

For Local educators

- Develop and implement differential strategies and approaches for working effectively with the families of students of color.
- Organize and sponsor workshops for training school board members on issues related to the academic achievement of African-Americans and other racial and ethnic minorities.
- Strongly consider establishing focused support programs during the freshman year that enhance a personalized, caring school culture to respond to the high dropout rate for African-American males between eighth and ninth grades and during the freshman year.
- Give priority status to professional development and in-service opportunities that provide current Illinois teachers with the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to help eliminate school violence, ameliorate the effects of poverty on learning, and enhance cultural responsiveness.
- Target resources to determine effective strategies for parental empowerment, enrichment and development as one method of identifying why students aren't achieving at acceptable levels and what can be done to help them.
- Working with community leaders, establish mechanisms to empower parents and community members in the decision-making process used to place students in certain tracks or in special education programs.
- Implement a multi-faceted approach to reverse the trends of increased dropout rates of African-Americans and other racial and ethnic minorities, including early identification of students and active outreach to parents and caregivers of students at risk of dropping out.
- Assist students to reach performance expectations by providing educational opportunities before and after school and in the summers.

For Universities

- Assure that teachers are prepared to effectively serve a multi-cultural/multiracial student population by deepening teacher knowledge in the areas of literacy, culturally responsive teaching, relationship building, differentiated instruction and best teaching practices.
- Strengthen teacher preparation programs, including requiring a minimum of 20 weeks of student teaching and coursework on critical issues in education such as the achievement gap and its causes.
- Present teaching as a viable occupation for undergraduate and graduate students of color.
- Provide minority students with the information and support they need to qualify for, enroll and remain in postsecondary education until they complete a certificate or degree program so the achievement gap does not continue in their lives as an economic gap.
- Examine overcrowding in public schools as an influence on student performance and make recommendations about desirable class sizes to policy makers.

For Local political and community leaders

- Organize and conduct community forums that will review and discuss the academic performances of students in the community.
- Hold school administrators and policy makers accountable for the academic performance of students.
- Prepare and circulate community achievement report cards that document goals and progress with respect to closing the achievement gap.
- Push local political leaders to be actively involved in local community efforts to address the achievement gap.

Participants

Karen Hunter Anderson
Senior Director, Illinois Community
College Board

Linda Renee Baker
University Professor, Paul Simon Public
Policy Institute

Mary Bennett
Youth and Parent Coordinator,
Springfield Urban League

Carolyn Blackwell
Retired Administrator, Springfield
Public School System

Seymour Bryson
Associate Chancellor (Diversity),
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Dave Carvalho
President, Flossmoor Elementary
School Board of Education

DeLinda Chapman
Member, American Association of
University Women

Paul E. Cross
Superintendent, Regional Office
of Education, Hamilton-Jefferson
Counties

Mitchell Daniels
Manager, Illinois Department
Employment Security

Monique Davis
Illinois State Representative
(D-Chicago)

Will Davis
Illinois State Representative
(D-East Hazel Crest)

Randy Dunn
Superintendent, Illinois State Board of
Education

Clara Fitzpatrick
Professor, Columbia College Chicago

Linda Flowers
Principal, Thomas Elementary School
(Carbondale)

Paul Froehlich
Illinois State Representative
(R-Schaumburg)

Twin Green
Executive Director,
The Links Option Center

Mattie Hunter
Illinois State Senator
(D-Chicago)

Anna Jackson
Lecturer, SIUC Department of English

Philip Jackson
Executive Director, Black Star Project

Terri Jackson
Director, Multi Cultural Affairs,
University of Illinois at Springfield

Mike Lawrence
Director, Paul Simon Public Policy
Institute

Jesse D. Madison
Chair, Illinois African-American Family
Commission

Jeff Mays
President, Illinois Business Round
Table

Anthony Neal
Principal, SIU Charter School of East
St. Louis

Terry Nunn
Deputy Director, Illinois Board of
Higher Education

Ida Cross Pruitt
President, Cross and Associates

Barb Schwartz
Coordinator, Illinois Department on
Aging's Grandparents Raising Children
Program

George Smith
Executive Director, Management
Planning Institute

Terry A. Solomon
Executive Director, Illinois African-
American Family Commission

Richard Streedain
Professor, National Louis University

Vince Williams
Consultant, Vince R. Williams and
Associates

For more information, contact:

Paul Simon Public Policy Institute
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
1231 Lincoln Dr., Mail Code 4429
Carbondale, IL 62901
Tel: (618) 453-4009
Email: siuppi@siu.edu
Web: www.siu.edu/~ppi

Eliminating Illinois' Educational Achievement Gap

Action Plan from a symposium held
on March 27, 2006



Southern[™]
Illinois University
Carbondale

Sponsored by:
The Illinois African-American Family Commission and Southern
Illinois University Carbondale's office of Associate Chancellor
for Diversity and Paul Simon Public Policy Institute

The academic achievement gaps between whites and minorities in Illinois are among the largest in the nation.

Our state must do better – much better. We cannot tolerate the disparities.

In human terms, thousands and thousands of young people will suffer the consequences of unrealized potential in an increasingly competitive global economy.

As a state, we will be unable to attract and keep businesses that provide good-paying jobs unless we offer in the 21st Century a workforce comparable to the one that helped make Illinois one of the nation's most prosperous states in the 20th.

Eliminating the debilitating disparities in academic performance will command extraordinary leadership and involvement in the governor's office, in the General Assembly, in city halls, in teacher preparation programs, in corporate suites, in churches, synagogues and mosques, in civic and community groups, in families and, of course, in schools throughout Illinois.

There is no single answer, no single point of responsibility. All of us, whites as well as racial and ethnic minorities, have a stake in the outcome and a role in reform – as parents, as citizens, as taxpayers, as educators, as people determined to move Illinois forward instead of allowing the state to slip into backwaters devoid of educational and economic opportunity and a good quality of life.

The Illinois African-American Family Commission and the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute gathered policy makers, educators and community activists to focus on the challenges, the success stories and a mission that must be second to none in this state. Contained herein are the names of participants and recommended courses of action.

There are schools in this nation and in this state where African-American students and those from other racial and ethnic minorities are succeeding, where there is no achievement gap. Bridging the existing divides will challenge us, but it is not a mission impossible unless we lack the will to engage it.



Seymour Bryson, education committee chair of the Illinois African-American Family Commission and SIUC Associate Chancellor for Diversity, makes remarks during the symposium as Illinois State Superintendent of Schools, Randy Dumm, looks on.

THE ACTION PLAN

For the Illinois African-American Family Commission and the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute

- Seek a commitment from each of the candidates running for governor of Illinois in 2006 to convene educators and other stakeholders for a summit early in 2007 to focus on how to close the education achievement gap that adversely affects African-Americans and other racial and ethnic minorities.
- Ask the state legislature to establish a bipartisan, bicameral committee to address the achievement gap by considering recommendations from this conference, by identifying and studying best practices around the state and the country and examining other avenues for ultimately eliminating the disparity.
- Continue to impress on the governor and legislature that re-vamping the education funding process in Illinois is a necessary step to assure adequate and fair funding for schools and that this issue should be a top priority.
- Engage the business community in the discussions about the achievement gap and its impact on the workforce and seek their active participation and support of specific programs aimed at addressing achievement gap issues.

For State Policy Makers (including the governor, the legislature, the State Board of Education and the Board of Higher Education)

- Launch an aggressive campaign and explore incentives to encourage more racial and ethnic minorities to go into the teaching profession, particularly in the elementary grade schools. Also, address possible disincentives.

- Respond to studies that conclude highly qualified, culturally sensitive teachers make a substantial positive difference in improving the performance of minority students and develop strategies that will facilitate the placement and retention of these teachers in the neediest schools.
- Take steps to insure that minority students have access to courses and curricula that will permit them to enhance their performance.
- Convene a panel of school administrators and pursue development of alternatives to discipline rules and practices like zero tolerance policies, school suspension, and school expulsion for other than violent or drug-related offenses as a strategy to keep students in school so that they are able to meet or exceed performance expectations.
- Mobilize state agencies, community groups and school administrators to establish the linkages and supports schools need to address students' barriers to learning, such as poor physical, dental and mental health, inadequate nutrition and lack of school supplies.
- Provide and fund incentives for all schools in Illinois to implement mentoring programs for new teachers during their first three years in the profession as one strategy to increase retention.
- Press policy makers and educators to develop and create educational programs that do not limit educational opportunities and career choices at an early age.
- Modify the existing career awareness standards as necessary and incorporate them into the Illinois Learning Standards as an integral part of what students should know and be able to do.
- Present the ISAT scores for middle school students (5th through 8th grades) in the context of college readiness as one strategy to support better preparation of students for postsecondary education, reversing the trend of high enrollment in college remediation courses that drain students' financial aid without gaining them any college credits.
- Fund a study to examine the extent to which students are taking advantage of opportunities to take community college courses while in high school and to receive credit from both institutions for their work as a strategy to keep students in school and to promote high levels of achievement.



Jesse Madison chairs the Illinois African-American Family Commission



Paul Simon Public Policy Institute professor Linda Renee Baker reviews draft recommendations and general themes of the panel discussions with the audience.