



PROJECT LIST, 2014-2015

The Achievement Gap Initiative (AGI) at Harvard University is a university-wide effort affiliated most closely with the Graduate School of Education and the Wiener Center for Social Policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government. Its mission is to bridge research and practice by framing issues, producing and disseminating research and distilling implications for decision makers in an emergent movement for excellence with equity. Work at the AGI is conducted by full time staff, graduate student research assistants, fellows, project consultants, and affiliated faculty.

SCHOOLING AND INSTRUCTIONAL QUALITY

- **Teaching Quality, Student Engagement, and Student Agency:** A project commissioned by the Raikes Foundation aims to harvest evidence on ways that the quality of teaching affects student engagement and agency. The project uses models of school engagement and teaching quality from the Tripod Project for School Improvement. The data have been collected over several years from classrooms around the nation. Measures of behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and motivational mindsets, provide the basis for addressing issues of student social fit, conduct, aspiration, effort, and efficacy. The report on this work will distinguish ways that different components of teaching predict students' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
- **Measuring Teaching Effectiveness:** States and districts around the nation are seeking multiple measures of teaching effectiveness for both accountability and school improvement purposes. The AGI is working with the Tripod Project for School Improvement and a number of partners to construct teacher quality measures from student survey responses. Recent reports from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation show that Tripod Project measures of teaching effectiveness help predict student learning gains. The MET reports can be downloaded from www.metproject.org. Also see, Ronald F. Ferguson with Charlotte Danielson (2014) "How Framework for Teaching and Tripod 7Cs Evidence Distinguish Key Components of Effective Teaching." In Thomas J. Kane, Kerri A. Kerr and Robert C. Pianta, eds, *Designing Teacher Evaluation Systems: New Guidance from the Measures of Effective Teaching Project*. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- **Instructional Leadership:** In June 2009, the AGI held a conference that featured sixteen high schools, including eight from Massachusetts, making exemplary progress at raising student achievement based on value-added estimates. A 200-page conference report distills the presentations and draws implications for instructional leaders. The report was featured in a front page story in the New York Times on September 27, 2010 and has received attention through a number of other news outlets. It is available in hard copy and can also be downloaded from the AGI website. Communication from school officials from around the U.S. indicates that they are finding it helpful. The AGI is building on the exemplary high schools report by analyzing how value-added and gap-narrowing patterns in MA schools relate to teacher responses concerning their working conditions. Also see, Ronald F. Ferguson with Eric Hirsch (2014). "How Working Conditions Predict Teaching Quality and Student Outcomes." In Thomas J. Kane, Kerri A. Kerr and Robert C. Pianta, eds, *Designing Teacher Evaluation Systems: New Guidance from the Measures of Effective Teaching Project*. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass Publishers.



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- **Early Career Supervision:** Students at HGSE and HKS who have been former teachers arrive each fall with mixed reviews of the supervision they received in their first teaching jobs. In response, the AGI has collaborated with students to produce a survey to document their experience being supervised as beginning teachers. The survey will be used nationally in collaboration with both Teach for America and the American Federation of Teachers. Results will inform a report with advice to school administrators who supervise teachers at the beginning of their careers.
- **Value-Added Implications of Special Education Inclusion:** The first phase of this project used data from the Massachusetts State Department of Education to construct student level value-added measures. The test score and student background data were from the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) for 8th and 10th graders. For the special education project, individual-level estimates for reading and mathematics were aggregated to the school level for students who received special education services during their 8th grade school year. In addition, value-added estimates were compiled for each school as a whole. The AGI is compiling a report examining whether students with equal MCAS scores and the same special education status at the end of 8th experience greater achievement growth by the end of 10th grade if they attend high schools that practice inclusion. The report will supplement statistical findings with qualitative data from schools that practice different degrees of inclusion.

PARENTING

- **How I Was Parented:** The How I was Parented project has conducted one-hundred and twenty extensive interviews with Harvard students on how they were parented. The emphasis is on how parents contributed to Harvard students' development and learning. Students who participated as either interviewers or respondents have come from the Harvard Kennedy School, the Graduate Schools of Education, Law and Business as well as from the undergraduate College. This project responds to a question that many people ask: "What prepares and motivates a student to end up at Harvard?" An aim of the project is to compare and contrast the parenting styles that students from a variety of backgrounds have experienced. The focus includes both good and bad experiences. For example, ways that parents dealt with differences between high and low achieving children in the family is a special focus. Findings will serve as the basis for a book on parenting and educational achievement.
- **Seeding Success:** The Seeding Success project aims to influence early childhood parenting and caregiving practices. It builds upon a two-day conference the AGI held in the summer of 2011. Prominent researchers presented on the most important insights from their work regarding how parents affect achievement. Following the conference, the AGI assembled a national advisory committee and began to design a project to reach parents of all racial and socio-economic backgrounds. The focus is on five fundamental parenting behaviors for children ages 0 to 3 that support multiple domains of early childhood development. In collaboration with community-based partners, the AGI is working to pilot the intervention with a quasi-experimental assessment design.

YOUTH CULTURE

- **Possible Selves:** To become successful adults, youth need support in developing images of possible future selves as well as associated strategies. The AGI is working with a network of out-



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of-school-time providers to co-design experiences that aim to provide youth with knowledge, skills, and mindsets that will help them navigate the journey from adolescence to adulthood.

- **Youth Culture and the Conspiracy to Succeed:** Adolescents desire few things more than social acceptance. However, as individuals, they have quite limited power to set or reset rules by which social acceptance is granted. Schools participating in the *Conspiracy to Succeed* invite students and adults to collaborate in an effort to reset the rules – both formal rules and informal social norms – that affect school behaviors and that help to determine success not only in school, but for a lifetime. Two dozen schools from several states participated in an initial diagnostic survey. Students confirmed that their school cultures are not what they would choose if they could design the cultures themselves. Several schools made informal efforts to organize their own *conspiracies*. Work is ongoing to define specific methods and messages to more formally mount *conspiracies to succeed* in middle schools and high schools, to provide supports for implementation and to evaluate the impacts.

EMPLOYMENT

- **Pathways to Prosperity:** The Pathways to Prosperity project was initiated at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, by Professor of Practice Emeritus Robert Schwartz and AGI Director Ron Ferguson as faculty co-directors. It responded to a need for better pathways—especially pathways other than four-year college degrees—from adolescence into the adult world of work. The first report was released in February 2011. Inquiries have come from around the nation seeking information on how to become involved with the Pathways work. Schwartz, in collaboration with Jobs for the Future, is heading a network of thirteen demonstration states with the goal of improving the pathways in their respective regions. On March 18th and 19th of 2013, the Pathways project collaborated with the AGI to convene a two-day national conference on Creating Pathways to Prosperity. The conference was attended by 430 people representing a broad cross-section of leadership positions in public, private, non-profit and research sectors. Videos from the conference and a report *Creating Pathways to Prosperity* that builds upon the conference are available on the AGI website.
- **Supervision of Adolescents in First Jobs:** In collaboration with the Boston Private Industry Council, the AGI is interviewing local supervisors of young people in their first jobs. Most have received little if any support in preparing for this role. The report on this work will identify needs for training and will share some of the insights that supervisors have found most helpful.

COMMUNITY

- **Collective Impact:** The AGI is conducting a study of the role of foundations in collective impact efforts. Collective impact is the current-day label for cross-sector systems change leadership efforts aimed at reorganizing how resources are used to improve the quality of life in targeted communities. Raising achievement and narrowing gaps is a major focus of such efforts, many of which have a cradle-to-career focus on helping young people prepare for life. Working with a regional foundation and drawing upon a number of organizations around the nation, the AGI will produce a report identifying major themes and challenges in making collective impact efforts successful.



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THE AGI VIDEO LIBRARY

The AGI website hosts more than 200 videos of presentations on research and practice from AGI forums and conferences on topics related to achievement gaps. Each video has an abstract and is classified based on keywords and major topic area to make the library a useful resource. Many of the videos are accompanied by the PowerPoint presentations that were used for the presentations. The AGI video library has become a valued resource for college courses. It has also been used by community activists and others working to inform their constituencies about key issues and options for raising achievement and narrowing gaps.

SUPPORT FOR THE AGI

The AGI relies on support from external funders. There is always a need for additional support. If you are interested in helping to support the AGI or would like more information on our work, please contact us at AGI@Harvard.edu or by calling 617-496-9154. You can visit our website at www.agi.harvard.edu. Offices are at the Wiener Center for Social Policy.