

A Comparison of Initiatives: 1960s to 1990s - Closing Educational Achievement Gaps

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Introduction

Evidence has shown that when comparing educational achievements of the 1960s with the 1990s, underachievement was common among poor or rural and minority students in North Carolina during both periods. A significant educational achievement gap was found between poor minority students and white students in academic performance and graduation rate that had a direct relationship with poverty and one's socioeconomic status.¹ In the 1960s and 1990s, efforts were made to lessen these educational achievement gaps. A change in strategies by local and state leaders under the coordinated guidance of the North Carolina Fund (*NCF*) was the primary influence that affected change in the 1960s. The driving force behind educational initiatives in the 1990s was Governor James B. Hunt. The question during both periods was what could be done to improve education for all of North Carolina's children?

Educational achievement had lagged behind since the depression era, producing a high percentage of poverty among the state's citizenry.² Once Terry Sanford became governor, he immediately sought to address the issue of poverty and poor educational standards in North Carolina. Although the state had made strides in public education in the early twentieth century, for decades, a significant portion of North Carolina's population was denied adequate education based on racial and economic factors. To address this continuing disparity, Governor Sanford successfully launched a campaign to raise taxes to support education. He believed that the most efficient way to improve the quality of life for ordinary North Carolina citizens was to address the root of the issue – that being the causes of poverty. With a group of very influential businesspersons, educators and leaders, Sanford established the North Carolina Fund for the purpose of fighting the causes of poverty.³

Governor James B. Hunt, known as the education governor in the 1990s, pushed the ABCs of Education Program. Coordinated by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, its aim

was to lessen academic gaps in reading and mathematics that existed between rural or poor and/or minority students when compared to their white counterparts. However, there was no North Carolina Fund or nongovernmental agency available to strategically coordinate the holistic approach needed to address the many problems that faced poor students and impacted their academic outcomes. Is it possible that the lack of such coordination had a significant impact on the state's ability to close those gaps in education? Judge Manning, in the *Leandro v. State of North Carolina* case, tended to think so. He ruled that the lack of such coordination in rural and low-wealth communities contributed to high rates of failure among at-risk minority or poor students in rural North Carolina communities.⁴

Leaders during both periods raised similar concerns: What could be done to enable North Carolina children to have a better future? What could be done to increase the number of graduates from high school? What could be done to ensure that all North Carolina children would be educated in adequate facilities by well-trained teachers who used innovative teaching methods, updated textbooks, and had access to appropriate auxiliary services? What could be done to address the impact of segregation on the educational success of minority students? How were poverty and/or the state's economic status impacting educational outcomes?⁵

As Governor Sanford searched for answers, he found inspiration in the inaugural address given by former Governor Charles Brantley Aycock. Aycock pointed out that the state was entering an era of industrial development and it would be necessary that the state utilize the intelligence of all of its citizens.⁶ Similarly, Sanford recognized the same need and sought to use education as a means of rescuing as many youngsters from poverty as possible so they could better serve the state. Consequently, efforts made by Governor Sanford were an inspiration to Governor James B. Hunt in the 1990s. Realizing that the state had entered the information technology era, Governor Hunt issued a challenge to the state in 1999 to become the best public schools system of any state in America by 2010.⁷

Thesis Statement

North Carolina has worked to close educational achievement gaps for the past four and one-half decades. Initiatives to correct these problems were implemented in the 1960s and 1990s. This research will show that although the state had thirty plus years to significantly decrease its educational achievement gaps, many of the same problems continued to exist well into the 1990s. It will further show that educational techniques used during both periods to attack this problem were similar in many instances, although differences did exist. Additionally, it will show that the NC Fund was the instrumental institution that coordinated innovative changes in educational methodology that continued to impact educational strategies in the early 1990s. However, by the latter 1990s, North Carolina would see a rise in pressure groups that emerged to support more challenging initiatives in education reform through the Charter School movement. The greatest challenge for the state in the 1990s would continue to be determining how to effectively prepare all students to meet the new challenges that would exist in the twenty-first century.

Educational Achievement Gaps of the 1960s

Governor Sanford and North Carolina Fund members realized that North Carolina faced a complexity of issues as they tied educational deficits and gaps to poverty. They visited several communities across the state to assess the magnitude of poverty and found its impact on education overwhelming. In But What About the People, Governor Sanford spoke with passion and conviction about the impact of poverty on North Carolina's children and its many families. Culturally deprived children had weaknesses and deficiencies in language skills as well as physical and motor skills development. Problems with health care, self-discipline, and self-confidence also burdened the impoverished child.⁸ The African American population had to fight both poverty and discrimination. Sanford felt that some of the poverty that inundated the people was self-imposed and some of it is undeserved. All of it withered the spirit of children who neither imposed it, nor deserved it. These were children of poverty who tomorrow would become the parents of poverty.⁹

He and the Fund hoped to break this cycle. Sanford understood that poverty was more than just living below a certain income level; it was living in a state characterized by being disadvantaged and deprived. His aim was to break the cycle by improving educational opportunities for all citizens in North Carolina.

Sanford's poor constituents were living in urban and rural overcrowded slums. Their physical and mental health was strained as they struggled to endure the daily stresses of life. Sanford quoted Michael Brooks, staff member of the NC Fund, as describing them as "multi-problem families and individuals, caught in a web of interwoven disabilities."¹⁰ Brooks further reported, "Thirty-seven percent of all families in North Carolina had incomes of less than three thousand dollars and eleven percent had incomes of less than one thousand dollars."¹¹

Being concerned about poverty and education did not cloud Sanford's vision nor make him believe that he and the North Carolina Fund would eradicate poverty. In fact, he stated, "It is not poverty that we have set out to fight, it is the causes of poverty. Much as we would like to, we cannot identify poverty and erase it... We cannot even rescue everybody caught up in poverty. That is unfortunate, but to suggest otherwise is to delude ourselves. We can, perhaps, use *education as the lifeline* for rescuing those who are young and resilient enough to participate in their own rescue."¹² Hence, the rationale of the NC Fund was established.

The North Carolina Fund's undertakings were products of avant-garde thinkers. It received funds from such institutions as the Ford Foundation, Z Smith Reynolds and Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundations. It was the first organization in North Carolina to look at the total poverty problem, and then develop a comprehensive outline to fight the causes of poverty throughout the state. Governor Sanford came to recognize that improved education did not necessarily significantly improve the plight of the impoverished child. Hunger, sickness, crowded living, and poor study conditions constantly distracted these poor children so they could not readily take advantage of what the schools had to offer. He agreed with Michael Brooks' philosophy that the world was a

hostile environment with little opportunity for the impoverished to realize self-improvement. This type of living condition could and did breed apathy and/or a lack of aspiration.¹³

To add complexity to the poverty problem, African Americans were suffering under oppressive Jim Crow laws. Sanford wanted North Carolina to be a state where all of its citizens benefited from educational opportunities. Sanford stated, “In addition to the multiple problems of poverty too many of our Negro students suffer a more specific handicap which hampers their success in the school system ...without education there would be no hope. With education, their hopes at best would meet many frustrations.”¹⁴

Poverty and racial discrimination were two social factors that impeded educational progress in North Carolina well into the 1960s. Other factors included the state’s economic structure and its political realities. Along with other Southern states, North Carolina fell far behind the rest of the nation in educating its citizens. For example, the average annual salary for teachers in the South was \$4,973, while the rest of the U.S. averaged \$6,105. North Carolina teachers averaged \$5, 052, but other states like Virginia, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana and Texas paid their teachers more, however, not above the national average. The average expenditure per pupil in 1964 was \$337 in the South, while the rest of the United States spent \$507 per pupil. North Carolina spent \$332, below the average of southern states. The percent of persons twenty-five years of age and over with less than five-years of schooling (functional illiterates) in the 1960 census was 15.1 percent in the South, while it was 6.3 percent in the rest of the U.S. North Carolina fell below the average of Southern states with 16.5 percent of its citizens being illiterate.¹⁵

A closer look at North Carolina’s public school system revealed that North Carolinians were suffering from the lack of a well financed and well-governed school system. Bill Flowers, educational consultant for the NC Fund, asked these questions of the Education Study Committee as he took a closer look at the state’s education system: “How has public education contributed to the poverty problem in North Carolina? What changes should be made in order to prepare all children

for gainful employment or for future training? Why did fifty percent of North Carolina's students drop out of school before graduating from high school?"¹⁶ He further raised concerns with the Educational Committee about these areas: children staying in school too few years, the quality of instructional programs producing too many failures, a segregated school system inhibiting progress, financing of education based on "what was left" or "what legislators and county commissioners wanted to give" instead of financing based on philosophy tied to educational needs of the state. The fact that there were no attempts made to use school buildings as general community education centers perplexed Flowers as well. Auxiliary services operated to the advantage of the middle- and upper-income students, while disadvantaged students were deprived of adequate bus services, auxiliary services, or field trips.¹⁷ North Carolina truly did not have an effective way to meet all of its children's needs. Actually, in examining the history of public education in North Carolina, I believe that the dual structure alone made the reality of educational gaps inevitable. A brief look at the history of public education in North Carolina supported this theory.

The State Board of Education was established in 1860. It collapsed in 1865 but was re-established in 1868 after the Civil War. In 1913 the Department of Public Instruction appointed an associate supervisor of rural elementary schools. His duty was to promote "Negro Education". By 1917 the title changed to State Agent of Negro Schools. In 1921 the state created the Division of Negro Education under the Department of Public Instruction that continued until 1959, thus the state was operating two educational systems. Public schools were poorly financed during those earlier years. As Assistant Director of Negro Education G. H. Ferguson, noted, "the civilization of the State was based on ultra-individualism, and thousands of citizens honestly could not understand why they should pay taxes to educate other people's children. Others were willing to support schools for white children, but stood steadfastly and doggedly against the education of the Negro...these people appear to have been willing to deny education to white children in order that

they might keep the Negro in ignorance. Services varied based on economic, social and racial groups.”¹⁸ A zero sum gain attitude prevailed.

Careful examination of data reported by G. H. Ferguson related to progress made by African American students over a three-year period (1921-1923) indicate that educational programs, financial appropriations, high school graduation rates, rural school facilities, and accreditation rates showed that minority schools lagged behind for a very long time when compared to education opportunities and support for white students, thus creating a significant educational gaps. G. H. Ferguson further reported, “less than one-half of the children, who should have been attending, were enrolled. The average daily attendance was less than fifty percent of the enrollment. During the three or four months in the middle of the year, there was considerable overcrowding and congestion. There was practically no supervision of instruction. More than half of the children, particularly in the rural schools, were enrolled in the first grade - ranging in ages 5 to 15 years or more. There were about 4,500 supervisors, principals and teachers in the urban and rural schools, with an average educational level of about three and one-half years of high school. A large number of rural teachers had not finished an elementary school. A large number of the principals were ministers with regularly assigned churches. More than fifty percent of the schools were of the one-teacher type, and a large number of the rural schools had meager furnishings and the buildings were in deplorable condition.”¹⁹

Until 1959 the state operated two educational systems to address the needs of its white and African American student populations. In 1959 the Division of Negro Education was made a section of the newly organized Division of Instructional Services.

This evidence supported the belief that inequity in the segregated system could only produce academic gaps over a period of decades. Although the state mandated the establishment of a dual system, G. H. Ferguson revealed that “the Division of Negro Education had no real power or

influence over policy, politics, procedures, or standards in the State Department of Public Instruction”.²⁰ It would prove very difficult if not nearly impossible for African American children to catch up educationally, economically, or politically without interventions, although there were some who made significant accomplishments under those bleak conditions.

African American leaders continued to rally the support of private groups and their local communities. The Division of Negro Education relied heavily on philanthropic contributions from such agencies as General Education Board, Rosenwald Fund, Jeanes Fund, Slater Fund, Phelps-Stokes Fund, and the Southern Education Foundation.²¹ Even with the disparities in the dual system, Ferguson listed several improvements over a thirty-nine year period. These improvements included an increase in percent of total enrollment in the high school department from 6.6 percent to 10.8 percent. The number of classrooms increased from 6,068 in 1930 to 10,360 in 1960. The value of school property increased from \$2,387,324 in 1920 to \$160,005, 577 in 1960 and the number of one-teacher elementary schools decreased from 1,153 in 1930 to 11 in 1960. The number of high school graduates increased from 59 in 1921 to 10,837 in 1960. The number of full time librarians for the schools increased from 30 in 1945 to 113 in 1960. Expenditures for school libraries expanded from \$14,107 in 1945 to \$393,938 in 1960. The number of teachers, principals and supervisors increased from 4,556 in 1924 to 10, 137 in 1960. The average scholarship of all these school workers was about three-and-one-half years of high school training in 1924 and about four and one-third years of college training in 1960. The average annual salary for teachers (elementary and high school) increased from \$2,821 in 1951 to \$3,914 in 1960. During the same period the average annual salaries of principals increased from \$4,251 to \$5,998.²² By 1960 the personnel of this division were absorbed into various sections of the Division of Instructional Services. The Division of Negro Education became obsolete.²³

Discriminatory practices continued even with the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* when Chief Justice Warren rendered the decision that “separate but

equal” had no place in the field of public education. By 1964 the Supreme Court had ruled discrimination in public places, including public schools, unconstitutional. This ruling alone would change the face of public schools across America.

The NC Fund took a holistic approach towards addressing educational weaknesses by also addressing economic, health, political, and other weaknesses. Governor Sanford called North Carolina leaders together and challenged them to find ways to utilize education, health, welfare, employment, and other public services to lighten the burden of poor people by introducing new experimental programs. If this approach worked, it could be used across the state, and would bring improvements to North Carolina’s schools, state agencies, and institutions, thus benefiting those trapped in poverty.

NC Fund Solutions to the Educational Achievement Gaps in the 1960s

I deem Terry Sanford a visionary with a moral conscious that led him to make bold moves during the 1960s. When he became governor of North Carolina, he realized that he was in a unique position that would allow him to address North Carolina’s complicated social, political, economical, and educational dilemmas. He stated, “If government is not for the express purpose of lifting the level of civilization by broadening the opportunities in life for its people, what is its purpose? Surely our civilization is not so frail that we can consider our duty done at a time when our education is missing upwards of fifty percent of our population.”²⁴ This statement indicated Sanford’s moral commitment, human spirit, and understanding of true governmental leadership. “North Carolina’s development would benefit from the investment made in educating its citizens. If North Carolina was behind other states, then its children started life with a competitive disadvantage”, Sanford said. The state could not afford to be passive; it had to be concerned about every individual. Sanford was concerned that all of North Carolina’s children would have a fair chance to develop, to compete, to achieve, and to fully use all of their innate talents.²⁵

With millions of private and public dollars to spend, the NC Fund launched several initiatives to address the state's educational challenges. Governor Sanford's educational plan called for an increase in teaching personnel, increase in teacher salaries, improvement of in-service training of teachers, expanded use of technology, a teacher aide in classrooms as an added resource, and improvement in the administration of the school.²⁶ These programs included, but were not limited to, the Learning Institute of North Carolina (LINC), the Comprehensive School Improvement Project (CSIP), and Youth Educational Services (YES).

LINC was designed to improve education by testing new educational ideas that would lift the state's school system to higher levels. It was free to undertake new experimental programs, establish and operate schools (alone or in cooperation with other agencies), design new programs for trial in public schools, undertake curriculum development and design, make grants to individuals or institutions, contract with public, private, or government agencies, and undertake basic and applied research studies.²⁷ One such project was the North Carolina Advancement School in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. This school was a residential program designed for eighth grade boys of average or above average abilities yet their academic accomplishments did not mirror their potential. This school was a research facility that sought to develop programs that would be useful in public school systems. Financed by LINC, this school welcomed 150 visiting teachers and one thousand students its first year of operation in 1965. Its administrators reported to the State Board of Education at the December 1965 meeting that 70 percent of the students who attended the school had made significant improvement at the School. Also about half raised their grades when they returned to their home school, and approximately two-thirds had improved their attitudes about school and learning in general. Although this progress was seen, it was noted that the school had difficulties in securing visiting teachers because of inadequate funding for substitutes to replace them at their home based schools. During the fall of 1966, the Advancement School, with the assistance of the State Department of Education, conducted a series of field test at fifty different public class room in reading, language arts, mathematics, science and physical education. Finally, a series of research reports were published to reveal data collected at the School. The

reports covered research activities that had been conducted in conjunction with John Hopkins University. These included a comparison of efforts on learning in intergroup and intragroup competitions.²⁸

CSIP sought to: a) help teachers gain a better understanding of the children's' background, b) assist administrators in finding better ways of organizing the school day and school year to accommodate differences in background and rate of learning, c) redevelop and add new staff position for more effective teaching d) redesign the curriculum, e) make better use of instructional tools such as television for in-service and pre-service training of teachers, and f) find ways to incorporate new developments into the public school system. CSIP introduced a summer pre-school readiness program that predated Head Start and was possibly its model. This experimental summer enrichment program targeted mostly culturally deprived homes, and it served some 4,100 children. It aimed to increase school readiness, promote physical, mental, emotional, social, and intellectual development. It further promoted parent involvement, explored ways to stimulate teachers and other educators to develop new and more effective ways of teaching and working with disadvantaged children. It developed possible guidelines for the future direction of education at pre-primary and primary levels.²⁹

CSIP also gave teachers more flexibility as team-teachers than in their self-contained classrooms. Furthermore, teachers were released from teaching duties during school hours so that they could make in-school visits for professional development. Teacher aides were added to the classroom and that allowed time for one-on-one or small group instruction. Given that the state was in the midst of desegregation, administrators had an opportunity to weave African American staff into teaching team situations. African Americans also had opportunities to work in supervisory positions over a diverse staff for the first time. These changes became best practices in school administration over the years.³⁰

Youth Educational Services (Y.E.S.) was a student organization that began in January 1964 when students from eleven colleges were challenged by Governor Terry Sanford to give more

efforts towards civic enterprise and become more involved in community service. From this challenge, students formed the Intercollegiate Steering Committee in cooperation with the North Carolina Film Board. This group produced four half-hour films depicting the conditions and aspirations of the State's many Negro citizens. These films were shown on television, at colleges and universities, and at civic meetings. In November 1964, students from twenty colleges and universities attended a conference coordinated by the Intercollegiate Council at which they discussed the organization of tutoring programs and the techniques of tutoring. From this conference, the students initiated tutoring programs in six cities. Six months later, eleven colleges and universities and four hundred college students were involved in offering the same services to nearly one thousand children. By May 1965, the tutoring programs had received such overwhelming response from parents, the public schools, children and the communities that it became obvious that this program needed a full time staff. By September 1965, the tutorial program had received funding from the North Carolina Fund and LINC to establish its office.³¹

Youth Educational Services spread its services across the state by providing tutorial services to hundreds of children and offering assistance to tutorial projects. It provided resource materials, training, project organization and project evaluation services. Y.E.S. used the Tutoring Program at the North Carolina Advancement School as a laboratory for testing new tutoring materials, evaluation techniques and approaches to tutor training. Its major purposes were 1) to coordinate and service existing tutorial projects in North Carolina, 2) to assist local persons in establishing new tutorial projects; and 3) to exchange ideas and information with persons and organizations doing related work.³²

North Carolina Fund programs stretched across the state from the Mountain region (i.e. Yancy, Mitchell and Watauga counties) to the Piedmont (i.e. Scotland, Robeson, and Mecklenburg Counties) and into the Coastal region (Craven County). With its \$16 million dollar operation over a five-year period, the Fund addressed health issues as well a housing, education, unemployment,

underemployment, and economic development. From its efforts sprang many independent agencies or organizations. For example, United Organizations for Community Improvement (UOCI) in Durham was developed which in turn developed United Durham, Inc., a group of poor people that established businesses owned and operated by the poor. It also recruited and trained 327 college students who were placed in service work with anti-poverty agencies throughout the state. The Fund supported Foundation for Community Development (FCD). This non-profit organization worked with the poor in eleven geographic areas in North Carolina in leadership development and training, community organization, and economic development. With funds from the U.S. Department of Labor, the Fund established field offices in three eastern North Carolina areas and sent out field workers to work directly with the unemployed and underemployed as they sought to determine how to best address those family's needs by using local resources.³³ These programs were viewed as model projects, much like North Carolina's ABCs of Education in the 1990s. It was cited as an example for other states to model.

Concluding Thoughts about the 1960s

The 1960s saw innovation and experimentation in education. Were these projects successful? Did North Carolina's children realize significant educational changes as a result of these initiatives? Did North Carolina citizens realize an improvement in their standard of living that could be tied directly to NC Fund initiatives? These are questions that may not be fully answered in this paper because my research has yet to reveal quantitative data to indicate the impact of these initiatives on their participants and on the state.

In light of the fact that the NC Fund unveiled such a variety of projects (including manpower development organizations, community health programs, community organization agencies, political advocacy organizations), one might conclude that the Fund did have a tremendous impact on individuals, institutions, state and federal governments. The level of commitment and the abilities of the Fund's staff allowed its projects to reach a broad base of

people, placing the Fund one step ahead of other established programs or projects during the 1960s. The NC Fund was the thrust behind many new grassroots community-based organizations such as United Organizations for Community Improvement (UOCI), Operation Breakthrough, and the Foundation for Community Develop. It birthed many grassroots civic leaders such as Ann Atwater, well known community organizer in Durham, North Carolina. Unlike earlier decades, the 1960s witnessed poor people commanding a voice on local boards, committees, and other decision-making bodies such as public housing authorities, school boards, or boards of election. I assert that the North Carolina Fund's educational initiatives played a major role in addressing educational gaps that had existed for decades. It further influenced the economic and social injustices of North Carolinians – a more holistic approach to addressing the causes of poverty that impact education.

Was North Carolina freed from the educational gap phenomenon in the following decades? Unfortunately, the answer is no. The state was still experiencing similar challenges in the 1990s.

Educational Achievement Gaps in the 1990s

Poor and minority rural students still lagged behind in academic performance in the 1990s. They made up the largest population of dropouts, had teachers with less qualifications, and schools in poor regions of North Carolina had limited financial resources. Additionally, statistics showed that a gap appeared early in the educational career of African American preschool students. They began school with more deficiencies in vocabulary skills than their white peers. Dr. Dwight Pearson pointed out that although there were educational achievements made in the 1990s with the introduction of the ABCs of Education, educational achievement gaps still existed.³⁴

Kathleen Kennedy Manzo reported on changes that were needed in order to deliver effective educational programs in North Carolina to meet the needs of disadvantaged students. Problems were brought forward in May 1994 when five low-wealth school districts sued the state alleging in the case *Leandro v. State of North Carolina* that the state was not providing adequate educational

resources for disadvantaged children. After six weeks of deliberation, Judge Manning issued his three-part preliminary ruling. In the first two parts, he ruled that the state's education system was "sound, valid, and constitutional," but that in order to provide *equitable* educational opportunities for all children, the state needed to set up a high-quality pre-kindergarten program for four-year-olds deemed at risk of failing in school. However, the third part issued the hardest blow, Manning ruled that North Carolina's disadvantaged students were not being served appropriately because North Carolina did not have a "*coordinated, effective educational strategy*" for addressing their needs, and that funding was not a key issue.³⁵ In comparing the 1960s to the 1990s, the NC Fund worked with the State Board of Education to organize and coordinate the educational strategies for North Carolina's poor at-risk students. No such organization existed in the 1990s. However, directives coming from Governor James B. Hunt had the greatest impact on managing progressive educational initiatives in the 1990s

A closer look at the 1990s revealed that the state had fallen behind again in adequately educating all of its children. Very similar circumstances existed in the 1960s. As reported in *Black Issues in Higher Education*, a dozen North Carolina colleges and universities had formed a consortium to develop outreach programs to help public schools close the achievement gap between African American and white students. Statistics indicated that during the 1998-1999 school year, forty-nine percent of African American students scored at or above grade level in reading and math tests, while 79 percent of their white counterparts scored at or above grade level in reading and math. Superintendent Mike Ward was quoted as saying that "we are thirty years into this process that we call integration. It is simply wrong that gaps in performance and economic opportunity are still so stark."³⁶

NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) agreed to put in \$100,000 in seed money to start the consortium program intended for African American students. This nine-week pilot project would serve 100 third-, fourth- and fifth- graders in Durham by tutoring them in writing, language

arts and mathematics. Parents were also to be involved. Shaw University in Raleigh would utilize students, faculty, staff and community members to help children with basic skills and character education in nearby schools. NCCU Chancellor Julius Chambers was quoted as having said, “The achievement gap condemns minority children to one of the most unpleasant lives imaginable. We have a real crisis today. I don’t know how many young minority children you see who have missed an opportunity at getting an education and are now out with really no life and no future. I’ve seen a bunch of them.”³⁷

Much like the 1960s, the 1990s were beset with multi-dimensional problems that affected the educational achievement of its rural or poor and minority students. Anti-assimilation, race, poverty, academic coursework, peer pressure, teaching quality, parenting, preschool, stereotype threats, summer slide, teacher expectation, household media, test bias, genetics, school size, stigmas, and marginality have all been credited as factors contributing to the educational achievement gap of minority students in the 1990s.³⁸ Unfortunately, other types of complex circumstances entered the picture in the 1990s – the war on drugs and the massive numbers of young at-risk minority youths being placed in prisons. One is often reminded of the stark reality that there were more young African American males in prisons than in colleges or universities during the latter twentieth century. This, I believe, was the type of problem Governor Sanford was trying to avoid in the 1960s.

The Department of Public Instructions made a concerted effort to have input from a wide range of staff as it developed the plan for raising achievement and closing gaps. The North Carolina Advisory Commission on Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps found the following variables affected student achievement: school practices, preschool education, summer effect, parental expectations, parental education and socioeconomic status, lack of congruence between home and school culture, and societal discriminatory practices. The Commission listed specific reasons for each of these issues. For example, research showed a direct relationship between

teachers' expertise – as measured by scores on licensing examination, higher-level degrees, and experience – which accounted for a significant proportion of the measured variance in students' reading and mathematics achievement scores. Also, low teacher expectations of minority students resulted in self-fulfilling prophecies, contributing to significant achievement gaps between minority and non-minority students. In addition, the lack of quality preschool education for minority children had been a factor contributing to the differences in achievement between minority and majority students. Minority children started school with a lag in vocabulary skills when compared to their white peers (see Appendix A). Lack of congruence between home and school culture made a significant difference in their success. Students tended to be more successful when their home and school cultures were similar. It seemed that the movement from the familiar to the unfamiliar resulted in disconnectedness for many minority and low-income students. Lastly, societal discriminatory practices still existed. A study done by White and Johnson in 1994 noted that students' test performance was believed to be impaired due to fear of confirming a negative racial stereotype. Early in a minority student's life, he/she becomes aware that he/she does not inherit the same educational and career choices as non-minority students. This results in these youth not identifying with academics and seeking other means of demonstrating competency and achievement.³⁹ One may accept or reject the whole of this report; however, the fact does remain that negative racial stereotyping still existed. In essence, similar problems existed in the 1960s as in the 1990s, although they became more complex in the 1990s. Perhaps they were described differently, or perhaps they increased or decreased in intensity; nevertheless, they existed.

Solutions to the Educational Achievement Gaps of the '90s

Unlike in the 1960s, the 1990s did not have a single group coordinating the efforts of closing the educational achievement gaps. Judge Manning's ruling clearly identified the problem that faced disadvantaged students in North Carolina. Although nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and governmental agencies addressed the needs of low performing students, it is

difficult to determine their true impact. There have been after-school programs, tutor and mentor volunteer programs, Saturday academies, summer school and countless other initiatives, but at the time of this writing, I am unaware of any research that identifies these varied initiatives as having significantly contributed towards improved student performance on the state's standardized tests.

The State Board of Education, under Governor James Hunt's leadership, introduced the ABCs of Public Education in 1995. Dr. Dwight Pearson, Section Chief of Closing the Achievement Gap, Division of School Improvement, NC Department of Public Instruction, has data that indicated that the ABCs program improved student performance on the state's end-of-grade test; however, the gap still persisted.⁴⁰ Was this program a coordinated statewide effort? Yes. However, this initiative does not focus on addressing the variables that impact the impoverished child? A look at the ABCs' development revealed its focus.

Under Governor Hunt's administration, the 1992 Legislative session introduced the Performance-Based Accountability Program to ensure involvement by parents, teachers, and others who worked with students. This program mandated that school systems meet the performance indicators set by the State Board of Education. Local systems were required to develop improvement plans that would be responsive to the needs of the 21st century. Under Governor Hunt's administration, educational leaders supported smaller class sizes (which meant more teaching personnel), increased teacher salaries, expanded use of computer technology, innovative preschool education program, and incentives for teachers to pursue National Board Certification base on more rigorous standards.⁴¹

The ABCs of Public Education was designed to increase student achievement by teaching the Basics, with emphasis on reading, writing and mathematics, and by maximizing local control. Incentives were given to schools that achieved high growth, and emphasis was placed on high educational standards. The Department of Public Instruction was reorganized and funding for the eight Technical Assistance Centers across the state was transferred to local school systems.

Assistance teams were formed during the 1996-1997 school year and assigned to low-performing schools. Eligible personnel in all schools that achieved exemplary growth standards received incentive awards. By 1999, the State Board of Education had adopted a recommended set of standards for elementary, middle and high school students. The goal of the standards was to identify students who needed additional help and to provide early and ongoing assistance to ensure that those students could perform efficiently in reading, mathematics, and writing so that they could better benefit from the high school curriculum.⁴² The focus was on teachers, the teaching environment, and curriculum. Little if any focus was on the student's home environment, his socioeconomic status, and other problems that surround poverty and student achievement.

The ABCs of Education aimed to improve student performance, ensure safe, orderly, and caring school environments, utilize quality teachers, administrators, and staff; maintain an effective and efficient operation as well as maintain and nurture strong family, business and community support. Dr. Dwight Pearson shared that although achievement in academic performance had occurred in the 1990s; the gap still existed. No student groups had reached the 100 percentile on end-of-grade test in academic performance.⁴³

The ABCs aimed to have 100 percent of North Carolina's students performing at or above grade level in reading and mathematics by the year 2013. Dr. Pearson pointed out that it would be in the best interest of the state to close these gaps now or face serious social and economic issues in the future. He contended that school administrators and teachers play a very important role and must shift their paradigm to effect this change. He further stated: "they must teach children to think critically instead of just retaining a body of knowledge." The ABCs program rewards teachers and schools for achieving certain academic goals and levies consequences on those school and students that performed below grade level based on the North Carolina end-of-grade tests. Some persons viewed this approach as biased and even counterproductive. Nonetheless, this was and still is the approach that is in operation.⁴⁴

Even with the introduction of the ABCs, parents and other education stakeholders were not pleased with the slow rate of progress being made within the education system in the 1990s. After heavy lobbying by advocates of Charter Schools, in 1996 the General Assembly ratified House Bill 955, which allowed the opening of Charter Schools in North Carolina.⁴⁵ Charter Schools were deregulated public schools with more freedom and flexibility to introduce new teaching methods. Although governed by a private board of directors, they were responsible for meeting state standards as set by the ABCs. There was also a movement to introduce a voucher program, but that effort failed.

If North Carolina expected a lasting impact on improving education, legislature needed to address other issues such as economic gaps (i.e. underemployment, unemployment, and wages), social gaps (i.e. home ownership, health care, etc.), and political gaps (i.e. representation and political voice) so that poor families would have a better chance of competing and succeeding. The question still remains – who will coordinate a more holistic approach to addressing the needs of poorly educated children in North Carolina? The NC Fund did in the 1960s.

As further stated by Dr. Dwight Pearson, fulfilling the following requirements would significantly improve student performance and close academic gaps: a) North Carolina's teachers and administrators accepting a new paradigm, shifting from the excellence of a few to excellence for all, b) the state's integrated schools must address the segregation within that integrated school environment, c) all students being taught by highly quality teachers, d) teachers having high expectations of all of their students, e) all students being exposed to a rigorous instructional program, and f) money (resources) being made available to meet educational needs.⁴⁶ In conclusion, when comparing educational initiatives of the 1960s to those of the 1990s, evidence indicates that North Carolina's leaders faced similar challenges during both periods. Various methods were used; millions of private and public dollars were spent, yet the gap still persisted over the decades.

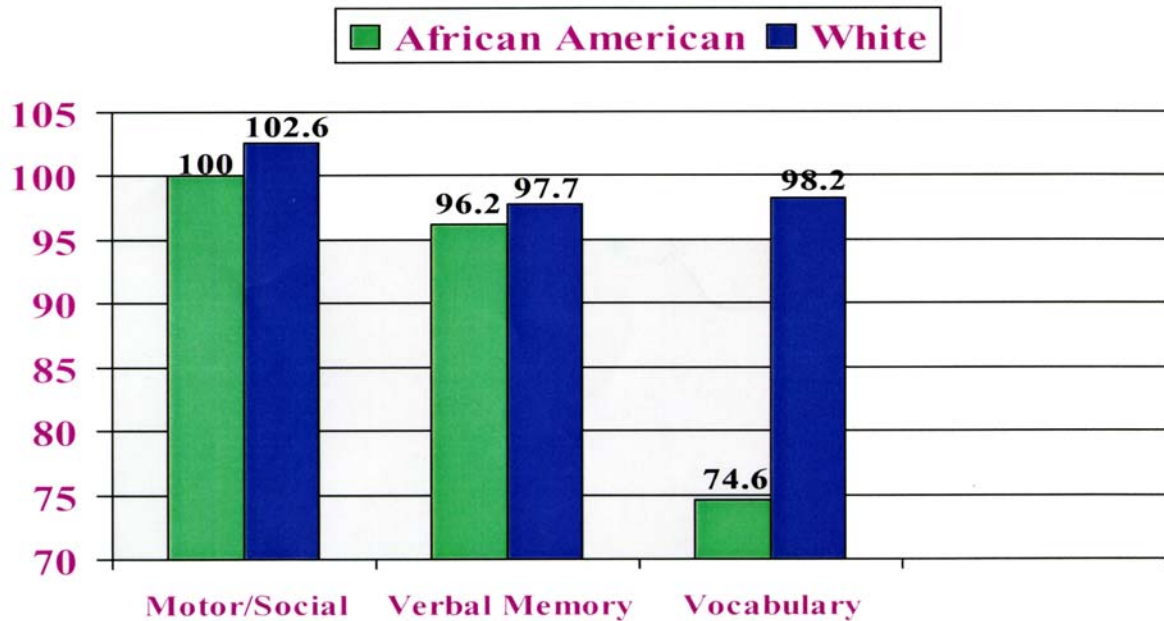
Governor Terry Sanford, having been inspired by former Governor Aycock, and having had his own personal experiences with poverty, committed himself to improve the economic and social dilemmas in his state. He prepared himself and his constituents to meet the demands of a progressive industrial society. Using the North Carolina Fund, Sanford launch landmark initiatives to fight the causes of poverty. From the Fund sprang numerous grassroots groups and individuals that focused on addressing not only educational issues but economic, health related, and housing issues in the 1960s.

Thirty plus years later, North Carolina found that she was still preoccupied with many of the same perplexing concerns regarding education (i.e. high dropout rate among poor or rural and minority youth, low academic performance, insufficient numbers of qualified teachers for the classroom, especially in poor or rural and minority communities, and limited technological resources in rural isolated areas). The state commissioned a body in latter 1990 to study how to raise achievement and close gaps. This body had no power to implement its recommendations, only to make them. There were no Terry Sanford, George Esser, John Ehle, Nathan Garrett, or Howard Fuller to challenge leaders in the 1990s. The greatest challenge or call to duty came from Governor James B. Hunt, known as the education governor. However, there was no independent nongovernmental body to coordinate a broader more comprehensive program. Consequently, many rural and poor communities suffered from a lack of quality education. Out of this need sprang such groundbreaking initiatives as the Charter School movement. With passage of the Charter School law in 1996, the first of one hundred schools would open their doors in the 1998-1999 school year. There is a movement afoot under the direction of one of North Carolina Fund's former leader, Dr. Howard Fuller, who led the Foundation for Community Development in the 1960s. He is now executive director of the Institute for the Transformation of Learning housed at Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This institute's focus is on "improving academic achievement

in urban America through expanded educational options. It targets low-income children and families who are being ill served in the current educational system”.⁴⁷

The Fund may not have achieved all of its established goals during the 1960s but it did achieve a goal that perhaps it had not intended; it left a lasting impression on the minds of thousands who were touched by NCF projects. Many of these individuals, I believe, have been instrumental in initiating projects that seek to bring about educational, social, economic, political, and structural changes that address the causes and impact of poverty in North Carolina and our nation.

Test Scores of Preschoolers



African American and White preschoolers are equal on tests of motor and social development (100.0 versus 102.6) and verbal memory (97.7 versus 96.2)

African American preschoolers score substantially below Whites on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (74.6 versus 98.2)

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth

ENDNOTES

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- ³ Ibid, p. 127
- ⁴ Manzo, Kathleen Kennedy, “NC Ordered to Meet At-Risk Students’ Needs”, *Education Week*, April 10, 2002, Vol20 Issue 29, p. 1.
- ⁵ Sanford, Terry, But What About The People? New York, New York: Harper and Row, 1966, p. 10-21
- ⁶ Ibid p. 9
- ⁷ Compiled by Shannon E. Wall, Belmont Abbey College, summer 1998 and revised by Jenny Matthews, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, summer 2001, “The History of North Carolina State Board of Education: First in America”, North Carolina State Board of Education, summer 2001, available from www.ncpublicschools.org/state_board/SBE_history/chapter7.html/
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- ¹⁰⁻¹³ Ibid p. 130
- ¹⁴ Ibid p. 140-141
- ¹⁵ From the North Carolina Fund Collection, Folder 1162, #4710, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- ¹⁶ From the North Carolina Fund Collection, Folder 7612, #4710, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- ¹⁷ From the North Carolina Fund Collection, Folder 7608, #4710, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

¹⁸ Governor Terry Sanford's Papers, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina, Box 1 p. 2

¹⁹ Ibid p. 5

²⁰⁻²¹ Ibid, p. 9

²² Ibid, p. 10

²³ Department of Public Instruction, Finding Aid, Division of Negro Education, "Introduction", State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina, September, 1960

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²⁵ Ibid, p. 5

²⁶ Ibid, p. 20, 27

²⁷ From the North Carolina Fund Collection, Folder 630, #4710, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

²⁸ From the North Carolina Fund Collection, Folder 8286, #4710, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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^{31,32} From the North Carolina Fund Collection, Folder 8349, #4710, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

³³ "NC Fund Records Inventory", Manuscript Department, Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Southern Historical Collection, #4710, "North Carolina Fund: Historical Notes", available from www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/n/North_Carolina_Fund/hist.htm

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