After the Test:
Closing the Achievement Gaps With Data

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Executive Summary

In recent years, closing the achievement gaps between higher- and lower-achieving groups of students has become the focus of state and federal policy. Yet, while there are decades of research about classroom-level practices associated with increased student performance, few studies have examined the school-level policies and strategies that help close the achievement gaps. In order to identify effective school-level policies and strategies, the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC) surveyed 32 K–8 schools in the San Francisco Bay Area and compared responses from schools narrowing the gaps with schools maintaining or widening the gaps. Schools' gaps were measured using California's Academic Performance Index (API) ranking system over the four-year time period between 1998–99 and 2001–02. We defined *gap-closing* schools as those schools in which all students made improvement but low-performing students made more rapid progress. Conversely, we defined *non-gap-closing* schools as those schools in which high-performing students made more improvement than low-performing students. We also conducted case studies of three schools making outstanding progress in narrowing the achievement gaps.

FINDINGS

The survey explored policies and practices on a variety of issues, from the role of leaders to instructional strategies. Stark differences between the gap-closing and non-gap-closing groups emerged regarding use of data, painting a distinctive picture of what happens in gap-closing schools. Findings from our study are grouped into three categories—teacher support for use of data, leadership for equity, and school focus—with case studies after each to illuminate what survey findings can look like in practice.

1. Teacher Support for Use of Data

Teachers at gap-closing schools are more likely to:

- Use data to understand skill gaps of low-achieving students.
- Administer frequent assessments of students.
- Receive professional development on analyzing low-performing student data.
- Receive professional development on linking low-performing student data to instructional strategies.
- Have leaders that encourage or lead systematic inquiry into the gaps.
- Discuss low-performing student achievement data with colleagues.
- Visit each others' classrooms to observe instructional strategies more frequently.
- Recommend using data and teacher collaboration when asked "What should schools do to close the gap?"

Case Study: Belle Air Elementary School
Belle Air Elementary School is a K–6 school located in San Bruno. About two thirds of Belle Air students are Hispanic/Latino, about 20 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, and about 15 percent are white. While all student groups improved between 1998–99 and 2001–02, Hispanic/Latino students made almost three times the achievement gains of white/Asian students. Teachers at Belle Air are constantly using data to ask questions, challenging themselves to try new approaches, and evaluating results. Each grade level has its own inquiry question to investigate, analyzing how that grade can contribute to the school's goal of closing the achievement gaps; similarly, each teacher conducts inquiry into his or her own classroom practice. The school uses a variety of diagnostic assessments, and teachers have time built into the schedule for collaboration. Data analysis prompted Belle Air to focus more intensively on literacy. Students now spend a minimum of 2½ to 3 hours daily on reading, and all grades use the Open Court reading program. In addition to student achievement gains, teachers cited many changes linked to using data, including richer professional interactions, an increased focus on supporting low-performing Hispanic/Latino students, and full faculty buy-in to a "no blame, no shame, no excuses" culture.

2. Leadership for Equity

Gap-closing schools are more likely to have:

- Leaders for whom closing the gaps is a primary goal.
- An agreed-upon and explicit definition of equity.
- People of color in positions of leadership.
- Leaders who set measurable goals for closing the gaps.
- Leaders who provide structured opportunities for faculty to discuss race and ethnicity.

Case Study: Roosevelt Middle School
Located in southeast Oakland, Roosevelt Middle School serves children in Grades 6–8. About half of the students are Asian, and the largest ethnicity is Chinese. Just over a quarter are Hispanic/Latino, and just under a quarter are African American. While all student groups improved between 1998–99 and 2001–02, African-Americans made about three times the achievement gains of Asian students. Roosevelt made dramatic changes in its academic program so that students could spend a daily minimum of two hours on reading. Every Roosevelt teacher—including science and mathematics teachers—now teach reading. Every day, students attend English class, which provides standard language arts instruction; reading class, which focuses on explicit literacy instruction; and literature class, which gives students 35 minutes of silent sustained reading.

Roosevelt also made dramatic improvements in school climate. In 1997–98, 60 percent of African-American students—or three out of every five—received suspensions, prompting faculty to hold data-based discussions on bias and develop stronger classroom management styles. By 2002–03, the suspension rate for African-American students was down to 18 percent, a decrease of 70 percent. Other climate-improving strategies include

a full-service student health center, a student rewards program, and specific supports for African-American students.

3. School Focus

Gap-closing schools are more likely to:

- Focus on inside-school factors versus outside-school factors affecting achievement.
- Have a narrow reform focus.
- Provide teachers with frequent professional development on literacy instruction.

Case Study: Musick Elementary School

Located in Newark, Musick Elementary School serves students in Grades K–6. Its two largest student groups are Hispanic/Latino (half of all students) and white (one quarter of all students). While all student groups improved academically between 1998–99 and 2001–02, Hispanic/Latino students made about 5½ times the achievement gains of white students. The school has focused considerable time and resources on building a strong foundation in reading. For most of the past decade, all Musick teachers—and all teachers in Newark Unified School District—participated in intensive, classroom-based training on strategies to teach reading comprehension. The school has released a teacher full-time as a literacy coordinator to provide schoolwide professional development. Musick also has built comprehensive leveled libraries in every classroom and a leveled reading book room. Use of guided reading, running records and a K–3 reading specialist give students at Musick an early advantage, bringing most students up to grade level by the third grade.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Schools narrowing the achievement gaps are using data in a variety of ways to engage in a continual improvement process. Although data use is frequently thought of as an analytical, technical strategy, data also can be a catalyst for the effective work that schools need to engage in to change school culture. The following recommendations pertain to data use:

1. Schools need frequent, reliable data.

Schools need quarterly, monthly, or even weekly feedback on progress. Gap-closing schools go beyond state-mandated testing to use diagnostic assessments that provide teachers with a clear portrait of individual students' strengths and weaknesses and, in turn, feedback on the effectiveness of instructional strategies.

2. Teachers need support to use data.

For teachers to take action on data, they need structured opportunities to reflect, discuss, collaborate, and learn new instructional strategies. They also need professional development, particularly classroom-based coaching, on how to tailor instruction to student needs. Collaboration time enables teachers to help one another with challenges, share successes, and mutually provide the practical support needed to change practice.

3. Race matters.
With African-American and Hispanic/Latino children languishing far behind their white and Asian peers, educators cannot choose to be color-blind. Emphasizing race in educational discussions and activities may seem controversial or counterintuitive, but it appears to be more effective than the alternative if the goal is narrowing the achievement gaps. School faculties need to have structured conversations about race and ethnicity with teachers actively discussing why gaps exist, how classroom practice might reinforce systemic gaps, and how teachers can actively combat bias. More people of color need to be hired as teachers and promoted as principals. School communities need to develop and agree on an explicit definition of equity and then establish a roadmap with measurable goals for closing the gaps.

4. Focus is essential.
Successful schools don't try to do it all. Instead, they use data to determine what matters most and focus their efforts accordingly. Since strong reading/literacy skills are the foundation of learning, schools with achievement gaps need to make tough choices, devoting less time and resources to other aspects of schooling until all children can read at grade level. In addition, a focused effort on raising achievement in one subpopulation can have widespread benefits for all students. Finally, school leaders need to bolster the faculty's sense of efficacy by encouraging a focus on what can be done inside school to close the achievement gaps.

Summary of Recommendations

1. **Schools need frequent, reliable data.** Whether in the form of diagnostic assessments or qualitative data, teachers and school leaders need frequent feedback to identify strengths and weaknesses.
2. **Teachers need support to use data.** Teachers need professional development regarding how to understand data and how to take action on the data. They also need collaboration time to discuss strategies and visit each others' classrooms to observe practice.
3. **Race matters.** Schools need to hire and promote people of color and provide structured, data-based opportunities for faculty to discuss how race and ethnicity affects students' experiences in school. They should get specific regarding what equity should look like and then set measurable goals regarding how to reach that vision of equity.
4. **Focus is essential.** Schools should not try to do everything. Instead, they should choose what matters most and can be controlled within school walls and focus on it. One essential focus is to make sure that students are mastering reading/literacy skills; these skills are the foundation of learning.

Introduction

The topic of closing the achievement gaps is at the forefront of debate over public education, largely because of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The stated goals of the NCLB Act are ambitious: "Designed to help close the achievement gaps between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers, the new law will change the culture of America's schools so that they define their success in terms of student achievement and invest in the achievement of every child" (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). In the wake of this law, much debate has ensued and questions have abounded. Which kids compose the gaps? What do schools need in order to close the gaps? And, urgently, where are the examples right now from which we can learn?

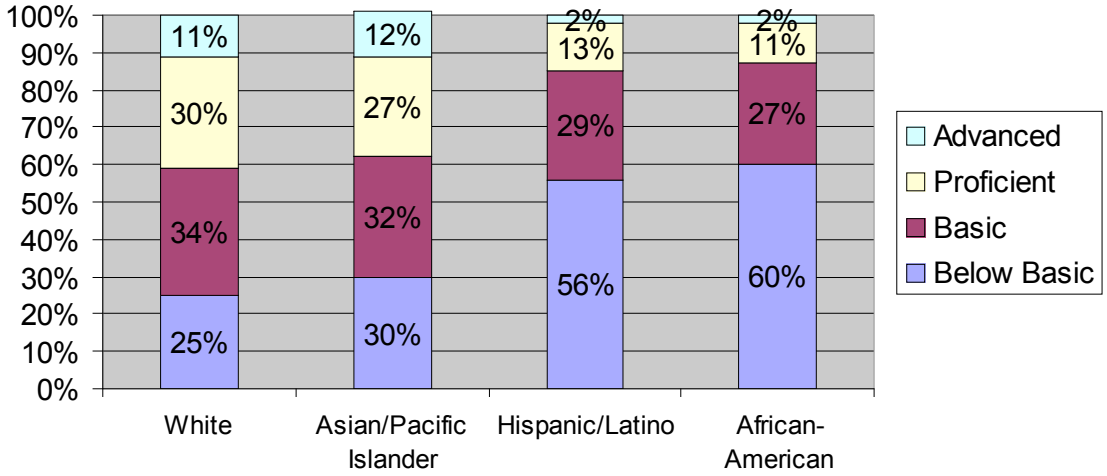
WHAT THE GAPS LOOK LIKE

The term *achievement gaps* refers to the difference in academic achievement between white, Asian (specifically Chinese-American, Japanese-American, and Korean-American), and economically advantaged students and their African-American, Hispanic/Latino, Native American, Southeast Asian, and socioeconomically disadvantaged counterparts. Achievement gaps appear on every widely used measurement of academic achievement, from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to the SAT, as well as additional indicators such as high school graduation rates or Advanced Placement course enrollments.

The nation's white and Asian students perform markedly better on the NAEP than their Hispanic/Latino or African-American peers. For example, on the 2003 NAEP fourth-grade reading test, 39 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander students and 41 percent of white students were proficient or advanced, compared with only 15 percent of Hispanic/Latino students and 13 percent of African-American students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). Figure 1 shows these results.

Similarly stark achievement gaps exist in other grade levels and subjects measured by the NAEP.

Figure 1. 2003 NAEP 4th-Grade Reading Performance by Race/Ethnicity



Source:. Percentage of Students, by Reading Achievement Level and Race/Ethnicity, Grade 4: 1992–2003. *The Nation's Report Card: Reading* (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003)

The gaps occur at the state level as well. In 1998, California's test scores on the fourth-grade NAEP in reading revealed an achievement gap of 28 points for African-American students and 36 points for Hispanic/Latino students (Education Trust, 2002; see also Bay Area School Reform Collaborative, 2002). With 10 points roughly equivalent to one grade level, African-American fourth graders in California were almost three years behind their white counterparts. Hispanic/Latino fourth graders were almost four years behind. African-American and Hispanic/Latino students trailed behind their white and Asian peers in writing, science, and mathematics as well (Education Trust, 2002; see also Bay Area School Reform Collaborative, 2002).

In California among those students taking the SAT in 2000, African-American students averaged a score of 861; Hispanic/Latino students, 898. In contrast, the average Asian student scored 1040, and the average white student scored 1080 (Education Trust, 2002; see also Bay Area School Reform Collaborative, 2002).

Alarmingly, the gaps widen as children go through the school system. Nationwide, African-American children average one year behind white students in second or third grade; by 12th grade, they have fallen to three or four years behind. The average African-American or Hispanic/Latino student graduates from high school with the mathematics, reading, and vocabulary skills of a typical white eighth grade student (Donahue, Voelkl, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1999; Smith, 1995).

Though there are certainly gaps between socioeconomic strata, race/ethnicity is—in many ways—the most recalcitrant and entrenched descriptor of the achievement gaps. Even when controlling for families' education backgrounds or socioeconomic status, gaps among racial/ethnic groups persist (Phillips, Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Crane, 1998). Differences in achievement cannot be attributed to poverty; even middle-class children of color lag significantly behind their white counterparts (Noguera & Akom, 2000).

The facts are sobering and disheartening. Educators may question whether achievement gaps can be closed at all and whether schools can play a role. Excitingly, evidence is building that progress can be made and that schools do, without a doubt, matter. Several recent studies have either profiled successful schools or programs. The Success for All (SFA) curriculum, a scripted, phonics-based reading program, has been highly lauded as a promising strategy for raising African-American and Latino student achievement (Slavin et al., 1996). Programs such as Even Start have been shown to have a positive effect (Dwyer & Frankel, 1998).

Another slate of studies has turned the spotlight on successful schools and districts. In *No Excuses: Lessons From 21 High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools* (Carter, 2000), the success stories 21 schools are summarized, highlighting the crucial role of principals. Another study of high-performing, high-poverty schools points to best practices that can make a difference, including building instructional leadership, improving accountability, building capacity to accompany new accountability measures, increasing time instruction, and creating stronger professional development and teacher support programs (Charles A. Dana Center, 1999).

Studies also have investigated the impact of policy changes on issues such as class size or teacher quality and found convincing evidence that these innovations can have a positive impact. Strategies such as preschool, increased teacher preparation, specific curricular interventions, and class-size reduction can boost the performance of students of color (Ferguson, 1998; Klein, 2002).

A number of studies link teacher quality to the achievement gaps. Researchers in Boston, Dallas, and Tennessee used data to show differences in achievement between students taught by teachers of differing quality (Haycock, 1998). Teachers' backgrounds also matter. Research has shown that the percentage of teachers of color has a positive impact on the academic achievement of students of color (Polinard, Winkle, & Meier, 1995).

Research has shown that focusing on in-school factors influencing student achievement is especially critical when looking at the racial achievement gap. Within-school factors have a greater impact on the achievement of students of color than they do on white students' achievement (Borman, & Rachuba, 2001). The academic resilience of low-income students of color has been shown to be more dependent on attending an effective school than does the resiliency of low-income white students. African-American students respond more strongly to teacher expectations, behavior, and favor than do their white counterparts (Ferguson, 1998).

Since school matters, the question remains: What are schools that are closing the achievement gaps doing right? We know a lot about good curriculum and good instruction, but is there a set of school-level strategies or behaviors that gap-closing schools are using? The majority of schools cannot wait for a dynamic leader to come their way. A reading program that works in one school may not to work in another. Big policy changes, aiming to reduce class size or ensure that all teachers are highly qualified, are failing to make the deep and far-reaching changes called for in the short term.

Right now, hundreds of thousands of schools have achievement gaps that are dramatic. What strategies and structures can these schools employ today to help to close it? We hope this report helps to answer this question, shedding some light on the set of in-school factors that can help eradicate the ability to use students' race/ethnicity to predict academic success.

How We Did the Study

SCHOOL SELECTION

Across the six counties of the San Francisco Bay Area—Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara—32 schools were selected for study. The schools, all racially and ethnically diverse, represent a wide spectrum: suburban and urban, and high and low socioeconomic brackets. Each school has an affiliation with the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC), a foundation-funded school reform organization serving a network of 124 schools spread across 28 school districts in the socioeconomically, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse San Francisco Bay Area. The selected schools were involved with BASRC from three to eight years, participating as BASRC Leadership Schools between 1996 and the present. As Leadership Schools, they received flexible grant funding averaging between $150,000 to $300,000 per year and participated in professional development provided by BASRC. All surveyed schools serve students in Grades K–8. Of the 32 schools selected for the study, 31 had both significant white or Asian subpopulations and significant African-American or Hispanic/Latino populations for every year between 1998–99 and 2001–02; one had two significant subgroups in 1998–99 and 2001–2002. (This study uses the state's definition of significant subgroup, meaning either 100 students or 15 percent of the student population.)

We measured schools' achievement gaps using California's Academic Performance Index (API) ranking system over the four-year time period of 1998–99 to 2001–02. Each school in the state receives an API score based on student performance on the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) testing package, including a standardized test and standards-based assessments. Between 1998–99 and 2001–02, the API was the only student achievement score all California schools received that was disaggregated into racial/ethnic achievement groups. Therefore, it is the only measure for the studied time period that can be used to compare racial/ethnic achievement gaps. The API is a composite measure that includes student scores in both reading and mathematics and that differentially weights student achievement gains to give schools an incentive to move students out of the lower quartile of test scores. Thus the API—unlike the annual yearly progress (AYP) measure that is at the center of federal policy in the No Child Left Behind Act—gives more weight to students moving from the first quartile to the second than from the second to the third, and so on.

DATA COLLECTION

From this group of 32 schools, we collected data in two ways. First, we distributed a survey to all 32 schools to inventory the policies and strategies being used. (Stanford University's Center for Research on the Context of Teaching provided consultation on survey development.) Second, we selected three schools with impressive progress in closing the achievement gaps and researched them through interviews, observations, and document review as case studies. Focus groups with teachers and students from six gap-closing schools also helped to augment findings.

1. Survey

The survey was designed to gather information on the policies and practices that BASRC schools are employing that might contribute to closing the achievement gaps. Topics addressed on the survey included use of data, the role of leaders, teacher attitudes and beliefs, professional development, instructional strategies, and literacy programs. The majority of the items on the survey used a four- or five-point scale measuring either frequency or agreement with the questions. It also included several open-ended questions.

Teacher Selection

Surveys were mailed to respondents in January 2003. Three surveys were mailed to each of the 32 schools' principals with a request for them to be distributed to teachers. (We offered schools that returned three completed surveys a $75 gift certificate to a bookstore.) We asked that principals select teachers who had been at the school for three or more years, had been involved with the school's reform work, and had taught language arts at least part of the time.

Schools were given the identical survey with one exception: Those with a significant subpopulation of African-American students were asked to respond with these students in mind. Similarly, schools with a significant subpopulation of Hispanic/Latino students were asked to respond considering these students. In four schools with both significant Hispanic/Latino and African-American subpopulations, we asked respondents to consider the subpopulation that had data to suggest the gaps were closing.

Response Rates

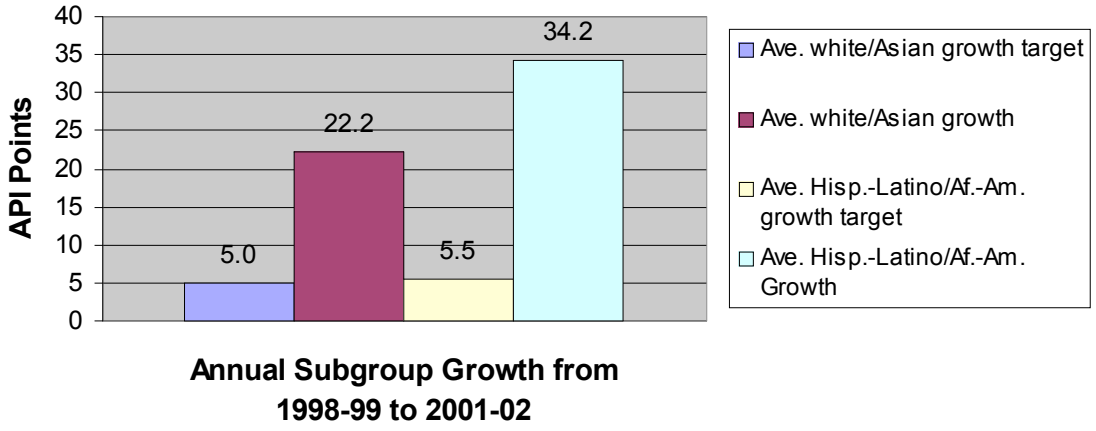
Of the 32 schools surveyed, we received surveys back from 32 schools, or a full 100 percent of those surveyed. Out of a possible total of 96 individual teacher surveys, we received 82, an 85-percent teacher response rate. Schools surveyed had a wide range of student demographic diversity, with an average of 25 percent Asian students, 31 percent Hispanic/Latino students, 10 percent African-American students, and 32 percent white students. Thirty-five percent of students enrolled in the surveyed schools qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, and 26 percent were English language learners. Eighty-nine percent of teachers in the schools surveyed were fully credentialed.

Respondents represented a broad range of teaching backgrounds. Their total number of years teaching ranged from two to 38 years, with an average of 12 years in the classroom. Respondents had been teaching at their current schools for an average of nine years. The sample included teachers working in Grade K–8 in self-contained, single-subject, specialist, and pullout classrooms. Five of the respondents were the reform/literacy coordinators at their school, and four others held leadership positions such as grade-level or subject-area lead teacher. All but one respondent reported his or her race/ethnicity; of these, 79 percent identified themselves as white, 7 percent as Asian, 5 percent as Hispanic/Latino, 5 percent as other, and 4 percent as African-American. These percentages roughly reflect the racial/ethnic composition of Bay Area teachers, who are 74 percent white, 7 percent Asian, 8 percent Hispanic/Latino, and 5 percent African-American.

Analysis

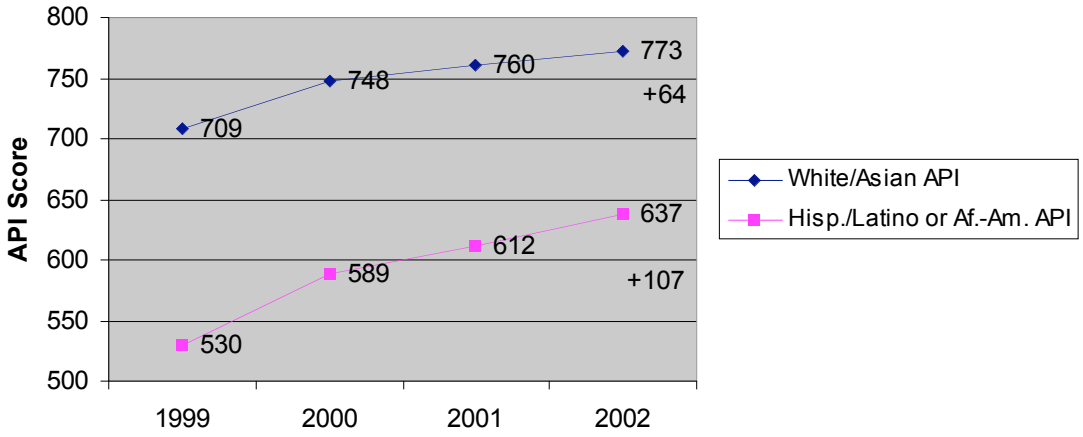
Schools were divided into two groups, gap-closing and non-gap-closing, based on API scores. In the 16 gap-closing schools, the low-performing subgroup made almost twice the achievement growth as the high-performing subgroup. White and/or Asian students exceeded their targets by an annual average of about 17 points; Hispanic/Latino or African-American students exceeded their targets by an average of about 29 points. On average, white and/or Asian students made 4½ times the growth necessary to meet targets; Hispanic/Latino or African-American students made over six times the growth necessary to meet targets. These results are indicated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Gap-Closing Schools:
Target Annual Growth vs. Actual Annual Growth



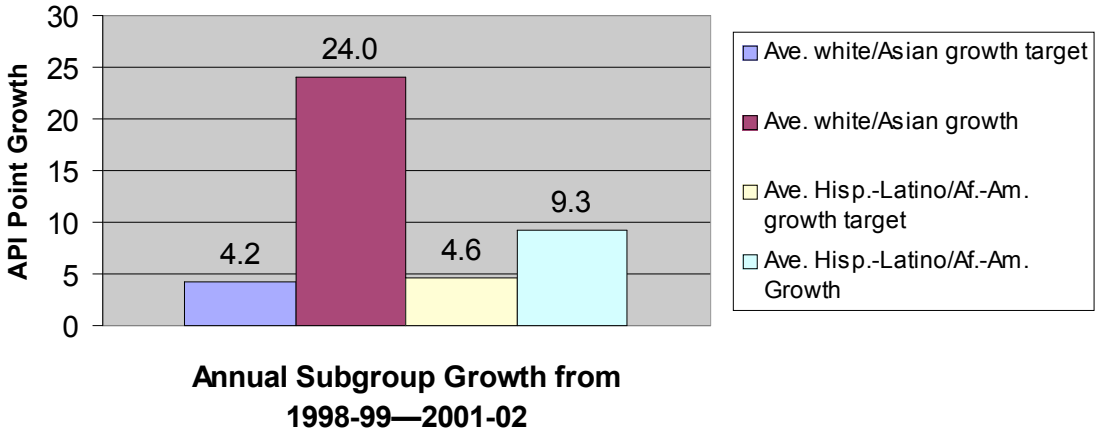
Over the same four year period, from 1998–99 to 2001–02, these 16 schools closed the achievement gaps between 5 percent and 86 percent or between 9 and 109 points, averaging a 26-percent or 43-point reduction in the achievement gaps (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Gap-Closing Schools' API Scores



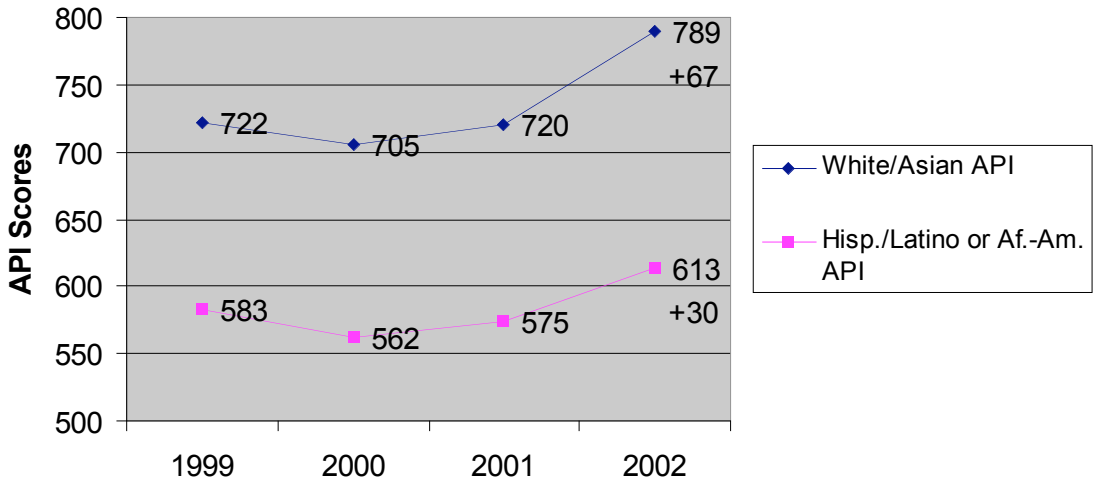
Conversely, in the 16 non-gap-closing schools, the high-performing subgroup made more progress than the low-performing subgroup (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Non-Gap-Closing Schools: Target Growth vs. Actual Growth



In the 16 non-gap-closing schools, while all subgroups exceeded their growth targets, white/Asian students made an average of 2½ times the growth of their Hispanic/Latino or African-American peers. White and/or Asian students exceeded their targets by an average of about 20 points; Hispanic/Latino or African-American students exceeded their targets by an average of just under 5 points. Over this time period, from 1998–99 to 2001–02, these 16 schools maintained or widened the achievement gaps between 0 percent to 158 percent or between 0 to 96 points, averaging a 38-percent or 36-point increase in the achievement gaps. (See Figure 5.)

Figure 5. Non-Gap-Closing Schools' API Scores



Because the survey questions measure school-level outcomes, individual responses were aggregated into school-level responses. For example, if a school had three teacher respondents, these were aggregated into one school-level score for each survey question. To measure the difference between gap-closing and non-gap-closing responses, we analyzed gap-closing schools and non-gap-closing schools in two ways. In our first analysis, we simply divided the 32 schools into two groups based on gap change as described earlier.

In our second analysis, we took into consideration both "change in" and "size of" the gaps. We compared eight schools that both narrowed the gaps and had gap size that averaged under 100 points (98 points) and compared them with eight schools that both widened the gaps and had almost double the average gap size (183 points). This second approach weeded out those schools narrowing but with exceedingly large gaps, and similarly removed schools technically maintaining or widening but with very small differentials between subgroups. All of the survey findings reported were statistically significant in the second data cut; half were significant in both the first and the second cut. (Details regarding statistical significance are included in the Appendix.)

2. Case Studies

Between February and June 2003, study staff conducted both interviews and observations at the three case-study sites: two elementary schools and one middle school. We visited each site between five to seven times and visited almost every classroom at all grade levels in each school. In addition, we conducted more in-depth observations of key classrooms, which were selected based on recommendations from interviews with teachers in the school. The goal of these observations was to see best-case examples of what staff members themselves believed was making a difference in their efforts to close the achievement gaps.

Attending one to two meetings at each school, we observed leadership-team, grade-level, and full-faculty meetings at sites. We also conducted between 7 and 14 interviews per site, including the principal, all of the members of the leadership team, specialists in reading and student support, and a minimum of two classroom teachers. All schools receiving BASRC funding are required to submit annual Reports of Progress, and these further supplemented our data collection as historical documents evidencing the schools' progress.

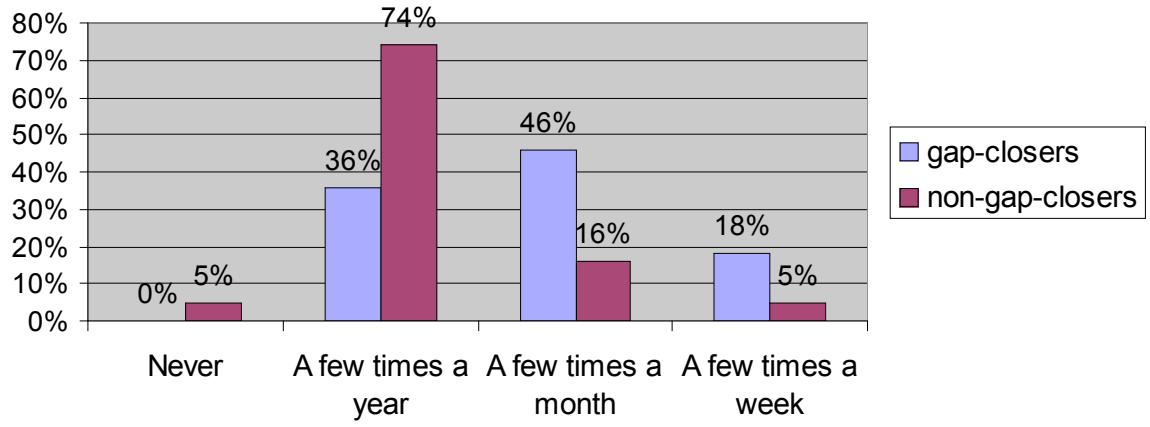
Between January and May 2003, study staff also conducted three focus groups: one with a mixed group of teachers from a variety of gap-closing schools, a second with students at a gap-closing middle school, and the third with teachers at a gap-closing elementary school.

Findings

What does it take to close the achievement gaps? Our findings suggest that what matters most is how schools use data.

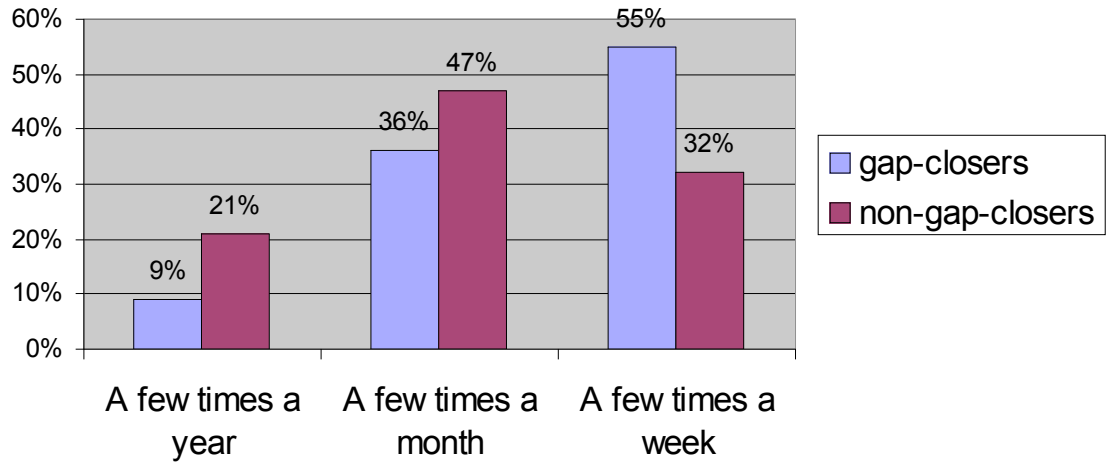
Teachers in gap-closing schools more frequently use data to understand the skill gaps of low-achieving students. Figure 6 indicates that about two thirds of respondents from gap-closing schools use data to understand skill gaps at least several times a month and, sometimes, several times a week. In contrast, under a quarter of respondents from non-gap-closing schools use data this frequently; in fact, over 75 percent of these teachers reported using data only few times a year, or never.

Figure 6. How frequently do you use data to understand the skill gaps of low-achieving students?



Gap-closing schools also use assessments more frequently. Figure 7 indicates that almost all teachers at gap-closing schools administer ongoing assessments of students at least monthly, with over half administering weekly assessments. In contrast, just under a third of respondents from non-gap-closing schools administer weekly assessments, a little less than half do monthly assessments, and about a quarter administer assessments only a few times a year. One gap-closing survey respondent advised, "Collect other types of data than SAT-9 or trimester district assessments. If you collect [data] more frequently, you might see change and be better able to refine your inquiry."

Figure 7. How Frequently Do You Administer Assessments of Students?



Differences between the groups emerged over questions regarding use of data, painting dramatically different pictures of what happens after the test. All of the findings discussed below are statistically significant, as detailed in the Appendix. Results are grouped into three categories: (A) teacher support for use of data, (B) leadership for equity, and (C) school focus. Case studies in each of these areas illuminate what survey findings can look like in practice. In gap-closing schools, teachers are more likely to have structured time during the school day to talk about results and next steps. They are more likely to get support about how to take action on the data. Gap-closing schools are less likely to shy away from race; when they receive data indicating a gap between students of one race or ethnicity and another, they address the problem directly through discussion and policy changes instead of glossing over it with talk about all students or average achievement. When data pinpoint a weakness in students' academic skills, gap-closing schools are more likely to focus in on that area, making tough choices to make sure students are immersed in what they most need.

Before proceeding, it is interesting to note what did not produce significant results. No teacher characteristics, including years of experience and credentialing, were statistically significant between the two groups. In other words, both gap-closers and non-gap-closers had about the same teacher qualifications. In addition, two groups of survey questions did not produce significant results: questions about attitudes and beliefs, and questions about specific attributes of reading programs. Teachers from both groups of schools indicated that they believe the achievement gaps can be closed and that all children can learn regardless of race or ethnicity. Both teacher belief systems and the specifics of reading programs are complex, however, and more research needs to be done regarding their impact.

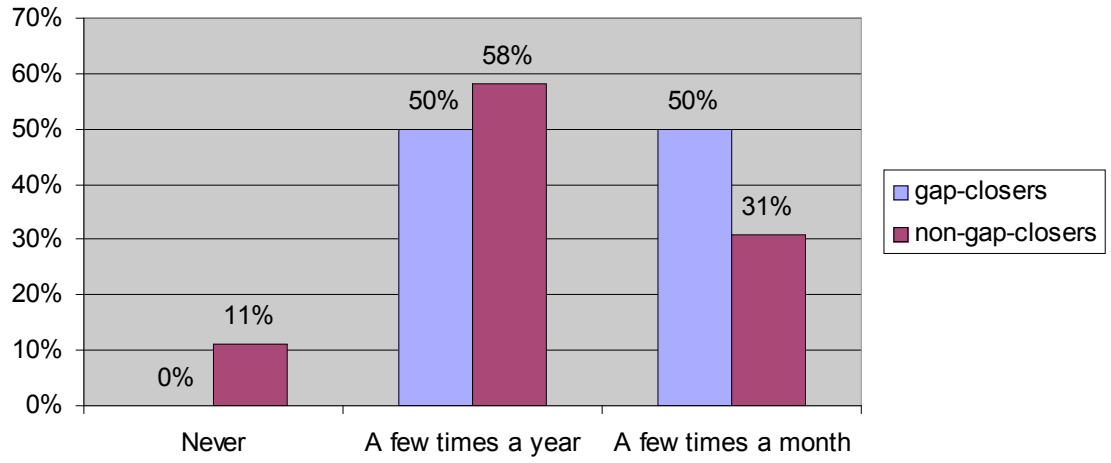
TEACHER SUPPORT FOR USE OF DATA

Teachers in gap-closing schools are more likely to receive professional development about how to use data. Their school leaders are more likely to encourage them to see using data as part of their job, and they are more likely to collaborate with other teachers, whether discussing data or sharing instructional strategies.

1. Professional Development

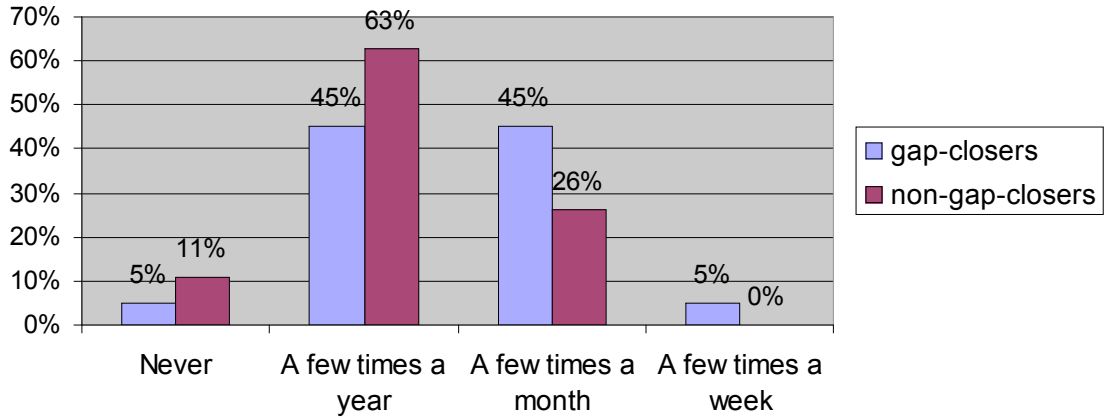
Teachers at gap-closing schools have received more professional development about analyzing data on low-performing students. Figure 8 shows that half of respondents at gap-closing schools indicated that they received professional development on this topic a few times a month, compared to non-gap-closing schools where less than one third did. Moreover, 11 percent of non-closers have never received professional development on this topic, whereas all gap-closers have had some.

Figure 8. How frequently do you receive professional development on analyzing low-performing student data?



Teachers at gap-closing schools also have received more professional development about linking data on low-performing students with effective instructional strategies. Figure 9 indicates that twice as many gap-closers as non-gap-closers have received professional development on linking data to instructional strategies on a monthly or a weekly basis. A good three-quarters of non-closers receive professional development on this topic only a few times a year or never.

Figure 9. How frequently do you receive professional development on linking low-performing student data to instructional strategies?



In answering the open-ended question at the end of the survey ("What strategies do you think are most important for your school to focus on in order to close the gap?"), many respondents emphasized that it is essential to give teachers support so that they know how to take action on data. One respondent wrote, "Our school has not focused on specific strategies for teachers to use that help Hispanic/Latino students. They are mentioned (as in, they exist) but as a school we have not pursued them. We are told we should be using them, but we are not given examples or in-service, literature, etc. to help us bring them into the classroom. The administrators tell us 'good teaching practices' would help close the gap for those target students, but don't all teachers believe they are using good teaching practices, whether or not they actually are doing so?"

Another teacher wrote, "I think training—professional development—to raise awareness of how the literacy strategies we are learning should or could be adapted to meet our focus groups' specific needs would be very beneficial."

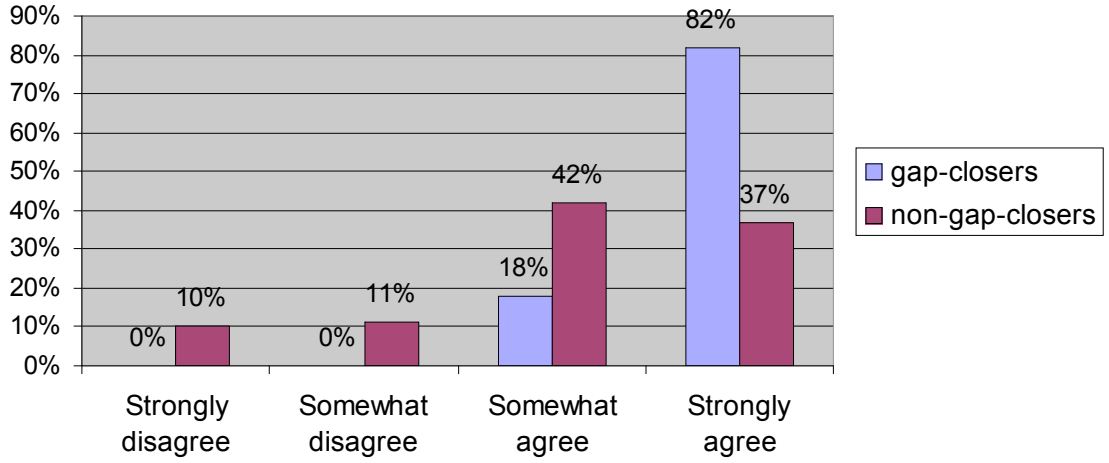
Finally, another respondent wrote, "We need staff development on specific strategies that are shown to work based on research. Teachers are trying but are not always sure which strategies are going to show the greatest achievement in student work. We have begun to talk about ways to differentiate instruction, but we are at the tip of the iceberg. Teachers need more time to explore this type of instruction and support in the classroom when doing it. The prospect of making big change is possible and exciting."

2. Encouraging Inquiry Into the Gaps

Leaders in gap-closing schools are more likely to encourage or lead inquiry into the achievement gaps. Figure 10 indicates that all respondents from gap-closing schools agreed that their school leaders encourage or lead inquiry—asking questions about data—into the gap, with 82 percent strongly agreeing. In contrast, about one third of non-

closing respondents strongly agreed, just under half somewhat agreed, and about a quarter of respondents from non-gap-closing schools actually disagreed with this statement. No respondents from gap-closing schools disagreed. One gap-closing respondent explained the value of inquiry, writing "The more we understand why we have [a gap], the better we can understand how to close it."

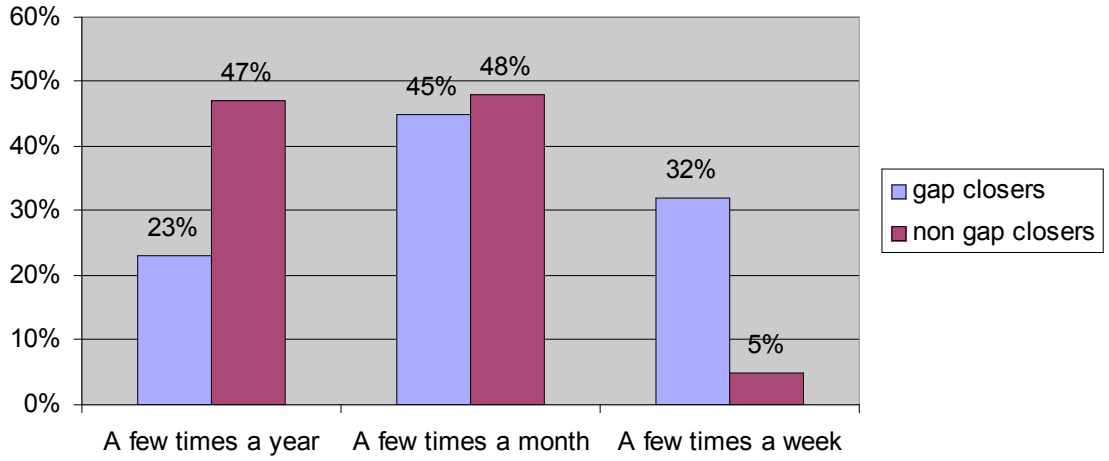
Figure 10. School Leaders Encourage or Lead Inquiry Into the Gaps



3. Discussion of Data With Colleagues

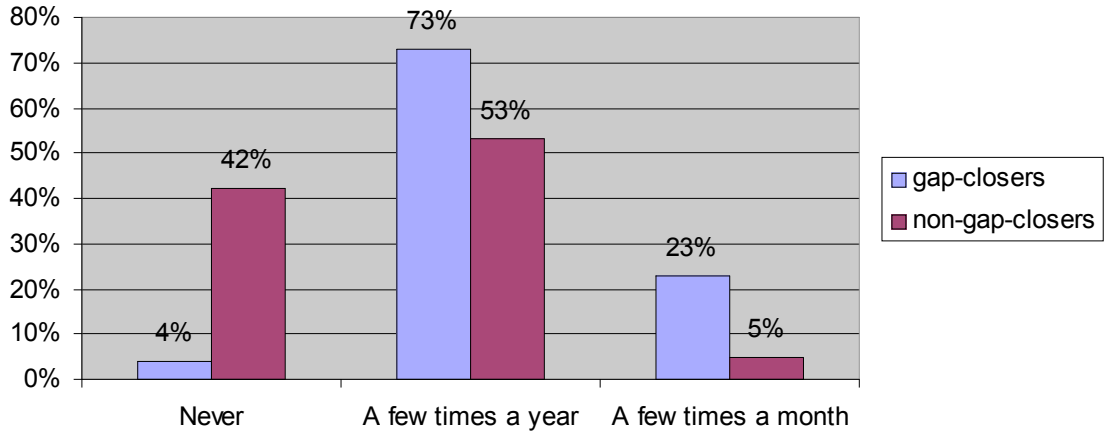
Teachers in gap-closing schools are more likely to discuss low-performing African-American or Hispanic/Latino student achievement data with colleagues. Figure 11 indicates that over three-quarters of respondents from gap-closing schools discuss data at least a few times a month; about a third of these indicate that they talk about data a few times a week. Respondents in non-gap-closing schools discuss data far less frequently; just about half discuss data only a few times a year. In the words of one gap-closing survey respondent, in order to close the gaps, teachers should focus on "analyzing data on low-achieving students and adjusting our teaching—a Cycle of Inquiry."

Figure 11. How frequently do you discuss low-performing student achievement data with colleagues?



Teachers in gap-closing schools are more likely to visit each others' classrooms. Figure 12 indicates that almost all respondents from gap-closing schools visit colleagues' classrooms to observe instructional strategies a few times a month or a few times a year. In non-gap-closing schools, respondents were just about evenly split between those who have visited classrooms and those who have never visited a colleague's classroom.

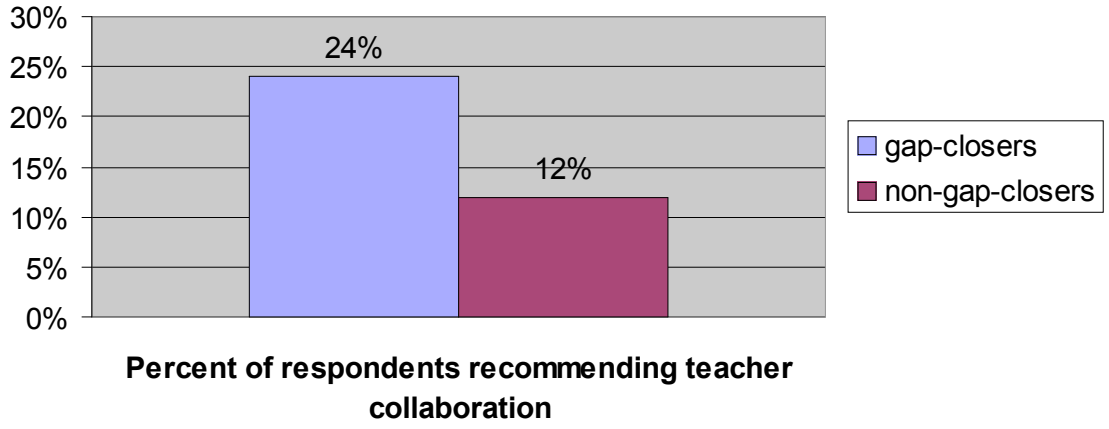
Figure 12. How frequently have you visited colleagues classrooms to observe instructional strategies?



When asked in an open-ended question what schools should focus on in order to close the achievement gaps, twice as many respondents from gap-closing schools as respondents from non-gap-closing schools cited teacher collaboration. Figure 13 indicates that just

under 25 percent, or 9 out of 37 respondents from gap-closing schools, recommended teacher collaboration—compared to only 12 percent, or 4 out of 34, in non-gap-closing schools. Respondents from gap-closing schools recommended both grade-level and cross-grade collaboration in which "teachers share successful teaching strategies in general as well as specific strategies/lessons for specific standards." Another wrote, "Teachers of English language learners need personal collaborative time to discuss, reflect. We can help each other." In a similar vein, a respondent recommended "sharing with colleagues strategies that work with low-performing students and visiting colleagues' classrooms to observe instructional strategies."

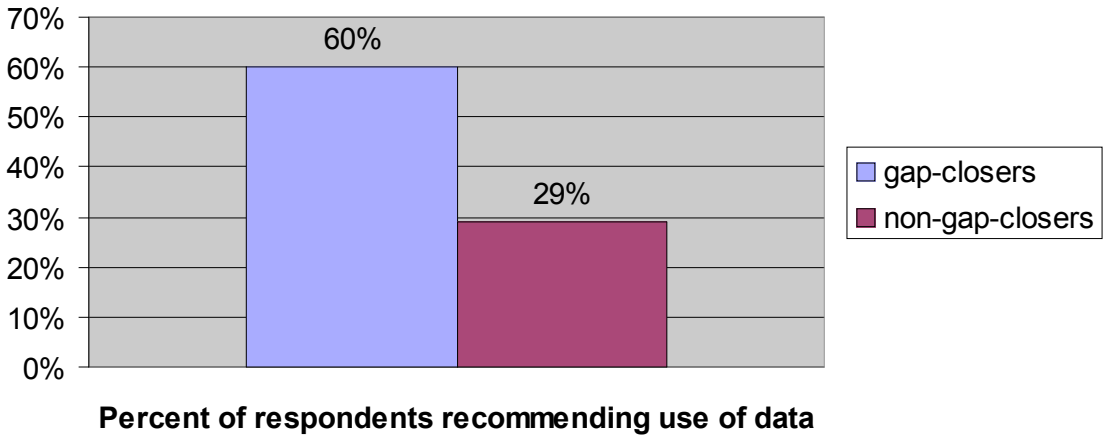
Figure 13. Recommend Teacher Collaboration to Close the Achievement Gaps



4. Recommendation: Use Data

It's no surprise, then, that gap-closers are more likely to recommend using data when asked "What strategies do you think are most important for your school to focus on in order to close the gap?" Figure 14 indicates that just under two thirds, or 22 out of 37 gap-closing respondents recommended the use of data, compared to under one third, or 10 out of 34 non-gap-closing respondents. Many responses specified "diagnostic assessments" or "multiple measures of assessment." One wrote that schools should focus on "using multiple measures to assess student performance and analyzing data on low-performing students." Another discussed the benefits of inquiry, reflecting, "I think it is important for us to stop and consider why there is a gap. Often we try to fix something before we have time to understand why there is a problem. If we collect [data] more frequently, we might see change and be able to better refine our inquiry."

Figure 14. Recommend Use of Data to Close the Achievement Gaps



CASE STUDY OF BELLE AIR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:
TEACHER SUPPORT IN PRACTICE

In the early 1990s, Belle Air Elementary was a school where few families wanted to send their children. It was widely considered by teachers, parents, and community members alike to be the worst school in the district. "There were substitutes and volunteers that were afraid to come here," remembered one teacher. "Now, once they're here, it's hard to get them to leave. You get hooked…. The word's out that it's a good place to be."

Belle Air Elementary is located just south of San Francisco in the diverse city of San Bruno in San Mateo County. The school is adjacent to San Francisco International Airport and Highway 101. Though not in the most picturesque setting, the entire facility is brand new as of 2002, when an extensive building project replaced the original 1950s structures.

Enrollment: 427; 57 percent eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.
Demographics:

- 66.5% Hispanic/Latino
- 15% Pacific Islander
- 10% White
- 4% Filipino
- 4% Asian
- 1% African-American

English Language Learners: 44% of total enrollment

- 82% Spanish
- 12% Tongan

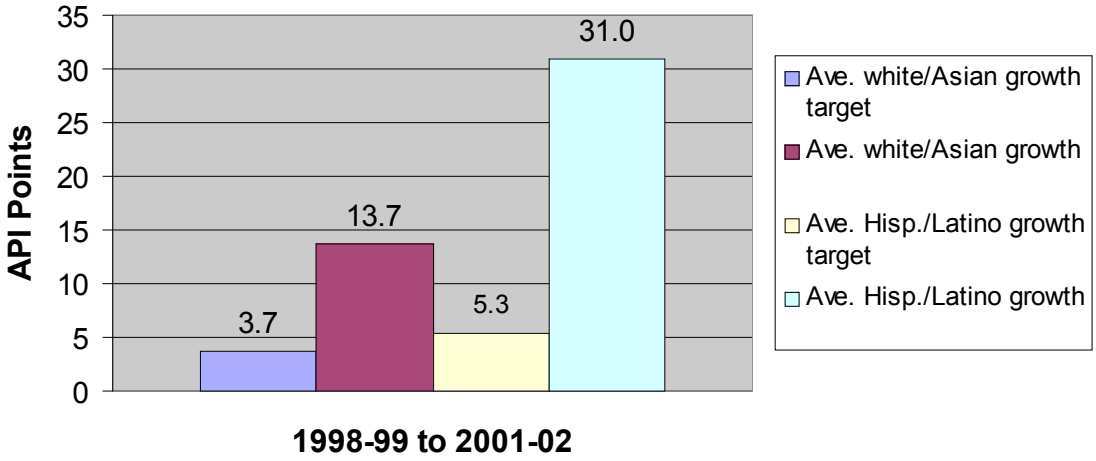
(CDE DataQuest 2002–03)

Belle Air is a Title I school that serves students from kindergarten to sixth grade. Enrollment numbers have remained relatively steady; but, like many schools in California, the school's population is becoming more and more diverse. Five years ago, there were twice as many white students; Hispanics/Latinos made up just under half of the student body, whereas today they make up two thirds. The number of English language learners has almost doubled during this time period as well.

Belle Air has been a Leadership School in the BASRC network since 1996, the year BASRC began. Twenty teachers are on staff; of these, 18 are fully credentialed and two hold emergency credentials. Nineteen are white and one is Filipino. Seven of the 20 teachers have been at Belle Air for five or more years, and the average tenure at Belle Air is 8½ years. The current principal, Angela Addiego, has been in her position for eight years. Early in her tenure, teacher turnover was high but it has slowed in recent years.

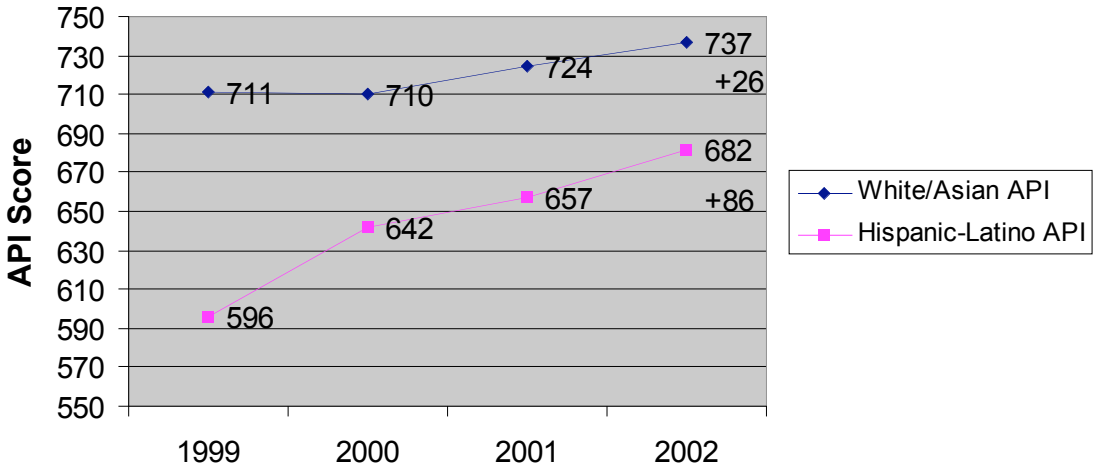
Amid all the changes—new teachers, new student demographics, new building construction—Belle Air has been making consistent and impressive student achievement gains. (See Figure 15.) During the time period 1998–99 to 2001–02, Hispanic/Latino student made almost three times the academic growth of white/Asian students, exceeding their annual targets by an average of about 26 points while whites/Asians exceeded their annual targets on average by about 10 points. Over these four years, white/Asian students made 3½ times the growth necessary; Hispanic/Latino students made almost six times the growth necessary to meet targets.

Figure 15. Belle Air Elementary:
Target Annual Growth vs. Actual Annual Growth



Looked at in another way, between 1999 and 2002, Belle Air closed its achievement gaps by 52 percent, or 60 API points. (See Figure 16.) Hispanic/Latino students improved their API scores by 86 points or 14 percent, while white/Asian students also improved their API scores by 26 points or 4 percent. If the current pattern continues, Belle Air's gaps as measured by the API will be completely closed by 2006.

Figure 16. Belle Air Elementary:
Hispanic/Latino vs. White/Asian API Scores

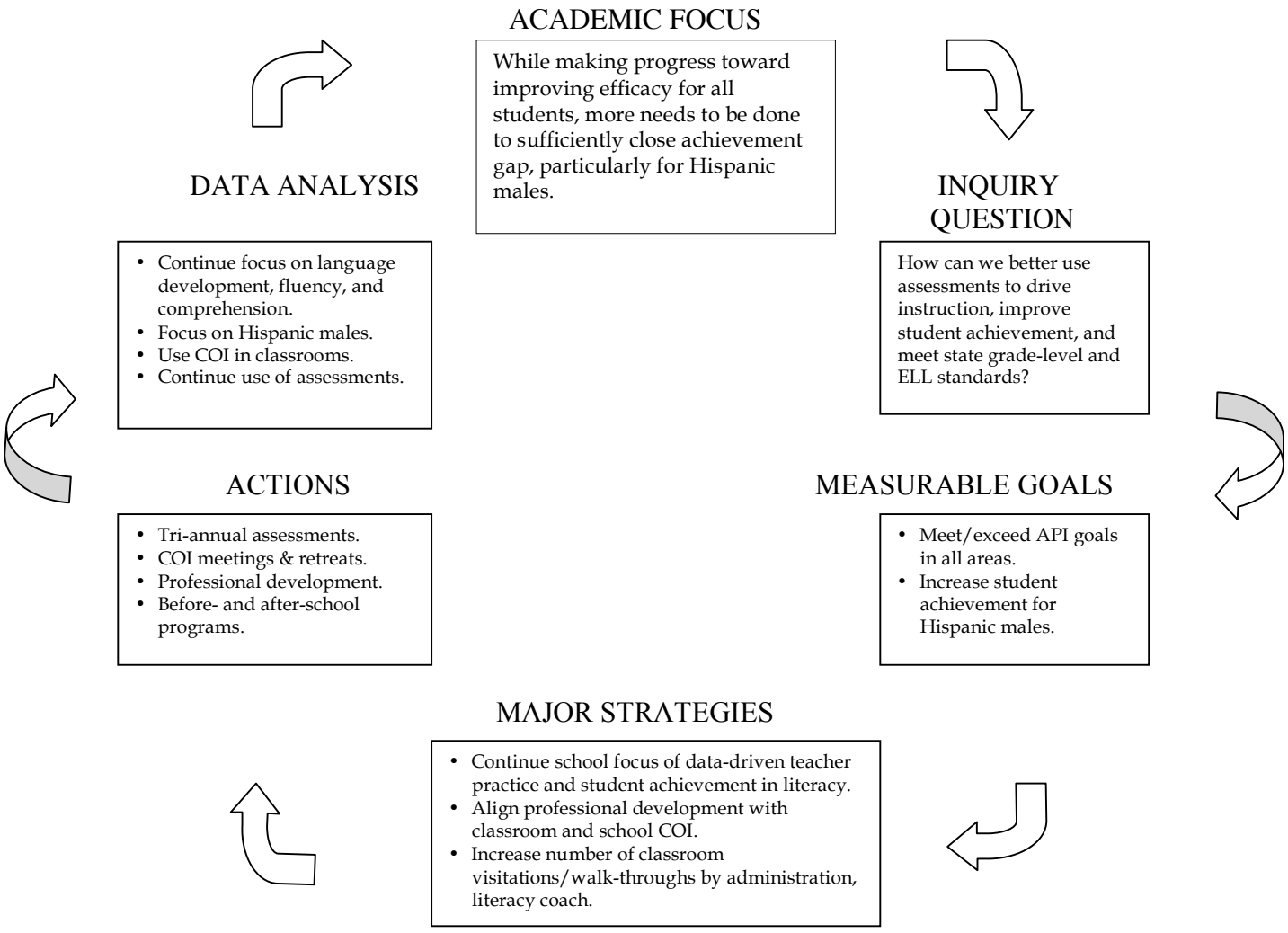


HOW ARE THEY DOING IT?

1. Cycle of Inquiry

Teachers at Belle Air are constantly using data to ask questions, challenging themselves to try new approaches, and evaluating results. It's a process that BASRC calls the Cycle of Inquiry (COI). This process is illustrated in Figure 13. Belle Air engages in this formal self-analysis on a schoolwide, grade-level, and classroom-level basis.

Figure 17. Belle Air School Cycle of Inquiry (2002–03)



Each grade level has its own question to investigate, analyzing how that grade can contribute to the school's goal of closing the achievement gaps. Similarly, each teacher conducts inquiry into his or her own classroom practice. Principal Addiego is serious about this process; each teacher's Cycle of Inquiry is included in his or her job evaluation.

A key element in making this inquiry work meaningful has been the use of diagnostic data. Belle Air administers trimester reading assessments for Grades 2–6, with results broken down into several components such as fluency, vocabulary, decoding, comprehension, and letter recognition. The school developed these trimester assessments by piecing together sections of preexisting assessments, following the guidance of teacher feedback and state standards. Belle Air was an early adopter of Open Court reading, and teachers also use weekly Open Court assessments and annual Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) data. To manage the assessment process, Belle Air has an assessment advisor who makes sure that teachers find the data helpful and that attention is paid to students who have significant achievement gaps. The school also shares a district staff member with other schools for inputting assessment data.

Conducting inquiry led Belle Air to focus on students who are the most at-risk: Hispanic/Latino males. Once the school collectively recognized that this group underperformed compared to all other groups, teachers selected a Hispanic/Latino boy from each class as their "focal student" and paid particular attention to their support for and interactions with these students. Teachers reported that this practice not only helped the focal students improve but also helped them become better teachers, more adept at differentiating instruction. Over time, this practice also has helped close the gap between male and female achievement levels. In the school's most recent Cycle of Inquiry, focal students are now Hispanic/Latino boys or girls, underscoring the importance of the use of data to keep abreast of changes.

All this questioning takes time, and Addiego has seen to it that teachers have time built into their schedule so inquiry is an integral part of their job, not an add-on. During these collaborative meetings, teachers ask questions, investigate data, and support one another in trying new strategies to increase overall student achievement and to close the achievement gaps. A priority of Addiego is to make sure collaborative meetings stay focused on achievement gaps. Leadership Team meetings are now "much tighter," said Addiego. "They're all centered around our focus—closing the gap. We don't spend a whole lot of time anymore talking about who pays for coffee…. We used to spend hours talking about who pays for coffee." Over time, these collaboration sessions have become more structured and refined, first with the leadership coming directly from Addiego, and then over the past two years with more guidance from the Leadership Team. Building time into the school schedule has had a profound effect on teachers. As one teacher said:

Time to talk about data-based next steps:

- Weekly grade level team meetings during early release days.
- Weekly leadership team meetings
- Full staff meeting twice a month
- Cross-grade level team meeting 3–4 times a year
- Full faculty summer retreat

> Absolutely, teachers see closing the gap as a priority. Because it's finally time. Finally, somebody's saying "This is important" and "Surprise, we're going to give you the time to do it." As opposed to "Here's something new to do. Do it on weekends, during the summer."

> I think people were more responsive to looking at the achievement gap because we were treated as professionals who were given the time, which I think happens in the business world but doesn't usually happen in the teaching profession. Usually if something like that needs to be done, it's done on your own time.

The Cycle of Inquiry has produced several changes at Belle Air. There is a high degree of visible alignment across classrooms and grade levels. For example, all teachers teach mathematics in the morning and language arts before lunch, and all classrooms follow an open-door policy. Within grade-level classrooms, daily lesson plans are aligned so that all students are learning the same content at the same pace. In addition, the primary grades have moved away from using a pull-out English language learner (ELL) program. Now, 35 to 45 minutes a day of within-class direct instruction is provided for ELL students, who are grouped by California English Language Development Test (CELDT) level.

Growing comfortable with collaboration, teachers reported an increased ability to critique and accept criticism and a shift toward richer professional interactions. "We just did the fishbowl," said a teacher, referring to an exercise in which teachers reflect on practice while others watch, then join the discussion. "That's a hard conversation to have. Sometimes it takes a lot to step out of your role and realize that we're doing it for the kids. That could never have happened six years ago—ever. It's hard because teaching is a very personal profession. When people are showing you data or asking you to evaluate your own work, that's a hard place to get to."

2. Focus on Literacy

Principal Addiego and her faculty believe that reading is the cornerstone of learning. "Children can't do much in the world unless they have fundamental reading skills," said Addiego. "Everything has to do with words and communication and understanding, and all that goes back to reading." In 1996-97, Belle Air adopted the Open Court reading program for Grades K–3 and expanded it to all grade levels in 2001–02. It required a large time investment and a big change in the way teachers taught reading. Principal Addiego explained, "I had to say to teachers, 'You have to give up those foo-foo units.' You know how teachers have those little activities that are so cute and they spend so much time developing them? But they don't have any standards or content in it. We had to get rid of that. 'Foo-foo' was a big word for a while. I don't even have to say that anymore because we're past it." All teachers also use silent sustained reading and silent sustained writing as a part of their daily curriculum. Belle Air students now spend a minimum of $2^{1}/_{2}$ to 3 hours daily on reading.

To get to where it is today, Belle Air invested a significant amount of time and effort on teacher professional development focused on literacy. Several experts were brought in to work with teachers on issues such as teaching reading to children in poverty, working with ELL students, and reading skills inference and analysis. Inservice days and observations at other schools helped teachers fully implement Open Court reading.

Belle Air also offers a variety of support systems for students who are below grade level in literacy. A before-school fluency program, implemented in 2000, gives students the opportunity to come in before school and practice essential reading skills. An after-school class for English language learners also was created to provide additional vocabulary and language support. In addition to the district-funded summer school, Belle Air since 2001 has offered a summer school session targeted at focal students who need extra remediation. Finally, a preschool was established at Belle Air in 2000 for 3- and 4-year olds. It serves almost all Hispanic/Latino children who then go on to attend the school, giving them early exposure to language and print.

Belle Air faculty acknowledge the trade-offs of having such an intense focus on literacy. Less time is spent on art, music, or projects that can't be linked directly to academic achievement. Open Court is a highly prescriptive teaching method, and some of the more veteran teachers chose to leave the school. Those that have stayed on, however, became converts, asserting that their students are better readers now and that these skills have had a positive effect on all other subjects.

3. High Expectations

The slogan that "all children can learn" has become commonplace; it would be difficult to find a school principal who does not claim high expectations for students, and the BASRC study shows that teachers at both gap-closing and non-gap-closing schools espouse this doctrine. Principal Addiego, however, believes that the slogan represents a real goal and fundamental commitment. She expects her staff to believe that "all children, and I mean each and every child, deserve an equal education. You cannot do any of this work if you don't hold the vision." Addiego never misses an opportunity to communicate the school's vision whether it's through bimonthly staff meetings, visits to teachers' collaboration sessions, visuals posted all around the teachers' lounge, or tough one-on-one conversations with teachers she feels are not upholding these expectations.

Though Addiego is the head of Belle Air, the school's leadership structure is collaborative, with assessment, curriculum, and reform advisors forming a leadership team. This team fosters a culture of high standards and expectations throughout the entire staff. All faculty interviewed cited the school's motto—"No blame, no shame, no excuses"—and explained that they had to shift their mental model. "It's about having high expectations," one teacher explained. "It's not okay—that because these kids come from poverty or from an unsupportive home, or because these parents aren't knocking on the door of the school—to accept low performance. If I got something that wasn't the best piece of work, before I might have excused it and thought, 'Well, they don't have anyone to help them at home.' Now, I'm asking 'What can I do to aid this child, to give him or her more support? How can I scaffold the work so they can get where they need to be?' "

Teacher collaboration helps teachers both hold one another accountable and support one another in helping kids excel. All teachers submit lesson plans to Addiego every week. Classroom observations also reinforce high expectations; leadership team members

conduct walk-throughs with a copy of the state standards to make sure that the work they're seeing is at grade level.

High expectations can lead to high teacher turnover. If teachers don't share the belief that the achievement gaps can be closed, they are "out of here real fast," said Addiego. "I don't want people who don't believe it…. We don't stand for that." All job candidates are immediately introduced to Belle Air's "no excuses" credo. New staff are told in no uncertain terms, as one teacher put it, "we're Open Court. We're data driven. We're trying to close the achievement gap. If that sort of teaching interests you, this is where you want to be." Addiego and her staff are happy to pay the price of attrition if it means that the teachers who remain are truly committed. Now, faculty turnover has stabilized and there's consensus around the school's mission and vision.

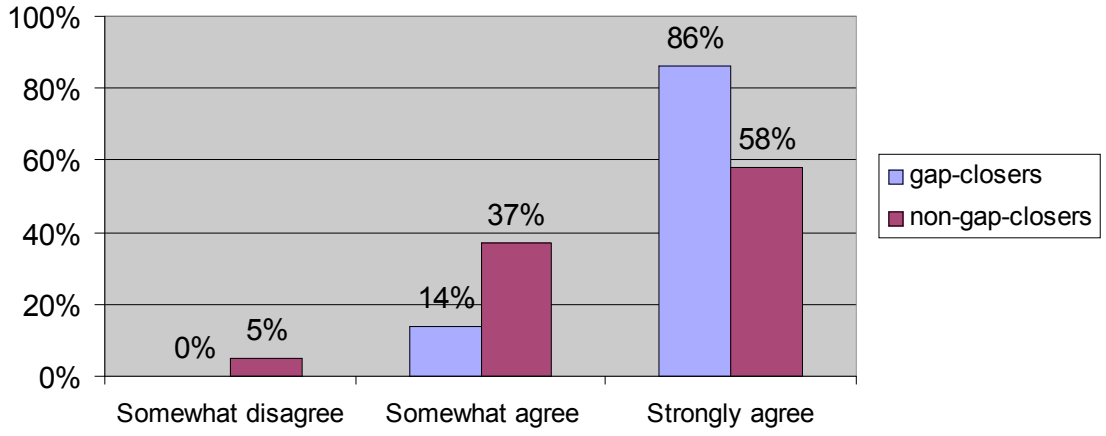
The district that once looked down at Belle Air is now looking to Belle Air for answers. Significant improvements at the school have prompted a districtwide adoption of the Open Court program. Furthermore, the districtwide trimester assessments currently in use were developed by Belle Air staff. At a recent districtwide meeting, a teacher said, "Teachers were saying, 'I'm new to the district. The kids that you would assume would test at the bottom of the pile—referring to Belle Air—are not testing at the bottom of the pile. There's something phenomenal going on there, and we need to find out what it is.' That never used to be said in a district situation. That something down here might be working." In the words of Principal Addiego, "Public schools can be as good, if not better than private schools if they're focused and clearly have beliefs that each and every child can receive a fair and equitable education. And we have to do it. It's our responsibility to step up to the plate and do the very best job we can. Schools need to walk the talk. And, in fact, there are schools doing it."

LEADERSHIP FOR EQUITY

Leaders in gap-closing schools make closing the gaps a top priority. Gap-closing schools are more likely to have gotten specific about what equity means, developing their own definitions of equity and setting measurable equity goals. Issues of race and ethnicity don't take a back seat at gap-closing schools. These schools are more likely to have people of color in leadership positions as well as frequent discussions regarding race and ethnicity.

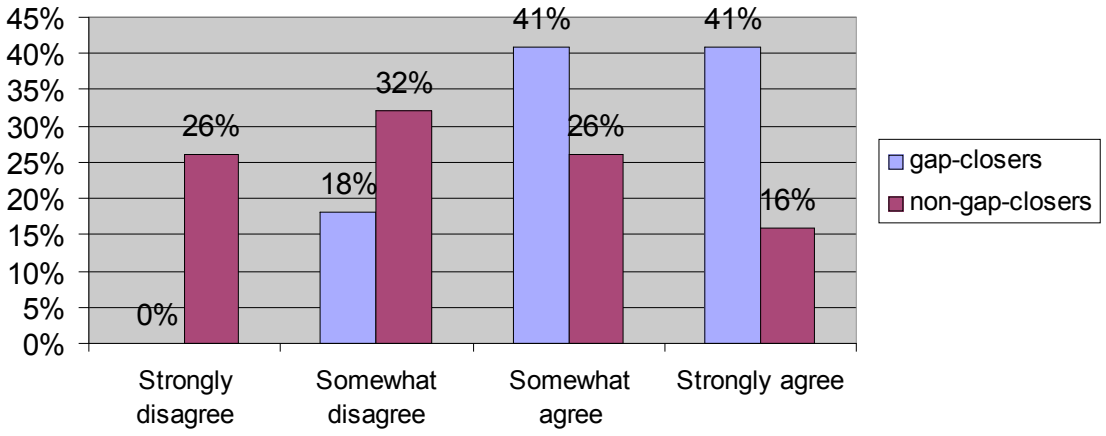
Respondents in gap-closing schools are more likely to agree that closing the achievement gaps between white/Asian students and Hispanic/Latino or African-American students is a primary goal for school leaders. Figure 18 indicates that the vast majority, or 86 percent of respondents from gap-closing schools strongly agreed that their leaders held closing the achievement gaps as a priority, compared to just over half at non-gap-closing schools. Interestingly, when asked whether closing the gaps between socioeconomically disadvantaged and nondisadvantaged students has been a primary goal, there was no statistical difference between the answers, with 59 percent of respondents from gap-closing schools and 63 percent of respondents from non-gap-closing schools agreeing.

Figure 18. Closing the Gap Has Been a Primary Goal for School Leaders



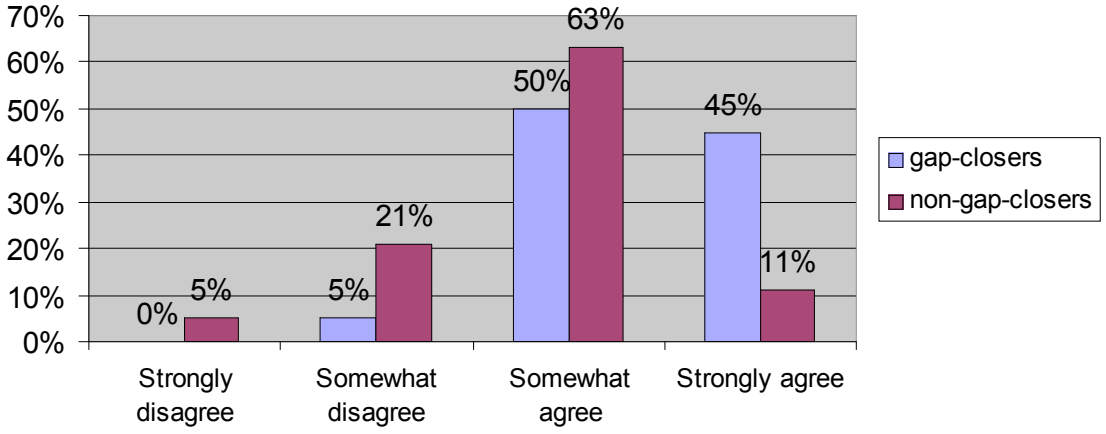
Gap-closing schools are more likely to have developed and agreed upon an explicit definition of equity. Figure 19 indicates that well over three-quarters of respondents from gap-closing schools agree with this statement, with just under half strongly agreeing. In non-gap-closing schools, the majority disagreed that their school had an agreed-upon definition of equity, with over a quarter strongly disagreeing. In gap-closing schools, no respondents strongly disagreed with the statement.

Figure 19. School Community Developed and Agreed Upon an Explicit Definition of Equity



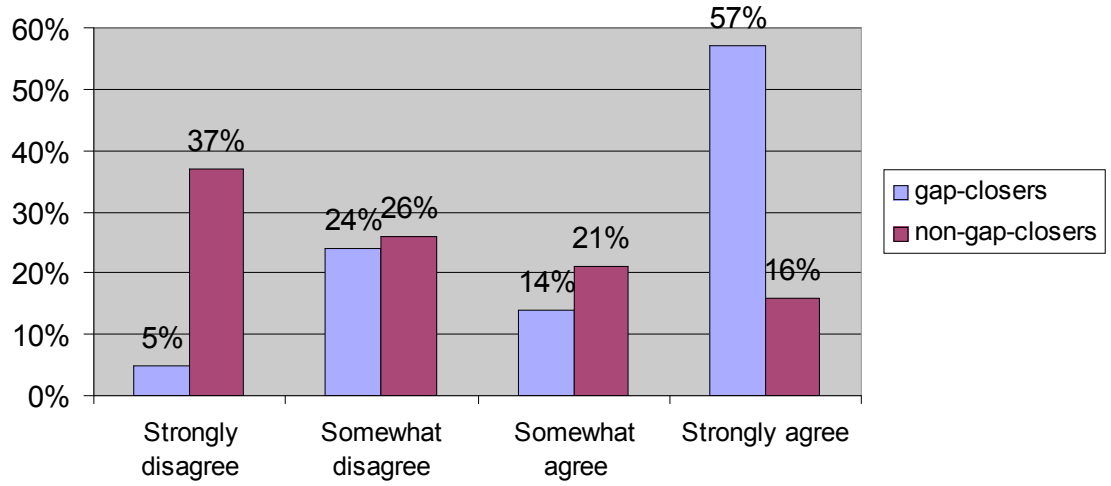
Leaders in gap-closing schools are more likely to set measurable goals for closing the achievement gaps. Figure 20 indicates that almost all gap-closers agreed that their leaders had set measurable goals, with just under half strongly agreeing. Of non-gap-closing respondents, just under three-quarters agreed and over a quarter disagreed. In this case, results were also significant for setting measurable goals for closing the achievement gaps between socioeconomically disadvantaged and nondisadvantaged students. Eighty-six percent of gap-closing respondents agreed, 41 percent of these strongly. In contrast, 68 percent of non-gap-closing respondents agreed, with only 11 percent strongly agreeing.

Figure 20. Leaders Set Measurable Goals for Closing the Gaps



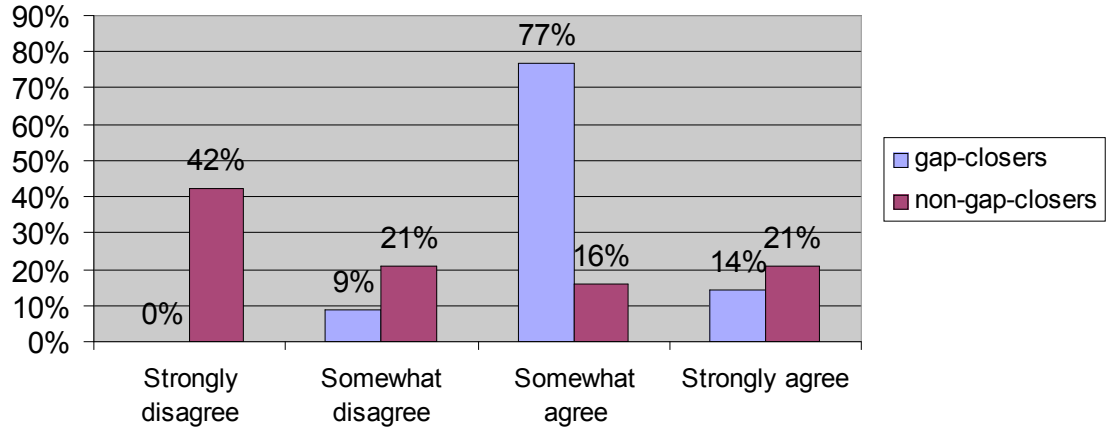
Gap-closing schools are more likely to have people of color in positions of leadership. Figure 21 indicates that about three-quarters of respondents from gap-closing schools agree that people of color are leaders in their school, with just over half strongly agreeing. In marked contrast, in non-gap-closing schools about two thirds disagreed, with over one third strongly disagreeing.

Figure 21. People of Color Hold Leadership Positions



Leaders in gap-closing schools are more likely to provide structured opportunities for faculty to discuss race and ethnicity. Figure 22 indicates that almost all respondents from gap-closing schools agreed that they have structured opportunities to discuss race and

Figure 22. Leaders Provide Structured Opportunities for Faculty to Discuss Race and Ethnicity



ethnicity, whereas about two thirds of respondents from non-gap-closing schools disagreed. There's a marked difference in who strongly disagreed that they had opportunities to discuss race and ethnicity—no respondents from gap-closing schools, compared with just under half of respondents from non-gap-closing schools.

Several survey respondents cited the importance of work in this area. One respondent recommended that schools provide "staff development regarding responding to issues of motivation (often a result of institutional racism) [and] developing and fostering positive relationships with students." Another gap-closing respondent explained that at his or her school, they benefited from "addressing elements of racism as our student population is changing."

Some responses from non-gap-closing schools reflected frustration over a need in this area that isn't being met. One wrote, "I would like to see some training in sensitivity toward cultural differences and in ways to reach out to our Hispanic/Latino families." Another wrote, "As a staff, we have not discussed strategies specific to race. Rather, we talk about the underachievers as a whole and focus our attention on strategies that help all. We have not addressed learning styles particular to race and thus have not focused on their needs. We talk about the gap (Latinos/African American), but do not specifically address their needs. They are lumped in with all underachievers."

CASE STUDY OF ROOSEVELT MIDDLE SCHOOL:
LEADERSHIP FOR EQUITY IN PRACTICE

Roosevelt Middle School is located in the San Antonio section of southeast Oakland. It serves students from sixth to eighth grade. The school is in a large, old, three-story building that used to house a high school. Over the years, the school has struggled with vandalism and neighborhood violence, as well as gang activity among the student population. Thirty years ago, the school was almost entirely African-American but now has a diverse student body.

Enrollment: 944; 69% eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.
Demographics:

- 50% Asian
- 27% Hispanic/Latino
- 20% African-American
- 1% White

English Learners: 57% of total enrollment

- 38% Spanish
- 23% Cantonese
- 13% Mien
- 11% Cambodian
- 8% Vietnamese

(CDE DataQuest 2002–03)

Roosevelt has a diverse teacher population as well. Of the 51 teachers, 39 percent are white, 24 percent are Asian, 22 percent are African-American, and 12 percent are Hispanic/Latino. Sixty-eight percent are fully credentialed; 27 percent, or 14, are university interns, of whom 10 are Teach For America volunteers; and one teacher has an emergency credential. The principal, Darcel Stockey, has chosen to rely on Teach For America teachers because "they have the energy and the will to change and make a difference." Only 29 percent of Roosevelt teachers have been at the school five or more years, and the average number of years teaching at the school is nine. Principal Stockey has been at Roosevelt since 1997, as assistant principal for one year and then principal since 1998. She made the unusual decision to leave the district office, after 12 years there as a federal program administrator and school reform coordinator. She returned to Roosevelt because, as she put it, "One day I woke up and realized I wanted to get back in touch with school sites." The 2003–04 academic year marks her 30th year as an educator. Roosevelt was a BASRC Leadership School from 1996–2001 and during the 2001–02 school year, the school worked with a BASRC-funded, district-based data coach.

Despite its challenging demographics and relatively inexperienced teachers, Roosevelt's Academic Performance Index (API) data show that the school is closing the achievement gaps between African-American and Asian students. Figure 23 indicates that between 1998–99 and 2001–02, African-American students made about three times the growth of Asian students, with Asian students making 2½ times the growth needed to meet annual targets and African-American students making almost six times the growth needed. During this time period, the annual API growth target for Asian students averaged 10 points and these students improved an average of 25 API points each year. Over the same period of time, the annual growth target for African-American students averaged 12 API points and these students improved an average of 58 API points each year.

Figure 23. Roosevelt Middle School:
Target Annual Growth vs. Actual Annual Growth

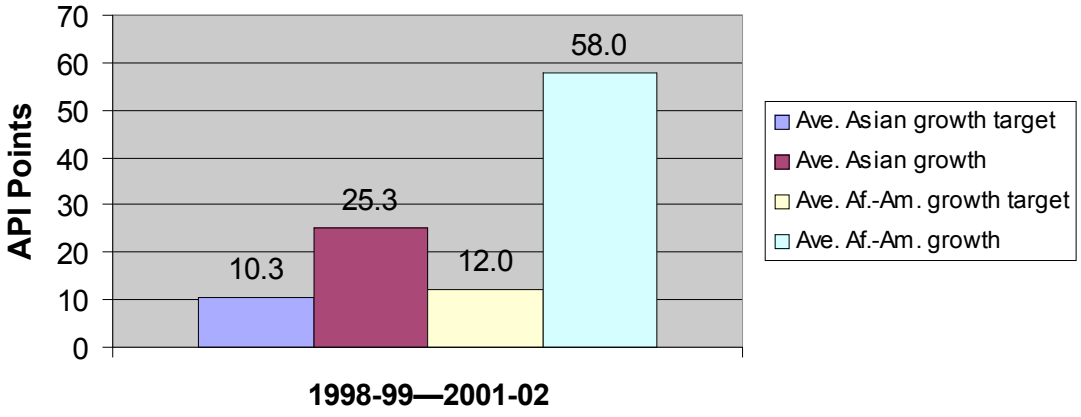
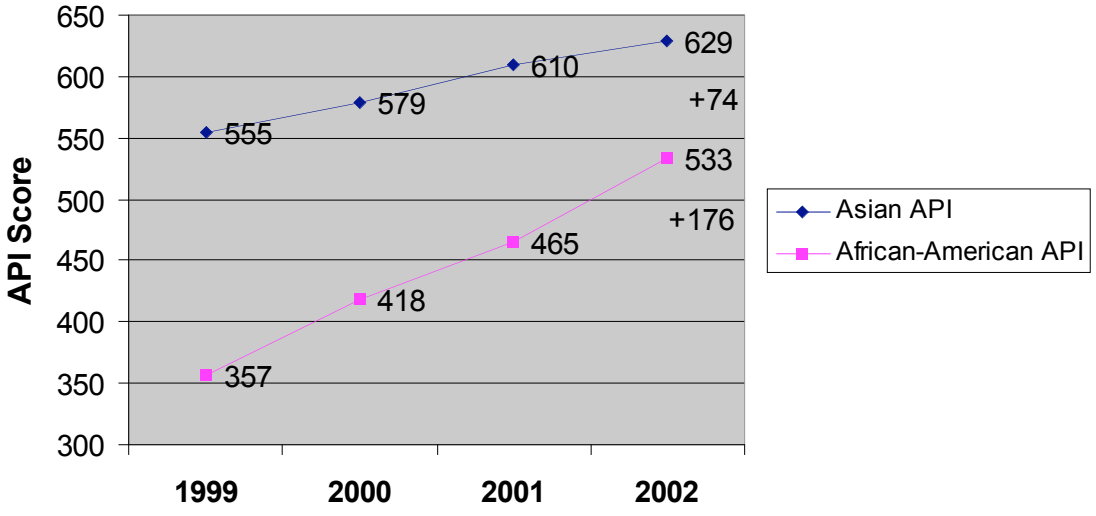


Figure 24 indicates that as measured by API scores, the gap at Roosevelt has narrowed by 102 points, or 49 percent, to 96 points in 2002. African-American students improved by 176 points, or 49 percent, to 533 points. Asian students improved by 74 points or 13 percent to 629 points. If this pattern continues, Roosevelt will close its API achievement gap between Asian and African-American students by 2005.

Figure 24. Roosevelt Middle School API Growth



Hispanic/Latino students also have made gains, though at a slower rate. Overall, they improved 14 points or 3 percent to 421 points. This case study investigates what Roosevelt has done to improve student achievement specifically with its African-American subpopulation.

HOW ARE THEY DOING IT?

1. Data-Based Decision Making

Roosevelt uses data constantly to improve both academic achievement and the school's learning environment. When Stockey became principal in 1998, she conducted a thorough needs analysis, leading the teachers through a careful examination of student achievement data and conducting focus groups with parents, teachers, students, and community members. What she discovered was sobering. "African-Americans were underrepresented in everything," she remembered. "It was across the board. We were bottom feeders in every area. African-Americans were the majority performing in the first quartile. It was 'in your face' data. To me, you couldn't ignore it. But the other companion to that was the quiet data. The detentions, suspensions, referrals were African-Americans. That was another hard one that we had to look at."

Student Achievement Data. Over the past five years, Roosevelt has gone from what principal Stockey described as a "perfunctory" attitude toward looking at data to examining it with a passion. "[Roosevelt] has had a real climate shift in terms of comfort with data, and receptiveness to using it in meaningful ways," said Patrick Lee, data and assessment coordinator at Oakland Unified School District. "The administration has worked really hard with teachers so that they're not seeing the data as evaluative against them, but rather as pieces of information on which to reflect. Reflecting on data is a continual process that they undergo throughout the year."

The school uses a wide variety of diagnostic assessments, including a Curriculum Embedded Assessment (CEA) for writing, the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, and a math Problem of the Week (POW) also instituted in 2001. Each test is administered biannually, once in the fall and then in the spring. Teachers look at data from these assessments, and data from the STAR testing program (disaggregated by race and ethnicity), and determine strengths and weaknesses and plan their curriculum and lessons accordingly. "When we started with BASRC," explained Principal Stockey, "one of the things that we always looked at was the data. And people did so reluctantly. You find now they delve into the data."

Roosevelt has an infrastructure to support the consistent use of data with staff resources and time during the school day and at the end of the school year. Teachers have time for data analysis every Wednesday, a minimum-release day in which classes are 30 minutes each. Twice a month, the entire staff meets; in the other two weeks, there are either department meetings or committee meetings. To make sure the daily business of running a school doesn't crowd out time for discussing data, one staff meeting a month, called Standards in Practice, is devoted solely to this work. Similarly, the committee structure is intended to focus discussions. Every teacher serves on a committee. While every committee is data-informed, two in particular—the Data Committee; and the Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Committee—focus their efforts on analyzing data for the rest of the staff to use, including creating charts and graphs for departmental reflection. As one teacher reflected, "Everybody is given the data, and we take our time and look at it.

We do a lot of that. We throw ideas up on the table…. Before, there's been criticism that 'Well, so we've got all this data, what are we going to do differently?' And I think that's what's happening now; we're able to do more planning."

Use of data is further emphasized by Roosevelt's annual Day of Reflection. At the end of every school year since 1996, Roosevelt has held a Day of Reflection, a structured feedback session on the past academic year for the entire staff to analyze school data and suggest next steps. The leadership team then takes recommendations and, over a summer leadership team retreat, develops an implementation plan. The whole faculty then convenes for a fall retreat to develop a data-based action plan. The school also employs a full-time instructional coordinator, Jane O'Brien, who is responsible for managing all aspects of the assessment process, including making sure teachers receive necessary data in a timely manner and in a format that they can understand. "[Roosevelt's] approach to data has been very honest and forthright," said Lee, the data and assessment coordinator. "The principal and assistant principals have been very forceful in working with their staff on looking at the data and looking at differences in achievement. And asking teachers and teams of teachers 'Why do these patterns exist?' Asking hard questions. 'Why do these gaps exist?' "

Assistant Principal Theresa Clincy summed up Roosevelt's philosophy, explaining, "This school is data-driven. You don't know if you are digressing or improving if you don't look at data from one year to another. You make changes accordingly so you do make improvements over time. That's one of the first things I learned when I came on board with Darcel. Look at the data, see what it says. Go from there."

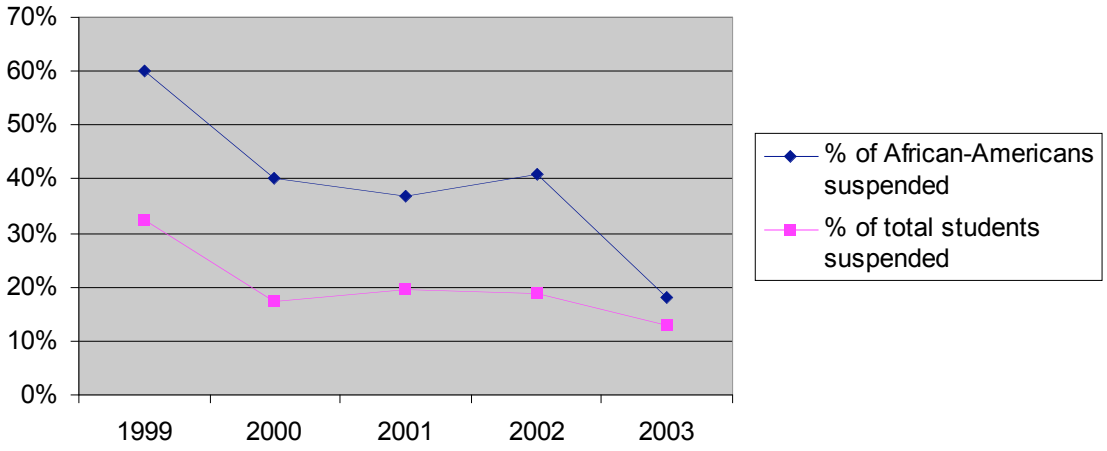
Discipline. In 1998, when Darcel Stockey became principal of Roosevelt Middle, 60 percent of African-American students received suspensions over the course of the school year. In other words, three out of every five African-American students were missing valuable classroom time due to the discipline system. Stockey was horrified, and so were Roosevelt's parents, teachers, and students. When Stockey conducted a needs assessment through focus groups with these constituents, they all responded that school climate was detrimental to learning.

The school staff began some data-based, candid schoolwide discussions, asking themselves why this was happening at Roosevelt. Stockey gave teachers time to look at the data and come to their own conclusions. "They had to think about it," Stockey said. "Other than that it is me advocating. They really had to do the confrontations." One teacher, shocked by the trend, said, "I'd never seen anything like what was going on at our school…. My radar goes up when I look at how many kids are being suspended and what their ethnic make-up was…. And so we looked at it, and we really focused on it." Stockey also invested in professional development for teachers to learn how to change their classroom management styles. Several teachers cited the value of an inservice from a veteran Roosevelt teacher on classroom management with African-American students.

The result? A reduction in both suspension and tardy rates and a dramatic reduction in the number of African-American students punished. Figure 25 indicates that by 2002–03, the

suspension rate for African-American students, while still high, was down to 18 percent, representing a 70-percent decrease. The total number of students suspended decreased as well, though at a slower rate—meaning that the school reduced the overrepresentation of African-Americans being suspended. In 1998-99, 44 percent of all suspensions were African-American students, whereas in 2002–03 African-Americans made up 34 percent of all suspensions. Looking at data helped teachers become more aware of their biases. As one reflected, "I know that when I see data [and think] 'Oh my God, look at all these suspensions,' that kicks me in the butt. You make sure this is not what you're doing."

Figure 25. Suspensions at Roosevelt



The largest benefit to these changes has been ensuring that African-American students, particularly boys, spend more time in the classroom. To make sure kids in the discipline system don't miss class time, the school developed an alternative to suspension: Saturday community service. Now suspended students spend Saturday mornings at school, first in a 30-minute group counseling session and then doing chores on school grounds. "It's about equity and access," said Principal Stockey. "I knew we couldn't keep taking kids out of classes."

2. Focus on Reading

Roosevelt students spend a minimum of two hours every day on reading. Every teacher at Roosevelt, including those in science and mathematics, teach a period of reading every day. In addition to both English and reading class, students also have literature class every day, giving them 35 minutes in the middle of the day for silent sustained reading. Reading class gives kids explicit instruction in how to best acquire, analyze, and understand text. In literature class, students generally spend their time reading a book of their choice, though some teachers encourage journal writing and a few use the time to perform plays. When asked what she thought was closing the achievement gaps at Roosevelt, Assistant Principal Theresa Clincy replied, "Most of it is attributable to the schoolwide focus on reading."

It took a lot of work to encourage the school to focus this dramatically on reading. First, Principal Stockey developed teacher buy-in to the reading focus through engaging teachers in unflinching analyses of student achievement data. In the mid-1990s, the school was focused on improving students' writing skills; but at the end of the 1997-98 school year, the faculty spent a Day of Reflection focused on students' Gates-MacGinitie reading scores. Alarmingly, 90 percent of students were reading below grade level, with African-American students at the very bottom. Faculty realized that while writing was related to students' needs, poor reading comprehension was the primary reason that students were reading poorly. As one Roosevelt teacher said, "We were starting to see that the students were definitely having some needs in their reading, and we felt like that should take more of a priority and that the two [reading and writing] together helped each other."

Second, Stockey had to alter the school schedule radically, reducing teacher preparatory periods from two a day to one to allow time for Reading class while creating a block of time in all students' schedules at the same time every day for literature. They also had to cut back time given to electives, consolidating art, music, and computers into a rotating block.

Lastly, Stockey gave her staff lots of support through professional development. Reading specialists from the district and a variety of Bay Area organizations provided traditional professional development as well as classroom-based peer coaching. The Bay Area Math Project provided specific professional development to mathematics and science teachers in learning how to differentiate reading instruction for students with different skill levels. Coaching also produced changes in traditional language arts instruction. One language arts teacher reflected, "When I first got here… actually we weren't teaching reading. It was language arts." A series of workshops with a consultant, said Stockey, "opened my eyes completely to what I was doing that was good, what I wasn't doing that I needed to be, and what I was doing that I shouldn't be doing. It broke it down systematically." Professional development has been instrumental in making the focus on reading successful. By spring 2002, two to three times as many students were at or above grade level on the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, ranging from 23 percent to 30 percent in sixth through eighth grade.

3. Equitable and Supportive School Climate

Back in 1996, Roosevelt had few supports in place to ensure that all students could learn. Now, the school boasts a health center, a highly functioning Student Support Team, a student rewards program, and specific supports for African-American students.

The Health Center is the pride of Roosevelt. Located in the school building just down the hall from the principal's office, the clinic offers a variety of medical services, including vision, dental, and hearing screening; mental health services through individual and group counseling; and health education both in the classroom and in the clinic on a multitude of topics including nutrition, fitness, and substance-abuse prevention. Over the past five years, the center has expanded services and hours of operation. It is now open

every minute school is in session, and both students and community members can use it on a drop-in basis. It is operated through partnership with community-based organizations the East Bay Asian Youth Center and La Clinica de la Raza, with support from Oakland Unified School District. "I think that sometimes we overlook, particularly in the middle school population, a lot of the social and emotional issues and the health issues that interfere with kids' academic success," said clinic director Samantha Blackburn. "It's a time of really huge transition for youth. If you ignore the things that they're going through, it'll definitely impact their academics." The center helps Roosevelt students do their best.

The school also has a particularly strong Student Support Team (SST) composed of teachers, administrators, counselors, the school's full-time social worker, and parents when necessary. The SST meets on a weekly basis for 1½ hours to discuss at-risk students, creating intervention plans, and matching individuals with necessary services. What makes Roosevelt's model different from many other schools with SSTs is how they use their time. Over the past decade, they have shifted from using the time as a brainstorming session, considering options for student support, to a more refined process of reviewing teacher referrals and focusing on next steps. School counselor Annette Oropeza explained, "As a review team, we determine which provider is going to follow up with the student and meet with parents, teachers.... This person takes responsibility like a case manager for following that case and making sure [the students] get all the services that they need." There is a strong belief at Roosevelt that providing support helps to increase academic achievement. As Assistant Principal Clincy explained, "You can't teach until the whole child is ready to learn. That's not just the physical or the mental. It has to do with getting them the interventions, whether it's counseling, whether it's group support, whether it's medical assistance…so that the child's ready to learn."

Five years ago, with the goal of creating a more positive school climate for students, a group of teachers and support providers created the Justice At Middle School (JAMS) program. Through classroom-based curriculum and schoolwide assemblies, JAMS establishes a set of behaviors expected from Roosevelt students and gives students an opportunity to celebrate their school and one another. Lesson plans provide articles and discussion questions on a variety of topics such as tolerance, appreciating diversity, exploring one's identity, and gender stereotyping. JAMS also includes positive incentives in the form of coupons, giving teachers the opportunity to "reward students when they're caught doing something good," school counselor Annette Oropeza explained. Students can earn coupons for behavior that contributes to positive school climate, from improving their attendance to helping clean a lunch table. The coupons then make them eligible to win prizes in raffles held during monthly school assemblies.

To support African-Americans specifically, the school both increased the number of algebra sections offered and incorporated a student support group targeted toward African-American boys. Five years ago, African-American students simply were not enrolled in algebra. Principal Stockey added more algebra sections and, after a statewide search, hired a female African-American algebra teacher in 2002. Now, about 40 percent of African-American students are enrolled in Algebra. In addition, Simba—Swahili for

"lion"—began at Roosevelt in 1996. Originally intended to serve African-American boys, Simba is a support group that serves about 50 students during the course of the school year. Due to student interest, Simba has now expanded to service at-risk kids regardless of race or gender. Students meet once a week in small groups to work on a variety of topics—from academic responsibility to community involvement to classroom behavior— through discussion and journal writing.

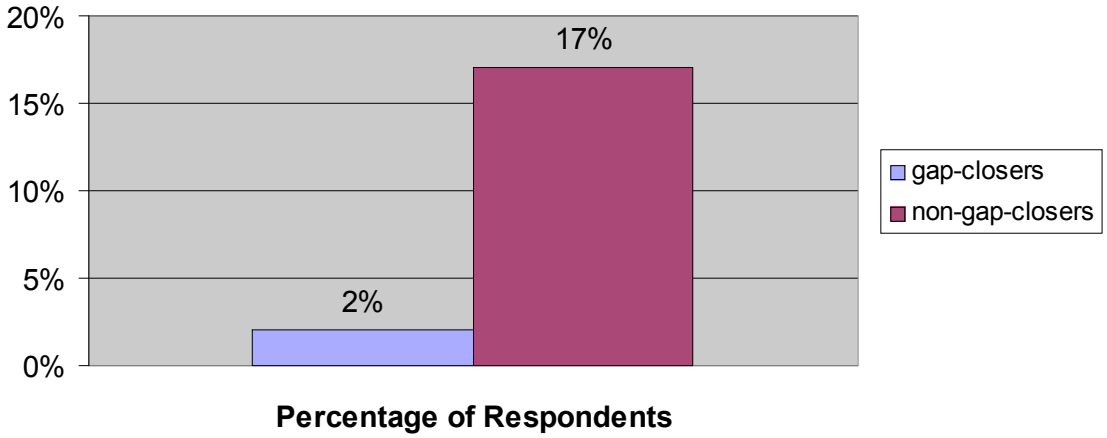
The result has been a 180-degree turnaround in Roosevelt's climate. A teacher said, "One of the first things [you notice] when you walk into a school is, are all the students in class? It's a huge thing. Now, we've got all kids engaged in some way in the classroom and not running amuck in the halls. That was what it was like when I first arrived. You would be cussed out just as quickly as the child next to you. It was like…just a real different, different place." In 1997, the average monthly student absentee rate was 13.6 percent; in 2002 it was down to 8 percent, representing a reduction of over 40 percent. Principal Stockey knew running Roosevelt would take a lot of work. "When they first talked to me about the job, I cried," she admits. But when she talks about the changes at Roosevelt during her tenure, she's glad she chose to take on the responsibility. "I can almost feel the difference day-to-day," she reflects. "A number of parents are almost in awe, saying 'Maybe I'll put my kids back in school here!' "

SCHOOL FOCUS

Gap-closing schools focus in on what their students need most. Teachers at gap-closing schools report that their schools have a narrower focus than teachers at non-gap-closing schools. They're also more likely to focus on inside-school factors, or areas that educators have control over, rather than home, community, or family factors beyond educators' control. And while all schools indicate that they're focusing on reading, gap-closing schools give their teachers more frequent professional development to support this focus.

Gap-closing schools are more likely to have a tighter reform focus than non-gap closing schools. Respondents were given 12 topics (such as assessments, standards, and teacher collaboration) and were asked to report whether these topics were a major focus, moderate focus, minor focus, or not a focus in their school reform efforts. Figure 26 indicates that seven, or 17 percent, of non-closers selected 10 or more as a major focus, whereas only 2 percent of gap-closers selected 10 or more. On average, non-closers chose seven items as a major focus, whereas gap-closers chose five. In the words of one teacher, schools "need a clearly defined focus, which is supported by administration. Sometimes [schools] are trying to change too much or too often and don't do something long enough to measure its success or failure for the target population."

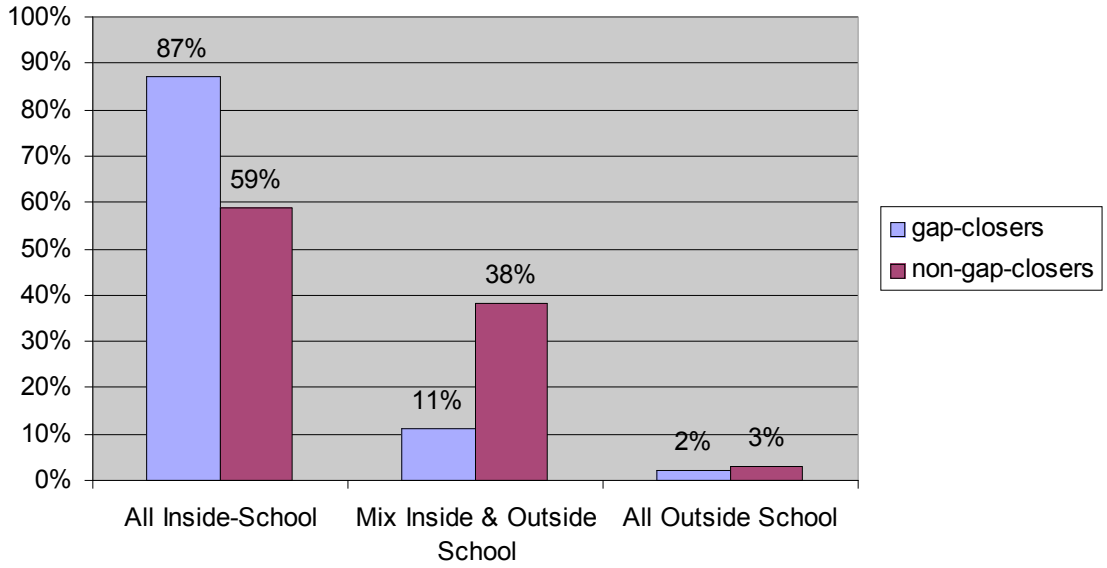
Figure 26. School Focusing on 10 or More Areas in Their School Reform Efforts



When asked what it takes to close the gaps, respondents from gap-closing schools were more likely to cite inside-school factors (such as reading programs or instructional strategies) instead of outside-school factors (such as parental involvement or home support of student learning). Figure 27 indicates that 87 percent, or 32 of 37 gap-closing respondents, cited all inside-school factors. Of the remaining five, four cited a mix of inside-school factors and outside-school factors, and one cited all outside-school factors. Just over half of non-gap-closing respondents, or 20 of 34, cited all inside-school factors;

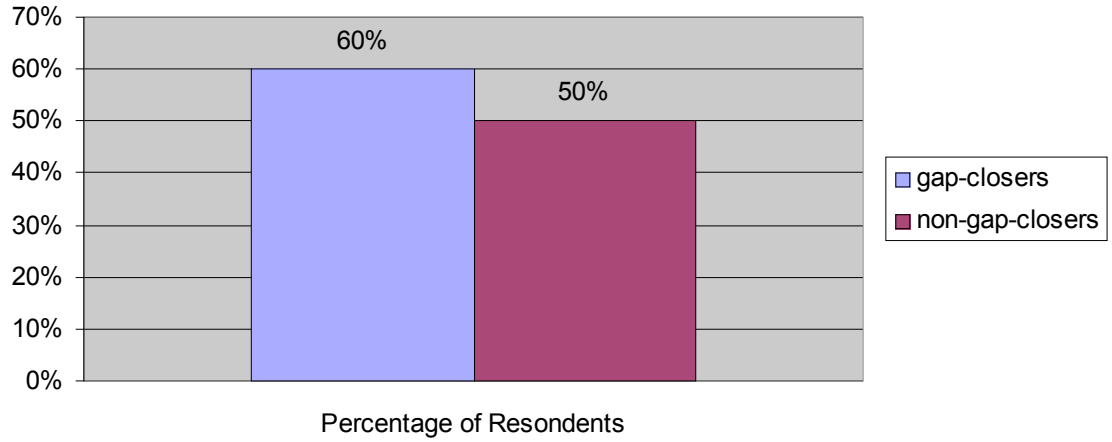
just over one third or 13 cited a mix; and one cited all outside-school factors. Some respondents who recommended outside-school strategies simply listed a variety of extracurricular activities, such as "homework center, after-school programs, and clubs." Some seemed to be focusing on a deficiency; one teacher said, "Educate parents on how to help their children with schoolwork." Another suggested "night classes for parents to help them work with their students/children." A third offered that "the achievement gap will close more if Hispanic parents were more involved with our school; however, that is not a norm for their culture. Students must have literate role models who prove and demonstrate the importance of literacy." Some focused on building constructive links, such as "We need to draw in more parent support and buy-in for focusing on acquiring language."

Figure 27. Recommend Focus on Inside-School vs. Outside-School Factors



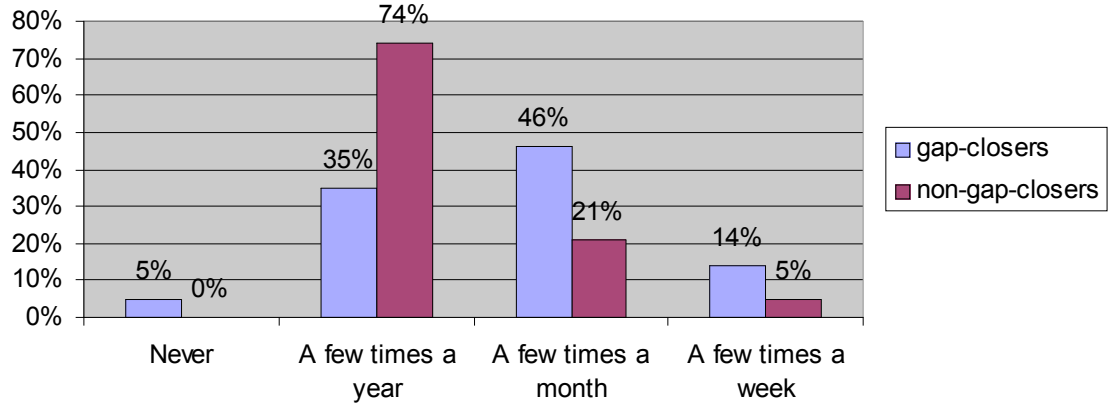
Reading or literacy is the No. 1 priority in both gap-closing and non-gap-closing schools. When respondents were asked to rank areas of school focus, both groups ranked literacy program first with no statistical difference between the groups. It also was the most frequent recommendation when respondents were asked what schools should do to close the gaps. Figure 28 indicates that very similar numbers—just over half of gap-closers and exactly half of non-gap-closers—recommended focusing on literacy or reading.

Figure 28. Recommend Focus on Reading/Literacy to Close the Achievement Gap



A difference emerged, however, regarding teacher support for the reading focus. Respondents at gap-closing schools more frequently receive professional development in literacy instruction for low-performing students. Figure 29 indicates that just under two thirds of gap-closers receive professional development in literacy instruction a few times a week or month, while only about one quarter of non-gap-closers receive the same amount of professional development on this topic.

Figure 29. How frequently have you received professional development on literacy instruction for low-performing students?



How to focus on literacy varied across the spectrum, with no discernable pattern according to gap-closing status. In the survey's open-ended question about what it takes to close the gaps, many respondents stressed the importance of teaching children clear

steps and strategies to learn how to make meaning of text, recommending "explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies with constant practice and use." Both groups cited the Reading Recovery program and Readers' and Writers' Workshop, and two respondents from gap-closing schools cited the Open Court reading program.

CASE STUDY OF MUSICK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:
SCHOOL FOCUS IN PRACTICE

E. L. Musick Elementary School is located in the city of Newark on the southeastern edge of the San Francisco Bay. Built in 1956, it is the oldest operating school in the district. Located in a residential area, Musick serves students in kindergarten through sixth grade. The school is rapidly becoming more diverse: 10 years ago, 50 percent of Musick students were white; 30 percent were Hispanic/Latino; and the rest were split about evenly between Asians, African Americans, and Filipinos.

Musick School has a stable teaching force but high turnover among administrators. The average Musick teacher has been teaching at the school for 17.4 years, compared to 12.7 years in the state as a whole. Only two of its 19 teachers have been at the school for five years or fewer. All are fully credentialed. Seventeen are white; one, Asian; and one, Hispanic/Latino. The principalship, however, has a high turnover rate. Over the past 10 years, the school has had six different principals. Cary Bossi was principal during the majority of the time period studied in this report, from fall 1999 through mid-spring of 2003, when she moved to a position in the district office. Musick has collaborated with BASRC schools in Newark Unified School District since 1996; it became a BASRC Membership School in 1999 and a Leadership School in 2001.

Enrollment: 467; 40% eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.
Demographics:
- 46% Hispanic/Latino
- 20% White
- 14% Filipino
- 12% Asian
- 4% Pacific Islander
- 3% African-American

English Learners: 24% of total enrollment
- 70% Spanish
- 7% Farsi (Persian)
- 6% Tagalog

(CDE DataQuest 2002–2003)

Belying theories that stable leadership at the principal level is essential to produce improvement, Academic Performance Index (API) data over the past five years show that Musick is closing the achievement gaps between Hispanic/Latino and white students. Figure 30 indicates that between 1999 and 2002, Hispanic/Latino students made about 5½ times the growth of white students, exceeding their targets by an average of about 40 points while whites exceeded their targets on average by about 7 points. Over these four years, white students made a little less than 2½ times the growth necessary; Hispanic/Latino students made over 8½ times the growth necessary to meet targets.

Figure 30. Musick Elementary School: Target Growth vs. Actual Growth

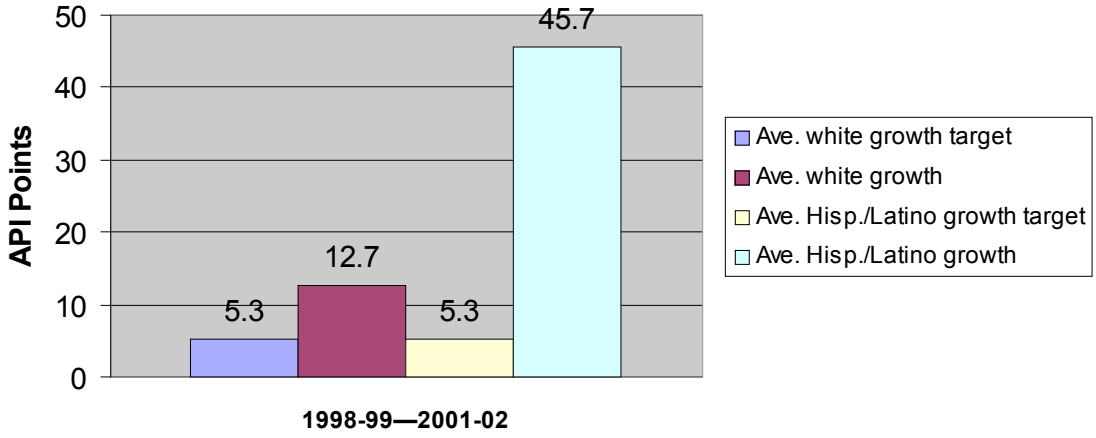
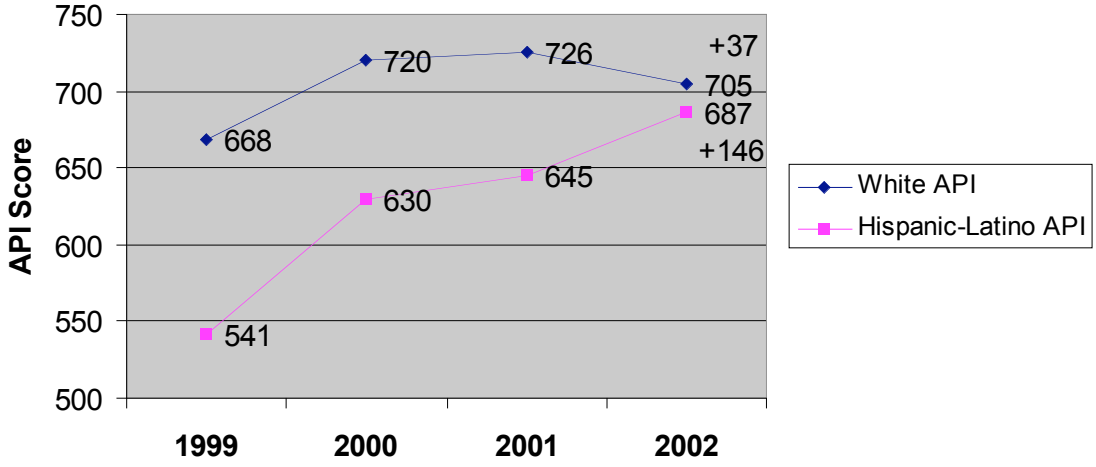


Figure 31 indicates that the achievement gap between whites and Hispanics/Latinos has narrowed by 109 points, or 86 percent, to just 18 points in 2002. Hispanic/Latino students improved by 27 percent, or 146 points, to 687 points. White students improved by 6 percent or 37 points to 705 points. Following this pattern, Musick would close its API achievement gap between white and Hispanic/Latino students by 2004.

Figure 31. Musick Elementary School: Hispanic/Latino vs. White API Scores



HOW ARE THEY DOING IT?

1. Working on Their Weakness: A Focus on Reading Strategies

Musick Elementary is strong in math. Using the Excel Math program with demonstrated success, particularly with English language learners, Musick's veteran teachers know when not to change a good thing. Reading, however, has been more of a challenge. Over the past decade, the school has built a stronger foundation in reading and, in recent years, has focused with even more intensity on literacy.

In the mid-1990s, Newark Unified School District began using the Mosaic of Thought program as the basis for teaching reading. This approach breaks the process of reading into specific subskills—such as asking questions, drawing inferences, and synthesizing—with the goal of creating independent, thoughtful readers adept at making meaning from text. For the better part of the past decade, all Musick teachers and all teachers in the district have participated in intensive, multiyear, classroom-based training from the Public Education and Business Coalition (PEBC) on the Mosaic of Thought strategies. The Mosaic program is not one of the state-adopted reading series, but the low teacher turnover rate along with the school's sustained investment in professional development has led to consistent implementation of a curriculum for teaching reading comprehension.

Concurrent with the Mosiac strategy, the district provided funding for a teacher to be released full-time as a literacy coordinator. Chris Scheving began part-time in this role in 1995 and worked for three years with primary teachers before becoming a full-time literacy coordinator in 1998, expanding his responsibilities to working with teachers K–6. Stability in this teacher leader position has been important. Musick has full-staff literacy meetings twice a month, facilitated by literacy coordinator Scheving. Over a decade ago, the district created early-release time for every school in the district. Literacy meetings are a mix of formal and informal professional development. One teacher said, "[Chris] presents...and we have time as a group to actually work with grade level partners or across the grade levels and talk about what we're doing and how it relates. Things that worked, things that didn't work…I think these [meetings] are really worthwhile." Literacy meetings have helped teachers focus in on how best to support the school's lowest-performing student group: English language learners.

In 1999, the arrival of Principal Cary Bossi prompted further examination of data and a renewed commitment to improving reading. Bossi explains, "I talked to the staff about what we could do…. We decided that reading comprehension was an area we needed to focus on. Our math scores were way better than our reading comprehension scores. We looked at our reading and tried to focus on what we could really work with the kids on." PEBC professional developers returned with the school and provided additional support on how to coach teachers on specific comprehension strategies. Literacy coordinator Scheving began conducting demonstrations in individual teacher's classrooms, observing teachers implementing new strategies, and providing the support and expertise teachers needed to try new approaches. One teacher described how it worked: "[Chris] would come in and model it—a read-aloud, think-aloud, shared reading, different strategies. I

would take notes. The next time, he would come in and observe me. Then we would have a conversation…and we would talk about what I saw in his lesson, what he saw in my lesson. I would ask questions and he would try [to come back] and model at a deeper level what I was questioning. That was the most powerful thing I've ever experienced as far as professional development."

To keep the school focused and keep reading fun for kids, the school implemented daily Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) time. Exact DEAR times vary from teacher to teacher, but they average about 20 minutes a day in primary grades and 45 minutes a day in upper grades. Kids are allowed to spend time with a book of their choosing. To ensure that every teacher has access to a large selection of books appropriate for the wide variety of reading levels in every grade, Musick used API growth target award money both to augment leveled libraries in every classroom and a leveled-reading book room for all teachers to use. "A lot of times kids don't like reading because they're not good at it," said former principal Bossi. "When they have books at their level, they feel better about themselves, and they start liking reading. Leveled books reinforce that. Instead of a negative cycle of frustration, leveled books help them into a positive cycle." Every teacher interviewed agreed that the ready availability of leveled books has contributed significantly to Musick's growth.

2. Strong K–3 Foundation

Musick has an exceptionally strong primary grade foundation. Use of guided reading and Running Records and the existence of a K–3 reading specialist give Musick kids an advantage. "I think it sets the tone for the rest of the grades in the school," said Bossi, reflecting on K–3 teachers. "They really encourage the rest of the group. They keep push, push, pushing and lead the charge. Frankly, we have a strong K–3 foundation." A teacher underscored the importance of this early start, saying, "When you get them off to the right start, you're not going to experience that gap. It's got to be caught early. Early intervention is the key."

As is true at the other two case-study schools, Musick uses diagnostic assessments to provide teachers with real-time data on student achievement. District trimester assessments are used in Grades 1–6; Running records are used by primary-grade teachers as an ongoing assessment to keep track of their students' reading levels and to identify strengths and weaknesses. Teachers use running records to isolate what the child most needs to work on to improve his/her reading skills. "You get detailed information [from running records]," said one teacher. "Not just what level they are reading but what kinds of mistakes they are making." Running records were initially a district mandate, and all teachers were instructed to use it once every trimester. It is no longer mandated, but the school's K–2 teachers continue to keep running records on all their students on a monthly basis, and for below-grade-level learners on a monthly, sometimes a weekly basis.

Trubie Bailey, a K–3 reading specialist, was hired in 1996 and since 1998 has been a part of Musick's full-time staff. During the school year, Bailey works with about a third of the schools' K–3 students in intensive one-on-one and small-group remediation. Trained in

Reading Recovery, Bailey cycles children through, on average, every six weeks for one-on-one and small-group sessions. Bailey analyzes the reading levels of all K–3 Musick students using running records, SAT-9 scores, and trimester district assessments. These data help her to know exactly which kids to work with and how to work with them. "When the kids leave me, they are on grade level," said Bailey, and the interviewed teachers agreed. "They may not be at the 99th percentile," Bailey said, "but they can read as well as the rest of the class. And in the affective domain, I enable a whole lot of kids to have a loving connection. They know I care. They know they can come to me, and they do. I think kids need that." Many children, after cycling back into their traditional classroom, still opt to stop by Bailey's room for some quiet reading in her classroom library.

Kindergarten, first-grade, and second-grade teachers also do small group guided reading with leveled books every day. Every week, these grades also do "Buddy Writing," a collaborative effort in which first or second graders are paired with kindergarteners to do journal writing. Older students practice editing skills as they help younger students reflect on and improve their writing.

3. Distributed Leadership

Leadership at Musick is shared among multiple levels, both within the school and at the district. Principal Bossi, during her tenure, was a strong voice which wasn't always in harmony with the school's veteran teachers, many of whom have been in the classroom for over 20 years. Literacy coordinator Scheving has provided a valuable intermediary role, working collaboratively with teachers and with principals and encouraging the focus on accelerating Hispanic/Latino achievement. As one teacher put it, "With the literacy coordinator's leadership, things really fell into place." Reading specialist Bailey also has helped give the school guidance and leadership around reading, working with teachers on how best to do running records and guided reading, and leading the charge on establishing leveled-book libraries.

Musick also has benefited from guidance, structure, and funding from Newark Unified School District. Dating back to the early 1990s, the district began focusing on literacy, creating time and positions in schools to support the work. The majority of professional development that Musick has benefited from, ranging from outside consultants to literacy coaching, has been funded through district initiatives. The district also provides a data assessment coordinator who provides information on student achievement data. Teachers receive graphs and visuals from the district office; from this information, they are able to identify low-achieving student groups, determine standards on which to focus, and determine action plans.

Strong veteran teachers, principal turnover, and district intervention are not always a winning combination. Add rapidly changing student demographics, and a school has quite a challenge. Musick, however, has found a way to make this work, with teacher leaders and district leaders both contributing to keep the school's focus coherent and produce undeniably consistent growth. The one constant in education is change, and

Musick has learned how not only to meet this challenge but also succeed in narrowing their achievement gaps along the way. Literacy coordinator Scheving offered this insight:

> What's been done in the past is maybe people haven't been too clear about how to make sure all kids feel accepted. If [kids] start off feeling a little bit different, they internalize that difference, they start behaving differently. It's reinforced and you get a widening of the gap instead of a narrowing. That's got to be caught early. Early intervention is essential.... [At Musick] we've had Hispanic children come in, kindergarteners, not being able to speak a word of English, going around the playground talking up a storm. Spanish or English, it doesn't matter. They just love being in school. They love being around their friends. They like talking to each other. They start off talking Spanish to an English-speaking kid. Before long they're speaking some English. Later on they're kind of leading the class.

Recommendations

Schools narrowing the achievement gaps are using data in a variety of ways to engage in a continual improvement process. Those closing the gaps are constantly examining strengths and weaknesses, trying new strategies, and evaluating progress. Using data is frequently thought of as an analytical, technical strategy, but data also can function as a catalyst for some of the more emotional, affective work that needs to be done to change school culture. Data can be used to spur community building, helping faculty to confront the difficult issues that need to be addressed in order for schools to thrive. The kind of deep-rooted reforms necessary to close the achievement gaps cannot come about from a technical process alone, relying solely on data analysis. Nor can sustainable academic improvement be brought about by a purely affective process, relying solely on conversations regarding institutionalized racism. A blended approach, however, using data to make necessary changes to instruction and as an entry point for tough conversations about equity, can result in real improvement. Schools and districts may benefit from the following recommendations:

1. SCHOOLS NEED FREQUENT, CREDIBLE DATA

Annual standardized testing data are helpful to policymakers and the public in gauging general school quality across a state or the nation, but teachers and school-based leaders need detailed information on a more frequent basis and more diverse assessments.

Provide frequent assessments.

To engage in a continual improvement process, schools need quarterly, monthly, even weekly feedback on progress. Such assessments serve two functions: Some assessments help teachers to track students' progress, while others are more diagnostic, helping teachers to pinpoint individual students' strengths and weaknesses. This kind of detailed information can, in turn, provide feedback on the effectiveness of instructional strategies, giving teachers feedback on their own work as well as guidance on how to tailor instruction to address students' skill gaps.

Provide diverse assessments.

Diversity of the assessments is as important as its frequency. Multiple assessment measures are important to provide teachers with a complete portrait of their students' strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, qualitative data, which can be formally gathered through focus groups with stakeholders, can provide school leaders with valuable insights regarding schools' learning environments.

2. TEACHERS NEED SUPPORT TO USE DATA

After students are tested, faculty typically are called together, informed about students' results, told that they need to improve, and sent back in their classrooms. Not surprisingly, very little changes. In the worst-case scenario, data actually have a negative

impact, contributing to teacher burnout and a sense of helplessness. To make sure that data sparks positive change, teachers need professional development and collaboration time. Both provide structured opportunities to reflect, discuss, collaborate, and learn about new strategies so that they can take action.

Provide professional development on how to understand data.

Understanding data is a new requirement in the teaching profession. Data can be overwhelming, particularly if presented in stacks of paper without any guidance. Teachers need training in how to understand results so that they can gain an accurate understanding of their students' strengths and weaknesses. They need to know what the achievement gaps look like at their school—not just which students are failing to master important standards, but which skills these students lack—before teachers can take targeted action to close the gaps.

Provide professional development on how to take action.

Once teachers understand results, they need to be able to know what to do next and how to do it. They require a wealth of information about instructional strategies and curricula so they can make well-informed choices regarding how to meet identified needs. High-quality professional development, particularly when followed up by classroom-based coaching, can help teachers meet this challenge. Although many teachers have years of experience, many more are new to the profession; no one teacher has a monopoly on good ideas. By being given access to outside expertise, particularly in the rapidly advancing field of reading instruction, teachers can increase their repertoire of strategies. If data shows a weakness in, for example, decoding text, teachers need time with experts on decoding so that they can learn how to become more effective. Experts also can diagnose gaps in curriculum and advise appropriate materials to meet students' needs. The leap from testing to classroom practice can seem like a chasm; professional development can provide a bridge, helping teachers connect their practice to their students' needs.

Provide collaboration time.

Teachers need time to collaborate, helping one another with challenges and sharing strategies that work. These professional interactions can't happen in the lunchroom or on weekends. Collaboration time needs to be built into the school schedule as part of the regular work week. Whether it happens in weekly grade-level team meetings, cross-grade level meetings, leadership team meetings, or full-faculty meetings, teachers need structured time together to discuss practice. Innovations happen every day in the field of teaching, but too often they happen behind closed classroom doors. Regularly scheduled collaboration time ensures that change and improvement spreads, and one teacher's breakthrough can become the transformation of a grade level or even a school.

One important form of collaboration is teachers visiting other teachers' classrooms. Talk can be helpful, but seeing how a colleague teaches can provide the structured, practical

support teachers need to change their practice. This open-classroom approach is fairly countercultural to the teaching profession; as one Belle Air Elementary teacher explained, "People in the teaching profession are used to coming into their classroom, closing the door, and being an independent practice. But they're finding more and more there's open doors. There's people coming in—whether it's the principal or the superintendent, people from BASRC, teachers from other schools, peers. That's relatively new in teaching. And it really forces you to be on your toes.... I think that's a new thought in the teaching profession." A collaborative environment needs to become the new norm in schools.

3. RACE MATTERS

Race in America is an explosive issue. National history, current events, and personal experiences combine to make race a complicated and frequently emotional subject. Many white people—who are the majority of teachers, administrators, and policymakers—choose to aim for color blindness. It feels more comfortable, it carries less risk, and it reflects the notion that we are a nation of equal opportunity. Reality, however, is decidedly color conscious. With African-American and Hispanic/Latino children languishing far behind their white and Asian peers, color blindness appears to compound the problem. Talking about race and taking action with particular groups of students in mind may seem controversial or counterintuitive to many people raised to think color blindness is the goal, but the findings of this study strongly suggest that addressing race is what it will take to narrow the achievement gaps in our nation's schools.

Hire and promote people of color.

Schools that are closing the achievement gaps report that they have far more people of color in leadership positions than do the comparison group of schools. Many schools are challenged by the relative scarcity of African-American or Hispanic/Latino school administrators, and teacher training institutions should increase their efforts to recruit people of color into school administration. The findings of this study also suggest that informal leadership roles and formal nonadministrator or teacher leader roles are important. More could be done to expand leadership in schools and recruit people of color into these positions.

Talk about race.

School faculties in gap-closing schools have structured conversations about race and ethnicity. Almost every school in the nation with students of more than one race has an achievement gap with a racial component. Teachers need actively to engage in a conversation about why these gaps exist, considering the impact of race as well as the more often-cited issues of poverty and family background. Teaching is a complex and highly situated activity that cannot exist outside of a societal context. Ultimately, each teacher needs to consider carefully whether—and how—his or her own classroom practice might be reinforcing systemic gaps. The link between race and classroom practice is one of the most difficult to make, but making sure that instructional decisions are based in data can be one way to keep teachers focused on what is really happening in

classrooms. When teachers are given time to look at disaggregated data, it becomes impossible not to acknowledge race. As one teacher leader said:

> When we [first] disaggregated the data, people wanted to know, 'Why are we disaggregating by race?' They said we should be color-blind. But we replied we wanted to make sure that no pattern existed. It starts that way. You open up the level of conversation with small groups of teachers. If you share in a small group, experiences are shared. We purposely made them mixed race…. We wanted to start small. We now have this group of teachers who have been empowered by these conversations, who now will speak up. They know that they have comrades who support them. It opens more doors. Conversations have become more honest. That only happened in the last two years…. There's very little difference between races now on the SAT-9. Now, we're looking constantly at data.

Data is a key component to spurring conversations concerning how race and ethnicity affect students' experiences in school. "We've had a big cultural shift ourselves to provide all of this data to the sites," said Patrick Lee, Oakland Unified's data and assessment coordinator. "Prior to that, I think a lot of what we had was decisions made based on hunches, with a lack of awareness of where the gaps actually existed, sometimes by people not as knowledgeable about the achievement levels of different populations of students. And so now we've created this awareness." The process of confronting data that reveals stark race-based gaps can be painful, but it can spark the kind of momentum that leads to real change.

Get specific—Define what equity means and set goals.

School communities that are closing the gaps develop and agree on an explicit definition of equity. This can be an exercise in mission building or vision building, spending time discussing the big picture so that all faculty share the same end goal. It also can mean discussing a general goal (for example, all children will learn at or above grade level) and getting specific about what that this result would look like at a particular school site.

Gap-closing schools then establish reasonable roadmaps to achieve their vision, setting measurable goals for each racial or ethnic subgroup to close the achievement gaps. Any school can hang a banner declaring it to be a place where all children can learn, but schools that are closing the gaps actually define what high expectations mean and look like in practice. Each site needs to develop its own individualized goals based on its student population and achievement levels. Teachers can easily dismiss externally imposed goals, such as federal growth targets, as being too removed from schools' specific situations to have real bearing. While the school collectively strives toward adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets, teachers need to be given the assignment to translate these into their own achievement goals. The latter are more likely to be internalized and viewed as authentic personal goals. With measurable, individualized goals, the phrase "closing the gaps" becomes more than just a saying or an impossible utopian dream; such goals give teachers the opportunity to strive for and celebrate step-by-step progress.

4. FOCUS IS ESSENTIAL

Schools are pulled in so many different directions that sometimes the hardest challenge of all is focusing. Successful schools do not try to do it all; instead, they select a couple of things that matter and do them well.

Focus on reading.

It's clear that reading/literacy skills matter a great deal, perhaps more than any other skill. There is widespread agreement that reading should be schools' No. 1 priority and focus. "I believe we need to restructure schools and become specialists," said a teacher in a gap-closing school, "specializing in nuts and bolts of teaching reading, from the lowest end to the highest end. I believe we are not serving our kids to the best of our abilities because we're trying to do too much and teachers aren't having the opportunity to become experts." Prioritizing reading means focusing less on other things—other things which matter but, ultimately, matter less. Among the tough choices made by gap-closing schools are offering fewer electives; reducing teachers' prep time to add an additional reading period; and ending projects, field trips, or collaborations based on nonacademic subjects. These are painful trade-offs but necessary ones if the oft-touted goal of closing the achievement gaps is to become a reality.

Regardless of the specifics of the reading program used, schools should:

- Devote substantial amounts of time (on the order of 2 to 2½ hours a day) to reading.
- Integrate reading/literacy instruction into science, mathematics, and social studies.
- Provide continuous professional development on teaching reading, including classroom-based coaching, for all teachers.
- Provide instruction and materials targeted explicitly to individual students' needs.

Focus on what's happening within school walls.

School leaders need to keep faculty focused on what can be done in school to close the achievement gaps. Children with low achievement levels frequently face a variety of challenges outside school walls; too often, conversations about the achievement gaps focus on these external factors. Structured, data-based conversations can help shift teachers' attitudes away from a negative focus on what's beyond their control to a constructive attitude about what is within their locus of control. One teacher wrote, "The first year we were very data driven…. We had a breakthrough, a cultural change, a shift in thinking wherein the major intervention is the classroom. That changed a lot of the ways we thought about ourselves. We didn't focus on parents and the home. Instead, we focused on the curriculum."

Diagnostic data can point to areas of strengths and weaknesses, breaking down what can seem like an insurmountable problem into logical next steps. If teachers don't have the chance to talk about what can be done in school, they frequently feel powerless. "I

struggled with external blame," admitted Belle Air Principal Angela Addiego. "Do you blame the parents for not being able to get the kids to read? But…my thinking is that kids are here. When they're here, it's our responsibility to do the absolute best we can to get them educated. We have to put systems in place that support children when they are at school. And outside of school, too, but I can only control so much…. I focus on what can happen here." What happens in school matters a lot. Discussing what's within schools' control can strengthen teachers' sense of efficacy.

Get small to get big.

Case-study schools that focused on a small student group—the lowest-performing student group—reported big gains for the school as a whole. In Belle Air Elementary School, a focus on supporting Hispanic/Latino boys helped teachers hone their skills at differentiating instruction for all. At Roosevelt Middle School, a focus on African-American suspensions resulted in a reduced suspension rate for all students. It may seem counterintuitive, but focusing on a few students can lead to the kinds of deep changes that promote whole school change.

THE WORK TO BE DONE

To inspire schools to close the achievement gaps, policymakers have emphasized annual standardized testing and explicit achievement goals. These strategies have helped to create a sense of urgency around the need to close the gaps. Goals and incentives, however, aren't enough; schools need resources and support to accelerate the learning of low-achieving students while continuing to improve achievement for all. When teachers have access to frequent, diagnostic assessments and high-quality professional development including coaching and collaboration time with colleagues, they are able to use data to make real and exciting changes. Data alone doesn't improve schools, but data used effectively can lead schools to narrow and ultimately close the achievement gaps. As Patrick Lee, Oakland Unified data and assessment coordinator put it:

> [Data] are the tools and resources to help address the question of 'What next?'… How do you change the climate at a school [or] the nature of relationships between adults and students at the school? Those things are so big that, honestly, at a central level, we provide some resources for it. But where we see the biggest gains are where the site takes ownership over those issues. There truly has to be a Cycle of Inquiry, where you are analyzing the data and you are looking at what are the root causes of those differences but really getting to that next step. What do we do about it? I don't think that that process can be achieved without having the data.

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Appendix:
Statistical Significance of Survey Findings

The following table summarizes the statistically significant findings from both data runs. The means are on a four-point scale. On questions of frequency, 4 = a few times a week, 3 = a few times a month, 2 = a few times a year, 1 = never. On questions measuring degrees of agreement, 4 = strongly agree, 3 = somewhat agree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 1 = strongly disagree.

Question	**16 vs. 16 n=32**			**8 vs. 8 n=16**		
	2-tailed sig.	Gap Mean	Non-Gap Mean	2-tailed sig.	Gap Mean	Non-Gap Mean
6a. How frequently have you used data to understand the skill gaps of low-achieving African-American or Hispanic/Latino students?				.014**	2.79	2.10
6b. How frequently have you administered ongoing assessments of students?	.086*	3.33	2.98	.094*	3.48	3.00
6c. How frequently have you discussed low-performing African-American or Hispanic/Latino student achievement data with colleagues?				.078*	3.04	2.56
6g. How frequently have you visited colleagues' classrooms to observe instructional strategies?	.077*	2.00	1.67	.009***	2.17	1.50
7b. To what degree do you agree or disagree that closing the achievement gap between African-American or Hispanic/Latino students and white/Asian students has been a primary goal for school leaders?				.094*	3.88	3.50
7c. To what degree do you agree or disagree that the school community developed and agreed upon an explicit definition of equity?	.013**	2.94	2.30	.004***	3.29	2.15
7d. To what degree do you agree or disagree that people of color hold positions of leadership in the school?	.009***	3.12	2.30	.016**	3.27	2.10
7g. To what degree do you agree or disagree that school leaders set measurable goals for closing the achievement gap between African-American or Hispanic/Latino and white/Asian students?	.083*	3.28	2.84	.020**	3.46	2.65
7h. To what degree do you agree or disagree that school leaders encouraged or led schoolwide inquiry into the achievement gap?				.014**	3.83	2.79
7i. To what degree do you agree or disagree that school leaders provided structured opportunities for faculty to discuss race and ethnicity?	.075*	2.78	2.31	.003***	3.08	1.96
9d. How frequently have you received professional development about analyzing data on low-performing students?				.059*	2.48	2.16
9e. How frequently have you received professional development about linking data on low-performing students with effective instructional strategies?				.053*	2.52	2.13
9f. How frequently have you received professional development about literacy instruction for low-performing students?				.073*	2.69	2.25

* $p < .1$
** $p < .05$
*** $p < .01$