

CLOSING THOSE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

You have probably read comments in previous articles about achievement gaps. Perhaps, you have attended a board meeting when I have illustrated some of this informational data via a formal presentation. Usually, the term “achievement gap” is used when discussing the progress of our student subgroup populations (students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students) as compared to the main body of students within a school or the district.

However, there is another interesting achievement gap that is clearly illustrated by our report card data. This new gap, if you will, is a gender gap. That’s right. If we look carefully at our data, it is quite obvious that we have an achievement gap between our boys and our girls. In short, girls are outperforming our boys, and it shows up clearly in our reading and math results among our students, especially in grades 3-8.

We have known that in the area of reading, our students have some success barriers in the area of non-fiction reading and informational text. This barrier presents itself again in composing both short and long term written responses to prompts from non-fiction/informational texts. This issue can further present itself in the core subject areas of math, science, and social studies because these subjects deal with what’s real (non-fiction/informational texts) and not fiction or make believe.

Let’s face it---reading is the single most important subject for students to master. Successful learning in all other subjects is dependent upon a student’s mastery level of

reading/language arts. When we examined achievement data by gender, we saw some cause for concern in some schools and in some grade levels. The concerns have been shared with principals along with ideas to address the gaps.

Somehow or another, we all seem to be missing the boat when it comes to creating a love for reading among our boys, especially from the fourth grade on up. This is something that we will be focusing some strategies on in our schools this year. How about at home? Do your children, particularly your boys, often or ever pick up a book, newspaper, or magazine to simply read? Or, do they spend most of their time mastering computer or Nintendo games, playing sports, or riding bicycles, etc? There's nothing wrong with any of these activities, especially those that involve exercising and physical activities. However, too much of anything is usually not a good thing. Do your children observe you, their parents, reading at any time while at home? This, too, is an important step in the overall process of teaching children not only the importance of reading, but of becoming life-long readers and learners.

Appropriate modeling at home by parents is so important as we look at the overall development of the child. Teaching our children to develop an interest in reading of both fiction and non-fiction materials is crucial as we look to close achievement gaps. As I mentioned earlier, reading is the cornerstone for success.

This is why we must all work together to make certain that children master the art of reading, and develop an intense interest in reading, both at home and at school.

Remember, we need for our children to be fit, both mentally and physically, to the very best of their abilities.

If you have any questions about this article, please feel free to contact me at 544-5586.

Thank you.

Charles P. Kimble

Superintendent