

Closing the Achievement Gap in East Lansing Public Schools

An 18-month Project Review

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The Achievement Gap Project

► 4-year initiative (2008-2012)

► Guiding Questions

1. What factors (home, school, self, and peer) inform the academic performance of African American students in East Lansing Public Schools?
2. What instructional strategies are most effective for African American students in the district?
3. What school-level and classroom-level interventions can be implemented to meet the academic and social needs of African American students?



Research Methodology

■ Data Collection – Years 1 & 2 (2008-2010)

■ Qualitative

- Classroom observations
- Administrator Interviews
- Parent Focus Groups
- School building staff meetings
- Student Focus Groups and Individual Interviews (in-progress)

■ Quantitative

- Student Achievement Data
- Educator and Counselor/Social Worker Surveys (in-progress)
- Professional Development Meeting Evaluations
- Student Survey (in-progress)



What is Qualitative Research?

Qualitative research refers to research about persons' lives, lived experiences, behaviors, emotions, and feelings as well as about organizational functioning, social movement, cultural phenomena, and interactions between persons and groups. (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)



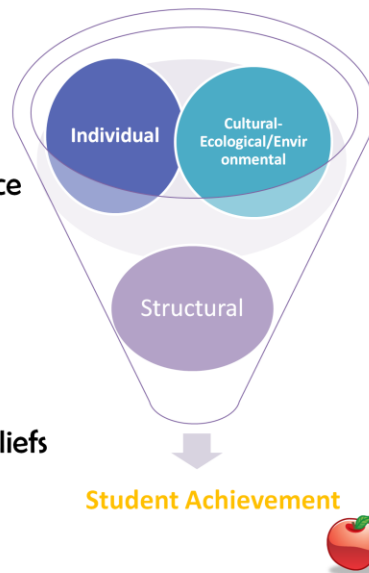
What is Quantitative Research?

Quantitative research is 'Explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics).' (Muijs, 2004)



Factors that Inform African American Student Achievement Outcomes

- **Structural Factors**
 - School culture/climate
 - Institutional Policies
 - Teacher Pedagogy and Practice
- **Cultural-Ecological**
 - Social Identities
 - Peer Groups
 - Home Environment
- **Individual**
 - Achievement attitudes and beliefs
 - Behavioral Choices



Structural

- The culture and climate of a school building can affect student achievement – whether students feel part of a school community and what measures are in place to promote those positive feelings
- Do institutional policies shape achievement outcomes in helpful or harmful ways? (e.g., tracking/ability grouping, extended learning time, time-on-task in the classroom, etc.)

Individual

- Understanding students' behavioral choices in school is largely informed by the school culture, peers, and out-of-school factors that are often not considered.

The Achievement Gap is . . .

- Comprised of many gaps. It's:
 - A racial gap
 - A socioeconomic gap
 - A social class gap
 - A gender gap
 - A skills gap
 - An opportunity/access gap
 - A funding/resource gap
 - A teacher quality gap
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The different ways in which the gap can be defined speak to theories about what contributes to the gap.

Students of color often attend under-funded urban schools.

Students of color take fewer AP and honors courses.

Males of color underachieve at higher rates than females of color

Students of color are overrepresented in special education

Students of color have less qualified teachers

Students of color attend schools with fewer resources

Classroom Observations

- 60 classrooms have been observed
- A total of 37 teachers have been observed

School	# of Consent Forms
Donley Elementary	9
Glencairn Elementary	11
Marble Elementary	6
Pinecrest Elementary*	11
Red Cedar Elementary	11
Whitehills Elementary	12
MacDonald Middle School*	19
East Lansing High School*	14

*Note: Total count includes social workers and counselors. All principals are included in counts.



Some teachers were observed more than once. The data collected from observations includes informal feedback/comments from building administrators and teachers/support staff.

Classroom Observations

- Strengths

1. Effective use of technology in the classroom
2. Praising students for work ethic and skill mastery

- Challenges

1. Disruptive nature of student autonomy
2. Lack of clear behavior/classroom management systems
3. Ignoring African American students, particularly males



1. Use of technology appears to yield positive student engagement and participation from most students in many classrooms.
2. This was more evident with all students at the lower grades. At the high school, we observed fewer instances where students of color were actively called upon and praised for answers and student work

Administrator Interviews

- 9 administrators interviewed
- Themes
 1. What contributes to the achievement gap in ELPS?
 2. Teachers' Perceptions of the Gap
 3. Strategies for closing the Gap?



Contributions to Achievement Gap

- Teacher Pedagogy and Practice
 - Harmful Differential Treatment
 - Teachers' Lowered Expectations
- The Access Gap
- Parent Engagement
- District/School Culture and Climate
 - Curricular Differences for "Late Arrivals"
 - Lack of Teachers of Color in classrooms



Teachers' Pedagogy and Practice

Harmful Differential Treatment

I think teachers want to think that they're not treating kids differently, but I think it's sort of been built in, and if you don't put it out there and recognize it then it's easy to ignore.

(Female administrator, 11/26/08)



Teachers' Pedagogy and Practice

Lowered Expectations

I think also that you are going to get what you expect, and if you expect less you are probably going to end up getting less. If less has been expected of them [Black students] continually, by the time they get to the middle school it is almost too late to make a change. (Female Administrator, 11/18/08)



Teachers' Pedagogy and Practice

Lowered Expectations

I think it also has to do with our expecting the kids to come with certain skills. I mean we are resting on our laurels. Now they don't come with those skills. We have to teach them how to write a paragraph. You have to teach them vocabulary now. . . . Teachers are not holding kids to the fire and they are just accepting anything. Not having standards and saying, "I expect you to write in cursive, and I expect you to do do do do do . . . And you rise to the standard." We don't change our standards to say this is okay and this is the exception. Watering things down. Instead, we should say, "You can do it. You may not be the best the first time out, but you can do it." (Female Administrator, 11/18/08)



Related to the skills gap. Hold high expectations

The Access Gap

- Access to early learning opportunities
- Access to building cultural capital



Access Gap: Early Learning Opportunities

It is very clear to me that we can't do it all. I don't think we do really well with what we are supposed to do. If it is to educate kids, then that narrows the repertoire of things that you are going to be able to do. But, it really undergirds what a youngster brings to the table. When you have not had an opportunity to go to a great day care program, and you haven't had that great start - how do you level that playing field when you have both parents working three or four jobs, and they are not here? It is the cycle of poverty. (Male administrator, 12/3/08)



Parent Engagement

My sense sometimes from the African American families is that they come in with a little bit of a chip. You know, you are wronging my kid. They will quickly go to a place that is defensive as opposed to being more supportive about problem solving. Some of the same experiences have also happened with some White families. I think it is hard for the kids when the parents are beating up the school, sometimes legitimately, and you are not holding your kid accountable. (Male Administrator, 12/3/08)



District/School Culture and Climate

Curricular Differences for “Late Arrivals”

I’ve even had parents that work in the other neighboring districts saying to me, you know, a student’s that in 11th grade in East Lansing is like a 9th grader in this other district. . . .

Students coming in [to the district] later in life as opposed to earlier on, **being acclimated to the school system, is part.** (Male Administrator, 11/20/08)



District/School Culture and Climate

Lack of Teachers of Color in Classrooms

I also believe that students need to feel comfortable in school and they need to see their culture in front of them. I think that's extremely important because they need to be able to talk and feel comfortable enough to talk to individuals. And I'm not saying that people in this district are not easy to talk to, but if there is a certain comfort zone . . . When you're comfortable, you learn, you know the avenue is open to learn. (Male Administrator, 11/20/08)



Parent Informational Meetings and Focus Groups

- February 2009: 2 informational meetings held
- April 2009: 2 focus groups held
- Parent Demographics for Meetings (n=23)
 - Single mothers and husband/wife pairs
 - Parents of student-athletes and participants in other extracurricular activities (e.g., NHS, Band)
 - Out-of-District and In-District Resident parents
 - Graduate students and career professionals
 - African American and White parents
 - Active in Black Parent Union and Parent Councils



7 parents attended the informational meetings
5 for 1 focus group; 13 for another focus group

Parent Focus Groups: Praise for ELPS

My daughter started in 7th grade middle school at MacDonald Middle School, and what I like is the fact that she's been able to participate in a lot of in-class activities as well as extracurricular. And we had a lot of good teacher support. She's now in the 10th grade in high school . . . (African American father, 4/22/09)



Parent Focus Groups: Challenges

1. Parents' sense of cultural isolation and exclusion for themselves and their children stemming from in-school and out-of-school factors related to race and social class
2. Perceptions of teachers having lowered academic expectations for African American students
3. Lack of teacher racial/ethnic diversity in the schools
4. Negative labeling of Black male students
5. Teachers' lack of interest in teaching to various learning styles



1. Refers to black students being “the only one” in some of their classes when there might be enough of them to have multiple black students in the same class
 1. Refers to lack of cultural group integration into the curriculum
 2. Parents find it difficult to access certain social networks among the broader parent community and often felt excluded.

Isolation of African American Students

. . . My daughter's school, they really don't care. Um, she brought an issue to me where she said **she didn't like being the only brown girl in her classroom**. In kindergarten, there was a bunch of them in her class – first grade they're all separated. And I spoke to my neighbor, she has a first grader as well, and she was like, he [her son] told me the same thing. **He doesn't like being the only brown boy**. And I think **they purposely did it**, if you ask me, because it was just shocking to me that **none of them [Black students] were in the same class**. It's like four different classrooms, there's a handful of [Black students], and you know, **that makes them uncomfortable**. (African American mother, 4/22/09)



Additionally this isolation of Black students was perceived by parents to be evident in the lack of attention to Black culture in the curriculum.

Parent Exclusion

It's [District Parent Council] comprised of mostly White mothers who don't have to work. And they have the meetings at 9:30 in the morning. What about working parents? They can't participate. It's almost as if it's meant to exclude us (African American father, 4/23/09)



Teachers' Lowered Expectations

From my standpoint, I would rather him [the teacher] emphasize **do it right the first time** and not have that safety net there . . . I don't know that I think it's necessarily conscious, but I think it's not – **I don't think that his expectations for my child are as high as mine are** (African American mother, 4/23/09)



Almost every parent in both focus groups commented on teachers' lowered expectations for African American children in the district. They didn't like the idea that their children would be giving multiple chances to re-do assignments. Hold the bar high the first time and expect that students can reach that bar and that there are consequences when you don't.

Teachers' Lowered Expectations

My daughter, she's in the ninth grade and she's in a geometry class, and the teacher told her after she had been in there probably about a month or so, "oh I didn't know you were in the ninth grade." As if she didn't expect her to be in that class, because in order to be in geometry you had to have the accelerated math in middle school . . . "what is she saying, that I'm a dummy or something? Or I'm supposed to be dumb or something that I couldn't be in this class?" . . . She didn't expect [my daughter] to be in that class and my daughter took it as maybe because I'm black or something, you know? May that's not what the teacher meant, but that's the way she took it. Cause she told her that – the teacher told her well, we don't get too many ninth graders in geometry. So it was kind of an insult to her, to my daughter. (African American mother, 4/23/09)



Negative Labeling of Black Males

Black boys as “troublemakers”

And my son didn't tell me until after he graduated. But he said when he would start a new school year, like the teacher would say, “well I heard about you, and you're not gonna do this in my class.” So he said, “well, if they say that to me in the beginning, [I'm] automatically going to act up the whole school year just because you said that, you know?” (African American mother, 4/22/09)



One mother expressed that in a certain school building, “there were some kids who were identified as troublemakers, and once they got identified as troublemakers, that followed them. That was our experience.” (4/23/09)

Disinterest in Teaching to Diverse Learners

. . . It seems like when, um, issues come up, like class changes or different learning styles and you try to engage the administration and the teaching staff to sit down and talk about how some of those things could be remedied, things don't go very smooth. It's like the school wants to just continue forward with its plan and not be responsive to some of the issues that a family or child is experiencing . . . It's really been us being proactive to push the issue through rather than, I think, the school being interested in trying to deal with those issues. (African American father, 4/23/09)



ELPS Faculty Demographics by Race/Ethnicity

	TEACHERS		GUID. COUNS/SOC.WK		FACULTY TECH	Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	N	%
White	205	96	6	75	1	212	95
Black	8	4	1	13	0	9	4
Hispanic	1	0	1	13	0	2	1
Total	214		8		1	223	

Teacher Gender: 74% female; 26% male

Counselor/Social Worker Gender: 88% female; 13% male

Faculty Top 3 Cities of Residence: 34% East Lansing; 15% Lansing;
12% Okemos

ELPS Faculty Race/Ethnicity by Building

	Workplace Data Services		Donley		ELHS		Glencairn		MacDonald		Marble		Pinecrest		Red Cedar		Whitehills		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
White	1	100	23	100	64	93	12	100	33	92	23	100	24	96	18	95	14	93	212	
Black	0		0		3	4	0		3	8	0		1	4	1	5	1	7	9	
Hispanic	0		0		2	3	0		0		0		0		0		0		2	
Total	1		23		1		12		36		23		25		19		15		223	

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- Three buildings have no faculty of color: Donley, Glencairn, and Marble. Marble does have an African American principal.
- The average number of years employed in the district for faculty is 15.5.

ELPS Student Demographics by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Black/African American	595	17.5
Asian American	331	9.7
Native American/Alaska Native	15	.4
Hispanic/Latino	172	5.1
Pacific Islander	5	.1
White/Caucasian	2004	58.9
Multiracial	283	8.3
Total	3405	100.0



The district is approximately 41% students of color. African American students represent the largest group of students of color at 17.5%, followed by Asian Americans at 9.7%.

ELPS Student Demographics by Residence and Lunch Status

		F/R Lunch	Paying Lunch	Total
Schools of Choice	N	226	515	741
	% within Resident/SOC	30.5	69.5	100.0
	% within Lunch status	21.4	22.0	21.8
	% of Total	6.7	15.2	21.8
East Lansing Resident	N	832	1825	2657
	% within Resident/SOC	31.3	68.7	100.0
	% within Lunch status	78.6	78.0	78.2
	% of Total	24.5	53.7	78.2
Total	N	1058	2340	3398
	% within Resident/SOC	31.1	68.9	100.0

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Schools of Choice Demographics

There are 741 (21.8%) students in the district who are schools of choice students. Of these, 30.5% report F/R lunch status.

1. Of all the students on F/R lunch 21.4% are SOC. Thus, most of the students in the district who are on F/R lunch are in-district residents.
2. Of all the students in the district, 6.7% are SOC students who are also on F/R lunch.

In-District Residents

78.2% of ELPS students are in-district residents. Of these, 31.3% report F/R lunch status.

1. Of all the students on F/R lunch, 78.6% are in-district residents.
2. Of all the students in the district, 24.5% are in-district residents who are also on F/R lunch.

Summary

Less than 1/3 (31.1%) of students in the district report F/R lunch status. Less than ¼ of students in the district are schools of choice students. Most of the F/R lunch student population in the district is in-district residents.

ELPS Schools of Choice Students by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	N	% Within Schools of Choice	% Within Student Ethnicity
Black/African American	162	21.9	27.3
Asian American	34	4.6	10.3
Hispanic/Latino	52	7.0	30.2
Multiracial	85	11.5	30.0
Native American/Alaska Native	7	.9	46.7
Pacific Islander	0	.0	.0
White/Caucasian	401	54.1	20.1

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% Within Schools of Choice

When we break down the schools of choice population by race/ethnicity, we see that 54.1% are White, followed by 21.9% who are African American. The majority of SOC students are White. 45.9% of SOC students are students of color. Based on the previous slide, we know that only 30.5% of the schools of choice population report F/R lunch status. Thus, nearly 70% of the SOC population do not report being economically disadvantaged. This might help dispel stereotypes and beliefs about this student population as being harmful to the district's overall academic performance.

% Within Student Ethnicity

1. 27.3% of African American students in the district are schools of choice students. Thus most African American students are in-district residents.

ELPS Free/Reduced Lunch Student Population by Race/Ethnicity

31.1% (n=1,058) of students in ELPS are on free/reduced lunch

Race/Ethnicity	N	% Within F/R Lunch Status	% Within Student Ethnicity
African American	321	30.3	54.0
Asian American	154	14.6	46.5
Native American/Alaska Native	10	0.9	66.7
Hispanic/Latino	85	8.0	49.4
Asian Pacific Islander	1	0.1	20.0
White/Caucasian	367	34.7	18.4
Multiracial	120	11.3	42.4



When we break down the F/R lunch population by race/ethnicity, we see that White students make up the largest percentage of the F/R lunch population (34.7%), followed by African American students (30.3%). However, 65.3% of the F/R student population is students of color. This has implications for examining the intersection of race and socioeconomic status (SES) and the effect of academic performance.

% Within Student Ethnicity

Of the African American student population in the district, 54% are on F/R lunch. If you look at the table, only 18.4% of the White student population are on F/R lunch. Yet, for every non-White group (except Asian Pacific Islanders with an 'n' of 1), nearly half or over half of the racial minority populations are on F/R lunch. Again, this has implications for examining whether or not being economically disadvantaged and a student of color in this district has any effect on academic performance.

Examining GPAs and MEAP Trends



Mean GPA: SES and Race

Lunch Status*	Mean GPA	Std. Error
Paying	3.07	.05
Free & Reduced Lunch	2.43	.05
Ethnicity*		
Black/African American	2.44	.05
Asian American/Pacific Islander	3.32	.09
White/Caucasian	2.82	.04
Other (Hispanic, Native American, Multiracial)	2.43	.08

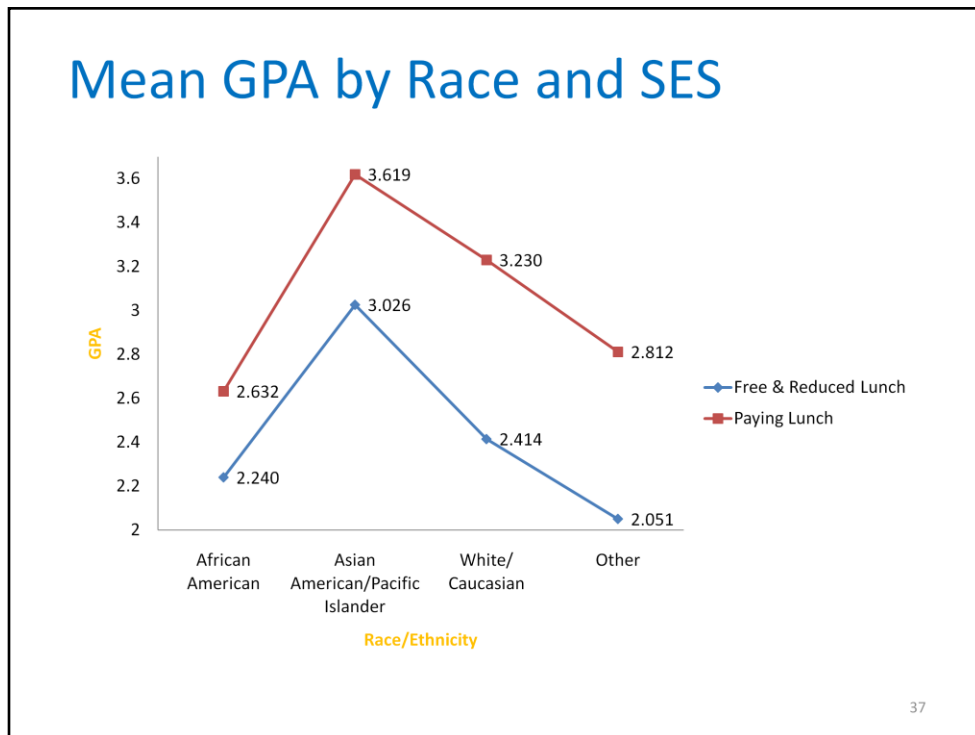
*p<0.001



From Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) results, significant mean differences in GPA by SES and race are evident.

When we control for race/when we hold race constant, higher SES students have a higher mean GPA than lower SES students; a mean difference of 0.64 points. When we control for SES or hold it constant, Asian American/Pacific Islanders have higher mean GPAs than all the other students, (M=3.32) followed by White students (M=2.82) , whose mean GPA is significantly higher than those of African American (M=2.44) and 'Other' (M=2.43) students of color

The Other category is a combination of Hispanic, Native American, and Multiracial students because their 'n's were so small for statistical analyses.



In addition to SES and race main effects on performance, there were significant interaction effects, $F(1,1091)=3.39$, $p<0.05$. Although high SES students had better mean GPAs than low SES students, differences in performance were greatest for White (0.82) and Other (0.76) students. Even so, the mean GPA of African American students is lower relative to all the other racial groups – except for Other low SES . Even if you are a non-economically disadvantaged African American student in this district, you are more likely to have a lower GPA than other non-economically disadvantaged students. Consistently, Asian American/Pacific Islander students had the highest mean GPA, regardless of their SES status.

Implications for African American students

If you are an African American student in this district, you are more likely to have a lower GPA than your peers. If you are Black and low-income this is also true.

If you are a student of color (except Asian American/Pacific Islander) and you are low-income, you are also more likely to have a lower GPA than your peers.

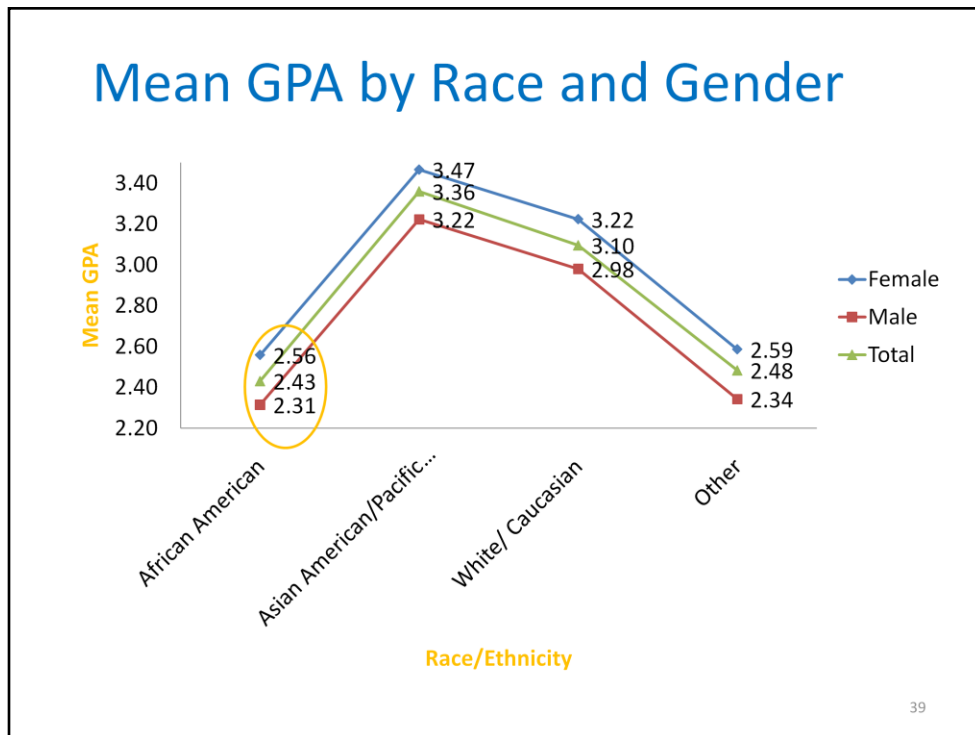
Mean GPA by Race and SES



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This table just shows a different way of looking at the same information from the previous table. Students of color (except Asian American/Pacific Islander) who are low-income have the lowest GPAs in the district. For African Americans who are not economically disadvantaged, their GPAs are lowest relative to their non-economically disadvantaged peers.

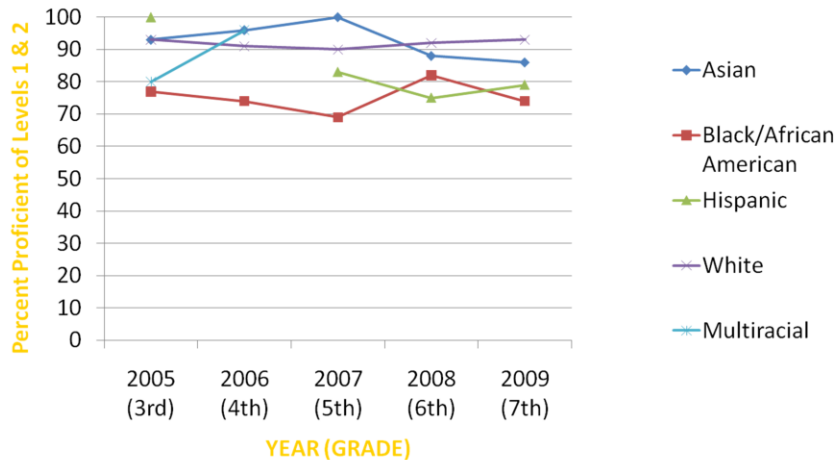
A student who is low-income AND a person of color is more likely to have a lower GPA in this district. The interaction of race and SES has a statistically significant negative effect of low-income students of color.



When performance is modeled by gender and race, there are significant mean differences by race ($F(3,1098)=51.14$, $p<0.001$) and by gender, $F(1,1098)=22.59$, $p<0.001$.

Overall, the mean GPA for girls ($M=2.96$) in the district is higher than that of boys ($M=2.72$). Although the difference is not big (0.24), it is significant. Consistently, female students outperform male students at the high school in ELPS, even when performance is broken down by race. The lowest performing group is African American males, followed by 'Other' males and African American females. This indicates that by race African American students are performing lower than many other students at the high school. Specifically African American males are the lowest performing students at ELHS.

District MEAP Reading for 2005 Grade 3 Cohort



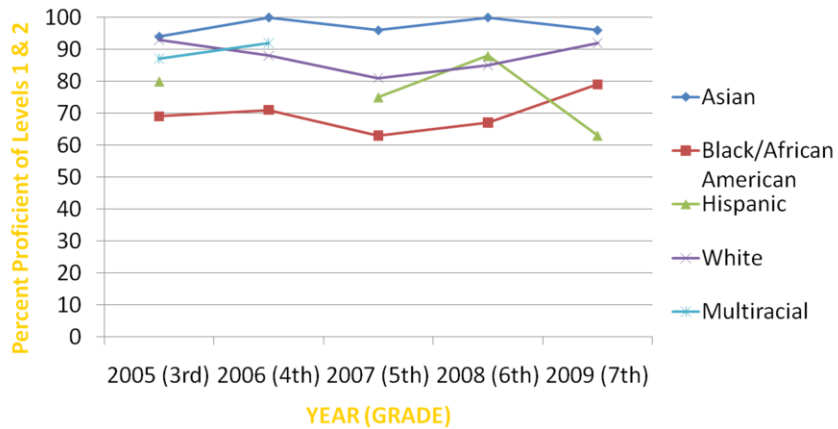
If you examine the trend lines between black and white students, we see that in 6th grade, the gap narrowed. The gap was largest in 5th grade. Something to note is that when Black students transitioned from their K-4 building to their 5/6 building and from their 5/6 building to the middle school, reading performance declined. This was also true for Asian students in the transition to the middle school. The performance of White students also declined slightly when transitioning to the 5/6 buildings. These data indicate that the district might need to examine transitions and how to better support students.

District MEAP Reading for 2005 Grade 5 Cohort



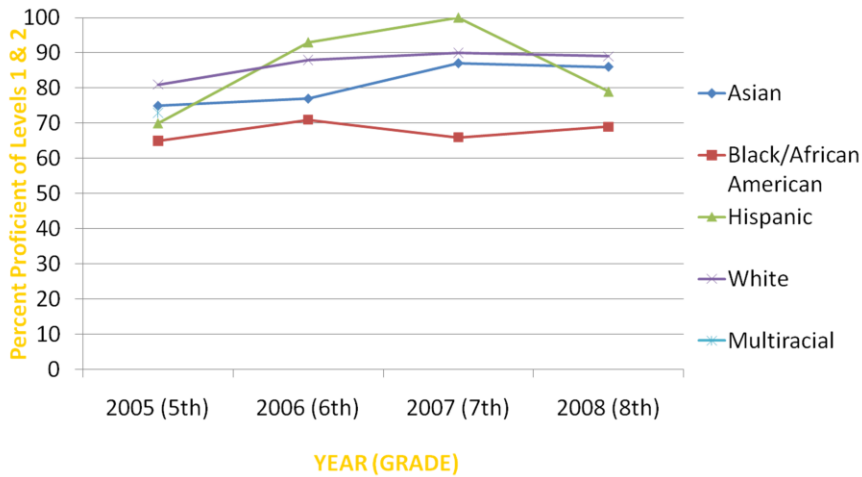
While the reading performance for Black, Asian, and White students decreased when transitioning to the middle school, the decline was greatest for African American students.

District MEAP Math for 2005 Grade 3 Cohort



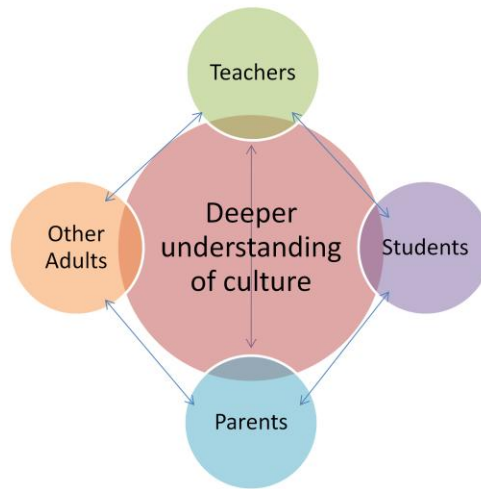
Note the decline in math performance for African American, White, and Asian students when transitioning from a K-4 building to a 5/6 building. However, for African American and White students, their math performance did not decrease when transitioning to the middle school in 2009.

District MEAP Math for 2005 Grade 5 Cohort



Over a four-year period, in this cohort African American students had the lowest levels of proficiency. African American students are the only group to decrease in the percent proficiency when moving from 6th to 7th grade. This happens to be a building transition from one of the 5-6 buildings to the middle school. Once Black students are at the middle school for one year, their math MEAP achievement rises from the year before.

Culture and Relationship-building



Quality instruction and strong, healthy relationships

Recommendations

1. Establish an Achievement Gap Task Force
2. Develop and implement a gap-closing action plan
3. Establish clear methods for recruiting and retaining faculty and staff of color
4. Define a professional development agenda that ties building staffs' cultural competency with existing district initiatives
5. Increase and formalize accountability measures throughout the district
6. Develop a clearinghouse of resources on cultural relevance and cultural competence and inclusivity (e.g., website, wikispace)
7. Establish regular community dialogues about the achievement gap
8. Develop programming specific to meeting the needs of African American students, particularly Black males
9. Examine building transitions to enhance student academic performance (e.g., grades 4 to 5; grades 6 to 7; grades 8 to 9)
10. Develop an action plan – through the use of building Parent Councils and EL District Parent Council – to increase engagement and participation of a wider group of parents in the schooling process



Define a professional development agenda that ties building staffs' cultural competency with existing district initiatives

- Enhance achievement by understanding the impact of race, class and culture on teaching and learning
- Create results-oriented building staff development plans to accomplish school improvement goals
- Establish Teacher Study Groups dedicated to understanding cultural awareness and growing Teacher Leaders within the district



Increase and formalize accountability measures throughout the district

- Develop achievement goals based on disaggregated data
 - Devise instructional plans to meet these goals in conjunction with school improvement plans and district accountability goals



Schools should devise instructional plans to meet the achievement goals in conjunction with their school improvement plans and district accountability goals (as outlined in the District Strategic Plan).

Develop sustainable transition programs

- Strengthen the transition process from 4th to 5th, 6th to 7th, and 8th to 9th
 - Standardized test score data indicate that student transitions between buildings might have an effect on academic performance
 - Students need time to adjust to new building culture, people and routines

