

North Carolina Advisory Commission
on
Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps
Progress Report
to
State Board of Education
and
State Superintendent

April 4, 2001

Dr. Robert E. Bridges
Chairman

Introduction

The Advisory Commission on Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps was appointed in the summer of 2000. It was charged with preparing to advise the State Board of Education, the State Superintendent, and ultimately local school systems on ways to close the number of gaps that exist in student achievement outcomes and student participation while continuing to push for higher achievement overall. The Commission's members come from all across the state and bring a wide range of experiences and involvement in the education arena. Teachers, school administrators, parents, superintendents, directors, school board members, and others close to the schooling process are included. The dean of a public university school of education, an attorney who specializes in school law, a researcher/consultant, representatives of organizations that advocate for minority groups, and a newspaper editor add to the diversity of the Commission. A former school superintendent chairs the Commission.

The newly assembled group began its work in August 2000 and established a quarterly meeting pattern. Meetings were subsequently held in October, January, and March. It was determined in August that a deliberate and probing approach would be taken to learn more about the gaps in question and the nature of what has been a long history in this area of stubborn resistance to change or sustained improvement. Before formulating recommendations or offering advice, the Commission felt that a disciplined search for aspects of the problem that may have been overlooked, considered to be off-limits, or viewed as simply too difficult or expensive to receive major attention should be undertaken. While the Commission supports the many efforts being made to address the gaps, it is believed that deep seated "root causes" of this problem must be uncovered, recognized, and *accepted* before effective practices and strategies can be developed to bring about sustainable progress in closing these gaps.

To more closely examine the gaps and efforts being made to close them, the Commission first was given a full review of statewide test data, disaggregated by race and economic status, by state education officials. The Commission requested and received additional information needed to more fully appreciate the problem and how we are living with it throughout the state. This process continues. National research on closing the achievement gap has been reviewed along with formal studies conducted by states and local school systems around the country including: Anne Arundel County Public Schools, Annapolis, Maryland and Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Miami, Florida. A close look was also taken at the developments in the Houston, Texas school system over the past five years where considerable progress has been made in closing gaps.

Schools and school systems in the state experiencing relative success at closing gaps were invited to share their practices and approaches that have proven effective. Commission members attended national and state conferences, focusing on the topic. A very productive and informative dialogue was held with the faculty of an elementary school struggling with the problem without much success and desirous of an opportunity to share their condition and practices with the Commission. The session was held at the school site and involved teachers, administrators, and other support personnel. In a somewhat similar fashion, the Commission leadership requested a dialogue with a public, historically black university that has closely tracked and monitored the progress of admissions from the public school population that

performs on the bottom side of the achievement gap. New insight into the student and his or her mindset was sought along with a look at student-teacher relations, instructional technique, the curriculum and the nature of the student support network in place at the university. Selected university faculty, administrators, and support personnel participated in the half-day session on campus.

The Commission's greatest resource is its experienced and diverse membership. With considerable information in hand, a work plan was devised to utilize the membership in a focused and concentrated analysis of data and the summary of findings and beliefs on the assigned topics. Having concluded that the root causes referenced earlier could probably be found in key areas or components of the child development process, the Commission was divided into five Study Committees with assigned responsibility for exploring further in the following areas:

- The preparation and support of teachers as they assume today's demanding responsibilities.
- The underachieving student and his or her condition for learning.
- The role of home and community in facilitating and supporting achievement with underachieving youngsters.
- The influence of legislation and policy (existing or needed) related to raising achievement and closing gaps.
- Minority student participation in instructional programs and exclusion from school.

At some point, committees will organize their findings and from this baseline of information, and beliefs, direction, and promising practices will be identified and recommended to the State Board of Education, the State Superintendent, and to local systems in general.

The work of each committee was reviewed by the full Commission at its March 26th meeting. Very productive discussion was generated around each committee's findings to date. It was observed that the committees were at different points of discovery and progress influenced mostly by the nature and complexity of the topic area. As an example, the more tangible nature of law and policy facilitates review and analysis. The same applies to some degree in examining minority student participation data, programmatic placement and the frequency of exclusion from school. On the other hand, exploring the more subjective elements of teacher preparation and support requires more access, time and deliberation. Getting a feel for the underachieving minority student's condition for learning and perception of himself as an academic achiever will be crucial to shaping approaches to more effectively developing his potential. The Committee is examining all three underachieving minority groups and children living under the influence of systemic poverty. And the search for roots to this problem in the home and community requires sensitive inquiry and an in-depth look at how and what we communicate, expect, and trust between home and school.

The work to date of two study committees is included in this update. It is expected that similar baseline findings and questions will be developed over the next three months. This will bring the Commission closer to a point of continuously advising on direction and best practices in addressing the discrepancy that exists in student achievement outcomes.

Progress Report

Closing the Gap: Student Participation

Introduction	Closing the achievement gap that exists between groups of students is a top priority for the State Board of Education and the NC Department of Public Instruction. The purpose of the Commission is to advise and work with the local board of education and administration on closing the gap in academic achievement and on developing a collaborative plan for achieving that goal. <u>The subcommittee on Student Participation’s goal is to identify specific findings that impact or encourage student participation.</u>
Framework of Analysis	For purposes of our research and this report, the subcommittee has defined the concept of “student participation/exclusion” to include the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Research▪ Critical Issues▪ Issues that Impact Student Achievement▪ Student Suspensions▪ Student Dropouts▪ Student Conduct▪ Placement in Special Programs▪ Student Dropout Factors▪ Our Beliefs▪ What we need to know
Finding: Systemic processes contribute to student exclusion.	Extensive statistical documentation exists that indicates that minority students are often excluded from the instructional process and various school activities; and this exclusion contributes to their academic underachievement. Therefore, systemic processes that contribute to the exclusion of these students from school activities must be examined

	and changed if the minority achievement gap is to close.
Review of North Carolina Department of Instruction and national reports	The Subcommittee on Student Participation has reviewed reports prepared by the NC DPI, along with a series of national and statewide reports that paint a grim picture of the number of minority students who are excluded from mainstream educational opportunities. These reports include statistics regarding students who are suspended or expelled from school, who dropout of school, those identified for exceptional children's programs (specifically, behaviorally- emotionally disabled programs and programs for the mentally and learning disabled) those who are underrepresented in gifted programs, and those who can not participate in school activities due to social/economic barriers (i.e. finances, transportation). The committee has read several pieces of research literature that supports the findings of the statistical reports.
Report Limitations	The subcommittee will limit this progress report to our findings and beliefs in the areas of Long-term Suspension, Drop Out and Placement in Special Programs. At a later time (after sufficient data is available), we will also share in a similar format information on short-term suspensions and placement in academically advanced programs.)
Critical Issues Being Examined	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What does the research report? 2. Where are the gaps in services? 3. What are our findings? 4. What are the barriers to students? 5. What impact will early intervention have? 6. What questions need further study?
Student Suspensions	The Report on the Study of Student Suspensions and Expulsions dated January 15, 2001 reports that suspensions and expulsions significantly impact student attendance and academic performance. The report goes on to indicate that in the 1999-00 school year, 7,466 students were suspended long-term. This represents an increase of 21.6% over 1998-99. For 1999-2000, 98 of 117 LEAs reported that a total of 122,202 days were

	<p>spent out of school for their students with long-term suspensions and not placed in an Accelerated Learning Program (ALP). Long-term suspension coupled with 38,340 days for students on 365-day suspensions, the total loss days equal 160,542. This total does not include lost days due to short-term suspensions. Over half of the long-term suspensions were borne by Black or Multi-racial students. <u>Short-term suspensions:</u> Short-term suspensions can last from one to ten days. Students may have multiple, short term suspensions throughout the year such that the cumulative days suspended involve a significant portion of the student's academic year.</p> <p><u>Long-term suspensions:</u> Long-term suspensions (LTS) can last from eleven days up to the remainder of the school year. Students may receive more than one long-term suspension during the school year. Districts may allow students to attend an Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) during their long-term suspension. Certain serious offenses may result in the student not being allowed to enroll in any school for the remainder of the school year or the calendar year (365 day suspension).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Male students comprise 77% of the long-term suspended students and females comprise 23% for the 1999-00 academic year. The percentage has decreased 1% each year for the past two years for males and has increased 1% per year for females.▪ More than half of the long-term suspended students were Black or Multi-racial from 1997-98 to 1999-00, whereas the proportion of Hispanic, American Indian, and Asian students remained constant. Black students comprise 33% of the public school population. <p>The proportion of Black-Multi-racial students suspended per 100,000 students was about two to three times that of any other ethnic group. The number of White students per 100,000 has increased steadily during the three-year period.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Long-term suspensions peak in ninth grade, which accounts for about one-third of all
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	<p>suspensions. Suspensions decrease by 60% in grade ten and steadily decline from grades ten through twelve.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More than half of long-term students in all ethnic/gender groups were placed in an ALP in 1999-00. Females in all groups were more likely to be placed in ALPs than males. When comparing the two largest groups of LTS students (Black and White), White males were least likely and Black ▪ Black and multi-racial males make up the highest percent of all long-term suspensions (44% in 1999-00). They are also the most over-represented ethnic/gender category of long-term suspensions. The percent of Black males is 2.75 times their representation in the general student population. ▪ Charter Schools reported a total of 153 long-terms suspended students. Black students comprised the largest percentage of LTS students, even more so than in other public schools (90% and 65% for 1998-99 and 1999-00).
Student Code of Conduct	<p>There is not a uniform statewide Student Code of conduct. Therefore, within legal limits, specific behaviors constituting misconduct and the definitions of those behaviors vary across Local Education Agencies and schools. The law does require that all schools have plans, policies, and procedures for dealing with disorderly and disruptive students. All schools and school units must have effective measures for assisting students who are at risk of academic failure or of engaging in disruptive and disorderly behavior.</p>
North Carolina Law	<p>At issue: North Carolina State law does not require public schools to provide instruction for suspended students.</p>
Federal Law	<p>Federal law requires services to be provided for exceptional children suspended more than 10 days.</p>
Finding	<p>The research shows that student suspensions, expulsions, and the Exceptional Children's Programs</p>

	contribute significantly to the widening of the achievement gap for students.
<p>Identification and Placement in Exceptional Children's Programs</p>	<p><u>Identification, Screening, Evaluation and Placement:</u> Local educational agencies including local school administrative units, charter schools, and Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Correction, Office of Juvenile Justice agencies providing special education to children with disabilities are responsible for ensuring that all children with disabilities within their jurisdiction are identified, located and evaluated, including children in private and religious schools within their jurisdiction, ages birth through twenty-one.</p> <p><u>Student Referrals:</u> When a teacher, parent, or other involved person recognizes that a child is exhibiting developmental problems or that a child's educational needs are not being met, he/she will provide in writing the reason for referral, addressing the specific presenting problems and the child's current strengths and weaknesses or needs.</p> <p>A full and individualized evaluation of a child's needs must be conducted before any action is taken with respect to the initial placement of a child with a disability in a special education program. For children in the area Behaviorally-Emotionally Disabled and Learning Disabled, required screening and evaluation must include "dated and signed documented evidence of at least two interventions attempted in the learning environment in order to make behavioral and academic achievements possible within the regular educational setting, designed in consultation with other staff members and observation by an independent observer" prior to a child being placed in BED or LD categories or learning environment.</p> <p>Furthermore, eligibility criteria for Specific Learning Disabled states that criteria to be met includes: "the disability is not primarily the result of sensory deficits, motor deficits, mental disability, behavioral/emotional disability, or environmental, cultural/linguistics, and or economic influences. If a student's learning problems can be attributed to any of these exclusionary factors, then the primary disability is not a learning disability".</p>
<p>Individualized Education Program</p>	<p>The Individualized Education Program Team (IEP</p>

<p>Team:</p>	<p>Team) is responsible for making decisions about initial evaluations and reevaluations, the IEP, placement including alternative education settings; determining the relationship between the disability and behavior in disciplinary action when the behavior will result in a suspension of more than ten consecutive days or a series of suspensions that cumulate to more than ten days that result in a change of placement.</p> <p>Members of the IEP team include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Qualified LEA representative (in special programs), ▪ Special education teacher, ▪ Regular teacher, person who interprets instructional implication of evaluation, ▪ Parent(s), and ▪ Other individual knowledgeable of special programs/service. <p><u>Evaluations:</u> Parents must be given notice of the pending evaluation which describes any evaluation procedures that the local education agency proposes to use. Written consent must be secured from the parent before any evaluations are conducted. If the parents refuse to give consent, the local education agency may continue to pursue an evaluation by using mediation or requesting a due process hearing.</p> <p>The IEP shall be reviewed at least annually and any necessary changes shall be made. Parents must be invited to participate in the review. This should be the opportunity to “exit” the student from the special classes back into the classroom with appropriate interventions. Data indicates that few Black/Multiracial students exit back into the classroom. At question is the equity of the exiting process and are re-evaluations procedurally done to give the child the full opportunity to be educated in the traditional classroom setting.</p> <p>The step in the identification process that requires at least “two interventions” must be attempted and documented to educate the child in the regular setting before evaluating for BED classes is often missed or</p>
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	given inadequate time and attention before placement is determined.
Finding	Minority students are over identified for special programs, often placed without adequate interventions to address the problem prior to placement.
Dropout Facts	<p>North Carolina ranks 42nd in the country for graduation rates by state, with 60.8% (1998) according to the Postsecondary Education Opportunity Report. Dropouts cost the State money. They are less likely to find and hold jobs that pay enough money to keep them off public assistance, according to Russell W. Rumberger. A study by the U.S. Census Bureau found that more than one-third of all high school dropouts who were employed full-time and year-round in 1990 worked in “low wage” jobs that paid less than \$12,195 per year. In one city alone, it was estimated that a year’s cohort of dropouts from the city school system would cost \$3.2 billion in lost earnings more than \$400 million in social services (Catterall, 1987).</p> <p>A full report on state demographics of dropouts is not available at this time.</p> <p>In 1999-00 the dropout rate for 9-12 indicated improvement from 6.7 to 6.4.</p>
Why students drop out of school and what can be done?	<p>Russell Rumberger of the University of California, Santa Barbara prepared a study on “Why students drop out of school and what can be done. Highlights of his report follows:</p> <p><u>Individual Perspective:</u> The individual perspective focuses on the attributes of students – such as their values, attitudes and behaviors – and how these attributes contribute to their decisions to quit school. Rumberger reports that <i>student engagement</i> is the final stage in a cumulative process of disengagement or withdrawal. Engagement is reflected in student’s attitudes and behaviors with respect to both the formal aspects of school (classrooms and school activities) and the informal ones (peer and adult relationships). Both dimensions of engagement can influence the decision to withdraw from school. The framework suggests that dropping out represents one aspect of three inter-related dimensions of educational achievement; (1) academic</p>

achievement, as reflected in grades and test scores, (2) educational stability, which reflects whether students remain in the same school or remain enrolled in school at all, and (3) educational attainment, which is reflected by years of schooling completed and the completion of degrees or diplomas. Student mobility increases the risk of dropping out of high school. A primary factor is academic achievement, a strong predictor of dropping out of school. Absenteeism is the most common indicator of overall student engagement along with discipline problems. Several demographic variables have been examined in the literature: gender, race and ethnicity, immigration status, and language background that contribute to dropouts. Other individual attributes have also been shown to predict school dropout, including low educational and occupational aspirations, and teenage parenthood. Several studies have examined the predictors of dropping out from as early as first grade. These studies found that early academic achievement and engagement in elementary and middle school predicted eventual withdrawal from school. One additional indicator of prior school performance is retention. As more states end social promotion and institute high school exit examination, the number of dropouts will rise.

Institutional Perspective: Individual attitudes and behaviors are shaped by the institutional settings where people live. The various settings or contexts in which students' live- families, schools, and communities – all shape student behavior. The National Research Council Panel on High-Risk Youth, argue that too much emphasis has been placed on “high-risk” youth and their families, and not enough on the high-risk settings within which they live and go to school. Key factors are listed below:

Family factors: Family background is widely recognized as the single most important contributor to success in school. Specifically the socioeconomic status and family structure such as parental education and income is a major predictor of school achievement and dropout behavior. Studies also show that students from single parent and step families are more likely to drop out of school than students of two-parent families. Sociologist James Coleman argues that social capital, which is manifested in the relationships parents have

with their children, other families and the schools also influences school achievement, independent of the effects of parental education and income.

School factors. Schools exert powerful influences on student achievement, including dropout rates. Four types of school characteristics have been shown to influence student performance; (1) Student composition: The social composition of students in a school can influence student achievement. (2) School resources: Currently, there is considerable debate in the research community about the extent to which school resources influence school dropout rates. Two studies found that the pupil/teacher ratio had a positive and significant effect on high school and middle dropout rates. Also the higher the quality of the teachers as perceived by students, the lower the dropout rate, while the higher the quality of the teachers as perceived by the principal, the higher the dropout rate. (Rumberger & Thomas, 2000). (3) School structural characteristics particularly type of control (public, private) contribute to school performance. Studies have found that student's from private schools typically transfer to public schools instead or before dropping out, meaning that student turnover rates in private schools are not statistically different than turnover rates in public schools. School size also appears to positively influence dropout rates. (4) School policies and practices. Several studies found academic and social climate – measured by school attendance rates, students taking advanced courses, and student perceptions of a fair discipline policy – predict school dropout rates, even after controlling for the background characteristics of students as well as the resource and structural characteristics of schools. Schools affect turnover directly through explicit policies and conscious decisions that cause students to involuntarily withdraw from school. One metaphor that characterizes this process is discharge: students drop out of school, schools discharge students.

Community and Peers. In addition to families and schools, communities and peer groups can influence students' withdrawal from school. Employment opportunities can influence dropout rates by providing work during and after school. Working long hours in

	<p>high school also impacts students staying in school.</p> <p><u>Race and Ethnic Groups.</u> Family, school and community conditions for racial and ethnic minorities in the U.S. are generally much worse than for the white majority. As a result, minority students are more likely to attend high-poverty schools that have lower levels of resources and poorer learning environments. Other studies refute this assumption.</p>
<p>Beliefs of the Student Participation Committee</p>	<p><i>“After extensive research and discussion and based on some of the findings presented, the Student Participation Committee has developed the following set of beliefs.”</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Student mobilization increases the risk of academic failure and dropping out. 2. Students of color are moved in and out of the learning environment through practices that prove to be exclusionary. 3. Students of color are over-represented in underachieving areas, and under represented in advanced areas of achievement. 4. IEP should be the vehicle for exiting the student from special classes back into the regular classroom with appropriate interventions. 5. African-American males disproportionately represent long-term suspensions. 6. Economically disadvantaged students and students in special programs are over-represented in suspensions. 7. Family income, education and social capital play a significant role in high school dropouts as well as community support. 8. A diverse workforce is needed to ensure students of color have role models to emulate and communicate. 9. Any program or initiative that addresses problems must begin with young children, or

	<p>early in the onset of the problem.</p> <p>10. Children who fail to thrive in school, who do not learn to read at grade level expectations, and who are labeled discipline problems at a young age must have their cognitive, social and physical needs addressed in systematic, inclusive and culturally appropriate ways, if the minority gap is to be impacted and closed.</p> <p>11. As more states end social promotion and institute high school exit examinations, the number of dropouts will rise.</p>
<p><u>What we need to know?</u></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What data on short-term suspension show? Is it consistent with long-term suspension re: Disparities for students of color? Are there multiple short-term suspensions for the same students that total a significant number of instructional days being missed? 2. What role does the Juvenile Justice System play in expulsions? 3. What are the profiles of exceptional children? 4. What is the correlation between athletic policies, low performance, dropping out of school or graduating and advancing to higher education? 5. How are students tracked? 6. What role is the guidance counselor playing in student participation? 7. What is the ratio of students referred and placed in special programs?

Progress Report

Closing the Gap: The Influence of Legislation and Policy to Raise Achievement and Close the Gaps for Minority Students

<p><i>Framework for analysis</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>State role</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>set standards</i> b. <i>build capacity</i> c. <i>mandate strategies</i> 2. <i>Relationships between reforms</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>minority students</i> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Introduction</p> <p>The legislation and policy committee has focused its efforts on the following question: How can the General Assembly and the State Board of Education most effectively use laws and policies to help public schools raise minority student achievement and close the gap? We are clear that to have the most impact, the State must have a cohesive strategy expressed through its laws and policies rather than a series of isolated attempts to address the issue. There must be a vision of the extent to which the role of the state is to set standards related to minority achievement, build local capacity to provide better opportunities, and to mandate certain proven strategies. This cohesive strategy also should identify the relationships between laws and policies focused specifically on minority students with other reforms addressing at-risk students as well as general improvement of the system of public education. As an initial step in the development of a cohesive strategy, the committee has used the following series of questions to explore existing laws and identify potential areas of laws and policies for further study.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To what extent should the General Assembly and the State Board of Education devote its focus and resources to <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. setting standards and monitoring progress; b. building capacity to develop more effective strategies at the local level, through budget and program flexibility, funding, incentives and assistance; or c. mandating research-proven strategies, such as reduction in class size? 2. What is the most effective approach to improving the educational opportunities provided to minority students? What are the relationships between <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. issues specifically related to minority students;
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<p>b. <i>at-risk students</i> c. <i>broad educational reform</i></p> <p>3. <i>Concentration of resources</i></p> <p>a. <i>sufficiently concentrated</i> b. <i>complexity of issues</i></p> <p><i>The intangible element of improving the system</i></p> <p>1. <i>Role of the State</i></p> <p>a. <i>Set standards and monitor progress</i></p> <p>✓ <i>ABCs accountability</i></p>	<p>b. issues specifically related to at-risk students; or c. broad educational reform efforts, such as teacher quality and accountability systems?</p> <p>3. How do we allocate state and local resources, in regard to funds and time, so that</p> <p>a. resources are sufficiently concentrated to make an impact; but b. enough different types of strategies are employed to address the complexity of issues involved in minority achievement?</p> <p>Perhaps the most daunting question in considering state laws and policies targeted at raising minority achievement is what we sometimes describe as the “intangible element.” This “intangible element” is the sense that something more is needed than improved programs, higher expectations and better teachers in order for public schools to raise minority student achievement to the levels of other students. It is the impact of cultures and subcultures of minority students. It is the school culture, the climate of the classroom and individual interactions between a teacher and student or among students. It may be more than this. Something so difficult to articulate is challenging to address in law or policy. To the extent that law and policy cannot fully address this intangible element, we must be clear on how the state will provide leadership so that all issues related to minority achievement are squarely addressed.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Framework for Building a Cohesive Strategy of Laws and Policies to Address the Minority Student Achievement Gap</p> <p>The first element of a cohesive strategy is being clear on the role for the state as defined by law and State Board policy in addressing the minority achievement gap. The annotations in the left hand column outline the framework described earlier.</p> <p>The state has fully embraced setting standards and monitoring the progress of schools as a fundamental element of the ABCs. The ABCs has created a vehicle for the state to establish the expectations that all students will continue to progress in their academic achievements and will, at a minimum reach grade level proficiency. Its</p>
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<p><i>& incentives</i></p>	<p>mechanisms for creating accountability are considered by some experts as critical for improving student performance. The trial court in <i>Leandro</i> cited the state’s expert witness, Dr. Hanushek, noting “[p]ut in plain English, the thrust of Dr. Hanushek’s opinion is that throwing money at an educational problem without having goals in place for spending and a system of accountability to measure the effectiveness of the spending is wasteful and not likely to result in improving student performance. The Court is of the same opinion.”</p> <p>If such an accountability system is so important for raising student achievement, then is it also important to have an accountability system that addresses the minority achievement gap? The current system creates no specific incentive for addressing gaps in performance between different groups of students. Further, the poor performance of certain groups, including racial or ethnic groups can be masked by the higher performance of other students at the same school. The masking effect is a serious issue in considering whether the ABCs provides sufficient incentives and standards for improving minority student achievement. This issue should be further explored.</p>
<p>✓ <i>State report card</i></p>	<p>In addition to student test scores, the state has the ability to monitor progress through the report card generated by the Department of Public Instruction. The General Assembly has requested that the State Board create a minority achievement report card. The Department of Public Instruction likely will meet this requirement by adding additional information about minority student achievement to the existing report card.</p>
<p>✓ <i>Local plans</i></p>	<p>More detailed information about the efforts of local school districts is available in the school district level safe school plans that are submitted to the state. There also are school level safe school plans and school improvement plans that are retained by the school district. These plans must address the needs of at-risk students; however, closing any gap in achievement is not specifically required. An effective school improvement plan should identify strategies for any group of students that are not meeting grade level proficiency, whether it is by race/ethnicity or some other common factor. The state could require school improvement plans to address any such cohorts.</p>

<p>✓ <i>Student promotion standards</i></p>	<p>In addition to setting performance standards for schools, the State Board has set promotion standards for students. This is the first year the standards go into effect, with fifth graders being the first group of students subject to the standards. As the results of this implementation are monitored, the state should review these issues: (1) whether the standard set is appropriate; (2) whether the State has sufficiently fulfilled one of its other roles of building capacity at the local level; and (3) whether the standards have been implemented as intended at the local level, including whether principals have used their flexibility wisely in making promotion decisions and whether local board policies have provided effective guidance. Given the disproportionate numbers of minority students who do not meet promotion standards after the first administration of the state tests, this is a particularly critical issue within the context of closing the gap and raising minority achievement.</p>
<p>b. <i>Build Local Capacity</i></p> <p>✓ <i>Budget flexibility</i></p>	<p>As a part of the ABCs, the General Assembly granted greater budget flexibility at the local level. School districts may transfer funds between allotment categories to the extent specified in the law. Schools also specifically benefit from greater flexibility: local boards are required to give schools flexibility “to the maximum extent possible” for the purpose of improving student performance. One of the restrictions in funding flexibility is in the teacher assistant category. Those funds cannot be transferred unless the positions are vacant. This will be a significant stumbling block for schools that want to raise minority achievement by implementing reform models that reallocate teacher assistant positions to additional classroom teachers or to lead facilitator teacher positions. More investigation is necessary to determine whether school districts have found any other barriers to reallocating resources as a part of a strategy for improving minority student achievement. The state also may want to consider whether any additional flexibility is necessary in order for the schools or school districts to implement any programs or strategies recommended by the state.</p>
<p>✓ <i>Program flexibility</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Waivers</i> 	<p>The General Assembly also provided greater program flexibility as a part of the ABCs by allowing schools and school districts to seek waivers from the State Board on specified issues related to the educational program, such as class size, and other issues so long as they are not specifically prohibited by law. Schools and school districts</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>School calendar</i> 	<p>also have been given greater flexibility with the school calendar, which could be critical for implementing particular reforms.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>School improvement plans</i> 	<p>School improvement plans created a vehicle for giving greater flexibility while enabling the local board and the State Board to monitor the use of the flexibility. The use of the flexibility should be reflected in these plans, and indeed must be in order to seek certain waivers. One question is whether this vision of greater flexibility in return for a cohesive plan has worked or whether, school improvement plans have fallen short of this vision.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>Incentives</i> 	<p>The ABCs creates financial incentives for performance based upon combined test scores at the school level. There are no financial incentives related specifically to raising minority student achievement. Five pilot programs are currently experimenting with an incentive structure that may better address minority achievement. The results of these pilots should be carefully reviewed for possible state-wide implementation.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>State assistance</i> 	<p>The most extensive state assistance is offered to low-performing schools. While this may be an effective strategy for reaching some minority students, it may not reach all schools where assistance is needed to address minority achievement. Given the potential masking effect in the accountability model, there likely are smaller concentrations of minority students under-performing at schools not designated as low performing. This raises a concern of how to ensure that state assistance also is available to help in these circumstances.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>Charter Schools</i> 	<p>Charter schools were designed in part to provide a new and different type of opportunity to address the needs of at-risk students. If they fulfill the intent of the General Assembly, they may become an important opportunity for exploring different ways to serve at-risk students, including significant populations of minority students. The greatest promise is if they are able to build local capacity of LEAs rather than being isolated efforts.</p>
<p>b. <i>Mandate research-proven strategies</i></p>	<p>There are no legal mandates to implement certain strategies for raising minority student achievement. While there are some federal constitutional limitations on providing certain services only for minority students (see discussion below</p>

<p><i>Criteria for mandating research-proven strategy</i></p>	<p>under strategies for minority students), these constitutional limitations would not hamper efforts to mandate strategies that are intended to benefit all students or at-risk students, even if known to be of particular benefit to minority students.</p> <p>There are a limited number of legal mandates intended to benefit at-risk students. For example, the State Board has established promotion standards that are intended to assure that students are meeting performance standards before progressing to the next level. (see discussion above) Another mandate is by the General Assembly, requiring that each school district have at least one alternative learning program, with the exception that a school district can seek a waiver from the State Board. Any current mandates should be assessed to make sure they are serving the intended purpose.</p> <p>As research becomes clearer on different strategies that may assist at-risk students, including those that disproportionately benefit minority students, the General Assembly and State Board should determine whether and how any of the research-proven strategies should be mandated by law or State Board policy. While the state roles of setting standards and building local capacity often are preferred by policymakers and local educators, it may be appropriate to mandate a particular strategy if it is (1) highly effective (2) feasible to implement across the state in an equitable manner; (3) the cost and use of other resources is reasonable relative to the expected gains and (4) sufficient funds are available to the school districts to effectively implement the mandate. Two research-proven strategies are prekindergarten education for at-risk children and reduced class size, especially for grades K-3. Both strategies are receiving considerable attention in North Carolina. We should evaluate these strategies, along with other research-proven strategies, using these criteria and other information that would guide decisions regarding implementation.</p> <p>State mandates also define fundamental elements of the North Carolina system of public education. While too numerous to mention all of these elements, some of the mandates most related to students and the educational program are the minimum number of school days (180) and hours of instruction (1000); attendance required between the ages of 7 and 16; full day kindergarten required to be made</p>
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	<p>serving at-risk students. Schools also must develop a safe school plan and school improvement plan that will identify how these students will be served. The ABCs includes accountability and incentives as a means to improve student performance. As mentioned in other sections, these plans may be a significant element of serving minority students better, but may be incomplete. Student promotion standards and alternative learning programs, described earlier, also are efforts primarily intended to assist at-risk students.</p>
<p>c. <i>Broad educational reform efforts</i></p> <p>✓ <i>Excellent Schools Act</i></p>	<p>Over the past several years, there also have been broad reform efforts that should help raise minority student achievement. These reforms have focused on improving public education, overall, not just for certain students. The ABCs, while in part a strategy to assist at-risk students, has a broader purpose of setting expectations for all students to continue to progress. (See earlier discussions for more details on the ABCs.) The Excellent Schools Act and its reforms in teacher quality is the other most significant reform that has had an impact on all schools and students. Improved teacher quality is critical to raising minority student achievement. Numerous studies identify that minority students often are taught by the least qualified or experienced teachers. We must further explore whether the reforms implemented through the Excellent Schools Act are sufficient or whether there are other legislative and policy initiatives necessary in order to address issues related to improving teacher quality, such as the severe teacher shortage.</p>
<p>3. Concentration of resources</p>	<p>The State’s primary focus has been on the reforms related to the Excellent Schools Act, the ABCs and promotion standards. This focus has been transferred to the local level as well with significant local resources – funds and time – being devoted to these reforms. Issues of teacher/school administrator quality and retention; accountability standards and promotion standards are likely to continue to dominate the education landscape for the next few years. Minority student achievement must be integrated into these issues to be sure that with the major reforms, the impact on minority student achievement is always considered. For example, equity in teacher quality could be addressed as a part of the broad teacher quality reform efforts to make sure that all schools, regardless of geographic location or socioeconomic makeup of the community or school, have the ability to</p>

<p>1. Refinement of Current Laws and Policies</p> <p><i>ABCs & standards/incentives</i></p> <p><i>ABCs & flexibility</i></p> <p><i>ABCs & school improvement plan</i></p> <p><i>Student promotion</i></p>	<p>retract and retain quality teachers.</p> <p>The concentration of resources also is critical in developing the cohesive strategy for addressing minority student achievement. We must reach that balance of sufficient concentration of resources on particular strategies in order for them to be successfully implemented with creating enough different strategies to address the complexity of the issue. Resources should be considered as a scarce commodity. Data driven analysis can help make sure that only the best strategies are employed. It is premature to evaluate this balance since there are pieces missing in the state strategy. As a cohesive strategy evolves, we should be asking whether this balance has been struck.</p> <p>Next Steps for Further Analysis by Committee This document has created a framework for raising questions about the next steps towards creating the most effective set of laws and policies possible to help public schools raise minority student achievement. It does not answer these questions. We will continue to explore the following issues that have been raised in this analysis:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Should the ABCs set standards for minority achievement to ensure that improved minority student achievement receives sufficient attention? 2. Are any legislative or State Board policy changes needed in flexibility to transfer funds between different funding allotments in order to implement strategies intended to boost minority student performance, including restrictions on transfer of teacher assistance funds? 3. Has the vision of greater flexibility in return for a comprehensive plan worked or have school improvement plans fallen short of this vision? Should schools be required in the school improvement plan to specifically address any issues of minority student achievement and closing the gap? Should school improvement plans be shared with DPI for increased accountability and to provide general information to the DPI on areas in which schools need assistance? 4. In considering the results of the implementation of State
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<p><i>standards</i></p>	<p>Board policy on promotion standards for fifth graders, we should ask three questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Is the standard set appropriate? (2) Did the State sufficiently fulfill one of its other roles of building capacity at the local level as necessary to effectively implement the standards? (3) Were State Board standards implemented as intended at the local level? Specifically, did principals use their flexibility wisely in making promotion decisions and did local board policies provide effective guidance? Were PEPs an effective tool?
<p><i>Excellent Schools Act & teacher quality</i></p>	<p>5. Are the reforms implemented through the Excellent Schools Act sufficient to raise teacher quality as necessary to raise minority student performance or are other legislative and policy initiatives needed? For example, are there laws or state board policies needed to address the teacher shortage or to provide incentives to teach at schools with high concentrations of at-risk children?</p>
<p><i>Mandates regarding general system of public education</i></p>	<p>6. Are there any current mandates regarding the general system of public education that should be eliminated or modified? For example, are there unintended consequences of certain mandates? Are there any laws with a disproportionately adverse impact on minority students, such as mandated suspensions?</p>
<p>2. New Legislative/Policy Initiatives</p>	<p>7. Legislation or state board policy could mandate certain research proven strategies. In order to determine which strategies merit being mandated by law, the committee will review certain strategies based upon the following criteria:</p>
<p><i>Mandates of research-proven strategies</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) research demonstrates that the strategy is highly effective at improving minority student achievement and closing the gap; (2) the strategy is feasible to implement across the state in an equitable manner; (3) cost and use of other resources are reasonable relative to gains produced; and (4) sufficient funds are provided to school districts to effectively implement the mandated policy?
<p><i>State Assistance</i></p>	<p>8. Given that state assistance is primarily directed to low-</p>

<p><i>Charter Schools</i></p> <p><i>Intangible Element</i></p>	<p>performing schools, how can law or State Board policy provide for assistance to be expanded to any school or school district where minority student achievement is not as high as it should be?</p> <p>9. To what extent have charter school laws been effective in providing opportunities to explore different ways to improve the academic performance of minority students?</p> <p>10. How can the intangible element related to minority achievement be addressed in law and policy? What are the limitations of law and policy to address this intangible element?</p> <p>These legal and policy issues form the basis for the continued work of the committee. The committee will prioritize these strategic directions with guidance from the full commission and begin addressing the various issues. We recognize that there may be other groups working on many of these issues and that we will want to learn from them as well.</p> <p>In the committee’s work, we will build upon the framework provided in this initial analysis. For example, the criteria for mandating research-proven strategies identified in this analysis will be the basis for creating a process for reviewing potential mandates. Or as another example, the committee will create a means for further analyzing legislation from enactment through implementation with the goal of identifying any elements, either in the law/policy or in the implementation, that need improvement.</p> <p>We will be successful in our efforts if we are able to assist the full commission, the State Superintendent and the State Board of Education in creating a vision of a cohesive set of laws and policies that effectively help public schools raise minority student achievement and close the gap.</p>
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Notes
Meeting with University College Representatives
Fayetteville State University
March 20, 2001

Commission Members present: Dr. Bob Bridges, Mrs. Faye Riner University College
Representatives present: Mr. John Young, Director, Dr. John Griffin (representing Chancellor McLeod) and others from the counseling and teaching staff of The University College

Dr. Bridges gave opening remarks, summarizing the work of the Commission on Closing the Gap, and explaining the purpose of the meeting. He indicated that the Commission is seeking information from those groups who are making a significant difference in closing the achievement gap between majority and minority students. Since University College has had success in closing the gap and helping students finish college who would not otherwise have finished, Dr. Bridges asked the group the following questions. Their comments are listed under the questions.

Question #1 What does the student look like to you who comes to the university at high risk of academic failure?

- Though the kids may act cool and nonchalant, secretly they don't think they can make it in college and hide it in many ways.
- They have many fears and low self-esteem. Their fears stem from having no knowledge of what it is like to go to college (first generation college students) and what is expected of them.
- They are reluctant to communicate with adults.
- Many have reading problems and limited vocabularies.
- They lack basic critical/analytical thinking skills.
- They come from homes where education is not honored and books, newspapers, and reading materials are not available.
- They lack writing skills.

Question #2 What do you do to reach these students? How do you make this magic happen?

- I make them write and write often. I use writing as a tool to build self-confidence.
- We take the guidance/advisory approach of "basic care" in which the adult takes time with the student, listening, responding to questions, and trying to help resolve the student's issues.

- I teach them vocabulary, how to break down words according to how they are constructed (prefixes, suffixes, etc.)
- I have them read the newspaper and discuss current events. Many of them have never read a newspaper. They know about the best tennis shoes, the latest jewelry, and last night's ball scores, but they are socially inept when discussing anything else.
- We insist that they not get sidetracked with extra-curricular events--they are here to concentrate on academics only, not band, not athletics, not clubs, the first year.
- We have patience with them.
- We place a heavy emphasis on reading and writing.
- We offer them a culture-based curriculum, in addition to the standard curriculum. This helps keep them interested in their studies.
- We offer them support and guidance in selecting courses, registration, instructors, etc. We provide lots of individual attention to the student.
- We work on the student's self-esteem. We want to give the students a sense of belonging to the university and the belief that they can succeed.

Question #3 What is parental involvement?

- This needs to begin when the student is quite young. Parents are the first teachers.
- We encourage parents to come to meetings about the students.
- We take the place of the parent in supervising the students and what they need academically. Several representatives in the room shared their experiences growing up. Those who spoke told of having supportive homes with an interest in education.

Closing the Achievement Gap at Fayetteville State University
An Overview of University College presented for a meeting with Members of the
Advisory Commission for Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps
Dr. Robert Bridges, Chair, and
Faculty and Staff at Fayetteville State University

One of the most important responsibilities of the University College at Fayetteville State University is to help freshmen make the transition from high school to the university. While some students arrive at the university fully prepared for the challenges they face, other students have one or more areas of weak preparation for university-level studies.

How are student identified who need additional assistance?

The primary factors used to identify students are: SAT score, high school GPA, and institutionally conducted profile (placement) examinations in math, writing, and reading. Generally, students with a total SAT score of less than 700, a high school GPA of 2.3 or lower, and low scores on all three profile exams are considered at high risk of academic failure. Other factors considered are the educational attainment of parents and family income. (Approximately 75-80% of our first-time freshmen are first-generation college students and receive federal financial aid.) The academic progress of all students is monitored carefully throughout the freshman year by the University College.

What resources are provided to assist students?

The University College provides a variety of resources designed to assist all freshmen. Some are designated for special assistance. These resources include:

- **Block Registration** - Through this process, students are placed into courses and course

loads consistent with their level of **academic** preparation; some students are pre-selected for enrollment in specific academic support programs.

- **Freshman Seminar** - Freshman Seminar, a two-semester course sequence required of all

freshmen, helps students develop the skills and knowledge that are essential for success at the university. Since the Freshman Seminar instructor serves as Advisor for all students in his or her classes, students have regular access to an individual who can answer questions and help them resolve the problems they face. Through the Freshman Seminar, students are connected with other important offices and programs, such as the Library, Financial Aid, and the Center for Personal Development. The Freshman Seminar Instructor/Advisor helps to monitor students' progress throughout the year, and directs them to academic support resources as needed.

Freshman Counselor - While the Freshman Seminar instructor is a student's advisor, the Freshman Counselor assists advisors in help students with especially serious problems, academic

or personal. The Freshman Counselor also monitors the progress of all students and makes contact, through letter or phone call, with those students at risk of academic failure.

- **Student Support Services** - A federally funded program, Student Support Services

provides tutoring, advisement, workshops, and cultural enrichment activities for students who are first-generation college students, who are economically disadvantaged or handicapped. A cohort of freshmen ("Broncos") are pre-selected each year for participation in Student Support Services.

- **Support Laboratories** - The Reading and Writing Center and the Mathematics

Laboratory provide additional academic support for students in conjunction with their English, math, and Freshman Seminar classes.

How do we measure the success of our strategies?

The primary measures of success are:

1. hours earned per semester
2. GPA
3. Retention and graduation rates

- Consider one application of these measures:

	#	Avg SAT	AVG HSGPA	Avg Alg.	Avg. Read	Avg FSU GPA	Avg Ern Hrs	1-yr retention
Broncos	96	742	2.36	6.68	9.46	2.07	24.14	88.5%
Non-Broncos	425	828	2.72	9.83	11.62	2.29	25.63	73.2%
Difference		-86	-3.6	-3.16	-2.16	-2.2	1.49	0.15

What general lessons have we learned?

Academic weaknesses are rarely exclusively academic. Frequently, they are symptomatic of other problems associated with attitude, motivation, and a sense of direction and purpose.

Strategies for assisting students must be "intrusive," that is, the institution must be proactive in enrolling students in academic support programs. If participation in support programs is voluntary, then the students most in need of using the resources will be the least likely to participate.

"Almost anyone can surmount initial educational disadvantage with the right combination of instruction, study, and a supportive environment." (Quoted from a Student Support Services Publication)