Chapter 2
CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP: OBSTACLES AND STRATEGIES

An achievement gap exists between students whose families are economically comfortable and children whose circumstances include poverty, most of whom are members of minority groups. Children from poor families often begin school at a distinct disadvantage, not only due to financial circumstances but also factors related to race and ethnicity, including bias. These disparities exist long before they enter the school arena, posing two questions: Why do the disparities exist in the first place? Where do they begin?

What Is an Achievement Gap?
Achievement gap refers to the observed, persistent disparity of educational measures between the performance of groups of students, especially groups defined by socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity and gender. The achievement gap can be observed through a variety of measures, including standardized test scores, grade point average, dropout rates, plus college enrollment and completion rates.

"International tests show achievement gaps in all countries, with big gains for U.S. disadvantaged students**,**" by Martin Carnoy and Richard Rothstein, January 30, 2013, Economic Policy Institute. Accessed March 17, 2017 at http://www.epi.org/blog/international-tests-achievement-gaps-gains-american-students/.

Research, starting with the federal government's 1966 report, "Equality of Educational Opportunity" and extending to recent studies, indicates that school, home and community factors and, historically, federal, state and local policies contribute to the achievement gap.

"Equality of Educational Opportunity," by James S. Coleman, *et al*. 1966. U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Accessed March 17, 2017 at http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED012275.pdf.

Efforts to improve the achievement of minority students have continued over the years. For example, closing the achievement gap was a key element of the 2002 Elementary and Secondary Education Act also known as the No Child Left Behind law (NCLB). A major piece of legislation that received bipartisan support during the administration of President George W. Bush, NCLB held schools accountable for progress among of all students including various "subgroups" representing racial and ethnic minorities, economically disadvantaged students, special education students, and English language learners.

However, the 2008 administration of the National Assessment of Education Progress suggested that NCLB failed to close the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students in a significant way. Reading and math scores are improving for black students across the country. But because white students are also improving, the disparity between black and white

students has lessened only slightly. On average, the gap narrowed by about 7 points from 1992 to 2007, so that black students scored about 28 points behind white students on a 500-point scale. The divide between minority students, particularly African-American students, and white students is considered one of the most pressing challenges in public education.

"Achievement gap still splits white, black students," by Bill Mayer, *The Plain Dealer*, July 14, 2009. Accessed March 17, 2017 at http://www.cleveland.com/nation/index.ssf/2009/07/achievement_gap_still_splits_w.html.

The results call into question whether NCLB, officially described as "An Act to Close the Achievement Gap," had its intended effect.

"No Child Left Behind Fails to Close the Achievement Gap," by Jesse Hahnel, National Center for Youth Law, April-June 2009. Accessed March 17, 2017 at http://youthlaw.org/publication/no-child-left-behind-fails-to-close-the-achievement-gap/.

In December 2015, President Obama signed the reauthorization of the federal elementary and secondary education law. As of this publication date, state plans to implement the new statute, the "Every Student Succeeds Act," are in development. While the new law intends to provide greater local autonomy in school administration, budget development and related district operations, it retains a commitment to closing the achievement gap.

Every Student Succeeds Act (*Public Law No.114-95*)
Preserves federal investment in Title I for disadvantaged students *
Requires state plans to increase achievement of low-income students
Addresses, and authorizes funding for, early childhood program and teacher training *
Requires "ambitious" state-defined long-term goals to measure achievement
* As signed into law, December 2015.

Closing the achievement gap cannot occur solely through school-based reform. Learning is influenced by what happens inside and outside of the school building. School board members administrators, teachers, and professional and support staff cannot be expected to close the achievement gap in isolation. Instead, communities and school districts must identify common goals, which ensure that all children and their families have access to proper nutrition, adequate housing, and proper health care such as mental health and counseling services.

The Task Force believes that it is the responsibility of school districts through their boards of education and staffs to identify the causes of student achievement gaps, including factors beyond the schools' control, and to develop plans to overcome them. Reform must be implemented not only in school, but also *within the context of the child's social and cultural environment*.

Factors Influencing Student Achievement
The cause of the achievement gap is complex; it cannot be attributed to a single factor. Rather, socioeconomic status, cultural environment, family background and individual school environment interact to create achievement gaps among groups of students. Conversely,

proactive strategies in the school, home and community could address the barriers to achievement and help us to provide the means for all students to achieve their potential.

- **Poverty and Psychosocial Stressors**
Generally, economically disadvantaged children are neither exposed to the various post-secondary opportunities (vocational-technical programs, 2- and 4-year college programs, etc.), nor to ways to access them.

    While poverty is not the sole cause of the achievement gap, it remains a major factor. Poverty rates are highest for families headed by single women, particularly if they are African-American or Hispanic. Unmarried mothers generally have lower incomes, lower education levels, and are more likely to be dependent on welfare assistance compared with married mothers. Child Trends, a non-profit organization that focuses on research related to family and youth issues, reported the following percentages of births outside of marriage for women of various racial/ethnic groups in 2013: African-American, 71% of all births; American Indian/Alaskan Native, 66%; Hispanic, 53%; White, 29%, and Asian or Pacific Islander, 17%.

    Child Trends DATABANK. Accessed March 17, 2017 at http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=births-to-unmarried-women.

    Children in poor single-parent households are much more likely to be exposed to psychosocial stressors and family dysfunction than other children. They typically live in communities with high unemployment rates, high crime rates, high rates of teenage pregnancy, inadequate resources such as safe parks, libraries and museums, plus limited access to healthy foods choices and primary health care services.

    > *When mothers need to work more than one job to meet financial obligations, not only are they often depressed, but spending quality time with their children is limited. Reading to a child and being warm and responsive to his or her needs all compete for time. This is an issue not only of maternal bonding, but also of academic preparation.*

    Children who live in poverty also have a substantially higher incidence of child health problems that cause learning problems. Newborns in economically disadvantaged households have lower birth weight on average than other children. Low birth weight birth weight can cause cognitive impairment and other learning disabilities. Poverty also creates unstable home environments (e.g., exposure to domestic violence, child physical and sexual abuse, poor housing, and frequent moving), all of which can impact learning.

    Substantial research points to the effects of poverty on maternal bonding. When mothers need to work more than one job to meet financial obligations, not only are they often depressed, but spending quality time with their children is limited. Reading to a child

and being warm and responsive to his or her needs all compete for time. This is an issue not only of maternal bonding, but also of academic preparation.

There is considerable evidence of a relationship between maternal depression and poor child outcomes. Maternal depression and other serious mental illnesses are significant factors in relation to parenting and overall child health. The healthy development of young children can be negatively impacted by the presence of maternal depression; these effects may be more profound and/or pervasive among families already at risk due to outside factors.

Infants and young children of depressed mothers can experience a range of problems including lower activity levels, fussiness, problems with social interactions, and difficulty achieving age-appropriate developmental and cognitive milestones. Additionally, research suggests that children of depressed mothers may experience poor bonding/attachment with their mothers, lower reading and language scores, and a higher incidence of later mental health issues and depression.

> *…a child born into poverty hears 30 million fewer words by age 3 than a child born to more affluent parents, creating a gap in literacy preparation that has implications for a lifetime.*

A Series of Research and Policy Publications of The Schubert Center for Child Studies, College of Arts and Sciences, Case Western Reserve University, Brief 8, January 2008.

Children are born into poverty or into families with life circumstances that result in poor outcomes start school at a distinct disadvantage compared to others. Less than half (48%) of poor children are ready for school at age five, compared to 75% of children from families of moderate and high income—a gap of 27 percentage points.

Isaacs, Julia, "Starting School at a Disadvantage: The School Readiness of Poor Children." Paper, March 19, 2012. Accessed March 17, 2017 at http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2012/03/19-school-disadvantage-isaacs.

Research clearly shows that the achievement gap already exists when children start school. For example, according to a 1995 by researchers at the University of Kansas, a child born into poverty hears 30 million fewer words by age 3 than a child born to more affluent parents, creating a gap in literacy preparation that has implications for a lifetime.

"The Early Catastrophe: The 30 Million word Gap by Age 3," by Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley, excerpted in *American Educator*, AFT, Spring 2003. Accessed March 17, 2017 at https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/TheEarlyCatastrophe.pdf.

- **Early Childhood Education**
  The value of early childhood education is further discussed in Chapter 6 of this report.

Research clearly shows that poor children with no preschool experience are at much higher risk for academic failure than children who are poor but have had exposure to

early childhood programming. However, the quality of the preschool experience is critically important. Students who attend preschool programs with well-trained teachers and lower student-to-teacher ratios benefit academically.

"The strongest evidence that preschool programs can produce large educational benefits for economically disadvantaged children comes from studies in which programs had both highly capable teachers and relatively small groups of children," states the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), citing research on preschool program quality for children in poverty.

"Class Size: What's the Best Fit?" by W. Steven Barnett, Karen Schulman and Rima Shore, *Preschool Policy Matters*, NIEER, December 2004. Accessed March 29, 2017 (updated) at http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/9.pdf.

- **The Home Environment**
  In a 2013 report on achievement gaps in the United States and other nations, the Economic Policy Institute, a non-partisan research organization focusing on the needs of low- and middle-income workers, cited the impact of home and community on academic achievement. "Extensive educational research in the United States has demonstrated that students' family and community characteristics powerfully influence their school performance."

  "International tests show achievement gaps in all countries, with big gains for U.S. disadvantaged students," by Martin Carnoy and Richard Rothstein, January 30, 2013, Economic Policy Institute. Accessed March 17, 2017 at http://www.epi.org/blog/international-tests-achievement-gaps-gains-american-students/.

  Carnoy, Martin and Richard Rothstein, "What do international tests really show about U.S. student performance?" (Report), *Economic Policy Institute* (January 28, 2013). Accessed March 17, 2017 at http://www.epi.org/publication/us-student-performance-testing/.

Healthy social-emotional development provides support for all children to make sound decisions in all aspects of their lives. Students who live in homes where parents do not interact with them in supportive, loving and compassionate ways, where the television is the "babysitter," where parents do not place emphasis on academic achievement, or where parents are emotionally unavailable because of long work hours, maternal depression, and other stressors are unlikely to have the supports they need to do their best in school.

> *An unstable home environment—particularly during adolescent years—creates behaviors that negatively affect school performance.*

Family dysfunction also places children at risk for behavioral problems. Children who are exposed to domestic violence, child sexual abuse, parental substance abuse, and parental incarceration show a greater frequency of anxiety, aggressiveness, depression, delinquency, and sexual acting-out behavior. School performance is often negatively impacted by these behavioral problems.

An unstable home environment creates behaviors in boys and girls—particularly during the adolescent years—that negatively affect school performance. Girls tend to initiate sex early and are at higher risk for teen pregnancy and parenting. Teen pregnancy and parenting is the number one cause of dropping out for adolescent girls. Adolescent boys are sensitive to the way their mothers are treated by the men with whom their mothers are in relationships; they also can be protective, particularly if the boyfriends are physically or verbally abusive. These stress factors not only make it difficult to learn in the classroom but create avenues for other difficulties that can lead to dropping out, encounters with the juvenile justice system, and incarceration.

- **The Quality of Instruction**
  Research has found that many school practices and characteristics impact student achievement. The Task Force is particularly concerned about the quality of instruction.

> *"Children don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."*
> **– Anonymous**

Students with the greatest challenges need the most talented and compassionate teachers. Experts agree that well-trained teachers are essential to good schools. In many districts, teachers with less preparation and experience are more likely to be assigned to work with students in poverty and those in low-performing schools. High-poverty schools with large numbers of minority students have almost twice the percentage of inexperienced teachers as do low-poverty and low-minority schools.

Linda Darling-Hammond and Laura Post; "Inequality in Teaching and Schooling: Supporting High-Quality Teaching and Leadership in Low-Income Schools," *A Notion at Risk: Preserving Public Education as an Engine for Social Mobility*, Richard D. Kahlenberg, Ed., 2000, The Century Foundation/Twentieth Century Fund, Inc.

Teachers who are not effective in the classroom have a significant negative effect on the learning process. *The New York Times*, reported on a study by economists at Harvard and Columbia Universities, which shows the impact of teacher quality on a fourth-grade student's future educational attainment and income.

> Having a good fourth-grade teacher makes a student 1.25 percent more likely to go to college, the research suggests, and 1.25 percent less likely to get pregnant as a teenager. Each of the students will go on as an adult to earn, on average, $25,000 more over a lifetime—or about $700,000 in gains for an average size class…

> Conversely, a very poor teacher has the same effect as a pupil missing 40 percent of the school year.

"The Value of Teachers" by Nicholas Kristof, *The New York Times*, January 11, 2012. Accessed March 17, 2017 at http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/12/opinion/kristof-the-value-of-teachers.html.

Studies by the National Research Council and other organizations show that students taught by National Board Certified Teachers make higher gains on achievement tests than those taught by teachers who are not board certified. Poor teaching over the course of several years can cause students to be unprepared for college and other post-secondary educational experiences.

"Exploring the Relationship between National Board Certification and High School Student Achievement," by Geary Don Crofford, Jon E. Pederson, Ph.D., Dr. Greg Garn, *New Horizons for Learning Journal*, Winter 2011. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins School of Education. Accessed March 17, 2017 at http://education.jhu.edu/PD/newhorizons/Journals/Winter2011/Crofford.

"The Research behind Certification," *National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.* Accessed March 17, 2017 at http://www.boardcertifiedteachers.org/about-certification/research.

Guide to National Board Certification, Version 1.6. 2016. National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Accessed March 17, 2017 at http://boardcertifiedteachers.org/sites/default/files/Guide_to_NB_Certification.pdf.

In a 2004 paper, researchers found that teacher quality more heavily influenced differences in student performance than did the student's race, class, or school. In addition, disadvantaged students benefited more from good teachers than did advantaged students.

> *…a very poor teacher has the same effect as a pupil missing 40% of the school year.*

Nye, Barbara, Syros Konstantopoulos and Larry V. Hedges, L.V. "How large are teacher effects? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 26, no. 3, (2004), 237-257. Accessed March 17, 2017 at http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/uploads/002/834/127%20-%20Nye%20B%20%20Hedges%20L%20%20V%20%20%20Konstantopoulos%20S%20%20(2004).pdf.

- **Class Size**
  The benefits of smaller class sizes are well-documented and particularly so for students in poverty. The Center for Public Education (CPE) identified 19 studies that addressed reduced class size in the primary grades. Most programs in the past 20 years have targeted kindergarten through third grade, in part because earlier research suggested that these are the optimal years for such programs, and in part because of more recent and comprehensive evidence from Tennessee's influential Project STAR (Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio).

  > After four years, it was clear that smaller classes did produce substantial improvement in early learning and cognitive studies and that the effect of small class size on the achievement of minority children was initially about double that observed for majority children, but in later years, it was about the same.

  "The Tennessee Study of Class Size in the Early School Grades," by Frederick Mosteller, Ph.D., *The Future of Children: Critical Issues for Children and Youths*, The Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University and The Brookings Institution, Vol. 5, No. 2, Summer/Fall 1995. Accessed March 17, 2017 at https://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/docs/05_02_08.pdf.

In its research, the CPE identified several important findings about reduced class size:

- Smaller classes in the early grades (K-3) can boost student academic achievement;
- A class size of no more than 18 students per teacher is required to produce the greatest benefits;
- A class-size reduction program spanning grades K-3 will produce more benefits than one that reaches students in only one or two of the primary grades;
- Minority and low-income students show even greater gains when placed in small classes in the primary grades;
- The experience and preparation of teachers is a critical factor in the success or failure of class size reduction programs;
- Reducing class size will have little effect without well-qualified teachers;
- Supports, such as professional development for teachers and a rigorous curriculum, enhance the effect of reduced class size on academic achievement.

  "Teacher quality and student achievement: At a glance," Center for Public Education, National School Boards Association. Accessed March 17, 2017 at http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Staffingstudents/Teacher-quality-and-student-achievement-At-a-glance.

A landmark 1978 study strongly endorsed reduced class size as a reform likely to produce improvements in academic achievement. The researchers reviewed 80 reports on the relationship between class size and achievement, obtaining more than 100 comparisons from "well-documented" studies of smaller and larger class size. They found that benefits begin to emerge as class size falls below 20 students.

Glass, Gene V. and Mary Lee Smith. "Meta-analysis of research on the relationship of class size and achievement." San Francisco: Far West Laboratory of Educational Research and Development (1978). Accessed March 17, 2017 at http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED168129.pdf.

- **Discipline**
  Issues surrounding student discipline and the juvenile justice system are also addressed in Chapter 8 of this report.

> *Students who are forced out of school for disruptive behavior are usually sent back to the origin of their anxieties and unhappiness…*

Too often, schools have become entry points into the juvenile justice system. According to experts and advocates working on behalf of at-risk teens, disciplinary problems that in prior generations were handled within the school, such as disruptive behavior, foul language and truancy, are often dealt with through suspension, expulsion and arrests. As a result, young people are removed from school as a first response rather than a last resort. And once they are suspended or expelled from school, it is very difficult to get them back on track.

Statistics reflect that these disciplinary practices disproportionately affect students of color and those with a history of abuse, neglect, poverty or learning disabilities.

Students who are forced out of school for disruptive behavior are usually sent back to the origin of their anxieties and unhappiness—the challenges they and their families encounter at home and in their neighborhoods. Those who are forced out for smaller offenses may become hardened, confused, embittered. Those who are unnecessarily forced out of school become stigmatized and fall behind in their studies; many eventually decide to drop out of school altogether, and many others commit crimes in their communities and are referred to the juvenile justice system. African-American and Latino males are especially at high risk of experiencing these challenges.

In January 2014, the civil rights units of the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education issued a guidance document on the equitable application of discipline in the schools. The 31-page document offers guidance on the non-discriminatory use of disciplinary measures to promote safe and orderly educational environments.

U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, and U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, "Dear Colleague Letter: Nondiscriminatory Administration of School Discipline," by Catherine E. Lhamon and Jocelyn Samuels, January 8, 2014. Accessed March 15, 2017 at https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201401-title-vi.pdf.

In its October 2014 final report, the NJSBA School Security Task Force, which consulted with law enforcement, education and school climate experts, considered the federal guidance document. It recommended that school districts and local law enforcement clearly address the intersection of school policy/disciplinary code, Criminal Code and the Juvenile Justice Code. The security task force recommended that school officials ensure that student behavior that is in violation of school codes of conduct be addressed by school officials and not be imposed on police.

What Makes Schools Safe? Final Report, NJSBA School Security Task Force, October 2014. Accessed March 15, 2017 at http://www.njsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/news-security-task-force-final-report.pdf.

- **Student Management**
  The Student Achievement Task Force believes it is imperative that districts review their student management procedures and consequences. Student management data should be analyzed to ensure equity in the application of the discipline code. Inconsistencies or evidence of bias, when identified, should be addressed through professional development and staff performance appraisal.

  Teachers, paraprofessionals and administrators need the tools to be proactive as they guide their students to making healthy and appropriate choices. Professional development on building student self-esteem, nurturing effective relationships with students, and respectful yet firm interventions when students make poor choices will contribute to a healthier school climate.

The Latin root for the word of "discipline" is "to teach." Teaching appropriate behaviors is an expanding responsibility for educators and school districts. Whether they use a commercial student management program or one that is district-developed, school boards should ensure that professional and support staffs receive professional development that will assist them in teaching their students appropriate behavior choices in a respectful manner.

- **School Climate**
  Chapter 9, "Social Emotional Learning," discusses school climate in further detail.

  Positive school climates where the adults intentionally create welcoming climates for students, their families, and all stakeholders encourage appropriate behaviors for all.

  For decades, schools have been experiencing an expansion of responsibility, or "mission creep," beyond the traditional "3 Rs." They are expected to help all children learn not just academic subjects, but also the appropriate behaviors, manners, and other skills once taught exclusively by their families. Today, financially supporting a family can be particularly challenging, sometimes requiring a parent to work more than one job. The matter is often compounded for single-parent households.

  In past generations, members of the extended family tended to live in close proximity to one another and in neighborhoods where everyone monitored children. That level of support is not always present today, and many parents rely on educators to teach their children skills once taught at home. Therefore, schools must collaborate with all sectors of the community, including the municipal government, law enforcement, social and health services, the faith community, service groups, senior citizens, and local business and industry. The goal is to develop comprehensive plans to proactively teach and encourage youth to make healthy decisions.

- **Student Health and Wellness**
  Students perform better when they show up for class physically and emotionally healthy and ready to learn. A number of practices and programs foster learning readiness and academic achievement while giving children the resources they need to improve their health and emotional well-being.

  School-Based Health Centers: SBHCs ensure that kindergarteners through high schoolers can get a flu shot, have an annual physical, have their teeth examined and their eyes checked, or speak to a mental health counselor in a safe, nurturing place—without the barriers that families too often face. SBHCs exist at the intersection of education and health and are the caulk that prevents children and adolescents from falling through the cracks. They provide care—primary health, mental health and counseling, family outreach, and chronic illness management—without concern for the student's ability to

pay and in a location that meets students where they are: at school. To date, there are approximately 2,000 school-based health centers across the nation.

School-Linked Health Centers: SLHCs are geographically separate from the school but provide access to services through collaborative and cooperative arrangements. SLHCs can be provided in a trailer or mobile van in close proximity to the school, or through a community–based organization in collaboration with a school district. Services can be provided by dispatching professionals to the school or by arranging for students' access on specific days and at specific times.

> *A number of practices and programs foster learning readiness and academic achievement while giving children the resources they need to improve their health and emotional well-being.*

Mental Health Services: School-based mental health services are provided either in school or through a collaborative arrangement with a community mental health agency. They provide counseling and mental health services to a specific student population.

Coordinated School Health Programs: In its 2015 report, the NJSBA Task Force on the Impact of Health and Wellness on Student Achievement, recommended that all school districts implement Coordinated School Health (CSH) programs, as defined by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

"CSH is a systematic approach to improving the health and well-being of all students so they can fully participate and be successful in school," states the report.

CSH programs focus on strategies in school and in the community. They are "designed to ensure access and/or referral to primary health care services, to foster appropriate use of primary healthcare services, to prevent and control communicable disease and other health problems, to provide emergency care for illness or injury, to promote and provide optimum sanitary conditions for a safe school facility and school environment, and to provide educational and counseling opportunities for promoting and maintaining individual, family and community health. Qualified professionals such as physicians, nurses, dentists, health educators, and other allied health personnel provide these services."

"Task Force on the Impact of Health and Wellness on Student Achievement, Final Report," August 27, 2015, New Jersey School Boards Association. Accessed March 17, 2017 at https://www.njsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Wellness-Task-Force-Final-Report-revised-april27.pdf.

"Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. Accessed March 17, 2017 at http://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/wscc/index.htm.

"Components of Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed March 17, 2017 at http://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/wscc/components.htm.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Chapter 2 – Closing the Achievement Gap: Obstacles and Strategies

FOR BOARDS OF EDUCATION

1. Be aware of, and change, practices that negatively impact the lives of children.

2. Require high-level curriculum that prepares students for global competiveness.

3. Advocate for school-based counseling and mental health services that address the needs of students and their families.

4. Through collaborative efforts, ensure student access to healthcare through School-Based Health Centers, School-Linked Health Centers, and Coordinated School Health Programs.

5. Review the policies related to equal treatment of students. For example, review research reports, such as "Not Measuring Up: The State of School Discipline in Massachusetts." Examine access to high-level courses, discipline procedures, and grading procedures, as well as other policies and procedures that inadvertently influence what happens to students based on race, ethnicity, and poverty.

   "Not Measuring Up: The State of School Discipline in Massachusetts." 2014. Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights and Economic Justice, Boston, MA. Accessed March 17, 2017 at http://lawyerscom.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Not-Measuring-up_-The-State-of-School-Discipline-in-Massachusetts.pdf.

6. Advocate not only before constituents, but also before state and federal representatives. Board members should develop professional relationships with elected officials to assist them in their representation of the district, the community, its students and employees.

FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS

7. Seek student input in curriculum design, teacher evaluation, and overall school evaluation. Surveys are an effective way to engage students in the school-reform process. The Task Force on Student Achievement believes that such an exercise would encourage students them to take responsibility for educational outcomes.

8. At the end of every school year or semester, give students the opportunity to evaluate their learning experience in every class. Such information should prove useful to school leaders—especially, principals—in identifying professional development and other efforts to improve teacher effectiveness.

9. Ensure that all administrators and instructional staff understand the role of School Improvement Panels (ScIPs) in data analysis and professional development recommendations to achieve school and district goals. The ScIPs were created through the 2012 TEACHNJ Act and are part of the AchieveNJ educator evaluation system.

    "The School Improvement Panel: Strengthening Evaluation at the Building Level," New Jersey Department of Education, updated August 2015. Accessed March 17, 2017 at www.state.nj.us/education/AchieveNJ/teacher/SchoolImprovementPanelandImprovingEvaluation.pdf.

10. Develop and administer a survey at the beginning of each school year to assess the physical and mental health needs of the school population. School nurses and guidance counselors should be involved in developing the surveys, and also in conducting the surveys and making recommendations based on the outcome.

11. When determining the support a child needs to be successful, consider the whole child—not just his or her academic needs but also the social-emotional needs that should be addressed. Educators should know the social, emotional, health, and basic needs of their students and their families. District leaders should identify how the school community and the community at-large can address these needs.