

Minutes of the Achievement Gap Task Force
June 11, 2008

Middle School updates:

Steve Flynn (Clarke)

Plan to shift block schedule to 33 blocks. Available studies will drop from 59 to 30. More electives will be offered based on enrollment numbers

Tues and Thurs will see 9 minutes added to each block – time for interventions

Team time on Thursdays will be streamlined in

Staff: Team meeting time and content meeting time shifted creating option for 1 additional meeting time for data collection and assessment

On team teachers have 1 duty plus 3 blocks for team meeting/content

Available sub every day for the entire year – **recommended?** Yes

15 teachers worked this year in Learning Center; feedback positive

Steve will provide data on number of students served and improvement experienced at forthcoming meeting

Abbi Maxton(Diamond)

Direct intervention with 12 students: 4 in 6th and 8 in 7th

Not children currently receiving support; mixed Boston/Lexington kids

The students met with (12) teachers and honed in on specific objective based on child's MCAS results. Pre-test MCAS/ post test based on chosen interest by kids/teachers

Evaluation to come

Middle schools: plan 3 days of Professional Development focus on common assessment

LEF grant: to support development and training in common assessment in elementary schools. All elementary teachers will be introduced to common assessment during 3 professional development days

Conferences and initiatives update:

June 16/17 conference *Achievement Gap Initiative* at Harvard with Ron Ferguson

(www.agi.harvard.edu) Attendees include: Steve Flynn, Carole Pilarski, Cheryl Prescott-Walden, Lynne Sarasin, Vito LaMura, Paul Ash, Phyllis Neufeld

Met with Dr. Ferguson a couple of weeks ago- were asked to present Lex. efforts and plans. Brookline, MA , and Montgomery County, MD, among others will be at the conference to share plans and best practices as well.

Ron Ferguson has taken this on as research study. Which districts are serious about this work? Can we work together? What haven't we thought of? He's trying to capture efforts and habits of the high performing districts.

Bill Cole and Jen Hanson - *MSAN: Minority Student Achievement Network*
(www.msanetwork.org).

Long term goal to erase achievement gap. In 2000, survey 40,000 students, Ron Ferguson assessed the data that led to the Tripod Project

Overwhelmingly high achieving districts but many other factors are different

- 1) Summer programs are a critical component. Economically advantaged students advanced over the summer, economically challenged students stayed the same or declined over the summer.
- 2) *Relationships* leg of the tripod is hugely important. No one every complains about a teacher building relationships

What about setting up mentoring program or bringing in inspirational speakers? See Blue Ribbon program in Chapel Hill; Shaker Heights program; ie: African American scholars program. Shatter the myths
Provide tutoring for kids falling behind; mentoring is key for kids in the middle.

AYD program in Texas a great summer program-14 days for incoming 9th graders in math. Find and recruit kids that are comfortable and familiar with subject to create student allies.

[Bill will send information to Vito and Paul](#). The summer programs are perfect grant targets.

Tripod project (www.tripodproject.org) has good surveys
45 minutes for completion by students and teachers, fully confidential. All information reported back directly to classroom Tripod is: Content, Pedagogy, relationships
How do we measure engagement: student, classroom, school?
Each category has 5 levels so a school can really zero in on the area that's lacking
Dr. Ferguson will make a presentation to the faculty before the survey ever happens, expensive but worthwhile. This gets at the input side that is largely anecdotal.
[P.A. will send power point to the committee](#)

Grant writing update:

School Committee approved Robert J Miller grant writers (great track record) \$29,000 fee to bring in 3-5X that much money in grants
We need more \$ for professional development; Paul Ash sent details and RJM responded with some questions and details that could improve our track record in receiving grants.
They also help manage grants received.
Can AGTF produce something that can be published, replicated, and used by other districts?

Bowman:

Mary Anton plugged into Tufts U research on literacy and literacy issues.
They have developed teaching instruments RAVO helps students learn to read – like Orton Gillingham. Currently being used at Carroll School. 1 first grade class at Bowman is being piloted and they have agreed to test other kids in particular for a vocabulary gap.
June 18: date to receive report on results of testing on 6 students. They will provide free tutoring on the reading issues identified.
Estabrook used RAVO but found that it wasn't really effective for small subgroup of children. They are currently revising because they can see ways to make this effective.
Analyzed data and identified a small critical piece that can be supported through tutoring (4 kids at Bowman, 2 at Estabrook) Data shows phonemic awareness is an issue as kids progress. Sharon FitzGerald notes importance of vocabulary piece to progress. Testing has been completed so the intervention will begin immediately. 35 people have already been trained.

Barbara Nobles is currently calling parents for permission to have their kids tutored for 90 minutes 2 days per week. Parents will receive individual assessments. Want parents to commit to 12 weeks.

Stephanie will send details after the 18th.

Edie Lipinski reports on digitally recorded books, many titles, one book per device. She's creating specific proposal containing why, what for, how much and benefit. There is so much positive data about the benefits of hearing books read aloud. Will develop method for understanding and interacting with students about what they are reading. P.A. needs the proposal NOW.

Stephanie Grimaldi reports on many overlapping initiatives within the system competing for time and attention , and often uncoordinated!

An issue that has come up several times in the course of committee work is the lack of communication and overlap of initiatives in this busy school system. Stephanie and Elaine have attempted to map all the things that are going on for Elementary teachers.

Notes:

Many groups are working independently to reach students and close AG

There is some attempt at coordination through the LLC

District wide: no formalized sharing of information.

Many teachers are being asked to multi-committee and it can be overwhelming

Recommendations: Coordinate and Inform!

1. Elementary Curriculum Council houses METCO, SPED, READING, SCIENCE, FINE ARTS, PRINCIPALS –standing agenda item to emphasize connections and how it is all working
2. Need one person to say how all these things connect and keep the connections tight.
3. Collect and coordinate data at end of year
4. Superintendent's bulletin: ongoing section with committee updates so people can see the connections.
5. Someone from each group needs to be tasked with identifying where and why they see the connections to other groups
6. Where can efforts be consolidated or deleted? Some of the committees are legally mandated.

Conversation about role/burden/responsibility of teachers and administrators ensued

Teachers:

Teachers are reporting that so much is flying at us from all these different committees. Recommendations to teachers are non-stop. Teachers wonder, What do I do? How do I reach each particular child? We have 22 kids at different levels in a wide range of subjects. They need another body, another hour at least to support all this. Staff members are consistently asked to do more without anything being taken away.

We need to better define priorities and make sure recommendations are achievable.

The confidence piece is very important. Build teacher confidence in the face of competing demands. Support veterans as well as new teachers. How do we build the capacity to reach our goals?

Let teachers know this is the messy piece of change and we will support them in putting it back together better.

Vito LaMura: Need deep comprehensive focus on fewer goals to be successful

Part of the confidence will be built by the administrators/ system understanding the coordination and being able to convey that to the teachers

Wider community:

Market the AG carefully and don't tie every initiative to it.

Present this effort as effort to provide opportunity for high achievement for all

Paul Ash: Excellence and Equity (Ron Ferguson) is what we are striving for. Those words will help take the push back away from AG efforts

How are the changes and efforts being conveyed to parents? How do the parents support these changes?

Parents were called directly in these small groups. But how do we use parents as a resource on a larger scale? Generating broad parent involvement is critical to success.

Martha Batten: Agree that parent involvement is critical, but even if there is no parent buy-in the school system has to move forward. Estabrook has scheduled an intervention period for next year. This will be implemented slowly in the coming year. Can't do it in the k-2 schedule, so it will be done in the older grades. Child by child decisions being made.

Stephanie Grimaldi: Focus of reading dept. meetings will be to increase and empower communication from school to home. Communication is primarily one way and needs to be two-way.

William Huff: Let's look at mindset on how we communicate. Talking at you needs to shift to talk with us.

Bill Cole: In a district like ours its clear that it's not, "not enough programs" Be more deliberate about what are we already doing. What needs improvement? , What needs to be eliminated? We can artfully manage ideas by inclusion, not by constant creation of brand new initiatives.

Administrators need to stay with the core. Go deeper not wider.

Jennifer Hanson: 2nd all things Bill says. Simplify. Assume kids want to achieve. Motivation is increased by connections

Rachel Cortez: *Home school communication*

Barbara Nobles did attend Math/Literacy night in Boston and Boston parents do receive the material in backpacks.

Any planned nights for parents need to be valuable, accessible and well communicated

Conversation ensued: Engagement how does it happen?

New families- how are they communicated with? If there is a new family packet what is in that packet?

Be careful that the communication doesn't get too blobby. Can we refine communication to one or two critical overviews per week? Update technology!

Worrying about the impact of "measuring" on relationships. Don't lose track of the relationships just because they cannot be measured

How often do Boston parents meet? Once a month. How are these meetings used and does this task force need to be active at these meetings?

Cheryl Prescott-Walden brings information from the system to keep Boston parents up to date

Use meeting for seminars, guidance, discipline, summer resources

To do list: recommend a communication sub-committee to communicate internally and externally throughout the year what is going on with AGTF in a way that is concise and interesting, regular and predictable.

Report back on suggested use of subs for elementary schools to allow staff to gather to address achievement: difficult to find a day because it is so late in the year. Harrington found one and the "A (achievement) Team" met for the whole day with a variety of staff members. Identified 3 steps they could take with current resources.

1. Conference room will be the dedicated METCO office – home for students and staff

2. Raising awareness and sensitivity among staff – sharing common language

Some new staff do not know what the METCO program is

Can METCO program be highlighted and defined at new teacher orientation?

Develop home-school relationship

Ask teachers to contact parents within first two weeks of the year with a hello and a positive comment about student. Ease conversation with parents who feel uncomfortable reaching out to teacher or principal.

3. Improve or extend conference time

A Team will meet on a regular basis. **Edie will send the report** and notes we should all see video "Far from Home"

Action Plan input:

Steve and Vito will "flesh out" the action plan over the next few weeks

Note: Fields are dark

Immediate suggestions:

- Add communication action
- Data teams instead of each school doing this on their own, can we create a system wide team or dedicated ½ time person to coordinate?
- Committee members tasked with sending any comments on Action Plan in the next two weeks. Send it to Vito and Steve who will work with Lynne and Paul

Next steps:

This group will continue to operate: Paul Ash feels we are central to staying focused. What are our high leverage ideas? And who/how will we communicate what and why priorities are chosen.

Remember tremendous competition for time and energy. We need to make sure we are focused and successful over the next 3 years. Willingness to remove plans/procedures that are not working.

Marha Batten: really important for the administration to stay focused on the big picture and communicate that to the staff. Coordination and integration needs to be constantly communicated to everyone

Overarching theme: create systems that are coherent

Need to develop effective subcommittees this will begin in the fall so work can actually be done. Action plan will lead to sub committees who will accomplish tasks
What sub committees do we need?

Next Agenda

Review action plan

Create and people sub committees

Next meeting date for fall: September 16 9-11 Clarke Middle School