



## **Envisioning Change: Improving the Educational & Developmental Outcomes of Young African-American Students in Illinois**

Disparities in academic achievement and opportunities persist between African-American and economically disadvantaged students and their White counterparts. Research consistently shows that the antecedents of poor school performance emerge early (birth to age 8), culminating in the “fourth grade drop”, by which time many African-American students trail their White peers by as much as two grade levels in math and reading. These disparities continue throughout elementary school and consequently affect high school graduation rates and college completion.

It is imperative that Illinois focus on the role of early childhood as the critical period for improving the academic performance of African-American students. There has been insufficient focus at all levels of state and local government on the factors in pre-kindergarten through third grade that contribute to disparities in achievement. Few states have developed comprehensive strategies to address gaps in academic achievement, yet there is unequivocal evidence that when schools and school systems are organized to support student success, low income students and students of color can achieve at high levels. In Illinois, for decades we have tolerated a gap of approximately 25% in test score results between African-American and White students on third grade ISAT scores. This gap stays the same or widens as children progress through school.

### **To address these disparities the Envisioning Change Project aims to:**

- Mobilize diverse stakeholders statewide who are committed to developing and implementing policies and practices for improving the academic outcomes of African-American children beginning in the early years.
- Build awareness and understanding of achievement and opportunity disparities by examining core issues and effective interventions.
- Develop a statewide *action plan* that will serve as a blueprint for future work aimed at assuring high-quality educational outcomes for all African-American children in Illinois.

### **To achieve these goals Erikson Institute will:**

- Convene an Envisioning Change Task Force of key stakeholders who will meet to develop a statewide action plan. Task Force members will include state education administrators, district superintendents, policy makers, advocates, business and community leaders, philanthropy, legislators and other stakeholders.
- Provide Task Force members with reliable current information to guide their deliberations and the development of the action plan.
- Disseminate the work of this project to a targeted but broad and diverse audience through multiple strategies including public forums, print and web-based media.

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