

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Report)

Special Meeting

Tuesday, September 26, 2006

Called by Mayor Kenneth E. Reeves, in accordance with Chapter I, Section 3 of the Rules of the School Committee, for the purpose of a roundtable discussion on closing the achievement gap.

Members Present: Mr. Fantini, Mr. Grassi, Mr. Harding, Ms. Nolan, Mr. Schuster, Ms. Walser,
Mayor Reeves

Mayor Reeves in the Chair.

The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:20 p.m. and explained that the meeting is to discuss how over subsequent meetings the achievement gap is going to be discussed.

Participants discussed the following issues, questions, comments and concerns:

- Need to have a conversation regarding Black under-achievement
- What gap are we looking at now – what is the gap
- What are contributing factors to the gap
- What are potential solutions
- What things have been implemented
- What things are we thinking of implementing
- What can schools control
- Outside factors need to be acknowledged
- Gap needs to be defined to help focus resources and have a better understanding of how to articulate it to families
- Once the gap is defined there is a different level of interest and expectation
- How do we best use data that we have to accelerate closing the gap
- There are different gaps – who eats breakfast – whose parents can help them, etc.
- Need to use data to better inform teachers, staff, after-school providers, etc.
- There is a political disconnect
- People who are doing well feel like they will lose something – we should be able to do this without hurting people who are doing well
- There may be a lot to gain from other districts that are doing well
- There are not too many districts who are doing well but certain schools are
- Would like to have conversations with experts
- Overall achievement for everybody – if you bring the bottom up, the top goes up
- It is important to define what groups we are focusing on
- There is also a gap for limited English proficient students
- Explore the question and tie it into professional development - perception affects performance
- How comfortable would people be if we put them in this position
- We are not doing this to place blame – people should feel safe
- Do not jump to prescriptions
- If we assume the sky's the limit we can come up with innovative ideas
- Look at the broader environmental issues
- This issue is very complex
- There seems to be two research beliefs – teacher perception and instruction
- Prefer that we put a lot of effort on instructional focus
- Institutions do change drastically
- Change does seem to be happening quite dramatically – age and culture of faculty has changed
- Ask Principals to write what they feel are issues to get feedback from within
- Bring children up to speed faster

- Could we subsidize child care for a year
- Think about how we define equity and look at how we deploy resources
- Make achievement gap to the highest level of Asian students
- The things we do need to add value and make a difference
- Schools need to be more balanced
- Look at hiring process – what makes a good hire
- What does it mean to hire the best person
- Insure that we hire people who can add value
- Is every group that we have adding value to our system
- Research isn't as great as you would think – there are gaps between research and practice
- Everyone has a different interpretation of the gap – define gap by FARM, paid lunch, class
- What is the gap between CPSD and State averages
- Clarify who we will be compared to and stick to whatever we define
- Would like to see people from the Ed School involved with us
- Need to have buy-in on whatever we accept as benchmarks
- There are enough administrators to have a Principal in classrooms to insure curriculum is aligned
- Need to start looking at middle schools
- There are still schools that have consistent failure
- Need to look to see where we can stop the bleeding
- How do our African-Americans do compared to those in the State
- The State has too many definitions
- If you have 100 definitions but do not hit 25 there is a problem
- Another gap is students achieving high and students achieving low whatever the demographics
- Proficient/advanced should be higher
- Resist celebration of 9% increase
- Remove veil of unrealism that CRLS cannot be on top 25 list
- African American boys need to see in front of them what they are expected to become
- Would it be useful to have a forum with others
- Have three forums and suspend the desire to come up with quick prescriptions
- Ask staff to come up with names of panelists – parents, churches, social services, immigrants, etc.
- How to publicize forums
- Have people who can frame this for parents
- What is a realistic goal for progress
- If we do the right thing, when can we expect progress
- Get questions from each member what they want answers to
- Does not want to lose what we are already doing
- Structure would be different depending on the audience
- Look at what our current practices are
- What does the achievement gap look like for children in non-Title I schools
- Where are the places within the system that are doing great
- Use the Media Arts Center, the CRLS auditorium, schools, for forums
- Three sessions are not enough – we need something on-going
- There needs to be some up-front preparation
- Identify parents who need to come
- Aim at parents whose children are below proficient
- Lack of time is an issue
- Meet in smaller groups to fine tune details
- Look at the CTA document on the achievement gap
- We need to come up with a budget
- If we could pull off child care, it would be worth its weight in gold

- Look at districts like Berkeley, Ann Arbor, Madison, Evanston
- What are Harvard and MIT doing for us – what could we get from them to help us

The following individuals volunteered to be members of the Planning Team:

Mr. Grassi, Mr. Harding, Ms. Walser, Dr. Turk, Mr. Haverty. It was suggested that George Greenidge, Jr. (National Black College Alliance) and students from the Minority Student Achievement Network be invited to participate.

The Chair thanked everyone for his/her participation. The meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Adjourned
Marilyn Y. Bradshaw
Executive Secretary to the School Committee