



Lexington Public Schools

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Our Schools

Efforts to Close the Achievement Gap Help All Students

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On February 7, the *Lexington Minuteman* reported on the findings and recommendations of a report entitled *The Achievement Gap in the Lexington Public Schools: Documentation, Research, and Recommendations*. Although the Achievement Gap Report focuses largely on the academic achievement of the 260+ METCO students attending the Lexington Public Schools, its recommendations are focused on improving education for all 6,200 Lexington students.

In one of the most impressive research studies cited in the Report, *After the Test: Closing the Achievement Gap with Data*, Kiley Walsh Symonds found that case-study schools, focusing on a small student group of persistent underachievers, reported big gains in achievement for the school as a whole. For example, when the Belle Air Elementary School focused on supporting Hispanic boys, teachers were supported in honing their skills at differentiating instruction and using data-driven instructional interventions. Achievement measures improved not only for the targeted group, but for all students taught by more highly skilled teachers. Other studies confirm Symonds' findings. It may seem counterintuitive, but focusing on a small group of students can lead to the kinds of deep changes that promote whole-school change.

All recommendations in the Achievement Gap Report are applications of research-based, field-tested, best educational practices found in gap-closing schools across the country. Implementation of these recommendations will positively impact the achievement of all Lexington students. Here are just a few examples of the report's recommendations that are all-inclusive in their scope.

- An overwhelming body of research demonstrates that it is essential for teachers to work in Professional Learning Communities focused on student achievement.
- Teachers need professional development in how to understand and take action on achievement data. Every school must develop a set of tiered intervention strategies directly linked to individual student assessment.
- Extended learning opportunities must be abundant for all students.

Many of the Achievement Gap Report's recommendations involving professional development, data-driven intervention strategies, common assessments, increased collaboration, scheduling revisions, school-home communication, and focused leadership can be implemented without any additional cost; however, some recommendations will require the application of additional resources, such as staffing extended learning opportunities. When necessary, we must expend these resources, just as we have in the past, only more wisely.

Are METCO students receiving a good education in the Lexington Public Schools? Yes, they are. The achievement gap in Boston schools is, as documented in the Achievement Gap Report, larger than it is in Lexington. However, previous well-intentioned efforts to close the gap have not succeeded. The good news is that there are research studies and real-world, gap-closing success stories to inform and guide our efforts. We owe this to our Boston families. They have every right to expect that the Lexington Public Schools will provide an educational experience for their children that results in achievement levels comparable to those of their Lexington-resident peers. And, as indicated in the Report's survey results, Boston parents are willing to step up and be part of the progressive effort. To this end, an Achievement Gap Task Force has been constituted and will begin meeting in mid-March.

The achievement gap is a national problem that springs directly from our nation's history. Almost all of the successful efforts at closing the gap have occurred in suburban areas with large minority populations or in urban areas. In high-performing suburban school districts where the underachieving minority students are small in number and easily lost in the outstanding achievement measures of the majorities, there is little evidence of widespread, successful gap closing. This is unacceptable. Lexington can and should use proven, gap-closing strategies to improve achievement for all students.