

# OPPORTUNITY GAP

*Closing opportunity gaps in education is the only way to close achievement gaps*



The achievement gap between White students and Black and Latino students correlates to the OPPORTUNITY GAP—disparity in access to quality schools and the resources needed for academic success, such as early childhood education, highly prepared and effective teachers, college preparatory curricula, and equitable instructional resources.

For the past two decades, our nation's leaders have focused on "output" standards and testing to close the achievement gaps that separate different student groups. This only looks at one side of the equation for success. It is essential to hold public

officials accountable for "input" standards, assuring that all students, regardless of where they live, have access to the resources they need to have a fair and substantive opportunity to learn. If we close the opportunity gap, we can close the achievement gap.

The Schott Foundation's report, *Lost Opportunity*, finds that, nationally, students from historically disadvantaged groups have just a 51 percent Opportunity to Learn, when compared to White, non-Latino students. The effects of these inequities

are disproportionately concentrated in a few states: California, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania and Texas. Detailed state-level reports, including data on inequities among groups and the social and economic consequences, are available at : [www.otlstatereport.org](http://www.otlstatereport.org)

*"The nation recognizes its social, civic and economic strength is directly linked to the strength of its public schools. But if every child is to have an opportunity for success, every student must have a true Opportunity to Learn."*

*John H. Jackson, President  
Schott Foundation for Public Education*

## Understanding the Opportunity Gap

New data now available from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights shines additional light on disparities in educational resources and opportunities. The Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) covers some 7,000 districts and more than 72,000 schools. View the data at: [ocrdata.ed.gov](http://ocrdata.ed.gov)

The data show whether students in different schools and districts have equal access to experienced teachers, rigorous coursework and other indicators of quality education. For example, 3,000 schools serving some 500,000 high school students offer no Algebra 2 classes, and more than 2 million students in 7,300 schools had no access to calculus classes.

*"Transparency is the first step toward reform and for districts that want to do the right thing, and the [CRDC] is an incredible source of information that shows them where they can improve and how to get better."*

*Russlynn Ali, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education*

### Opportunity gaps remain large among different student groups

- Schools serving mostly African-American students are twice as likely to have teachers with one or two years of experience than are schools within the same district that serve mostly White students.
- Students with limited English proficiency make up 6 percent of the high school population (in grades 9-12), but are 15 percent of the students for whom algebra is the highest-level math course taken by the final year of their high school career.
- Only 22 percent of local education agencies (LEAs) reported that they operated pre-K programs targeting children from low-income families.

Source: U.S. Department of Education; Civil Rights Data Collection

## ProPublica: Not all states are equal in closing opportunity gaps

The independent news service ProPublica reviewed the U.S. Department of Education database as part of an exhaustive analysis of states' efforts to close opportunity gaps. ProPublica found that family economic differences typically are reflected in the classroom, with students from wealthy families taking many more advanced courses.

ProPublica created a user-friendly tool that allows you to see whether your state—and your school—are providing equal access to quality education. View the tool at [ocrdata.ed.gov/projects.propublica.org/schools](http://ocrdata.ed.gov/projects.propublica.org/schools)

## Access to high-level courses varies by state

Based on ProPublica's analysis, here is a sample of how states compare to the national average for the percentage of students who take at least one Advanced Placement course:

| National Average | 18 percent |
|------------------|------------|
| Arkansas         | 25 percent |
| Wisconsin        | 18 percent |
| Pennsylvania     | 16 percent |
| New York         | 16 percent |
| Massachusetts    | 15 percent |
| Missouri         | 10 percent |

*“The opportunity to learn—the necessary resources, the curriculum opportunities, the quality teachers—that affluent students have, is what determines what people can do in life.”*

*Linda Darling-Hammond, Professor of Education at Stanford University*

## Resources

U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)  
[ocrdata.ed.gov](http://ocrdata.ed.gov)

Education Law Center's report on school financing: "Is School Funding Fair? A National Report Card"  
[www.schoolfundingfairness.org](http://www.schoolfundingfairness.org)

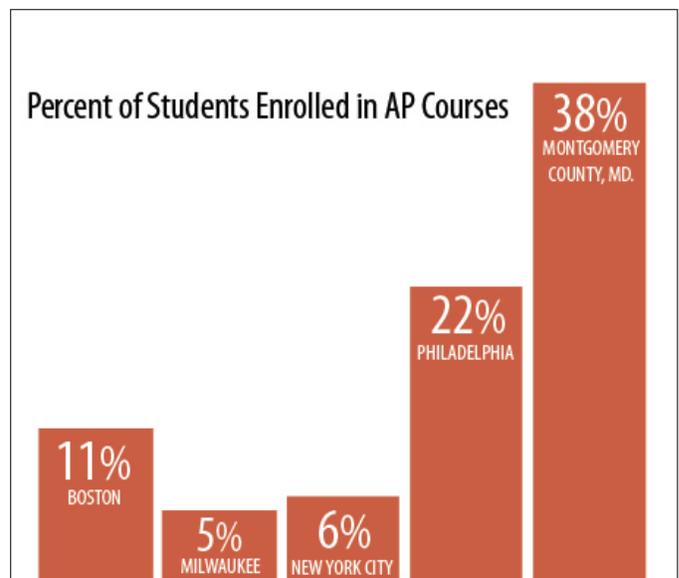
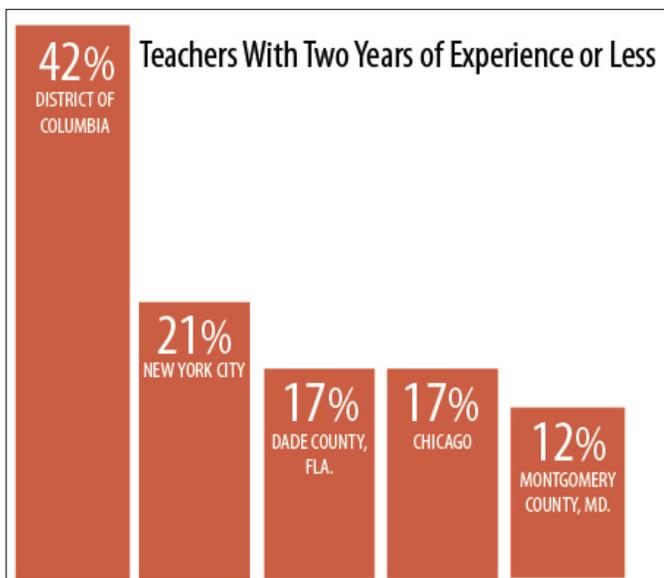
Yes We Can: The Schott 50-State Report on Public Education and Black Males 2010  
[blackboysreport.org/bbreport.pdf](http://blackboysreport.org/bbreport.pdf)

Lost Opportunity: A 50-State Report on the Opportunity to Learn in America  
[www.otlstatereport.org](http://www.otlstatereport.org)

ProPublica's analysis of state efforts to close opportunity gaps  
[projects.propublica.org/schools](http://projects.propublica.org/schools)

## Unequal access to experienced teachers

An analysis by the OTL Campaign of the Civil Rights Data Collection reveals large gaps in the access students have to experienced teachers and Advanced Placement courses.



# TALKING POINTS

## **The opportunity gap is the greatest crisis facing America's schools.**

- The opportunity gap is the disparity in access to quality schools and the resources needed for all children to be academically successful.
- Students from historically disadvantaged families have just a 51 percent Opportunity to Learn when compared to White, non-Latino students, according to the Schott Foundation's Opportunity to Learn Index. [schottfoundation.org](http://schottfoundation.org)
- If every child is to have an opportunity for success, every student must have a true Opportunity to Learn.

## **We must close the opportunity gap in education if we want to close achievement gaps.**

- Closing the opportunity gap is the only way we will make progress toward closing academic achievement gaps that separate most Black and Hispanic students from their White and Asian peers.
- We must commit to eliminating the opportunity gap if we are going to build a stronger, safer and more prosperous nation.
- Wealthy districts often are able to replace lost resources – which widen opportunity gaps – through increased tax support, but poor districts cannot.
- Ninety percent of American children attend public schools today, and that will probably continue. Public education is the only system capable of affecting the massive number of students needed to right our country's trajectory.

## **The opportunity gap has long-term consequences for individuals and our nation.**

- Having a high-quality education system for all students regardless of their ZIP codes is not only the democratic measure for leadership, it is increasingly the major determinant of a nation's economic fate.
- Over the next 30 years, U.S. cities and states probably will be defined by what happens for the bottom two-thirds of citizens rather than the top one-third.
- Only one-third of Americans have any college or postsecondary credentials, and the bottom two-thirds of Americans are more likely to drop out of schools and to be incarcerated.
- The bottom two-thirds of Americans control less than 15 percent of the nation's wealth. [ideas.repec.org/p/fip/fedgfe/2009-13.html](http://ideas.repec.org/p/fip/fedgfe/2009-13.html)
- Black males are pushed out of high school and into the pipeline to prison at rates higher than they graduate and reach high levels of academic achievement.

**We can close the opportunity gap.**

- We must do everything possible to make sure that each baby born today has the opportunity to succeed tomorrow in a stronger America.
- We can close the opportunity gap by guaranteeing every child's right to a public education based on high-quality early childhood education, effective teachers, college preparatory curriculum and equitable instructional resources and policies.
- The top nations in the world are investing in and reaffirming their public education systems as lifelines for progress.

**You can help close the opportunity gap.**

- In every town, city and state, public schools will help our nation fulfill its potential.
- Change policies and practices to ensure all children have a fair and substantive opportunity to learn and succeed in public schools regardless of ZIP code.
- Tell policymakers and other officials they are wrong when they attack public education and teachers.
- Raise your voice. Get connected. Take action.

## KEY DATA

### **The opportunity gap takes a huge toll on students.**

**47 %**

The percentage of black males who graduate from high school.

Source: *Yes We Can: The Schott 50-State Report on Public Education and Black Males*

**1.2 million**

The number of students who drop out of high school each year. That's one student every 26 seconds, or 6,400 students every day.

Source: *Editorial Projects in Education, Diplomas Count, 2011.*

**58 %**

The percentage of Latinos in the class of 2008 that finished high school with a diploma; 57 percent of African-Americans and 54 percent of Native Americans graduated.

Source: *Editorial Projects in Education, Diplomas Count, 2011.*

**3,000**

The number of schools that *do not* offer Algebra 2 classes (excluding some 500,000 students).

**2 million**

The number of students who have no access to calculus classes (in 7,300 schools).

Source: *U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), 2011*

### **Closing the opportunity gap must begin early.**

**22 %**

The percentage of local education agencies that operate Pre-K programs targeting children from low-income families.

Source: *U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), 2011*

**21 %**

The percentage of poor young children ages 3 to 6 years old who were able to recognize all 26 letters of the alphabet, compared with 35 percent living above poverty.

Source: *Child Trends DataBank (2007 data)*

**24 %**

The percent of children under 5 years old who are Latino and who also have low levels of school readiness and have the least access to formal early care and education programs.

Source: *National Council of La Raza, White Paper, February 2010.*

**The stakes are high for all of us.**

**23 million**

The number of college graduates the United States must produce by 2020 to meet President Obama's goal for the United States to become the most highly educated nation in the world.

**35<sup>th</sup>**

The United States' ranking out of the top 40 countries in math. The United States is 29<sup>th</sup> out of those 40 countries in science.

*Source: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)*

**12%**

The unemployment rate in March 2011 for people with only a high school diploma. That rate is 4.5 percent for college graduates, and 2 percent for those with a professional degree.

*Source: The Atlantic, Can the Middle Class be Saved, September 2011.*

**47%**

The percentage of Americans who believe their kids will have a higher standard of living as adults than they themselves now enjoy, a dramatic drop from 62 percent in 2009; 59 percent says it will be harder for their children to move up the income ladder.

*Source: Pew Economic Mobility Project, 2011.*

# RESOURCES

**Alliance for Excellent Education**

[www.otlcampaign.org/resources/education-and-economy](http://www.otlcampaign.org/resources/education-and-economy)

**Child Trends DataBank**

[www.childtrendsdatbank.org](http://www.childtrendsdatbank.org)

**Editorial Projects in Education, Diplomas Count 2011**

[www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2011/06/09/index.html?intc=ml](http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2011/06/09/index.html?intc=ml)

**KIDS Count**

[www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/KIDSCOUNT.aspx](http://www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/KIDSCOUNT.aspx)

**“Is School Funding Fair? A National Report Card”**

[http://www.schoolfundingfairness.org/National\\_Report\\_Card.pdf](http://www.schoolfundingfairness.org/National_Report_Card.pdf)

**Lumina Foundation**

[www.luminafoundation.org](http://www.luminafoundation.org)

**National Council of La Raza**

[www.nclr.org/index.php/issues\\_and\\_programs/education](http://www.nclr.org/index.php/issues_and_programs/education)

**Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)**

[www.oecd.org/topic/0,3699,en\\_2649\\_37455\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_37455,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/topic/0,3699,en_2649_37455_1_1_1_1_37455,00.html)

**Pew Economic Mobility Project**

[www.economicmobility.org](http://www.economicmobility.org)

**Schott Foundation for Public Education**

[www.otlstatereport.org](http://www.otlstatereport.org)

**U.S. Department of Education’s Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)**

[ocrdata.ed.gov](http://ocrdata.ed.gov)

**Yes We Can: The Schott 50-State Report on Public Education and Black Males**

[2010blackboysreport.org/bbreport.pdf](http://2010blackboysreport.org/bbreport.pdf)

# KEY ORGANIZATIONS

**Advancement Project**

[www.advancementproject.org](http://www.advancementproject.org)

**Alliance for Educational Justice**

[www.allianceforeducationaljustice.org](http://www.allianceforeducationaljustice.org)

**Alliance for Excellent Education**

[www.all4ed.org](http://www.all4ed.org)

**Alliance for Quality Education**

[www.aqeny.org](http://www.aqeny.org)

**Appleseed**

[www.appleseednetwork.org](http://www.appleseednetwork.org)

**Campaign for High School Equity**

[www.highschoolequity.org/#fbid=Xbq-7aUe0fa](http://www.highschoolequity.org/#fbid=Xbq-7aUe0fa)

**Forum on Educational Accountability**

[www.edaccountability.org](http://www.edaccountability.org)

**National Association for the Advancement of Colored People**

[www.naacp.org](http://www.naacp.org)

**National Council of Churches**

[www.ncccusa.org](http://www.ncccusa.org)

**Public Education Network**

[www.publiceducation.org](http://www.publiceducation.org)

**21st Century School Fund**

[www.21csf.org](http://www.21csf.org)

## QUOTES

"The nation recognizes its social, civic and economic strength is directly linked to the strength of its public schools. But if every child is to have an opportunity for success, every student must have a true Opportunity to Learn."

– **John H. Jackson, President of Schott Foundation for Public Education**

"Most of what we call the achievement gap is a resource gap. If you are in a hospital and your recovery isn't going so well, we give you more resources to catch you up, to make sure you walk out that door as strong and healthy as anybody else. In school it should be the same way. If you're falling behind, we should devote more attention to you, more resources."

– **Ben Jealous, President of NAACP**

"Despite the best efforts of America's educators to bring greater equity to our schools, too many children – especially low-income and minority children – are still denied the educational opportunities they need to succeed."

– **Russlynn Ali, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education**

"Change in education cannot be implemented on a piecemeal basis. The administration needs a new vision, one rooted in the recognition that schools must provide equal opportunity for all children to learn if the schools are to fulfill their vital role as the cornerstone of our democracy."

– **Pedro Noguera, Peter L. Agnew Professor of Education at New York University**

"Equal access to education is the civil rights issue of today and it's something that needs to be addressed across all borders. Education is the equalizer."

– **Rep. Bruce V. Morris, Connecticut**

"The transforming impact of excellent public schools is proven. The sad irony is that learning-related resources necessary for high academic performance are often tilted toward middle-class and affluent schools."

– **Edwin C. Darden, Director of Education Law and Policy, Appleseed**

"Sufficient school funding, fairly distributed to districts to address concentrated poverty, is an essential precondition for the delivery of a high-quality education in the 50 states."

– **David Sciarra, Executive Director of the Education Law Center in Newark, NJ**

## MEDIA COVERAGE

**The Atlantic:** *Can the Middle Class Be Saved?* September 2011  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/09/can-the-middle-class-be-saved/8600/>

**Milwaukee Journal Sentinel:** *Wisconsin schools alter sick-leave plans*, August, 28, 2011  
<http://www.jsonline.com/news/statepolitics/128573468.html>

**The Huffington Post:** *Child Wellness State By State*, August 18, 2011  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/18/child-well-being-rankings\\_n\\_929724.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/18/child-well-being-rankings_n_929724.html)

**Time:** *ACT Scores Show 1 in 4 High School Grads Are Unprepared for College*, August 18, 2011  
<http://newsfeed.time.com/2011/08/18/act-scores-show-only-1-in-4-high-school-grads-are-ready-for-college/>

**TLC Naptown:** *Will Black Male Achievement Programs Help Bridge The Gap?* July 14, 2011  
<http://tlcnaptown.com/national/wtlc/will-black-male-achievement-programs-help-bridge-the-gap/>

**The Baltimore Sun:** *Behind Maryland's AP success: An opportunity gap*, July 9, 2011  
<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/opinion/readersrespond/bs-ed-education-letter-20110707,0,7458508.story>

**Rolling Out:** *Graduation Rate at 47 Percent for Black Males in the U.S. Study Reveals*, July 19, 2011  
<http://rollingout.com/news-politics/theories-suspensions/graduation-rate-at-47-for-black-males-in-the-u-s-study-reveals/>