

## Minnesota's Achievement Gaps Crisis

Achievement gaps are differences in levels of educational proficiency measured between groups of children, such as racial, ethnic and income groups.

**Minnesota Has Some Of The Worst Achievement Gaps In Nation.** When it comes to 8<sup>th</sup> grade math, Minnesota has the largest gap in the nation between white and black students, as well as between white and Hispanic students. Minnesota has the 2<sup>nd</sup> worst gaps in the nation in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math between black and white students, and the 5<sup>th</sup> worst gaps in the nation in 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading between low-income and non-low-income students.

Comparing high school graduation rates of white and black students, Minnesota is the 3<sup>rd</sup> worst state. The same is true of the graduation gaps between low-income and non-low-income children. Between white and Hispanic students, Minnesota is the worst state in the nation. For Native Americans in Minnesota, the graduation rate is lower than for both black and Hispanic students. Minnesota has a crisis on its hands.

**Early Learning Opportunity Gaps At The Root of The Problem.** At the root of achievement gaps are opportunity gaps, which are differences in opportunities available to different groups. For example, 35,000 low-income children under age five – the children most likely to fall into achievement gaps -- can't access quality early learning programs. We must close early learning opportunity gaps in order to close achievement gaps.

**Why A Crisis?** The groups that are most likely to fall into achievement gaps are some of the fastest growing segments of the population. Therefore, if our leaders don't act to close the gaps now, all Minnesotans will suffer the consequences for decades to come.

- **Our Economy Will Suffer.** Children who fall behind in the early years too often don't graduate from high school. This leaves them unqualified for many of the jobs of the future. If Minnesota doesn't have the educated workforce it needs to compete globally, our economy, and all who depend on it, will suffer.
- **Our Communities and Taxpayers Will Suffer.** Economists tell us that children who fall into achievement gaps are more likely to generate lifelong government costs related to remedial education, unemployment, social services, health care, law enforcement and prisons. If Minnesota doesn't have self-sufficient, law-abiding citizens, it will tear at the fabric of Minnesota communities and put a heavy burden on taxpayers.
- **Our Children Will Suffer.** Most importantly, Minnesota children who fall behind and aren't able to catch up are robbed of an equal opportunity to pursue the American Dream. Because they lack educational qualifications needed for good jobs, they can't take advantage of all of the opportunities America has to offer.

**Must Start Early.** Achievement gaps can be measured as early as 9 months of age, so we can't afford to wait until age 4 or 5 to start helping children at-risk for falling into gaps. We must start as early in life as possible.

**Scholarships Needed To Close Gaps.** Early Learning Scholarships were designed specifically to close early learning opportunity gaps, and to ultimately address achievement gaps. They start early in life, provide help over multiple years, and are targeted to the low-income children who are most likely to fall into gaps. To address Minnesota's achievement gap crisis, our #1 priority must be to get Scholarships to the 35,000 low-income Minnesota children who can't access high quality early learning programs.