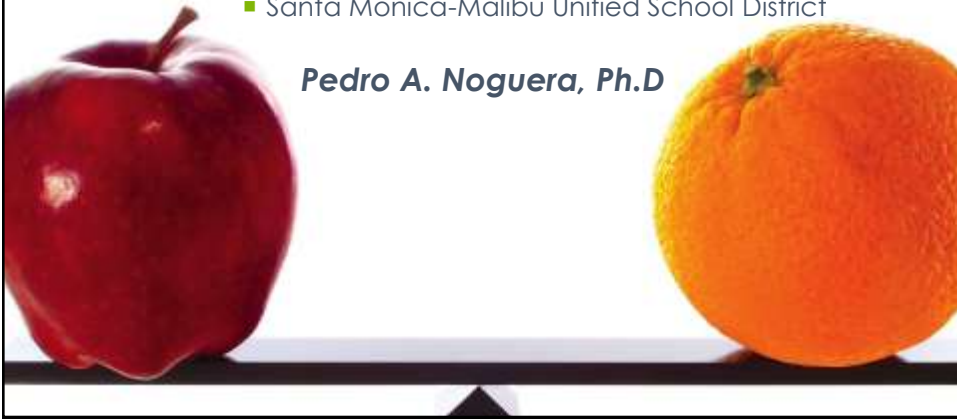


Pursuing Excellence Through Equity

■ Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District

Pedro A. Noguera, Ph.D



2

Making Equity
Central

3

Commit to Pursue Excellence Through Equity

Equity is:

- Giving all students what they need to be successful
 - Academic, psychological, emotional & social
- Recognizing all students are different
 - All students must be challenged and stimulated
 - Adapting strategies to meet the needs of individual & groups of students
- Meeting the needs of all students is essential to expanding equity

Equity is not:

- Lowering standards
- Treating all students the same
- Something only schools serving poor students of color should be concerned about

4

Equity and Excellence Must be Compatible Goals

- Internal accountability and district coherence on common goals are essential
- Primary responsibility of district and site leaders
 - To ensure that conditions conducive to good teaching and learning are in place at each school so that the needs of all students can be addressed

5

Equity and Excellence Must be Compatible Goals

- Schools must identify and eliminate practices that contribute to race/class disparities
 - Limiting learning opportunities based on behavior, perceptions of ability, special education status
 - Limiting access to challenging material
- Leaders must monitor the impact of initiatives established to provide support and hold stakeholders accountable.
- Move beyond zero-sum scenarios
- SMMUSD is better equipped than many districts to accomplish this goal
- District must stay focused on outcomes – academic and developmental

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What We Know About the Achievement Gap

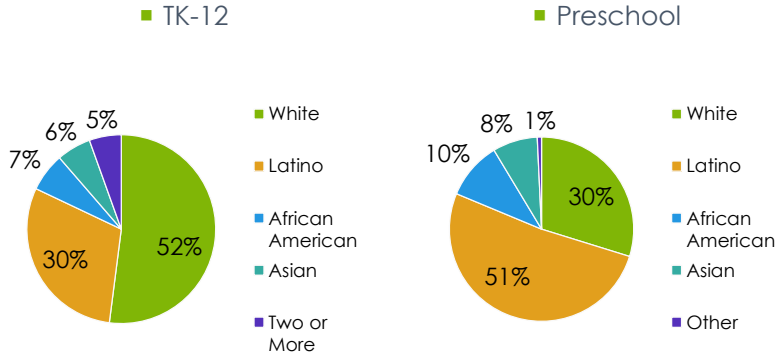
- It mirrors other disparities (health, income, employment)
- We have historically viewed genetics and culture as the cause of disparities
- External conditions affect academic performance (health, housing stability, poverty)
- Schools often exacerbate disparities through practices that reward privilege and harm the disadvantaged

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Santa Monica-Malibu USD Student Demographics

7

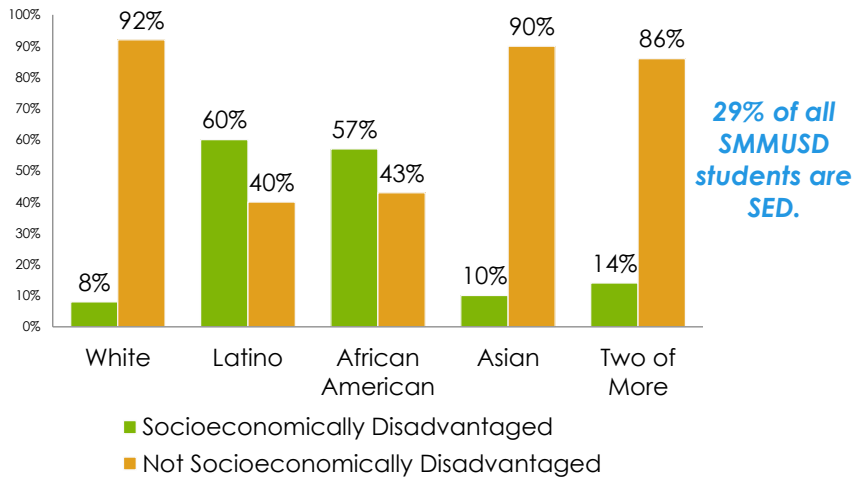


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Socioeconomic Status (SED) by Race/Ethnicity

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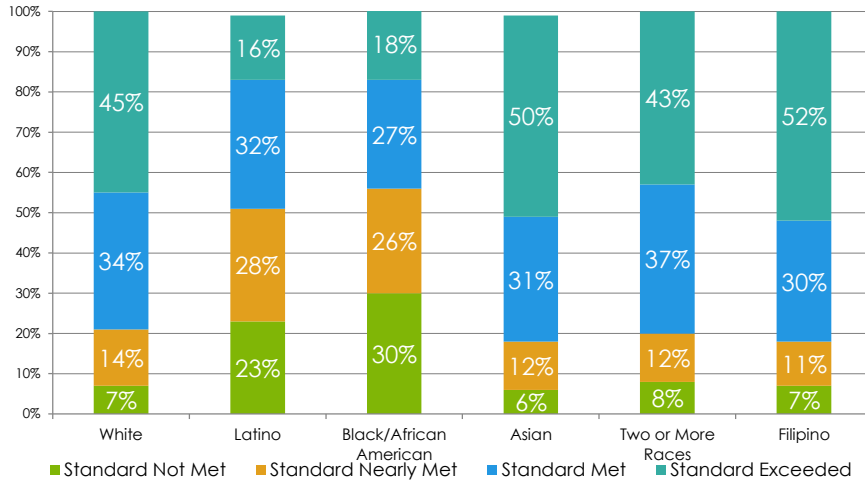


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ELA Performance by Race/Ethnicity (CAASPP 2014-15)

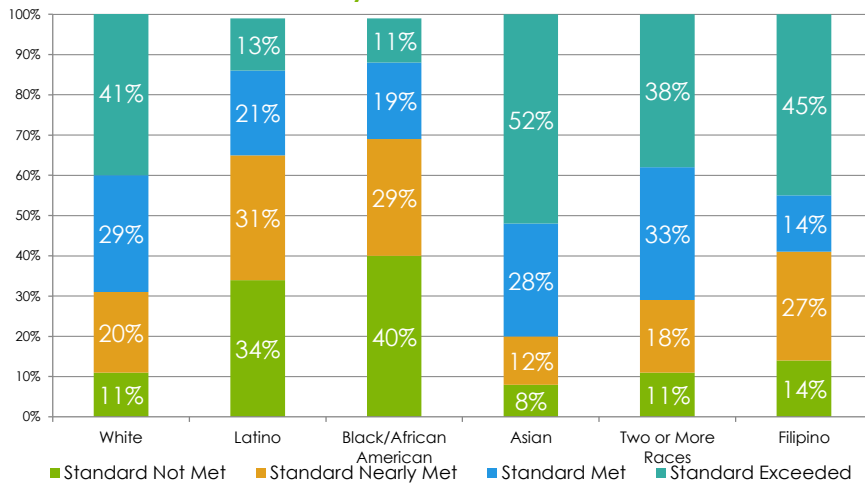


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Math Performance by Race/Ethnicity (CAASPP 2014-15)

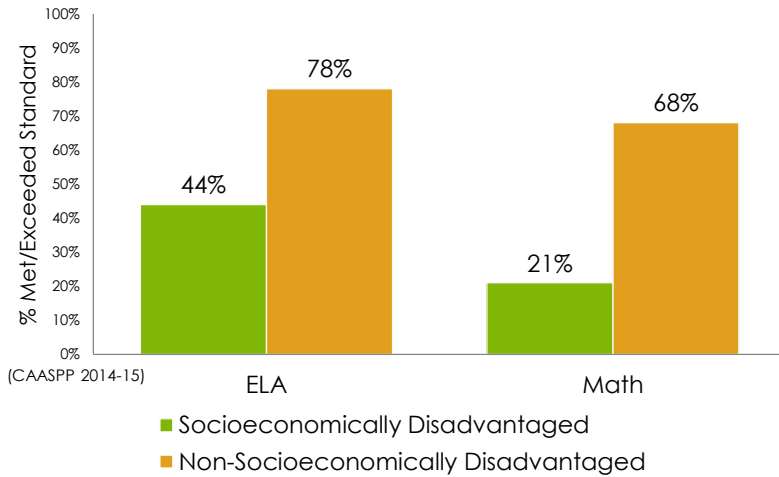


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Students That Met/Exceeded Standard: Math & ELA, by SED

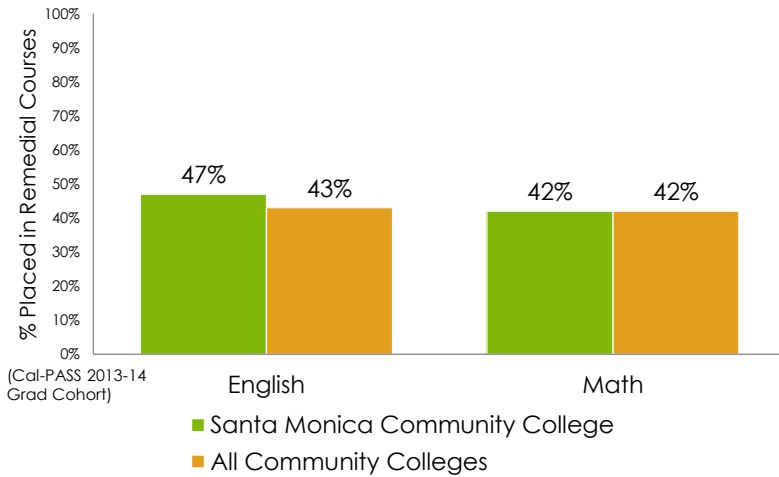


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Students Placed Into Remedial English & Math



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Constraints Contribute to Perpetuation of Status Quo

- Capacity building efforts are not coherent
 - Content does not consistently reach all teachers
- Leadership turnover – lack of sustained strategies
- Political distractions
- Lack of public will

14

Methodology

- Document scrutiny and data analysis
- District stakeholder interviews
- Site reviews:
 - Interviews & focus groups - principal, teachers, classified staff, and students
- Lesson observations

15

Methodology

- 16 sites reviewed
 - 2 days per site, 3 days/7 reviewers at Samohi)
- 545 classroom observations
- Observations ranged from 10 to 30 minutes
- Interviews and focus groups: 45 minutes
- Principal meetings: 60 to 90 minutes

When possible, meetings with assistant principals, literacy coaches, ELD coaches, and math coaches were included and planning meetings, special programs or activities, recess, transitions, and dismissals were observed

16

Findings

17

Findings: Central Leadership

- Central leaders are knowledgeable and aware of district-wide needs, have a clear vision, and have implemented programs to improve the quality of learning and teaching
- However, some promising initiatives have not been well implemented:
 - Inconsistent or ineffective training, buy-in not established, communication not effective, or coherence with district goals not made clear
 - Limited support provided to reinforce understandings and trainings and ensure follow-through

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Findings: Central Leadership

- Leaders have not sufficiently measured & evaluated the implementation of initiatives to gauge impact and adjust course in a timely manner when needed
 - Most new initiatives, including PLCs, RTI, the use of literacy coaches, etc., are not clearly understood and are being implemented unevenly
- A shared understanding of the meaning of equity or how an equity agenda should be implemented has not been established

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Findings: District

- Frequent changes in leadership has contributed to a lack of follow-through and evaluation and a high degree of cynicism, resulting in:
 - Lack of consistent implementation of systems, structures, processes and practices, which contribute to inconsistent and varied expectations for learning and teaching
 - Few initiatives to build capacity in support of equity have been maintained when leadership has changed
 - Isolation and fragmentation across and within school sites undermines buy-in for a cohesive district-wide vision and mission

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Findings: District

- District leaders (board members, central office, site leaders) are frequently distracted from a clear focus on equity and improving the quality of student learning
- There is misunderstanding of what autonomy means and a tendency to adopt oppositional stances toward district strategies
- There is a tendency to prioritize the demands of affluent parents, which frequently comes at the expense of attention to the needs of disadvantaged students and pursuit of district goals

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Findings: District

- History of racial tensions in the city and in schools has contributed to distrust and feelings of marginalization amongst communities and staff of color
- A misconception that equity is not a concern for some schools or for Malibu
- Malibu-Santa Monica tension is a significant distraction from a clear focus on student needs
 - Geographical and cultural disconnect, intense debates over equity in funding and resources, rejection of equity as a priority for Malibu

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Findings: Learning & Teaching

- Many dedicated and talented teachers and administrators value and support equity.
- Classroom instruction is predominantly teacher-centered and a wide variety of strategies for engaging students are often not utilized. Opportunities to develop and utilize higher order thinking skills are not consistently available to students.
- Few examples of differentiated instruction were observed, meaning there is not always a plan for learning appropriate for the range of learners in each classroom. This is particularly harmful to underperforming students, students with special needs, and English language learners.
- Students have insufficient opportunities to assess their own work or the work of peers. Many are unaware of how rubrics are used to assess their progress or determine what they need to improve.

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Findings: Learning & Teaching

- Most students are generally on task and are passively engaged. Student engagement in lessons is, in some cases, limited by a lack of effort or capacity in how to integrate linguistic, literacy, and culturally responsive tactics.
- While many teachers hold themselves accountable for their impact on student learning outcomes, many do not. This reflects a disconnect between teaching and learning that exists in many schools.
- Co-planning among teachers is often dependent on informal relationships.
- At sites where teachers are organized in cohesive teams, learning and teaching practices are generally more conducive to meeting the needs of the range of learners the schools serve and teachers are more aware of strengths and areas of growth.
- Technology is not utilized creatively and consistently in classrooms.

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Findings: School Culture

- School learning environments are positive in most respects, with a few instances of insensitive behavior by students and/or a small minority of staff.
- Well-established routines are evident at many schools; however, some schools have routines and disciplinary procedures that are implemented inconsistently resulting in patterns of engagement, behavior and discipline that vary among classrooms.
- Widely shared perception that underperformance, particularly among SED and English Learners, is due to family circumstances prevents some from finding ways to meet the learning needs of all students.

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Recommendations

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Shifts in Practice Aid in Shifting a Culture

- From focus on adults to clear focus on students
- From professional isolation to coherence, collaboration and accountability
- From leaders as managers to collaborative problem solvers focused on improving learning and teaching
- From reactive planning to a vision-driven cycle of development and improvement with clear focus on priorities, strengths and needs

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5 Essential Ingredients for School Improvement

Use the Five Essential Ingredients for School Improvement as guide for capacity building

- A coherent instructional guidance system in place
 - What is required to ensure high quality planning and collaboration is enabled, supported and expected?
- Ongoing development of the professional capacity of staff – internal accountability
 - What must our internal accountability processes be like to ensure continuous development of the professional capacity of staff?

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5 Essential Ingredients for School Improvement

- Strong parent-community-school ties
 - What is required to develop strong partnerships with families and community members from all backgrounds?
- A student-centered learning climate
 - Do student needs drive decision-making, shape systems, practices, and processes and determine how we work?
- Shared leadership rooted in a shared, common vision
 - Do all stakeholders understand what is required of them to meet our vision of student success?
 - Do our collaborative processes, support, and accountability mechanisms enable capacity building?

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Recommendations: School Board

- School board must establish clear priorities and goals related to equity and the implementation of strategies to improve learning and teaching. It must hold itself accountable for following through and maintaining the focus on its own goals.
- There must be a clear directive from the board enabling the district's central staff to carry out their plans without distraction. This should include a specific requirement that principals be supported to devote a significant portion of their time to the development and improvement of learning and teaching.

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Recommendations: Central Leadership

- Central leaders must devise mechanisms to improve communication, support, and accountability for district priorities and must be present in schools on a consistent basis to assess and support the implementation of district initiatives
- Initiate training for all central office and site leaders on how to implement equity-based strategies and obtain commitment and buy-in from staff throughout the district

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Recommendations: Central Leadership

- Set grade level performance benchmarks – these should be developed by teachers and by applied at all schools in district
- Early intervention
 - Continue literacy coach model in elementary schools to support early intervention and development of instructional strategies and interventions in the classroom
 - Identify middle and high school students who are not making adequate progress, diagnose learning needs, create a learning plan, and provide access to teachers with a track record of effectiveness
- Increase access to rigorous courses and increase academic support
 - Evaluate the impact of AVID, tutorial, efforts to diversify AP course participation, and other academic supports and make necessary adjustments to practices and funding decisions

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Ensure Fidelity in Implementation of Initiatives

- Solicit feedback to monitor progress, provide support and hold stakeholders accountable
- Develop tools for measuring the effectiveness of initiatives with stakeholders and use them to build capacity, buy-in, and ensure clear understanding of goals
- Utilize data systems to monitor the effectiveness of initiatives

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Focus on Engagement

- Behavioral Engagement
 - Preparation
 - Persistence
 - Instrumental help-seeking
- Cognitive Engagement
 - Deep processing
 - Meta-cognition
- Affective Engagement
 - Interest
 - Value

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Utilize Strategies That Engage Students

- Active learning, interactive classroom, on-task learning
- Personalized learning plans
- Inquiry-based pedagogical strategies
- Simulations
- Socratic seminars
- Project-based learning
- Experiential/applied learning
- Student leadership in the classroom
- Public presentations of student work

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Provide Site-based Professional Development

- Provide site-based professional development focused on evidence-based teaching
 - Make expectations clear and standards explicit by modeling and exposing students to high quality work
 - Utilize diagnostic tools to check for understanding
 - Learn about students interests in order to make lessons culturally relevant
 - Focus on motivation and engagement by soliciting feedback and questions from students
 - Analyze student work with a focus on evidence of competence and mastery

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Immediate Next Steps

- Leadership Training Institute (Summer 2016)
 - Principals and central directors
 - Instructional leadership, data-informed decision making, changing school culture
- Professional development for teachers (voluntary)
 - Culturally responsive teaching, eliminating bias, improving student-teacher relationships, and raising teacher expectations

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Targeted School Support

- Supplemental resources (city, community) should be used to provide targeted afterschool support at schools that serve higher percentages of SED students and students of color.
- Services should be specifically directed toward, but not limited to, students in need
- Focus on enhancing and accelerating learning
- All interventions should be evaluated and student progress should be closely monitored

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Successful Strategies

Brockton, MA
Abington, PA

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Brockton Scholarship Winners 2015

"Brockton High School has every excuse for failure, serving a city plagued by crime, poverty, housing foreclosures, and homelessness... But Brockton High, by far the state's largest public high school with 4,200 students, has found a success in recent years that has eluded many of the state's urban schools: MCAS scores are soaring, earning the school state recognition as a symbol of urban hope."

James Vaznis, Boston Globe Oct 9, 2009

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Key Elements of Brockton Strategy

40

- Shared leadership
- Concerted effort to obtain buy-in around the strategy
- A coherent strategy focused on student needs
- Professional capacity building through differentiated professional development
- Follow through, examining the evidence, sticking with it

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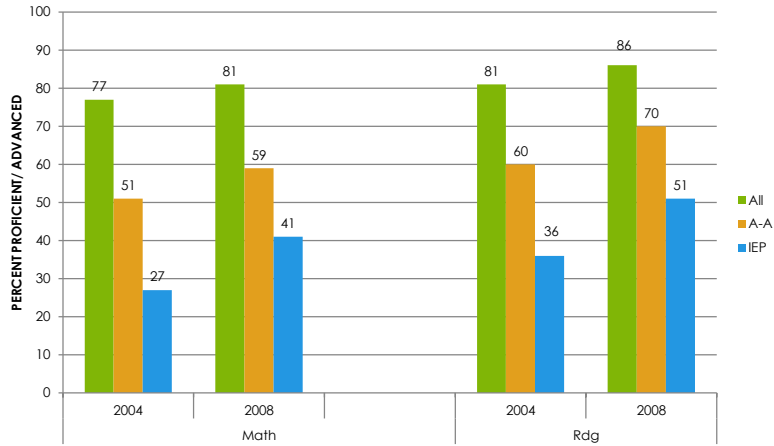
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Key Elements of Abington Strategy

- Closing the Gap
 - Access to and support in advanced courses
 - Data-based decision making – what's working, what's not?
 - Focus on getting interventions right
 - Continuous professional development
 - Engaging students through extra curricular activities and electives

Incremental Progress in Abington, PA

GRADE 8 PSSA DATA





43

Final Considerations

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Mutual Responsibility

- Board– maintaining community support for schools, fiscal accountability, asking the right questions
- Superintendent– managing politics, providing guidance to staff
- Central Leader role – supporting schools through collaborative problem solving
- Site Leader role – supporting staff, maintaining appropriate conditions for teaching and learning

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45

Mutual Responsibility

- Teachers – classroom climate conducive to learning
- Support Staff – maintaining the learning environment
- Parents/Community – supporting children and schools
- Students – getting their work done to the best of their ability

46

Focus on the Right Questions

- Instead of focusing on how to raise achievement we should ask:
 - How can we get our students motivated and excited about learning?
- Instead of focusing on how to prepare our students for state exams we should ask:
 - How do we prepare our students to be independent learners? What will they need to know to be successful in this community/country?
- Instead of asking how to cover the curriculum we should ask:
 - How will I make what I teach relevant and meaningful to students?

47

We know we are succeeding in closing the gap when the backgrounds of students (race & class) cease to be predictors of achievement.