

## District of Columbia Statewide Education Research Activities

In its Race to the Top application, the District of Columbia has committed to developing, expanding and using its data systems in order to make information more transparent and accessible to stakeholders, to better facilitate research to improve student achievement and close achievement gaps, and to enable responsive and informed policy decision-making at all levels of the education system. Access to high-quality data is fundamental to meeting the goals of the grant and making informed decisions about how to turn around struggling schools, increase teacher and leader effectiveness, and better target instructional resources to students.

Therefore, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) is devoting Race to the Top resources to improving the quality, availability, and accessibility of data and to developing a research agenda that will inform reform efforts related to policy, instruction, operations, management, resource allocation, and overall school effectiveness.

***A central component of this agenda is OSSE's establishment of the following statewide educational research priorities and related research activities to proactively engage researchers from high-quality organizations and institutions of higher education. The priorities include: Closing the Achievement Gap; Preparing Students for College and Career; Identifying Effective School Models, Programs, and Instructional Materials; Increasing Teacher and Leader Effectiveness; and Ensuring Students Are Ready for School; Supporting Adequate and Equitable Facilities and School Financing; and Promoting High Quality and Effective School Choice Options.***

**Closing Achievement Gaps:** Equity is a critical component of DC's reform efforts. There are several types of achievement gaps that this research priority seeks to address. There is a gap in achievement between low income students and the small pocket of higher income students in DC, a gap between DC students and higher performing school systems, and a gap between special education students, English Language Learners and other students. There are likely promising instructional strategies in specific schools that are working to increase achievement and close gaps that other schools could learn from. This research priority seeks to analyze these achievement gaps and identify strategies for closing them.

<p><b>Sample research questions:</b> What kind of achievement gaps exist in DC (which subgroups)?                  Are there schools in DC that have successfully narrowed achievement gaps?                  What strategies are they using to do so?                  What can we learn about principal leadership in the schools that have narrowed or are narrowing the achievement gap, and what can we learn about principal leadership in the schools where large gaps exist?</p>	<p><b>Outcomes:</b> Improved DC CAS and NAEP scores, improved graduation rates, college attainment</p>
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**Preparing Students for College and Career:** As a primary strategy for increasing college readiness and success, the District of Columbia has adopted the Common Core Standards and will be implementing them in the school year 2011-12. While the standards will drive changes to curriculum and instruction to better prepare students for college and career, high quality implementation of the standards will be critical to their success. Moreover, many students are falling off track or dropping out of school in middle or high school. In fact, a 2006 report by The Bridgespan Group found that less than half of DC's ninth graders graduate from high school within five years. This research priority would support work to evaluate the implementation of the common core, track students' trajectories as they prepare for college and career, and identify effective strategies for increasing college readiness and success. An additional component of this work is identifying the effectiveness of workforce training programs, career, and technical education.

<p><b>Sample research questions:</b> What factors, including course taking, predict high school, college, and workforce success?                  How are common core standards being implemented and how is this implementation impacting college outcomes?                  How are AP/IB/Dual enrollment programs impacting student achievement in postsecondary programs?                  Which students are taking developmental courses in what subjects?                  How does the DC curriculum as implemented prepare students for college entrance requirements?                  What are the education requirements at each educational level (PK-postsecondary/workforce) and how are they aligned?                  Where are students falling off track and how can we provide supports to prevent dropouts?                  How are students transitioning from different educational programs and how can the process be improved?                  What can we learn about principals, school counselors and staff in the schools with good college outcomes vs. those in dropout factories?                  What non-academic supports are helping students successfully transition to post secondary education?</p>	<p><b>Outcomes:</b> College enrollment, college completion, college credit approval, workforce earnings and future employment, need for developmental courses</p>
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**Identifying Effective School Models, Programs, and Instructional Materials:** The District of Columbia’s Race to the Top application outlines a Theory of Change that would decrease the number of low-achieving schools, shift mid-achieving schools to higher levels of achievement, and increase the number of high-achieving schools across the State. In order to accomplish these goals, the District of Columbia needs a strong evidence base about “what works” to improve school performance. This research priority would identify effective school models, programs, and instructional materials to inform instructional decisions by LEAs and spread best practices across the district.

**Sample research questions:** How are individual Schools and LEAs Performing?  
Which CMOs structures and models are associated with large impacts?  
What are essential components of high performing schools?  
How effective are school support organizations (e.g. TFA, TNTP, Teachscape, particular assessments, intervention strategies)?  
What are promising practices for turning around a low performing school?  
What are effective out of school time programs in supporting academic achievement and growth?  
What programs are producing strong outcomes for special needs students and how do they function?  
How does expansion or replication of high performing schools happen successfully?  
What programs are effectively building critical thinking and 21st century skills?

**Outcomes:** DC CAS scores, schoolwide growth, NAEP, other indicators of school performance such as attendance, climate, etc

**Increasing Teacher and Leader Effectiveness:** Research demonstrates that the best way to improve student achievement for all students is through effective teaching. Therefore, DC has committed to increasing the number of highly effective teachers in its classrooms and is also focused on developing effective school leaders. This research priority will inform work at the state and LEA level to increase teacher and leader effectiveness. It will answer questions about the distribution of effective teachers and leaders, promising instructional and leadership practices, and promising strategies for improving teacher and leader effectiveness.