Closing the Achievement Gap

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Closing the Achievement Gap with No Child Left Behind

Many students are slipping through the cracks of the American Education System. There is an increase in the achievement gap in the US. The blame for this should not be placed solely on the students, but rather shared with the adults in the students’ lives, schools, and communities. Thirty-five percent of students that dropped out of high school said “failing in school academically” was a major reason for dropping out (Bridgeland, Dilulio & Morison, 2006). Youth that are considered at risk require additional supports if they are going to succeed academically (Lampsky & Johnson, 2010). At risk youth usually are fighting one or more of the following barriers to academic success: retention in grade level, poor attendance, behavioral problems, low socioeconomic status, low achievement, substance abuse, or teenage pregnancy (Slavin & Matten, 2004). One policy set in place to improve this is 2001 No Child Left Behind. This act requires schools and states to collect and report student-achievement data for various student subgroups. There is controversial legislation that is the source of continuous national debate, one stated intent is to identify, address, and ultimately eliminate achievement gaps.

Youth with the most challenging academic and social behavior problems need pro-active comprehensive and consistent systems of support (Lampsky & Johnson, 2010). School-wide discipline systems are typically unclear and inconsistently implemented – absence of a “social behavior curriculum” (Slavin & Matten, 2004). Consequently, educators often lack specialized skills to address severe behavior and learning challenges. The time to handle these issues often does not exist and result in these students having to suffer with little to no help. These
students are conserved at risk if they are likely to fail, either in school or in life (Lampsky & Johnson, 2010). Mentoring is one intervention that has been as effective in assisting with these issues (Carter, 2004).

Working as a school administrator it is frustrating to assess students and see they are below grade level and 95% of the students are minority children. Many of our students have come to us from other places and they are more than 2 school years behind where they are supposed to be. It makes me to question if the policies that have been set in place are effective or if they are even addressing this issue.