

Policy Options to Tackle the Achievement Gap



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A Broader and Bolder Approach to School Reform:

Closing the opportunity gap and transforming
schools

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The Reproduction Dilemma

- Rather than reducing poverty education is implicated in the reproduction of inequality across generations
 - Inequality in society reinforces inequitable outcomes – achievement gap
 - Significant disparities remain between “visible minorities” and white middle class students
- US education policies have failed to disrupt these patterns or break the cycle of poverty

Narrow vs. Broad Approach

Broad

- Use pressure to foster accountability
- Focus exclusively on achievement
- Use test scores to rank
- Adopt scripted teacher-proof curriculum
- Hold principals accountable
- Treat parents as consumers
- Punitive approach to discipline
- Encourage competition among schools

Narrow

- Focus on learning conditions
- Use assessment to diagnose
- Develop teacher skills continuously
- Focus on “whole child” – health, nutrition, safety
- Hold all stake holders accountable
- Treat parents as partners
- Use discipline to develop character
- Expand learning opportunities
- Promote cooperation between and among schools

Not everything that can be
counted counts.

Not everything that counts
can be counted.

William Bruce Cameron, 1963

The Biggest Obstacle: Normalization of Failure

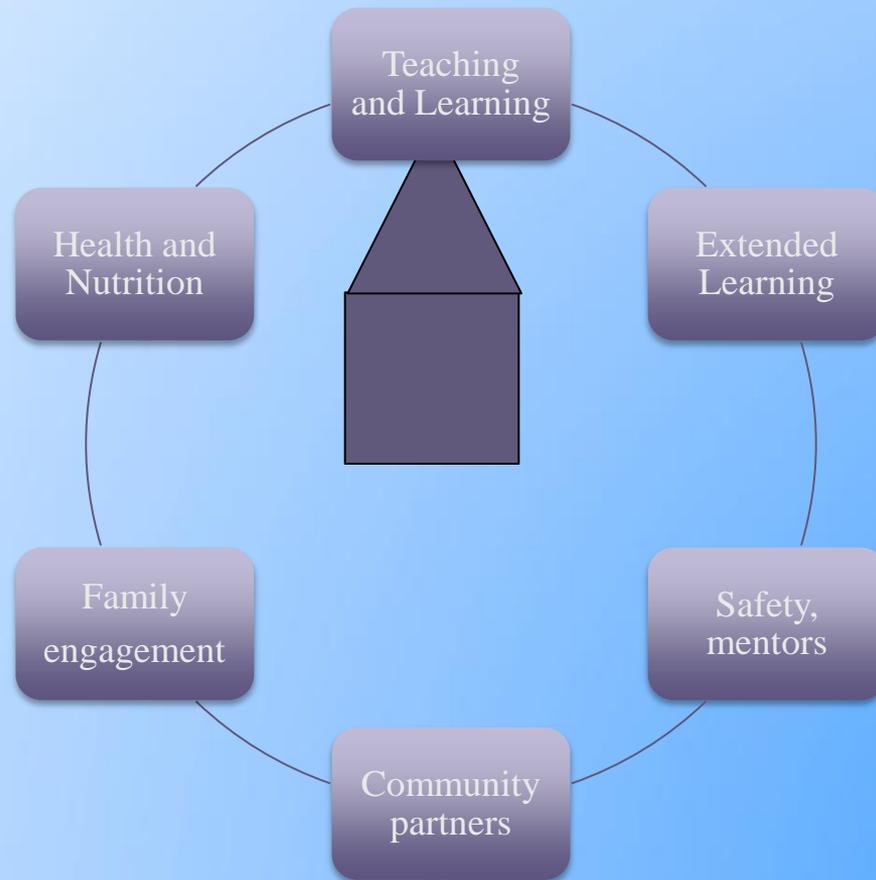
- Tendency for staff to treat patterns of achievement as “normal”
 - Complacency - Staff has grown accustomed to the predictability of academic outcomes
 - Rationalizations - Teachers and administrators explain low achievement by blaming parents and students
 - Beliefs - Staff believes that culture and biology determine intelligence rather than access to resources and educational opportunity

Five Essential Ingredients for School Improvement

Organizing Schools for Improvement, 2010 – Bryke, et.al.

- 1) A coherent instructional guidance system
- 2) Development of the professional capacity of faculty
- 3) Strong parent-community-school ties
- 4) A student-centered learning climate
- 5) Leadership that drives change

We need a new vision to create schools that can counter the effects of inequality



What We Know

- Student achievement is affected by a variety of social, psychological and environmental factors
- Services must be provided in a coordinated manner to counter effects of poverty and improve developmental and learning outcomes
- Changing outcomes for youth requires a focus on the needs of the “whole child”
 - Physical, social, psychological and emotional needs
 - Art, music and physical education must be included

Key Principles

Poverty is not a learning disability but ignoring poverty can be disabling

Education can play a role in breaking the cycle of poverty if it promotes empowerment.

Education must also promote excellence by breaking stereotypes, empowering students and cultivating mastery.

Schools must be organized to meet student needs

Bronx Academy of Language and Technology



Students in control of learning at Hollenbeck Middle School, IA



Teachers must focus on learning...

- Make expectations clear and standards explicit by modeling and exposing students to high quality work
- Utilize diagnostic tools to check for understanding
- Learn about their students interests in order to make their 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

Respond in a holistic manner to the needs of children

- Health and welfare needs
- Social and emotional needs
- Developmental challenges
- Family and community challenges
- **Create an environment where children can thrive**

PS 28 obtains highest gains in literacy and math in Brooklyn -2012



Brockton scholarship winners 2015



Stay focused on the right questions:

- Instead of “How do we raise achievement?”
 - How do we promote healthy development and get students *excited about learning*?
- Instead of “How do we hold teachers accountable?”
 - How do we hold *everyone accountable* – Governors, Presidents, superintendents, teachers, students and parents?
- Instead of “How do we close the achievement gap?”
 - How do we close opportunity gaps and create schools where a child’s *race and class are not predictors* of outcomes?