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Comprehensive School Reform: Meta-Analytic Evidence of Black-White Achievement Gap Narrowing

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Abstract

This meta-analysis extends a previous review of the achievement effects of comprehensive school reform (CSR) programs (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2003). That meta-analysis observed significant effects of well endowed and well-researched programs, but it did not account for race/ethnicity. This article synthesizes 34 cohort or quasi-experimental outcomes of studies that incorporated the policy-critical characteristic of race/ethnicity. Findings: compared with matched traditional schools, the black-white achievement gap narrowed significantly more among students in CSR schools. In addition, the aggregate effects were large, substantially to completely eliminating the achievement gap between African American and non-Hispanic white students in elementary and middle schools. Title I policies before or after the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 seem to have had essentially no impact on the black-white achievement gap. Curricular and testing mandates along with the threat of sanctions without concomitant resource supports seem to have failed. This study suggests that educational achievement inequities need not be America's destiny. It seems that they could be eliminated through concerted political will and ample resource commitments to evidence-based educational programs.

Keywords

Comprehensive school reform, Title I, racial differences, academic achievement, education policy, elementary schools, middle schools, meta-analysis.