Examining the Exceptions: Beyond the Excuses, What Urban Schools are Doing to Close the Achievement Gap

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Research Questions

• What factors are enabling certain urban, low-income, non-white schools to succeed academically despite facing the same environmental factors that are typically barriers to high achievement at schools with similar demographics?
Background

• Stop explaining failure and excuses for the achievement gap

• Examine replicable traits of success in “high-fliers”
Literature Review

- Outstanding Principals
- Uncommon Teaching Quality
- Effective Spending
- Parental Involvement
- Measurable Goals
- High Expectations
- Positive School Climate
- More Time on Task
- Affirm Diversity & Cultural Difference
- Teach Values of Success
- Teaching to the Test
- Effort Creates Ability
- Discipline Leads to Achievement
- “High Flyers” NOT Replicable
Methodology

• 3 “High Flyers” in Hartford
  – Success Gauge: 5th & 6th Grade CMT
  – Majority non-white, low-income

1: Network-Affiliated Charter School
2: Independent Charter School
3: Traditional Public School

• Observe 1 full day of classes
• Interview 7 educators
While many differing factors go into fostering high achieving schools, what really matters is a school’s effective comprehensive collaboration to support teachers in sharing best teaching practices, forming standards-based curriculum and assessment, and demanding that all educators provide a consistent education, respecting and caring for every single student.
Significance

• Can a school become a high-flyer without ALL of the literature’s “required” traits?

• What traits are vital?

• What is fundamentally similar amongst Hartford’s high flyers?

• Replicable?
Literature-Consistent Findings

• Increase Time on Task
  – Extended days & years

• Success & College Focus
Literature-Inconsistent Findings

- Replicable
- Schools Reach out to Parents (NOT the other way around)
- Clear & Consistent Expectations
Findings

• The most fundamentally important factors of “high-flyers”:

  – Teaching to the Test with Caring & Respect

  – 100% student engagement

  – Collaboration & consistency in teaching practices
Conclusions

- High-flying schools are founded on school-wide collaboration that demands a consistent education for all students through an adherence to best teaching practices that follow a curriculum driven by (test) scores, and by fostering a caring respect of students as equals, capable of producing their own knowledge to attain academic success.
Implications

• Replicating “High-Flyers”?
  • Policy-Makers
  • District-Wide
  • In-School

• High-Flyers Granted Autonomy