

## A Long, Proud History of Advocacy

The National Education Association (NEA) has a long, proud history of advocating for its members, America’s children, and public schools. Founded in 1857 “to elevate the character and advance the interests of the profession of teaching and to promote the cause of popular education in the United States,” it remains constant in its commitment to its original mission. NEA has worked to expand the rights and further the interests of educational employees and to advocate human, civil, and economic rights for all.

As early as 1926, NEA collaborated with the American Teachers Association (ATA)—a historically Black organization formed in 1904—on issues of educational equity. Four decades later, the two groups joined forces in the civil rights fight for racial desegregation, and in 1966, the ATA and NEA merged to bring new strength to their common causes.

Today, NEA is the largest employee organization in the country. With affiliates in every state and more than 2.8 million members, it continues its long, proud history of advocacy through its members and affiliates, national programs, training and technical assistance, legislative initiatives, and establishing coalitions and partnerships with various entities including business, higher education, minority communities, progressive groups, and others.

*“Our responsibility to close the achievement gaps goes to the heart of this nation—to its strength and its progress. To its ability to allow everyone—even those from the humblest of beginnings—to have a real shot at the American dream.”*

—NEA President Reg Weaver

## Building Broad Support for Public Education

True to its founding principles, NEA members believe that every child in the United States deserves a quality education, regardless of background, race, ethnicity, or immigration status. However, the rapidly changing demographics, the global economy, and increased attacks on public education have created a new set of challenges for minority communities that demand major changes in policy at the local, state, and national levels. NEA is stepping forward to meet those challenges. Efforts are underway to reduce class size, establish effective programs for English language learners, improve school safety, increase educational funding, enhance parental involvement, and to recruit and retain qualified and culturally

competent teachers who reflect the diversity of today’s students. Achieving these goals requires the broad support and involvement of everyone—students, families, schools, legislators, business and government, foundations, institutions of higher education, and others. NEA recognizes that if we are to preserve America’s public schools—and ensure a great public school for each and every child—we will need to strengthen and expand these relationships to broaden support for public education.

## Closing the Gaps in Student Achievement

Despite classroom gains made over the last several years, significant gaps in academic achievement persist among many, in particular among racial and ethnic groups, and children of low socioeconomic means. Many factors contribute to the educational achievement levels of students. The research reveals that student achievement gaps for minority populations are large, begin early in life, and are persistent. Closing these gaps is one of the most pressing challenges facing public schools. NEA is committed to doing everything it can to eliminate the achievement gaps for all children.

Student Category	High School or More	Some College or More	Bachelor's Degree or More
White	85.5%	55.4%	27%
Black	72.3%	42.5%	14.3%
American Indian and Alaska Native	70.9%	41.7%	11.5%
Hispanic	52.4%	30.3%	10.4%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	78.3%	44.6%	13.8%
Asian American	40.4% to 91.2%*	24.3% to 76.4%*	7.5% to 63.9%*

\* The range of percentages for individual Asian American ethnic groups is shown here since some Asian American groups face achievement gaps while others do not.

U.S. Census Bureau: *Educational Attainment: 2000*

## **Vision for Minority Community Outreach**

*NEA aims to be a true collaborative partner with ethnic minority communities in advocating for, and realizing, outstanding public schools for every child. We aim to be recognized in minority communities as a committed partner, a source of meaningful information and guidance, and a trusted champion in improving the quality of our nation's public schools.*

- Establish partnerships with ethnic minority communities to develop and implement strategies to close the gaps in student achievement.
- Develop and implement, in collaboration with community partners, an education campaign designed to challenge attacks on public education such as vouchers, privatization, and tuition tax credits.
- In collaboration with community partners and other NEA departments and state affiliates, advocate for sound public policy at the state, local, and national levels to reduce class size; secure adequate funding for public education; secure adequate wages for teachers and education support professionals; promote programs that assist disadvantaged and English language learners; and other critical issues.

## **Minority Community Outreach (MCO) Program**

The face of American public education is rapidly changing. Today, ethnic minority students in our nation's schools have risen to almost 40 percent of America's student population. Over the next 20 years, that percentage may well reach 50 percent.

While the number of ethnic minority students is increasing, so are the challenges they face. Substantial gaps in achievement exist among many of these populations. Many attend schools that face the greatest educational, economic, and social challenges. Where these communities have been traditional allies in our efforts to support public education, increasingly they are turning away from public schools as a result of their frustration with schools that do not meet the needs of their children and the relentless advocacy efforts of those who would privatize education.

If we are to preserve America's public schools—and ensure a great public school for each and every child—we will need to meet the needs of these children, reestablish the ethnic minority community's commitment to public education, work collaboratively with these groups to improve the quality of the schools in their communities, and assure all children the educational experience they need and deserve.

Through the MCO Program, NEA aspires to:

- Strengthen relationships with current partners representing ethnic minority communities, and initiate new partnerships and/or projects around education and other issues of mutual interest.

**Percent of Total US Population by Race and Hispanic Origin, 2000 to 2030**

