

# Exposing the Gap, Revisited

**North Carolina Schools  
are Still Failing  
Minority Students**

## **Ten Years Later, the Racial Achievement Gap Has Not Narrowed**

Ten years ago, North Carolina officials vowed they would close or significantly narrow the racial achievement gap by the year 2010. Over the next two years, they created the Closing the Achievement Gap section of the Department of Public Instruction, formed a commission, conducted a year-long study, and released several reports that identified the root causes of learning gaps and offered recommendations to eliminate them.

Then for the next eight years, the state made only limited efforts to accomplish its ambitious goal. With every passing year, the Department of Public Instruction held fewer discussions about

disparities between

black and white students; between the poor and the advantaged; and among those living in rural, urban, and suburban areas.

These limited efforts

have not only failed to fulfill the promise to close the achievement gap, a decade later the gap has not even narrowed. On every measure, minority students are still failing to achieve the success of their peers. American Indian, black, and Hispanic students continue to have significantly lower standardized test scores than white students. They have higher dropout rates and lower graduation rates, are under-represented in programs for the gifted and disproportionately disciplined with suspensions and expulsions. Clearly, what attention and resources the state has put toward closing the achievement gap have been wholly inadequate, and tens of thousands



of children have been deprived of a sound education as a result.

## The scope of the problem

### End-of-Grade Tests

During the 2008-2009 school year, only 43.6 percent of black students in grades 3 through 8 scored at Level III or higher on End-of-Grade (EOG) math and reading tests, compared with 76.7 percent of white students.<sup>1</sup> (The exams are scored on a scale from I to IV, and students are considered to be proficient or performing at grade level if they score at Level III or IV.) The 33.1 percentage-point difference between proficient black and white students in 2008-2009 was

virtually unchanged from the 30 percentage-point gap between those same groups during the 2000-2001 school year (Fig. 1).

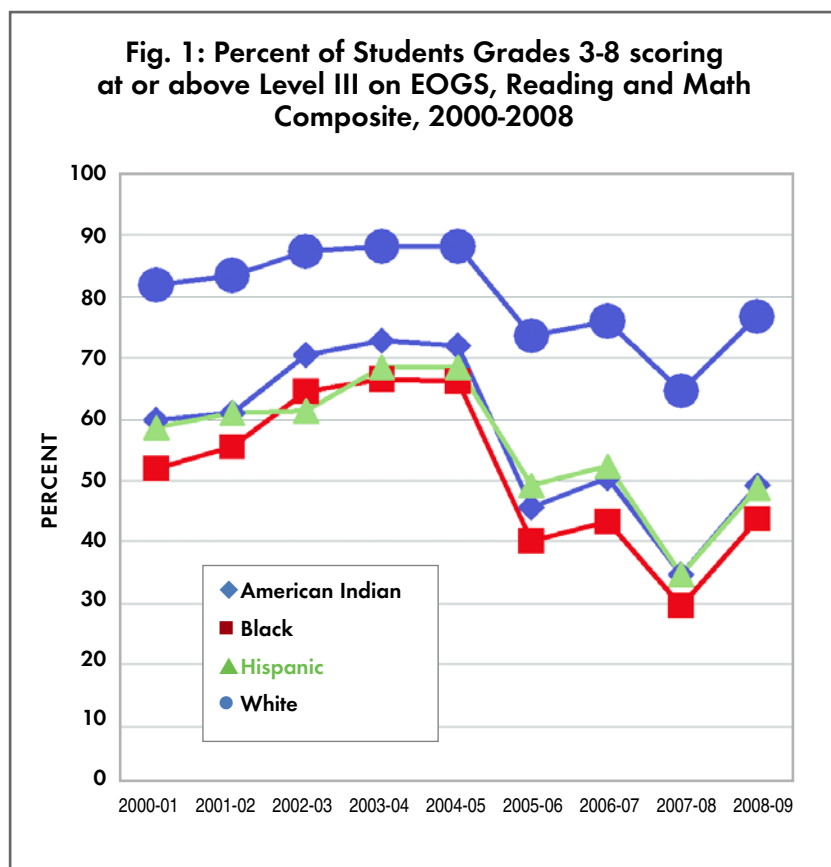
All data for Figures 1 through 6 come from the N.C. Department of Public Instruction, "Reports of Supplemental Disaggregated State, School System (LEA) and School Performance Data," available online at [www.ncpublic-schools.org](http://www.ncpublic-schools.org).

### High School End-of-Course tests

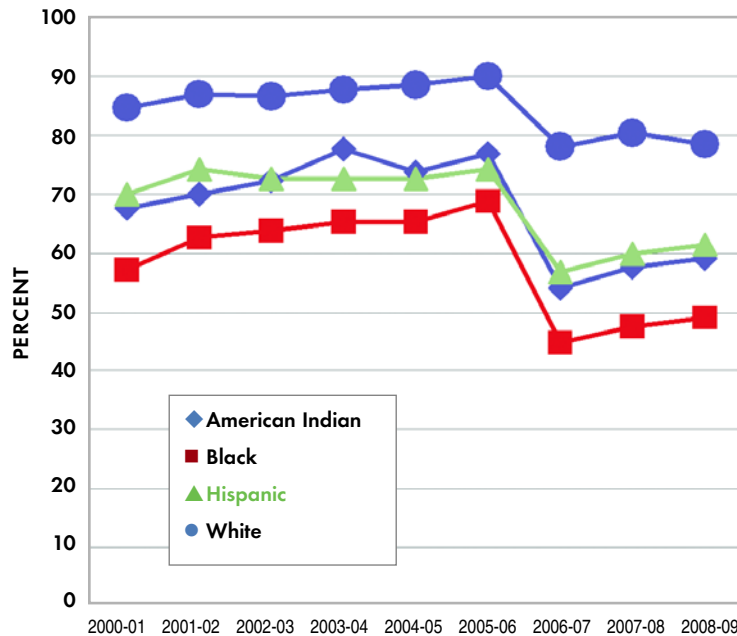
For most students who began 9th grade in 2006 or after, certain courses are required for graduation. In order to earn a diploma, students must score at Level III or above on standardized, End-of-Course (EOC) tests in these required subjects:

Algebra I, Biology, Civics and Economics,<sup>2</sup> English I, and U.S. History.

End-of-Course tests scores for all student groups have fluctuated since the beginning of the decade, but gaps between student groups have remained consistent (Figs. 2-6). For example, during the 2000-2001 school year, 78.2 percent of white students passed English I EOC tests, compared with 49.4 percent of black students, a 28.8 percentage-point difference. By the 2008-2009 school year, 84.2



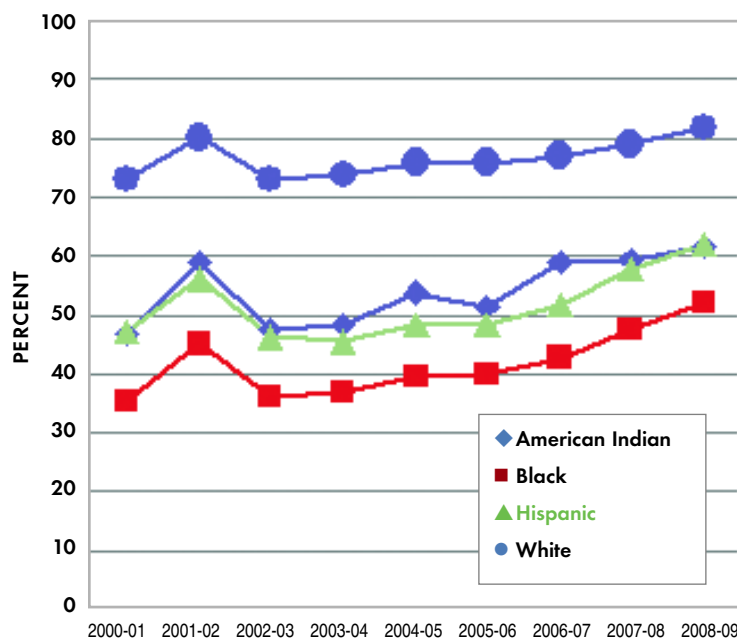
**Fig. 2: Percent of Students Performing at or above grade level on Algebra 1 EOCs 2000-2001 through 2008-2009**



percent of white students were performing at grade level or higher on the test, compared with 58.3 percent of black students, still a 25.9 percentage-point difference.

During the 2008-2009 school year, only about half of black students taking EOC tests in Algebra I, Biology, Civics and History performed at grade level, and nearly 60 percent passed the English I test. American Indian and Hispanic students did slightly better; about 60 percent passed each of the five assessments last school year. In comparison, about 80 percent or more of white students were proficient on each of the five tests.<sup>3</sup>

**Fig. 3: Percent of Students Performing at or above grade level on Biology EOCs 2000-2001 through 2008-09**



## SAT Reasoning Test

The disparities between racial and ethnic groups that appear on North Carolina's EOC assessments also show up in scores for the SAT Reasoning Test, the standardized assessment most college-bound students in North Carolina submit to college admissions offices (Fig. 7). Although the average SAT score for black and American Indian students has increased slightly since

2001, performance gaps between these students and their white cohorts have remained essentially the same.

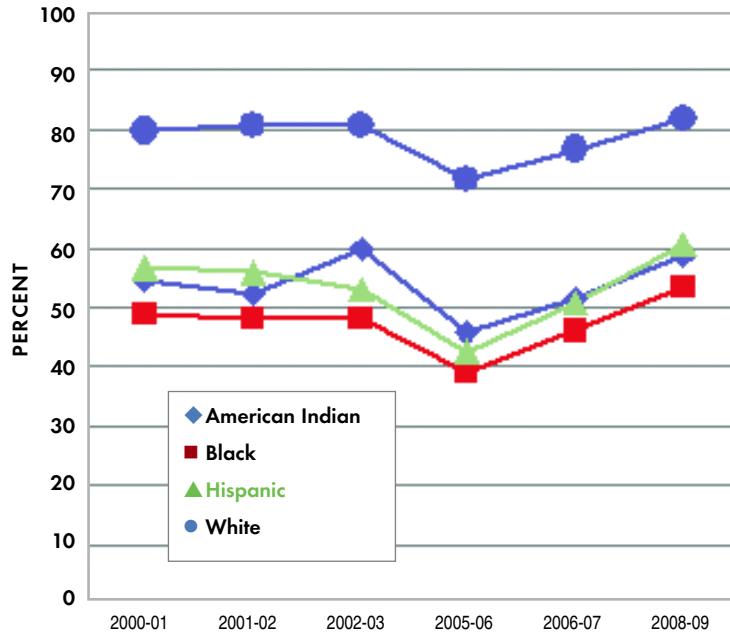
In 2001, the average SAT score for white students in North Carolina was 1041, which was 206 points higher than the average score for black students and 150 points higher than the average score for American Indian students. In 2009, the average SAT score for white students was 1063—208 points higher than the average score for black students and 150 points higher than the average for American Indian students.

The average test score for Hispanic students has decreased since 2000-2001, from 975 points to 963 points during the 2008-2009 school year, and the SAT-score gap between Hispanic students and their white peers has increased by 34 points since 2000-2001.<sup>6</sup>

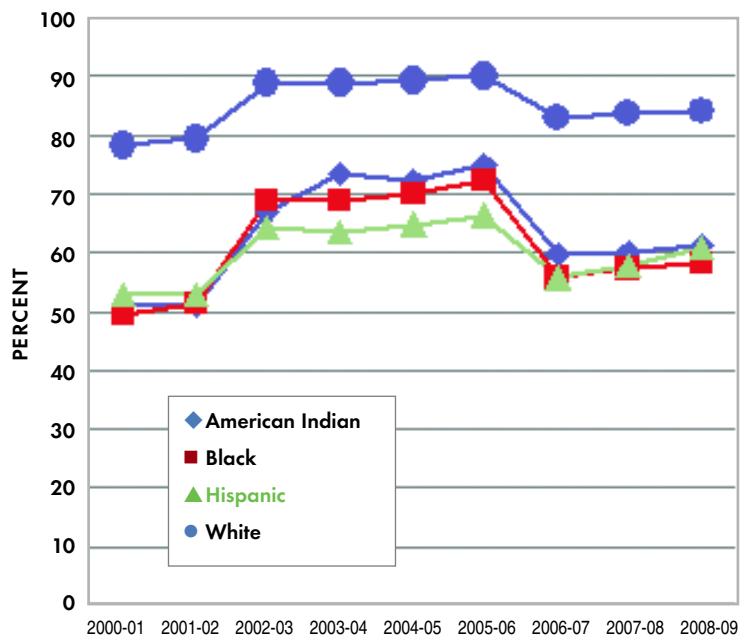
### The National Assessment of Educational Progress

The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) is the only national assessment

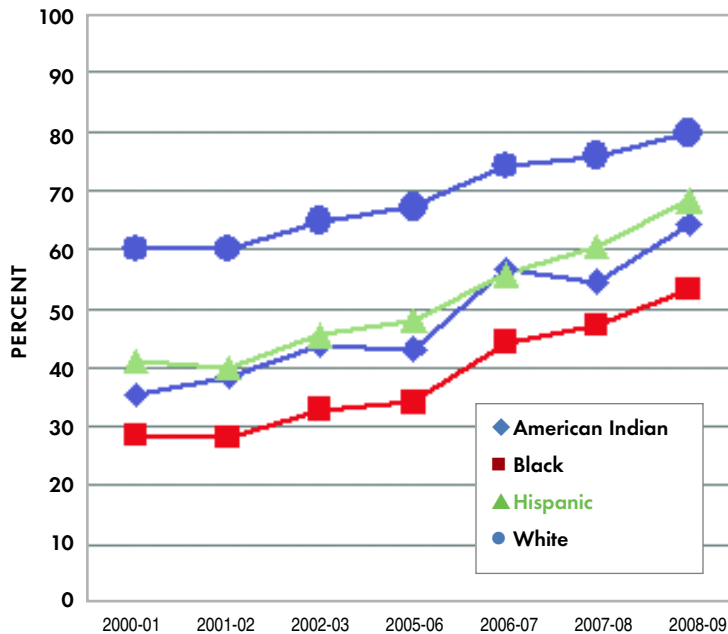
**Fig. 4: Percent of Students Performing at or above grade level on Civics EOCs 2000-2001 through 2008-09<sup>4</sup>**



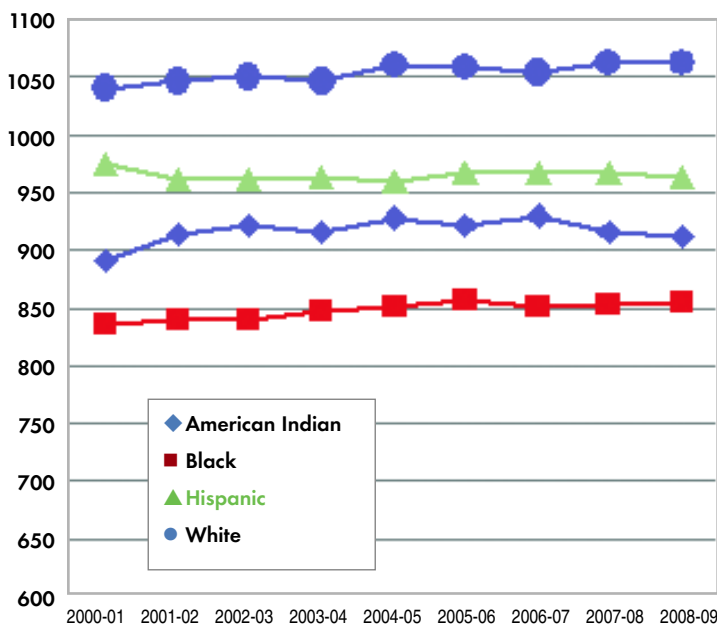
**Fig. 5: Percent of Students Performing at or above grade level on English EOCs 2000-2001 through 2008-09**



**Fig. 6: Percent of Students Performing at or above grade level on U.S. History EOCs 2000-2001 through 2008-09<sup>5</sup>**



**Fig. 7: Mean Total SAT Scores for North Carolina by Race**



that looks at what students know and what they can do in various subject areas. The NAEP, which are administered to a sample of 4th and 8th grade students, allows North Carolina to gauge the rigor of its curricula compared to other states. While the state has seen small dips in overall performance on reading assessments and steady improvements on overall math scores, no real progress has been made at narrowing performance gaps between student groups (Figs. 8-11). For example, on 2009 math assessments, black students had an average score that was 28 points lower than white students at the 4th grade level, compared to a 23-point difference in 2000. At the 8th grade level, black students had an average math score that was 35 points lower than white students in both 2000 and 2009.

The NAEP shows that other states have also struggled to close their achievement gaps.<sup>7</sup> States, including North Carolina, have had the most success in narrowing the gap in 4th grade reading. However, North Carolina is one of nine states that saw an

## ACHIEVEMENT GAP NATIONWIDE

NAEP Test, Years	Black-White Achievement Gap Closing	Black-White Achievement Gap Remains Same	Black White Achievement Gap Widening
<b>Grade 4 Reading</b> 1998-2007	18 states including: Alabama Florida Georgia Louisiana <b>North Carolina</b> Oklahoma Texas Virginia	13 states including: Arkansas Mississippi South Carolina	Massachusetts Tennessee Washington
<b>Grade 4 Mathematics</b> 2000-2009	10 states including: Arkansas South Carolina	20 states including: Alabama Georgia Louisiana Mississippi Tennessee Texas Virginia	Nevada <b>North Carolina</b>
<b>Grade 8 Reading</b> 1998-2007	6 states including: Florida	20 states including: Alabama Arkansas Georgia Louisiana Mississippi South Carolina Tennessee Texa Virginia	Missouri <b>North Carolina</b> Oklahoma Rhode Island
<b>Grade 8 Mathematics</b> 2000-2009	15 states including: Arkansas Georgia Louisiana Tennessee Texas Virginia	11 states including: Alabama Mississippi <b>North Carolina</b> South Carolina	Illinois Massachusetts

increase in the last decade or so in the difference between the average test scores of black and white students on one or more of the 4th and 8th grade reading and math tests. Along with Massachusetts, North Carolina saw the achievement gap widen in two of the four tests. It should be noted that in both

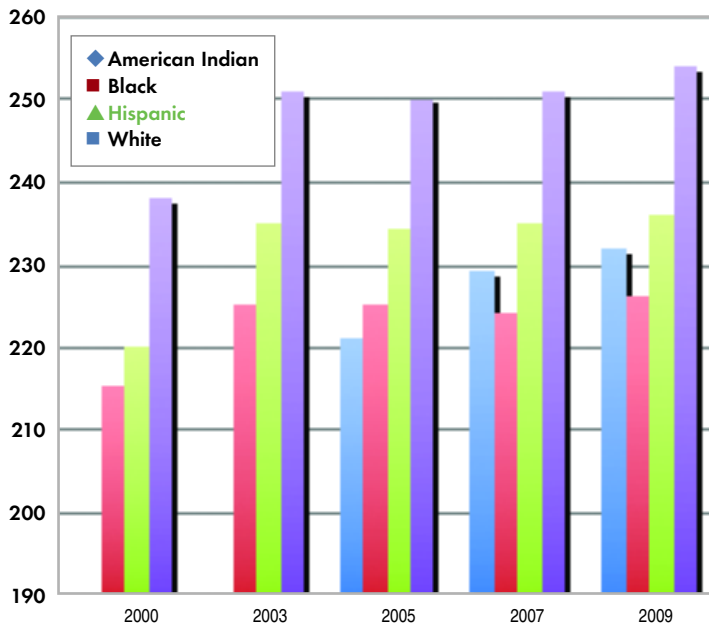
cases, the increase in the achievement gap in North Carolina was relatively small.

### Honors Courses

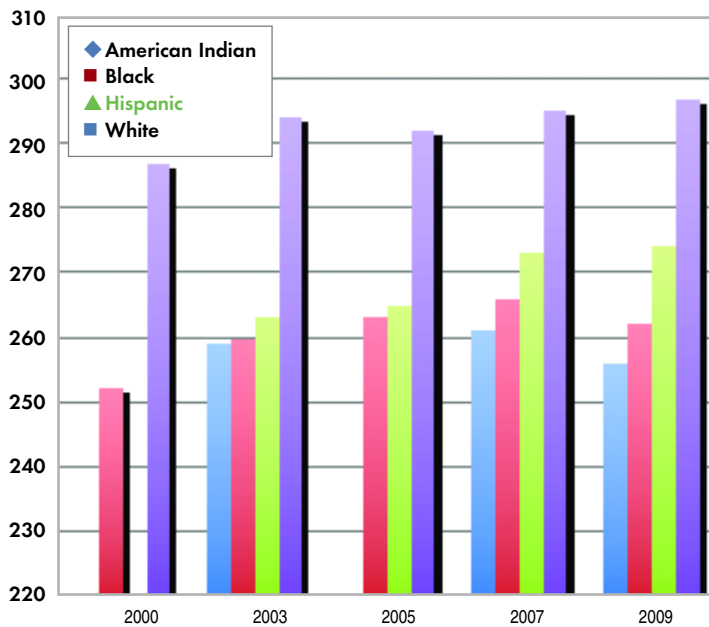
According to state data from 2001 to the present, North Carolina's American Indian, black, and Hispanic students



**Fig. 8: Average NAEP scale scores for mathematics, grades 4 by year and Race/ethnicity<sup>8</sup>**



**Fig. 9: Average NAEP scale scores for math, grade 8 by year and Race/ethnicity<sup>9</sup>**



have been and continue to be significantly less likely to take the most rigorous coursework their schools offer. During the 2007-2008 school year, black students, who made up 31.2 percent of the state's kindergarten through 12th grade school population, made up only 17 percent of the student population enrolled in Advanced Placement English IV classes and 16.6 percent of students enrolled in Honors Advanced Math classes. Hispanic students, who made up 10.5 percent of the state's kindergarten through 12th grade school population during the 2008-2009 school year, made up only 4 percent of the population enrolled in Advanced Placement English IV and Honors Advanced Math classes (Figs. 12-13).

## Suspensions

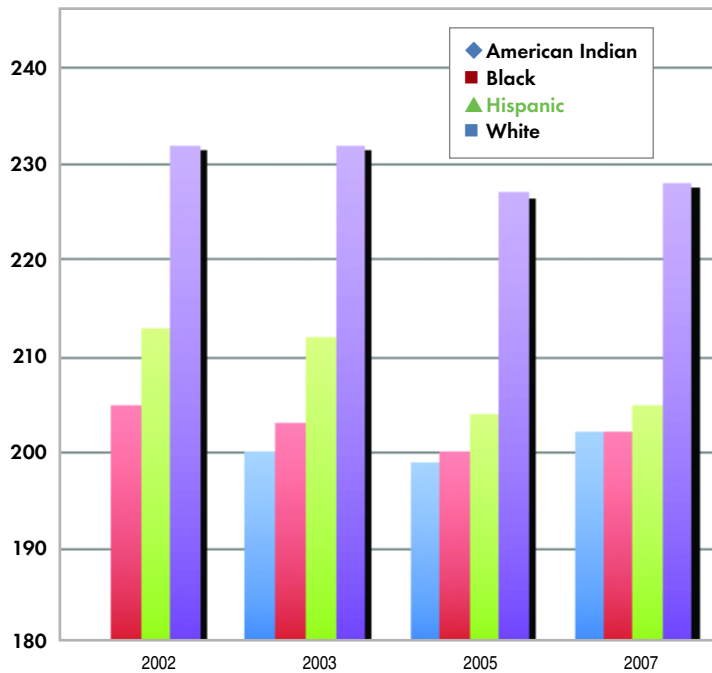
While minority students are under-represented in higher-level classes, they are over-represented on suspension rolls (Fig. 14). Since the 2004-2005 school year, the state has reported rates

of suspension (e.g., the number of suspensions per students enrolled) which allows for more accurately comparing the extent of representation across groups that vary widely in size. Suspension rate data from 2004-2005 through 2007-2008 show that black students are almost four times as likely as white students to miss class time because they were on short-term suspensions. American Indian students are almost three times as likely as white students to be given short-term suspensions.<sup>13</sup>

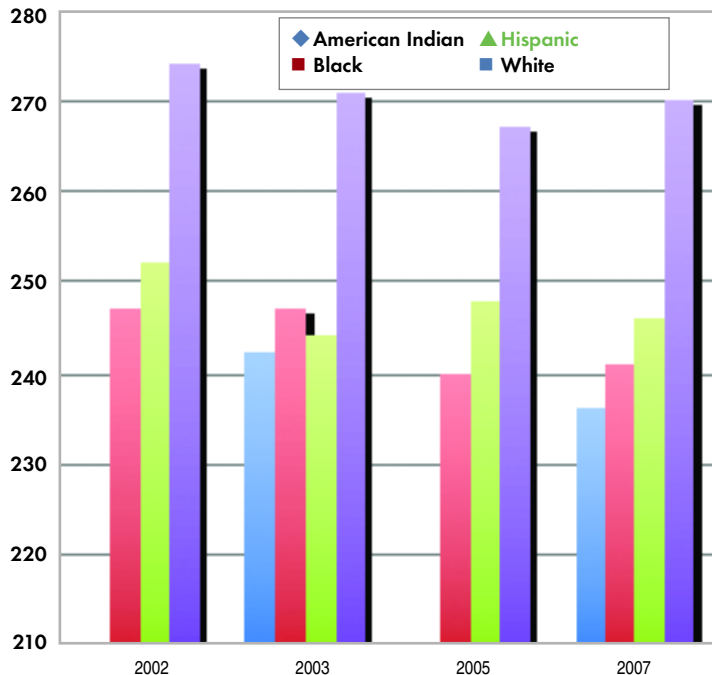
### Dropout/Graduation Rates

North Carolina has seen reductions in dropout rates for all students over the past decade, but disparities between minority students and their white peers are still evident. During the 2007-2008 school year, about four out of every 100 white students in grades 9 through 12 left school without a diploma, compared with six out of every 100 black students and seven out of every 100 American Indian and

**Fig. 10: Average NAEP scale scores for reading, grade 4 by year and Race/ethnicity<sup>10</sup>**

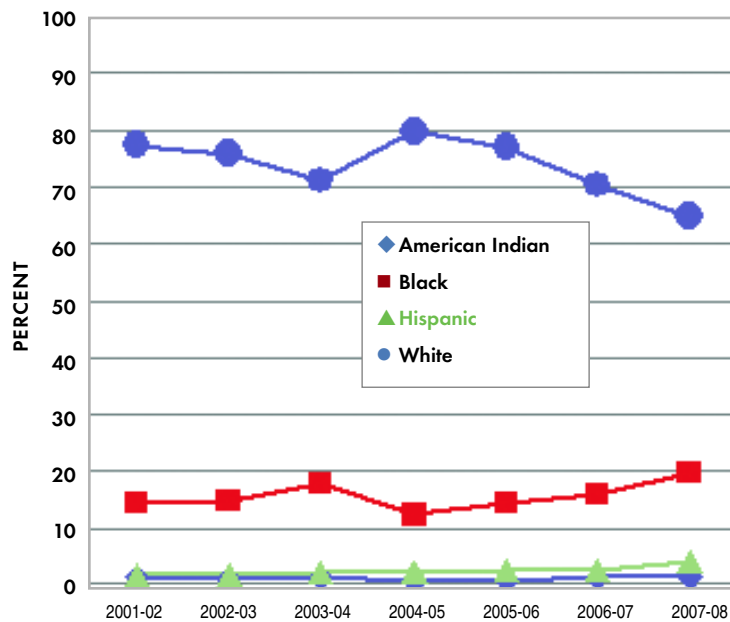


**Fig. 11: Average NAEP scale scores for reading, grade 8 by year and Race/ethnicity<sup>11</sup>**





**Fig. 12: Percent of English IV Advanced Placement 2001-2002 through 2007-2008**



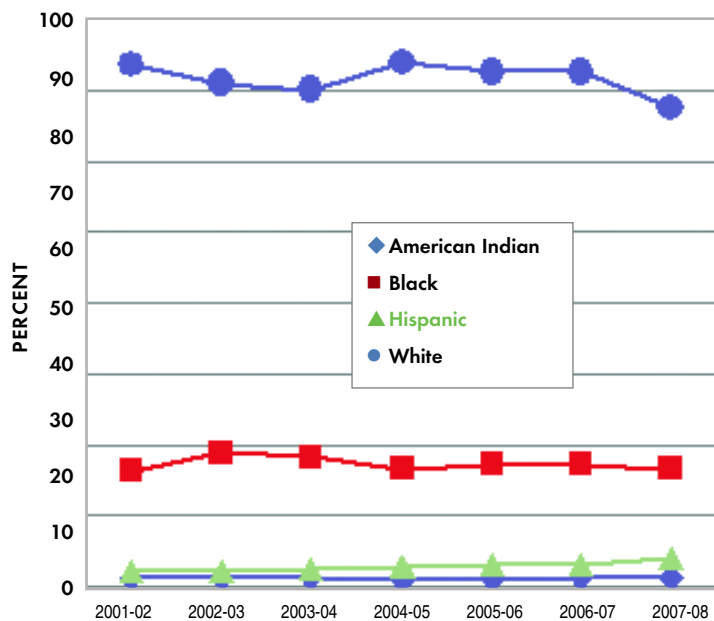
Hispanic students, according to the NC Department of Public Instruction (Fig. 15).

## Conclusion

North Carolina's economic future depends on preparing students of every racial and ethnic background for college and/or workforce success. Over the past decade, North Carolina has succeeded at raising performance levels for all of its students on many measures of achievement. However, the state has failed to significantly close gaps between students of different ethnicities and races. As the North Carolina Commission on Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps pointed out back in 2001, a rising tide will lift all boats, but it takes additional intervention to change the relationship between vessels.

North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction has done a commendable job of sharing best practices at its annual Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps Conference, seeking local input through

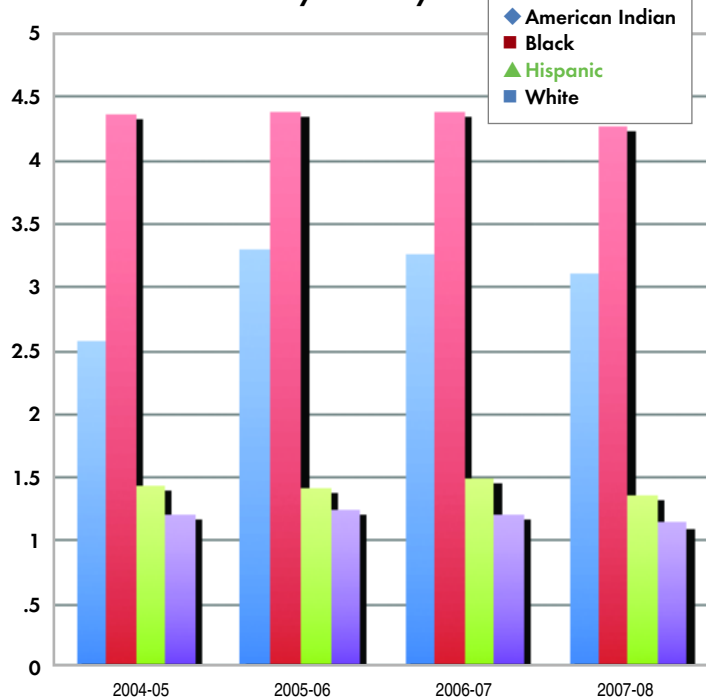
**Fig. 13: Percent of Advanced Math (Pre-Calculus) Honors 2001-2002 through 2007-2008**



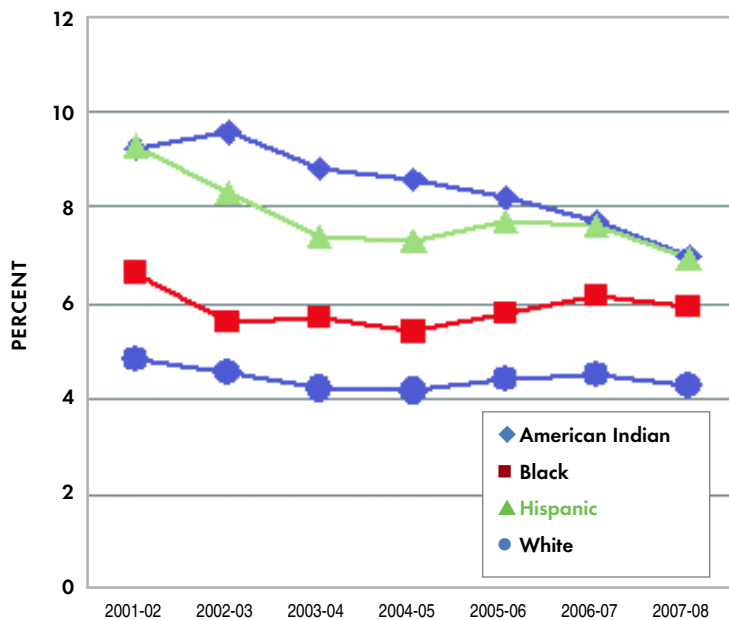
community task forces, and training teachers and administrators to work with diverse populations of students and parents.

However, closing the achievement gap requires more than seminars and trainings. It requires commitment, political will, deliberate actions, and resources. Unless closing the gap becomes a priority for state leaders, another decade will pass in which thousands of students leave North Carolina's schools without fully developing their talents and realizing their potential. The social and economic cost of those lost talents is a price North Carolina cannot afford to pay. □

**Fig. 14: Number of Suspensions per 10 students by Ethnicity**



**Fig. 15: Percent of students by ethnic group who dropped out of school in grades 9-12, 2001-2002 through 2007-2008.**



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- 1 End-of-Grade test data in this report includes all assessments administered by the statewide testing program. "Reports of Supplemental Disaggregated State, School System (LEA) and School Performance Data." <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/reporting/leaperformancearchive/>.
  - 2 Until 2003-2004, Civics and Economics classes had been called Economics, Legal and Political Systems.
  - 3 North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, "Reports of Supplemental Disaggregated State, School System (LEA) and School Performance Data." <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/reporting/leaperformancearchive/>.
  - 4 Civics and Economics End-of-Course test results were excluded from state data analysis during the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years. A new test for this subject area was released during the 2005-2006 school year.
  - 5 U.S. History End-of-Course test results were excluded from state data analysis during the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years. A new test for this subject area was released during the 2005-2006 school year.
  - 6 North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, "North Carolina SAT Reports." <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/reporting/sat/>.
  - 7 All NAEP data from National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP State Comparisons. <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/statecomparisons/>
  - 8 Scores for American Indian students were not released in 2000 and 2003 because reporting standards were not met.
  - 9 Scores for American Indian students were not released in 2000 and 2005 because reporting standards were not met. Scores for Hispanic students were not released in 2000 because reporting standards were not met.
  - 10 Scores for American Indian students were not released in 2000 because reporting standards were not met.
  - 11 Scores for American Indian students were not released in 2002 and 2007 because reporting standards were not met.
  - 12 North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, "Education Statistics Access System." [http://beyond2020.dpi.state.nc.us/wds80\\_1/ReportFolders/reportFolders.aspx?sCS\\_referer=&sCS\\_ChosenLang=en](http://beyond2020.dpi.state.nc.us/wds80_1/ReportFolders/reportFolders.aspx?sCS_referer=&sCS_ChosenLang=en).
  - 13 North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, "Consolidated Data Report, 2007-08: Annual Report of School Crime & Violence, Annual Report of Suspensions & Expulsions, Annual Report of Dropout Rates. "



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