

“Operation Graduation”

Closing The Achievement Gap

-A Developmental Design-

“Graduation is The Expectation”

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Title Clarification

It is important to clarify the title of this brief paper for several reasons. First, it is important to note that many people and a number of different groups within, as well as external to, ISD 709 have been involved with addressing not only closing the achievement gap, but also other disparities between white students and students of color. Second, this energy and effort has extended over a period of time and much of the planning that has gone into any program design deserves to be credited in large part to those who have been addressing these issues. Third, this effort continues and if we are to be successful should continue well into the future. All research suggests endeavors that are in the spotlight and continually evaluated are those with the highest probability of success. For these reasons the following definitions are offered.

Inclusive: “Including people of all kinds.”

Developmental: “Process of change – the process of changing and becoming larger, stronger, or more impressive, successful, advanced, or of causing somebody or something to change in this way.”

Design: “Create a detailed plan of something.”

“Closing the Achievement Gap” this phrase refers to the difference of academic test scores for white students and students of color. *Integration Funding – MN. Rule 3535*

In 2005 there was a Minnesota State audit of Integration Funding Program services that were being provided by district and multi-district collaboratives throughout the state. Those collaboratives that were scrutinized caused legislators to reconsider the effectiveness of how Integration Funding should be used. It was determined in 2009 that “closing the achievement gap” language should be added to MN-Rule 3535 to reduce the achievement disparity between white students and students of color.

While it has long been known that an achievement gap exists, many districts including ISD 709 have either not specifically addressed the problem or have been unsuccessful in their efforts to address the problem. It is the intent of the Duluth community and ISD 709 administration to effectively address the achievement gap.

Inclusion

At this time there are five key groups involved with developing a comprehensive plan to address the achievement gap. The groups in random order are Education Equity Advisory Committee, Community Closing the Achievement Gap Group ('The Group'), Learning Services Lead Team (LSLT), Principals, and ISD 709 School Board and Administration. Many members of these various groups may serve on several of the groups involved. However, it is most important to note that the groups are representative of a broad spectrum of interests, organizations and factions from within the Duluth community. These groups as a whole are highly diverse, multiracial and reflect a gender balance.

Developmental

The number of groups and high diversity involved has provided an energetic and constructive dialogue. Some of the members of the groups have not been involved with these discussions as long as others. This has not seriously hindered the discussion but has added value to input from everyone who is involved. There's a strong commitment to develop specific and strategic programming that effectively closes the achievement gap. At the same time, there is a realization that we cannot wait for a "perfect" end product to be developed. There are students who need immediate interventions, support, and assistance to achieve academically. So at the same time we are building a paradigm for the future, we are living the beginning of that paradigm today.

Design

The following design has had its origin in discussions with EEAC members, LSLT meetings, Community Education Improvement Group, Administration, and Culture Center Parent Advisory Committees. To the greatest degree possible the rudimentary design offered at this time is founded on evidence-based practices.

Assumption 1: Students are individuals – Each student learns at a different rate, may learn through a different style, and is a unique listener and communicator. Therefore, an individualized learning plan is warranted for each student, regardless of where they may place on the assessment continuum. This individualized assessment system is available to teachers on a routine periodic and ongoing basis.

Assumption 2: An individualized assessment provides the means to develop an **Individual Learning Plan (ILP)** for each student by each Teacher. Central to the plan are the academic needs and the goals of the student. However, acknowledging students as whole persons reasonably requires the planning process to attend to other needs of the student as well.

Assumption 3: We believe that the Duluth community and ISD 709 have an array of resources to assist students in not only academic, but personal growth as well. The assessment of the student's needs should not stop at the academic realities of the students, but should include an overview of the students' reality. We view the student and the student's family as the two greatest single resources for

the student success. For this reason, the students' academic plan is a crucial portion of the students' **Graduation Plan**.

Assumption 4: It is not enough to have knowledge of a student's needs and resources to address those needs in the community. It is critical to develop, coordinate, track, evaluate, communicate, occasionally mediate and modify ILP's on behalf of the student. This will require a dedicated staff position that will focus on those students with the greatest immediate need.

Structural Pieces

1. **Assessment** (MCA-II, NWEA, Classroom performance, whole student approach)

Intense

Strategic

Core

2. **Interventions** (to be determined and/or further defined, e.g., *Read 180*)

Intense-for students at risk of imminent failure in subject matter

Strategic-for students with slipping grades

Core-standard curriculum and classroom approach

3. Graduation Plan (GP)—A plan that specifically addresses the “whole student” and the immediate learning needs of a student will be developed with input from the student, teacher, parents and secondary learning resources, if necessary. *All Graduation Plans complement and support Individual Learning Plans developed by the Teacher and Students.*

4. Graduation Coaches-this job position will be developed to work directly with key and secondary resources on behalf of the student's success. This position will require good writing and communication skills for the incumbent. The individual should be familiar with community resources, cultural nuances of the students and student families, community agencies, and educational system. While a teaching license is not required, it may be desired as a qualification.

The incumbent will work with resources that match the needs of the student and/or the family. The ability to establish and maintain rapport with the student and family will be critical. This individual may occasionally provide tutoring to the student as well as oversee group study times (Camps).

5. Extended school days, weeks and school year- This is an evidence-based approach has been used in countries that have student performance and achievement that exceeds those of the United States. This approach is also used in various charter and magnet academies that have strong performance records. This approach is also used by various public school districts and/or schools within public districts that have strong performance results.

Learning Camps – Math and Reading Camps will be times allotted with a specific focus on math and reading respectively. Ideally, there will be several different types of Camps

Day Camps—These may be held throughout the school year immediately after the school day.

Saturday Camps – these may be held on Saturday mornings to allow greater parent participation.

Summer Camps – these may be scheduled at the end of a school year, and prior to the new school year to reinforce math and reading retention.

The language of “**Camps**” was suggested specifically for Pre-K and K – 5 grades with the notion that ‘camp is fun and learning should also be fun’.

6. Achievement Agreements –the Graduation Coaches will develop Achievement Agreements with parents.

The above items are not all inclusive any means. We need to further determine and in some cases, design developmentally appropriate interventions for students and continue to pursue input from the various involved groups, including PACs, Principals and Teachers.

This paper looks at the initial formative structure of “Operation Graduation”. It must be emphasized that this is only the beginning. Each successive year should include review and recommendations for improvement by the groups and individuals that have provided input into the design. Those

2011 Closing the Achievement Gap Plan Concept-Year 1

Graduation Planning has some unique and distinct differences from Special Education. Individual Education Plans (IEP):

- The IEP is mandated through legal process and highly structured by external government.
- An Individualized Learning Plan is intended to be developed as both a preventative and or a remedial approach for students who have not been identified as Special Education. This is closer to the RTI model with some unique differences.
- There are four primary areas for consideration in the development of these ILP’s, they have been identified by the Community Education Improvement Group that has been meeting and they are the Student, the Students’ Family, the Community, and the School.
- Teachers will have primary responsibility for learning planning. The focus of the Graduation Plan needs to be on **the whole student**, and that includes paying attention to the students’ medical and dental health, family circumstances, peer structure, socio-economic status, to name a few areas). The **Graduation Coach** as recommended will serve as the case manager/traffic

director for a number of resources on behalf of the child. This is a holistic multidisciplinary approach intended to serve the whole student from a team perspective.

- This is a longitudinal approach. Coaches assigned students will follow those specific students from school to school in the event the student's family relocates. A high degree of transience tends to interfere with student achievement. This should in part be mediated by a case-management approach.

Two other reasons that strongly support this adjunct to an individualized assessment and planning approach are, first, these allow the position of Integration Specialist to evolve to include a coaching role without bargaining unit conflicts and second, the potential to recruit qualified staff of color for these positions is increased. All research indicates that having staff of color in positions of authority, where they may be observed and interacted with by students of color is beneficial to those students. These positions would be designated as Integration Specialists which is an existing position in the system.

Early Childhood and Pre-K

- Implement programming to develop language skills for children who qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Kindergarten through Grade 5---Elementary School

- Case Management approach-this would include individualized student assessment that is consistent with the developmental stage of the student and/or appropriate to the grade level.
- Case Management approach-this would include a process we would refer to as, "Graduation Planning", i.e. each child will "graduate" from the class they are in to the next class. "Graduation is The Expectation" should become the mantra for each teacher, counselor and administrator. The majority of the Graduation Counseling in the elementary level will be done by Integration Specialists. In part four of these positions would be modifications of the current Culture Center Worker position.
- Case Management approach-this is a longitudinal approach, wherein a "Graduation Counselor" is assigned student and if that student should relocate to another school within the district will follow that student to that school. This will provide our newly in academic planning and other realms to be determined within the Graduation Plan.
- Graduation Plans-minimally, these plans will address four areas as identified by the *Community Close the Achievement Gap* planning group. These areas are: 1. The student, 2. The community, 3. The student's "Family", and 4. The school.
 1. The student-of course a student provides assessment information input into the plan also provides the overall picture of his/her circumstance Socio-economically.
 2. The community-the community is considered to be the agencies and resources available to the success of the Graduation Plan.

3. The student's family-the "family" is defined by the student. Individuals outside of the student's nuclear family may include persons the students trust and would seek out as confidants. (Circumplex Family Theory, Dr. Tom Olsen)
4. The school-the school is represented by the Teacher. The teacher has the sole responsibility for defining the academic needs of the student. I see this as enhancing the student probability of success through potentially developing their relationship with the teacher. The teacher does not abdicate their responsibility to communicate with the parent; however the teacher now has an additional assist with the involvement of a Graduation Counselor.
 - Teacher Support- the existing Middle Schools are transitioning and those students in the higher grades within those schools deserve the opportunity to complete the academic rigor initially experienced. This is a 0.5 FTE commitment for both Lowell and Nettleton.

Grade 5 through Grade 8---Middle School

- Students in Middle Schools will begin to develop their own Graduation Plans as well as begin to explore careers and career options. The graduation counseling that occurs at this level may be more peer based but, never ignores the district's philosophy that "Graduation is The Expectation".
- While the role of the adult Graduation Counselor changes from a director to a mentor role. The Graduation Counselor remains a supportive factor in the students' educational process and may become more of a traffic director for external resources such as tutors.
- Plato is strongly introduced to the students as a supplement to classroom lessons.
- Teacher support- this would come in the form of Teacher support staffing to allow up to five teachers at each Middle School one day per week to work with students in need.

Grades 9 through Grade 12--- High School

- A Graduation Culture continues to work with the student and his/her family. The rule continues to be primarily supportive up to and including involvement with the judicial process if necessary.
- High Schools will develop a "School Within a School" program on each of the campuses.
- A strong centralized tutoring program will be developed for High Schools.
- High Schools will incorporate a retention and recovery to expedite a marginal or former student's return to classes.

Braided Funding

Funds to be redirected from the Office of Education Equity (OEE) will not pay for all of the programming described and to be developed. The braiding of other District funds such as Compensatory Education and Title I funds will also support programming. However, the element of the proposed approach that includes the probable hire of staff of color to directly assist District Teachers in the closure of the achievement gap is possible, definitely allowable by the funding source, evidenced based and community supported.