

# Back to School...

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## Closing the Achievement Gap...

### What is the achievement gap?

The "achievement gap" in education refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students. It is most often used to describe the troubling performance gaps between many African-American and Hispanic students, at the lower end of the performance scale, and their non-Hispanic white peers, and the similar academic disparity between students from low-income and well-off families. The achievement gap shows up in grades, standardized-test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college-completion rates. It has become a focal point of education reform efforts.

**What is the cause of the achievement gap?** There is no clear cause of the achievement gap within schools, but there are many cultural, genetic and structural factors that have had an impact on this discrepancy.

Annette Lareau, an educational researcher, suggested that students who lack middle-class cultural capital and have limited parental involvement are likely to have lower academic achievement than their better resourced peers. Other researchers suggest that academic achievement is more closely tied to race and socioeconomic status. Regardless of which factors have the greatest impact on the gap, it is clear that minority students are more likely to find themselves at a distinct disadvantage in school in comparison to white students. Still others have argued that the achievement gap may be to a significant extent explained by genetic/hereditary causes.

**What does it mean to narrow the achievement gap?** Explanations for the phenomenon -- and levels of concern over its existence -- vary widely, and are the source of much controversy, especially since efforts to "close the achievement gap" have become some of the more politically prominent educational reform

issues. Many schools have started using after-school tutoring sessions and remedial programs to help narrow the achievement gap associated with minority students. The problem with such programs is that in order to narrow the gap, minority students must learn at a rapid speed in order to "catch-up" with their white peers. Other schools have started de-tracking their students or tracking by ability groups in order to provide the same quality education for all students, regardless of race. By de-tracking schools, all students are more likely to have equally qualified teachers, expectations, curriculum, and resources.

The achievement gap exists in schools all over the world. The only way to bridge the achievement gap is to engage students in school.

Research from this article was gathered from Editorial Projects in Education and Wikipedia.

## Thought of the Month

"A ship in the harbor is safe—but that's not what ships are built for."

-John A. Shedd

## Urban Institute 2009



Students Janelle Wiesen and EllaKate Wagner

EllaKate Wagner and Janelle Wiesen from the Ionia County Youth Advisory Council (YAC) attended this year's Urban Institute Conference in Philadelphia. They both attended a pre-conference session that took them to three colleges in Philadelphia who are heavily involved in service learning, the University of Pennsylvania, Temple University, as well as Drexel University. This was a great op-

portunity for them to tour around an urban setting with service-learning programs. They both helped with different breakout sessions that taught the youth about service learning and how easy it is to apply back into the curriculum. They were also involved in a session that taught youth how to be trainers so they can go home and train their own youth about service learning. They also had many opportunities to network

with other youth, including youth from the National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC). They were able to exchange project ideas and techniques used in other states and programs. After returning home from the Urban Institute they plan to take their newly acquired knowledge and train local youth from their Youth Advisory Council on service-learning. They also plan to use this knowledge in the future to help better their schools.

## Summer Service-Learning Project



For the past few summers the Ionia County ISD has been offering a Summer Service-Learning Project conference to teachers from all over Ionia County. This summer the ISD had the opportunity to offer this conference to teachers in both Ionia and Montcalm County. The Summer Service Learning Project is a three day gathering of teachers to de-

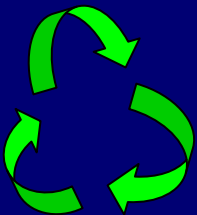
velop and plan to go back and implement their service-learning units into their classrooms. The Summer Service-Learning Project is a great opportunity for teachers to develop their skills and knowledge of service-learning.

## Going Green

The Ionia County ISD is trying to become more eco-friendly and that means that the service learning newsletter is going to start being posted online at [www.ioniaisd.org](http://www.ioniaisd.org). We will continue to print the service-learning newsletter, but we will also be posting the newsletter online. We encourage you to

can be paper free by the end of the year! Remember to check us out at [www.ioniaisd.org](http://www.ioniaisd.org) under service-learning.

for your support with our goal of becoming paper free! We hope that we can be paper free by the end of the year! Remember to check us out at [www.ioniaisd.org](http://www.ioniaisd.org) under service-learning.



## UnitedHealth HEROS Grant (Due: October 22)

UnitedHealth HEROES Grants Support Youth-Led Innovative Solutions to Leading Health Educators, service-learning coordinators, and students in the health professions are eligible to apply for the UnitedHealth HEROES service-learning project grants. Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that combines meaningful service to the community with school-based curriculum or program-based learning.

Grant recipients will receive up to \$1,000 in support for service-learning projects that focus on childhood obesity, engage youth ages 5-25 in the planning and implementation process, and take place during Semester of Service 2010 (MLK Day, January 18, to Global Youth Service Day, April 23-25).

The grant cycle opens August 1 and applications are due October 22, 2009. To access the application, com-

plete our Eligibility Quiz. If you are eligible, you will be given access the application materials.

To create a service-learning project around childhood obesity, check out "First Responders: Youth Addressing Childhood Obesity Through Service-Learning."

<http://ysa.org/AwardsGrants/UnitedHealthHEROES/tabid/318/Default.aspx>

**Nickelodeon's**

**BIG Green**

**Grants**

**Program is**

**due: December**

**31, 2009**



## Nickelodeon's BIG Green Grants

Big Green Grants provide resources to schools and community-based organizations to support environmentally friendly projects that educate and inspire kids to (1) take care of the environment; (2) be active and live healthily; and/or (3) engage in community service. Adults complete the application. Kids include essays and/or artwork explaining why this project is important to them and their school, club, after-school pro-

gram or community. Eligible schools and community-based organizations can apply for one of two funding opportunities. (1) A \$2,500 grant for an environmentally-friendly project. (2) A \$5,000 grant for an environmentally-friendly project. To request \$5,000, applicants must provide a 1-to1 dollar-to-dollar match (\$10,000+ total project budget). To be considered for the program, applicants must explain how the proposed project will

benefit or enhance the learning experience of kids, as well as its relevance to the environment, being active and living healthy, and/or community service. Applications are accepted and reviewed on a rolling basis throughout the year with a particular focus around Nickelodeon's Worldwide Day of Play (September 26, 2009). <http://www.bghevent.com/grant/index.htm>

## Lowe's Toolbox for Education (Due: October 16)

Lowe's will donate \$5 million to public schools and public school parent teacher groups - at more than 1,000 different public schools per school year. How would you improve your school? Increase parent involvement? Build stronger community spirit? Create a new school tradition? The ideas are endless.

Whatever goals and dreams you have for your school, we can help you fulfill them! At a time when schools and community groups are struggling to make ends meet, Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation recognizes that we must increase our focus on basic, one-time project needs. This year, we chal-

lenge ourselves to seek ways to provide the tools that help our educators and parent groups through these challenging times efficiently and with the greatest impact. In 2009, basic needs will take priority. <http://www.toolboxforeducation.com/>



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# Strategies for Success with Literacy

**An innovative curriculum designed to engage students for academic excellence.**

This program combines research-based strategies from the fields of literacy, service-learning, civic development/citizenship, and social/emotional learning. The acclaimed approach helps students become academically and civically engaged and increases their literacy skills. New components have added leadership and career exploration plus higher order skills that improve research and writing.

December 1 & 2, 2009  
8:30– 4:30

Ionia County ISD  
2192 Harwood Road  
Ionia, MI 48846

For more information contact  
Deborah Wagner  
[dawagner@ioniaisd.org](mailto:dawagner@ioniaisd.org)  
616-522-1405



**Cost: \$200**

Registration includes a “Strategies for Success” Teacher Tote Bag with \$350 worth of resources including a Teacher Guide with articulated lesson, Student Guide, and ten books used to integrate skill development and literacy, and more! **Register today!**  
[www.ioniaisd.org](http://www.ioniaisd.org)