

AMERICAN APARTHEID EDUCATION:  
THE BLACK-WHITE ACHIEVEMENT GAP  
IN UNITED STATES PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

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## ABSTRACT

Education has a revered place in society: it is one institution seen as vital for all members of a society, as well as for the reproduction of the society as a whole. However, such an institution is susceptible to the ills of developed society. This notion is exemplified by the large disparities that have emerged within both the educational performance and overall attainment of certain groups of students. These groups tend to be broken down by various social identifiers, such as one's gender, social class, and especially race. Specifically, black students in the United States education system are victim to the worst disparity in both educational performance and attainment. This disparity has been well studied and researched, and is infamously known as the black-white achievement gap. The black-white achievement gap exists at all levels of the education spectrum, starting as young as pre-kindergarten and extending into and throughout adult life. The gap is rooted in many complex causes, such as economics and familial background. As each new root cause is identified, we come that much closer to building the bridge over this chasm. To this point, multiple attempts have been made to close the gap, many without success. However, certain individual schools have adopted revolutionary tactics in an attempt to bridge the achievement gap, and some are finally finding success that has eluded previous attempts to solve this deep-seated societal issue.

## THE SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

The success of any given society can be measured by its longevity. A successful society maintains enduring and ongoing concerns that benefit many from varied positions of social class, status, and with personal orientation. Many societies of differing power structures rise to great heights, only to fall rapidly back, losing their grip on a society that was once totally in a dominant group's control. Many authoritarian and totalitarian societies witness this sort of rapid rise and equally, if not more, rapid fall. The issues with societies such as these is their lack of ability to reproduce societal members with similar values, beliefs, and expectations that conform to a dominant and arbitrary worldview. If nothing else, a society must be able to reproduce societal members with similar values as those that came before them, and that such values make sense, from their personal orientation, to those given the task of recreating society.

However, aggressive, unequal, and totalitarian societies often find this reproduction difficult, as subsequent generations find trouble accepting the values and beliefs of those that came before. Muzafer Sherif, a Turkish-American social psychologist, coined the idea of "least arbitrary norms." This set of norms, Sherif states, occurs when societal expectations are transmitted to younger members of a society via their older counterparts and when the younger members recognize the logic of such expectations. The relative arbitrariness of these norms significantly affects the degree of conformity by the younger, new members of the society<sup>1</sup>. In effect, "least arbitrary" means that norms that are established in everyday life remain relevant and applicable to the younger generation. As societies live and reproduce, least arbitrary norms follow a natural progression in ideas and belief systems. However, belief systems become outdated, and least arbitrary norms can become replaced by most arbitrary norms. The younger

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<sup>1</sup> Sherif, M., & Sherif, C. W. (1965). *Problems of youth: Transition to adulthood in a changing world*. Chicago: Aldine Pub.

generation of societal members often refuse to maintain a position of subjugation to such old-fashioned ideas. As such, Sherif postulates, unequal social systems promoting totalitarian subordination will cease to be functional in due time as younger generations refuse to accept the oppressive views of their fathers' and their fathers' fathers'.

Perhaps an important application of such a proposition exists in the education system of a given society. Not only does education of younger members in society oftentimes advance society, it also represents an integral part of the reproduction of members that is vital for societal longevity. In his study of the moral order of education in 14<sup>th</sup> century Europe, Emile Durkheim stated that education consists of the “methodical socialization of the young generation.”<sup>2</sup> Durkheim stressed the importance of a uniform definition of education that stressed equal access to, at least, the defined starting points of an educational process in order to achieve the aforementioned socialization. However, defining education and its process are not simple tasks. The system of education within any society, but especially in the modern Western world, consists of many moving parts and many different emergent objectives. It is essential, then, to consider educational systems both past and present in order to define what education is to a given society.

After much deliberation, Durkheim arrived at the following definition of education: “[Education’s] object is to arouse and to develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual, and moral states which are demanded of him by...the political society as a whole.” As such, education has a collective function above all and exists in order to perpetuate and reinforce the broader and more global expectations that society expects from its members while also maintaining a certain degree of necessary diversity. This diversity stems from the notion that

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<sup>2</sup> Durkheim, E. (1956). *Education and sociology*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press

as children go through the educational system, they will specialize and be conditioned for future roles based on their strengths and their limitations. Education, then, plays a large role in this specialization as students “have different functions to fulfill” and must be adapted to “what [they] must do.”<sup>3</sup>

Understanding that at least a moderate amount of diversity is needed and expected to result from the education system, it makes sense that disparities will emerge. A society that emphasizes exclusively, highly educated health professionals would be unable to function effectively in the same way that a society that emphasizes exclusively, strictly and narrowly educated physical laborers would be unable to function. Each society in the given example would be unable to manage emergent and evolutionary problems that coincide with development and growth. However, quoting philosopher Emmanuel Kant, “the end of education is to develop, in each individual, all the perfection of which he is capable,” a point which Durkheim emphasizes by claiming the most important object of education is to carry “each individual...to their highest point of perfection.”<sup>3</sup>

Durkheim’s view of society and education emphasized a very optimistic view of willful coordination of tasks towards agreed upon ends. While we often maintain that total diversity is a vital part of educational coordination, Western educational systems, especially in the United States, tend to favor certain students over others, emphasizing a type of homogeneity that would distress Durkheim. Perhaps the most important takeaway from Durkheim’s *Education and Sociology* is the notion that “the education of our children should not depend upon the chance of their having been born here or there, of some parents rather than others,” a statement that is perhaps the spiritual successor of Max Weber’s notion of life chances.

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<sup>3</sup> Durkheim, E. (1956). *Education and sociology*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press

While Weber did not seek to provide an elaborate definition of life chances, this concept appears in much of his work and lays the foundation for Weber's notion of society. Simply, life chances are those opportunities that a person is presented with in his or her life to attain social mobility. Oftentimes, life chances are tied directly into social class. In his comprehensive dictionary on Max Weber, Richard Swedberg states: "we may speak of a class when a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, insofar as this component is represented...by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income."<sup>4</sup> Weber displays a similar sentiment in *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, stating "the primary practical manifestation of status with respect to social stratification [is]...often monopolistic appropriation of privileged economic opportunities."<sup>5</sup> Essentially, life chances become a method of measuring one's economic opportunities. Especially in modern society, social mobility without accompanying wealth and income is, more or less, impossible. Life chances, then, are focused on the idea that some individuals in society are presented with more opportunities for income and economic gain than others.

Unfortunately, the process of obtaining life chances resembles a sort of domino effect. Those individuals with many life chances knock their first domino down, and the chain remains unbroken, with all of the dominos falling until the last one. Pretend for a second that these dominos represent that individual's life chances. As a life chance is presented and subsequently taken advantage of, this positive social mobility creates more opportunities for movement. On the other hand, an individual with few life chances may have a shorter chain of dominos. These individuals are not necessarily ignoring the advantages of the life chances that are presented to

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<sup>4</sup> Swedberg, R., & Agevall, O. (2005). *The Max Weber dictionary: Key words and central concepts*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Social Sciences.

<sup>5</sup> Weber, M., Henderson, A. M., & Parsons, T. (1947). *Max Weber, the theory of social and economic organization*. New York: Oxford University Press.

them. More so, it's that at some point, the opportunities cease to be present. This cessation represents the notion that the "distribution of life chances [is] 'initial' rather than lifelong,"<sup>6</sup> namely the exact opposite of what Durkheim wished to see within the education system.

Durkheim, then, believes that education should provide necessary foundations for every student, regardless of class and status, to reach their fullest potential. Education, for Durkheim should represent "the great equalizer." A society's education system is intended to provide a way out, so to speak, for those individuals who were born into situations where life chances were few and far between. An individual's lack of consistent life chances should not affect his or her educational outcomes. However, as is evident by simply taking a glance at the United States' education outcomes, this benevolent view does not appear in practice. However, simply because such an ideal does not appear 'practical' in the present, at the very least, it can be thought of as a remote possibility. Science is on Durkheim's side when he stated that "all men are born with equal aptitudes;" (and, concomitantly, all should have, at least from the start, equal opportunities) Jaekyung Lee observed in 2004 that "no one has found genetic evidence indicating that one racial group has less innate intellectual ability than others."<sup>7</sup> Durkheim stresses that education is so important that it makes for differences between persons in society; this notion is troubling when the existence of severe patterns of educational disparity exist in a society such as the United States.

An alternative view of the purpose of the education system lies in a very critical theory developed by Karl Marx emphasizing social reproduction. In layman's terms, social reproduction involves the argument that "Schools are not institutions of equal opportunity but mechanisms for

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<sup>6</sup> Daston, L. (2008). Life, chance & life chances. *Daedalus*, 137(1), 6.

<sup>7</sup> Lee, J. (2004). Multiple Facets of Inequity in Racial and Ethnic Achievement Gaps. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 79(2), 62.



perpetuating social inequalities.”<sup>8</sup> In this sense, any disparities that emerge from the education system are purposeful, making this view an especially troubling one when discussing the widespread gap in educational attainment in the United States. However, this view is not without its grounds. Few are surprised by the observation that education remains a source of inequality. The solution, however, seems to involve intense competition rather than creative coordination. Fortunately, with confidence I can say that most educators and participants in the United States education system do not wish to perpetuate inequalities, and as such would never view such a perpetuation as the true purpose of the education system.

If we accept Durkheim’s assumption that all men are born with equal ability as supported by scientific evidence and suspend Marx’s theory of social reproduction, then disparities in educational attainment cannot be chalked up simply to genetic differences in intellectual aptitude or the purposeful disparaging of minority social groups in administration offices. This more optimistic reason for disparity, beyond genetic differences, is good news for those racial groups that at one point were told they were intellectually inferior, namely African Americans in the United States.

However, as we will discuss, the observed educational disparities rooted in multiple separate social locations. Not only are black students subjected to an education institution that systemically undermines their avenues for success, but across the social landscape, black students are also placed at severe disadvantages. Black students overwhelmingly come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and single-parent families compared to their white peers. Additionally, the family that black students do have are more than likely not college educated, and perhaps hold hostile views towards education based on their own experiences. As will

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<sup>8</sup> Collins, J. (2009). Social Reproduction in Classrooms and Schools. *Annu. Rev. Anthropol.* Annual Review of Anthropology, 38(1), 35.

become evident, the culmination of these factors has created an educational gap between specifically two distinct groups of students, and such a gap is not easy to bridge.

### THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

In order to understand the implications of these disparities, it is essential to know the details of the educational gap experienced by certain groups within the United States. This disparity is known quite commonly as the achievement gap and has been a heavily studied and researched phenomenon within the education field in the United States for quite some time. The achievement gap is most notably between black students and white students within the public school system. The achievement gap extends across all areas of education: standardized test scores, college readiness, general performance, and school completion rates, to name a few, and it is a problem that seemed, at one point, on its way to resolution. During the integration period of the Civil Rights Era and then extending into the 1970s and 1980s, the achievement gap narrowed on all fronts. Black student dropout rates decreased significantly and annually, and serious headway was made in black student performance in both mathematics and reading. However, since 1988, the achievement gap has either widened or stayed constant annually.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the 1990s represented the worst period for educational equality in quite some time, with the gap in mathematics specifically increasing substantially.<sup>10</sup>

In the long term, differences can be noted generally by percentage of persons with certain levels of educational attainment. Across the board, white students complete more schooling than black students. In 2014, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) issued a report that

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<sup>9</sup> Flores, A. (2008). Examining Disparities in Mathematics Education: Achievement Gap or Opportunity Gap? *The High School Journal*, 91(1), 29-42.

<sup>10</sup> Lee, J. (2004). Multiple Facets of Inequity in Racial and Ethnic Achievement Gaps. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 79(2), 51-73.

broke down levels of attainment by race and ethnicity in the United States of persons ages 25 to 29. NCES reported that, in 2014, 95.6% of white persons aged 25 to 29 had at least a high school diploma, whereas a comparable, but lower, 91.9% of black persons had at least this amount of education. Moving just one rung up the ladder, however, the gap becomes quite a lot larger. In 2014, 40.8% of white persons aged 25 to 29 had at least a bachelor's degree compared to a mere 22.4% of black persons of the same age.<sup>11</sup>

It may appear due to fundamental financial differences between the racial groupings that this difference in educational attainment in the United States is an economic issue more than it is a social one. It does not need to be said that college in the United States is a rather expensive venture, and people of color generally have lower incomes than their white counterparts. It can be and often is assumed, then, that black students don't receive a college degree due to financial reasons instead of an underlying issue within the education system. However, as mentioned, the disparities between black and white students exist at every point on the education spectrum in the United States. In fact, the inequalities experienced by black students start from the ground up. Another report by the NCES tested both white and black students in reading and mathematics as they entered kindergarten in fall 2010, and then tested them again in spring 2012 at the conclusion of their first grade year. The results, unfortunately, are rather startling. The students enter kindergarten testing at nearly identical levels: a mean score of 38.8 in reading for white students compared to a mean score of 36.0 for black students. A year and a half later, however, the difference between these scores increased significantly, resulting in a mean score of 72.4 for white students and 67.0 for black students. A similar yet more dramatic trend can be observed in

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<sup>11</sup> Percentage of persons 25 to 29 years old with selected levels of educational attainment, by race/ethnicity and sex: Selected years, 1920 through 2014. (n.d.). Retrieved December 13, 2015, from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14\\_104.20.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_104.20.asp)

the mean mathematics scores, which began at 33.1 and 27.0 for white and black kindergarten students respectively and, in the same year and a half, grew to 66.7 for white students and 56.7 for black students.<sup>12</sup>

The implications of these results are less impactful when considering the difference between the mean outcomes, but become more significant when the difference in growth between the students is noted. White students in both categories started a few marks higher than their black counterparts, which is largely attributed to child rearing and attitudes about education within the family prior to schooling. However, white students outpaced black students in both categories even having started with higher scores. Another study found similar results. Black students began kindergarten approximately .60 standard deviations below white students in mathematics and .40 standard deviations below in reading. Over each of the first four years of schooling, kindergarten through third grade, these differences grew by .10 standard deviations annually.<sup>13</sup> Both of these studies serve to suggest that school exacerbates inequalities rather than reduces them. The question that remains, though, is how do these disparities grow even when black and white students are receiving equal education?

The answer is this: they don't. Once again, a widely accepted explanation regarding the achievement gap lies in economics. School systems are locally funded and, as such, low income areas receive less funding for their schools.<sup>14</sup> All too often, a lack of funding is viewed as the sole reason black students are afforded less quality education than their white counterparts.

Certainly, school funding plays an important role in the quality of a student's education, but to

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<sup>12</sup> Average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scale score of 4th-grade public school students and percentage attaining reading achievement levels, by state: Selected years, 1992 through 2013. (n.d.). Retrieved December 13, 2015, from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14\\_221.40.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_221.40.asp)

<sup>13</sup> Murnane, R. J., Willett, J. B., Bub, K. L., & McCartney, K. (2006). Understanding Trends in the Black-White Achievement Gaps during the First Years of School. *Brookings-Wharton Papers on Urban Affairs*, 2006(1), 97-135.

<sup>14</sup> Flores, A. (2008). Examining Disparities in Mathematics Education: Achievement Gap or Opportunity Gap? *The High School Journal*, 91(1), 29-42.

claim that funding is the only issue at hand is to suffer from severe tunnel vision. The reality looks quite a bit different: less than one-third of the racial achievement gap between black and white students can be attributed to differences in economic resources.<sup>15</sup> The achievement gap is far more complex than how mere economic explanations make it seem. The problem is much deeper, as indicated by the fact that even when comparing black and white students of comparable or equal income levels, there still exists an achievement gap as measured by standardized test scores.<sup>16</sup>

When observing the gap between black and white students SAT scores, this point only becomes more salient. While local funding of schools is an important consideration, it is also argued that family income plays a very significant role in the educational outcomes of students. Once again, families of color tend to be lower income, and as such cannot afford educational opportunities that middle or upper-class families can, such as private tutors or supplemental learning courses over the summer. One unsettling statistic shows that black students from high income families of more than \$200,000 a year scored, on average, lower on the SAT than did white students from families with incomes between \$20,000 and \$40,000.<sup>17</sup>

Such a statistic has several explanations. One prominent consequence involves the illustration of an inherent inferior cognitive ability of black students compared to white students, which is an extremely dated view and lacks ongoing supporting evidence in the form of replications, or depicts an educational problem that is much larger than economics. Just as education itself is a system of many moving parts with a variety of different objectives, the

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<sup>15</sup> Princeton Professor Searches for a New Explanation for the Black-White Educational Achievement Gap. (2008). Princeton Professor Searches for a New Explanation for the Black-White Educational Achievement Gap. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, (60), 21–22.

<sup>16</sup> Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(7), 3-12.

<sup>17</sup> The JBHE Foundation, Inc. (2009). Why Family Income Differences Don't Explain the Racial Gap in SAT Scores. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 62, 10-12.

achievement gap is an equally complex issue within an already complex system. There is no one explanation for the persistence of the gap; it is a multifaceted issue and, as such, requires a multifaceted diagnosis. As stated by Flores when discussing disparities in mathematics education, “It is important to recognize a symptom such as low achievement, [but] it is even more critical to understand and address its underlying causes.”<sup>18</sup>

### THE HISTORICAL GROUNDING OF THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

A largely overlooked yet compelling cause of the achievement gap lies in the history of education within the United States. It rarely comes into consideration that “schooling for whites in this country extends back for several centuries,” since its founding. Yet, “no such centuries-long positive history” exists for minorities and people of color, especially African Americans who were disallowed education during the period of slavery in the United States.<sup>19</sup> We need not even go back that far to observe blatant injustices and inequalities enacted against black students in this country. It was not until the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas* decision that black students were even allowed to attend the same school as white students. Prior to that, African Americans attended “separate but equal” schools designated exclusively for students of color. However, these schools were far from equal. During this time, “more than one-quarter of the racial gap in children’s literacy rates could be explained by differences in easy-to-measure variables, such as school year length and per pupil expenditure.”<sup>20</sup>

Even after the *Brown* decision, proper measures were not taken to permanently integrate school systems. While segregation for black students has certainly dropped compared to its

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<sup>18</sup> Flores, A. (2008). Examining Disparities in Mathematics Education: Achievement Gap or Opportunity Gap? *The High School Journal*, 91(1), 39.

<sup>19</sup> Gardner, D. (2007). Confronting the Achievement Gap. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 88(7), 544.

<sup>20</sup> Why Family Income Differences Don't Explain the Racial Gap in SAT Scores. (1998). *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, (20), 6.

levels in the 1950s and prior, the recent trend is toward a more increased and somewhat stealthy segregation (Lee, 2004). In all honesty, it could be called more than just a trend, because it seems all too intentional. Over one fourth of black students in the Northeast and Midwest attend what Jonathon Kozol has aptly termed “apartheid schools,” in which 99 to 100 percent of the students are nonwhite.<sup>21</sup> Kozol offers up the reasoning that in the 1954 *Brown* decision, the court made no accommodation for the possibilities of a redemptive version of apartheid education. In simpler terms, the court made no measures to ensure that re-segregation would not become the reality it is today. Granted, segregation today is not directly the result of some public policy.

However, political bodies have made no effort to stop it from happening. Middle-class and upper middle-class white families have not only fled majority minority schools and school districts, but have taken up arms and have demanded that their school officials carve out “new domains of pedagogic isolation to provide their children with the exclusive opportunities they believe that they deserve.”<sup>22</sup> While it is not wrong to want the best for one’s children, it is wrong to demand quality education at the expense of others. Perhaps those parents do not realize this is what is occurring, but as they flee majority minority schools to attend predominantly white schools a further distance away, the students left over at the prior school suffer.

An argument that could be made by these parents with students in majority minority schools is that they do not want their children to suffer from either the poor funding of their current school – which is disturbingly probable, considering across 30 states, high minority districts received less money per child than low minority district<sup>23</sup> – or they do not want their child’s work ethic to be affected by the less ambitious minority students. The latter is a common

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<sup>21</sup> Kozol, J. (2005). *The shame of the nation: The restoration of apartheid schooling in America*. New York: Crown.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(7), 3-12.

misconception; an idea rooted in a “bad culture theory” that suggests black students discourage one another from being academically ambitious.<sup>24</sup> In reality, it is quite the contrary. In a 2006 study, black students were more likely to report that their black peers thought it was important to study and make good grades than were white students.<sup>25</sup>

Regardless, white middle class families are fleeing these school districts and their flight does more harm than they think. Relevant studies on the effects of racial desegregation in schools found that black students’ test scores increased with integration whereas white students’ scores were unaffected.<sup>26</sup> The white students, then, would have been no worse for wear had their parents allowed them to stay in a school attended mostly by minority students – or what are referred to as majority-minority schools – whereas the black students in that school benefited from the integration. This makes Kozol’s notion of “legal apartheid schooling” even more troubling. If black students and students of color benefit from integration, apartheid schools that have either 0 or 1 percent white enrollment are disadvantageous to the students within them from the start.

The black students remaining in majority-minority schools suffer in more ways than one when the white students leave. Aside from benefiting from the exposure to students of a different ethnicity, majority minority schools in lower income areas are plagued by a host of other problems, the first of which is the quality of teachers. It should be noted that this is in no means a complaint levied against teachers. Rather, it is a complaint levied against policymakers who have allowed re-segregation to run rampant creating schools that are difficult to work in with an

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<sup>24</sup> Princeton Professor Searches for a New Explanation for the Black-White Educational Achievement Gap. (2008). Princeton Professor Searches for a New Explanation for the Black-White Educational Achievement Gap. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, (60), 21–22.

<sup>25</sup> Diamond, J. B.. (2006). Still Separate and Unequal: Examining Race, Opportunity, and School Achievement in "Integrated" Suburbs. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 75(3), 495–505.

<sup>26</sup> Lee, J. (2004). Multiple Facets of Inequity in Racial and Ethnic Achievement Gaps. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 79(2), 51-73.



inability to competitively compensate their teachers. The statistics are everywhere: black students are twice as likely to be taught by an inexperienced teacher with three years or less experience than their white counterparts;<sup>27</sup> black students are significantly more likely to be taught by a novice or out of field teacher than are white students.<sup>28</sup> Black students, then, who remain at schools from which white families flee are further disadvantaged because experienced teachers are following the middle class white families. This is to no fault of the teachers; they are simply following the funding. However, we are left with a tremendous problem: those students who most need highly skilled teachers are the least likely to have them, further magnifying inequalities.

The problem with teachers is largely unrelated to black students benefitting from having white peers; it's simply an unfortunate consequence of an already unfortunate situation. It could be assumed, then, that the situation for black students who remain in schools with at least a moderate white enrollment is less bleak. However, it should come as no surprise that their situation is equally problematic. Use Lakeside High School, as an example. Lakeside is an impressive high school located in a suburb of the Midwest. Black students compose 40% of the student body whereas white students represent a larger but comparable 50%. These students, both black and white attending the same school, would assuredly get the same quality of education. However, statistics once again prove that this ideal hypothesis is not based in reality. In terms of advanced mathematics courses, black students represent only 8% of those students enrolled in AP Calculus. White students, on the other hand, compose a whopping 82%.<sup>29</sup> This

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<sup>27</sup> Flores, A. (2008). Examining Disparities in Mathematics Education: Achievement Gap or Opportunity Gap? *The High School Journal*, 91(1), 29-42.

<sup>28</sup> Murnane, R. J., Willett, J. B., Bub, K. L., & McCartney, K. (2006). Understanding Trends in the Black-White Achievement Gaps during the First Years of School. *Brookings-Wharton Papers on Urban Affairs*, 2006(1), 97-135.

<sup>29</sup> Diamond, J. B.. (2006). Still Separate and Unequal: Examining Race, Opportunity, and School Achievement in "Integrated" Suburbs. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 75(3), 495-505.

disparity is not an issue based in black culture; actual studies and actual facts tell us that. One could assume that black students are less ambitious than their white peers. Such an assumption ignores an institutional problem of which, tragically, black students have little or no control. Lack of ambition feeds into a stereotype that also provides a diversion from the fact that discrimination in schools has systemic roots in need of examination.

Black students are systematically placed in the least advantaged locations for learning inside the schools they attend<sup>30</sup> through a process called tracking. Tracking involves placing students with other students of similar ability so as to tailor their education experience to their own potential. In theory, tracking sounds ideal: it allows students who would otherwise outpace the class engage in more challenging work while catering to students who may struggle or take longer to understand the information. However, low-tracked students are often paid far less attention than their higher tracked peers. Not surprisingly, black students and students of color are disproportionately tracked at lower levels.<sup>31</sup>

Grouping and tracking based on skill can start as early as first grade, and may thus significantly contribute to the black-white achievement gap. As discussed earlier, black students are already outpaced by their white peers by the end of first grade. If black students are then tracked into slower learning groups, the distance between black and white students will only become larger. Further, studies illustrate that “black students fall behind white students during kindergarten and first grade, but not the summer in between.”<sup>32</sup> This distinction is important to make as it means white students are not outpacing black students by way of summer programs or other educational opportunities of which low income minority families may not have access.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Condron, D. J. (2009). Social Class, School and Non-School Environments, and Black/White Inequalities in Children's Learning. *American Sociological Review*, 74(5), 685-708.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

Rather, white students are outpacing black students while sitting right next to them in the same classroom.

White students do have access to opportunities and avenues of support that many black students do not have. First and foremost, black students come from families who were exposed to a less favorable school system. Black students today have parents that were in school shortly after integration, and grandparents who likely went to a segregated school. Due to this history, black parents' own experience with school was negative; they are less inclined to be involved with their child's education.<sup>33</sup> Parental involvement is important and often carries with it a positive relationship with school performance. However, when a black student's parents are less than enthusiastic or apathetic about their education, it becomes a perpetual problem. The black student will grow up and eventually have kids of his or her own, and then will likely be equally uninvolved with their own child's schooling due to their own negative experiences.

It is troubling enough to have uninvolved and absent parents for a child's schooling, but the issue is further problematic when discussing college-bound or college hopeful black students. Most black students taking college-entrance standardized tests, either the SAT or the ACT, are likely to be first generation college students, even when they come from a high-income family.<sup>34</sup> White students, on the other hand, are very unlikely to be the first college attendee or graduate in their family and often have numerous family members, such as aunts, uncles, and grandparents who have also attended college. Not only does this further the student's understanding of the college system, but places an expectation on them to go to college that is absent for black students. Black students are encouraged to be first generation college students, yet are often not

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<sup>33</sup> Gardner, D. (2007). Confronting the Achievement Gap. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 88(7), 542-546.

<sup>34</sup> The JBHE Foundation, Inc. (2009). Why Family Income Differences Don't Explain the Racial Gap in SAT Scores. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 62, 10-12.

supported in an appropriate way to make this a reality. For proof on that, note everything up until this point. Not only are their parents less likely to have gone to college, but even high income black parents are more likely to work multiple jobs, taking them away from the home more often than white parents.<sup>35</sup> As such, the parents are around less frequently to assist with their child's schooling assuming their own experience wasn't negative enough to turn them away from it. To add final insult to injury, black students are also much more likely to live in poverty and have single-parent homes.<sup>36</sup> All of these factors together make the social support network for black students very small while their white peers are surrounded by highly educated family members who expect nothing less than for their child to attain a college degree.

To this point, many sociological factors that work to affect the achievement gap between black students and white students have been identified, but perhaps the most impactful factor is one that is less sociological than the rest. In a controversial study conducted by Robert Rosenthal, a handful of students were selected at random to be determined "bloomers," or those students who had more potential to learn than others, after being administered a nonverbal test of intelligence. After the tests were conducted, Rosenthal identified the bloomers to the teacher. The students were never told if they were determined to be bloomers or not. As Rosenthal states in a summary of his study, "the only difference between [the groups], then, was in the minds of the teachers."<sup>37</sup> After 8 weeks, the test was re-administered and those students who had been identified as bloomers performed significantly better than the students who were not so identified.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Lee, J. (2004). Multiple Facets of Inequity in Racial and Ethnic Achievement Gaps. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 79(2), 51-73.

<sup>37</sup> Rosenthal, R. (1994). Interpersonal Expectancy Effects: A 30-Year Perspective. *Current Directions in Psychological Science* *Current Directions in Psychol Sci*, 3(6), 177.

This phenomenon, the Pygmalion effect, continues to emerge in many real world educational situations. The Pygmalion effect emphasizes the idea that if a subject is expected to perform better or be brighter by their observer or tester, then that expectation will become a reality. While not intentionally done in other actual schooling situations, teacher expectations of students undoubtedly influence the performance of the students. Teachers oftentimes adopt the notion that black students and students of color simply lack the potential of a white student. As such, “teachers go through the motions of educating these children [black students] pay lip service to the ideals, but don’t believe, deep down, that these children will ever catch up.”<sup>38</sup> The students, of course, are never told they lack potential, but neither were the children in the Pygmalion study told they were bloomers. Regardless of the student’s awareness, the mindset of the teacher has a resounding effect.

#### ATTEMPTING TO BRIDGE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Unfortunately, such an effect has consequences for too many black students in the United States. I argue that without a doubt, the effect contributes to the low achievement rates of minority students in our society. However, we have convinced not only ourselves but the larger society that these children simply can’t learn. We’ve done it all. A long line of failed initiatives is simply followed by other more expensive failed initiatives and programs. Money is poured into the gap and it never seems to fill.<sup>39</sup> Effort after effort is doomed to fail because we have convinced ourselves that the achievement gap is an unsolvable problem. As Kozol states in his

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<sup>38</sup> Gardner, D. (2007). *Confronting the Achievement Gap*. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 88(7), 545.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

book *The Shame of the Nation*: “it is hard to convince young people they ‘can learn’ when they are cordoned off by a society that isn’t sure they really can.”<sup>40</sup>

The fact of the matter is society expects students of color to fail and sets them up appropriately. Higher standards and expectations are insistently demanded of urban principals and their teachers and the students in their schools, but far lower standards appear to be expected of the dominant society that has so isolated these children in unequal schooling institutions.<sup>41</sup> It is apparent, then, that the achievement gap between black and white students is far from resolved. Raising teacher expectations isn’t enough. Funding low income schools more heavily isn’t enough. Creating social support systems for black students and students of color isn’t enough. We must do all of that and more. As stated before, no centuries-long history of positive education exists for students of color. We as a society have sat idly by hoping that these students would make up the ground they were disallowed from for so many years, but they haven’t because the system often works against them. Hope is not lost and nor should it be. Considerable work needs to be done to bridge this gap, but utilizing other education systems around the globe and choosing to learn from our own mistakes are both steps we can and should take in order to right this injustice. As Americans, we pride ourselves of maintaining the ideals of equity and justice as hallmarks of our democracy, and we have grossly failed on both of these promises to a large group of American people.<sup>42</sup>

Recall Muzafer Sherif, a sociologist aforementioned for his concept of least arbitrary norms. Sherif championed another notion called superordinate goals, defined as “goals which are compelling and highly appealing to members of two or more groups in conflict, but which cannot

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<sup>40</sup> Kozol, J. (2005). *The shame of the nation: The restoration of apartheid schooling in America*. New York: Crown.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(7), 3-12.

be attained by the resources...of the groups separately...attained only when groups pull together.”<sup>43</sup> In a sense, education is very much a type of superordinate goal that Sherif is speaking about. The greater and equal education of an entire society is difficult to balance, as seen throughout this paper, but is a goal that should help to reduce intergroup conflict by facilitating joint efforts and collaboration. Unfortunately, we see that this is anything but the case in the United States. While work is being done on many different fronts to improve the education system in this country, there remains a certain degree of privilege and self-interest. Why should white students stay in majority minority schools if it only serves to help the other students without benefit to the white students? Why should parents settle for the most equal education for their child if they can find, afford, or seek out better alternatives? The superordinate goal of holistic and equal education has, unfortunately, done anything but facilitate cooperation between conflicting groups.

Perhaps this is because the United States currently finds itself in a period of emergence, as George Herbert Mead (1932) termed it. Given the relatively recent history of the United States, it was not long ago that inequalities in education were institutional and, more or less, intentional. However, as American society has progressed, so have our ideals and belief systems. Americans find themselves breaking free from a period of oppression and into a period of tolerance, but this break is not made easy. Mead defines the present as “a time in between the old and the new,” or the “moving from one social system to another.” This change does not come easy, however, and carries with it a lot of residuals from the previous social system. Change does not happen all at once; rather it happens over long stretches of time. Given that, Mead describes

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<sup>43</sup> Sherif, M. (1958). Superordinate Goals in the Reduction of Intergroup Conflict. *American Journal of Sociology*, 63(4), 352.

a characteristic societies experience when moving from one system to another: “[the] carrying on of identical conditions from the past into the present.”<sup>44</sup>

Mead is suggesting that the shifting from one social system to another is not an overnight affair. Rather, it is a process of readjustment, and processes take time. This process, however, involves a certain degree of fear towards change. People do not change social systems because they want to; they change such systems because they perceive a need to adjust. However, as some may see change as necessary, others may desire to attach themselves and the system to the fleeting ideas of the past. In the case of education, these ideas are represented by the separate but equal doctrine of the Civil Rights Era, or, even more extreme, ideas rooted in the era of slavery in the United States. People in society do not resist change but they do tend to resist change all at once. It makes sense that, after centuries of slavery and second-class citizenship, black students often fall short of white student achievement. What is troubling is not that the disparity exists, per se, but that it continues to despite our “best” efforts to bridge the gap. This begs the question, though: are we really putting our best effort forward when it comes to closing the black-white education achievement gap? The short answer is no, the long answer is below.

Travel back in time with me to 1896, a period of deep racial discrimination and segregation in the United States. Riding off of the relatively recent conclusion of the Civil War, black Americans were struggling to be considered equal citizens by those stuck in Mead’s proverbial “present” – a period of readjusting to a new social system while attached to an old, oppressive social system. During this particular year, the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court case reached its divisive ruling: “segregation...was not discrimination.”<sup>45</sup> This ruling allowed

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<sup>44</sup> Mead, G. H., & Murphy, A. E. (1932). *The philosophy of the present*. Chicago: Open court Publishing.

<sup>45</sup> Separate but Equal - Separate Is Not Equal. (n.d.). Retrieved March 15, 2016, from <http://americanhistory.si.edu/brown/history/1-segregated/separate-but-equal.html>



facilities and institutions could be separated by race so long as they were “equal.” The ruling did not consider, at least in any real depth, measures to make sure that facilities and institutions would be equal, not that this step would have made this decision any less controversial. However, because of that, schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century were allowed to be segregated. This decision was not reversed until the landmark aforementioned 1954 (nearly 60 years later) case *Brown vs. Board of Education Topeka, Kansas*, which found that “segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children.”<sup>46</sup>

Travel back in time with me again, to a much earlier portion of this analysis and recall Karl Marx’s theory of social reproduction. During the period of the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* case, social reproduction was very much the purpose of the American education system. While the segregated schools claimed to be equal, actually having been so would not have changed the relevance of social reproduction. At the heart of it, the schools reinforced the belief that black and white students were different enough to warrant segregation. However, perhaps less intentionally so, but due to the difference in quality between white schools and black schools, this period of legal segregation further reinforced the norm that black Americans were second class citizens and, as such, were less deserving of quality education. Perhaps this was rooted in a belief by white Americans that they deserved more than their black counterparts or perhaps in a belief that blacks did not have the potential or capability of achieving the education levels of their white counterparts. Whatever the reason, Marx’s theory of social reproduction finds its home here. What is truly troubling is the fact that for a period of time, schools were intentionally segregated by race in conjunction with quality. Beyond a reasonable doubt, the state of the black-

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

white achievement gap today can be largely attributed to the residual consequences of *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, over 100 years ago.

Legal segregation of social facilities and institutions went the way of Sheriff's most arbitrary norms: over time, societal members refused to conform to such previously held beliefs and values to the point of formal overturning of norms of segregation marked by the court case *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1953. However, as is likely already evident through portions of this analysis, the legal segregation of schools – not explicitly backed by law – is making its comeback. It is difficult to pin all of the failings on our current education system on a court case that reached its verdict in 1896. For that reason, allow me to shift the focus to a much more recent, albeit less dramatic, failing of the public education system: President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind Act in 2001.

The No Child Left Behind Act, from this point on abbreviated NCLB, was developed and pushed into legislation as a means of improving the education system, an intent that was not necessarily shared with the separate but equal doctrine. The NCLB placed accountability as the centerpiece of education reform,<sup>47</sup> promoted by a mindset at the time that schools and teachers were directly responsible for a declining education system. Again, at heart, the NCLB is an act with good intentions but poor, if not tragic, executions. Its first failing is placing undue burden on the teachers in schools. Even though we have identified teachers as playing a large part in a student's individual development, it would be difficult to believe that teachers across the nation are intentionally teaching some students more than others out of spite, lack of belief in the student, or any other reason. NCLB, however, treats them as the primary, almost individual, movers of student educational achievement, an assumption that is simply untrue.

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<sup>47</sup> Linn, R. L., Baker, E. L., & Betebenner, D. W. (2002). Accountability Systems: Implications of Requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. *Educational Researcher*, 31(6), 3-16.

The NCLB required states to test students enrolled in public school systems in reading and math in grades 3 through 8, and at least once in high school. Such tests were to be used to measure student achievement and success, accompanied by state developed “measurable objectives for improved achievement by all students and for specific groups: economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency.”<sup>48</sup> Along with these measurable objectives, states had to develop Adequate Yearly Progress goals, abbreviated AYP, for individual schools. Failure to reach these goals resulted in increasing sanctions for non-performing schools. If a school failed to reach AYP for 2 years in a row, it must allow students to transfer to a better performing school in the same district while a school that failed to reach AYP for 3 years must offer free tutoring for its students. Additionally, those schools at the point of school choice, or failing to meet AYP for 2 years in a row, are held back 10% of their Title I funding.<sup>49</sup>

These sanctions carry with them two very important implications regarding the current state of the education system in the United States. First, schools that do not meet AYP goals for two years straight are required to give their students the option to leave the school in favor of a better performing school in the same district. This requirement loops us back to the issue of white students leaving majority minority schools, further harming the minority students, ironically left behind. When given the option, white students from better financial and social backgrounds are going to be more able to move schools within their district than black students from likely worse financial and social situations. Even though school districts are created by geography, many low income inner city students either walk to school or take a city bus.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Klein, A. (2015). No Child Left Behind: An Overview. Education Week. Retrieved March 5, 2016, from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/no-child-left-behind-overview-definition-summary.html>

Allowing students to move to a better performing school is an initiative targeted specifically at the students who have the ability to move. As such, higher income white students will likely leave these low performing schools more than the black students will, eventually creating those apartheid schools mentioned earlier.

The second implication of these sanctions lies in the funding. It is counterintuitive to take funding away from schools that are struggling to stay afloat. Once at two consecutive years of failing to reach AYP goals, a school is not only losing its highest performing students to better performing schools in the district, they are also losing a considerable amount of funding, further limiting whatever possibility the school had of achieving the next year's AYP goal. As is evident, this becomes a vicious cycle. Low performing schools consistently lose both students and money they desperately need to other schools in the area that are meeting their AYP goals. At an individual school level, this is understandable. As a society, we do not want to promote poorly performing social institutions – we cannot keep a school around simply because it is a school. However, the schools that are being left worse for wear were already on the bottom rung of the educational quality ladder, and the students that attend these schools are those that the education system serves to benefit the most. When a low-income, low performing school is stripped of funding and various programs, it is not only the school and its faculty that suffer, but also, and more importantly, the hundreds of children that are now left without a viable option of quality education.

Recall the quote from the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision: “segregation of...public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children.”<sup>50</sup> Even in 1954, it was common knowledge that the segregation of schools harmed those minority students more than it

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<sup>50</sup> Separate but Equal - Separate Is Not Equal. (n.d.). Retrieved March 15, 2016, from <http://americanhistory.si.edu/brown/history/1-segregated/separate-but-equal.html>

did white students, so how has the current system of re-segregating schools via roundabout measures such as the sanctions of NCLB flown so under the radar? While not explicitly legal and intentional apartheid schooling, it comes very close without being blatantly discriminatory. The current education system in the United States encompasses the widespread issue of institutional racism, but does so in a way that appears well intentioned. This is not to say that the NCLB Act was not well intentioned, nor does this caveat mean that NCLB was not a tremendous failure. The Act set an ambitious goal that aimed to have all students performing above proficiency by the 2013-2014 school year, requiring schools to present a one percentage point of growth in those students testing proficient each year. Unfortunately, neither of these goals came close to being realized, and the latter expectation of one percent improvement per year would have put very few schools on track to meet 100% proficiency by 2014.<sup>51 52</sup>

However, this is an important place to note that the education system in the United States is broken not because we do not know what works, but because legislation has created and continues to support a system that, at its fundamentals, fights against equality. As Mead suggested with his writings on the present, changing from one system to another is no easy matter, a truth that certainly applies here. While there is much to work on across the board when it comes to the current state of education, closing the black-white achievement gap (as well as the minority-white achievement gap) is the priority of this analysis. The answer lies not in creating greater areas of funding for low income schools – which would certainly not hurt – nor does it lie in providing free tutoring for schools that fail to meet AYP goals. Rather, the answer

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<sup>51</sup> Klein, A. (2015). No Child Left Behind: An Overview. Education Week. Retrieved March 5, 2016, from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/no-child-left-behind-overview-definition-summary.html>

<sup>52</sup> Linn, R. L., Baker, E. L., & Betebenner, D. W. (2002). Accountability Systems: Implications of Requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. *Educational Researcher*, 31(6), 3-16.

lies where it always has: the integration of schools and the purposeful education of every individual student.

#### CHAPEL HILL ACADEMY: A CASE STUDY IN ACHIEVEMENT GAP CLOSURE

A complaint that could perhaps be levied against sociology and liberal arts as greater disciplines is a general avoidance of proposing solutions. Sociology, as a critical social science, is often seen as only identifying rampant problems within society without addressing solutions to such problems. Regardless of how true such claims are, the reformation of such societal problems remains as important, if not more so, than the process of identifying them. As such, I do not wish to leave a bleak conception of the United States education system with the reader. Instead, I wish to incite a certain degree of hope, that while the achievement gap certainly exists and consistently marginalizes black and minority students, this is not the end-all-be-all of American education.

To do this, I will cite a local example: Chapel Hill Academy, a charter school supported by the Lena Pope Foundation located in Fort Worth, Texas. As a charter school, Chapel Hill is not subjected to quite as many rules and protocols of standardization that schools within the public Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD) are. This gives Chapel Hill room to teach and educate as they see fit. Oftentimes, this extends to individualized education for each student, as evidenced in the following quote by Chapel Hill's principal, Victoria Sendejo: "We treat students as individuals, there's no other way to learn." Further, when prompted on staff and teacher involvement with students, Sendejo stated that a "holistic effort" is taken to engage students "to show students that the staff supports them, believes in them, and is behind them."

Sendejo will be the first to tell you that Chapel Hill is different. If that was not clear by her quotes above, perhaps a closer look at Chapel Hill's approach will provide clarity. The Academy, stated above as having a holistic approach to educating students, affords their students educational opportunities in all aspects of their lives, especially those outside of the classroom. Chapel Hill has multiple field trip opportunities throughout the regular semester, and offers an extensive "Rangers Camp" for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders over a two-week period over the summer. This camp includes 6 days of educational class time with STEM (Science-Technology-Engineering-Math) based curriculum and 4 days of enriching field trips. While the field trip is not technically free, the only cost bore by the parents and students is a \$20 registration fee. Further, Lena Pope offers scholarships for students who find non-Chapel Hill sponsored local summer camps so that they may attend and benefit from these out-of-school-time opportunities.

Chapel Hill has also taken a revolutionary stance on discipline: they avoid the suspension of students. Robert Ramirez, the charter school's Student and Campus Coordinator, heads the disciplinary actions taken on students, and stated that "black and special education students are suspended most often" in state ISDs. Ramirez was very happy to report that this was not the case at Chapel Hill. In fact, their suspension rates "do not correspond with any one subgroup or another," Ramirez stated, as they avoid suspending students as a general practice. How can a student learn and develop academically and behaviorally if he or she is not in school, the place where those skills are taught, Ramirez postulates. Further, hand-in-hand with Chapel Hill's holistic approach to student development, all teachers and staff are trained in Social Emotional Learning, and sets aside time to teach emotional management, self-regulation, and real-life problem solving strategies to all of their students, K through 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

Chapel Hill invests heavily in its students, and requires very little investment from them. Students at Chapel Hill are selected via a lottery system of the applications received. The only stipulation is that the family must reside in one of the 7 school districts in the area served by the charter, and the student must be within the K-5 age group. The demographic turnout of Chapel Hill, then, is a product of chance rather than conscious decision making. While this means that the racial integration at Chapel Hill is not intentional, it also means that there is no purposeful, albeit stealthy, segregation observed in the apartheid schools mentioned earlier. The implication of this demonstrates that Chapel Hill's success, to be illustrated later, is a product of their student development methods rather than the demographic makeup of the student body. To reiterate: Chapel Hill is not successful simply because it has a high concentration of high income, white students who perform well in any environment.

In fact, it is quite the opposite. 65% of Chapel Hill's students come from low-income families, as evidenced by the number of students that qualify for free or reduced lunch. In terms of racial distribution, 56% of the students at Chapel Hill are black, 23% Hispanic, 14% white, and another 7% are either bi-racial or of a different racial group. By contrast, FWISD has a significantly higher proportion of low-income students, with 79% qualifying for free or reduced lunch. The racial distribution of FWISD is heavily Hispanic, making up 62.8% of the student body. Another 22.7% are African American, 11% white, and a little over 3% bi-racial or other.

While demographically Chapel Hill and FWISD are different, the true differences emerge when observing the achievement of black students between the charter and the district. It is important to note that there is a higher proportion of black students at Chapel Hill, so the following statistics are not due to a small, above average segment of the black student population. Using the STAAR examination, the statewide standardized test for primary public



schools in Texas, as an indicator of school performance, those students performing at “Phase In Level II” are considered satisfactory. The STAAR examination is administered starting in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and is given in four different subject areas sporadically over the course of a student’s academic career: reading, math, writing, science. Across all levels, Chapel Hill Academy’s black students outperform their counterparts in FWISD. In 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading, 73% of Chapel Hill black students performed satisfactory, compared to 54% of FWISD, 62% versus 50% in 4<sup>th</sup> grade writing respectively, and 50% versus 47% in 5<sup>th</sup> grade math.

Across the board, Chapel Hill Academy’s black students perform at higher levels than Fort Worth ISD’s. However, the most staggering difference comes when observing the achievement gaps between the respective education institution’s white and black students. While black students are performing at a satisfactory majority, the key issue here is the gap between these students and their white counterparts.

The achievement gap, then, between white and black students in Fort Worth ISD is very large. Utilizing the same STAAR examination scores, in the 2014-15 school year, 86% of white students performed satisfactory in reading and mathematics, 80% in writing, and 89% in science. With percentages exclusively 80% and higher, it is hard to imagine the black students of FWISD competing, and, unfortunately, they do not come close. Across reading, mathematics, writing, and science respectively, a dismal 58%, 64%, 52%, and 59% of black students performed at these same satisfactory levels. In the case of the science STAAR examination, this represents a 30 percentage point gap between satisfactory white students and black students, a number that is discouraging and only serves to solidify the existence of the black-white achievement gap.

In typical Chapel Hill Academy fashion, the black students of the Fort Worth charter school have a different story to tell. While overall achievement scores are lower, they are only

slightly so with a significantly smaller gap between the racial groups. White students at Chapel Hill Academy achieved 83%, 81%, 67%, and 64% satisfactory scores in reading, mathematics, writing, and science. Black students stayed within a few percentage points in some cases, achieving 76%, 62%, 62%, and 50% satisfactory scores in the same ordered categories. The black student body scored lower at Chapel Hill in both mathematics and science than Fort Worth ISD, but not by much: only 2 and 9 percentage points correspondingly. However, they perform a whopping 18% better in reading and 10% better in writing than their Fort Worth ISD counterparts. Nevertheless, the key takeaway from this comparison lies in the drastic difference in achievement gaps between white and black students at Fort Worth ISD and Chapel Hill Academy. While Chapel Hill lags a few overall percentage points behind Fort Worth ISD in terms of STAAR satisfactory performance, the charter is significantly closer to equal educational outcomes.<sup>53 54 55</sup>

## CONCLUSION

As it currently stands, Emile Durkheim's conceptualization of education as the "great equalizer" is far from reality. As it currently stands, Karl Marx's theory of social reproduction of class inequalities via the institution of education is all too real. As it currently stands, every factor of an average black student's social location serves to place him or her at a disadvantage educationally, further disenfranchised by a system that fails to support these students who need it the most. The bad news is the black-white achievement gap is a social problem that has existed for centuries. The good news is schools such as Chapel Hill Academy have made strides in

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<sup>53</sup> Chapel Hill Academy. (2016, February 22). 2014-15 Federal Report Card for Texas Public Schools (Rep.). Retrieved March 23, 2016, from [https://www.lenapope.org/files/2814/5617/7436/2014-2015\\_Federal\\_Report\\_Card.pdf](https://www.lenapope.org/files/2814/5617/7436/2014-2015_Federal_Report_Card.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> Texas Education Agency. (n.d.). 2014-15 School Report Card: Chapel Hill Academy (Rep.). Retrieved March 23, 2016, from [https://www.lenapope.org/files/3214/5070/7469/2014-2015\\_TEA\\_School\\_Report\\_Card.pdf](https://www.lenapope.org/files/3214/5070/7469/2014-2015_TEA_School_Report_Card.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> Fort Worth ISD. (n.d.). 2014-15 Annual Report (Rep.). Retrieved March 23, 2016, from [http://www.fwisd.org/pages/FWISD/2014-15\\_Annual\\_Report](http://www.fwisd.org/pages/FWISD/2014-15_Annual_Report)

closing some of the elements of this centuries-old achievement gap in a matter of years. Yet we still remain at a critical crossroad of identifying best practices while maintaining strategies that do not place black students under further pressure and scrutiny.

It is imperative to understand, however, that the cessation of the marginalization of black students is not replaced with the marginalization of white students. Closing the achievement gap should, obviously, result in higher educational attainment across the board. We must not bring other groups of students down for the sake of closing the achievement gap. Perhaps it is most important that we listen to Emmanuel Kant who yearned for education to bring about the utmost perfection of which each student is capable. To close the achievement gap, we must not aim to give certain students chances to succeed over others, even if that means affording black students opportunities they have been deprived of for hundreds of years. Rather, to close the achievement gap, we must aim to give all students the same avenues and pathways to success. So long as society holds differing expectations for different groups of students, some version of the current achievement gap will persist. A shift in societal expectations is not only imminent but necessary; a shift from an attitude that holds differing expectations for white and black students to one that instead holds the same expectations for a single category: all students within the United States' education system.

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