

The Achievement Gap-Still

Len Miller, Chairman, Stamford Achieves

As we begin a new school year, Stamford Achieves continues to be concerned about the achievement gap that exists between white students and Black and Hispanic students. While we are pleased that some of the test scores of Stamford students have improved from the prior year, there has still not been a narrowing of the achievement gap in this city. This is something for us all to be alarmed and concerned about.

Stamford Achieves in its prior form as a Blue Ribbon Commission designated by the Mayor, and now as a stand alone nonprofit organization has had as its mission to focus on the achievement gap and to find long range practices and solutions that would close the gap while improving the quality of education for all students. Among our first priorities was to bring this issue to the public, and to increase the awareness of all sectors of the community. Public awareness of the achievement gap has significantly increased since the formation of Stamford Achieves, and now the time has come for all of us to take specific actions that will quickly close the achievement gap.

Following is a capsule summary of the achievement gap in Stamford using the third and eighth grade levels as examples:

It is important to note that the Black and Hispanic students in Stamford represent

over 50% of the student population. Therefore when looking at the numbers above it is astonishing to realize that over 70% of Black and Hispanic students are below goal, and over 60% of these same students are below proficiency in both math and reading in the third grade, in reading in the eighth grade, and only slightly better in math in the eighth grade. The percentage of white students that are below goal approximates the percentage of Black and Hispanic students that are above goal. In some cases there are above 40 percentage points differential between the white students and the Black and Hispanic students.

Stamford does not compare favorably with state results although in many cases the differences are not significant. In comparing Stamford with other urban areas Stamford does better than some and not as well as others.

What this data means is that we are not getting the job done of closing the achievement gap. This is simply not acceptable, and if those of you reading this in the business world had these results in your product or service output you would not be able to maintain your business. Could you have a manufacturing output where roughly 50% of your finished product was below your minimum standards? Of course that would be intolerable, and we should demand no less from

our school district, and our community, even more.

It is important to note that there are regular public schools, magnet schools, and charter schools throughout the country, in Connecticut, and in fact in Stamford that have either closed the gap or significantly reduced it. It can be done.

The closing of the achievement gap was an important part of Stamford Superintendent Dr. Starr's strategic plan and also a top priority of the Board of Education. It will not be possible to have the quality school system that we all want without keeping the achievement gap as the top priority of not only the education community but for all who live and or work in Stamford. In today's global economy, the skills demanded our future workforce and our need to continue to innovate to stay competitive will require that all of our students perform to at their highest potential. The achievement gap must be closed, and it must be closed quickly. We at Stamford Achieves pledge to intensify our efforts to help make this happen.



Len Miller

(note - Goal levels indicate extensive knowledge of the subject while Proficiency levels indicate adequate knowledge of the subject matter.)

	3 rd Grade		8 th Grade	
	Percentage At/Above Goal	Percentage Goal	Percentage At/Above Goal	Percentage Goal
	2008	2007	2008	2007
Reading				
White	67.1	68.8	79.0	79.0
Black	28.2	25.7	33.9	38.6
Hispanic	28.3	33.2	34.8	39.5
Math				
White	71.3	75.5	72.5	69.7
Black	24.5	34.3	22.2	23.2
Hispanic	43.8	43.7	28.7	29.9

(note - Goal levels indicate extensive knowledge of the subject.

Closing the Achievement Gap will benefit all

Duane Hill, Vice Chairman, Stamford Achieves



Duane Hill

By now it should be no secret to anyone that the state of Connecticut, the wealthiest in the nation, ranks last or close to last on almost every measure of the achievement gap between African American and Hispanic students and their white counterparts. This gap results in enormous costs and consequences to our communities. The causes of this gap are numerous and complex, but there are solutions.

All too often, we look at problems in our communities as just that—"problems". We frequently spend countless time and money studying the problems and not nearly enough time talking about solutions and opportunities. The achievement gap is an issue where we can make significant progress and where all can benefit by focusing more on the possibilities, the opportunities and the solutions. Let's begin now to change the conversation on the achievement gap from one about problems to one of possibilities and solutions. Make no mistake, there are solutions.

In a recent study of schools in Connecticut that have been successful at significantly reducing or closing the achievement gap, the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now identified five factors that were consistently present in these high performing schools. They were excellent teaching, high quality principals, data driven decision making, strong parental engagement, and positive school culture. There are many examples around the state where individual schools are making great gains in closing the achievement gap. The Stamford Public system is adding an Office of Parental and Community Engagement. This is a very positive step.

So what are the benefits of closing the achievement gap? Based on another recent study conducted by ConnCAN entitled The High cost of Low-Performing Schools, the benefits are numerous. Take for example the estimated \$58 to 135 million in lost income and Social Security tax revenue attributable to the achievement gap. Would it not serve to reduce the tax burden on all citizens if we could recapture this loss by eliminating the achievement gap? Health care costs are another area of opportunity. Reducing the cost of health care that can be attributed to the achievement gap will reduce health care premiums for all. Similarly, it is estimated that a one percent increase in national high school graduation rates could add as much as \$1.4 billion back into the economy.

Equally important, students who can start to achieve at their potential become significantly more productive as adults and contribute to the wealth of the community rather than becoming burdens. Looking at these issues as possibilities and opportunities should provide incentive for all of us to work at eliminating the achievement gap.

Going forward, as we talk about eliminating the achievement gap, let us talk less about the problems and more about how we insure quality teaching, how we produce strong principals, how we create better data systems, how we can more effectively engage parents and how to create school cultures where all students are expected to achieve.

There is no doubt in my mind that if we focus more on the benefits to all, the possibilities, the opportunities and the solutions, we can quickly have real impact on eliminating the achievement gap.

During the next several months, Stamford Achieves will be actively working to create this new dialogue that will move our community to solutions and benefits for all. We encourage you to join us in that dialogue.