies. Beyond that it is the parent's responsibility to be involved in their child's education. The schools and teachers can't do it all.

## THE COMMUNITY'S ROLE

In demanding higher school performance and student achievement changes are almost always aimed at what the school could do differently, and how parents must play a stronger role in boosting student achievement. However, we often fail to see that schools are a part of a larger community, and that the community plays a role in the formal education of our children.

The resources a school has to offer its children are based upon the community in which it is located. Property values and taxes increase school funding, community

organizations provide support services, and every citizen within the community is responsible for voting on issues related to the school system. It is easy to see that community members and the community as a whole have a large impact on the functioning of the school.

With demands on schools to improve student achievement, educators are recognizing that they must rely on community support to meet state and national standards, develop new programs, and secure financial resources. Increasingly school boards and superintendents are seeking the input of the community in setting educational standards for schools. Communities, however, are comprised of a wide variety of individuals, businesses, and organizations, which may or may not

see themselves as having a vested interest in local schools. Should they, and how should they, be held

accountable for student achievement?

#### **SOME POSSIBLE APPROACHES:**

- Educational leaders, including superintendents and school boards must work to educate the community on current school issues and engage citizens in developing community expectations for individual schools. Community members are kept abreast of school performance in all areas, so that issues may be addressed from a community perspective. Ideally when a community supports standards, it will be more willing to provide resources to support their attainment.
  - **78% of superintendents surveyed reported they have processes under way to encourage public engagement, but only 41% say they actually solicit input from the community before formulating policy.**
- Partnerships need to be formed with community organizations. Through forming relationships with community organizations schools will have resources at hand to see to the welfare of every child and family in its school. Cultural organizations may also supply a wealth of knowledge to supplement the classroom lessons. By forming partnerships, community organizations will have a greater stake in the educational outcomes of schools.
- Engage stakeholders in the community, and show them how education effects the entire community. Demonstrate to the community members how achievement is not only something that affects the students, teachers, and principles, but also has a greater effect on the community, it business, its cultural institutions, and its future.
- The community's responsibility ends at the ballot box. Educate voters on how to support school related referendum. Government, parents and schools are truly responsible for children's educations and they are the ones that should be held accountable.



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## **EDUCATIONAL READINESS: PRE-KINDERGARTEN THROUGH POST SECONDARY EDUCATION**

### **THE VALUE OF A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA**

**F**ailure to ensure students' readiness for postsecondary education and the labor market threatens to slow American productivity, lower our standard of living, and widen the gulf between rich and poor. Today, many students are graduating high school without the skills and knowledge required to be successful in college or the workplace. To be "college ready," students must graduate from high school, take courses that colleges require for admittance, and possess basic literacy skills. On a positive note, though high school graduation rates remained steady between 1991 and 2002, college readiness rates improved, rising from 25 percent to 34 percent. However, this still means that more than 4 in 10 high school graduates are not prepared for college-level courses. Employers estimate that 45 percent of high school graduates do not have the skills necessary to advance beyond entry-level

jobs. Sixty percent of employers rate graduates' skills in grammar, spelling, writing and basic math as only "fair" or "poor." Even high school graduates themselves know that there are gaps in their preparation with 2 in 5 recent graduates who are now in college identifying such gaps and almost half of those not currently enrolled in college agreeing. Currently, as many as 28 percent of college freshmen are immediately placed in remedial courses.

There is a significant economic impact to not preparing students for college and the workplace. Each year, taxpayers pay an estimated \$1 billion to \$2 billion to provide remedial education to students at public universities and community colleges. Deficits in basic skills cost businesses, colleges, and unprepared graduates as much as \$16 billion annually in lost productivity and remedial costs.

One study indicates that in order to be fully prepared for work and postsecondary education, each student should take a minimum of four years of math and English. Very specific content areas are recommended including Algebra, Geometry, data analysis, and statistics in math, and English courses which include literature, writing, logic and communication skills. Currently, no

states require all students to take all these courses. Missouri and Illinois only require two years of math and three years of English and do not specify the content area that must be covered.

#### **SOME POSSIBLE APPROACHES:**

- Require all students to take four years of math and four years of English as well as other course requirements which will prepare students for work and college, requiring students (and their parents) to “opt out” of this curriculum rather than “opt in.”
- States should require students to pass an exit exam in order to receive their high school diploma. These tests should assess knowledge and skills related to what is needed to be successful in college and the workplace.
- Colleges and universities should stop admitting students who do not enter their institutions ready for that level of academic performance thereby forcing high schools to do a better job in preparing students.

## **IS POST SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR EVERYONE?**

**S**ome people say that as times have changed, it is even more important now than ever to encourage every young high school graduate to continue their formal education at a four year university. Some people advocate that two year community colleges are perfectly good alternatives to the four year university track. Others would argue that any form of ongoing education, be it two or four year colleges, apprenticeships, or trade school is what is needed for everyone after high school. Yet others might say

that commonly heard, “ school isn’t for everyone,” and think that going to work right after high school may be the best alternative for some young people. Consider, what your expectations about college are for your own children or other family members. Are they the same for everyone else?

Studies have shown that overall, the more education a person has, the more income they generate. Four year graduates make almost twice as much as

non-college graduates. While the difference between hourly or annual salary is striking, the difference in lifetime earnings is even more compelling. Someone with a Bachelor's degree will make \$711,280 more over their lifetime than an individual with a high school diploma. Additionally, the more education one has, the more likely they are to be employed and the faster they find work when they are unemployed. While education does not necessarily guarantee employment, the higher the education level, the more competitive a person is in the job market. There are also societal benefits to having more college graduates. As the U.S. is in the midst of an economic shift from an industrial economy to a knowledge economy, having more college educated citizens may indeed lead to the societal benefits of having more people pay more taxes, being more productive and globally competitive, requiring less government support for individuals and families.

What do Bill Gates (Microsoft founder), Ted Waitt (Gateway Computer founder), and David Geffen (Entertainment industry mogul) have in common? None of them have a college degree. According to a Bureau of Labor Statistics national survey of jobs, only 30 percent of all jobs in the U.S. require a college degree. One can point to hundreds of good jobs that are available without higher education or four year degrees. There are several occupations which do not require a four year degree and pay higher wages than most college grads will ever see. Topping the list of careers that require only a high school degree are Air Traffic Controllers who can earn upwards of \$80,000 a year. Other careers that do not require post

secondary education, but pay a livable wage include real estate agents, sales representatives, claims adjusters, inspectors, and criminal investigators. Some people can not afford going to college and do not see the economic tradeoff of being in debt upon graduation as a wise choice. In fact, from a societal standpoint, there are positions which are essential to community functioning in which we all need people without college degrees.

Take the following as an example of how government and private sector may promote programs as alternatives to college. In 2004 the U.S. Department of Labor launched a promotion of skilled trades to high school students to address worker shortages. This focused primarily on the construction trade industry. That same year, a \$2.2 million grant was received by the St. Louis Carpenters Joint Apprenticeship Program to train high school teachers who will pass it along to their students. There are one million new construction jobs expected nationally by 2012.

### **SOME POSSIBLE APPROACHES:**

- In order to be more globally competitive, we must create opportunities for everyone to receive a four year college education. State and federal funding resources should focus on this goal.
- Create a societal standard that accepts two year and technical skill training as viable alternatives to four year college. Everyone does benefit from some kind of post secondary education.
- The adage that “some people are not cut out for college” is true. Society must accept this as well as the need for a workforce that is not college educated. Resources need to be spent to ensure that those without postsecondary education are able to make a living wage and contribute productively to society.

### **HOW CAN EVERY CHILD ENTER SCHOOL “READY TO LEARN?”**

**B**y the year 2000, all children will start school ready to learn” was one of former President George Bush’s national educational goals in 1990. Yet far too often, kindergarten students show up poorly behaved and ill-prepared to learn. In fact, less than half of Missouri children who enter kindergarten can determine “less than” or “more than” when comparing amounts. Just over one third of students entering kindergarten are able to recognize the relationship between letters and their sounds. Factors that assist young children with their readiness to learn are clear and include stable, consistent and loving parental and family relationships, a healthy environment free of toxins such as smoke or lead, effective health and mental health services, and access to high quality child care when parents are away at work. We also know that a child’s future academic success is

largely determined by the quality of their early care and education.

Some say that a primary cause for of this problem is poverty itself. They point to studies showing that more affluent children do better in areas of language development and social emotional skills. Rather than assuming that poor educational outcomes can be corrected through educational reform, supporters of this view say that more attention needs to be paid to the role of non-educational influences such as family income. There is a consistent pattern of income buying access—the more affluent children are two to three times more likely to be enrolled in formal pre-kindergarten settings. Income also buys quality with research showing that even when low-income children are in more formal early learning programs, the quality is poorer.

While acknowledging that family income is a key factor, other research

finds that parents hold the key to promoting school readiness. Parental behavior and activities including reading to children, playing, hugging, and maintaining a consistent routine, stimulate cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development in children long

before they enter school. Yet, only 2 out of 10 parents read to their babies and 45 percent of children over two are read to daily by their parents. Half of parents report not having a daily routines for meals, naps, and bedtimes for their one or two year old child.

**SOME POSSIBLE APPROACHES:**

- States should provide universal pre-kindergarten for all 4 year olds such as what was started in Georgia in 1993. Their program operates like a regular school day—6 ½ hours—and is free to parents. Last year the Georgia Lottery provided the state’s pre-K program with \$250 million. Opponents to this say that universal pre-kindergarten is too expensive of an option.
- Increase resources for programs such as Parents As Teachers which promote parents role and responsibility in early childhood education. Parents should be made more aware of how important it is for them to prepare their child for kindergarten. Opponents say that responsibility is not solely parents and that if this route is chosen it must be combined with other efforts to keep schools and communities accountable.
- State government should encourage higher quality day care provision by not providing subsidies for unlicensed child care facilities, requiring higher minimal credentials and qualifications for providers, and enforcing stricter guidelines regarding the number of children in a home without a daycare license (currently, Missouri allows caregivers to provide care to up to four unrelated children and an unlimited number of related children without being licensed). Proponents say that subsidizing some of the worst child care centers in the state is like “flushing money down the toilet.”
- Rather than relying on traditional methods to fund early childhood programs, alternatives such as TIFs, tax abatements, referendums, and private donations to an early child care foundation should be considered and implemented. It is not solely government’s responsibility to fund such programs and government finances are strained to the point that this should not be a priority for government spending.



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## **FUNDING FOR EDUCATION: MEETING THE NEED**

### **FUNDING EQUITY**

**T**he state of Missouri ranks 33<sup>rd</sup> nationally in the amount of state funding it provides for education, Illinois ranks 46<sup>th</sup>. The main source of income for public schools is the local property tax because education requires a steady stream of funding, one that doesn't fluctuate (such as sales taxes). This reliance on local property taxes allows the financial burden of funding education to be shifted from the state and placed in the hands of the local communities, creating a funding gap, particularly for school districts serving low-income communities. Residents in low-income communities are forced to pay higher property taxes on homes of lower value to fund the basic needs of local schools.

Supporters of the current system of funding for education prefer the local control they are able to have over their schools. Residents feel this allows them to decide what is necessary for the education of their children. Opponents, however, point to the major inequities this creates from district to district. Property values and how those values are assessed vary, especially in comparing the rural and metropolitan school districts. Residents of communities where property values are lower are also living in communities where the income brackets are lower. They are often paying a higher property tax, and thus a higher percentage of their income, to fund local schools. Yet the schools in rural and low-income areas still are financially unable to compete with the richer school districts. Many communities cannot afford to tax themselves a higher percentage to provide more for local schools.

### **SOME ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES:**

- Increase state and federal share of funding for schools. Local communities face the burden of generating funding to support schools while still complying with federal and state education standards. Federal and state governments must work to ensure appropriate funding is provided to schools to meet mandated achievement standards, easing the reliance on local property taxes.
- Earmark additional federal and state money for high poverty school districts, provide financial support based on need.
- Fairly distribute current funding within districts. While funding inequities exist from district to district, they may also exist within districts. District administrators and school boards must work to ensure that each school within the district receives equitable funding, and states must ensure that each district receives adequate funding to reach high standards.

## **SCHOOL CHOICE AND VOUCHERS**

While we take pride in our commitment to offering education to all, we struggle with how to cope with troubled schools and the “achievement gap” that, while closing slightly according to recent studies, continues to separate the achievements of minority and white students. Some say the best way to deal with these problems is to give children in underperforming public schools—schools that are often in poorer districts, populated by minority students—new schooling options, including the chance to get vouchers to attend private schools or the choice to go to charter schools.

Supporters call this approach “school choice,” and think our school system should operate like our economic market and allow consumers to hold public schools accountable. They believe that choice, not additional funding for public schools, is the answer to our education problem. They point out that over the past three decades, per pupil education spending has doubled, but test scores have remained stagnant.

They also believe that public schools that cannot adequately educate students do not deserve public money. Instead, they propose vouchers and charter schools, which they say will give parents more control over their children’s education by providing options while forcing substandard public schools to improve in turn providing a better education for all children.

Critics of this approach say vouchers and charter schools make the overall improvement of public education more difficult by draining valuable resources from our core public school system, which they suggest is the most important institution for educating most students. They believe we should focus on targeting funding to improve our most troubled public schools by reducing teacher/student ratios, boosting teacher pay to increase teacher quality, and improving facilities, from basic systems to the science and computer labs needed to train tomorrow’s workers.

These critics also note that the poorest children do not always benefit from the current school choice options, as vouchers often do not cover the full cost of attending private schools. Still other groups maintain that public dollars should not be used for private education. They point to a return to segregation and to government funds being used for religious education.

There are still others who think we should find a way to do both things at the same time: 1) Allocate more money to under performing schools and, 2) provide educational choices for families, including vouchers and charter schools, even if this means raising taxes or finding other sources of revenue.

### **School Choice Terms:**

**Charter schools** are publicly funded schools that function independently of local school districts and are exempt from certain state regulations, as long as they meet state standards for student achievement.

**School Vouchers** give parents a voucher for the money that would have been spent on their child's education at a public school and allow them to apply this money toward tuition at a private or parochial school.

**Magnet Schools** in the St. Louis region were formed as a part of the desegregation settlement, therefore the goal is integration. African American city residents and non African American county residents are given priority in admission. Participating school districts allow African American students from city schools to attend predominately white county schools, while non African American students are brought into magnet schools.

### **Regional Choice: Where do we stand?**

- ❖ Neither Missouri nor Illinois offer publicly funded vouchers for attending private schools.
- ❖ Illinois currently offers a tax credit for education related expenses of parents sending their children to public, private, or parochial schools. Parents must spend at least \$250 and the credit may not exceed \$500.
- ❖ Missouri law states that charter schools may operate only in the school districts of St. Louis and Kansas City, while in Illinois a maximum of 45 charter schools may operate; 30 in the Chicago metropolitan area and 15 in the rest of the state. Each school is responsible for meeting state achievement standards.
- ❖ Illinois has 27 charter schools serving 13,360 students. Missouri has 24 charter schools serving 12,130 students.
- ❖ Missouri has forty-five magnet schools, 30 of them located in the St. Louis region, while the state of Illinois has 420 magnet schools, but only a few are located outside of the Chicago Metropolitan area.

### **SOME ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES:**

- Create state legislation that would allow for the use of publicly funded school vouchers to be used at any private or parochial school.
- Increase funding for charter schools.
- Apply more resources towards improving public schools such as raising teacher salaries, reducing class sizes, and funding teacher education.

## TAX INCENTIVES

A property tax abatement is an economic subsidy offered by local governments to attract or retain businesses. Essentially, the local government offers to exempt some or all of the business' property value from being taxed, for a specified number of years.

Property tax abatements are seen as a good way to attract business to an area. By offering these subsidies, areas are able to attract business, which may help to revitalize and stabilize areas by bringing in jobs and housing. Many times these jobs are for low-skill workers, and companies may bring along with them opportunities for development of affordable housing in these areas. Legislators and community members often see approaches such as tax abatement as a way to encourage local economic growth and to create a better business climate.

Since property tax is the largest funding source for education, when taxes are forgiven the district loses that income. Schools find themselves losing funding to support the attraction of new business and economic growth. In addition, when companies build facilities in a new area they bring along new residents to the community, including new families with children, creating higher school enrollment and a greater demand for more teachers and classrooms. This creates additional burden on the schools, exacerbated by the company that brought them in not paying taxes to support education. This also increases the burden on other residents. Opponents of such tax subsidies also argue that data

is lacking to show the economic growth these programs promise.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is also a form of economic development subsidy. Local governments may designate an area as a TIF district, anticipating that this area will be a site of redevelopment. Along with the redevelopment of the area comes an anticipated increase in property values and property tax revenues.

A TIF district allows for future property taxes to be divided into two funds. The first fund attached to the original property values of the area continues to go where it always has: schools, police, etc. The second fund is created by the increase of property tax and revenue, all revenue generated from the increase in property tax (the tax increment)-is now designated for subsidizing the redevelopment of the area. These increased property taxes then are no longer available for things like schools and fire protection, but go to pay for roads, sewers, lights, and in some instances privately owned buildings or land, which support further economic development.

This diversion of property taxes may last from 10-30 years depending on state regulations. The debate surrounding TIF tax diversion involves many of the same discussions as the debate surrounding tax abatement. These subsidies seem to encourage economic growth and revitalization of areas, but they run the risk of hurting our schools by diverting needed tax revenue. Another complaint is that the "new" business growth is really just existing businesses moving

from one local community to another,  
creating competition with ourselves.

**SOME ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES:**

- Allow school boards a formal voice in the granting of tax abatement and TIFs. School districts while largely affected by abatements and TIFs are rarely allowed a voice in granting these subsidies. In Missouri, school boards have a seat on the advisory committee granting a TIF, but have no formal say on the granting of tax abatement to corporations. Illinois school boards have no formal say in the granting of tax abatement or TIF.
- States should reimburse school districts the funding lost to tax abatement and TIF. Several states provide funds to local districts to compensate for differences in property wealth from district to district. These funds may offset some of the funding lost to abatements and TIF; however, the funding is usually not sufficient to cover all losses. This is especially true when we consider that assessment of a district's property wealth generally includes all properties, even those receiving tax abatement or TIF.
- Create more local and state regulation of current TIF and tax abatement agreements. Many tax abatement and TIF agreements are long-term deals. States and municipalities must measure the economic outcome of these agreements over the years and re-evaluate the need and effectiveness of such subsidies. Cost benefit analysis of these agreements should be done to measure the benefit of the economic growth to the loss of school revenue.
- Tax abatement and TIF are necessary ways of encouraging economic development and revitalization of some communities. The loss in school revenue is offset by the increase in economic development. This increase in economic development has the potential to then lead to more money for the schools. Therefore, they should be encouraged.



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## **CLOSING THE RACIAL ACHIEVEMENT GAP**

According to the No Child Left Behind Act, schools are now responsible for presenting achievement data by racial group. The picture of disparity which this paints raises the question—how equal is education in St. Louis? Many of our failing schools are located in the poorest neighborhoods, with high concentrations of minority students. How can we as a region ensure that all of our schools are able to educate our children to the standards we as a community set?

It is difficult to connect the racial achievement gap that persists in our region to one single cause or explanation as it is a multi-faceted issue. Expectations, resource distribution, and cultural competency of institutions all play roles in this problem. Each of these aspects is described below followed by some possible alternative approaches to solutions.

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### **SOME FACTS**

- In 2004, Illinois eighth grade math assessments revealed African American students on average scored 35 points lower than their white counterparts. In Missouri, the average was 33 points lower on math assessments.
- In 2001, graduation rates in Missouri showed only 58% of African American students graduate four years after entering high school, while 77% of white students graduated. In Illinois the graduation rates were 53% for African American students and 84% for white students.




## EXPECTATIONS

Expectations have long been linked to outcomes. Referred to as the “Pygmalion Effect,” expectations and standards set for students have a direct relationship to student performance. Low expectations lead to low achievement, but when we set high expectations for our children as students, they rise up to meet that challenge.

The culture of low expectations has long been cited as a leading cause in the low academic achievement of minority students. These expectations arise in schools as well as in communities and

individual homes. Stereotypes of minorities, particularly of African American males, lead to low expectations and a lack of nurturing for these children who are viewed prematurely as problems. According to some, expectations of delinquency and behavior problems become self-fulfilling prophecies in schools, communities, and homes where adults are quick to assume the worst. The alternative to this would be for schools, communities, and families to work together to set high educational standards for all children.



### The Department of Defense Model

The United States Department of Defense Education Activity operates two school systems for children of enlisted personnel in other countries, and on bases located within the U.S. Employing military standards of discipline, training, commitment, and high expectations these schools have been successful in significantly narrowing the achievement gap between white students and minorities with the achievement gap for these schools being well below the national average. Student demographics of these schools are similar to many inner city schools, which are often cited as failing. Forty percent of enrollment are students of color, 50% of the students qualify for reduced price or free lunches, student mobility is at a rate of 35%, and 80% of the students have parents with no education beyond a high school diploma. Assessment tests show high levels of success for all students, but particularly African American and Hispanic students. These schools are successful for a number of reasons. The school provides a culture of high expectations for all its students, is flexible in the designing of its curriculum allowing for changes to meet the needs of the student population. Schools hire quality teachers, provide extensive professional development, and effectively use all available resources. Other factors that may contribute to the high student success is the small size of the schools, the availability of before and after school programs, and the high level of community and parental involvement.



## RESOURCES

In St. Louis and the surrounding areas, schools located in the poorest neighborhoods, have the highest number of minority students, and the lowest number of resources available to them. Availability of resources, financial and

otherwise, is a major factor in the achievement of students. The quality of teachers, including their experience and training, as well as the quality of the curriculum are two key resources needed for student success. Beyond the school

system, resource inequities are found in the communities and homes of these students. Research has shown that minority students are less likely than their white counterparts to have access to in home resources such as the internet, computers, encyclopedias, or even a parent at home in the evening. Due to segregated housing, failing schools are most often located in high-minority,

high-poverty neighborhoods. These communities lack additional resources, such as after school programs, cultural institutions, museums, and parks. All of these resources found in homes and communities contribute to student success. When they are not available, student academic achievement is negatively affected.

### **SOME FACTS**

- In Missouri, 39% of secondary classes in high minority schools are taught by teachers lacking a major or minor in that field compared to only 22% of classes in low minority schools.
- The same is true in Illinois with 37% of classes in high minority schools and only 17% of classes in low minority schools.
- In 2003, of students placed in gifted and talented programs in Missouri only 7% were African American compared to 89% white. In Illinois the numbers were 8% African American and 80% white.
- Looking at suspensions, for the same year: African American students are disproportionately represented. While they make up 17% of the student population in Missouri, they account for 35% of the suspensions.
- African American students make up 21% of the student population in Illinois, yet account for 36% of all suspensions.

### **CULTURALLY COMPETENT SCHOOLS**

Despite growing diversity in our classrooms, the policies, practices, and procedures of the dominant culture remain the accepted approach to learning. This gives children of the dominant culture a significant learning advantage over students of other races and ethnicities who are made to adapt their learning styles in order to succeed.

Culturally competent educators learn to effectively communicate with students from different races, cultures, and classes while respecting the cultural differences they bring to

the classroom. Culturally competent educators also become more aware of their own attitudes toward members of different races and cultures with whom they may be working. There are hidden rules and agendas within economic and cultural structures that affect school institutions. This affects the policies and procedures embedded within the schools as well as the instructor's response to these policies and interactions with individual students and their classrooms.

**SOME ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES:**

In discussion about the racial achievement gap—its causes, its existence, and its solutions—there are many viewpoints as to what could or should be done to achieve high academic performance for all students.

- Some view the achievement gap not as an issue of race, but as an issue of class. People supporting this idea believe that the gap in test scores is not reflective of race, but rather it is due to the socio-economic status of the student's family. They assert that children who are performing poorly do so because they do not have the resources, financially or otherwise, to compete with other children. According to this perspective, the real gap is between children coming from well off homes and neighborhoods versus those who come from poor homes and neighborhoods.
- Among the arguments for closing the achievement gap is the idea of including extra funding earmarked for support services aimed at minority students. Examples would include developing before and after school programs as well as additional tutoring. Funds could also be used to work with parents of minority students on ways to help their child at home. Opponents argue it isn't fair to spend more money on minority students. All children need funding to support their education and all children should be funded equally. They believe it isn't the government or community's responsibility to make up for the differences between economic levels tied to the funding gap. All children should be funded equally at school and beyond that it is the parent's responsibility to provide for their child's educational needs.
- Still others have a different perspective. Some believe the problem is not in the schools or the level of funding provided for the children, but in homes and communities. Aligning standards, setting flexible curriculums, etc. does nothing if the child does not have a stable home environment with the support needed to be successful in school. They trace the root of the achievement gap to what is being done in the homes, citing a lack of parent involvement in their child's education, a lack of discipline for children in their homes and communities, and attitude of indifference and low expectations for the child's educational achievement. The belief is that the school and teachers can only instruct, they can't reinforce the behaviors at home or ensure that a child's homework is complete, or that the child has someone to help with his or her studies. To fix the problem, we have to start at home and remedy those issues first.
- Some believe that the fact that research shows us how to fix the problem combined with the fact that our community is not implementing these measures, indicates that there is an element of racism in our society that continues to perpetuate the racial achievement gap. Research has shown that setting higher standards, aligning curriculum to these standards, equitably distributing resources, involving parents in schools, and increasing the cultural competency of schools would all help close the gap. What is needed is the political will to do this.