



Closing the Achievement Gap for African American Students



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1. INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVES

In an ever-changing society, it is necessary for the XXX School District to prepare every student to live and learn in a world different from the past.

This diversity initiative strives to provide a positive learning environment for the district's lowest-achieving ethnic subgroup, African American students, by developing, implementing and monitoring policies and procedures that strive to increase academic achievement.

The desired outcomes of the XXX School District's Diversity Initiative are:

Objective 1: Develop a comprehensive curriculum that is inclusive, reflects multi-cultural diversity, and promotes contributions by all races, creeds, and cultures.

Objective 2: Provide an environment that aids in the development of a positive self image for all students.

Objective 3: Encourage community involvement in creating a culturally inclusive school environment.

Objective 4: Provide ongoing cultural diversity staff training that creates an awareness and appreciation of other cultures and ethnic groups.

2. PROGRAM MISSION

XXX School District is committed to the principles and practices of education that recognize and celebrate cultural diversity as an essential ingredient to the success of a democratic society and to the fulfillment of the district's mission to provide a "Quality Education for Every Student."

This commitment is specifically directed toward the elimination of racism and the removal of cultural barriers for African American students wherever they may exist throughout the district, including intentional or unintentional discriminatory practices in classrooms, schools and offices.

Fiscal Impact:

The financial impact of the program will be minimal. Staff trainings will be conducted during previously scheduled in-service days and staff meetings. Planning meetings will take place after school and staff attendance will be on a voluntary basis. The district has approved a limited amount of operating funds and a local business has made a one-time donation to support the program in its first year.

3. STRATEGIES TO RAISE ACHIEVEMENT

Instructional Variables:

Multicultural Approaches to Instruction

- Interdisciplinary lessons
- Collaborative team teaching

Cultural Competence

- Demonstrate knowledge of cultural, ethnic, linguistic and gender diversity in the classroom
- Understand aspects of his/her own culture that may facilitate or hinder communication

Information in Curriculum on Cultural Differences

- Use curriculum materials that describe historical, social and political events from a wide range of racial, ethnic, cultural and language perspectives

Active Participation

- Call on every student regularly
- Frequently call for substantive oral and written responses

Teacher-Student Social Variables:

Fairness and Respect

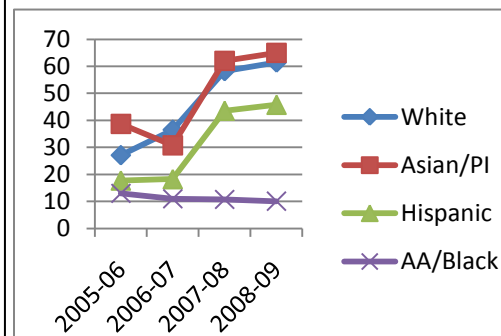
- Base all interactions on human dignity principles, respect for every person and an attitude of hope and optimism

Low Favoritism & Low Friction

- Treat all students equally and provide equal access
- Students and teachers support one another

4. SUPPORTING DATA

This line graph shows the percentage of students who have exceeded state standards on the O.A.K.S. test in English/Language Arts (ELA), from 2005 – 2009. All subgroups show a steady increase, except the African American/Black students.



5. OUTCOME MEASUREMENTS FOR EACH OBJECTIVE

Ob 1: Academic departments will report student outcomes to the program planning committee. **Quarterly**

Ob 1: Academic departments will work with administration and parent groups to evaluate curriculum choices in relation to cultural diversity, with an intentional focus on African American students. **Quarterly**

Ob 2: Counselors will observe, measure, and evaluate student participation in extracurricular activities. **Daily**

Ob 2: Administrators will observe, measure, and evaluate student behavior office referrals. **Daily**

Ob 3: The program committee will create and implement a parent survey to help measure the effectiveness of the program goals. Data will be used to improve the program in the next biennium. **Twice Annually**

Ob 3: The number of community organizations and business that become involved in the program committee meetings will be evaluated. **Quarterly**

Ob 4: Attendance will be taken at all program trainings to ensure 100% staff participation. **Monthly**

Ob 4: Administrators will include the desired outcomes and measurements in teacher evaluations. **Annually**

6. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

There is considerable research that confirms that dramatic increases in African American student achievement can come from dramatic changes in student teacher interactions (Gallego & Cole, 2001). This article highlights the results of a two-year study to examine those interactions to identify and describe the specific and common instructional and management strategies and contextual features used by 29 teachers whose African American students closed achievement gaps. Analyses of the data in that study suggest teachers enhanced their pedagogy to meet their students' needs. Teachers and principals agreed that teachers leveled the playing field for students as they applied 42 strategies, related to three areas: curriculum and instruction, contextual features and environment, and classroom assessments.

Conversations around this topic have occurred during staff meetings and in-services in the XXX School District, but these discussions invariably come to show that educators in the district oftentimes go through a process that appears to be change oriented but, in fact, does not result in any substantial improvement of student learning (Eubanks, Parish, & Smith, 1997). In the XXX School District these conversations have served to maintain a status quo of not addressing the true needs of these minority students. Eubanks, Parish, & Smith's (1997) work, *Changing Discourse on Schools*, continues to explain that Discourse II schools intend to produce schools where every student develops intellectually to higher levels of achievement and the performance gap related to race narrows until the outcomes of academic testing are no longer related to that factor. This reading has helped identify the lack of effort that is currently being made in this area and gives direction for future planning. Schools must cease in being passive in the face of racism and this must include education for its school community. The XXX School District must "reduce the feelings of inferiority for students of color" (Singleton & Linton, p. 44).

7. REFERENCES

- Eubanks, E., Parish, R., & Smith, D. (1997). *Changing the discourse in schools*. In P.M. Hall's *Race ethnicity and multiculturalism: Policy and practice* (pp. 151-168). New York: Garland Press.
- Gallego, M. A., & Cole, M., (2001). "Classroom cultures and cultures in the classroom". In V. Richardson (Ed.) *Handbook on research on teaching* (4th ed., pp. 951-997). Washington, D. C.: American Educational Research Association.
- Singleton, G., & Linton, C. (2006). *Courageous conversations about race*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.