AN EXAMINATION OF THE K-12 BLACK-WHITE ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN MISSISSIPPI

By
Timothy O. Abram, II

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Approved by

___________________________________
Advisor: Dr. Marvin King

___________________________________
Reader: Dr. Melissa Bass

___________________________________
Reader: Dr. Andy Mullins
Dedication Page

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my entire family. I am only a product of the collective interest you all took in me. I especially would like to dedicate this thesis to my late cousin, Bennie Abram, III, whose journey at Ole Miss was tragically cut short before I entered as a freshman. This thesis stands as a completion of the journey you began for our family.
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I would like to acknowledge my thesis advisor, Dr. Marvin King, for his relentless pursuit of my full potential as a scholar, thinker, and writer. I would also like to acknowledge the other members of my thesis committee, Dr. Melissa Bass and Dr. Andy Mullins for their support and valuable insight throughout my entire thesis writing process.
ABSTRACT

TIMOTHY ORINAZE ABRAM: An Examination of the K-12 Black-White Achievement Gap in Mississippi

This thesis examines the disparities in educational outcomes of black and white students throughout the state of Mississippi and investigates the steps that other states have taken to close the black-white achievement gap. White students outperform black students in every single measure of academic output, specifically the proficiency and passing rate on the state standardized test, the Mississippi Curriculum Test, the four subject area test (Algebra I, US History, Biology I, and English II), graduation and dropout rates, and the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) examinations. This research focuses on the historical environment which produced the current educational inequities between black and white students, standardized test score data, and the actions that other states, along with the efforts of Mississippi are taking to close the achievement gap.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CREDO Center for Research on Education Outcomes
EEOS  Equality of Education Opportunity Survey
KIPP  Knowledge is Power Program
MCT  Mississippi Curriculum Test
MTC  Mississippi Teacher Corps
NAEP  National Assessment of Educational Progress
PCSP  Policy and Program Studies Service
Introduction

“The South’s unique importance for any effort to understand African American life, identity, and schooling is evident in its dual role of being the poorest region of the country and being perceived as offering unique economic and social opportunities, particularly for African Americans. It is the only region of the United States where the majority of public school children are low income. Black children’s disproportionate level of representation among low-income populations causes them to be most affected by the consequences of poverty.”¹

The black-white achievement gap is an educational woe that plagues each state in the United States. However, this thesis will specifically focus on the black-white achievement gap in Mississippi. But before delving into the nuances of the black-white achievement gap in Mississippi, it is important to present more broadly why the U.S. South serves as the paramount location to study the achievement gap. The article, Why the U.S. South? The Nexus of Race and Place in Investigating Black Student Achievement, refines, “the scholarship on the Black-White achievement gap through an analysis of racialized national spaces and population shifts, to set forth a more comprehensive understanding of school achievement than previously existed.”² An analysis of this article will provide a foundational framework through which the Mississippi black-white achievement gap can be properly contextualized.

² Ibid.
To establish the relevancy of the U.S. South as ideal location to study black achievement, the article mentions that from a historical perspective, as well as contemporary one, the South holds the highest concentration of black people in the country. The article found that between the years of 1990 and 2000 the South had the largest net growth of black people. It notes, “Specifically, more than 3.6 million black people migrated to the U.S. South during the 1990s, representing the largest internal migration of black people since the Great Black Migration of the early-to-mid-20th century.” ³ Though the population data presented in this article is dated, current census data suggests that black people still overwhelmingly live in the South. According to the 2010 Census brief report The Black Population: 2010, “The South was the region where the Black alone-or-in-combination population comprised the greatest proportion of the total population at 20 percent.”⁴ Additionally, the Census data found, “[O]f all respondents who reported Black alone-or-in-combination, 55 percent lived in the South, 18 percent in the Midwest, 17 percent in the Northeast, and 10 percent in the West.”⁵ The high concentration of black people in the U.S. South lends credence to the relevancy of studying black achievement in the South as opposed to some other geographic area of the country.

⁵ Ibid.
CHAPTER I

An overview of the black-white achievement gap

It is apparent that an achievement gap exists in America; however the singular reason, if just one reason exists, has yet to be made transparent. Larry Hedges and Amy Novell list differences in social class, differences in family structure and functioning, and discrimination as possible reasons for the black-white achievement gap. In modern society, test scores determine whether or not one attends college, future wages, and job placement. Plainly put by Ronald Ferguson in his book, Toward Excellence with Equity, “Whether we like it or not, test scores, and the skills they measure, matter.” With that being noted, the factors that often lead to inequality must be unveiled so that they can be addressed. Several different explanations have been put forth to explain this unfortunate phenomenon that plagues the black community.

A study conducted by Amy Orr titled, Black-White Differences in Achievement: The Importance of Wealth, argues “[Wealth] is an indicator of both financial and human capital, can affect academic achievement, as well as help to explain the gap in black-

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white test scores." The data was quantitative and came from existing sources of which, the primary one was the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79), titled “NLYSY79 Mothers and Children.” The article concludes recognizing that wealth has a positive effect on achievement and that wealth explains a portion of the black-white achievement gap. Orr maintains that her findings “demonstrate the importance of a multidimensional approach to the determinants and consequences of stratification.”

This particular article sheds light on one of the many variables, wealth, that adds to the growing gap in achievement between whites and blacks.

The “acting white” syndrome has also been presented as one of the possible factors that lead to the achievement gap. The article, It’s Not A “Black Thing”: Understanding the Burden of Acting White and Other Dilemmas of High Achievement defined “acting white” as simply using language or ways of speaking, attitudes, preferences that are considered a norm for white people. According to Fordham and Ogbu, “acting white was a part of a larger oppositional peer culture constructed by Black Americans in response to their history of enslavement, and the discrimination and persistent inequality the face.” However in light of this, studies have produced little empirical evidence to justify the claim that the “burden of acting white” is actually a

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10 Ibid, 299


factor in the black-white achievement gap.\(^{13}\) Although an unsubstantial amount of evidence has been presented to support this theory that causes the achievement gap, several studies mention “acting white” as a reason for large disparities among blacks and whites.

The language or particular dialect of English that black children speak is often considered a variable that leads to the achievement gap.\(^{14}\) Strickland and Alvermann note “As educators, we must resist the tendency to equate the use of language other than standard English with incompetence or a lack of knowledge.”\(^{15}\) Language serves as one of the pillars that lead to the achievement gap, if a teacher does not speak the same “language” as the student, and then it easily becomes apparent why black students lag as early as pre-kindergarten.\(^{16}\) A study in the book, *Bridging the Literacy Achievement Gap Grades 4-12*, mentions language as a reason for the achievement gap. However, the study also listed several other factors that led to the achievement gap: “Students in high-poverty and high-minority schools are not being challenged. Minority students are placed in lower level classes with a curriculum that does not prepare them for college. No provision is made for students who require more time and instruction to get on grade level. Teachers are often not qualified in subjects that they teach.”\(^{17}\) This leads to startling

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15 Ibid.
statistics such as the fact that only “1 out of 6 African Americans are proficient in reading by the time they are in high school.”

Family dynamics play an integral role in the achievement gap. According to recent data from the Kids Count data center, 67 percent of the black families are single-parent families. This percent alludes to one of the characteristics of the African American male student profile conceptualized by Whitney G. Harris and Gwendolyn M. Duhon in the book, *The African-American Male Perspective of Barriers to Success*. Harris and Duhon developed specific attributes that causes African American males to lag behind their white counterparts some of which include: [being] children of single mothers, [being] reared by relative other than their parent, and negative or absent influential males. Furthermore, the authors mention other factors that often cause African American males to not succeed to the extent of their white and even black female counterparts, then group them into three main categories with several attributes underneath them. These categories include “perceptions of the African American male”, “Learning Styles of the African American Male”, and “Barriers to Classroom Achievement.” Having general characteristics of the typical African American male student can help policymakers develop policy that addresses the problems of the African American male, which would indirectly help close the achievement gap.

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21 *Ibid*
Helen R. Stiff-Williams conducted a study titled, “The African American Achievement Gap.” The purpose of this study was “[to] define and discuss the African American achievement gap, describing its impact on both Blacks and American society, and presenting a theoretical basis for this phenomenon.” Data was quantitative and was derived from an array of existing sources such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac* and *Black Issues in Higher Learning*. The author developed two distinct categories to interpret the existing sources: “Consequences of the Achievement Gap” and “A Theoretical Framework of Causes and Effects.” In the “Consequences of the Achievement Gap” section, the author talks about several negative consequences of the achievement gap. Unemployment rates are heavily affected by the achievement gap, in Table 1.5 “Unemployment Rates by Education Level and Ethnicity” 13.9 percent of black school dropouts versus 7.8 percent of white high school dropouts were unemployed. The theoretical framework of causes and effects portion of the study essentially summarizes the theories on achievement gap as presented by other researchers such as, John Obgu’s *Cultural-Ecological Theory of School Performance* which, “focuses more on the macro level and how group members view themselves and their positions in relation to mainstream society.” The study concluded by saying that discrimination, poverty, the “summer effect”, and watching too much television leads to the achievement gap. Williams ends with a suggestion, “The attitude of policymakers, administrators, and educators must move away from a deficit and pathological view regarding African

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Americans and instead focus on inequities in their institutions by removing those obstacles that stand in the way of Black student progress.”

The overview of the black-white achievement gap presents a plethora of factors that lead to educational inequities among black and white students. The focus of this thesis will concentrate on the unique circumstances, causes, and subsequent results of the pervasive black-white achievement gap in Mississippi.

Chapter two will cover the historical context of the black-white achievement gap in the United States in its entirety, and then it will examine several Supreme Court decisions and their impact on the public education. Additionally, chapter two will examine the political atmosphere of Mississippi before and after the Brown decision.

Chapter three will explore the test score results from the Mississippi Curriculum Test. Chapter four will explore the four Subject Area Tests and the trends that emerge from the data. Chapter five investigates the data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress 4th and 8th grade reading and math exams and the trends that are produced in the data set. Chapter six examines some direct and indirect consequences of having an achievement gap between black and white students. Chapter seven highlights the measures that other states, as well as Mississippi are taking to ameliorate the black-white achievement gap. Chapter eight will be a conclusion of the findings of the thesis along with some recommendations for the state of Mississippi.

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26 Ibid.
Chapter II

Historical Context of the Black-White Achievement Gap

American history and its relationship with slavery play an immense role in the achievement gap between whites and blacks. Following the Civil War, many African slaves had “earned” their freedom by participating in the war effort; however, strict legislation known as the Black Codes were passed to limit the freedmen’s freedom. The Black Codes prohibited the teaching of reading and writing to the freed slaves. After the Black Codes, came “Separate but Equal” via Plessy v. Ferguson, which legalized segregation. This is important to note simply because black schools were often greatly underfunded compared to white schools. However, Brown v. Board of Education determined that separate was not indeed equal. In fact, the Brown decision, “helped convince the Court that even when physical facilities and other ‘tangible’ factors were equal, segregation still deprived minority children of equal educational

opportunities.” This argument was bolstered by the work of social psychologist Kenneth Clark and his wife Mamie. In the lower court, “Clark testified that segregation causes black children ‘to reject themselves and their color and accept whites as desirable.’” Clark and his wife used two dolls, a white one and a black one and asked black children their thoughts on the dolls. The study found “that feelings of inferiority existed at an early age, as children generally considered the white dolls prettier and smarter than the black dolls.” This study would later prove pivotal in overturning the 

Plessy decision. Despite this, in some cases, schools down South did not fully integrate until the 1970s. Nearly 60 years after the Brown v. Board of Education decision, the achievement gap has emerged as the “greatest civil rights issue of our time.” It should be made apparent that the quality of school differing for a large period of time coupled with racial oppression would leave behind the achievement gap that we currently face.

For decades, the United States dominated the global stage in educational performance. However, in recent years the United States has seen its place in the academic hegemony severely diminish. The lackluster performance of American students compared to their international peers is evident from the results of international

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32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
standardized testing. As the world becomes increasingly more globalized and technologically driven, the need for an educated populace becomes dire. This section of the thesis will provide an overview of the historical performance of educational achievements of the United States, followed by a review of the subsequent fall from grace. Finally, this portion of the thesis will delve into a smaller component of the educational woes of the United States—the black-white achievement gap.

The G.I. Bill and its effects on the black-white achievement gap

The aftermath of World War II had a profound impact on the development of the eventual educational juggernaut that the United States would become. This feat was achieved through legislation formally known as the Selective Service Readjustment Act or the GI Bill. This legislation not only bolstered the educational attainments of the United States, but it essentially created the modern middle class. Ira Katznelson writes in his book *When Affirmative Action was White*, “Through these opportunities, and by advancing the momentum toward suburban living, mass consumption, and the creation of wealth and economic security, this legislation created middle-class America. No other instrument was nearly as important.”

The results of the G.I. Bill were quite telling. Before World War II began the United States was producing around 160,000 college graduates per year. At the conclusion of the decade, the United States was producing 500,000 graduates a year. Katznelson writes, “The country gained more than 400,000

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engineers, 200,000 teachers, 90,000 scientists, 60,000 doctors, and 22,000 dentists.”

Although the GI Bill proved to be integral in creating the middle class and a expanding professional class, the limits of it were bound the pervasive racism which manifested itself during the implementation stages. In fact, some contend that the GI bill did very little for African American veterans. Katznelson writes, “To be sure, the GI Bill did create a more middle-class society, but almost exclusively for whites. Written under southern auspices, the law was deliberately designed to accommodate Jim Crow. Its administration widened the country’s racial gap. The prevailing experience for blacks was starkly differential treatment.”

The educational attainments for African Americans during the post-war period were quite contrary to gains experienced by white veterans. At the conclusion of World War II, many of the colleges and universities were only available to returning African America veterans in a limited capacity. Katznelson writes, “In all, black enrollment in the North and West in higher education remained small, never exceeding five thousand during the late 1940s.” The only remaining viable options for African American veterans were the historically black colleges and universities in the South. However, this is rather problematic if we take into context the state of historically black colleges and universities during this time. These colleges were formed under the “separate but equal” doctrine established by *Plessy v. Ferguson*. History has proven that separate inherently means unequal. Katznelson contends,

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Though separate, black colleges hardly were equal. ‘Not a single one of these institutions offers work that is even substantially equal to that offered in the corresponding state institutions for whites’ a 1945 assessment concluded, ‘and there is nothing to indicate that they will or can ever do so. (Katznelson, 132)

The inequality was compounded by the fact that college and universities in general “struggled to keep up with the demand for higher education, but both quantitatively and qualitatively the problem was significantly more acute for black institutions, the poorest educational establishments in the country’s most deprived region.”

The African American veterans returning home were relegated to these meager educational accommodations. The southern institutions were incredibly limited in the curriculum offered to African American veterans. Katznelson notes, “Similarly, there were immense disparities in the range of the liberal arts, and in graduate and professional training. No black college had a doctoral program or a certified engineering program.” The subsequent repercussions are evident in the amount of African Americans occupying high paying jobs such as doctors or engineers. This created a huge pool of African Americans veterans taking menial jobs, which in turn severely curbs the opportunity for upward social or economic mobility. Katznelson concludes, “[T]he G.I. Bill exacerbated rather than narrowed the economic and educational differences between blacks and whites.”

The G.I. Bill possessed a great deal of potential to produce a more equal opportunity for success for black and white veterans alike—on paper. However, the states were given the power of implementation, which inevitably left the responsibility of distributing benefits

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43 Ibid, 133.
44 Ibid, 134.
to racist local and state officials.\textsuperscript{45} Katznelson concludes his analysis of the impact of the G.I. Bill by saying, “The performance of the GI Bill mocked the promise of fair treatment. The differential treatment meted out to African Americans sharply curtailed the statute’s powerful egalitarian promise and significantly widened the country’s large racial gap.”\textsuperscript{46} The unequal distribution of the GI Bill benefits provides a historical context in which the racial achievement gap would only proliferate in the subsequent years.

\textit{Historical Development of Black-White Achievement Gap in Mississippi}

To properly understand the black-white achievement gap in Mississippi, it is necessary to understand the historical context into which public education in Mississippi was developed. Charles C. Bolton’s \textit{The Hardest Deal of All: The Battle Over School Integration in Mississippi 1870-1980} carefully outlines the complex history of the struggle for school integration, which plays an integral role in the creation and perpetuation of the black-achievement gap in Mississippi. Bolton contends that the mediocrity of public schools in Mississippi stem from the state’s unwavering support of segregation, which led to the creation of dual school systems for black and white students. Strictly from an economic perspective, the forthcoming “separate but equal” schools in Mississippi would be difficult to create. The genesis of public education can be established around 1870. Bolton writes, “When the first legislature of the new government convened in the winter of 1870, dominated by a similar group of white and black Republicans, it created a system of ‘free’ public schools in which ‘all children

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, 128.
\textsuperscript{46} Katznelson, Ira. "White Veterans Only." In \textit{When affirmative action was white: an untold history of racial inequality in twentieth-century America}. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005. 141.
between the ages of 5 and 21 shall have equal advantages." The timing of the creation of public schools was pivotal—five years after the conclusion of the Civil War. The war left Mississippi without its source of economic production which transformed the South into the poorest region of the country. It also left much of the physical infrastructure of the most agricultural South in shambles. Bolton underscores this by writing,

The shortcomings that permeated Mississippi’s public education could be traced to the effort to establish a dual school system. Creating two good public school systems in a state with a robust economy would have been an ambitious undertaking. In Mississippi, one of the poorest states in the Union, the state succeeded in only creating a mediocre school systems for whites and unbelievably impoverished school system for blacks. (4)

Though racism and a poor economy where two main factors that led to the dilapidated state of black public education, there is another factor we must consider—judicial decisions. The first case to mention is the landmark *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) case which produced the separate but equal doctrine. Three years after the “separate but equal” national precedent was set, another judicial decision emerged that greatly altered the national landscape. In 1899, the US Supreme Court handed down the decision of *Cumming v. Richmond County Board of Education*, which gave the states the power to determine what exactly “constituted a separate but equal education.” This act of federalism opened the door for states to impose severely discriminatory regulations towards public education. Bolton writes, “In Mississippi, with the blessing of the federal mandate in *Cumming*, separate but equal became a fiction.” During this time in Mississippi, African Americans were systemically denied access to any of the political

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processes occurring within the state. This subsequently left the fate of African Americans into the hands of white racists who cared little about the well-being of African Americans.

After the *Cumming* decision, there were two more monumental judicial decisions that would inevitably lead to the historic *Brown* decision. The first decision was handed down in *Gaines v. Canada* (1938). Born in Mississippi in 1911, Lloyd Gaines “was a lean, handsome man of twenty-three when he asked for the aid of the NAACP.”50 Gaines attended Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri and graduated with honors and as the president of his class.51 Following his graduation, he applied to the law school at the University of Missouri. In a letter to the president of Lincoln University requesting his transcripts be sent to Missouri, Gaines “indicated that he knew his application had a special meaning. He hoped that what he was doing would improve opportunities for all Negroes.”52 During this period, it was customary for state legislatures to provide out-of-state scholarships in order to perpetuate segregation in higher education. Gaines was cognizant of this, yet he chose to legally challenge the University of Missouri’s law school after it was made evident that he was going to be barred admission based on his skin color. However, it is important to note that Gaines’s decision to apply to the University of Missouri was “not mere coincidence.”53 The NAACP previously won a suit against the University of Maryland, which undoubtedly influenced Gaines’s decision.54 In addition, Gaines was the ideal candidate to levy a case against higher education in

51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid. 264.
54 Ibid.
Missouri. In the article, *The Case of Lloyd Lionel Gaines: The Demise of the Separate But Equal Doctrine*, Daniel Kelleher writes, “The fact that he was a product of Missouri’s segregated schools lessened the chance that the state would argue that he was not qualified. To argue along these lines would be to admit the undergraduate education provide Negroes in Missouri was inferior to that offered whites.” Initially, the Missouri Supreme Court would reject the argument of the NAACP lawyers. After an appeal, the case would make it to the US Supreme Court. This time the NAACP would be successful. In a 5-2 decision, the Supreme Court found,

> Here, petitioner’s (Gaines) right was a personal one. It was an individual that he was entitled to the equal protection of the laws, and the state was bound to furnish him within its borders facilities for legal education substantially equal to those which the state there afforded for persons of the white race whether or not other Negroes sought the same opportunity. (267)

With that landmark decision, the doors of graduate school were opened for African Americans. The success of this case would set a precedent for yet another case, *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950).

The *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950) case revolves around Herman Marion Sweatt’s mission to be admitted to the University of Texas Law School. After meeting with the university’s president, Theophilus Shickel Painter, to discuss his admittance to the school, Sweatt was denied admission. However, Painter wrote in a letter to the Texas Attorney General Grover Sellers saying, “This applicant is a citizen of Texas and duly qualified for admission to the Law School at the University of Texas, save and except for

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the fact that he is a Negro.”\textsuperscript{56} In 1946, Sweatt would file a case against President Painter and the University of Texas Law School. Coincidentally one of the lawyers representing him was Thurgood Marshall, who would later become the first African American US Supreme Court Justice.\textsuperscript{57} Marshall’s case for Sweatt centered on “the idea of intangibles.”\textsuperscript{58} Essentially, Marshall argued that inferior facilities and resources that were available at the alternative law school Sweatt went to provided him with an unequal education.

Before the \textit{Brown} decision was handed down in 1954, white politicians and white schoolteachers in Mississippi knew that in order to preserve segregation they would have to focus on the latter portion of the “separate but equal” mandate. In theory, these individuals figured that if the separate schools were truly equal, the attempts to integrate the schools would end. This is exemplified in Charles Bolton’s \textit{The Hardest Deal of All}. He writes, “Those white Mississippians who began to call for greater equalization between white and black public schools generally made sure to confine their support for reforms within the unshakable boundaries of preserving white privilege and saving school segregation.”\textsuperscript{59} The stark difference in the allocation of education funds and racism both were in operation during the implementation of the equalization plan. Table 1 emphasizes the massive disparity of educational funding between black and white students in 1962, 8 years after the \textit{Brown} decision. The most egregious offense of the inequality in educational funding allotments can be seen in Tunica County, where white

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
students were funded at nearly 30 times that of black students. It is apparent that the schools in Mississippi could never be truly equal with these massive disparities present.

After the Great Depression, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal policies provided funds for the cash-strapped Mississippi government. Despite the need for federal dollars, white southerners were fully cognizant of the federal strings attached to the funds. In fact, Bolton writes, “White southerners, while hungrily calculating how federal dollars might help their financially strapped region improve and ultimately preserve Jim Crow schools, continued to worry that federal funds might also provide an entrée for the federal government to step in and destroy their system of segregation.”

It is important to understand that the move towards equalizing the public schools for black

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Footnote: 60 Ibid, 41.
and white children was not done to genuinely help underserved, disadvantaged blacks, but rather to perpetuate the system of segregation which initially created the disparities. Bolton contends, “For white Mississippians, then, one-race schools represented the very heart of segregation. Losing the battle to preserve segregated schools would make it impossible to prevent social equality and miscegenation and was tantamount to losing the war over the continuation of racial segregation.”61 The huge discrepancies in funding for black school truly depicted the counter-narrative of equality that the equalization plan had in mind.

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled in the historic Brown v. Board of Education case that the separate but equal doctrine established by Plessy v. Ferguson violated the equal protection clause in the 14th Amendment. In theory, this should have immediately had a profound impact on the educational outcomes of African Americans across the nation. According to Bolton, “Enforcement of the Brown decision, however, proved difficult, and for ten years white Mississippians resisted all efforts to desegregate their schools.” The hostile attitude demonstrated by the political leadership of Mississippi truly depicted an environment in which no truly equal school for African Americans could emerge. In fact, after the Brown II decision stated that schools had to integrate with “all deliberate speed” the political leaders in Mississippi ramped up their efforts to fight desegregation of the schools.

In July of 1954, Governor Hugh White and his exclusively white Legal Education Advisory Committee (LEAC) met with 85-100 black leaders to discuss the ramifications

61 Ibid, xvii.
of the *Brown* decision. This meeting was not to discuss steps to integrate schools, but rather how to equalize the black schools to maintain segregation. Bolton writes, “[White leaders] needed firm assurance from blacks that they favored the status quo of segregated schools.” At the meeting, the blacks did not insist on an immediate implementation of the *Brown* decision but “their straightforward support of the decree, the blunt suggestions about the failures of separate but equal, and the bold talk of sharing power to determine the state’s educational course undoubtedly terrified Governor White and the LEAC.” In response to this meeting with black leaders, Governor White called for a special legislative session to “initiate steps to abolish the state’s public schools if necessary to avoid integration.” Bolton writes that white Mississippians would, “commit themselves to a number of other draconian and wasteful measures to fight school desegregation.” Essentially, the white political leadership in the state wanted to close down the schools if forced to integrate and convert them into private schools that would be funded by state tax dollars. Conservative educator J.D. Boyd wisely noted that it would be the white schools that would most suffer from these measures, not the black schools. Bolton later described this approach as the “odd logic of white supremacy.” White Mississippians preferred to undermine their own schools rather than to integrate. This is the mentality that the integrationist organizations such as the NAACP would have to face during its quest to integrate public schools.

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In 1955, the US Supreme Court handed down its *Brown II* decision and its “all deliberate speed” mandate. The Mississippi state legislature responded in 1956 by passing a resolution of interposition, which “promis[ed] to interpose the sovereignty of the state of Mississippi between any federal court decision requiring desegregation schools and the local school districts called on to begin integration.”70 Also during this time, the state legislature created the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission to “protect the sovereignty of the state”, this organization would have a budget of $250,000 to act as the “watchdog group for preserving segregation.”71 The Mississippi Sovereignty Commission had calculated assault on groups, as well as individual people, who desired to integrate the schools. These tactics included “economic intimidation and other threats, if necessary” to dissuade support of the *Brown* decision.72 The purposeful stalling of the implementation of the *Brown II* decision would continue until the *Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education* (1969) decision. The decision declared, “Continued operation of racially segregated schools under the standard of ‘all deliberate speed’ is no longer constitutionally permissible. School districts must immediately terminate dual school systems based on race and operate only unitary school systems.”73 The glacial speed and adversarial attitude towards school integration created an environment in which a black-white achievement gap would develop. Though an achievement gap would more than likely exists even if the state of Mississippi did not resist the *Brown* decision, it is left up

71 Ibid. 
72 Ibid, 76. 
to speculation of how wide the gap would be if more fervent efforts towards integration would have taken root in 1954.

Thirteen years passed after *Alexander* before another development in the state of Mississippi altered the educational system. In 1982, in a special legislative session, the Mississippi Legislature passed the Education Reform Act of 1982. Bolton writes, “The legislation provided $106 million of new money—during a recession—for public kindergartens, a 10 percent pay raise for public school teachers, and the placement of reading aides in public schools.”74 In addition, “The law also reinstated the compulsory education requirement abolished after the *Brown* decision, tightened teacher certification requirements, and reorganized the State Department of Education.”75 Though the Education Reform Act of 1982 was a key education reform in Mississippi, it still came up short in ending the educational disparities that existed between subgroups of children in Mississippi.

75 Ibid.
Chapter III

Mississippi Curriculum Test Data

In this section, the black-white achievement gap in Mississippi is examined through the lenses of standardized test results. According to the Mississippi Department of Education, “The primary goals of the Mississippi Curriculum Content Assessment System are to promote instructional improvement in the classrooms throughout the state and to provide valid, reliable data for accountability purposes in compliance with MS Code 37-16-1 and SB 2156.”76 After the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, this system was reconfigured to comply with the new standards that the legislation required. It is from the Mississippi Curriculum Content Assessment System do we get the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT), which measures student performance from basic to advanced in language arts, reading, and mathematics. However, this thesis focuses exclusively on the results from language arts and mathematics as more data was accessible on those two subjects. In what is to follow, I will examine each subject independent of the other and also each grade tested. I will outline the substantial gains (if any) as well as the stagnate gaps that manifest themselves at each grade level and each subject.

Language Arts MCT

I will first examine the data gathered from analyzing the testing results from the language arts test. The data from 2003-2012 will be utilized. The data will be interpreted in several ways. First, I will examine how the black-white achievement gap changes in the same grade across the years. Next will be an examination of the changes in the gap that occur in subsequent grade. The final step; will be a determination if any trends exist that could possibly shed light on best practices that can be applied in other academic areas.

In 2003, only 71 percent of black third graders scored proficient or higher on the language arts exam compared to 89 percent of white third graders. Another way to view this statistic is by saying that black students scored 79.8 percent of what white students scored. The 2004 MCT results presented a slight improvement for black students and a plateau for white students. Black students’ scores rose to 77 percent, while the white students’ scores remained at 89 percent. The black-white achievement gap closed by nearly 7 percent in 2004 (blacks scored 86.5 percent of what white students scored). The 2005 MCT results nearly mirrored the 2004 results with 76 percent of blacks scoring proficient compared to 90 percent of whites. The 2006 MCT results displayed an increase of 2 percent for black students (up to 78 percent) and a 2 percent decrease for white students (down to 88 percent). That data gathered from 2003-2006 on third grade MCT results displays a 8.8 percent closure of the achievement gap. However, the data from the 2007-2012 MCT Language Arts tests paints a grim image for both white and black students.
The 2007 MCT results show a drastic decrease in performance for both white and black third graders. Only 38 percent of black students scored proficient or higher compared to 64 percent of white students. Black students performed 40 percent lower than they had in 2006. White students did not fare much better as their performance dropped by 24 percent from the previous year. With both groups of students performing at a lower level, the gap in test scores exponentially increased. Black students went from scoring 88.6 percent of what white students scored to a dismal 59.4 percent, which nearly represents a 30 percent increase in the gap. The 2008 MCT results show a proportionate falling of the scores (both races fell by 3 percent). The black-white gap in 2008 dropped to 57.4 percent (down 2 percent from the previous year). The 2009 MCT test results reveal a marginal increase in performance for both black students (37 percent scored proficient, up from 35 percent the previous year) and white students (62 percent scored proficient, up one percent from the previous year). The 2010 MCT results displayed a modest increase in performance for black and white students alike. 41 percent of black students scored proficient, while 65 percent of white students scored proficient. The scoring gap between black and whites students closed by 3.4 percent. The 2011 MCT scores virtually mirror those of 2010 (42 percent of blacks scored proficient, 65 percent of whites scored proficient). The 2012 test results reveal an improvement in test scores for blacks, as the scores improved by 6 percent (to 48 percent scoring proficient) and for whites as the scores increased by 5 percent (to 70 percent scoring proficient). From 2003 to 2012, the data revealed the gap grew by 11.2 percent. To accentuate the drastic drop in performance, consider that 71 percent of black students scored proficient or higher in 2003, while only 48 percent scored proficient in 2012. Whites too show a drop in
performance, though not to the extent of blacks. In 2003, 89 percent of whites scored proficient or higher, while only 70 percent of whites scored proficient in 2012. The result from the third grade MCT Language Arts are quite telling as they provided the initial point of comparison for black and white students in the subsequent years. Next, I will evaluate the results from the 4th grade MCT Language Arts exams.

The 2003 4th Grade MCT Language Arts scores immediately reveals a drop in performance for both races in respect to the third grade results (Only 62 percent of blacks scored proficient, down from 71 percent in 3rd grade. White students dropped 7 percent, from 89 percent to 82 percent). However, the actual gap between the scores of both races slightly grew by 4.2 percent (from blacks scoring 79.8 percent of what whites scored, to 75.6 percent). Both the 2004 and 2005 MCT results demonstrated improvement for black students. 66 percent of black students scored proficient in 2004, that number increased to 72 percent in 2005. The performance remained stagnant over the same period of time (84 percent scored proficient or higher in 2004, and 85 percent scored proficient in 2005).

There was a remarkable closure in the achievement gap over the span of these two years. Black students went from scoring 78.6 percent of what white students scored in 2004 to scoring 84.7 percent in 2005, closing the gap by more than 6 percent. The 2006 MCT results were relatively the same from the preceding year. However, similar to the 2007 third grade MCT Language Arts results, the performance of both races precipitously dropped in 4th grade exam. Barely a third of black students (36 percent) scored proficient or higher in 2007, only 63 percent of white students scored proficient or higher. From the 2008-2012 the scores for black students rose by 9 percent (up to 48 percent from 39 percent), in the same period of time the scores of white students only rose by 4 percent.
(up 70 percent from 66 percent). These results reveal two simultaneous occurrences: both groups of students are improving in performance and the gap between the two is narrowing. In 2008, black students scored 59.1 percent of what white students scored. This percentage grew to 68.6 in 2012, signifying nearly a 10 percent reduction in the gap. Despite the large reduction from 2008-2012, the larger sample still present a net growth of the gap between the groups (blacks scored 75.6 percent of white scored in 2003 and only scored 67.1 of what whites scored in 2012).

The 5th Grade MCT Language Arts test scores begin where the preceding grades began with black students scoring roughly 76.3 percent of what white students scored in the 2003 results. From 2003 to 2005, blacks made somewhat modest gains in test scores (growing from 61 percent scoring proficient to 66 percent). In the same span, white students’ scores went from 80 percent scoring proficient to 82 percent. Over the three year span, the achievement gap narrowed by nearly 4 percent (from blacks scoring 76.3 of what white students scored in 2003 to scoring 80.5 percent of what white students scored in 2005). The 2006 MCT Language Arts test remained relatively stagnant from 2005. However, like the 3rd and 4th grade 2007 MCT Language Arts test scores, the 5th grade results dropped precipitously from the preceding years. In 2007, only 34 percent of black students scored proficient or higher, down from 67 percent the previous year. White students also saw a dramatic fall in their scores, down to 62 percent from 82 percent. Similar to the preceding years, the 2007 test results reflect the largest gap between the two groups. Black students only scored 54.8 percent of what white students scored. Between 2007 and 2010 black scores improved by 5 percent (up to 39 percent scoring proficient or higher) while white scores improved by 2 percent (up to 64 percent
scoring proficient or higher). During this time period the gap in the test scores narrowed by 6 percent (blacks went from scoring 54.8 percent of what white students scored to 60.9 percent). Interestingly, the black students’ scores increased by 5 percent from 2010 to 2011 making it the largest single year of improvement for blacks spanning from 2003 to 2012. Although progress was made between 2010 and 2011, overall the scoring gap grew by over 9 percent from 2003 to 2012.

The achievement gap between black and white students is at its second lowest point in the 6th grade language arts test. In 2003, only 50 percent of black students scored proficient or higher on the language arts test. White achievement is also at its second lowest starting point with only 74 percent of the students scoring proficient or higher. In the following year, both groups of students made modest gains. 54 percent of blacks scored proficient or higher in 2004 and 77 percent of white students scored proficient or higher. From 2003-2006, the percentage of black students scoring proficient or higher increased by 6 percent (from 50 percent to 56 percent) and the scores of white students only displayed a modicum of improvement with their scores only rising by 2 percent (up from 74 percent). Also during this time the scoring gap narrowed by 6.1 percent (blacks went from scoring 67.1 percent of what white students scored in 2003 to scoring 73.7 percent of what whites scored). In 2007, similar to grades 3-6, the scores of both groups drastically fell and the gap between the two exponentially grew. Only 32 percent of black students scored proficient or higher on the language arts MCT. 66 percent of white students scored proficient or higher. The scoring gap on the MCT between whites and blacks increased by 13.1 percent in just one year. From 2007-2012, there were substantial gains in both black and white achievement. Black students’ performance on
the language arts MCT improved by 13 percent (from 32 percent to 45 percent scoring proficient). White students’ performance improved by 11 percent on the language arts MCT (from 59 percent to 70 percent scoring proficient). The overall achievement gap closed by 10 percent from 2007-2012 on the 6th grade language arts test.

The 7th grade language arts MCT test results start nearly at the same place as the 6th grade test scores. 53 percent of black students scored proficient or higher, compared to 75 percent of white students. However, in 2004 a noticeable drop in performance for both groups of student occurs. In only one year, 53 percent of black students scoring proficient or higher dropped to an alarming 41 percent. A similar, though not as drastic drop in performance occurs for white students. The 75 percent of white students scoring proficient or higher in 2003 dropped to a 68 percent in 2004. In the following year, black students improved by 5 percent (up to 46 percent scoring proficient or higher), while students stagnated at 68 percent scoring proficient or higher. The 2006 language arts MCT scores revealed a decrease in performance for both white and black students (black students fell by 3 percent, white students by 1 percent). Similar to each of the preceding grades, the 2007 test results show an exponential drop in performance in both groups. Less than a third of black students scored proficient or higher on the language arts MCT in 2007. Only 58 percent of white students scored proficient or higher as well. The achievement gap grew by 12.5 percent. However, from 2007-2009 black and white students made significant gains on the MCT. Black students’ scores improved by 10 percent (up to 40 percent) and white students’ scores improved by 7 percent (up to 65 percent). During the same time period, the gap of the scores in terms of percentages closed by 10 percent (blacks were scoring 51.7 percent of what white students were
scoring in 2007, to scoring 61.5 percent in 2009). Though the increased performance of both groups from 2007-2009 was noteworthy, from 2009-2012 there was an even greater boost in the test scores, primarily that of black students. In 2009, only 40 percent of black students averaged a score of proficient or higher. This number grew to 52 percent in the 2012 MCT language arts test scores. In 2009, 65 percent of white students on average scored proficient or higher on the MCT. This number grew to 75 percent by 2012. The overall gap between black and white students also narrowed by 7.8 percent from 2009-2012. Though there were several periods of significant gains in the achievement gap (2007-2009, 2009-2012), overall the gap slightly worsened from its starting point of black students scoring 70.7 percent of what white students scored in 2003, to scoring 69.3 percent in 2012.

The 2003 8th grade MCT Language Arts test results are the poorest starting point for both black and white students. In 2003, only 38 percent of black students scored proficient or higher, while only 65 percent of white students scored proficient or higher. In the following year, both groups improved by 3 percentages (up to 41 percent for blacks, and 68 for whites). The 2005 results showed that both groups regressed by 4 points (down to 37 percent for blacks and 64 for whites). However, in 2006, black students improved by 8 percent, while white students improved by 4 percent. The achievement gap also narrowed by 8.4 percent from 2005 to 2006 (blacks went from scoring 57.8 percent of what white scored, to 66.2 percent). The familiar trend of a drastic performance from the 2006 MCT test to the 2007 MCT again manifests itself in the 8th grade language arts test. Stunningly only 29 percent of black students scored proficient or higher on the MCT, 61 percent of white students scored proficient or higher.
In 2007, black performance dropped by 16 percent, almost double that of white performance. In 2008, black students’ scored improved by 6 percent (up to 35 percent), while white performance only improved by 2 percent (63 percent). In 2009, black students regressed by 3 percent, while white students by 4 percent. Both groups improved their performance in 2010, blacks improved by 6 percent (38 percent) and white performance improved by 4 percent (up to 63 percent). Black and white students’ scored improved again in 2011 by 4 percent (up to 42 percent for black students and up to 67 percent for white students). In 2012, black students regressed by 1 percent, while white students improved their scores by 1 percent. After the drastic drop scores in 2007, in which black students went from scoring 66.2 percent of what white students scored to scoring only 47.5 percent of what white students scored, the achievement gap eventually narrowed by 12.8 percent by 2012. Although the gap was narrowed by 12.8 in 2012 (black students scored 60.3 percent of white students scored) it never reached the 66.2 percent before the 2006 test results.

The MCT Language Arts scores from 3rd to 8th grade spanning 2003-2012 reveal several unique trends. The scores of black student as a percent of the scores of white students decrease with each subsequent grade. The scoring gap is at its most narrow point among 3rd graders and at its widest point among 8th graders. Figure 1 depicts three distinct segments of the achievement gap spanning from 2003-2012. For example, from 2003 to 2007, there are only small fluctuations of narrowing of the gap in each grade. In 2007 however, each grade dropped drastically. And from 2008-2012 there is glacial narrowing of the achievement gap, with only the 6th and 7th grade scores approaching
where they started in 2003. Every other grade is significantly lower than the original starting point in 2003.

![Figure 1 Black MCT Language Arts Score as % of White Score: 2003-2012 (Proficient or higher)](image)

Source: http://reports.mde.k12.ms.us/data/

Thus far, the MCT Language Arts have been analyzed to measure the increase or closure of the black white-achievement for each particular grade. However, Table 1, measures the black-white achievement gap of one cohort of 3rd graders in 2007 and tracks them until they are 8th graders in 2012. (In 2007, a new edition of the MCT was administered.) The results demonstrated a slight increase in the gap from 2007 until 2010, a sharp closure in 2011, followed by a subsequent increase in 2012. Overall, the gap in
the proficiency rate between black and white students only changed by less than one percent in six years. Furthermore, black students in 2012 still remained 23 percent behind white students in 2007. The glacial paces of improvement coupled with the fact black students are years behind white students present a bleak outlook for black students in Mississippi.

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Source: http://reports.mde.k12.ms.us/data/

**MCT Mathematics**

A similar methodology used to analyze the MCT language arts test will be employed to view the results of the MCT mathematics exams. The data utilized in this section spans from 2003-2012. The data will be interpreted in several ways. First, I examine how the black-white achievement gap changes in the same grade across the years. Next, is an examination of the changes in the gap that occurs in the subsequent grades. The final step is a determination if any trends exist that could possibly shed light on best practices that can be applied in other academic areas.
The 3\textsuperscript{rd} grade math MCT scores for black and white students alike remained relatively stagnant from 2003-2006. Black students’ proficiency rate was approximately 88 percent, while white students’ proficiency rate was approximately 96 percent during the 2003-2006 span. In 2007, the performance for both black and white students tremendously dropped. The 2007 math MCT results revealed that only 46 percent of black students scored proficient or higher, compared to 69 percent of white students. After the 2007 tests results, both groups of students made incremental improvements in the proficiency rate for 3\textsuperscript{rd} graders. By 2012, black students tested proficiency at a rate of 54 percent, representing a 9 percent increase from 2007. White students made similar gains by 2012, boasting their proficiency rate by 11 percent to 80 percent in 2012.

In 2003, 69 percent of black students scored proficient or higher on the 4\textsuperscript{th} grade math MCT test, compared to 91 percent of white students. In the following year, black performance remained at 69 percent, while white students’ performance dropped to 88 percent. In 2005, black students’ performance jumped by 4 percent (up to 73 percent of blacks scoring proficient or higher). In the same year, 91 percent of white students scored proficient. Black students scored 80.2 percent of what white students scored in 2005, closing the gap between the two groups by nearly 5 percent since in 2003. The proficiency rate for both groups virtually remained the same in 2006.

The 2007 4\textsuperscript{th} grade math MCT scores revealed a significant drop in performance for black and white students. In 2007, only 42 percent of black students scored proficient, while only 68 percent of white students scored proficient. In a single year, the proficiency rate for black students fell by 31 percent and by 22 percent for white students. Black students went from scoring 81.1 percent of what white students scored in 2006, to only
scoring 61.8 percent of what they scored in 2007. After the drastic drop in 2007, scores for black and white students alike increased by 3 percent (for black students) and 5 percent (for white students) in 2008. The 2009 math MCT scores again show a slight improvement of 2 percent for both groups of students (up to 47 percent scoring proficient for blacks, and 72 percent for white students).

From 2010 to 2012, the 48 percent of black students scoring proficient grew to 59 percent. During the same span, white students saw their performance improve by 9 percent, jumping to 79 percent of white students scoring proficient or higher.

The gap in the proficiency rate for the 5th grade math scores, beginning in 2003, are worse than the 3rd grade math scores for black and white students. Only 54 percent of black students scored proficient or higher in 2003, compared to 84 percent of white students. In the following year, black students’ scores improved by 2 percent to 56 percent, while white students slightly regressed to 83 percent. By 2006, 61 percent of black students scored proficient or higher (up 7 percent from 2003) and 84 percent of white students scored proficient (basically unchanged from 2003). Black students went from scoring 64.3 percent of what white students scored, to scoring 72.6 percent in 2006, which represents a 8.3 percent closure in the gap.

The 2007 5th grade math scores, like the 3rd grade scores, reveal a tremendous drop in proficiency for white and black students. In fact, the drop in performance is almost identical (21 percent for black students, 19 percent drop for white students). In 2008, slight improvements occurred for both groups (+2 percent for black students, +3 percent for white students). After the monumental drop in 2007, black and white students showed less improvement from 2009-2012 than from 2003-2006. In fact, black and white
students’ rate of proficiency only improved by 5 percent from 2009-2012, which essentially means that both groups performed slightly better, but the gap between two remained relatively the same. For example, in 2009 black students scored 66.2 percent of what white students. In 2012, that percentage only grew by 2.2 percent (up to 68.4 percent).

The 6th grade math MCT scores start off at a slightly better point than the 5th grade scores. 57 percent of black students scored proficient or higher, while 85 percent of white students scored proficient. Both black and white students regressed slightly in 2004 (black students’ proficiency fell by 3 percent, while white students’ proficiency rate fell by 2 percent). However, in 2005 black students’ performance improved by 8 percent, compared to white students who only improved by 1 percent from the previous year. The 2006 test results reveal another drop in the proficiency of both black and white students. Similar to the previous grades, the 2007 test results show a drastic drop in performance for black and white students. In 2007, black students’ proficiency rates dropped by 20 percent, while the white rates dropped by 16 percent. The 2008 test scores essentially mirrored those of 2007, with the white students performing at a 1 percent higher rate. In 2009, black students’ proficiency jumped by 5 percent, while white students’ proficiency rose by 2 percent. Despite the small gain of performance in 2009, both groups regressed in 2010. But from 2010-2012, there were significant gains for black students and white students, as both groups improved their respective proficiency rate by 2012.

The 2003 7th grade MCT results are the lowest starting point of the MCT data being examined from 2003-2012. Only 37 percent of black students scored proficient or higher compared to 72 percent of white students. Black students only scored 51.4 percent
of what white students scored, equaling a 48.6 percent achievement gap between black and white students. In the following year, both groups of students increased their proficiency rate. Black students’ proficiency rate increased by 6 percent, while white students’ proficiency rate increased by 4 percent. From 2004-2006, black students improved their proficiency rate by 8 percent, compared to only a 1 percent growth in the performance of white students. In the same span, the achievement gap closed by nearly 10 percent. In 2004, black students were scoring 56.6 percent of what white students were scoring, but in 2006 they were scoring 66.2 percent of what white students were scoring. The familiar trend of drastic drops in performance occurs again with the 2007 test results. Only 39 percent of black students scored proficient or higher, while 63 percent of white students scored proficient or higher.

After the sudden downfall in performance in 2007, both groups made huge gains from 2007-2010. The rate of proficiency for black students increased by 12 percent, going from only 39 percent scoring proficient to 51 percent. White students saw their proficiency rate increase by 11 percent during the same span, going from 63 percent scoring proficient to 74 percent. White students made a 1 percent gain in 2011, moving up to 75 percent scoring proficient. The scores of black students stayed the same. In 2012, however, black students made a 5 percent jump in proficiency, moving up to 56 percent, while white students again only made a 1 percent jump.

The 2003 8th grade math MCT test scores are similar to the 7th grade scores. Only 43 percent of black students scored proficient or higher, while 76 percent of white students scored proficient or higher. Both black and white test scores fell in 2004, with only 38 percent of black students scoring proficient or higher and 68 percent of white
students. Scores for both groups increased in 2005, then fell in 2006 and 2007. After the 2007 results, black and white students made steady progression. For example, from 2007-2012 the amount of black students scoring proficient or higher moved from 35 percent to 63 percent in 2012 (a 28 percent increase in performance). White students also saw a tremendous increase in their performance going from 64 percent scoring proficient, to 83 proficient in 2012 (a 19 percent increase in performance).

The overall trend for the MCT math scores vary from the MCT language arts test. For example, from 2003 to 2006, 3rd grade black students scored 90 percent of what white students scored. Each subsequent grade only display small improvements in the gap between black and white students. In 2007, the gap takes a downward spiral for each grade’s scores, then a subsequent rebound from 2008 until 2012. As Figure 2 notes, the 8th grade MCT scores of black students outpaced every other grade following the rapid fall in 2007. In fact, the 8th grade scores are actually better than they were in 2003. Similar gains are evident from the 7th grade scores as well. This is peculiar as we have seen in Language Arts, the gap seems to grow as the grades progress, but the exact opposite in the math scores. The gains made in math should be noted and further examined to pinpoint strategies of success that could be implemented in the other academic disciplines.
Similar to the MCT Language Arts test, to this point each grade’s MCT results have been compared next to the previous year’s results. However, to measure the growth or closure of the achievement gap for one cohort of students, the performance of the 3rd graders in 2007 were tracked until they were 8th graders in 2012. Table 2 shows the narrowing gap in the proficiency rate between black and white students on the MCT Mathematics exam. From 2007-2009, there were small fluctuations in the proficiency gap between black and white students, followed by a slight dip in performance in 2010. However, in 2011 and 2012 the proficiency gap closed by 7 percent. These strides are impressive due to the fact that black students in 2012 are only 6 points away from the rate of proficiency of white students in 2007.

Source: http://reports.mde.k12.ms.us/data/
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Source: http://reports.mde.k12.ms.us/data/
Chapter IV

Subject Area Testing Program Data

According to the Mississippi Department of Education, “The Mississippi Student Achievement Improvement Act, approved by the Mississippi Senate in 1999, states that standards for high school graduation shall include student ‘mastery of minimum academic skills as measured by assessments developed and administered by the State Board of Education.” High school students in the state of Mississippi must pass four assessments (Algebra I, Biology I, U.S. History, and English II) in order to receive a high school diploma. In this section, the rate of passing the subject area test by both black and white students will be examined. In addition, the rate of proficiency will be analyzed between the groups. It is important to observe the gaps in the rate of passing these exams, as this step is contingent to receive a high school diploma. The rate of proficiency must be analyzed to display the quality of student the state of Mississippi is producing. When analyzing the data from the subject area test results, it is pertinent to acknowledge the utilization of a completely different framework based upon the year in which the student took any particular exam. According to the Mississippi Office of Student Assessment Subject Area Testing Program, Second Edition Guide, “Beginning in 2007-2008, all students enrolled in Algebra I and English II for the first time were tested on material

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from the 2007 *Mathematics Frameworks, Revised* and the 2006 *Mississippi Language Arts Framework, Revised.* The guide would later add, “Students who were enrolled in Algebra I and English II prior to the 2007-2008 school year were taught from the *Mississippi Mathematics Framework 2000* and the *Mississippi Language Arts Framework 2000.*” Additionally, “Beginning in 2010-2011, all students enrolled in Biology I for the first time were tested on material from the *2010 Mississippi Science Framework.* Students who were enrolled in Biology I prior to the 2010-2011 school year were taught from the *Mississippi Science Curriculum Framework 2001.*”

**Algebra I Subject Area Test**

The passing rate of the Algebra I Subject Area test is relatively high for both black and white students. In 2004, 86.7 percent of black students passed, while 96 percent of white students passed. However, the proficiency rate between the two groups is what is alarming. Only 44 percent of the 86.7 percent passing black students scored proficient or higher. White students fared much better with 72 percent of the 96 percent of students passing scoring proficient or higher. The 2005 Algebra I Subject Area test has similar rates of passage (85.8 for blacks and 95.6 for whites), but the rate of proficiency dropped for both groups. Out of the 85.8 percent of black students that passed, only 39 percent scored proficient or higher (down 5 points from the previous year). The scores of white students actually dropped slightly more than black students. Out of the 95.6 percent of

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79 Ibid.

80 Ibid.
white students who passed the exam, 66 percent scored proficient or higher (down 6 points). The 2006 test have a similar passing rate (85.8 for blacks, 95.4 for whites), but the percentage of students scoring increased for both groups by 3 percent.

There is a noticeable drop in the rate of passing between the 2006 and 2007 tests, yet the proficiency rate increased. The causation of this drop in performance is outside of the scope of this thesis. The 2007 test results display an interesting occurrence, the performance of both blacks and white dropped (the black passing rate fell by nearly 27 percent, while the white passing rate fell by 12.6 percent) however the rate of proficiency for both groups increased by 2 percent for both groups (up to 44 percent for blacks and 71 percent for whites).

In 2008, the passing rate for both groups narrowly grew, but the rate of proficiency grew tremendously (50 percent of blacks scored proficient or higher (+6 percent), 75 percent of whites scored proficient or higher (+4 percent). In 2009, both the rate of passing and proficiency grew moderately for black and white students. Particularly for black students the rate of passing grew by a little over 10 percent (from 61.2 to 71.5 percent) and the rate of proficiency grew by 10 percent (from 50 to 60 percent). The rate of passing for white students only improved by less than 3 percent, but the rate of proficiency grew 7 percent (up to 82 percent).

The 2010 Algebra I test results revealed improvements for both black and white students. The passing rate improved by 7.1 percent for black students and 3.9 percent for white students. In addition, the rate of proficient scores improved for both group students (black students improved by 8 percent, up to 68 percent and white students increased by 4 percent, up to 86 percent). Upward progression slowed in 2011 for black and white
students. The black students passed the Algebra I test at a rate of 4 percent less than the previous year. White students passed the Algebra I test at a rate of 3 percent less than 2010. The rate of proficient scores saw a similar drop in 2011. Black students regressed by 3 percent (down to 65 percent, and white students fell by 2 percent, down to 84 percent). The 2012 test results show another spike of improvement for black and white students. The black passing rate improved nearly 4 percent (up to 78.5 percent) and the passing rate of white students improved by a little more than 2 percent (up to 92 percent). The proficient rate increase increased by 4 percent respective for both groups.

Tables 3 and 4 depict both the passing rate and the proficiency rate for black and white students on the Algebra I subject area test. In Table 3, it is clear that the passing rate only slight fell from 2004 to 2006, then in 2007 came the drastic fall in performance due to the change in the standards in the testing framework. However, after the change in test standards in 2007, the passing rate gap narrowed by 14 percent between black and white students by 2012.

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<td>2005</td>
<td>85.8</td>
<td>95.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>85.8</td>
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<td>89.9</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>71.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>61.2</td>
<td>83.2</td>
<td>73.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>80.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>92.4</td>
<td>85.1</td>
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<td>2011</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>89.3</td>
<td>83.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>85.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://reports.mde.k12.ms.us/data/

Table 4 shows the extraordinary gains made in the proficiency rates from 2004-2012. The proficiency gap between black and white students closed by 17 percent from
In addition, it is evident that black students in 2012 are only 3 percent away from the proficiency rate of white students in 2004. Though this gap still indicates that black students are at least 9 years behind white students, the gap in proficiency in Algebra I is much less profound than in other subject areas.

Table 4 Black-White Proficiency rate Algebra I test (2004-2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>% of White Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>61.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>59.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>62.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>73.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>79.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>77.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>78.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://reports.mde.k12.ms.us/data/

*Biology Subject Area Test*

The passing rate of black and white students on the Biology test in 2004 is similar to the passing rate of the Algebra I test in 2004 (85.5 percent of black students passed, while 96 percent of white students passed). However, the rate of proficiency is initially higher for both groups in Biology. For example, 53 percent of black students scored proficient or higher (compared to 44 percent on the Algebra I test) and 85 percent of white students scored proficient (compared to 72 percent on the Algebra I test). Over the next two years (2005 and 2006) both the passing rate and the proficiency rate remained virtually stagnant, though black students passed at rate 3 percent higher from 2004 to
2005 (up to 88.1 percent from 85.5 percent). The proficient rate hovered around 54 percent for black students from 2004 through 2006 and 85 percent for white students.

In 2007, the passing rate for black students fell by nearly 7 percent and the proficient rate fell by 5 percent. However, white students’ performance barely changed (proficient rate fell by 1 percent to 83 percent and the passing rate remained at 96 percent). The 2008 results reveal a similar narrative to the 2007 results, the black proficiency rate dropped by 2 percent and the passing rate increased by .2 percent. Both the white passing rate and proficiency rate stayed the same. The passing rates for both groups slightly fell in 2009, but the proficiency rate for black students improved by 2 percent (up to 48 percent), white proficiency remained at 83 percent.

The 2010 biology test result displayed a precipitous decrease in performance for black and white students alike. White students’ rate of passing fell by 8.5 percent and black students’ rate of passing fell by double that of whites (18 percent). The rate of proficiency seemed to drop proportionally black proficiency rates fell by 11 percent, while white proficiency fell by 9 percent. From 2010 to 2012 the black passing rate increased by 7.3 percent, while the proficiency rate increased by 10 percent. The white passing rate increased by 3.5 percent, while the proficiency rate increased by 7 percent.

The biology subject area test data showed to separate times in which the passing and proficiency rate of both groups dropped drastically. It happened after 2006 and again after 2009. Tables 5 and 6 reveal the stark fall in performance for both black and white students. The cause of the rapid decline in the performance is difficult to discern from the available data.
### Table 5 Black-White Passing rate on the Biology I test (2004-2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>% of White Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>85.5</td>
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<td>2005</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>86.3</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>79.4</td>
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<td>82.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
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<td>96</td>
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<td>2009</td>
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<td>2010</td>
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<td>2011</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>88.6</td>
<td>69.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>73.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://reports.mde.k12.ms.us/data/

### Table 6 Black-White Proficiency rate on the Biology I test (2004-2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>% of White Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>62.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>63.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
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<td>84</td>
<td>63.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>57.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>55.4</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>57.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>37</td>
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<td>50.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://reports.mde.k12.ms.us/data/
The English II subject area test has the lowest passing rate for both black and white students in 2004. Only 73.9 percent of black students passed, while 91.2 percent of white students passed. However, what is most concerning is that only 20 percent of black students scored proficient or higher. Only 51 percent of white students scored proficient on the 2004 English exam. In 2005, the passing rate for both groups declined (black students’ passing rate fell by 7.6 percent, while white students’ passing rate fell by 2.3 percent). In terms of proficiency rates, both groups only marginally improved by 1 percent (up to 21 percent for black students and 52 percent for white students). The 2006 English II exam results a less than 1 percent improvement in black scores and white scores fell by 1.5 percent. However, the appalling rate of proficiency for black students in 2006 was 19 percent, which is the lowest rate of proficiency for any test from 2004-2012.

The 2007 test results are interesting as the passing rate for black and white students both dropped, though like previous years and assessments, black students’ performance fell more drastically. Black students passing percentage rate fell by nearly 12 percent, while white students’ performance only fell by 3 percent. During the decline in passing, the rate of proficiency improved for both groups, particular black students as the rate from a historic low of 19 percent to 32 percent. White students’ proficiency rate also saw drastic improvements, going from 52 percent to 68 percent in one year. The passing rate and proficiency rate for black and white students remained relatively unchanged from 2007 to 2009.
The 2010 test results show a 5 percent improvement in the passing rate for black students (up to 60.8 percent) and the proficiency rate increased up by 8 percent (up to 43 percent). White students saw an increase of less 2 percent in the passing rate, and a 3 percent increase in the proficiency rate. The 2010 test results marked the last major year of improvement for black students. The subsequent years only produced marginal improvements in the passing and proficiency rates for black and white students. Tables 7 and 8 show the passing and proficiency rate for black and white students. Table 7 shows that the gap grew between blacks and white students by 10 percent over the 9 year span. The table shows how black students in 2012 are a shocking 30 percent behind white students in 2004.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>% of White Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>91.2</td>
<td>81.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
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<td>2008</td>
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<td>84</td>
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<td>81.9</td>
<td>67.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://reports.mde.k12.ms.us/data/

Table 8 shows the proficiency rate between black and white students on the English II subject area test from 2004-2012. In terms of absolute numbers, both the
scores of black and white students improved by 24 points from 2004-2012, however the scores were miserably low, especially for black students to begin with. The proficiency gap between black and white students narrowed by nearly 20 percent over the 9 year span. However, black students in 2012 were still 7 percent behind white students in 2004.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>% of White Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
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<td>2005</td>
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</table>

Source: http://reports.mde.k12.ms.us/data/

U.S. History Subject Area Test

The US History subject area test results in 2004 show a remarkable passing rate for both black and white students. 93.9 percent of black students passed the exam, while 96 percent of white students passed. In terms of proficiency, 50 percent of black students scored proficient or higher, compared to 76 percent of white students. The gap in proficiency is also at one of its narrower points in 2004 with black students scoring 65.8 percent of what white students scored. In 2005, the passing rate for both groups virtually remained the same, but the proficiency rate slightly diminished (down to 48 percent for
black students, and down to 75 percent for white students). The 2006 test show a slight decrease in the passing rate for black students (down by 4.1 percent) and white students’ performance remained at 96 percent. The proficiency rate regressed for black students by 1 percent and up to 84 percent (up 9 percent) for white students.

The 2007 US History exam results are unique because unlike its Algebra, English, and Biology counterparts the passing race increased for black students and stayed the same for white students. However, the proficiency rate for both groups of students fell (white students’ proficiency rate fell by 6 percent, black students’ proficiency rate fell by 1 percent). The 2008 test results almost entirely closed the achievement gap in passing between black and white students. Black students passed at a rate of 94.7 percent, while white students passed at 96 percent. In this one year, black students scored nearly 99 percent of what white students scored. The proficiency rate did not substantially change from the previous year, but the nearly closing of the passing rate achievement gap is noteworthy. After the historic scores of 2008 for black students, passing performance tapered off to 88 percent through 2010. The proficiency rate hovered around 42 percent as well. White students continued to pass at rate of 96 percent and score proficient at rate of 75 and 78 percent, respectively.

As Tables 9 and 10 will show, both the passing rate and the proficiency rate for black and white students dropped after the 2007 test, particularly for black students. Table 9 shows how black students in 2012 are 25 percent behind white students in 2004 in passing the US History exam. Table 10 shows the slight fluctuations of the proficiency rate for both black and white students. Because of the glacial pace of improvement, black students in 2012 are nearly 30 percent behind where white students were in 2004.
### Table 9 Black-White Passing rate on the US History test (2004-2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>% of White Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
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<td>2008</td>
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<td>91</td>
<td>78.8</td>
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</table>

Source: http://reports.mde.k12.ms.us/data/

### Table 10 Black-White Proficiency rate on the US History test (2004-2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>% of White Score</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>65.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>64.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>56.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>78</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td>57.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>69</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>60.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://reports.mde.k12.ms.us/data/
Figure 3 reveals two dominating trends in the rate of proficiency for black students from 2004-2012 in two specific subjects, Algebra I and English II. In 2004, black students only scored 61.1 percent of what white students scored in terms of proficiency on the Algebra I test. By 2012, that percent nearly rose to 80 percent. The English II test scores also note a huge gain. In 2004, black students only scored 40 percent of what white students scored in terms of proficiency. The English II test scores saw gains of nearly 20 percent by the year 2012. Although the proficiency gap between blacks in Algebra II remains nearly 20 percent and 40 percent in English, the gains cannot be ignored. Conversely, the proficiency gap in biology and history display a negative growth or, at best a plateau from 2004 -2009. The biology scores dropped a bit in 2010, then somewhat rebounded in 2011 and 2012. Taken as a whole, the biology and history scores are actually lower than what they were in 2003.

Source: http://reports.mde.k12.ms.us/data/
Chapter V

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Data

In the previous section, data from the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT) was examined to uncover the scoring gaps in language arts and mathematics tests between black and white students. The MCT results were valuable in a sense that they provided an internal assessment of our students, but they are weakened by the fact that the standards cannot be compared to the results of other states. The NAEP data will be examined for a two-fold purpose. First, to measure the black-white achievement gap on an assessment that is not native to Mississippi. Second, the NAEP data will provide a foundational point of comparison so that the achievement gap in Mississippi can be effectively compared to that of surrounding states. The origins of the NAEP exam as well as the state NAEP counterpart will be briefly explored before delving into the data.

The need for assessing the talents of students of the United States became increasingly clear after the Russians launched Sputnik in 1957. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, “Concerns about the scientific proficiency of the U.S. students led to Project Talent, which administered tests to a large national sample of

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the nation’s secondary school students.” The precursor to the NAEP however could not decipher the abilities of each subgroup of students because at the time of its administration, “asking a student’s race was considered by many to be improper—and illegal in some states—so the question was not asked, and thus the study was unable to answer the questions about minority performance that were essential to the issue of equal educational opportunity.” However, this would change with President Kennedy’s appointment of Francis Keppel as head of the Office of Education in 1962. Curious about the responsibilities of his new position, he discovered that it was the duty of his office to report about the annual performance of U.S. students. The NCES website states, “He marveled at the fact that, in nearly a century, the Office had never done so.” After a conversation with Ralph Tyler, the Director of the Institute of Advanced Studies in the Behavior Sciences, “the germ of the idea that was to grow into the National Assessment of Educational progress was sown.”

The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 played an integral role in making way for the NAEP test to emerge. The CRA of 1964 required, “a report on the Equality of Education Opportunity to be delivered on July 1, 1966.” As a result the Equality of Education Opportunity Survey (EEOS) was administered to 1 million students from grades 1, 3, 6, 9, and 12. However, the execution of the tests was “rushed” due to its relatively close deadline. Though the EEOS was a step into the direction of national testing, the test and its results were problematic. According to the NCES website, “The

82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
final size was only about 65 percent of the intended sample size due to the unwillingness or inability of some to participate." In addition, the “technology available at the time did not take the sample characteristics into account when computing variance of the estimates.”

The idea of national testing was met with opposition because of the “potential encroachment of the federal government on states’ rights.” However, a decline in the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) in the 1960s demonstrated a need for a “good indicator of the performance of all students, not just the college bound. The need for such an indicator influenced the design of NAEP.” In 1969, we finally see the first NAEP data collection which focused on citizenship, science, and writing of 17-year-olds. Though the path to establish national testing was one filled with many obstacles, the insight that the data provided invaluable insight on the performance of each group of students in the United States. This section of the thesis will focus on the NAEP data on 4th and 8th grade Mathematics and Reading tests from the years 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, and 2013. I will examine any emerging trends that manifest itself in the data and I will measure the growth or narrowing of the achievement gap over the ten year span.

**NAEP Reading**

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) website, “The NAEP reading assessment measures the reading and comprehension skills of students in...
grades 4, 8, and 12 by asking them to read selected grade-appropriate passages and answer based on what they have read.”

Before discussing the actual test results from Mississippi students, it is pertinent to develop an understanding of the scoring framework that NAEP abides by. The tests from 2003, 2005, and 2007 have different achievement-level descriptions than the tests conducted in 2009, 2011, and 2013. The 1992-2007 Achievement-Level descriptions are as follows: Basic (score of 208) which means, “[students] should demonstrate an understanding of the overall meaning of what they have read”; Proficient (score of 238) which means, “[students] should be able to demonstrate an overall understanding of the text, providing inferential as well as literal information”; Advanced (scored of 268) which means, “[students] should be able to generalize about topics in the reading selection and demonstrate an awareness of how authors compose and use literary devices.”

The updated 2009 achievement-level description have the same numeric value for each of its three tiers of achievement.

Although the data from the NAEP is not comparable to that of the MCT, the NAEP data reveals a completely different narrative in the test scores of black and white students in Mississippi. Table 11 shows that black students as a whole never reached the first tier (Basic) of achievement. In fact, the closest black students ever got to achieve the basic level were in 2011 and 2013 with an aggregate score of 198. On the contrary, white students did not fare much better. White students only performed at the Basic level from 2003-2013. White students scored 224 in the 2009 NAEP reading assessment, which

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92 Ibid.
represents the high score this group of students ever scored, still 14 points shy of proficient.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>% of White Students Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


The poor performance of black and white 4th graders should be bring into question the effectiveness of the educational system of Mississippi. According to the NAEP data, on average students in Mississippi are not proficient in reading. The actual test scores showed the performance of black students improved by 6 total points from 2003 to 2013 (from 192 to 198), while the white scores slightly fluctuated during the decade, ultimately improving by 1 point (from 221 to 222). Though the achievement gap between black and white remained separated by at least 20 points, the percent of what blacks scored relative to whites actually narrowed by 3 percent from 2003-2013. In 2003, blacks averaged a score of 192 on the 4th grade reading NAEP exam, while whites averaged a score of 221. Another way of viewing this is data is to state that black students scored 86.9 percent of what white students scored in 2003. This number grew to 90.4 in 2011 and eventually ended up being 89.2 in 2013. The 4th grade reading NAEP is interesting as it depicts a relatively stagnate achievement gap between black and white students.
The 8th grade reading NAEP test results for Mississippi are similar to the 4th grade results; however, the gap between black and white students is closer. For example, 5 out of the 6 times Mississippi students were tested from 2003-2013, black students scored at least 90 percent of what white students scored. Before delving into the specific scores of the students, the scoring scale for the 8th grade exam must be provided as it greatly differs from the 4th grade NAEP scale. The same basic categories are still present: basic, proficient, and advanced. To qualify as basic requires a score of 243. According to the National Center of Education Statistics, “Eighth-grade students performing at the Basic level should be able to locate information; identify statements of main ideas, theme, or author’s purpose; and make simple inferences from texts. They should be able to interpret the meaning of a word as it is used in the text. Students at this level should be able to state judgments and give some support about content and presentation of content.” A proficient score is 281. The NCES states, “Eighth-grade students performing at the Proficient level should be able to provide relevant information and summarize main ideas and themes. They should be able to make and support inferences about a text, connect parts of a text, and analyze text features. Students performing at this level should also be able to fully substantiate judgments about content and presentation of content.” An advanced score is 323. The requisite for an advanced state, “Eighth-grade students performing at the Advanced level should be able to make connections within and across texts and to explain causal relations. They should be able to evaluate and justify the strength of supporting evidence and the quality of an author’s presentation. Students

94 Ibid.
performing at the advanced level also should be able to manage the processing demands of analysis and evaluation by stating, explaining, and justifying.”

The achievement gap in the 8th grade reading NAEP is much closer than that of the 4th grade gap as I previously demonstrated. Table 12 demonstrates how black students, on average never score above the basic scoring tier and white students on average consistently scored proficient each year tested between 2003 and 2013.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>% of White Students Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>90.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>89.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>90.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>90.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>90.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>90.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


With an average score of 242, black students nearly scored proficient as a whole in 2003, that number fell to 238 in both 2005 and 2007. During this same period of time, the scores of white students never fluctuate more than three points from one year to the next. Surprisingly, the overall performance of white students actually went down by 2 points from 2003 to 2013. In perhaps the most telling revelation of the stagnation of the achievement gap on the 8th grade NAEP test, the gap only fell by .1 percent from 2003-2003 (black students went from scoring 90.3 percent of what white students scored in 2003 to 90.2 percent in 2013).

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Overall, both the 4th and 8th grade NAEP reading assessments from 2003-2013, indicate stagnation in the achievement gap between black and white students. The numeric value of each group’s scores tends to increase, but they appear to be doing so simultaneously, which perpetuates the achievement gap. Next, the 4th and 8th grade NAEP math assessments will be examined to uncover any gaps or closures that may exists.

**NAEP Math**

According to the NCES website, “The National Assessment of Educational Progress mathematics assessment measures students’ knowledge and skills in mathematics and students’ ability to apply their knowledge in problem-solving situations.”  

To properly examine the scores of both black and white students in Mississippi, it is pertinent to provide the scale that the NAEP utilized in its assessment. The NCES website says, “In mathematics, NAEP has created a scale ranging from 0-500 at grades 4 and 8 and a scale from 0-300 at grade 12, based on statistical procedures called Item Response Theory (IRT). IRT is a set of statistical procedures useful in summarizing student performance across a collection of test exercises requiring similar knowledge and skills.” Similar to the NAEP reading assessment, the mathematics portion has a three scale system of achievement: basic, proficient, and advanced. To score at the basic level students must score at least 214. The NCES website states, “Fourth-grade students performing at the Basic level should show some evident of understanding


the mathematical concepts and procedures in the five NAEP content areas.” The score of proficient is 249. The NCES scale states, “Fourth-grade students performing at the proficient level should consistently apply integrated procedural knowledge and conceptual understanding to problem solving in the five NAEP content areas.” To score advanced the students must get a score of 282 and “should be able to apply integrated procedural knowledge and conceptual understanding to complex and nonroutine real-world problem solving in the five NAEP content areas.”

The 4th grade NAEP mathematics assessments displayed an overall smaller achievement gap than its reading counterpart. For example, in 2003 black students averaged a score of 213 on the mathematics assessment, while white students averaged a score of 237. Black students scored nearly 90 percent of what white students scored in 2003. It is important to note the constant improvement of scores for both black and white students, and the narrowing of the gap in 3 consecutive test cycles (2003, 2005, and 2007). In 2003, black students averaged a score of 213, then in 2005 the score improved to 216, and it increased again in 2007 to 218. White students’ scores only improved by increments of 1 point during the same span of testing cycles. Table 13 shows how the small increments of improvement for white students and the relatively larger improvement for black students bring us to the narrowest point of the achievement gap in any of the NAEP test results (math and reading). In 2013, black students scored 90.9 percent of what white students scored.

99 Ibid.
The 8th grade NAEP mathematics test result paint a grim image of black students’ achievement. Table 14 shows that from 2003-2013 black students scored below the basic level, which requires a score of 262. This means the average black student taking this exam could not “exhibit evidence of conceptual and procedural understanding in the five NAEP content areas.”

In addition, this means that average black student could not “signif[y] an understanding of arithmetic operations—including estimation—on whole numbers, decimals, fractions, and percents.” The scoring differential between white and black students hovered around 30 points from 2003-2013; however, the actual gap in terms of what percent of blacks scored in comparison to whites remained at or near 90 percent.

Table 13 Black-White 4th Grade Math NAEP Scores (2003-2013, odd years)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>% of White Students Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>89.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>90.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>90.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>89.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>90.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>90.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


102 Ibid.
The MCT, Subject Area Tests, and the NAEP standardize test scores reveal that black students lagged behind white students in every measurable capacity. Though each test measures mastery of a different academic category in varying methods, the results for black students still are the same. The MCT and Subject Area Tests generally displayed a narrowing of the gap until 2007, then a plummet, followed by a glacial improvement. The NAEP typically displayed a consistency in the gap of performance of black students relative to white students. The data from each of these tests provide quantifiable proof that a gap exists between white and black students. In addition, this data also shows areas in which the state is doing moderately well in (MCT Mathematics and the Algebra I subject area test) and areas that need vast improvement (MCT Language Arts, the Biology I, US History, and English II subject area tests).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>% of White Students Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>89.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>88.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>90.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>90.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>89.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter VI:

*Indirect and Direct Consequences of the Black-White Achievement Gap*

Black students tend to score lower than their white counterparts in virtually every national assessment of student achievement. However, national assessments are not the only arena in which black students lag behind white students. On average, black students also tend to graduate from high school at a lower percentage than white students. This gap in academic performance is known as the achievement gap, specifically, the black-white achievement gap. The lower test scores alone are not truly indicative of the profound affect that the black-white achievement gap has on society. Cyclical patterns of poverty, crime rates, graduation rates, and the inequalities in wage earnings are directly or indirectly correlated with the black-white achievement gap. In what is to follow, I will investigate exactly why the black-white achievement gap is a problem. I will buttress my claim by analyzing a wealth of statistical data which reveal stark differences in black crime and incarceration rates, wage earnings, dropout and graduation rates than white ones. It is important to note that the black-white achievement gap does not alone explain the differences in black and white life outcomes, but it is one of many complex variables to explore.
Education and Crime

It is widely accepted that there is a correlation between education and crime rates. According to The Effect of Education on Crime: Evidence from Prison Inmates, and Self-Reports, by Lance Lochner and Enrico Moretti,

…[S]chooling increases individual wage rates, thereby increasing the opportunity cost of crime. Second, punishment is likely to be more costly for the most educated. Incarceration implies time out of the labor market, which is more costly for high earners. Furthermore, previous estimate that the stigma of a criminal conviction is larger for white collar workers than for blue collar workers, which implies that the negative effect of a conviction on earnings extend beyond the time spent in prison for more educated workers.”

Although the relationship between educational attainment and crime is not causal, the stark correlation carries strong implications. Lochner and Moretti further bolster their claims by analyzing data from both the FBI Uniform Crime Rate Reports and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to examine the relationship between incarceration rates and education. The findings reveal a strong link between incarceration rates and education. However, it is pertinent to note that Lochner and Moretti, “[E]mploy[ed] a number of empirical strategies to account for unobservable individual characteristics and state policies that may introduce spurious correlation.” This addition greatly strengthens the veracity of the findings. Lochner and Moretti purported,

104 Ibid.
“One extra year of schooling results in a .10 percentage point reduction in the probability of incarceration for whites, and a .37 percentage point reduction for blacks. To help in interpreting the size of these impacts, we calculate how much of the black-white gap in incarceration rates in 1980 is due to differences in educational attainment. Differences in average education between blacks and whites can explain as much as 23% of the black-white gap in incarceration rates.”

Although this data alone does not immediately cement the relationship between education and incarceration, it certainly supplies enough data for policymakers to notice and possibly craft future legislation around. Though the higher rates crime and incarceration are prime indicators of the relationship between the achievement gap and subsequent criminal activity, there are other indicators that will be discussed as well.

**ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF ACHIEVEMENT GAP**


The perpetuation of the black-white achievement gap has strong economic implications which should draw a high level of concerns from not only our policymakers, but to the American citizenry in general. In 2009, McKinsey & Company produced a summary report of its findings of the educational practices of the United States. The report produces actual dollar amounts of the cost of the pervasive achievement gap that exists not only between the races, but also among varying socioeconomic groups. However, the report in regards to this thesis will focus on the racial component of the study. Though this thesis primarily focuses on the black-white achievement gap, it is

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pertinent to present the overall economic consequences of the achievement gap in general.

To begin, the McKinsey & Company report carefully separated the various achievement gaps. The reports lists the achievement gap between the United States and other countries; black and latino students in comparison to white students; the income achievement gap; and the achievement gap that exists between students schooled in different systems. The general findings were horrendous and should be alarming for policymakers. The report found: 1) If the United States had in recent years closed the gap between its educational achievement levels and those of better-performing nations such as Finland and Korea, GDP in 2008 could have been $1.3 trillion to $2.3 trillion higher. This represents 9 to 16 percent of GDP. 2) If the gap between black and Latino student performance and white student performance had been similarly narrowed, GDP in 2008 would have been between $310-$525 billion higher. 3) If the gap between low-income students and the rest had been similarly narrowed, GDP in 2008 would have been $400 billion to $670 billion higher.\(^{106}\) These astoundingly high figures strongly implicate that eradicating the achievement gaps of this country is more than a moral imperative; it should be an economic prerogative.

To properly illustrate the profound impact that the achievement gap has on economic outcomes for Mississippians specifically, this thesis draws upon the findings of the 2008 Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning report, *The Economic Status of African Americans in Mississippi*. In its executive summary, the report states,

“Much of the gaps in earnings and household incomes can be attributed to differences in education and occupation by race. Accordingly, improving educational attainment and access to higher-paying occupations would do so much to close these gaps. This requires not only a focus on labor market issues, but also on other obstacles facing the state’s African American population.”

The report goes on to draw a correlation between poverty and educational attainment. This inference is relevant because African American men and women live in poverty at almost triple the amount of their white counterparts. The report found that in 2006, 38 percent of black women were living below the poverty line, as opposed to only 14 percent of white men. Similarly, 32 percent of black men were living in poverty compared to only 11 percent of white men.

The burgeoning information age demands a higher level of education. The high school diploma is simply not enough to ensure above-poverty financial security anymore. The higher education black-white gap manifests itself in Mississippi by way of college degree recipients. According to a table provided in the report, 14 percent of Black women held bachelor’s degrees, as opposed to 22 percent of white women in 2006. The percentages are even more grim for black men who only made up 9 percent of the bachelor degree holders in comparison with the 23 percent of white men. The economic consequences of this gap are dire. Often times, individuals in managerial positions or professional occupations possess an undergraduate degree. Naturally, these positions are more financially rewarding versus entry-level jobs that do not require a college diploma.

The report found, “Currently 39 percent of white women and 29 percent of white men in

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108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
Mississippi hold these positions, while the percentages are considerably lower for African Americans. Twenty-three percent of black women hold managerial and professional jobs, but only 11 percent of black men.”\textsuperscript{110} The Economic Status of African Americans in Mississippi report ultimately concluded that innovative methods must be pursued to track the outcomes of subgroups of peoples within the state. Ultimately, the report states that the large presence of African Americans in the state legislature “bodes well for the success of policies aimed at putting in place performance standards for tracking and evaluating the success of Mississippi’s programs in advancing its citizenry, not only on average, but also within each demographic group.”\textsuperscript{111}

The aforementioned report narrowly focused on the economic status of Mississippi and the role that the achievement gap plays in it. However the report, \textit{Economic Consequences of the Academic Achievement Gap for African Americans} gives light to more broad implications of the persistent achievement gap. The report asks five questions (however, I will only reference 3 of them) which each provides a more in-depth perspective on the economic consequences of the achievement gap. The reports seeks to identify: 1) To what extent do disparities in academic achievement contribute to black-white earning disparities? 2) Would the rather modest gains in academic achievement, which we might reasonably expect education reforms to accomplish, increase the expected earnings of African-Americans to any meaningful extent? 3) Can raising achievement from very low to moderately low or average levels promote economic


\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
success or does achievement have to lie in the above-average range in order to be economically valuable?\textsuperscript{112}

This report acutely examines disparities in hourly wages that are impacted by the achievement gap between blacks and whites. The report states, “Recent research suggests that the entire disparity in the hourly wages paid to African American women who hold full-time jobs at some point during a calendar year is account for by the disparities in measured cognitive skills.”\textsuperscript{113} African-American men also suffered greatly based of the immense differences in measured cognitive skill. The report states, “Recent research suggests that two-thirds or more of the disparity in hourly wages between white and African American men is associated with disparities in measured cognitive skill.”\textsuperscript{114} Though difference in hourly earnings based off of cognitive skills were daunting, the actual annual earnings difference between the races is equally concerning. The report found that, “the actual annual earnings of African American men remain noticeably lower than those of whites even when measured cognitive skills are equivalent.”\textsuperscript{115} The report further accentuates the importance of cognitive skills by stating, “equalizing measured cognitive skills could reduce the wage gap between African American and white men by one-half to two-thirds or more, and all of the gap between African American and white women.”\textsuperscript{116}

Next, the second question will be explored, “Would the rather modest gains in academic achievement, which we might reasonably expect education reforms to

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
accomplish, increase the expected earnings of African Americans to any meaningful extent?"\textsuperscript{117} The report noted that “one-fifth of a standard deviation increase in academic achievement would raise African Americans’ earnings by approximately 4%.”\textsuperscript{118} Olneck utilized data from Susan E. Mayer and Paul E. Peterson’s, \textit{The Cost and Benefits of School Reform, in Earning and Learning}. The report also found, “Another estimate that assumes an intervention, which both raises achievement by one-quarter of a standard deviation and increases education attainment by one year, is that discounted lifetime earnings might increase between $22,000 and $77,000.”\textsuperscript{119} Olneck states, “Using the one-quarter of a standard deviation as a reasonable expectation, I would expect that successful school reform could reduce the racial earnings gap for men by 17% to 20%. For women, the figure would be from 25% to 30%.”\textsuperscript{120}

The final question examined is “Can raising achievement from very low to moderately low or average levels promote economic success, rather than achievement having to lie in the above average range in order to be economically valuable?”\textsuperscript{121} The report responds with an “emphatic yes.” Olneck reports, “As one group of economists has concluded, ‘a high school senior’s mastery of skills taught in American Schools [sic] no later than eighth grade is an increasingly important determinant of subsequent wages.’”\textsuperscript{122} This report sheds light onto the economic opportunities that are possible if only a modicum of improvement happens in achievement. This information is especially useful

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.
for states like Mississippi, which as the last chapter shows, experiences educational improvement at a glacial pace.

_Gap in graduation and dropout rates_

A recent CNN article stated, “We all pay a heavy price when young people fail to graduate. The economic consequences of failing to graduate—lower incomes, less spending power, higher costs for public assistance programs, higher rates of incarceration—are comparable to the effects of a permanent national recession.” In Mississippi, the average graduation rate is 75.5 percent. However, once the average is disaggregated the black-white achievement gap again manifests itself. For example, the 2008 cohort white students’ graduation rate is 82.1 percent, while the graduation rate for black students is 69.5 percent. By examining the graduation rate in Figure 4, it is observable that rate of improvement for both group moves at a glacial pace and the roughly 10 percent gap between blacks and whites.

![Figure 4: Black-White High School Graduation Rates 2002-2008 cohorts](http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/dropout-prevention-and-compulsory-school-attendance/dropout-graduation-rate-information)


Though the graduation rate gap looms around ten percent, the dropout rate gap between black and white students is abysmal. Figure 5 depicts the disparities in the dropout rates between black and white students.

![Figure 5: Black-White Dropout Rates 2002-2008 Cohorts](http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/dropout-prevention-and-compulsory-school-attendance/dropout-graduation-rate-information)

Figure 5 shows how dropout rate between the 2002 and 2003 cohorts slightly dropped, however after the 2003 cohort, black and white dropout rates went into two separate directions. The dropout rates for black students plateau around 19 percent for the 2005, 2006, and 2007 cohorts. Conversely, the dropout rates for white students began to decline with the 2005 cohort. The most recent data available show that the dropout rate for black students in the 2008 cohort are still higher than the dropout rates for white students in the 2002 cohort, this elucidates that black students are not only behind white students in forms of percentages, but more importantly they are years behind white students.

The black-white achievement gap is much more than just a difference in standardized test scores. It has profound implications that dictate crime habits, wages,
and high school graduation and dropout rates. The findings of the McKinsey report highlight the economic imperative of having an achievement gap. Though the indirect consequences of the achievement gap are not as heavily scrutinized, the gap in wages and high school graduation and dropout rates, along with a correlation between educational attainment and crime can serve as primary motivators to eventually eradicate the achievement gap.
Chapter VII

States Address the Gap

The achievement gap is an educational issue without a single remedy that has effectively definitively closed the gap between black and white students. However, the absence of a one size fits all solution does not mean that measures are not being taken to address the persistent gap. One method to combat the achievement gap has been through the establishment of charter schools. According to the National Education Association, “Charter schools are publicly funded elementary or secondary schools that have been freed from some of the rules, regulations, and statues that apply to other public schools, in exchange for some type of accountability for producing certain results, which are set forth in each charter school’s charter.”125 This section of the thesis will offer some qualitative and quantitative research which supports the effectiveness of charter schools in addressing educational inequities, specifically the black-white achievement gap. In addition, critical analysis of charter schools will provide that challenges the effectiveness of charter schools. The second section of this chapter will focus on the specific policy actions some states have taken in order to close the black-white achievement gap.

In 2004, the Policy and Program Studies Service (PCSP) published Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program for the US Department of Education. The report had

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a dual purpose: (1) to provide the public and education policymakers with findings from a descriptive examination of how the PCSP operates and (2) to continue documentation of the evolution of the charter school movement that began in 1995 under another federally funded study.\textsuperscript{126} The scope of this report ranges from 1999-2002. The report found that “because some state charter school laws allow schools flexibility in hiring practices, charter schools as an overall group are less likely than traditional public schools to employ teachers meeting state certification standards.”\textsuperscript{127} This particular finding is notable because of the link between state certification and student performance. According to the report \textit{Teacher Licensing and Student Achievement} published by The Thomas Fordham Institute, “Roughly speaking, having a teacher with a certification in mathematics results in a two point increase in the mathematics test which represents more than three-quarters of a year of schooling.”\textsuperscript{128} The data for this study was derived from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, a nationally representative survey of about 24,000 eighth-grade students conducted in the spring of 1988. Though the data is a bit dated, it provides insight on the link between teacher certification and student performance. The Policy and Program Studies Services (PCSP) report also found, “In five case study states, charter schools are less likely to meet state performance standards than traditional public schools.”\textsuperscript{129} However, the study does suggest that, “It is impossible

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
to know from this study whether it is because of the performance of the schools, the prior achievement of the students, or some other factor. The study design does not allow us to determine whether or not traditional public schools are more effective than charter schools.”¹³⁰ Five years after the publication of this report, the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) published a more comprehensive report on the impact charter schools have on educational outcomes. Though the initial report does not provide any analysis of the effect of charters on student outcome, it demonstrated the growing interest of charter schools on a national scale.

In 2009, Stanford University’s Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) released the first national assessment on the performance of charter schools, *Multiple Choice: Charter School Performance in 16 States*. CREDO joined 15 states and the District of Columbia to “consolidate longitudinal student-level achievement data for the purpose of creating a national pooled analysis of the impact of charter schooling on student learning gains.”¹³¹ To properly compare the traditional student to the student in a charter, CREDO created a virtual twin “based on students who match the charter student’s demographics, English language proficiency and participation in special education or subsidized lunch programs.”¹³² Though the scope of the study includes 15 states and the District of Columbia, this thesis will focus on the states that are geographically and demographically similar to Mississippi, which are Georgia and Louisiana. According to the recent Census Bureau data Mississippi, along with Georgia

¹³² Ibid.
and Louisiana have at least 30 percent of their population listed as African American/Black. The CREDO assessment reveals two polarizing results for the states in which this thesis will focus on as a point of comparison for Mississippi. The report breaks up the findings using a state-by-state analysis in three distinct categories: states with significant higher learning gains; states that demonstrated lower average student growth; states with mixed results or no different gains from the traditional students. Louisiana displayed “significant higher learning gains” while Georgia showed “mixed results or no gain.”

To adequately identify the charter school effect by state, the CREDO assessment employed, “A dummy variable for each state in the model for student learning in reading and mathematics, so that each student’s longitudinal record which indicates which state the student is in. A second set of dummy variables groups charter schools within states so that charter school students within each state are separately identified.”  

The assessment goes on to say that, “The addition of these variables produces a measure of how much the academic growth of students in charter schools within each state differ from their virtual twins, on average.”

The data shows that charter schools had a profound impact on educational outcomes in Louisiana. According to Figure 13: Charter School Effect by State—LA, MN, MO and NC, Louisiana experienced a .06 growth (in standard deviations) in performance in both reading and mathematics, which is the highest average growth of

134 Ibid.
any state included in the study (the assessment notes significance at $p \leq 0.01$).\footnote{135} Conversely, the data showed that charter schools in Georgia had a barely negligible effect on performance in reading and math. There was a .01 growth (in standard deviations) in reading performance and a -.01 decline in the performance in mathematics. The study states that the disparity in the effects of charter schools “leads one to question how state charter policy differences contribute to these results.”\footnote{136}

Not only does the CREDO study demonstrate how charter schools effect particular states, but it shows how charter school effect specific subgroups of students, namely Black and Hispanic students. In the aggregate, charter school seems to have little impact on educational attainment for black students. In fact both reading and mathematics performance decreased when comparing students in traditional public schools to students in charter school for black students. Though the aggregate results overwhelmingly suggests that charter schools are not having a significant impact in improving performance, the state-specific results paint a picture of success for black students in Louisiana and one of failure for black students in Georgia. The study summarized the findings by stating the states with “negative and significant” and “positive and significant” growth in reading and in math. Louisiana black students experienced “positive and significant growth in both reading and math. On the contrary, black students in Georgia experienced “negative and significant” in reading and math.

The stark difference in the effects of charter schools in two states that are geographically comparable Mississippi seemingly suggests that charter schools are not
the surefire method of closing the disparities in educational outcomes between black and white students. However, the significant gains of black students in Louisiana suggests that the model of charter that the state implements may one worthy of emulation as states such as Mississippi are now allowing charter schools to exist.

The initial finding of the 2009 CREDO study provides a preliminary analysis of the overall effectiveness of charter schools in raising student achievement. In 2013, CREDO released the National Charter School Study of 2013 which has a two-fold purpose. First, the 2013 study provides current outcomes of the initial 16 states that were studied in 2009. Second, due to the 80 percent increase in charter school enrollment from 2009-2013, the report expands its scope to include 27 partner states. Again, this examination of the report will briefly highlight the performance of charter schools on a national aggregate level, but more so focus on the progression and/or regression of the states similar to Mississippi in demographic distribution, Louisiana and Georgia.

The National Charter School Study of 2013 found, “In reading, the 2009 charter school impact on learning gains were significantly lower than their traditional public school (TPS) comparison by seven days of learning per year. In 2013, the charter impact on student learning is positive and significant.” Generally speaking, charter schools at the aggregate level had a positive impact, specifically at .01 growth (in standard deviations) from 2009. (The study notes significance at p ≤ 0.01) Though charter school made significant gains in reading scores, an entirely different narrative emerges.

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138 Ibid.
139 Ibid.
140 Ibid.
after reviewing the data on the math scores. The study notes, “The 2009 and 2013 charter school impacts on math learning gains are significantly lower than their respective TPS counterparts… The difference for charter students in 2009 was 22 fewer days of learning, while in 2013 the deficit has shrunk to about seven fewer days of learning, indicating a relative improvement over time.”141 Furthermore, the study states, “For math, charter school impacts on learning gains are negative in 2009 and 2013, but the relative learning gap for 2013 is smaller than in 2009.”142 In summation, the results of the aggregate performance of charter schools seem to indicate that charter schools are showing some success in raising academic performance in areas such as reading, but not in math.

The first CREDO study in 2009 found that reading and math performance of black students at charter school actually decreased in comparison to their virtual twin counterpart at TPS. The 2013 report states, “The academic gains of black students in charter schools lagged behind that of black students at TPS in 2009 in reading by seven days of learning. In 2013, the situation is reversed; black students in charter schools have seven additional days of learning in reading to their counterparts at TPS.” 143 These results show a tremendous impact of charter schools in the aggregate in the reading performance of black students. Contrary to the 2009 report, the 2013 study shows gains in math performance for black students. The 2013 study found that, “The pattern for math closely parallels that for reading. When the learning gains of charter and TPS black students are compared in math, those who attended TPS had an advantage of seven days of learning

141 Ibid.
142 Ibid.
compared to those who attended charters in 2009.\textsuperscript{144} In addition to the gain in the amount of days of learning the study stunningly notes, “In 2013, the learning gap disappeared; black students have similar learning gains whether they attend a charter or TPS.”\textsuperscript{145} Though these results do not demonstrate a closure in the achievement gap between black and white students, the data does indicate that black students tend to perform better in charter schools than TPS, which should be a point of notice for the stakeholders in public education.

Though both of the CREDO studies provide mixed reviews of the effectiveness of charter schools, author Diana Ravitch offers a compelling argument against charter schools. In her book, \textit{The Death and Life of the Great American School System}, she utilizes the shortcomings of a great deal of charter schools to buttress her claim against their claimed effectiveness. One example she uses is the failure of the California Charter Academy. Ravitch states, “In 2004, the California Charter Academy, the largest charter school chain in California, collapsed in bankruptcy, stranding 6,000 students in sixty storefront schools at the beginning of the fall term.”\textsuperscript{146} Ravitch also highlights the performance of charter schools in Philadelphia. She notes, “The RAND team concluded in 2008 that students in charter schools made gains that were statistically indistinguishable from the gains they experienced while attending traditional public schools.”\textsuperscript{147} Additionally Ravitch states that even when charter schools achieve exceptional results, “charters avoid students with high needs, either because they lack the staff to educate them properly or because they fear that such students will depress their

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
scores.” She cites a study of the charter schools of Washington, DC by Jack Buckley and Mark Schneider. The charter schools enrolled a disproportionate of students, but “the vast majority of charters have proportionally fewer special education and English language learning students.” The achievement of charter schools which lack the full scope of potential students a traditional public school would have calls into the question of charter schools to adequately teach all students.

The PCSP report generally viewed charter schools in a negative light similar to Diane Ravitch, while the CREDO studies provided mixed reviews of charter schools. However, there is a charter school program which Ravitch herself says has “the most impressive record of success”, the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP). This section of the thesis will focus on the monumental strides the KIPP program has made in closing the achievement gap between black and white students. According to KIPP’s website, “KIPP began in 1994 with a powerful idea: to create a classroom that helped children develop the knowledge, skills, character, and habits necessary to succeed in college and build a better tomorrow for their communities.” This idea spawned from the minds of Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin when they sought to “redefine what was possible for a classroom of public schools students in Houston.” Twenty years after the opening of its first school, KIPP now serves 50,000 students in 141 schools in 20 states across the country.

148 Ibid.
149 Ibid, 134.
151 Ibid.
In 2013, Mathematica Policy Research published the report *KIPP Middle Schools: Impact on Achievement and Other Outcomes* which “uses experimental and quasi-experimental methods to produce rigorous and comprehensive evidence on the effects of KIPP middle schools across the country.”\(^{152}\) This report was predicated by the 2010 Mathematica Policy Research report *Student Characteristics and Achievement in 22 KIPP Middle Schools*. The most recent report “estimates achievement impacts for [the 43 KIPP middle schools in the study], and includes science and social studies in addition to math and reading. This report also examines additional student outcomes beyond state test scores, including student performance on a nationally norm-referenced test and survey-based measures of student attitudes and behavior.” An overview of the study found that, “The average impact of KIPP on student achievement is positive, statistically significant, and educationally substantial.”\(^{153}\) Interestingly, the study also noted, “A majority of the individual KIPP schools in the study show positive impacts on student achievement as measure by scores on state-mandated assessments.”\(^{154}\) This is a point of interest considering the abysmal performance of black students in Mississippi on state-mandated assessments.

The impact of KIPP schools on student achievement is remarkable. Students participating in KIPP made substantial gains in both reading and math scores. The report

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\(^{153}\) Ibid.

found that, "the average impact three years after enrollment is 0.36 standard deviations in our sample from the 44th percentile to the 58th percentile." Another impressive gain of KIPP is the fact that their "impact suggest that on average, KIPP middle schools produce approximately 11 months of extra learning growth in math after three years." In regards to the black-white achievement gap, KIPP schools made an impact on the local black-white test score gap by 40 percent after three years of enrollment. The gains made in reading were somewhat less than the ones made in math, but nevertheless substantial. The report noted, "Compared to national norms, the estimated reading impact after three years represents approximately eight months of additional learning growth." In the context of the black-white achievement gap in reading test scores, "after three years, the size of the KIPP impact in reading is equivalent to 26 percent of the local black-white disparity." Although the focus of this thesis is the black-white achievement gap, KIPP found that, “For most student subgroups of interest, the average KIPP impact is not appreciably different from the overall average impact among all KIPP students.” This element of KIPP would make the feasibility of charting KIPP schools more manageable as it not only improves educational outcomes for segments of the student population, but rather all students.

155 Ibid.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid.
Though there are many positive elements of KIPP, it does not come without any detractors. Diane Ravitch notes, “Like other successful charter schools, KIPP admits students by lottery; by definition, only the most motivated families apply for a slot.” Essentially, Ravitch is suggesting that only the best poor students enroll into KIPP schools. This undoubtedly leaves the public schools “worse off because they have lost some of their top-performing students.” As mentioned earlier, KIPP schools tend to produce more gains in educational attainment the longer a student remains in the KIPP schools. Ravitch sees this as problematic as “KIPP schools often have a high attrition rate.” Furthermore, Ravitch says, “Apparently many students and their parents are unable or unwilling to comply with KIPP’s stringent demands.” She based this claim off of a 2008 study of KIPP schools in San Francisco which found, “that 60 percent of students who started fifth grade were gone by the eighth grade.” Ravitch later goes on to mention the high teacher turnover rate as ills of KIPP. She concludes by saying, “Thus, while the KIPP schools obtain impressive results for the students who remain enrolled for four years, the high levels of student attrition and teacher turnover raise questions about the applicability of the KIPP model to the regular public schools.”

The condition of African Americans has captured the attention of many state entities across the country. Many states have created commissions that exist exclusively to identify and rectify the ills that plague their African American population. Though

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some these commissions were not created *specifically* to combat the black-white achievement gap, many of the immediate goals of these commissions is to improve the educational outcomes of black students. This section of the thesis will focus on the legislative measures taken to improve black educational attainment and indirectly aid in closing the detrimental achievement gap that exist between their white counterparts.

**ILLINOIS**

The state of Illinois whose African American population is roughly 14.8 percent of its total, recently created the Commission to End the Disparities Facing the African-American Community Act. According to HB1547, “The Commission shall: (1) research the disparities facing African-Americans in the areas of healthcare, healthcare services, employment, education, criminal justice, housing and other social and economic issues.”[167] After the Commission has conducted the proper research the law dictates that it “reports its findings and specific recommendations to the General Assembly…after which the Commission shall dissolve.”[168] Though the Commission only had a two-year window (it was created in August 2011 and had to deliver its findings by December 2013) to conduct its work, this action signifies the state’s recognition of the broken condition of African Americans and sought remedies to ameliorate the condition. In fact, Illinois governor, Pat Quinn said, “We know that disparities exist within the African-American community, preventing some from achieving their full potential.” He went on


to say, “In Illinois we want everybody in, and nobody left out. We won’t shy away from examining the root causes of inequality, and working to correct them.”169

WASHINGTON

Washington State has also made strides to address educational inequity within its state. In 2008, the state legislature established an Advisory Committee “charged with creating a plan—which, when fully implemented, will close the education gap for African American students.”170 Early in its work the committee identified five areas which were pertinent to address as in regards to the educational attainment of African American students.171 These areas were: teacher quality, teaching and learning, school and district leadership, student support, and family and community engagement.172 In each general area, the committee included detailed subpoints aimed at achieving the goal at large. One area of interest is the conversations with the district superintendents to discuss their strategies to close the African-American achievement gap. The *African American Achievement Gap Report* noted, “Overwhelmingly, superintendents see professional development as key to addressing the achievement gap.” The report later stated, “Despite their focus on professional development, the majority of superintendents are challenged with changing institutional practices and mindsets of staff and others that negatively impact African American students.”173

171 Ibid.
172 Ibid.
173 Ibid.
The committee noted “Closing the achievement gap will require more than implementing a particular program or two. It will require commitment, political will, deliberate actions and the alignment of efforts across the education system.” The Advisory Committee also provided specific policy recommendations targeted closing the achievement gap. Though six specific policy recommendations were given, this thesis will only highlight two of them. The third recommendation was to “Revise the State Board of Education’s School Improvement Plan under WAC 180-16-220 to require districts and schools to close achievement gaps.” The fourth recommendation is to “Establish in CISL an appointed, statewide achievement gap oversight committee to monitor the implementation of school and district plans to close the achievement gap for African American students.” Though the black-white achievement gap is still persistent in Washington, the actions taken by the state legislature indicate the urgency of closing the achievement gap for African Americans in Washington State. Next, the measures taken by the state of Arkansas will be examined.

ARKANSAS

Similar to Illinois and Washington, Arkansas established a special commission to tackle the achievement gap. Arkansas created the Commission on Closing the Achievement Gap in Arkansas whose aims are to: (1) Develop a plan for the state designed to enable all public school students to meet the state’s academic achievement standards while working toward the goal of narrowing the achievement gaps in public

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174 Ibid.
176 Ibid.
schools for economically disadvantaged students and students from major racial and ethnic groups. (2) Monitor the Department of Education’s efforts to comply with federal guidelines on improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged, specifically including, but not limited to, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001; (3) Monitor the Department of Education’s identification of population groups to be motivated in closing the achievement gap efforts; (4) Receive national school lunch data and reports biennially from the Depart of Education; (5) Interface with local school districts achievement gap task forces created under the 6-15-1603 to provide data on the achievement gap and achievement gap strategies. These are concrete steps that the state of Arkansas is taking to close its achievement gap. The Commission found some stunning economic implications regarding the closure of its achievement gap. The Moving Forward on Closing the Academic Achievement Gap annual report of the Commission noted, “if the current drop-out rate was reduced by even half (which would include approximately 5900 Arkansas students), the state would see the following results: $60 million dollar increase in home sales, $51 million dollar increase in the gross state product, $42 million dollar increase in earnings, $33 million dollar increase in spending, $9.8 million dollar increase in investments, $5.9 million dollar increase in auto sales, and $3.5 million dollar increase in tax revenue. The report goes on to say that solely from an economic perspective it is evident that success for all students equals success for the entire state.

In addition to forming a state commission on closing the achievement, the state of Arkansas also established local task forces charged at tackling the achievement gap at the micro level. According to Arkansas Code 6-15-1603, “The purpose of each task force is to advise and work with its local board of directors and administration on closing the gap in academic achievement and on developing a collaborative for achieving that goal.” This task force has many different stakeholders from the community as members. These members range from parents of students in elementary, middle, and high school, local law enforcement, juvenile court counselor, school personnel (selected by the superintendent), local business representative, one representative from a university school education, and two high school students. This approach seems to be a viable due to the proximity of each board to the students compared to the state commission. However, the annual report from the state commission noted that the local task forces sometimes failed to implement the strategies produced by the commission. Although accountability seems to be a small issue for the local task forces, the mere creation of the task force demonstrates the buy in from all members of the community in closing the achievement. Continual concerted efforts such as these are critical in closing the achievement gap.

KANSAS

Kansas is yet another state that has established an advisory committee specifically for African Americans. In the 1997 Session Laws of Kansas, the legislature passed House Bill 2444 which, “established the advisory commission on African-Americans affairs


180 Ibid.
hereinafter to as the advisory commission.”181 Section 5 of the bill outlines the functions of the commission which include: (a) Gather and disseminate information and conduct hearings, conferences and special studies on problems and programs concerning African-Americans; (b) coordinate, assist and cooperate with the efforts of state departments and agencies to serve the needs of African-Americans especially in the areas of culture, education, employment, health, housing, welfare and recreation; (c) develop, coordinate and assist other public and private associations and organizations with understanding the problems of African-Americans (d) develop, coordinate and assist other public and private associations and organizations to provide services to African-Americans; (e) propose new programs concerning African Americans; (f) evaluate existing programs and proposed legislation concerning African-Americans.182 Though the scope of this commission is broad and does not exclusively focus on education, its creation lends credence to the importance of having governmental agencies specifically aimed at improving the lives of African-Americans.

The greatest contribution of the Kansas Advisory Committee on African-American affairs is the creation of an equity index. The Kansas Equity Index “can be interpreted as the relative status of blacks and whites in Kansas, measured according to the five corresponding Kansas African American Affairs Commission key strategic areas: Economic Opportunity and Asset Building, Healthy and Safe Communities, Schools and Educational Opportunity, Criminalization and Social Justice, and Advocacy and Civic


182 Ibid.
Engagement.”183 The primary usage of this index is to “permit communities to engage in dialogues and to create initiatives that are measurable.”184 The index is a tool to show the relative living standards between black and whites in Kansas and provides a vivid representation of the stark differences between the two groups, which in turn as the ability to inform public policy decision moving forward in the state of Kansas. Next, this thesis will examine the steps taken by the state of Indiana.

INDIANA

In 1992, the legislative council in Indiana created an interim study committee to investigate the problems of black males. Among the findings were: (2) By all indicia measuring achievement, success, and quality of life in American black males are facing a prodigious struggle for survival while fighting formidable opponents. (8) Between 1973 and 1988 the average real annual income for black males twenty (20) and twenty-four (24) years of age fell by more than fifty percent (50%). (9) The increasing misfortunes and the social distress bombarding black males in American society threaten the survival of black males.185 As a result of this study committee, the state legislature established the Commission on the Social Status of Black Males. The commission was charged to “make a systemic study” of the negative conditions facing black males and the existence of the conditions.186 In addition, the commission “shall propose measures to alleviate and

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184 Ibid.
186 Ibid.
correct the underlying causes of the conditions [facing black males].”187 As a part of its work, the commission produces annual updates and recommendations to improve the conditions of African Americans. Though a direct link between the establishment of this commission and closure of the black-white achievement gap may not be evident, it is important to note that Indiana sees the importance of providing aid for black males.

MISSISSIPPI

Mississippi has also made some strides to indirectly close the black-white achievement. One effort is to provide high-poverty public schools that face teacher shortages with teachers to fill the void. According to the Mississippi Teacher Corps website, “the Mississippi Teacher Corps is a two-year program that trains non-education majors to teach in high-poverty public schools in Mississippi.”188 The sole mission of the MCT is to end educational inequity, which encapsulates closing the black-white achievement gap. Dr. Andy Mullins and Amy Gutman created the MTC in 1989. The MTC is model after the Peace Corps with a few caveats. MTC provides its corps member with a full scholarship for a Master’s Degree in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Mississippi. This serves as an incentive to draw the best and brightest minds to Mississippi to teach. This is important because of the noted link between teacher quality and student achievement. In addition to the Master’s Degree, MTC does provide teacher training and certification to its members. According the MTC website, “Since

187 Ibid.
1989 more than 450 graduates, reaching an estimated 100,000 students, have taught in critical-needs school districts as a part of the Mississippi Teacher Corps.”

The Mississippi State legislature recently has been active in reforming the state of the educational system. Though the legislature did not pass any legislation with language directed at aiming the black-white achievement gap, it has taken steps to improve public education in Mississippi. Pre-kindergarten is one aspect of public education that Mississippi has made strides in improving. According to the Mississippi First website, “The Early Collaborative Act of 2013 provides funding to local communities to establish, expanded, and support successful early childhood education and development services.” The legislature allocated $3 million dollars for the legislation, making it the first ever state-funded pre-K program. Recent studies have demonstrated the impact of pre-K education on the cognitive development skills of young children. For example, the National Institute of Early Education Research produced the Preschool Education and Its Lasting Effects: Research and Policy Implications report in 2008, which highlighted several benefits of pre-K education. The report noted, “Well-designed preschool education produce long-term improvements in school success, including higher achievement test scores, lower rates of grade repetition and special education, and higher educational attainment. The establishment of state-funded pre-K potentially has the ability to close the pervasive achievement gap between black and white students. However, the impact of state-funded pre-K has yet to be seen in Mississippi because it is

189 Ibid.
191 Ibid.
still in its infancy stage of development and so few state dollars are allocated to fund pre-K. In due time, the impacts of pre-K in Mississippi will be able to be quantitatively and qualitatively measured for its effectiveness. In addition to state-funded pre-K, the Mississippi Legislature passed the Mississippi Public Charter Schools Act of 2013. The profound impacts of charter schools were discussed in detail in the earlier portion of this section of the thesis.

Mississippi has passed two other legislative measured aimed at improving public education. In 2013, the Mississippi State Legislature passed Senate Bill 2658 which requires districts with graduation rates of less than 80 percent to submit a restructuring plan to the Mississippi Department of Education. This bill has monumental implications for Mississippi school districts. According to most recent data available on graduation rates, 99 out of the 153 (or 64.7 percent) school districts boasts graduation rates less than 80 percent. In addition to Senate Bill 2658, the state legislature passed Senate Bill 2347 which will “improve literacy achievement by ending social promotion of third grade students who are not reading on grade.” The bill will also “allocate resources to schools to screen students’ literacy skills and provide those who are struggling with additional reading help, including the assistance of trained reading coaches.”

196 Ibid.
Though the state of Mississippi does not have any commission or laws that explicitly combat the black-white achievement gap, the measures the state has taken could potentially play an integral role in closing the pervasive black-white achievement gap in Mississippi without ever expressing the intent to do so.
Chapter VIII

Conclusions

After reviewing the test data from the Mississippi Curriculum Test (Language Arts and Mathematics), the Subject Area Tests, and the National Assessment Educational of Progress there are several conclusions that can be drawn. In regards to the Mississippi Curriculum Test, the data revealed several key trends.

The Language Arts exam results demonstrated that from 2007-2012 the rate of proficiency for black students only improved by 3 percent, and only by 4 percent for white students. Furthermore, the data also showed that the proficiency gap (in terms of the percent of white student’ scores scored by black students) between black and white students from 2007-2012 narrowed by less than one percent. In a more broad sense, the Language Arts test data shows that black students are only behind white students in terms of percentages, but also in terms of years. For example, in 2012 only 41 percent of the black students scored proficient or higher on the Language Arts exam, this is 23 percent less than what white students scored in 2007. Though this data set only represents as six-year window, the current pace of progression hints that it will take many, many years for black students to achieve at the same levels of white students in Mississippi.

The MCT Mathematics exam results were promising in comparison to the Language Arts scores. From 2007-2012, black students’ rate of proficiency increased by 17 percent, while the scores of white students increased by 14 percent. The proficiency gap in terms of the percent of white scores scored by black students also closed by 9.2
percent from 2007-2012. The clearest indication of the closure of the black-white proficiency gap can be observed by comparing the scores of black students in 2012 to that of white students in 2007. In 2012, 63 percent of black students scored proficient on the math MCT, this is only 6 percent less than what white students scored in 2007. Though the gap is still present, there have been monumental strides in terms of math education in Mississippi.

The four Subject Area Tests each have their own implications in regards to the black-white achievement gap. To maintain consistency, the scores from 2007-2012 will be the focal point. The proficiency rate of black and white students on the English II subject area test, both increased from 2007-2012. 32 percent of black students scored proficient or higher in 2007, that number is 68 percent for white students. By 2012, black students’ proficiency rate increased to 42 percent and white students’ rate increased to 75 percent. The proficiency gap in terms of the percent of white students score scored by black students narrowed by 11 percent over the six year span. Though some gains were made, the black proficiency rate in 2012 is still 24 percent behind the white proficient rate of 2007.

The proficiency rates between black and white students on the US History are virtually unchanged from 2007 to 2012. For example, 46 percent of black students scored proficient or higher in 2007, in 2012 only 47 percent of black students scored proficient or higher. White students’ scores did not improve much either of the same six year span. In 2007, 78 percent of white students scored proficient or higher on the US History test. In 2012, this number remained at 78 percent. The proficiency gap, in terms of the percent of white students’ score that black students score, only closed by 1.3 percent in the six
year span. Additionally, black students in 2012 are 31 percent behind where white students scored in 2007.

The proficiency rates of the Biology I test between black and white students basically were stagnant from 2007-2012. In 2007, 48 percent of black students scored proficient or higher, in 2012 this number fell to 47 percent. In 2007, 83 percent of white students scored proficient or higher, in 2012 this number fell to 81 percent. The proficiency gap, in terms of the percent of white students’ score that black students scored closed by .2 percent in the six year gap. Additionally, black students in 2012 are 36 percent behind where white students scored in 2007.

The English II, US History, and Biology I subject area tests all display the same narrative in regards to the black-white achievement gap. However, the results of the Algebra I test show some very promising results. In 2007, 44 percent of black students scored proficient or higher on the Algebra I test. In 2012, 69 percent of black students scored proficient or higher, signifying a 25 percent increase in improvement in a six year span. White students also displayed tremendous improvement on the Algebra I test. In 2007, 71 percent of white students scored proficient or higher. In 2012, 88 percent of white students scored proficient or higher, signifying a 17 percent increase in improvement. The proficiency gap, in terms of the percent of white students’ score that black students scored narrowed by 16 percent in the six year span. Additionally, black students in 2012 are only two percent below where white students were in 2007. Though black students are still years behind white students in terms of proficiency, the results in the Algebra I test hint that there has been great success in the area of mathematics in Mississippi.
The National Assessment of Educational Progress exams in 4\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th} grade reading and math reveal more stagnation in the black-white achievement gap. For example, on the 4\textsuperscript{th} grade math exam in 2003, black students scored 89.9 percent of white students scored, ten years later, the gap narrowed only by 1 percent. The 8\textsuperscript{th} grade math exam gap narrowed even less than the 4\textsuperscript{th} grade exams. From 2003 to 2013, the percent of white students’ score scored by black students only improved by .7 percent. The 4\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th} grade reading exams reveal a glacial pace of improvement as well. For example, on the 2003 4\textsuperscript{th} grade reading exam black students scored 86.9 percent that of what white students scored. In 2013, black students scored 89.2 percent that of what white students scored. This does indicate a small margin of improvement, but it is still relatively insignificant progress. The 8\textsuperscript{th} grade reading exams results show that the achievement gap between black and white students went virtually changed in ten years. In 2003, black students scored 90.3 percent of what white students scored. In 2012, this number was 90.2 percent. Though an achievement gap is still apparent in the NAEP exams results, overall the exams show that the gap between black and white students based off the national examination is much narrower than the ones based off of the state assessments.

The state of Mississippi has yet to take a specific measures directly aimed at ending the educational inequality that exists between black and white students. However, recent legislative measures such as the allowance of charter schools in the state and the ending of social promotion for third graders who are not proficient in reading are some steps that could potentially close the a black-white achievement gap in Mississippi. Time will be the ultimate judge of the effectiveness of the recent legislation aimed at improving the educational state in Mississippi.
Recommendations

This thesis has shown the profound achievement gap that exists between black and white students in Mississippi. In addition, it has discussed specific measures and strategies that other states have taken in order to address the achievement gap. In this section, I will provide some recommendations for the state of Mississippi to consider moving forward.

The creation of a state commission for African American education in Mississippi is a broad, but necessary first step. Mississippi has the largest percentage of African Americans, as a percent of its total population than any other state in the Union. Consequently, one could assert that Mississippi has the most to gain economically and socially speaking by ensuring social and economic well-being of African-Americans.

Following the model of states such as Washington, Kansas, and Arkansas the state of Mississippi should create a commission whose primary responsibility is to close the black-white achievement gap in Mississippi. I recommend that a thorough quantitative research study should be conducted to measure the effectiveness of each state’s commission on closing the achievement gap so that Mississippi can emulate the best practices exhibited by each state’s commission.

I would also recommend that the commission established by Mississippi develop an equity index similar to the state of Kansas which would put a numeric value on the disparities (economic and social) that exist between black and white Mississippians. This index would effectively demonstrate the inequalities that are present in state, and the magnitude at which they exist. This index would provide policymakers with tangible
evidence of the disparities that exists in the state and could work as a guide to determine which areas they should focus their efforts on.

The gains made in closing the black-white achievement gap on the MCT Mathematics test and the Algebra I subject area test provide some possible methods of teaching for other subject areas to emulate. I would recommend that quantitative and qualitative studies on the methods of teaching that mathematics teachers in Mississippi employ that have evidently played an integral role in the rapid narrowing of the achievement gap in mathematics in Mississippi. This can result in a distribution of best practices in other subject areas, which could pay great dividends in closing the achievement gap in the other areas of study. This distribution of best practices could occur at a statewide meeting led by mathematics teachers for the teachers of other academic disciplines. Though the nature of mathematics greatly differs from most other subject areas, I am confident that some of the methods utilized by math teachers can be readily applied to other subject areas.

I recommend all legislators, parents, and all others who have a stake in the education of Mississippi child begin viewing the vision of building a robust economy in Mississippi and world-class educational system though the lens of eradicating the black-white achievement gap. Neither of these goals will be accomplished in Mississippi with half of its K-12 students, the black students, scoring proficiency at a rate less than 50 percent in most cases. The plight of black students must been as plight of all students in Mississippi. The future fortunes of the state do not solely rest on the academic performance of white students or black students, all students.
In the epilogue of *The Hardest Deal of All The Battle over School Integration in Mississippi: 1870-1980*, Charles Bolton wrote, “Ultimately, the State of Mississippi can only advance when all of its citizens receive an adequate education. How will that will be achieved is almost unclear as when the enterprise of public education was first conceived during Reconstruction.” Through the creation of state commission aimed at closing the black-white achievement, the recent passage of charter school and state-funded pre-K legislation, and statewide distribution of best practices in the areas in which the black-white gap is narrowing may amalgamate into the perfect remedy to ensure all students in Mississippi receive the “adequate education” that Bolton calls for. Time, along with future reports on the affects of the current measures being taken by the State Legislature (charter schools and state-funded pre-K) will ultimately judge if the black-white achievement gap can be closed in Mississippi.

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