



# At a Glance: Closing the Achievement Gap 2008

Honoring South Carolina Schools for Progress  
Toward Closing the Achievement Gap  
April 2008

## 141 SC Elementary and Middle Schools Honored

In the Education Oversight Committee's (EOC) sixth annual study of the gap-closing schools, 141 schools (16 percent of elementary and middle schools) are honored based on results of the English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics portions of the 2007 Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT). The identified schools have high student achievement for at least one target subgroup --- African American students, Hispanic students, or students participating in the free/reduced price lunch program.

Identified as a persistent challenge nationwide, the achievement gap is defined as the difference in achievement between the target group (the historically lower-scoring demographic group) and the statewide comparison group (the historically higher-scoring group) at various PACT performance levels (Basic or Above/Proficient and Advanced.)

Principals and staff from the recognized schools are invited to the EOC meeting on April 14, 2008. Charles Middleton of Walhalla Middle School in Oconee County and Melvin Middleton, Jr., from Sanders-Clyde Elementary in Charleston County are presenting information about strategies and programs in their schools that are reasons for their successes.

### Details from this year's gap analysis

- In an analysis of PACT math and English Language Arts (ELA) scores:
  - Achievement in both subject areas from 2006 to 2007 was generally flat.
  - In both 2006 and 2007, approximately one-third of all students scored at the Proficient or Advanced level on the ELA test and one-third scored Proficient or Advanced on the math test.
  - In both years, almost one-fourth of all students failed the ELA test and one fourth failed the math test (scored Below Basic).
- In an analysis of the sizes of the achievement gaps in ELA and math:
  - As indicated in the tables below, the sizes of the gaps in 2007 generally increased compared to 2006, reflecting the general lack of progress overall in performance on the ELA and math tests. The gap between white and Hispanic students decreased at the Basic and above level in both math and ELA. In math, the gap decreased at the Proficient or Advanced level.

PACT English Language Arts Achievement Gaps Among Demographic Groups, 2006 and 2007				
Comparison Group – Target Group	Percent Basic or Above		Percent Proficient or Advanced	
	2006	2007	2006	2007
White African American	20.5%	20.9%▲	25.9%	26.3%▲
White Hispanic	19.7%	19.1%▼	21.5%	21.8%▲
Pay Lunch – Free/Reduced Price Lunch	21.0%	21.2%▲	28.1%	28.2%▲

PACT Math Achievement Gaps Among Demographic Groups, 2006 and 2007				
Comparison Group – Target Group	Percent Basic or Above		Percent Proficient or Advanced	
	2006	2007	2006	2007
White African American	23.4%	23.6%▲	28.9%	29.1%▲
White Hispanic	19.2%	17.5%▼	22.3%	21.6%▼
Pay Lunch – Free/Reduced Price Lunch	21.1%	21.2%▲	28.3%	28.3%-

▼: Gap Decreased  
▲: Gap Increased

- The *smallest* achievement gap was observed in PACT math at the Basic and above level (17.5 percentage points) comparing the performance of white and Hispanic students.
- The *largest* achievement gap was observed in PACT math at the Proficient and Advanced level (29.1 percentage points) comparing the performance of white and African American students.
- Achievement gaps observed at the Proficient or Advanced levels in ELA and math are larger than those at the Basic or above performance levels for all groups.
- Gaps between white and African American students remain consistently larger than gaps between white and Hispanic students and between pay and free- or reduced-price lunch students.
- Although performance was flat, there was an increase overall in the number of schools recognized this year (135 schools identified in 2006.)
- Many of the schools recognized in previous years for closing the achievement gap have maintained their accomplishment.
  - Nineteen schools have been recognized for six consecutive years.
  - Eighty-six (61 percent) of the 141 schools recognized in 2007 were also recognized in 2006.
- Thirty percent of this year's honored schools are high-poverty schools, serving a student population of at least 70 percent poverty. Twelve of the recognized schools have 90 percent or more of their students in poverty.
- Performance on the science and social studies PACT tests was analyzed in this year's report but schools were not recognized for achievement in these content areas. The gaps in these subject areas should be noted.
  - The performance of all students on the Social Studies and Science tests at both the Basic and above and the Proficient or Advanced levels increased from 2006 to 2007.
  - The largest gaps in achievement for a subject area were observed in science.
  - The size of the achievement gaps between the demographic groups studied in 2007 decreased in eight and increase in four of the twelve gap comparisons.
- Although progress is being made, the sizes of the gaps are discouraging if South Carolina is to meet its 2010 achievement goal for all students.

#### **Analysis of performance by gender groups and ethnicity**

This year, the EOC performed an analysis of PACT ELA and math performance by gender groups, ethnicity, federal free- or reduced-price lunch status, and 2007 Absolute ratings. The analysis revealed:

- The performance of every demographic group was highest in schools rated *Excellent* and lowest in schools rated *Unsatisfactory*, with overall very low performance for all groups in schools rated *Unsatisfactory*.
- In both ELA and math, the gaps between groups at the Basic or above performance level were larger in low-performing schools (*Below Average* or *Unsatisfactory*) than in high-performing schools (*Excellent* or *Good*);
- Conversely, in both ELA and math, the gaps between groups at the Proficient or Advanced performance levels were smaller in low-performing schools (*Below Average* or *Unsatisfactory*) than in high-performing schools (*Excellent* or *Good*), reflecting the overall very low performance of all groups in low-performing schools;
- Across both subjects and performance levels and across school rating categories, the highest-performing groups were white female and Other female students and white pay lunch and Other pay lunch students;
- African-American male students and African-American free- or reduced-price lunch students were the lowest-performing groups in both subjects and across absolute rating categories.

#### **Voices**

“At Sanders-Clyde, we take a holistic approach to education. Basic needs have to be addressed in order for students to learn.” – *Melvin Middleton, Assistant Principal, Sanders-Clyde Elementary School.*

“Teachers care at our school and positive home/school relations are critical. We require teachers to turn in a log of eight positive contacts per month with parents.” – *Charles Middleton, Principal of Walhalla Middle School*

**For additional information, contact the EOC at (803) 734-6148.  
A list of the honored schools, a technical report on this year's gap analysis, and other material  
can be found online at [www.eoc.sc.gov](http://www.eoc.sc.gov).**