Public Abstract

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Title:Examining Racial Congruence of Students and School Personnel to Better Understand the Achievement Gap

Walking into a school, it is not unusual for one to hear discussions surrounding student achievement levels and what can be done to help all students further succeed. Schools today face enormous pressure to lessen achievement gaps that are frequently evident in groups composed of culturally diverse, minority students. In order to help clarify what factors relate to higher levels of student achievement, this quasi-experimental study examined the relationship between student achievement and racial congruence levels of school personnel and students. This was accomplished through the use of publically available data and quantitative analysis. The data, deriving from 2014-2015, was collected from 158 elementary schools in the Houston Independent School District and consisted of student and personnel demographics, percentage of economically disadvantaged students, and fifth-grade students' State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) examination scores in the areas of reading, math, and science of each school. Using the demographics data, the percentage of non-white personnel was compared to the percentage of non-white students, and schools were labeled as highly congruent, moderately congruent, or slightly congruent. Results indicated mean reading and math scores were significantly higher when higher levels of racial congruence existed within a school, although the relationship between higher racial congruence levels and science scores was not significant. Even when controlling for the effect of the percentage of economically disadvantaged students within a school, these increased reading and math achievement scores held strong. Because achievement gaps between minority and majority students exist throughout the United States, the implications of this study are vast. The findings from this study can be used to better inform administrators as they make decisions regarding where to place hired personnel within districts, as such placements are shown to relate to math and reading scores. Additionally, the results are also important for educator recruitment programs, both at the PK-12 and higher education levels.