

Action Plan for Equity and Excellence:

Addressing Achievement Gaps

Achievement gaps exist among different groups of Wellesley students when differentiated along lines of gender, learning disabilities, race or socioeconomic status. Initiatives across the district have been implemented to address these apparent gaps. Although some initiatives have been ongoing for some time, the performance data has been slow to improve. Outreach has informed us that other school districts have had some promising gains on some of these same gaps.

We acknowledge that some of the initiatives we have used targeted toward specific groups of students are not shared across all groups of students although those strategies may be beneficial for a broader group of students. In sum, there are many parallel efforts happening without clear opportunities for cross-pollination. We have determined that coordinating these efforts will enhance the quality and efficacy of our work with specific groups of children as well as have a broader impact for the benefit of all our students.

Recognizing that there are ongoing efforts on this issue, the action plan's objective is to coordinate the work we are doing as a district to narrow the achievement gap for our students and coordinate our collective strategies and resources being applied for the benefit of all students. The intention of the Action Plan is to build upon the work to date and provide guidance on next steps. Based on common readings on what others have done and reflection on our own work, the Action Plan is designed with these cautionary caveats in mind:

- There is no single silver bullet; a combination of strategies is required to gain traction.
- An integrated, cohesive design that brings together multiple strategies is more desirable. No matter how well intentioned -- isolated actions and ad hoc work have more limited effective value.
- Both academic and environmental supports should be included in the plan design.
- The design needs to include out of school factors (summer school) and in school variables for more rigorous curriculum; for example, more time on task.
- Closing a gap that is already established is difficult; prevention trumps remediation. Solving the 9th grade problem in preschool is easier than solving it in 9th grade.

- Length of time in treatment is important; for many gap interventions, benefits escalate the longer the intervention is applied.
- Sustained work is required to hold gains

Based on research and what others and we have done, the Action Plan is further premised on the belief in the following principles.

- a. Practices that produce narrowing and closing of racial, ethnic, socio-economic achievement gaps are practices that will improve achievement for all students.
- b. Professional Learning Communities that develop standards-based common assessments linked to data-driven instruction via tiered-intervention strategies benefits all students.
- c. Practices informed by our research and data benefits our students.
- d. Enhancing and measuring not only student achievement, but also student engagement benefits all students.
- e. Guided widespread use of technology and embedded, on-going, targeted professional development for all staff benefits all students.
- f. Reviewing curriculum and instruction for cogency, rigor and relevance benefits all students.
- g. Creating a culture safe to overcome social and emotional barriers to intellectual risk taking for staff, children and families benefits all students.
- h. Common planning time for teachers to develop and discuss strategies for the aforementioned purposes benefits all students.

With these principles in mind, the Action Plan is organized into the following sections.

- I. Document progress using the data available to us
- II. Develop and implement common assessments
- III. Develop tiered-intervention strategies
- IV. Review curriculum and instruction for relevancy
- V. Monitor and support student engagement
- VI. Create culture to support appropriate and important intellectual risk taking

- VII. Technology plan to support instruction
- VIII. Professional development
- IX. Planning time
- X. Apply research
- XI. Monitor progress, adjust strategies, until success is achieved

Sections of the plan itself will become filled in over time but in the meantime the over all structure will provide us the scaffolding with which we can organize the work already ongoing and our next steps. It is our hope that this plan will be further developed by staff that will work on various parts so it is possible for some parts to grow faster than others. Documenting what is being done within this structure will provide a better way of informing each other about what has been tried and what worked and what did not. One area that has been highlighted for this year's set of district goals is developing common assessments. This work is critical to laying the groundwork for the development of effective strategies.

While we are working to improve our practice and look to the future, this should not displace our primary imperative to focus on the positive impacts we can have on the students we have today. In fact, it is our work with the current generation of students that informs and inspires us for the benefit of the next generation. The gaps in achievement we are striving to address will not be closed in a year or in two. The process of developing those efforts will take time and its success will depend on collective input and feedback. Through better coordination and collaboration of efforts across the district we believe we will narrow achievement gaps experienced by some of our students while benefiting all students at the same time.