

**Notes from the Minority Student Achievement Network
Literacy Mini-Conference
Cleveland, Ohio
November 8-9, 2007**

“What we learned..”

Coaching Models:

- There are multiple coaching models in different districts across MSAN with varying degrees of efficacy. All models contain a theoretical framework, a comprehensive school-wide literacy plan (different districts have plans in various stages of development), core strategies that are being implemented and an interactive professional development agenda. This agenda focuses on classroom observations, one-on-one and group coaching with particular attention paid to under-achieving or struggling students

**Keynote: Engaging the Mind for High Intellectual Performance:
Pedagogy of Confidence**

- The keynote speaker for the first day was Dr. Yvette Jackson. She is internationally recognized for her research around assessing the potential of disenfranchised urban students. She has rigorously studied the work of Dr. Reuven Feuerstein which involved cognitive mediation, literacy and gifted education. She also worked with Dr. Joseph Renzulli who examined the theory of giftedness, who can be classified as gifted and how can we recognize true giftedness. (By the way, Dr. Renzulli was the guest speaker at the AVID conference in Atlanta entitled: *Up Where We Belong: Accelerating African American Male Student Achievement.*) The main points of her presentation were:
 - We must change the paradigm of struggling students from remedial to “under-achieving” meaning they are not achieving **yet**.
 - We must engage the minds of under-achieving students through a “pedagogy of hope”
 - The different considerations for under-achieving students are: relevance (what is important to kids?), patterns (what are the trends in their ideas?) and emotional connections. What is relevant to the masses is not necessarily relevant to kids and their lives.
 - There are certain strengths of under-achievers. They are: creative, resilient, problem-solvers and highly verbal. We end the achievement gap when we look at the potential of kids, not their weaknesses

- We need to speak in “**positional language**” - this language changes: minority to students of color; disadvantaged to students who are put at a disadvantage; students with disabilities to variable learners
- The brain is always seeking three things: engagement, to be challenged and receive feedback
- How do we assess students’ high intellectual performance? How do we monitor students’ growth over time? We actually monitor students in the process of what they are doing. We formulate dynamic assessments (No clear examples were given.) and we look at the process of how a learner learns.
- Our students should be our number one data source!

(Dr. Jackson’s article: Unlocking the Potential of African American Students – Keys to Reversing Underachievement can placed in your mailbox upon request.)

Keynote: Trauma and Literacy

- The second keynote speaker for that first evening was Dr. Michelle Porsche. She is a research scientist that is studying literacy and achievement for young children and adolescents. She is currently working with the *Trauma and Literacy Project* at Harvard with Dr. Catherine Snow (internationally renowned literacy scholar on faculty at the Harvard Graduate School of Education).

Dr. Porsche’s presentation involved sharing her project of following 83 students’ families over 15 years and documenting their achievement in a longitudinal study. She discovered that even in the higher achieving students, violent trauma (death of family or friends, abuse etc.) made a significant difference in students’ achievement in various negative ways. Some made it to college, some did not. She is trying to continue the study to find out the longer-term effects.

(Dr. Porsche’s article: From PreSchool to Middle School – The Role of Masculinity in Low-Income urban Adolescent Boys’ Literacy Skills and Academic Achievement - with Drs. Stephanie Ross and Catherine Snow, can also be made available to you upon request.)

Coaching: MSAN District Presentation

- One assistant superintendent from Windsor Public Schools in Windsor, Connecticut and her district coaching staff gave a presentation on their progress in a district-wide literacy plan so far. They were cited by the state as overidentifying intellectually disabled African-American students in every category in 2003-2004. They joined MSAN in 2003 and along with that, created an Equity Team and an Equity Plan to address this issue.

They worked with Crystal Kuykendall, author of, *“From Rage to Hope: Strategies for Reclaiming Black and Hispanic Youth”* and are currently working with a consultant, Cavin Terrell who provides workshops that address race, prejudices and conflict resolution.

With respect to coaching, they have discovered several things:

1. The need for coaching exceeds available resources
2. Coaching evolves as the needs of students AND teachers evolve
3. Coaching helps students and teachers, help *themselves*

There were also questions they were still seeking answers to:

1. How do we teach adolescents beyond state test?
2. How do we identify multiple data points to measure our efficacy?
3. Is there a better model for literacy coaching?
4. How do we capitalize on exemplary practice to enlarge the sphere of influence?
5. How do we ensure that every teacher addresses the interests and cultural identities of our students of color?

The Windsor group also provided a list of references for literacy coaches. (If you would like a copy, can place one in your mailbox.)

Observations from MSAN Districts:

- Other challenges across districts that attended were: large district size, individual expertise varies on how to address the achievement gap, time to implement the needed instructional work is limited, teaching literacy strategies interpreted by teachers as additional actions to take during instruction, shifting of thinking and the performing differently must be significant among teachers to accomplish goals, some daily schedules do not allow enough time for teachers to collaborate and there is lack in some districts of the information technology to allow students to be identified and tracked properly in order to meet benchmarks for college readiness as early as possible.

In some of the break-out groups, we discussed the following topics:

- Secondary Assessment –
 - There are many questions and a need to have better assessments for adolescents
 - Do we focus on a deficit model or celebrating successes?
 - How do we connect kids and teachers to seeing progress?
 - What policies get in the way of learning? What assessments impact instruction?
 - Successes/Ideas: standards-based report cards, thinking maps, Achieve 3000 (uses AP news articles at different levels and is web-based)

- Building Capacity –
 - What's working?: using PLCs to change culture: training administrators in leading, walkthroughs, having a clear vision and strategic plan, anchoring literacy strategies, in-house professional development, celebrating incremental goals, balancing support and the sense of urgency
 - Challenges: consistency across schools and district, strong leadership, balance, communication, accountability, how do we set SMART goals?

Next Steps for MSAN:

- Host more mini-conferences that draw teachers (e.g., restructuring frosh classes)
- Use technology to communicate across MSAN: Teleconferences (qtrly video-conferences - conversations on literacy, school leadership topics, student achievement or related topics for teachers and school staff members that cannot travel; provide guest speakers and scholars), an intensive web-site
- Visit other schools and school districts engaged in the same work
- Host regional mini-conferences so travel will not be such an issue
- Focus more on what kind of instruction is needed - *"What does an MSAN classroom look like?"*
- Host a Literacy Coaches conference
- Host a conference focusing on assessment
- Problem solve common issues
- Professional development on mental health issues; how do we focus on kids stress/wellness; focus on listening to students