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NOT as the Mayor, for advertising selling lots of land and other

8/25/01

Test scores widening between races

By Kate Zernike

NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

A gap between test scores of black and white students that had narrowed through the 1980s widened from 1990 to 1999, according to results released Thursday by the federal Department of Education, with the average black 17-year-old reading only about as well as the average white 13-year-old.

Most perplexing, officials said, is that the gap is widest among children of the best-educated parents, where average scores by white students remained relatively steady while those of blacks fell back toward the lower achievement of the late 1970s.

That data suggest that what was once considered an urban problem, the consequence of poverty and disadvantage, has become a suburban problem, too, one that may result from lower expectations by teachers, a lower number of black students taking tougher courses,

or different attitudes about education among black students.

Such disparity in test performance, which has also been seen from analysis of SAT scores, has become one of the most challenging issues in American education. Evidence of a similar pattern in these tests, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, is more indicative of the situation in U.S. schools because it includes students from all groups, not merely those who are seeking to go to college.

Educators and officials say there is no clear explanation for why progress slipped after the gains of the 1980s in the next decade of remarkable prosperity.

"This is a depressing reversal of the gains made over the past two decades," said Michael T. Nettles, vice chairman of the National Assessment Governing Board, which monitors results of the test, the National Assessment of Educational Progress. "The alarming part is that since

1992, the gaps have been getting wider."

And while blacks are catching up to whites in performance of the basic skills, showing an ability to do simple arithmetic, for example, they are slipping further behind whites when asked to do more complicated work, such as fractions, percentages or decimals.

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ASSEMBLY EDUCATION

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