

Achievement Gap Action Group
Thursday, March 9, 2006
Minutes

Presentations and Discussion:

- Awareness to Action 2005: Tracking the Achievement Gap in Delaware Schools

This is the second annual report showing four years of achievement gap data for Delaware schools. The data is displayed by district and by school for each third, fifth, eighth and tenth grade for whom 4 years of data is available using data from the Delaware State Testing Program (DSTP) scores for reading and math. The percentages of students in each subgroup meeting or exceeding the standard are displayed in a graphic format along with school demographics and the most recent Annual Yearly Performance (AYP) rating under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). From that data, the “gap” is calculated using the reference group against the subgroup.

The report was reviewed noting how the data are displayed, what the charts show, and the limitations of the data.

- The limitations include:
 - There is inherent difficulty in drawing meaning from the Limited English Proficient data over time since students in this subgroup are constantly changing.
 - Intensive Learning Centers do not contain large enough student populations to report.

A trend analysis was also presented that gives more specific information about the percent of schools closing gaps in subgroups by subject and grade.

The trend analysis does identify those schools making significant gains with certain subgroups.

- The trend analysis does not capture the percent of schools that are consistent high flyers with little to no gap to close.

Discussion followed about how we might better capture the characteristics of “high flyers” and how we might use the report data to trigger change. Specific suggestions include:

- Showing “gap” information over time as a part of the school and district report cards
- How to use the data to encourage school cultures and school leadership that focus on student learning
- Doing an analysis of what is going on in those schools that have essentially closed the gap and/or making extraordinary gains in closing the gap.

- Correlates of Achievement

The discussion of the achievement gap report segued into an update and further discussion of the Correlates of Achievement data pilot that the R&D Center has been conducting. The specific Correlates of Achievement were developed by the Educational Testing Service as a measure designed to identify indicators that contribute to an achievement gap.

The Correlates of Achievement work done by the R&D Center is creating a dynamic, web-based program to help teachers and administrators analyze data within their schools on a continuous basis. The data are disaggregated by student, teacher, and school level factors, and incorporates class size, curriculum level, teacher experience, and group demographics. The data are constantly updated as teachers and administrators enter more elements into the system.

The question became how to use the Correlates to create a culture of continuous improvement and what are the levers that can best effect the change in school culture.

Distributive leadership was discussed as it contains the following features:

- Teachers and principals work with the data to create the staff development opportunities for using data
- Students learn how to use their own data to set goals and to reflect on their learning
- It empowers schools

As a result of the presentations and discussions, seven specific action steps were identified:

1. Establish a technical committee to work with the Department to create a data plan and secure the technical expertise (possibly from the private sector) to achieve it. Members from the Achievement Gap Action Group willing to serve include:
 - Bob Sutton
 - Paul Herdman
 - Bob Smith
 - Joe Pika
 - Audrey Noble
2. Conduct case studies to examine how to develop school cultures that can make a real difference in student learning.
3. Determine what funding would be required at the school level to build and support a cultural shift.
4. Determine if there is a way to capture and analyze meaningful data for special populations such as LEP and ILC students.
5. Determine how the longitudinal gap data can be added to school report cards or school profiles
6. Begin a larger effort to discuss the Educational Testing Service report on the 14 Correlates of Achievement and their significance in closing the achievement gap. Initially that could start at the Policies and Practices Conference scheduled for late June. From that point, individual professional groups would be encouraged to continue the conversation with their members for a sustained focus.
7. Request the State Board of Education require consistent course content, titles and numbers across districts.

The Achievement Gap Action Group will reconvene once some progress has been made on the seven areas noted above. In the interim, small groups will be convened to work on the priorities.