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Education

BS, Economics, Cornell University (1972)

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Ronald F. Ferguson is an MIT-trained economist whose research, teaching, writing, and consulting over almost four decades have focused on economic, social and educational challenges in urban America. Issues of racial and ethnic inequality have been central in his work. He joined the faculty at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government in September 1983, after full time appointments at Brandeis and Brown Universities. In 2009, he became a member of the faculty at the Graduate School of Education, joint with his position at the Kennedy School. While at Harvard, he has held visiting appointments at MIT and the College Board. In 2014, he co-founded [Tripod Education Partners, Inc.](#) and shifted into an adjunct faculty role at the Kennedy School.

Dr. Ferguson's research and publications cover issues in education policy, youth development programming, community development, economic consequences of skill disparities, and state and local economic development policy. Over the years, his work has attracted substantial national news coverage. In 1987 and 1988, his research on state policy and the economy in Massachusetts was featured prominently in television and newspaper stories during Michael Dukakis's presidential campaign. By explaining in detail how state policy interacted with broader economic forces, his research (with co-author Helen Ladd) provided a balanced and sober assessment of how policy during the Dukakis governorship contributed to the Massachusetts Economic Miracle from the early 1970s through the middle 1980s.

In 1995, Dr. Ferguson was asked by leaders of the National Community Development Initiative to organize the National Community Development Policy Analysis Network (NCDPAN) in order to help mainstream social science research contribute more effectively to the field of urban community development. Among other products, NCDPAN produced a social science synthesis volume that Dr. Ferguson co-edited and contributed to, in which leading social

Ronald F. Ferguson, PhD

scientists from several disciplines applied their expertise and insights to urban problem solving. Brookings Press published the volume, titled *Urban Problems and Community Development*, in 1999. Faculty in leading universities report that the book remains the leading volume of its type for use in university courses.

Dr. Ferguson's research on public education began in the late 1980s, with a study of whether the certification test scores of 200,000 teachers in 900 Texas school districts helped predict district-to-district differences in student learning gains. The answer was "Yes." Interspersed with work on other topics, Dr. Ferguson's education-related work has come increasingly to focus on racial and ethnic achievement gaps, appearing in publications of the National Research Council, the Brookings Institution, the U.S. Department of Education, and various books and journals. Harvard Education Press has published a collected-papers volume of his research and writing on the achievement gap for the period 1995 through 2007. The book is entitled, *Toward Excellence with Equity: An Emerging Vision for Closing the Achievement Gap*.

In addition to teaching and research, Dr. Ferguson has participated in a wide variety of consulting and policy advisory roles, including the National Research Council Committee on Community-level Youth Programming, the National Research Council Board on Testing and Assessment, the National Urban League's Campaign for African-American Achievement, the Research Advisory Group on Closing the Achievement Gap of the Council of Great City Schools. Advisory roles with the US Department of Education have included the Urban Education Advisory Board under the George W. Bush administration and Advisory Committee on Policy Evaluation Priorities of the Institute for Educational Sciences under the Obama administration.

His research and consulting on racial achievement gaps led him to create the Tripod Project for School Improvement, which he founded in 2001. Teacher content knowledge, effective pedagogy, and strong teacher-student relationships, are the three legs of the Tripod. Hundreds of schools from districts across three dozen states, Canada and China have participated by doing student or teacher surveys on classroom conditions. In addition to surveys and services, national conferences have brought together leaders from participating schools and districts for training and updates and to share ideas. Tripod surveys are the basis of the student perceptions component of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation project on Measuring Effective Teaching ([MET](#)). An initial progress report issued in December 2010 indicates that student survey responses to Tripod questions are reliable predictors of learning gains. As a result of the MET project and federal Race to the Top legislation, many school districts around the nation are now using Tripod or other student surveys in their school improvement and teaching evaluation systems.

In 2004, as a result of his effectiveness at bridging research and practice, Dean Ellen C. Lagemann of the Harvard Graduation School of Education asked Dr. Ferguson to lead a university-wide seminar on achievement gaps. Initial meetings focused on the need for a multi-disciplinary approach to understanding persistent achievement gaps. In addition, there was a desire among some faculty to engage policy and practice more actively. Therefore, in 2005 the Achievement Gap Initiative (AGI) at Harvard University was formed, with Dr. Ferguson serving as faculty co-chair and director.

The AGI is a university-wide endeavor that also reaches beyond Harvard to bring together researchers, policy makers, and practitioners to work on school improvement, parenting,

Ronald F. Ferguson, PhD

and youth culture issues to help raise student achievement and narrow racial and ethnic gaps. Support from Time Warner, Inc., the Gates Foundation, the Harvard Provost and others has enabled the AGI to convene national conferences and to maintain a web site (www.agi.harvard.edu) where both written and video-graphic materials for practitioners and researchers are downloadable from a searchable database. The video library contains over 200 videos of presentations at AGI events. As it attracts additional corporate and private donations, the AGI plans to expand its program of research and informational outreach to collaborate with community-level change agents nationally as a central aspect of its work.

In 2006, the AGI and the Tripod Project were featured in an interview with Dr. Ferguson published in the Harvard Education Letter ("Recent Research on the Achievement Gap," Nov/Dec 2006). The interview was a finalist for the Association of Education Publishers annual award in the category of Best Interview. Beyond published interviews, Dr. Ferguson's appearances on network and public television news programs and documentaries include the CNN Nightly News Hour, Today Show, ABC 20/20, Sunday Morning, the MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour, and evening news programs on the three major networks. His research and perspectives on public schooling are cited regularly in newspapers and magazines, including the New York Times, the National Journal, the Washington Post, Education Week and others. On February 13, 2011, he was the focus of a New York Times article entitled, "Closing the Achievement Gap Without Widening a Racial one." An October 2012 article in the Atlantic Monthly, entitled, "Why Kids Should Grade Teachers," featured his work with the Tripod Project. Other coverage appears regularly in education publications (for example, *School Administrator*, March 2014).