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Ikpa, Vivian, W. & McGuire, C. Kent (2009). *Narrowing the Achievement Gap in a (Re)Segregated Urban School District*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

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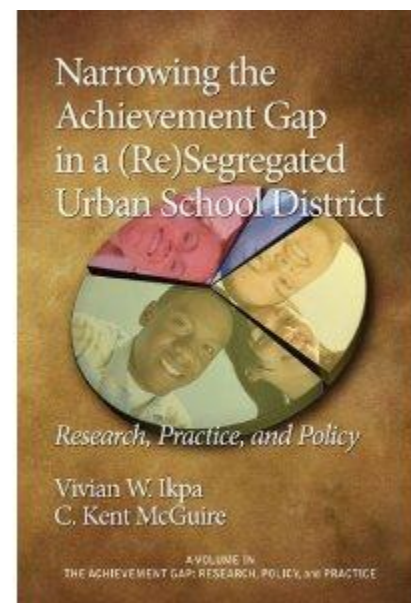
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Reviewed by Veda Jairrels

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The authors had a twofold purpose in writing this eight chapter book with 32 appendices. They wanted to present a data-driven analysis of the achievement gap and discuss steps that urban school districts have taken to reduce the gap. They focused on achievement disparities between African American and European American students in the Norfolk Public Schools of Norfolk, Virginia.

In chapter 1, the Introduction, the goals and organization of the book were explained. The authors began the chapter by discussing the legal cases that provided the basis for desegregation and then years later, “resegregation,” which was the term the authors



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used. The authors referred to the Norfolk Public Schools as “a model resegregated urban district” (p. 5) and indicated that in 2005, the school district received the Broad Prize, which is given to school districts that have made progress in reducing the achievement gap. This fact explains the relevance of this book as there are other school districts with a similar history regarding segregation, integration, and then resegregation. School administrators and policy analysts may reference the research in the book as they attempt to devise methods to enhance academic achievement.

The “challenges” of urban school districts were discussed in chapter 2. Statistics about academic achievement, high school graduation rates, national school enrollment by race/ethnicity, Norfolk Public Schools enrollment, and funding issues were provided. One table of data focused on the percentages of families in poverty for select years. Information was also presented about the educational status of African-American males.

One of the strengths of this book was the presentation of historical facts that may be unknown to many, whether inside or outside the field of education. For example, in chapter 3, the authors discussed the legal challenges to segregated schools and revealed that Boston, Massachusetts established integrated schools in the late 1700s. African American parents, however, believed that their children were being mistreated and consequently, requested a separate school. The authors discussed the events and legal maneuvers that followed this request. In addition to discussing the separate but equal doctrine and *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), they also discussed the legal cases that affected integration within higher education, such as *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada* (1938), *Sipuel v. Board of Regents of University of Oklahoma et al.* (1948), and *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950).

Virginia had a detailed resistance plan to integration and the plan is discussed in chapter 4. A 32-member committee created the plan in 1955. One provision of the plan was that integrated schools would be denied state funding and that funding would be provided to “efficient schools,” which

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were defined as those schools that were racially segregated. In an effort to avoid integration, some schools in the state were closed.

The earlier research literature regarding the achievement gap was discussed in chapter 5. They reviewed studies that focused on the achievement of African American and European American students in schools with varying amounts of diversity. Some of the studies investigated the educational ramifications of desegregation.

Chapter 6 explained the authors' research which studied the effects of busing on the achievement scores of African American and European Americans students. The authors analyzed 11 variables such as the percentage of African American teachers, the number of books in the school library, and instructional expenditures. Some of their findings may be surprising to the reader.

The achievement gap in the Norfolk Public Schools for several years was examined in chapter 7. The authors analyzed the fourth and eighth-grade passing rates on the Virginia Standards of Learning tests. They presented the data regarding elementary, middle school, and high school performance.

The Norfolk Public Schools has seven practices for enhancing academic achievement and these practices were discussed in chapter 8. One of the practices is "data-driven decision making" (p. 130). In Norfolk, this practice is evident when teachers work in teams to plan instruction, based on the data. Another practice is that the school district attempts to hire principals from within the school district. The district also established a Leadership Academy for principals.

From other research, the authors identified 5 important factors in reducing the achievement gap with professional development being one factor. This professional development included giving teachers instruction in how to use data. Another factor was allowing teachers to learn by observing in the classrooms of other teachers.

The authors also made recommendations for resegregated school systems. One recommendation was that school districts hire a teaching and administrative staff that is comfortable working in diverse environments. They also advocated that teacher preparation programs require a two-year teaching internship that focuses on “a culturally responsive curriculum” (p. 136). Another interesting recommendation is that technology be used to create virtually integrated schools. They encouraged universities, state education agencies, corporations, and other concerned parties to form collaborative partnerships for the purpose of enhancing the use of technology in the school environment. The appendices that followed chapter 8 contained data about passing rates on achievement tests, achievement gaps, drop-out rates, and other statistics.

The authors fulfilled their purpose in writing this book. The topical organization of the book is excellent. The book provides a compilation of research regarding the achievement gap into one volume. School district officials may review the research to determine what recommendations and findings may be applicable to their school systems. As the authors intended, students enrolled in courses focusing on urban school leadership may also be able to reference this book.

The flaws of the book are the numerous typographical errors and at least one missing reference. The errors, however, are readily discernible to the careful reader and do not significantly disrupt comprehension. The review of the research literature regarding the achievement gap, the historical information presented, and the study of the Norfolk Public Schools outweigh the aforementioned flaws and make the book valuable to school administrators, researchers, policy analysts, and students.

About the Reviewer

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