

Securing the Right to Learn

**Closing the Opportunity
Gap in America**



National Council for Educating Black Children

- Founded by Congressman Augustus Hawkins to create ongoing support for the education of African American children
- Rooted in the effective schools research of Dr. Ron Edmonds, whose research made it clear that:

“We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach children whose schooling is of interest of us.”

NCEBC Works in Districts, States, and Regions to...

Create and implement Community Action Plans and Literacy Centers to address school failure and high rates of grade retention, dropping out, suspension and expulsion, special education placements, and incarceration for black youth.

These efforts have identified a set of central issues, including:

- lack of access to high quality preschool experiences;
- under-resourced schools;
- poor quality instruction by underprepared teachers;
- inadequate education of parents and involvement in their children's schools.

From NCEBC (2009). The village takes responsibility: A call to action guide, Indianapolis, IN: NCEBC. Available at <http://www.ncebc.org>.

Precepts for Our Recommendations

- Educational inequality in the United States has deep roots and requires a systemic response.
- Marginal, fragmented programs will not be adequate to address the opportunity gap.
- A focus on test scores alone will not close the achievement gap.
- Federal policy needs to recognize and take a much more systemic approach to building quality and addressing inequality than it has to date.

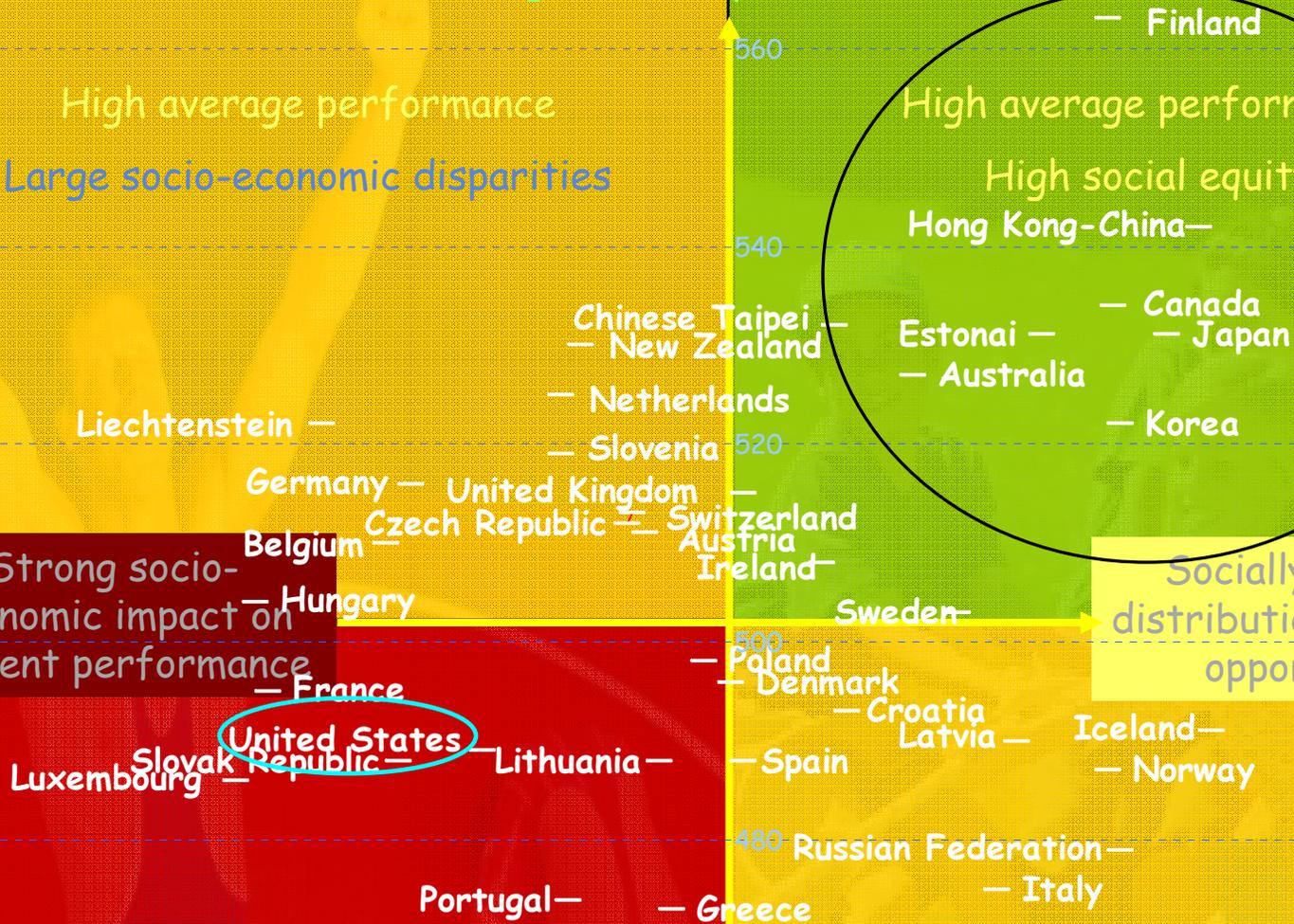
High science performance

High average performance
Large socio-economic disparities

High average performance
High social equity

Strong socio-economic impact on student performance

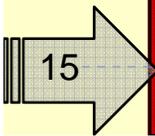
Socially equitable distribution of learning opportunities



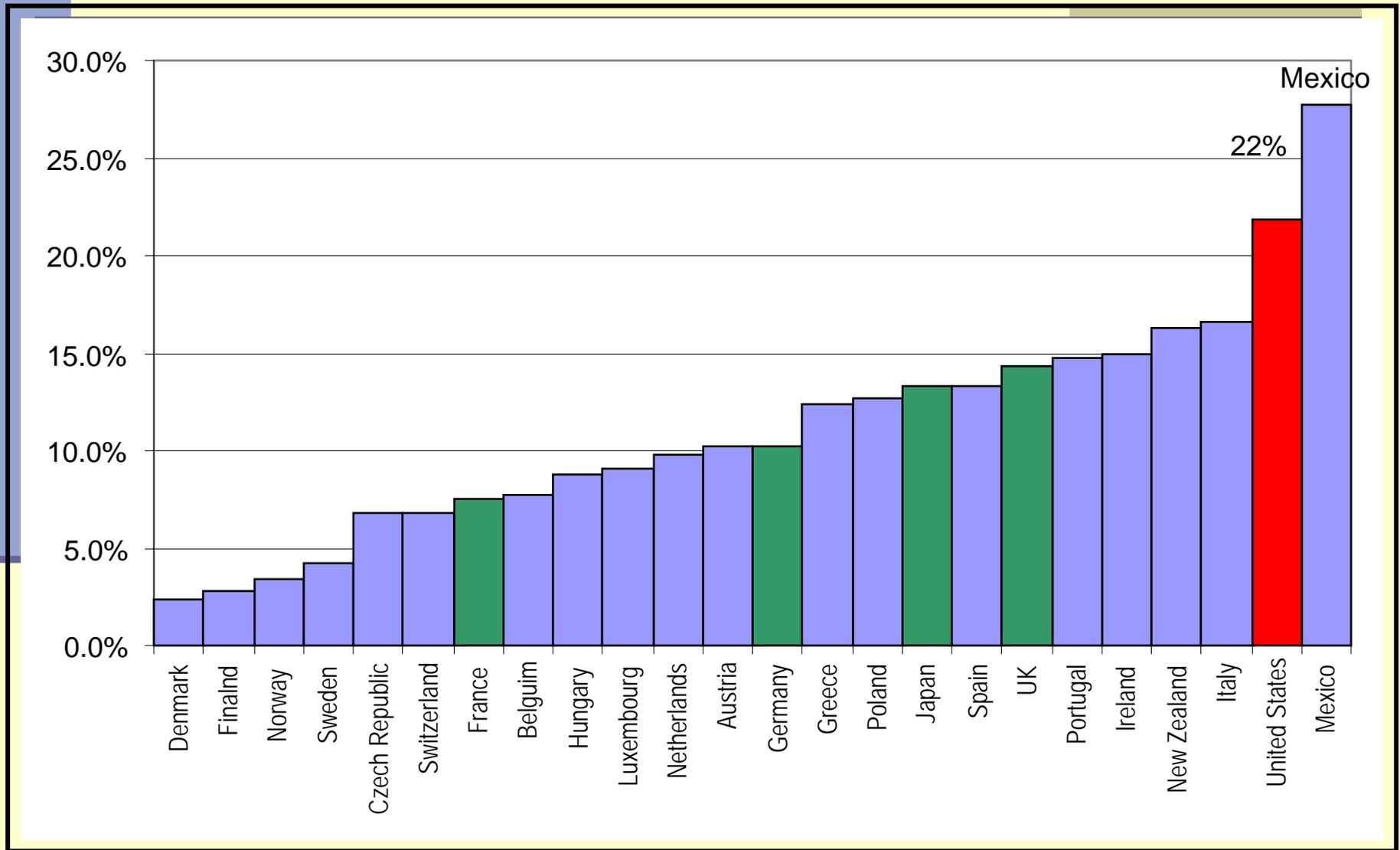
Low average performance
Large socio-economic disparities

Low average performance
High social equity

Low science performance



U.S. Leads in % of Children in Poverty, 2007 (OECD Nations)

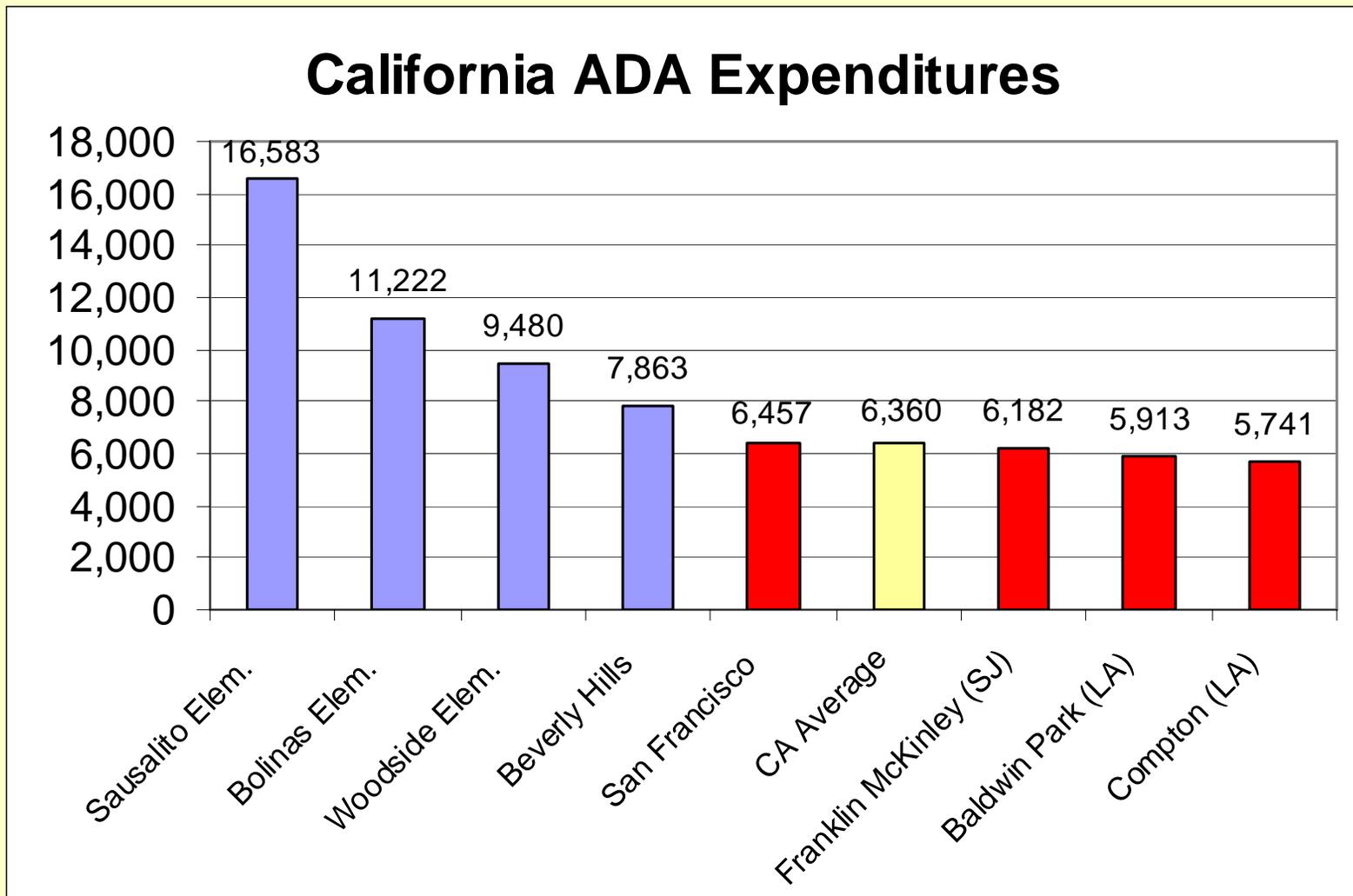


Educational Inequality Exacerbates the Effects of Poverty

Nationwide, schools serving “minority” and low-income students have

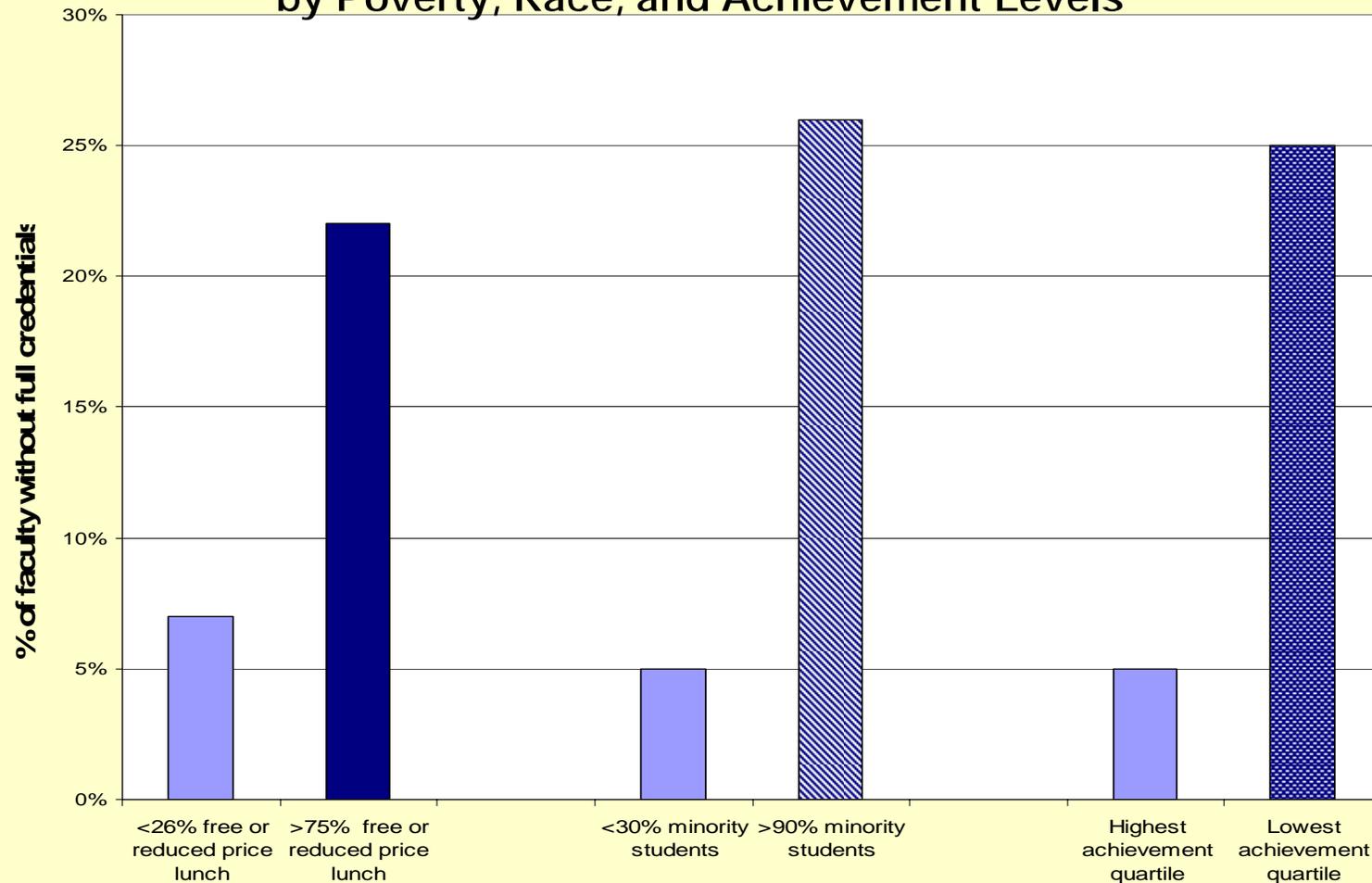
- Lower funding levels
- Larger class sizes
- Less well-qualified teachers
- Less engaging and challenging curriculum
- Fewer college preparatory or AP courses
- Larger school sizes
- Fewer computers, books, supplies

Education Spending is Unequal and Inadequate



The Teaching Gap Creates Most of the Achievement Gap

Distribution of Uncertified Teachers in CA
by Poverty, Race, and Achievement Levels



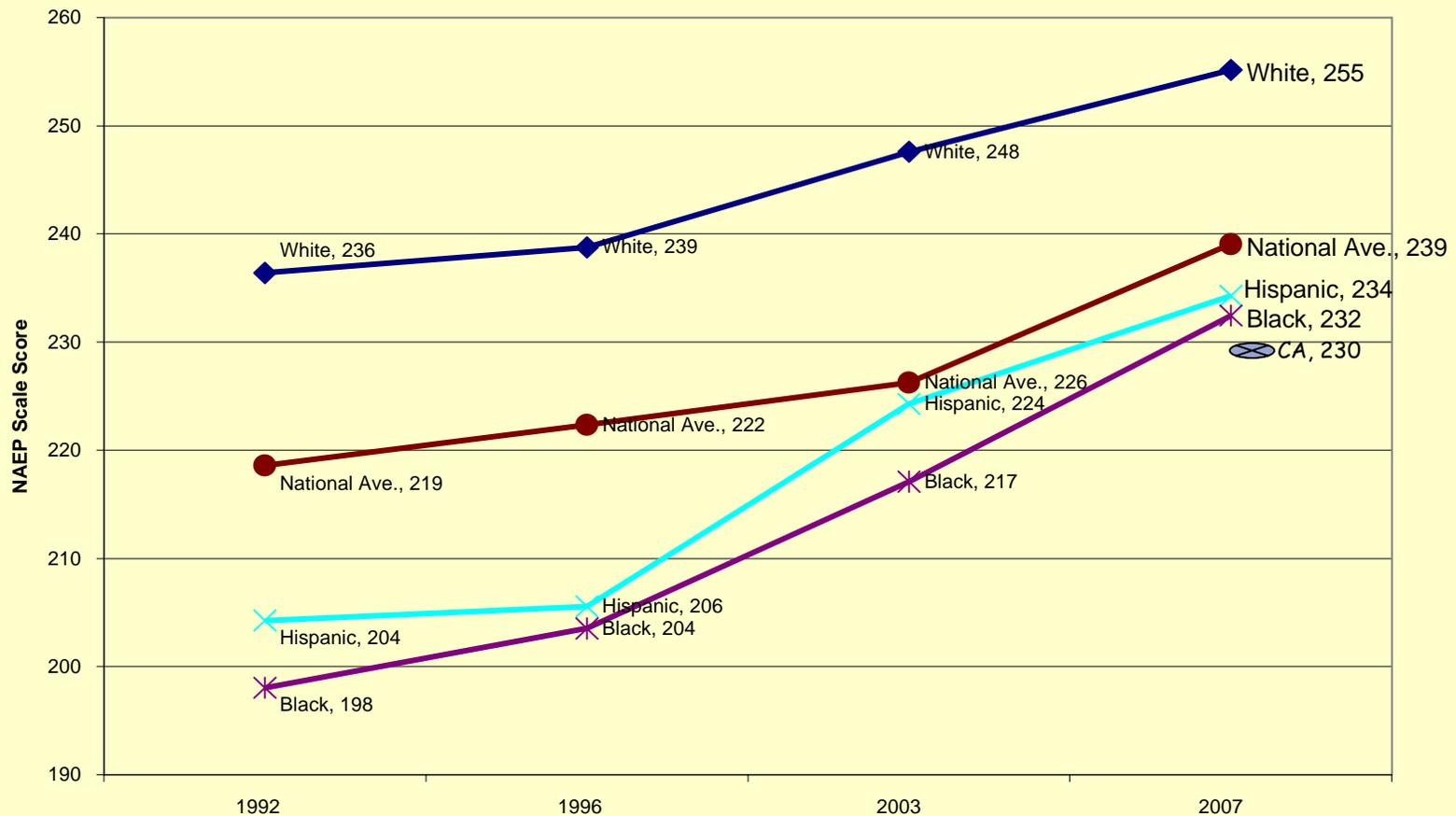
Source: Shields et al., 2001

Policy Can Reduce the Achievement Gap

- Anti-poverty policies, desegregation, and federal education investments in the 1960s and '70s cut the achievement gap in half and sharply increased educational attainment.
- College-going rates by race were equal by the 1970s.
- Had we continued those policies, the achievement gap would have been closed by 2000.
- States that have made systemic investments in equalizing funding, access, and teaching quality have increased achievement and reduced the gap (e.g. MA, CT, and NJ).

What Happens When States Finally Begin to Equalize Funding? The Case of New Jersey

New Jersey Math Achievement Trends 4th Grade NAEP



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress, NAEP Data Trends

Over the last few years New Jersey has become...

- One of the top 5 states in the nation on NAEP reading, math and science, and is #1 in writing
- The only top-achieving state serving large proportions of low-income students of color – 45% of NJ students are “minority”
- Among the states experiencing the strongest achievement gains and largest achievement gap reductions in the last few years

What Happened?

The New Jersey Story

- Parity funding for high-minority, low-wealth districts
- Investment in high-quality preschool with highly prepared teachers
- Whole school reform based on the Comer model supporting child development and parent involvement
- Teacher education & PD focused on urban teaching
- Focused literacy (and, later, mathematics) programs:
 - Expert coaches
 - Top-quality materials and classroom libraries
 - Teacher development for language-rich teaching
- Curriculum and assessment focused on higher order skills

High Leverage Federal Policy to Close the Opportunity Gap in America

1. Investments in high-quality preschool education.
2. Requirements for states to make progress on resource equity and adequacy under ESEA.
3. Investments in high-quality preparation and professional development for teachers and leaders who serve in high-need schools
4. Strategic federal investments to ensure high-quality, relevant curriculum and supportive learning environments in schools serving students of color.
5. Effective support for parent education and involvement.

More Strategic Preschool Investments

Why: High-quality preschool reduces school failure, grade retention, and special education placements, and increases graduation and later college-going.

How: Successful programs employ:

- highly-trained teachers (BA with specific ECE, developmental and cultural training);
- rich learning environments with hands-on materials and extensive children's libraries;
- small class sizes; and
- strong parent education.

Needs: Greater federal leverage for program quality and investments in teacher training for high-need communities.

Incentives for Progress on Equity: Outcome Accountability is Not Enough

- **Strengthen and enforce ESEA comparability provisions**
- **Create incentives for state equalization**, by tying progress on resource equity to receipt of federal funds.
- **Require states to report on Opportunity indicators** reflecting the availability of well-qualified teachers; strong curriculum opportunities; and instructional resources alongside reports of school academic progress.
- **Require states to meet Opportunity-to-Learn standards for schools identified as failing**, so that necessary resources are part of corrective action.
- **Include analyses of student treatment and access to learning opportunities** in school reviews.

Teacher Quality Matters Greatly

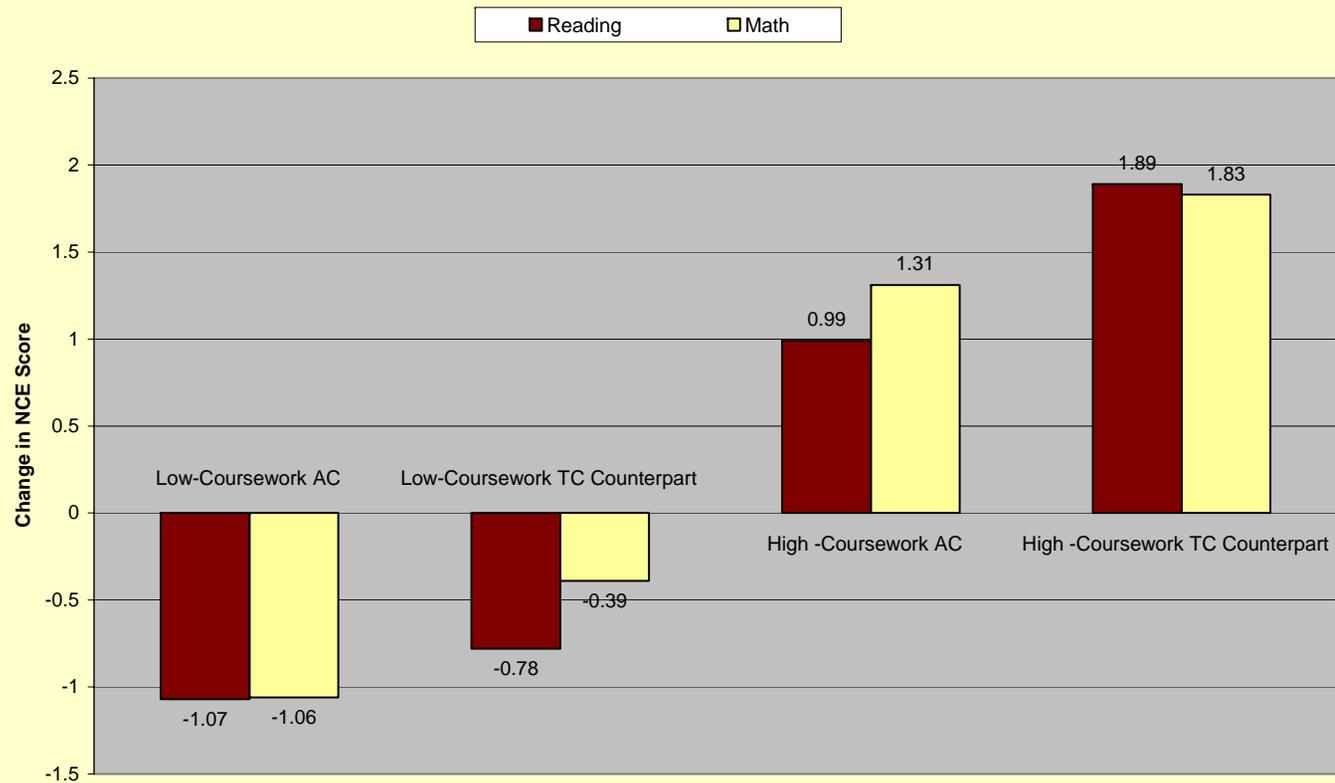
Two recent large-scale studies of student achievement in North Carolina and New York City found that teachers were significantly more effective if they:

- were fully prepared when they entered teaching – rather than entering through an alternative route,
- had taught for more than two years,
- were certified in the specific field they taught, and
- scored higher on licensure tests.

The NC study also found that teachers were more effective if they were National Board certified. Moreover, **the effects on student achievement of having a teacher with weak credentials as compared to having one with strong credentials were greater than the effects of race and parent education combined.**

Current Federal Policy Encourages a Race to the Bottom in Teacher Education

Fall-to-Spring Test Score Gains / Losses of Students Taught by Alternative Route and Traditional Route Teachers



Based on actual (unadjusted) fall and spring scores

Strengthen Teaching in High-Need Communities

- **Expand service scholarships** for preparing teachers for high-need fields and locations
- **Require states to study and expand *effective* teacher education programs**
- Use **teacher performance assessments** to evaluate and leverage more effective preparation to teach content in culturally-and linguistically responsive ways to students of color, ELLs, and students with special needs
- **Invest in preparation models** that improve teachers' ability to teach diverse students well, including urban teacher residencies, PDS partnerships, and expanded programs in HBCUs and HSIs
- Support **literacy centers** and high-quality student-focused **professional development** in high-need communities

Invest in Leadership Development

- Create recruitment pathways to attract a diverse pool of expert teachers with strong leadership potential
- Subsidize high-quality training that prepares instructional leaders, including internships with top principals in high-need schools
- Establish a “West Point” that prepares top-leaders for turnaround schools
- Develop Leadership Academies in states and high-need districts to support leadership teams in managing effective school change

Support Strategic Investments in High-Need Schools

- Expand funding for Community school models that offer comprehensive services wrapped around high-quality instruction
- Support school designs that personalize learning (small size, teaching teams, advisories, looping) and offer equitable access to relevant, high quality instruction that prepares students for college and careers.
- Sponsor successful models for school transformation that invest in critical faculty learning and parent involvement (e.g. Comer model; Benwood initiative approach).

Support Effective Parent Education and Involvement

- **Foster family engagement** by supporting parent education; time for parent-teacher meetings; and incentives for businesses to provide time off for parents to participate
- **Ensure access to data** about student opportunities to learn
- **Provide for genuine community input** into school improvement processes (not just sign-offs)

Insisting on Quality Education as a Civil Right

"On some positions, Cowardice asks the question,
'Is it safe?'

Expediency asks the question, 'Is it politic?'

And Vanity comes along and asks the question,
'Is it popular?'

But Conscience asks the question 'Is it right?'

And there comes a time when one must take a position
that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular,

But he must do it because Conscience tells him
it is right."

-Martin Luther King, Jr., "Remaining Awake Through a
Great Revolution", March 31, 1968