

# Identifying Factors that Contribute to Achievement Gaps

*Raising achievement to higher levels and closing student achievement gaps are priorities in schools and communities at all economic levels, and in urban, rural, and suburban settings.*

This guide is designed to help NEA members lead a discussion with other educators and community members that will identify the specific factors contributing to local achievement gaps in schools, school districts, and communities. Gaps may exist between groups of students of different backgrounds (e.g., ethnic, racial, gender, disability, and income) on tests, on access to courses and special educational opportunities, and on other indicators such as high school and college completion and employment later in life (see Discussion Guide #1, Identifying Achievement Gaps in Your School, District, and Community).

The causes of achievement gaps are multiple and complexly interrelated, and they vary from school to school, district to district, and community to community. As a starting point, consider factors that have been identified in various studies as contributing to achievement gaps.

## Factors That Contribute to Achievement Gaps

Within Schools' Control	Outside Schools' Control
<b>Schoolwide Factors</b>  Low expectations for student achievement; Lack of rigor in the curriculum; Large class size; Tracking groups of students into a less demanding curriculum; Unsafe schools; Culturally unfriendly environments; and Poor, or no, instructional leadership.	<b>Factors in the Local Community</b>  Economic opportunity for students' families; Access to health and social services; Community safety; Access to libraries, museums, and other institutions that support students' development; and Access to child care and after-school programs and facilities.
<b>Teacher- and Teaching-Related Factors</b>  Uncertified and inexperienced teachers; Insensitivity to different cultures; Poor teacher preparation; Low expectations of students; and Inadequate materials, equipment, and resources, including technology-based resources.	<b>Students' Background</b>  Families' income level; Students' birth weight; Students' diet and nutrition at home; Students' mobility; and Students' primary language (if other than English).
<b>Student-Related Factors</b>	<b>Education Funding Shortfalls</b>

Students' interest in school; Students' level of effort; Students' feeling that they are, in part, responsible for their learning.	State budget deficits; Unfunded federal mandates; and Inequities in funding among school districts.
<b>Families' Support of Students' Learning</b>  Families' participation in school activities; Families' skills to support and reinforce learning; and Students' TV watching and at-home reading.	<b>Families' Support of Students' Learning</b>  Time family members are able to devote to support and reinforce learning. Other Factors Societal bias (racial, ethnic, poverty and class)