

## **Research Brief #2: The Role of Collective Efficacy in Closing Student Achievement Gaps: A Mixed Methods Study of School Leadership for Excellence and Equity**

### **IMPORTANT QUOTE:**

“The Black-White achievement gap is a persistent problem that has been documented in innumerable studies” (p. 11).

### **What is this study about?**

The researchers were interested in addressing whether collective efficacy beliefs are important to the equitable distribution of student success across schools. They were also interested in how school factors, including leadership contribute to or maintain collective efficacy. Since previous research has demonstrated that collective efficacy fosters “the types of effort, creativity, and persistence required to support student learning” (p. 4), the authors reasoned that “such sustained effort may serve not only to foster high overall achievement but also to reduce achievement gaps” (p. 4).

### **WHAT’S IMPORTANT**

Efficacy-belief shaping information includes mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and affective states. A theme that consistently emerged in the interview data was that when teachers described mastery experiences, how they learned vicariously, or mood (affective states) of their schools “they frequently emphasized what their principals did to contribute in these areas” (p. 11).

### **THE DETAILS OF THE STUDY**

#### **Participants/Method and Procedures**

The researchers employed hierarchical linear modeling to investigate whether collective efficacy was positively related to differences among schools in student achievement and the reduction of achievement gaps. They also employed qualitative research methods to elicit teachers’ views on the ways in which school contextual factors, including leadership, influenced their collective efficacy beliefs and their practice.

The urban school district (60 schools - 52,000 students) in the study had demonstrated substantial, sustained progress in closing achievement gaps with a diverse population in the state of Texas. More than half the students in the schools were Latino and approximately one third were Black. In addition, approximately 70% of the students received a free or reduced-price lunch. Rates of poverty by school ranged from 41% to 93%. Seven years of state accountability data showed significant progress in closing achievement gaps by ethnicity and socioeconomic status while increasing absolute levels of achievement.

The first sample in this study consisted of 13,472 students and 2,041 teachers who learned and taught in 47 of the district’s elementary and middle schools. Student data was obtained from the district office and collective efficacy was measured through an annual survey administered to teachers in all of the schools.

Qualitative interviews were conducted at 6 schools. The researchers selected schools both above and below the collective efficacy and student achievement averages (means) in the study.

### **Results:**

Quantitative findings indicated that collective efficacy beliefs were important to educational equity and achievement. “After controlling for student and school demographic characteristics, collective efficacy was a statistically significant predictor of variation among schools in student mathematics achievement” (p. 9).

“The stronger a school’s sense of collective efficacy, higher the overall levels of mathematics achievement *and* the lower the disadvantage for Black students. One standard deviation increase in collective efficacy was associated with a 50% reduction in the academic disadvantage experienced by Black students” (p. 10). “In addition, Latino students did not score significantly differently than White students after accounting for their prior achievement, ethnicity, gender, and status with regard to ESL, special education, and free or reduced-price lunch programs” (p. 11).

Two themes consistently emerged across the interview data.

1. “Principals in schools with relatively high collective efficacy were often credited by teachers for putting structures in place that enabled teacher collaboration for instructional improvement” (p. 13). Schools with low collective efficacy showed evidence of less democratic and more punitive types of leadership.
2. In the schools with high efficacy, stories were shared in which educators refused to accept excuses for low performance and there was a strong normative pressure to increase instructional time and contribute extra effort.

**Limitations:** There weren’t any limitations noted in this study.

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