

PSCC Meeting notes: Closing the Achievement Gap

Introductions

DMS: not talking about numbers tonight, instead talk about how they monitor student performance and steps the school is taking to address student performance issues. Discussion tonight will focus on reading.

- 1) Good news is that 4sight exam indicates that all 6th-grade children are making good progress and achieving proficiency. Gap is almost eliminated in 8th grade students; there is still a gap, but it is in part due to the fact that 8th grade white students currently measure at 100% proficiency (again in reading).
- 2) Staff and administration are reading a book together called "Courageous Conversations" which discusses differing social constructs and barriers experienced by African American students over the past 200 years. There are study groups centered around issues in the book, and Mr. May-Stein is participating in a number of them.
- 3) Each reading and math teacher identifies an AA student who is not proficient in math or reading and follows the student's progress and experiences to gain insight into their own teaching methods and possible ways it can be improved. This is used as a lens to focus on methods, and is reviewed for each teacher in a weekly workshop for each grade-level (K teachers meet, 2nd grade teachers meet, etc.). DMS has chosen to focus on AA students this year based on his 7 years of experience working on achievement issues at Colfax. The goal is to increase the effectiveness of teaching techniques and getting better results in improving achievement levels for non-proficient students.
- 4) Finding through 4sight that core curriculum is not aligned with 4sight skills that are tested (assumption is that 4sight accurately predicts potential achievement on PSSAs: these are preliminary conclusions, need PSSA results because those are the yardstick that we are measured by).
- 5) Q: How effective are 4sight tests as a predictor of achievement? A: 4sight tests are stated to have a .89 correlation with PSSA exams.
- 6) Q: research shows class size impacts achievement – what is the district doing to address class size of 27 in primary grades? A: It's a resource issue, and it's a matter of district and state dept. of ed policy. Without changes in available resources, class size is likely to remain about where it is now.

7:35 Jenny Kellman, Reading Coach – Discussion of RTI issues (Response To Intervention) and the Tier System

1) Baseline amount of class time for reading is 90 minutes. Using the RTI system (based on research into what's needed to improve achievement), there are 3 tier definitions: A Tier-1 child requires an additional 30 minutes to achieve proficiency; Tier-2 45 minutes; Tier-3 is 60 additional minutes; These numbers are ideally additional minutes each class day.

2) RTI looks at issues besides simple time allocation – motivation & attitude, encouragement v. “raising the bar”. RTI focuses on preventive steps in K-3.

3) This system is used for assessment, not classification, and is used at Colfax starting in Kindergarten (e.g., DIBLs). The goal is to give teachers tools to use with children to improve achievement and to improve consistency of attention to children with Tier-3 issues. Other methodology deployed is Sunday, which is a set of alternate techniques that work with some children who are having reading proficiency issues (Tier-1, -2, & -3).

4) Q: What about the need for speech therapy or hearing issues? A: Speech issues are the simplest for a teacher to identify in the classroom and to refer a student to a speech screener. If speech services are required, parent permission may be required. In addition, hearing & dental screening are performed on every child at specific grade levels by the health staff. A2: this also relates to the issue of “fragile skills”, where a student has some level of mastery of some key skills for reading but not all skills are fully mastered.

5) Q: i) does the achievement appear in K or in later grades? ii) Is the “achievement gap” strictly correlated to race or is income level just as important (i.e., are they the same kids?)? iii) What about health care issues? A: the gap does appear in Kindergarten, and research shows correlations with pre-natal care, age of mother, income level, etc. A broad generalization would be that for Colfax and for PPS generally, the correlation of race and income level with achievement is very high. A-iii) there is research on age 0-3 issues involving verbal proficiency, vocalization

6) Q: what kinds of numbers are we looking for Tier-3 students at Colfax and is this system used schoolwide? A) RTI is focused on K-3. To give a specific example, at third grade there are 12 Tier-2 students (out of 75), and 5 Tier-3 students (out of 75). Ms. Kellman (reading coach) intervenes with each of these students in a pull-out mode.

7) Q: what are the impediments to bridging the socio-economic barriers (esp. the social barriers)? Transportation, cultural understandings, neighborhood barriers. A: We need to be careful about overgeneralizations about neighborhood, family status, etc., because they can lead to rationalizations. If we look to ourselves, there are issues of our own participation and involvement.

8) Q: Is the behavior management program creating negative reinforcement and stereotypes? A: It likely contributes in some ways, but we would need an alternate behavior management plan before we could make changes. Q: how much time is spent by the principal and assistant principal on behavior management? A: it’s highly variable and is related to snow-day disruptions, school vacations, and other disruptions to the school routine. Middle-level students are doing well this year, but primary-level students are creating disruptions are significant issues (often, behavior issues are symptoms of needs that need to be addressed with the student). Principal time is often spent refocusing the students so they can get back into a

mode where they can re-join the classroom (distraction is a technique that often gets results).

9) Q: do students change tiers over the course of the school year? A: Yes, for example there are students who have moved from below-basic to basic since the beginning of the school year, and we try to measure skills acquisition as well as test performance.

10) Q: Is there research on student morale and how it affects achievement? Is there a way to utilize interpersonal relationships to improve student achievement? A: You have to remember that social issues emerge as part of child and student development, separate from student achievement issues and racial, ethnic, religious, etc., issues.

11) Q: What can I as a parent do? What kind of work can parents do at the school to address this issue? Can you get community service providers to better promote school improvement? A) Good point, I (DMS) haven't done enough in this area and need to do more, and I've missed opportunities in this area.

12) Q: (Mark's question) Are there a small handful of parents who would join Mark in a working group to address issues and make recommendations on this issue? If so, contact Mark after the meeting. A: Other parents indicated an interest in this issue.