

January 2008

# ESOL Insights

Greetings from Halla Jmourko, ESOL Teacher Coach

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## What Causes an Achievement Gap?

- Learning differences
- Language
- Culture
- Exposure to early education
- Quality of instruction

## Possible Challenges to Closing the Achievement Gap for Latino Students:

- Parents with low-household incomes and low levels of formal education
- English Language Learners with unmet instructional needs
- High mobility of students

## The Achievement Gap

In this era of standards-based educational reform and accountability, much attention has been paid to the achievement gap in academic performance. Federal legislation demands not only that students achieve high levels but also that all students achieve at those high levels. To monitor progress toward this goal, policy makers, researchers, educators, and parents look for differences in achievement between subgroups of students. For example, a comparison is made of how students of different racial and socioeconomic groups perform in relation to another. Another example is the evaluation of how students whose native language is not English perform compared to their English-speaking peers. Any difference in academic achievement between such groups is called the achievement gap.

*Education Development Center, 2005*

*American Federation of Teachers, 2004*

## How Can We Close the Gap?

Achievement is closely linked to a student's ability to learn in a classroom setting. We have the challenge of ensuring that all children in our classrooms can access learning despite differences in their abilities, languages, cultures, and learning styles. We can use the ideas and strategies listed here to create an environment in which students can learn optimally.

- Students' diverse cultures are valued and viewed as enriching the schools' learning environment.
- Infuse principles of culturally responsive educational practice into your teaching.
- Incorporate a "study buddy" system that pairs students to support each other's learning.
- Keep a folder of positive examples of each student's work. Bring out this folder when a parent comes to visit or when a student is struggling.
- Highlight students who are making progress in certain areas along with those students who are always high achievers.
- Seek and use research-based information on effective instruction for linguistically and culturally diverse students.
- Advocate for stronger professional development programs for teachers on effective instruction for English Language Learners.
- Promote adult education and parent involvement programs.