

# 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-flyers”



# 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 & 6<sup>th</sup> 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



# Thesis

- 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 with out 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

