

# Working Together Achieving Together

Delaware Valley Minority  
Student Achievement Consortium



## Regional School District Collaboration as a Comprehensive Strategy for Closing the Achievement Gap

2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Closing the Achievement Gap Conference  
Neag School of Education  
University of Connecticut

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Minority Student Achievement Consortium  
University of Pennsylvania  
Philadelphia, PA

# *Who Are We?*

*Founded in 2004 the Delaware Valley Minority Student Achievement Consortium is an inquiry and professional development organization dedicated to supporting its member districts in significantly closing the gaps and increasing the number of traditionally underachieving students of color among their “best and brightest.”*



# ***Collaborative Partnership***

- Penn Center for Educational Leadership in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania
- The School District of Cheltenham Township
- Pennsylvania Department of Education



# ***What Are We About?***

- **Understanding and Appropriately Responding to What's Behind the Test Scores**
- **Examining and Changing District, School and Classroom Policies and Practices That Will Better Address the Learning and Development Needs of ALL Students and at the Same Time Close the Gaps**
- **Facilitating Engagement, Dialog and Learning Among Administrators, Boards, Teachers, Support Staff, Students, Parents, and Communities**
- **Networking/ Nurturing Partnerships/ and Sharing Information and Resources**



# *Defining the Gaps*

- Standardized Assessments (AP, IB, SAT Scores, State Assessments)
- Grades/GPA
- Enrollment Patterns in AP, IB, Honors, Gifted, Title 1- Remedial Programs, Special Education
- Discipline Referral Rates and Consequences
- Attendance Rates and Patterns
- High School Graduation Rates
- College-Going Rates/Attending First College Of Choice
- College Persistence and Success



# ***District Commitments***

- Disaggregating student performance or outcome data by race/ethnicity, gender, English language proficiency, disabilities/special needs, and socio-economic status at the district, school and classroom levels
- Collecting and analyzing data that assesses attitudes and perceptions of students, parents, teachers, administrators and staff relative to achievement and school success in order to better understand the nature of the gaps within the district
- Enhancing expectations for success and instilling greater rigor in course content and establishing higher cognitive expectations for all students



# ***District Commitments***

- Examining and adjusting district and school policies, organizational structures, grouping practices and student placement processes so as to insure underachieving students' access to rigorous courses, curriculum and support
- Enhancing positive relationships between adults and students by attending to the cultural competencies of educators and the social/cultural dynamics of the school and/or district
- Continuously examining issues of student motivation, expectations, and engagement from multiple instructional and cultural perspectives, and change practices



# *2006-07 Member Districts*

- Abington Township
- Bristol Township
- Cheltenham Township
- Cherry Hill Township, NJ
- Coatesville Area
- Collingswood, NJ
- Haverford Township
- Kennett Consolidated
- Lower Merion
- Norristown Area
- North Penn
- Moorestown, NJ
- Morrisville Borough
- Princeton Regional, NJ
- Radnor Township
- Rose Tree Media
- Springfield Township
- Tredyffrin-Easttown
- Upper Dublin
- Upper Merion Area
- West Chester Area
- Wissahickon



# ***District Team Professional Learning Opportunities***

- Fall and Summer Two-Day Conferences
- “Closing the Gap” Seminar Series at Penn
- Student Leadership Institutes
- School Board and Superintendent Workshops
- Minority Educator Networking Sessions
- School Counselor Workshops
- Minority Educator Recruitment Fair
- Task Force Meetings and Activities



# ***Consortium Steering Committee and Task Forces***

- Superintendents' Steering Committee
- Data and Research Task Force
- Recruitment and Retention Task Force
- School Counselor Task Force



# *Lessons We Are Learning*

- There are no quick or easy solutions- no “silver bullets”
- No two “suburban” districts are the same- community and district context and history play a key role in defining how the gaps play out
- Leadership at the top and shared leadership and mutual accountability at the school level are critical to success, and we need to better understand the nature of effective leadership in successful equity-driven school districts



# *Lessons We Are Learning*

- Districts that are moving forward are organizing and developing focused action plans: equity, access and closing the gaps are engrained in district missions and strategic plans
- Districts that are moving forward are having the “courageous conversations” about their race/class achievement gap challenges with their internal and external publics
- Achievement gaps are more often than not reflections of “opportunity to learn” gaps
- Districts are more successful working in collaboration than in isolation, and there is political capital in numbers



# *Lessons We Are Learning*

- Our traditionally unexamined practices of ability grouping at the elementary level and tracking at the secondary level exacerbate the gaps
- ALL students need to be exposed to intellectually demanding instruction, curriculum and learning experiences
- Appropriate in-school structures and/or programs are essential to support underachieving students of color



# *Lessons We Are Learning*

- Our assumptions about individual and subgroup abilities/capacities to learn need to be reexamined
- Our limited expectations for and assumptions about our underachieving students of color significantly impact our decisions about them, and ultimately their future “success trajectory”
- Student and parent perceptions of their experiences in and with our schools are critical in understanding what is behind the test scores



# *Lessons We Are Learning*

- Caring, respectful and trusting student-teacher relationships are essential for success of our diverse students
- National experts have offered strategies and credibility to our efforts, but the hard work needs to be done when teams return to their districts
- Parents of color need support in navigating the complex formal and informal systems in our districts and advocating for their children



# *Lessons We Are Learning*

- Teacher engagement in diversifying instructional and assessment strategies is critical to success of diverse students
- “It Takes Village”- Family and community involvement and engagement in providing support to their children is essential- we need more district models that are evidencing success
- There are many promising programs and interventions within our Consortium districts and beyond that need to be shared



# **Contact**

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