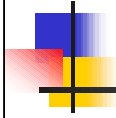



"Closing the Gap"



Improving Equity & Achievement for
Underachieving Students in Federal Way Schools



Progress . . .

- 65% of schools (20 out of 34) have exceeded District reading goals
- 74% of schools (25 out of 34) schools have exceeded District math goals
- 88% of schools (30 out of 34) showed continuous improvement in reading
- 85% of schools (29 out of 34) schools showed continuous improvement in math

Today I have some important information to share with the Board, and also with the community.

Over the last two years, we have made steady progress in improving the academic performance of our children. The great majority of our staff development has been focused on improvements in reading, and these efforts are yielding results.

You can also see by these numbers the substantial improvement in math.

That's the good news.



. . . Yet Improvements Needed

Significant academic disparity in underachieving students'

- Academic performance
- Advanced programs enrollment
- Special needs programs enrollment
- Disciplinary actions

Now for the not-so-good news . . .

In reviewing our progress and identifying those elements that are working effectively, we've also begun looking at areas where our students' needs are not being met.

Recently I asked for data on how our African American student population is achieving compared to other groups within our district.

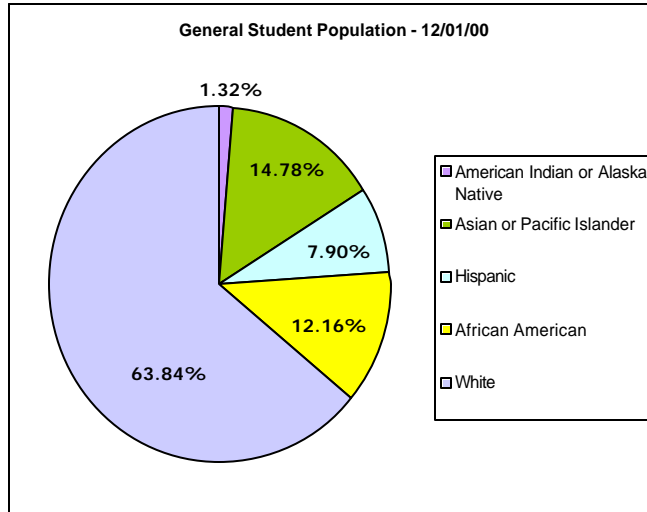
Frankly, I was appalled by the data. There are wide disparities in African American students' performance compared to others in terms of these four standard educational measurements.

In academic performance as measured by WASL tests and high school completion, as well as in advanced programs enrollment, African American students are significantly under performing and under represented. Conversely, their representation in special needs programs is significantly higher than their percentage of the population would indicate. And in terms of disciplinary actions such as expulsions and suspensions, their percentage of the population is significantly higher.

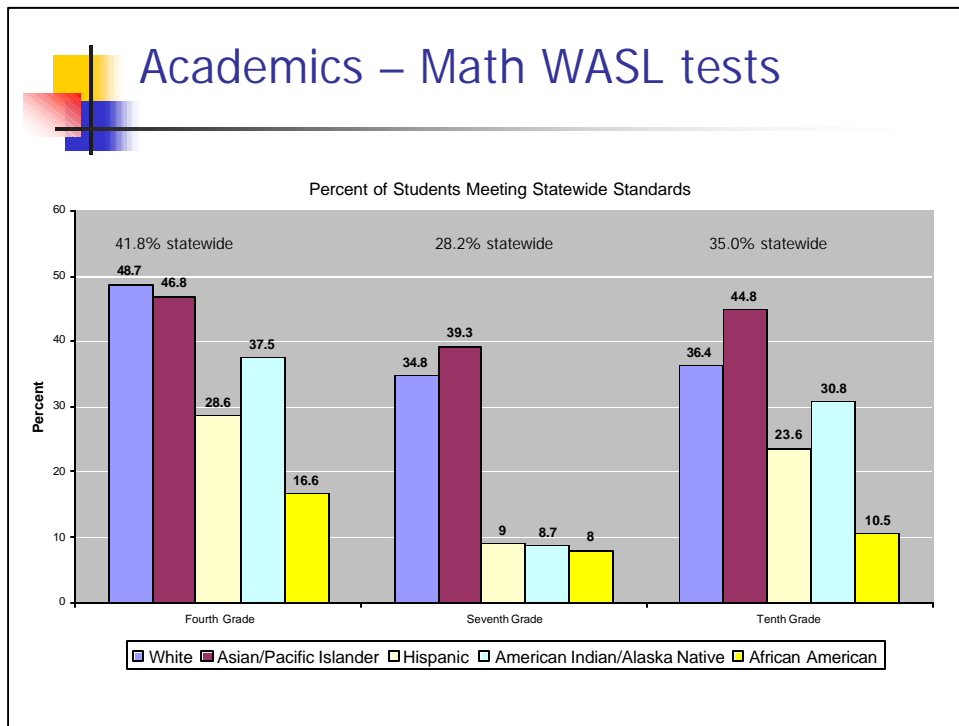
Let's look at the data more closely . . .



General FWSD Population



Our district has 22,541 students. Of that number, 2,740, or 12.16 percent, is African American.

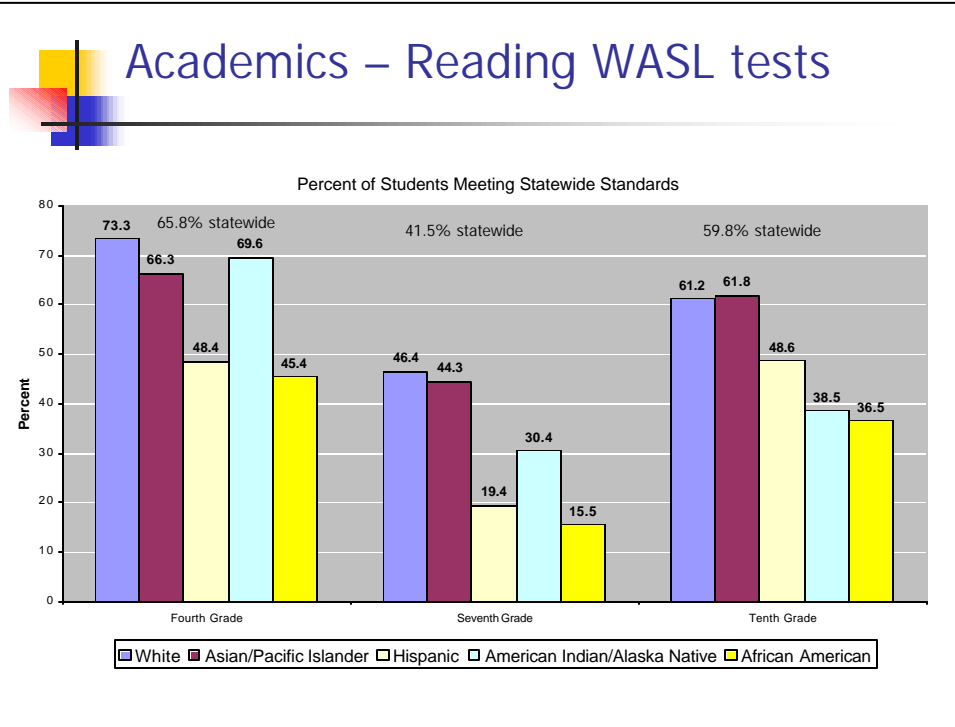


Here are figures for students meeting the state’s math standard in 4th, 7th and 10th grades.

While math achievement is generally the lowest of the basic skill areas assessed for all students, the results for African American students are particularly alarming.

For example, in fourth grade, only 16.6 percent of African American students meet the standard, as compared to 48.7 percent of white students. Even greater disparities plague us for math achievement at the 7th and 10th grade levels. In 7th grade, less than one African American child out of 10 in our district is meeting the state math standard.

By 10th grade, one in 10 African American students meets the math standard. This means that 90 percent of our African American kids don’t have the basic math skills needed to get a decent job, much less to go on to higher education and succeed.

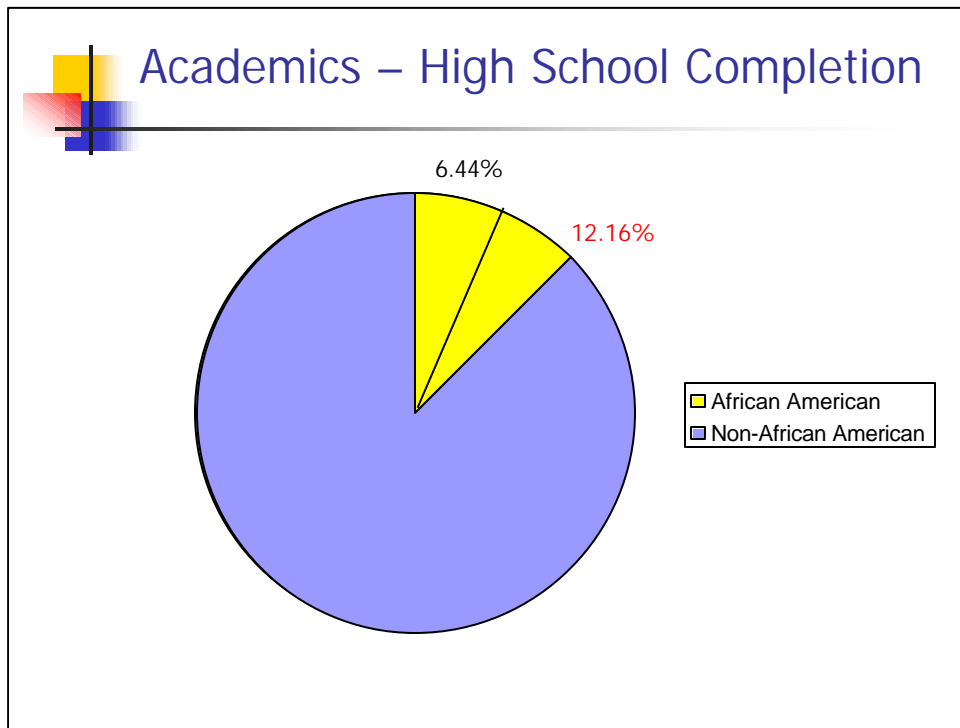


Here are those same comparisons for reading. Reading is a key to success in virtually all areas of learning and is a strong predictor of success in life.

You'll see a particularly large drop between 4th and 7th grades – in 4th grade, 45 percent of African American students are meeting the state standard, but this number drops to a totally unacceptable level of 15.5 percent by the 7th grade. This means that less than two out of 10 FWSD African American children are meeting the state reading standard in the 7th grade. The middle school years are a crucial time period for all students; being that far behind and having to make up so much ground is extremely difficult.

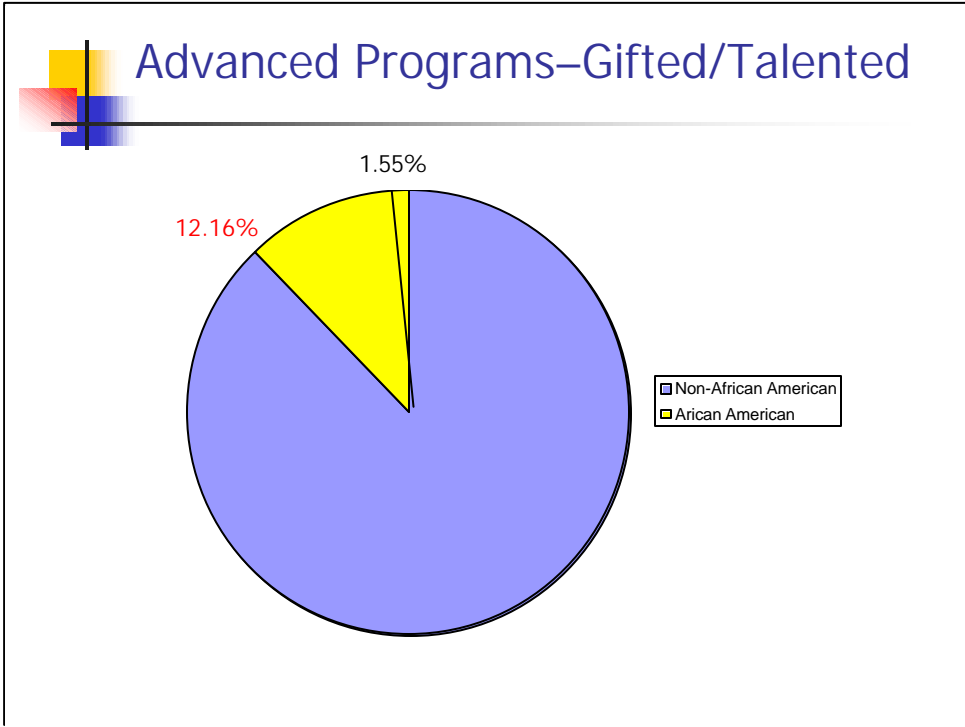
By the time these students reach high school, this population has recovered slightly. But even with those gains, we still see just 36 percent of African American 10th graders in our district meeting the state reading standard. One out of three is just not good enough!

I'm sure you noticed the same glaringly obvious point I did on these charts, and that is that for Math and Reading, African American students are at the bottom of 4th, 7th and 10th grade performance levels across our district.



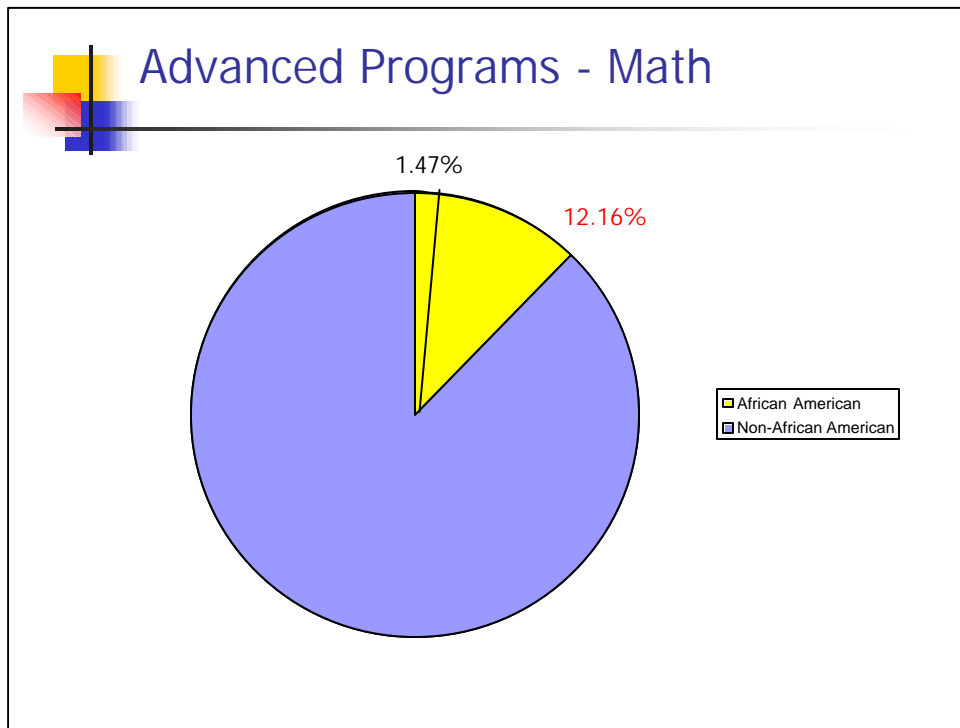
While African American students make up 12.16 percent of the total Federal Way schools population, they account for only 6.44 percent of the graduating class. This tells us that almost half of our African American students don't complete high school within our district.

While we must be careful with this statistic – some students may complete high school elsewhere – there is still enough of a gap here to be of concern.



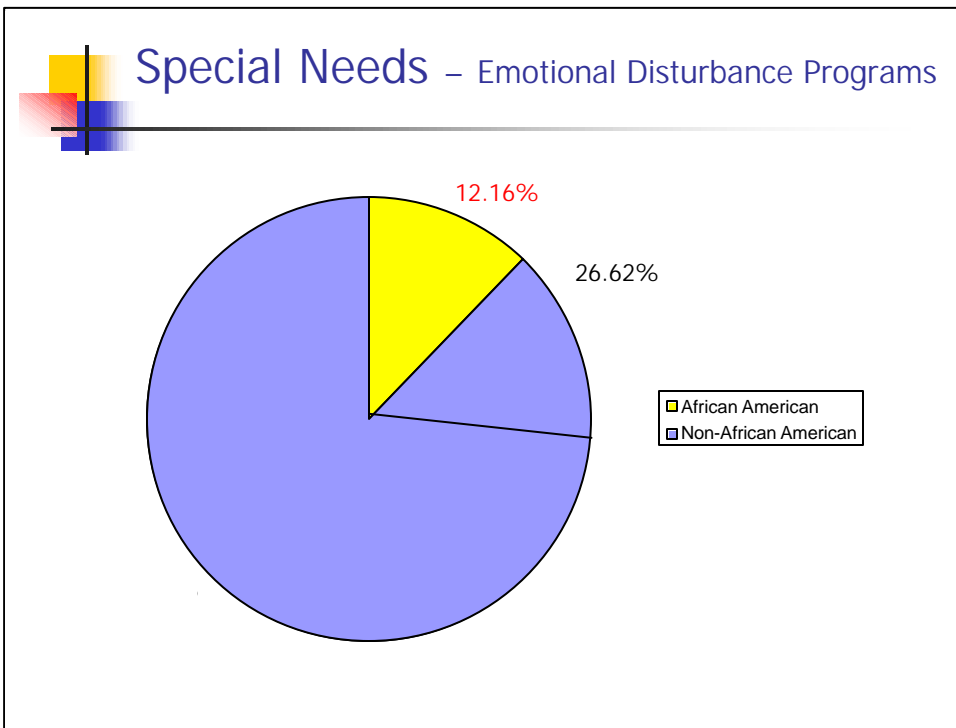
With an African American population of 12.16 percent, it is quite disturbing that only 1.55 percent of students in the gifted and talented programs is African American. That's less than two out of every 100 students.

There are 644 students in these programs. Only 10 are African American.



Here are the numbers for Advance Placement in Math. Much the same as in the Gifted & Talented Programs, an alarmingly small number, only 1.47 percent, are African American.

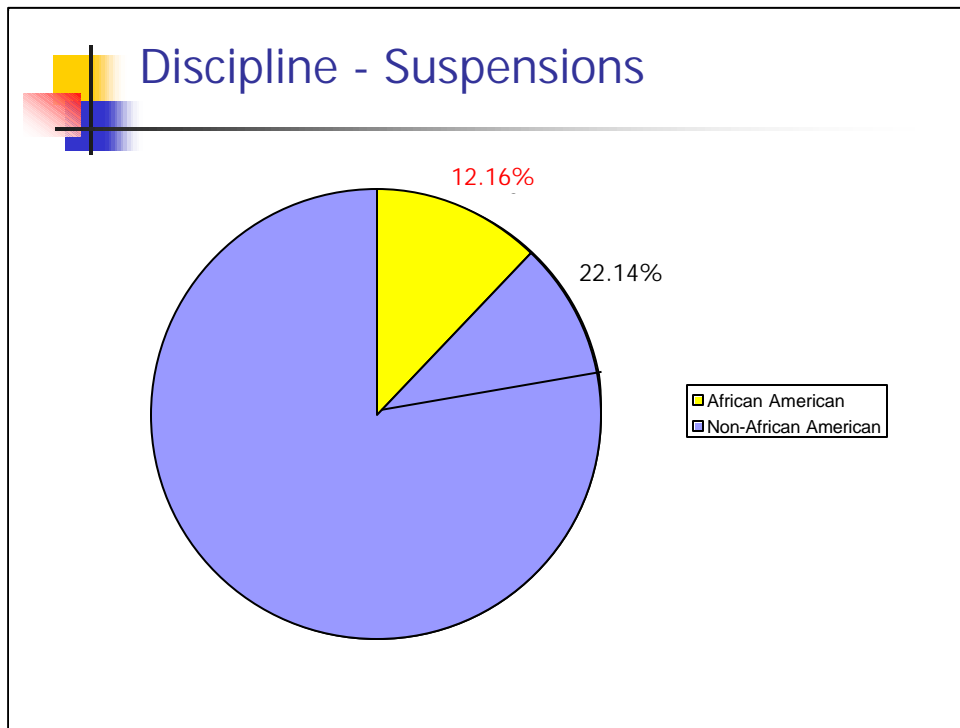
Of 204 Advanced placement math students, only 3 are African American. There certainly is an intuitive correlation here between this number and the low WASL scores in math. Our job is to see if there is more than an intuitive correlation.



This chart shows the number of students eligible for emotional disturbance programs (does not describe services for students). You can see that 26.62 percent of African American students are eligible for these programs, despite the fact that they make up only 12.16 percent of the district's population.



Similarly, this chart shows the number of students eligible for learning disability programs (does not describe services for students). 23.54 percent of African American students are eligible for these programs, which is basically double their representation in the population of the district as a whole.

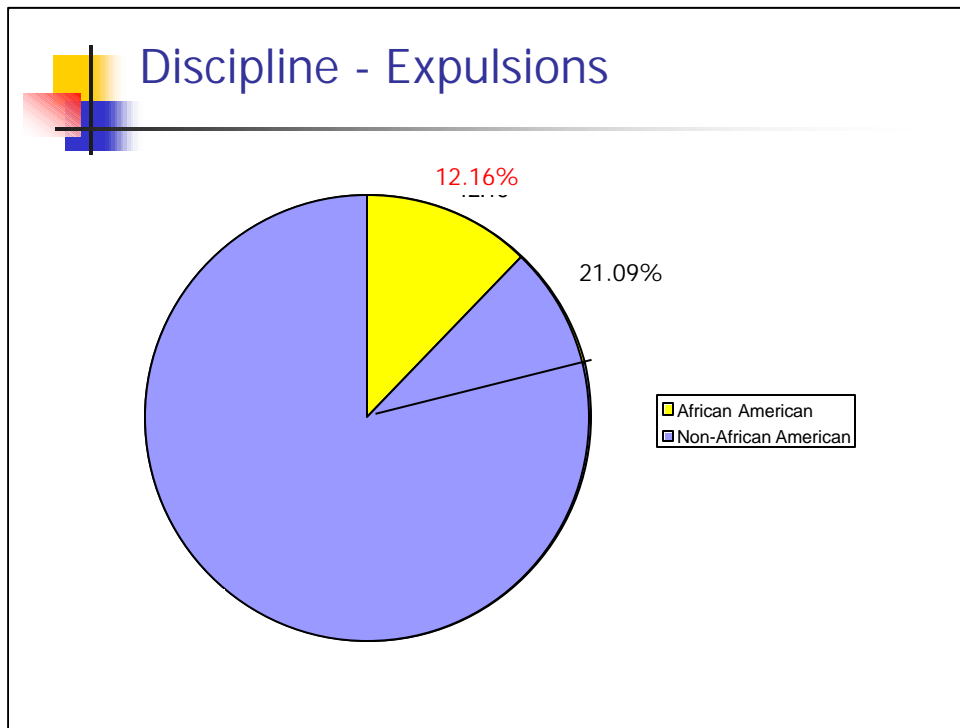


In the area of discipline, we see African American students disproportionately represented in statistics on suspensions and expulsions.

Again, the African American student population is 12.16 percent. Presumably, all things being equal, they would make up roughly 12 percent of suspensions. In fact, they represent 22.14 percent of suspensions.


We need to really understand what is causing these higher than normal numbers. Are these necessary suspensions? Are they based more on misunderstandings than behavior? Clearly we need to make sure we have discipline processes that solve problems. Students suspended are more likely to fall behind academically and thus become candidates for dropping out of school and more serious behavior issues than the action that led to the suspension.

We suspect there are cultural issues involved here. Disproportionate discipline may not necessarily be racially motivated, but may in fact be due to numerous other factors. We intend to understand this issue and take appropriate action to improve our processes wherever warranted.



Similarly, African American students in our district represent 21.09 percent of expulsions.

Something is out of balance here, and we need first to understand it, and then to fix it.



What Does it All Mean?

Many reasons for poor performance

- Poverty
- Mobility
- Cultural Barriers
- Parent Access and Involvement


Resist temptation to rush to judgement – or blame

Instead, focus on “closing the gap” – creating access and equity for achievement.

As you can expect, I’ve been spent quite a bit of time asking myself, and our staff, what this data means. Across the country, a great deal of work has been done over the years analyzing why any group of students may not perform well, and in general experts cite four key factors: Poverty, mobility, cultural barriers, and parent access and involvement. We don’t know yet to what degree these four factors play a role in the performance of our African American students, but it’s likely these factors are somehow connected to this data.

Let me say this: it’s often tempting to jump to conclusions when we see data like this. But I would encourage us to resist broad generalizations. These are very complex issues, and represent societal problems and a system that has been in place for many, many years . . . a system that may not have changed with our times. Let’s be sure we are not quick to assign blame.

Instead, we will look forward and focus on solutions that close the gap, and create access and equity. We need to be realistic: Federal Way Schools cannot be responsible for solving societal inequities that have existed in our country for, literally, hundreds of years. But what we CAN do is look at our own situation, acknowledge we have a problem, and make improvements. It’s about closing the gap and creating an environment where all students have the access and equity to achieve and succeed.




Plan of Action

- Office of Equity & Achievement
- Alma Dansby to begin July 1
- District-wide effort with community input
- Equity & Achievement Task Force
- Areas of Exploration:
 - Curriculum
 - Staff Development
 - Parent Access and Involvement

Today I am requesting the establishment of the Office of Equity & Achievement within my department. I have asked Alma Dansby to lead this office, and she will report directly to me. For the past four years Ms. Dansby has been principal at Lake Dolloff Elementary in Auburn. Before this she held teaching and administrative positions at several elementary and junior high schools. She is widely respected by her peers, parents and students, and I believe will make an excellent leader of this important work.

Additionally, we realize this is not just a school issue, but rather a community issue. For this reason it's important we get input from parents, business people, civic leaders and others.

We are creating an Equity & Achievement Task Force to work closely with Alma Dansby over the next several months. Alma and the Task Force are going to spend the next few months reviewing these issues and developing recommendations within three primary areas: curriculum enhancement, staff development and parent involvement. The recommendations will be designed to close the gap in terms of African American students' performance, providing them with access and equity needed for any student to achieve.



Questions to be Explored

- Linkage between academic performance and discipline
- Common standards and definitions for discipline
- Are our expectations high enough?
- Cultural and communication issues

There are several questions Alma Dansby and the Task Force will explore . . .

A few are . . . : What's the link between academic performance and discipline? Does better academic performance by African American students reduce frustration that sometimes leads to disciplinary actions?

Do we need clearer definitions for “disobedience,” “disruptive conduct,” and “rule breaking”? Are there instances when one student is suspended for action that another student may also commit and not be suspended?

What are our expectations? We know that people rise to the level of expectations.

And what is the role of communication? Do we have gaps between teachers and students trying to understand each other that are at the root of some of these problems? Are there differences in kids' learning styles and understanding kids' language, and the ways kids respond to authority and what they expect from authority, and what authorities expect from them?



Timeline

- June-August “Discovery Period”
 - Listening Forums at Schools
 - Listening Forums for Parents
 - Review of Best Practices
 - Expert Input
 - Year Two Community of Readers Plan
- August Administrator’s Workshop
- September Preliminary Report to Board & Community
- Report on individual school plans in October

We expect that for the next three months, this group will be in a “Discovery Period” to dig into the data I’ve shown you today and begin to understand what it means. We also want to hear from students, parents, teachers and staff, and will conduct listening forums to receive their input.

We’re also going to review some of the work other groups have done in this area – for example the State Superintendent of School’s Position Statement by the Multi-Ethnic Think Tank, and the 2000 Days to Excel Report from King County Executive Ron Simms’ office. Not only are we going to examine what has been put in place in Washington State, we’re going to hear from experts and examine best practices from around the nation which can be incorporated into our district. In August at our Administrator’s Workshop, we’ll hear from Alma Dansby and the Task Force on preliminary findings and recommendations. Then we’ll bring a preliminary report to the Board and the community in September.

There is, as you can see, a huge amount of work to be accomplished. And frankly I’m setting a very aggressive timetable. Some may argue that even if our group works aggressively over the next few months, it’s not enough time to study and solve a decades old (really centuries old) problem. However, academicians are often faulted for studying things to death, then coming up with watered down solutions . . . that’s not what we’re going to do in this district. We’re going to work aggressively to identify meaningful recommendations, implement those recommendations, and of course we can continue to refine and improve them as we go forward.

We will not shortchange our students. We must address the lack of achievement and rectify disproportionate standings that have plagued African American students for decades.