

Minority Student Achievement Advisory Committee, Loudoun County Public Schools, Meeting, October 15, 2014

Notes by Juana Kazmierczak, Evergreen Mill Elementary School,
LEAP 2nd Delegate and MSAAC substitute delegate

Minutes

The meeting was called to order and the minutes from the last two meetings were reviewed and approved by the delegates. To access all minutes from previous meetings, go to:

<http://www.lcps.org/Page/142871>

Attendees and Meeting Set up

Those in attendance consisted of both MSAAC and LEAP delegates, MSAAC officers, LCPS staff, guest speakers Dr. Ryan Tyler (LCPS Dir. of Research) and Dr. Eric Williams (LCPS School Superintendent), two school board members, and other interested parents. MSAAC delegates consisted of parents, teachers, parent liaisons, or guidance counselors. The tables at the meeting were organized by high school cluster. So, if your elementary school child will attend Loudoun County High School, you would sit with the delegates for all schools feeding into that high school. This is a great way to get to know parents and faculty from your school pyramid. This was also used as a way for teams to work together to answer various questions that were posed throughout the evening.

School Cluster News

The MSAAC chair asked a delegate from each table to summarize news from their school cluster. This included the following:

Freedom High School: Held PSATS

Park View High School: Held Homecoming and Workout Wednesdays

Rockbridge High School: Held Dedication Week (new high school), Homecoming, 5K fundraiser

Woodgrove High School: Held Think Pink fundraiser, Homecoming

Heritage High School: The delegate did not report any news but was excited to be there to see what they can do more for minorities, including the Hispanic student population.

Stoneridge High School: Held Homecoming, Be Shady Day (awareness of challenges the blind face), SAT testing, Bulldogs Don't Bully

Tuscarora High School: Sadly, the school's PE teacher passed away while on vacation. They dedicated the athletic field in his memory. Also, SATs were held, Homecoming, preparing for the upcoming Academic Fair and Symposium. Lucketts elementary is currently holding Parent/Teacher conferences.

Loudoun Valley High School: Homecoming, PSATs, Powder Puff Day, PTO emphasis on reading. Emerick Elementary: Fun Run fundraiser raised \$15K, elections for student government.

Potomac Falls High School: Held a service project with Sugarland Run Elementary School: read and play, math bingo. Potomack Elementary: Walk-a-thon raised \$14K

Dominion High School: Homecoming. Sugarland Run elementary: enjoyed having the seniors come over for their service project.

Loudoun County High School: Held PSATs, also pleased with SAT test results, continue to see improvements. Evergreen Mill Elementary: SOL test scores improved across the board; the Study Buddies program, which pairs volunteer tutors with our at promise students, as well as other efforts, helped improve test scores.

Excellence Requires Equity

MSAAC Chair Zerell Johnson Welch briefly introduced an article by Bradley Scott, M.A. titled: “We Should Not Kid Ourselves: Excellence Requires Equity”. She put up an equation on the screen that says:

Excellence – Equity = Elite

She said that the “excellence” part refers to the fact that we are in an excellent school district, as exemplified by our strong test scores, however, if we took away the “equity” part, we would simply be an “elite” school district. She gave the examples of “pillows” and how one student may need extra pillows to get the support they need in order to reach their full potential while another student may need less. For more information on Bradley Scott’s article, go to:

http://www.idra.org/IDRA_Newsletter/February_2000_Excellence_Requires_Equity/We_Should_Not_Kid_Ourselves%3A_Excellence_Requires_Equity/

Dr. Ryan Tyler on LCPS Achievement Gaps and Solutions

Dr. Ryan Tyler, Director of Research of LCPS, was one of two guest speakers for the evening. His topic was on “LCPS Achievement Gaps” and tools and strategies to help our children. He shared the latest data on test scores, which at a glance, are impressive. In fact, our test scores in all categories were either higher or tied with neighboring school districts (Fairfax, Prince William, and Virginia Beach). “There’s a lot of positive conclusions we can make, but there’s a challenge in front of us that we are well-equipped to handle,” he said. “As we build a Strategic Plan for LCPS, it might help bring into focus what we need to work on,” he added.

Dr. Tyler revealed that despite the strong overall test scores, differences continue to exist in academic performance between groups of students. He asked each table to think about certain groups of kids that have historically had “different outcomes”. In what group have we seen achievement gaps? The answer, he said: African American and Hispanic students, low-income, gender, ELL and those with learning disabilities.

He revealed charts for each subject area that reveal significant gaps between white/Asian and black, Hispanic, and low-income students. “Why are we getting different outcomes?” He asked the delegates to come up with possible answers. A delegate from Rockbridge High School postulated that it could be different attitudes and expectations. Another delegate from that cluster who has a special needs child thought it might be the need for more general inclusion. A delegate from the Freedom HS cluster said that she believes it’s a mentality (she said that her kids don’t want to join a robotics club because they don’t see their peers (of the same race) joining). A parent from Stonebridge wondered, “Who are giving these tests? How are they being administered for the different groups?” Delegates from Loudoun County surmised that the common thread was economic – a single parent having to work two jobs might not be home to help a child understand their homework, for example.

Dr. Tyler revealed that the following factors contributed to the achievement gap, according to numerous studies:

Environmental factors, low-income families, children in poverty, minority groups are overwhelmingly concentrated in the lowest-achieving schools, student tracking, negative stereotypes, and kids at an incredibly young age being influenced by other kids.

Dr. Tyler posed some possible solutions to closing the gap, including:

- Reduce class size
- Create smaller schools
- Motivation
- Concentration, persistence and engagement
- Parental involvement
- Supportive parenting
- High expectations and teaching literacy skills
- Early childhood education
- Expanding access to libraries

Dr. Eric Williams on Achievement Gaps and the LCPS Strategic Plan

The next guest speaker was Dr. Eric Williams, the new LCPS Superintendent. He said that there are two questions related to Achievement Gaps:

1. Are we doing our best at engaging, challenging and supporting our students?
He gave the example of Farmwell Middle School, in which students worked on a project to address the fact that the Colorado River no longer flows into the Sea of Cortez. They covered all core subject areas but also the project captivated the student’s interest because it was “making a difference” with solving a very real problem. “Let’s engage all of our students in work that students find meaningful. “
2. Are we doing our best to attract and retain and support staff? “The red carpet treatment should not only be given on the first day to teachers but throughout.”

Dr. Williams says that those two questions will be posed in the newly commissioned LCPS Strategic Plan. "Let's continue to have conversations so that a shared, common vision will emerge." He plans to meet with all stakeholders, including the MSAAC, to develop this vision, which he has entitled "Vision 2020".

Dr. Williams then asked if the delegates had any questions or comments. Sharon Wilson, a delegate, said that parents need tools apart from what teachers are doing to help close the achievement gap. She also said that the schools need more diversity. "It's important for minorities to see other minorities as faculty." Dr. Williams responded that schools have a "parent liaison" on staff to provide tools to parents. He also said that the LCPS Department of Personnel Services will be looking at the staffing data to get a better sense, asking questions such as: "Is it recruitment or retention?" "What can we do (especially) in schools with a greater, diverse population?" he wondered. A teacher who works with young adults asked if the strategic plan will include specific plans for each school. Dr. Williams replied: "Not an exact plan, but clearly, there needs to be that connection.

Another delegate asked what kind of support can we provide to students who might not be getting the type of support they need at home? Dr. Williams and others present mentioned various programs such as the volunteer and professional tutor programs at various schools, the Watch Dog Dads program, experiential learning projects, such as the one conducted at Farmell MS in which parents and members of the community would be asked to provide their insights and expertise. Another delegate asked: "What are those deliberate, specific actions to address achievement gaps?" Dr. Williams replied: "In the strategic plan, we want five broad goals and specific, measurable objectives. We need to have specific, measurable action steps. We just commissioned the strategic plan study (so we don't have all the answers yet)." Another delegate charged everyone to get to know each other and to take these ideas back to their schools to help address the achievement gap.

Upcoming MSAAC Events and Announcements

Several announcements were made at the end of the meeting:

- Dr. Williams will speak at Mt. Olive Baptist Church on October 20th.
- Applications are now being accepted for the Governor's School Summer Residential program.
- LCPS has seen overall gains in SAT scores!
- The next MSAAC meeting's theme will be: The commitment to improve performance outcomes. Dr. Kimberly Hough, Director of Personnel Services, will be the guest speaker and will address the question: how to increase diversity in LCPS.
- There is an MSAAC Fair and Symposium on April 18th at Tuscarora High School. Two people are needed to chair the event.
- There is a Step Show fundraiser on November 8th at Park View High School. It is open only to adults.
- A Central Intake Center is going to be created that screens, identifies, and registers ELL students. MCAAP and other groups will be part of the planning process. The next meeting

will be on October 29th at Stonebridge High School, 5:30 pm. Six teams will be looking at specific topics. All are welcome.

- The next meeting will focus on high-risk schools and recognize that there are barriers. They will talk about language diversity in the classroom. A third grade teacher from Sugarland Elementary will be speaking about her experiences. Dr. Flynn will also be giving a talk.