



ETS's Addressing Achievement Gaps Symposium The Family: America's Smallest School

A broad consensus exists in the United States that the family environment has a deep and enduring impact on a child's development and academic achievement. And, particularly as it relates to underserved populations, that environment often produces outcomes that can imperil our advancement as a nation and decrease our global competitiveness.

In 2008, Educational Testing Service (ETS) published a milestone report, *The Family: America's Smallest School*, which provides insights and data on this phenomenon. Among the many factors that affect learning, the report notes, are the level of parent education, the number of hours of television watching, and the amount of parental reading to children.

That and other studies notwithstanding, there appears to be a growing need for a consensus on practices and policies to bring about changes that can narrow the achievement gaps between people of various races, ethnicities, and social classes.

In recognition of this need, ETS will convene a symposium on the status and the role of the family in education, the 14th in its series of Addressing Achievement Gaps symposia. Scheduled for October 18, 2010, at the Willard InterContinental Hotel in Washington, D.C., the symposium will gather researchers, policy experts, educators, and practitioners to explore today's realities and tomorrow's solutions. More specifically, the symposium will address, among others, the following questions:

- What is the current status and structure of U.S. families?
- What characteristics and behaviors of parents and families contribute to or diminish student achievement?
- How can changes in the condition of parents and families contribute to the narrowing of the achievement gap?
- What programs, practices, and policies can be identified that tangibly contribute to building strong families?
- What national, state, and local policies on parents and families should be strengthened, implemented, and replicated to make progress in closing achievement gaps?

Addressing these questions can help us to develop cooperative partnerships in which families are allies with all stakeholders in education from practitioners and policymakers, to educators and researchers. We need to work together to improve not only schools, but also home and family conditions, to ensure that all students succeed. The collective expertise of expert panelists, speakers, and conference attendees will be harnessed to identify ways to focus policies and practices on improving the health and strength of families as they play the role of a child's first, and perhaps most important, school.

Our Co-convenors:

Bendheim-Thoman Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, Princeton University
Committee for Hispanic Children and Families
National Center for Children and Families, Teachers College, Columbia University