

Every Child Included

Meet the Urgency of Education through Secondary Public Schools

By J. Bert Freeman

Most of us know that significant achievement gaps in education still exist among students in many schools and districts across the country. For many years it has impacted African American, Hispanic and Low Income youth and their communities, particularly in the inner cities – large and small. It has impacted employability, home ownership, economic development, post-secondary education, rates of conviction and more. We can accelerate the academic improvement necessary among African American, Hispanic and Low income students in our public schools.

There is enough research that tells us that today, more than ever:

- Viable employment requires some education beyond high school.
- High percentages of African American, Hispanic and Low Income students in public schools require significant improvement in academic performance as evidenced in course grades as well as standardized tests. The need exists particularly in mathematics.
- The strongest influence on academic improvement is the classroom teacher.
- The next strongest influence on academic improvement is the school.
- Success in mathematics is one of the strongest indicators of success in post-secondary education.
- ‘High expectations’ is one of the strongest influences on achievement.
- Among secondary students (grades 6-12), the probability of meeting and exceeding grade level performance and standards and qualifications for post secondary education increases when there is a positive adult influence.
- Increasing the emphasis on the academic improvement of ‘students most in need of improvement’ increases the overall achievement of the school or district (at the inclusion of efforts for all rather than at the expense of anyone).

I have been involved with K-12 educators since 1987 in business, as a volunteer, as a parent, evaluator and staff developer. Here are some necessary actions to accelerate the academic achievement of African American, Hispanic and Low income students in our public schools:

1. Define success as: students meeting and exceeding grade level performance and standards and students exceeding qualifications for post secondary education.
2. Assign an academic advisor to each secondary student who is most in need of improvement. If the school or district has a mentor program, then train the mentors to also be academic advisors.
3. Increase the emphasis on academic performance in mathematics for students most in need of improvement, at the same level of emphasis as reading or beyond.
4. Even though there is an effort to increase resources for early childhood education, there must be at least an equal and even more urgent effort for secondary education. As much as development for the future is important, improving graduation rates and qualification for post-secondary education now is essential. This must also be done at the inclusion of every student, rather than at the expense of any student. Rather than saying “No child left behind”, *in a positive direction* we can say “Every Child Included”.

5. To increase the grade level performance in mathematics among secondary students, teachers of mathematics must be at the decision-making table and also working in teams in every high school and middle school. They must have the full support of their education associations, administrators and schools boards. They must establish and execute instructional and classroom management strategies that accelerate secondary student achievement in mathematics at every grade level, 6 thru 12. Also it must be understood that only teachers of mathematics can teach mathematics beyond pre-algebra. Parents, employers, post secondary institutions must rely on their expertise.
6. Understand that ‘closing the achievement gap’ means that the achievement of all students increases while the achievement of the students most in need of improvement accelerates to ‘catch up’, in time to meet and exceed the qualifications for post secondary education.
7. Provide the staff development for secondary mathematics educators that equips them as teams to exercise Teachers’ WIT (Whatever It Takes) for students to meet and exceed grade level performance and standards and to exceed qualifications for post-secondary education.
8. Educators must exercise high expectations for their students and for themselves, whatever the circumstances, however students act. When this is done as a team, it surrounds students with excellence.
9. Rather than emphasizing mathematics at the expense of reading, emphasize mathematics while still including reading programs.
10. Parents must keep academic achievement at the core of what happens in the schools, even in matters of discipline.

Why increase resources for improvement in secondary mathematics? It is simply because the urgencies exist now and we can see what they are. The largest achievement gaps in secondary education (grades 6-12) are in mathematics (achievement gaps are most often expressed by race or by socio- economic status). Mathematics is a strong indicator of academic success. Only teachers of mathematics can teach mathematics beyond pre-algebra; we need their help as well as their expertise.

We all know educators. Some of us are educators. Let’s take whatever opportunities we have to address this urgency that has existed for years. It still exists and it is nationwide. The data and information tell us that the urgency is clear. There needs to be significant concentration and emphasis on improving mathematics performance in secondary schools among African American, Hispanic and Low Income students. It is also important that we focus forward in whatever we do. That will accelerate progress even more. That will make the difference between world class education and average education.

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