

# ACADEMIC SUCCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS: CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Friday, October 16, 2009

## Attendees:

**Brad Brown  
Don Lloyd  
Hannah Pratt  
Joanne Lawson  
Kate Frazier  
Kelli Hoekstra  
Kevin Ikeda  
Krestin Bahr  
Marilyn Crabtree  
Pat Cummings  
Richard Watson**

**Darrick Hartman  
Kimberly Mueller  
Kelly Wedum  
Teri Wood  
Vickie J. Welch  
Donna Basil  
Barb Randall-Saleh  
Justina Johnson  
Jean Sheckler  
Ana B. McCall  
John Knight**

**Patrick Erwin  
Pete Shoop  
Sharon Hartung  
Minh-Anh Hodge  
Eric Konishi  
Diane Mikhlin  
Toni Pace  
Janet Gates-Cortez  
Cindy Tone Johnson  
Rebecca Rhone  
Miguel Villahermosa  
Karyn Clarke**

## Minutes

Dr. DaVerne Bell began the meeting by welcoming all those present to the Academic Achievement Seminar. She thanked them for their attendance and commitment.

*The following agenda items were addressed:*

- **Opening Remarks**

- School Board President Kim Golding remarked that our students need to be better prepared for the future. The Board is committed to this effort and will be expecting regular updates from this committee. The Superintendent and the Deputy Superintendent will be held accountable and the achievement gap will be expected to close. The process must be a transparent one.
- Superintendent Arthur Jarvis reminded the group that the passion for this work is in the room. Early on, Dr. Thelma Jackson was asked to determine what needs to be done in the state of Washington and in particular in the city of Tacoma. Dr. Jackson has readily accepted the challenge of the work. She has talked to many and presented a report to the Board. Deputy Superintendent Carla Santorno was brought into the mix, and that's what brought today's group together. Bottom line: We've got work to do. Unless we change the system, the actual work will still be there to do. We have to believe we can do it and we have to be tireless. He will support the committee in any way. This is exciting work but we have to recognize that people are discouraged and skeptical. Dr. Jarvis noted that he believes the committee can succeed
- Deputy Superintendent Carla Santorno acknowledged that a lot of work has been done prior to this. We need to take the information that has been gathered prior to this and implement it! There is a real need to focus on the urgency of this. We don't have any more time – we need to make a

difference right now. There is no magic out there and we need to focus on action, not plans. We now have a Board that is demanding measurable benchmarks to monitor our progress and achievement and this committee will be made accountable. There are urban schools across the nation that have made a difference and we need to capitalize on this. What difference has the prior work made? She is optimistic because of the leadership we have to work with. The goal is to get an action agenda formulated after four full days of committee work.

- Dr. Thelma Jackson, Educational Consultant within Washington State, lives in the Lacey area and has observed Tacoma from afar. She emphasized that “readiness to benefit” is critical, i.e., timing is everything. Things are in place now that weren’t there before – things are in alignment now. This was very appealing to Dr. Jackson. She emphasized a systems kind of challenge. Dr. Jackson was on Thurston County’s School Board for 20 years and she recognizes that we are at a critical point in this nation relative to education. She wants Tacoma to be one of those lamplight school districts for the nation. She is enthused by Carla’s urgency – no more talk – it’s time to do. “If our examination and understanding of the root causes of educational inequity are too shallow, our efforts will be inadequate and ineffective” – this is a Learning Community concept. There is no shortage of data. We KNOW what’s going on – now is the time to make the commitment and to follow through. Forces are converging to make sure promises aren’t broken again. *The opportunity for Tacoma*: New day, new leadership, new commitment, new action agenda. The right people are on the bus – let’s make the journey!
- Dr. DaVerne Bell began her work in Tacoma by ascertaining what had been done in the past and by researching how to cohesively bring together the work. We have a cross section of our district in the room because it takes everyone to make our students successful. Dr. Bell had the charge of putting this committee together and she reported that it was hard to exclude those who were truly impassioned. What about student voices? We can’t take kids out of school right now. Perhaps a student summit outside of school hours would work. She summarized the committee’s framework by outlining the **three Ts: Build Trust, be Transparent, have Tenacity about the work.**

- **Who Is In The Room?**

Each person stood and introduced himself/herself and told about his/her background and why he/she wants to serve on this committee. Each person had different reasons for wanting to serve, but the common denominator was **passion for education**. All want to be part of the change in Tacoma. The backgrounds of committee members were varied and diverse, but their love for education was universal.

- **Historical Overview of Past Efforts**

There have been many efforts in the past relative to closing the achievement gap, and we needn't re-invent the wheel. We also need to honor past work. Dr. Bell identified many historical efforts, many of which were displayed on the "Historical Table." *A partial list of these follows:*

- Pat Cummings mentioned Dr. Rudy Crew's Efficacy effort, including whether the elevated scores attained during his tenure were real and/or manufactured.
- Pat Cummings recently interviewed Past Superintendent Sergienko for a review of Tacoma's rich, diverse history, learning that Tacoma was one of the first in the country to implement a voluntary desegregation program. The Magnet program was heavily involved in desegregation as well.
- Minh-Anh Hodge noted that our present Parent Advisory groups were started by Dr. Milligan.
- Dr. Jackson, in beginning her work, tried to develop a historical perspective. Her question: Given all these efforts, etc., going back decades, what has to happen differently this time? Our work cannot end up being just one more report added to the archives. Getting a common understanding of what's gone on before is important. She reiterated that timing is everything – some things were ahead of their time. Academic success for all students is our vision. Given that this district is not where it should be, what has to be done differently? There are structural inequalities in the system and we could spend a lot of time finger-pointing. Actually, no one is to blame and everyone is to blame. There is no silver bullet and no single culprit. We have to move forward; however, we need to look at the past in order to not repeat it.

*At this point, the participants were asked to take a few minutes to read over the "Tacoma Gap History" handout. Comments:*

- What's missing is the lack of a mechanism for measurement relative to implementation.
- Lillian Barna, in 1991, realized there was an over-representation of ESL in the lower SES.
- The Korean Women's Association and the Asian Forum have been very active in working with the district toward achievement.
- Rudy Crew saw the need to have families get more involved – aunts, grandparents, etc.
- Harriet Williams worked tirelessly with our families toward student success.
- It was noted that many of the efforts were not tied to accountability, e.g., white privilege, push-back, etc.
- In 2008 Dr. Jarvis collaborated with the Puyallup Indian Tribe, resulting in a 5-year plan of commitment with our district.

- In defense of Rudy Crew, it was pointed out that Rudy Crew may not have had the support of the community.
- In connection with the past Superintendent’s Commission, the members were not allowed to discuss race. The worry was expressed that we won’t be allowed in this committee to go deep enough. Many are afraid to have that conversation.
- Dr. Shoemake instituted Get Smart Tacoma. This was a one-day summit that helped lay the groundwork for Tacoma 360.
- Many projects occurred in pockets, e.g., the Hilltop schools held events around poverty. The first project to include the whole district was the Efficacy Program.
- Community members here feel accountable to their districts.
- Everything seems to be a response to the mad black community, e.g., Urban League, Black Collective, etc.
- What happened to the relationships with the community and the district? Are we responding to a need or are we responding to our fear of a lawsuit?
- We have a team here that really cares. There are many in the community, etc., who really don’t care. If this is not presented as a systemic issue for all students, the achievement gap will never be solved. As soon as this becomes an all-black issue, it will not succeed. It doesn’t make any sense to close the achievement gap if we remain at a 2.5 GPA. We have to mend bridges in a non-adversarial way. Dr. Bell added that this indeed has to be for all kids. The committee is very aware of this.
- If the implementation for all prior programs was done, this district would be amazing. Historically, we have been reactionary rather than proactive and have picked a solution with no follow-through.
- Dr. Shoemake instituted the Gates Foundation work during his time with TPS.
- The Promotion Policy is part of our history. This occurred under Dr. Shoemake and impacted all students.
- Ethelda Burke should be honored for her work on behalf of student success. She took a very bold step relative to the achievement gap and the synergy of her work made a big impact.

- **Challenges**

Dr. Jackson directed the group on the subject of challenges. What has to be tackled if this in fact is going to be a systems approach? ***“What are the challenges that need to be faced in this District in realizing academic success for all children that is different from what we’ve already done?”*** **Report back:**

- Coordination of interagency and school district systems to share information in order to see the complete profile and barriers that impact the students’ ability to learn. Confidentiality, information sharing.
- Beliefs of teachers/staff that each child “deserves” the same quality education as any other.

- Beliefs of teachers/staff that they have the “power” to directly and significantly impact the students’ achievement/success.
- **Accountability** system that forces the **allocation** of **resources** to be driven in a way that is disconnected from the reality of teaching and learning. (☹️AYP has forced us to look at individual cells/groups of student populations, ☹️The accountability doesn’t connect with the teaching and learning. The way we analyze data, the negative data compounds itself until you have received a “data death sentence”) – Look at how we allocate resources as a district. Give Principals some control over resources in order to meet the needs of the individual buildings/students.
- How do we define ALL?
- How do we legitimately and effectively give a voice to the students/families that are unable, unskilled at advocating for their education?
- Just because you remove a child from their educational facility doesn’t mean you remove them from their education.
- Safety nets in place.
- Allocation of Funds & Services.
  - Meeting specific needs of schools.
  - Lack of capacity schools & community.
  - Personnel (social workers).
  - Tutoring services.
  - Compartmentalized funds.
- Low expectations for student populations; sometimes self-imposed; definitely reinforced in some classrooms.
- Teacher quality/classroom management – disruptions.
- Recruitment & retention of teachers willing to do the work.
- Disconnect between CAB philosophy and reality in schools.
- Making closing the achievement gap important to all stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, community) – modeling success.
- Lack of common language/principles – educating all stakeholders, communicating what makes a difference.
- Lack of accountability.
- Staffing for tutorial (ELO) – Educating for the Whole Child.
- Professional Development for SBI – different instruction – time -- \$ -- Discrete benchmarks throughout the year.
- Community services.
- School Board “on board.”
- Parent education.
- Warm, caring environment (climate).
- District culture – commitment.

- The tracking of highly capable students; identified in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and then receive differentiated education that should be available to all.
- High standards for all.
- Revisit the assumptions we make about the school day, school year, length of time, number of students, teacher day.
- Commitment to change.
- How do we get it?
- How do we see it?
- How do we measure it?
- Authentic self-examination of practices and beliefs about how children learn.
- What do we do with people who don't want to change?
- Community satisfaction with the way things are.
- Recruitment.
- Development of cultural competence – students too!
- A system that includes students, parents, guardians, community, teachers that “conspire” together to create, recreate, etc., the optimal learning environment.
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- Cutbacks in family-community partnerships (1½ people currently).
- Recruitment of highly qualified staff in high- needs schools.
- Hiring practices/policies – transparency. How are teachers/leaders chosen? Union/contractual concerns.
- Early education/parenting.
- Parents feel intimidated by system.
- Adjust school year.
- Mode of instructional best practices – delivery needs to meet child's needs, e.g., reverse learning, application, experience.
- Communication/transition from P-3, elementary-middle-high to establish successful strategies to increase academic/social successes.
- Every child and family needs an advocate to support school commitment.
- Financial resources – commitment for full implementation of programs.
- Adversarial relationship between community and school.
- Educate all personnel in TPS about cultural competency.
- Instruction – inclusive of ALL situational/learning styles – teacher/student relationships.
- Academic success.
- Funding.
- Personnel.
  - Staffing – quality.
  - Recruit best people.

- Grow its own.
- Data-Driven Continuous Improvement.
  - Model.
  - Not political/objective.
  - Based on best practices – national models.
- Attitudes/Perception.
  - Public/within structure.
  - Expectations for students/staff.
  - Buy-in.
- Teaching & Learning.
  - Time of day/structure.
  - Relationship.
  - Real plan: individualized.
  - Consistent – curriculum requirement.
  - Best practices/looping.
  - All like Highly Capable classes.
- Staffing.
  - Teachers placed for best fit – growth & development.
  - Don't just “love them” – rigor and relevance!
- People matter the most.
  - Compassion.
  - Caring.
  - Quality people.
  - Knowledge.
  - Content/pedagogy.
- High school, middle school teaching academy.
- Education = materials + commitment + compassion ( $E=mc^2$ ).
- System-wide data points.
- Staff (recruitment, support).
- Students – student failure rate, suspension.
- Programs – access, referral, intervention, acceleration.
- Community.
- Professional development (mandatory) – cultural competence.
- Resources - funding for focused tasks.
- Accountability – follow-up.
- Family involvement.
- Racism.
- Equitable distribution of resources (funding, expertise, staff, etc.) – not equal – students who need more help get more funding.
- Recruitment focus (for teachers and staff of color with vision).
- Culturally-relevant teaching strategies.
  - Taught to staff.
  - Expected and mandated by district.
- Implementation of school-wide changes

Dr. Jackson reminded the group that there wouldn't be much money provided for our endeavor – things will have to be done with what we have. Today was a good thing because it identified what challenges we face. It gives us a flavor of what has to happen to propel the district where it needs to be. Good beginning!

- **Dimensions** – *This item was tabled until next meeting due to lack of time. The committee members were instructed to review the handout relative to this topic (Dimensions that Impact the Academic Achievement Gap).*
  
- **Reflections** – *The following list was generated by comments from the committee members:*
  - Great session. Didn't hear violence as an issue, disparity and discipline of students of color, teacher absenteeism.
  - When the district proceeds with projects we tend to work in isolation. We need to look at the nation.
  - We need a distribution list in order to share thoughts in e-mail. There may be opportunities outside of this venue.
  - Outstanding job of coming together, great strategies. The issues are the same as they have always been. Our biggest problems are competing interests, etc. Maybe we need to review more of past history.
  - Our issues with minority kids – do we really know where they are? We need to have the data. Maybe we need to break down into small groups to do research and then bring to larger group.
  - There might be reasons why nothing has worked in the past. We need to be aware of these reasons.
  - Where/when will the community have a chance to look at this? If a school has a good working relationship with its community, we need to find out why.
  - Somewhat pessimistic as a parent and community leader. People are disheartened.
  - Not really just Tacoma starting and stopping initiatives. This is happening across the whole country. We need more research focus. Perhaps Dr. Bell could be a clearing house for this. We also need workable metrics addressed specifically as measurable. More articles. Come to the group with this information.
  - Gather the best information possible.
  - Feeling a sense of frustration. What can we do for the students we have now? We need to read more, but we also need to begin to implement things to help current kids. Don't want to buy more time. We need to take what we've learned and get it going.
  - Refreshing get-together. It's good to know there are other impassioned people out there. Has helped a lot. Instead of saying "woe is me," we can reflect on what we're doing on a daily basis to contribute to the achievement of our students.
  - How about sub-dividing this group in order to specialize?



Next meeting: October 30, 2009

9:00 a.m.-3: 00 p.m. – CAB Auditorium