

## INTRODUCTION

Each child has but one chance to succeed in our educational system. But, have we given them the best chance for success? No. Not as long as gaps exist in the opportunities we provide for each child to achieve academic success.

Closing the achievement gap, or reducing the predictability of a student's achievement based on his or her race or socio-economic level, is a national priority and is the primary goal of the Federal No Child Left Behind legislation. For Colorado the issue is especially important: while Colorado students' scores rank among the highest on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, Colorado students also demonstrate one of the highest achievement gaps in the nation. While state and local policy makers have taken some action to close those gaps, progress is not nearly fast enough. Overall, there are few examples of significant improvement.

Our best chances for closing student achievement gaps lie with the teachers with whom our children are closely connected. The research is clear; teachers are the single most important factor in improving student achievement. A variety of studies have shown that an effective teacher can be more important to student learning than a child's race, family income, parents' education or any other external factors often thought to dominate school outcomes.

*No child should be denied the opportunity to be taught by a quality teacher who can open doors to his or her future.*

Every day is another opportunity for our teachers to ignite the sparks of learning in our children. No child should be denied the opportunity to be taught by a quality teacher who can open doors to his or her future.

### 2006 - Shining the Light

In 2006, the Alliance for Quality Teaching (Alliance) launched a landmark study about the state of teaching in Colorado, *Shining the Light: the State of Teaching in Colorado*. The most significant finding from this report was the existence of a teacher quality gap. The study revealed that the greater the proportion of minority students or students eligible for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program (FRL) within a school or district, the lower the experience, education level and salary of the teachers and the greater the attrition rate. Students of color in Colorado have a one in ten greater chance of having an inexperienced teacher than do white students. The existence of this gap is particularly troublesome because these teacher characteristics are fundamental indicators of teacher quality and are positively correlated with student achievement. And, according to *Shining the Light*, this discrepancy by race and poverty has grown larger since 2000, with some gaps more than twice as large.

Knowing that the context within which teachers work is also important, the 2006 study identified the great diversity of size, growth, and ethnic enrollment across Colorado districts. This diversity made it clear that single policy solutions are not possible.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Appendix I includes a brief summary of 2006 findings and a report on progress of the recommendations.

## Why another study?

In identifying characteristics of teacher quality in *Shining the Light*, it was clear that much more is involved in the teacher quality equation than the characteristics measured in our study. More evidence is needed to determine the characteristics that are good predictors of quality teaching, and a deeper analysis of those characteristics would help us to understand their impact in Colorado. Thus, the current Alliance report was developed to build on the previous work.

## 2008 - Shining the Light II

*Shining the Light II* addresses two overarching questions which resulted from the previous study:

- What are the characteristics of a high quality teacher?
- What is the impact of teacher attrition and diversity on student achievement in Colorado?

### **What are the characteristics of a high quality teacher?** (Chapter II)

The importance of the relationship of teacher quality to student achievement has been well documented. However, understanding what we mean by teacher quality has been the topic of considerable debate among policymakers, researchers, scholars, educators and parents. This report provides the scholarly and research context within which we begin to clarify what we mean by a high quality (or effective) teacher.

### **What is the impact of teacher attrition and diversity on student achievement in Colorado?** (Chapter III)

One of the factors that affect student achievement is the classroom experience level of the teacher. When teachers leave the classroom, schools typically replace them with inexperienced teachers. This report documents the correlation of Colorado's lower performing schools with an inexperienced teacher workforce.

A growing body of research supports the impact of a teacher's ethnic background on the achievement of students with similar ethnicity. And yet, our study finds that the proportion of Latino students in Colorado is growing five times faster than the proportion of Latino teachers.

The findings and recommendations within this report shine the light on the extensive work that remains to be done in Colorado, at the state and local level, if we hope to close student achievement gaps and give **each** child the best chance of success.

