

The core values, mission, vision, goals, and priorities in *Our Call To Action* provide the foundation for the diversity training and development plan. Of particular importance to the Office of Staff Development (OSD) is the link to the *Framework for Improving Teaching and Learning* that provides the structure upon which all staff development is designed, delivered, and evaluated. Strengthening professional learning communities through courageous conversations is at the heart of the plan that recognizes the need for educators to develop clearer understandings of self and students as cultural beings in order to close the gap. Courageous conversations must address the issues of high expectations and effort-based intelligence. Teacher expectations and perceptions of ability are often deeply held convictions, rarely articulated and difficult to confront. Yet the research indicates that unless teachers recognize unconscious and unintentional biases, poor and minority students will continue to be at risk for academic success.

Just as important to academic success and closing the achievement gap is the implementation of excellent instruction. Attention to the development of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices that recognize the nature of learning and help teachers create conditions that motivate students to become critical thinkers and collaborative problem-solvers is essential. Improved minority student achievement and increased cultural competence are at the heart of *Our Call To Action* and the *Framework for Improving Teaching and Learning*.

The recently amended MCPS *Policy IKA, Grading and Reporting*, has significant implications for diversity training and development. This policy affirms the school system's commitment to maintaining rigorous performance and achievement standards for all students. The policy hinges on high expectations as demonstrated by teacher use of a variety of assessment measures that provide meaningful feedback to students and families regarding students' academic progress. Meaningful feedback engages teachers and students in conversations about student work and provides students with the information they need to improve their performance. Differences in the ways teachers provide feedback to students based on their perceptions of students' abilities are well documented in the literature. More than 30 years of research from Teacher Expectations Student Achievement (TESA) confirms the importance of timely, specific, and descriptive feedback in improving student achievement. The impact of meaningful feedback regarding academic performance has been shown to have a particularly positive effect on the achievement of minority students.

Research Base for Diversity Training and Development

There is consensus in the research that staff development designed to ensure excellence and equity in education must be centered on teacher understanding of the powerful force culture exerts on teaching and learning (Banks, 2001; Delpit, 1995; Ford & Harris, 1999; Williams, 1996; Nieto, 2002; Lee, 1998; Shade, 1997; and Denbo & Jones (eds.) 2002). Effective staff development addresses three major outcomes. First, staff must develop the awareness, knowledge, and understanding of their own culture and the beliefs, values, and assumptions that frame the educational practice of individuals and institutions. Uncovering and identifying personal attitudes and behaviors related to diverse groups allows educators to surface hidden biases and stereotypes that are at the root of low expectations and inequitable behaviors towards students. Second, staff must increase their knowledge and understanding of the cultures of their

students. Understanding the cultural characteristics, perspectives, and strengths of students from diverse groups allows educators to engage in asset thinking instead of deficit thinking when planning, delivering, and evaluating instruction. Being knowledgeable about students' cultures makes it possible for teachers to incorporate students' experiences and talents in the curriculum. These first two outcomes are increasingly important given that the teaching force is predominantly white, female, and middle class while the student population is becoming more and more diverse. Third, educators must be able to use their knowledge and understanding of culture to create culturally sensitive learning environments and to deliver culturally responsive instruction. Teachers also must develop the knowledge and skill to modify instruction so that all students have equitable opportunities to learn and succeed. The first and second outcomes are centered on cultural competence, while the third outcome refers to increase minority student achievement and the elimination of achievement gaps.

The three outcomes described above are expressed in the enduring understanding and essential questions that follow. Specific training outcomes will vary, but all diversity training and development in the MCPS plan are predicated on these outcomes.

Enduring Understanding:

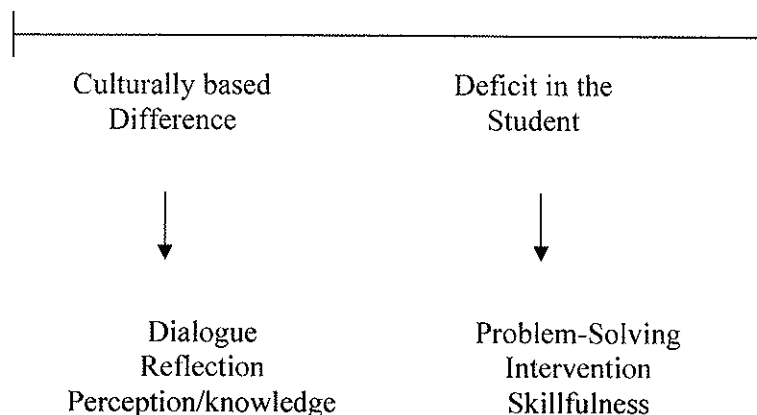
Culture exerts a powerful influence on teaching and learning.

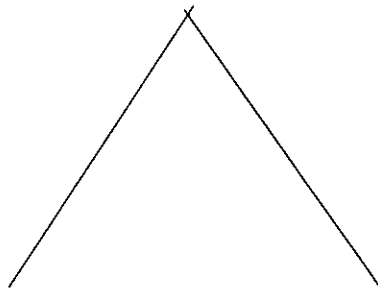
Essential Questions:

1. How do awareness, knowledge, and understanding of one's own culture promote culturally competent teaching and learning?
2. How do awareness, knowledge, and understanding students' cultures promote effective teaching and learning?
3. How can educators establish culturally sensitive learning environments and modify instruction to be culturally responsive?

Framework for Diversity Training and Development

The plan for diversity training and development is centered on the three aforementioned research-based outcomes and is based on a model that acknowledges the need to develop both the will (essential questions 1 and 2) and the skill (essential question 3) to close the achievement gap and raise student performance. The basic premise of the model is that when students act in unexpected ways or ways not congruent with the norms of the teacher or school, the students can be viewed along a continuum from deficit to different. The model is represented below.





Cultural Competence
Framework for Thinking

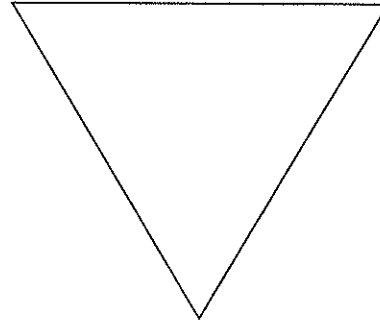
Disposition Act

Informed Will

Expectations

Intent

Inclusion



Minority Achievement
Framework for Action

Capacity to Act

Repertoire of Skills

Strategies

Impact

Exclusion

Traditionally, behaviors and learning performances that did not conform to the teacher's expectations were viewed more from the deficit end of the continuum than the difference end. Deficit thinking views the student as having some academic or behavioral shortcoming or fault. The problem belongs to the student. The school's response was to plan remediation that would address the deficit through a problem-solving approach. The student's problem was identified, "fixing" strategies were brainstormed, and one or more of the brainstormed strategies was selected for implementation. All available information was gathered, reviewed, and narrowed to a point of action to be taken. Ironically, if the intervention was not successful, the view of the student as deficient was reinforced. Deficit thinking exacerbated low expectations, focused instruction on "basic" skills, and fueled low levels of teacher efficacy for working with diverse learners. The consequence has been the exclusion of diverse learners in rigorous coursework, gifted and talented programs, and Advanced Placement/Honors courses; overrepresentation of students of color in special education; and disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates.

Staff development consequently focused on improving teaching actions by building teacher capacity to implement a range of teaching strategies to meet the needs of students. This approach has a great deal of merit. One would be hard pressed to find anyone who refutes the need for teachers to have a wide repertoire of instructional strategies to be successful working with diverse learners. Excellent teaching does make a difference and high quality instruction is a key ingredient in the improved student achievement. Yet, not all groups of students have

benefited equally from our enhanced capacity to act. Persistent achievement gap by race/ethnicity, socio-economics, language, and disability have resisted many of our best efforts to alleviate them.

This circumstance requires us to rethink our usual practices and view the achievement gap more from the other end of the continuum. From the difference lens, students who do not act in ways that are expected are not viewed as deficit, but as behaving in another way. To understand the difference, we engage in a dialogue about the variations in perspective, beliefs, values, attitudes, and patterns of behavior. Unlike the problem-solving perspective, dialogue is not focused on coming to a specific and defined intervention or resolution. Rather dialogue continually increases perspective taking, knowledge, and understanding as ideas, information, and stories are shared. There is no end point. Dialogue provides a framework for observation, inquiry, and thinking about student behavior and informs problem solving. Whereas the problem-solving perspective is centered on strategies and skills, the difference lens is focused on expectations.

The model points out a significant misunderstanding that can hinder efforts to close the achievement gap. Teachers are well intentioned and deeply committed to students' academic success and personal growth towards responsible adulthood. Teachers' core identities are often deeply rooted in their roles as educators, guides, advisors, and mentors. As a result, teachers who see themselves as "helpers" may assume that their well-intentioned actions have a positive impact on students. This is not necessarily so, especially when differences in culturally based patterns of thinking and behaving are present.

Both problem solving and dialogue are necessary strategies for accomplishing school system goals. They are not mutually exclusive. The cultural competence that results from dialogue informs effective problem solving. Cultural competence in and of itself will not eliminate achievement gaps. The problem-solving perspective, though it has brought about improvements in overall student performance, has not closed the gap. If beliefs and values dictate behavior, then we must examine both.

Considerations for Planning Diversity Training and Development In MCPS

The National Staff Development Council's (NSDC) Standards for Staff Development indicates that effective staff development is ongoing, job-embedded, data-driven, and promotes meaningful dialogue and collaborative problem solving of the issues. These principles have several important considerations for systemwide diversity training and development.

First, single session training, despite its length or quality, is unlikely to result in the application of new instructional practice that improve student learning. Job-embedded follow-up training is necessary to ensure teacher learning is transferred to classroom practice that results in improved student learning.

Second, ongoing, job-embedded training implies depth over breadth. Given the critical relationship between teacher beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions to classroom practice, teachers must have multiple opportunities to explore their own cultural perspectives, understand how educational inequities arise, and develop comfort and competence with culturally relevant

instructional strategies. The establishment of professional learning communities will support deep and thoughtful reflection, discussion, and problem solving. In addition, professional learning communities provide an excellent forum for collecting and analyzing student achievement data to identify strategies that result in improved student achievement in MCPS.

Third, in a school district as large as MCPS, directed, stand-alone diversity training as a single approach is inefficient and insufficient. Adequate resources (time, staff, and funding) remain a challenge. Stand-alone training risks being viewed as an add-on and another demand placed upon teachers and schools. Furthermore, the complexity of the issues surrounding race/ethnicity, socio-economics, language, and disability as they relate to the achievement gap cannot be effectively addressed in large group sessions of limited duration. Diversity must be embedded into all staff development programs so that it is viewed as foundational and connected to the goals, initiatives, and priorities of the school system. The infusion of diversity into all training programs is clearly facilitated by the team configuration of OSD.

Fourth, the effective use of technology can support quality systemic diversity training. Technology provides: 1) systemic access to diversity training, 2) consistency in content, 3) common experiences that foster rich dialogue and discussion within professional learning communities and 4) support for OSD staff, school-based administrators, staff development teachers, and others in leadership roles in schools to implement job-embedded staff development.

Oversight of Diversity Training and Development

Oversight of diversity training and development will occur at three levels. First, the deputy superintendent will convene an advisory committee composed of parents, community and advocacy group representation, local government, higher education, and MCPS staff. The purpose of the committee is to ensure that a wide range of stakeholders representing multiple perspectives have input into the direction and implementation of the plan. Second, a steering committee, composed of internal diversity “champions” will be identified to monitor implementation and to advocate for actions to resolve diversity issues as they impact the mission and function of their respective offices. The steering committee will have representation from the offices of School Performance, Shared Accountability, Curriculum and Instructional Programs, Staff Development, and Human Resources to help ensure systemic implementation and institutionalization of effective research-based practices. OSD team leaders who have the most direct responsibility for implementation will provide the third level of oversight. As a project team, OSD leadership will be responsible for collecting and analyzing data on the effectiveness of the embedded and directed training in order to make program adjustments. Collaboration among the project team will facilitate the delivery of innovative and cost-effective staff development across the county.

Recommendations for Diversity Training and Development

Based on the background, research, and contextual features of the school system, the following strategies for diversity training and development are recommended:

1. Build OSD capacity for diversity training.
2. Build the capacity of key OSD client groups to lead for diversity.

3. Build principal capacity to lead for diversity.
4. Build school staff capacity to implement culturally relevant instruction.
5. Build capacity of MCPS offices to eliminate disparities in systemwide disaggregated data.
6. Use technology to widen access to diversity training and to follow-up directed training.

Recommendation #1: *Build OSD Capacity for Diversity Training*

The goal of the first recommendation is to capitalize on staff who can actively advocate, monitor, and support diversity training as they perform their regularly assigned duties. Creating a strong and committed critical mass of staff within OSD to conduct diversity training will maximize the efforts of the diversity team and help to institutionalize new practices. All OSD teams have great potential for effecting systemwide change regarding diversity. Initially, the diversity team will focus efforts on three OSD teams with the ability to reach large numbers of instructional staff and build school capacity to close the gap. These three teams are the Leadership Development Team, the Staff Development Initiatives Team, and the Consulting Teacher Team.

The Leadership Development Team prepares student support specialists, assistant principals, novice principals, and principals new to MCPS. School-based administrators are positioned to lead for change in schools. Their role in articulating, modeling, monitoring, and assessing the vision of culturally proficient schools is a core competency in a school system with a highly diverse student population and a relatively homogeneous teaching force. Diversity content and processes will be spiraled into all three years of the leadership development program. In the first year of the leadership development program, diversity will focus on disposition/knowledge level objectives; second year training will focus on knowledge/skill level objectives; and third year training will center on the application/analysis level objectives. In addition, plans are underway to infuse explicit diversity content into the training related to the MCPS Administrative and Supervisory Professional Growth System Standards.

The Staff Development Initiatives Team is identified because of its two primary roles: 1) Support school-based staff development teachers and 2) responsibility for curricular training. Staff development specialists are positioned to have substantial influence on the work of school-based staff development teachers who, in turn, have significant influence on classroom teachers. By virtue of their roles as coaches, collaborators, and trainers, staff development specialists and school-based teachers have ongoing opportunities to provide both diversity training and coaching for instructional staff.

Given the monumental effort underway to implement the revised curriculum, content specialists in Staff Development Initiatives Team are situated to explicitly engage teachers in learning about culturally relevant instruction as an expectation of effective curriculum implementation. Of particular note is that curriculum training is mandated. This circumstance means that large numbers of teachers participate on a regular basis. Embedding diversity explicitly in the curricular training will help to alleviate the resistance often encountered when diversity issues

are addressed in directed training. In addition, teachers are more likely to view new pedagogy as part of standard practice and not as a separate demand or indictment of current practices.

By nature of their position, consulting teachers (CTs) have intensive and extensive opportunities to influence the practices of new teachers and under-performing teachers. As observers, co-planners, mentors, demonstration teachers, and coaches, consulting teachers can engage their teacher clients in one-on-one dialogues about beliefs and practices in ways that are relatively risk-free. Consulting teachers have a unique opportunity to help shape positive teacher expectations and behaviors early in new teachers' careers thereby helping to institutionalize new attitudes and practices. Preliminary plans to develop a tool for CTs to use when observing and conferencing with teachers about specific strategies for communicating high expectations to students are underway.

The focus on administrators, specialists, school-based staff development teachers, and consulting teachers does not mean that other OSD teams are excluded in the diversity training plan. Discussions with the Special Programs Project Team resulted in a plan to develop and implement a training of trainers diversity course for MCPS in-service course instructors. The purpose of the course is to raise awareness and correct unrecognized biases within course content and instruction and to assist course instructors to incorporate multicultural perspectives, content, and teaching strategies into their courses. New teacher and mentor training used diversity as the connecting strand in their training throughout the year. Collaboration with the Skillful Teacher In-District Trainer Team is ongoing. Discussions and resource sharing has occurred for both of the Studying Skillful Teacher courses. Further collaboration is planned.

Clearly, leadership for diversity training must be a shared value and responsibility in OSD. Given limited resources, the most efficient way to institutionalize research-based practices for closing the achievement is for all OSD staff to deliver the same message. Time to discuss the issues, analyze the data, and identify best practices must be regularly scheduled for individual teams and team leaders. This input is essential in structuring a comprehensive and cohesive diversity development program.

Recommendation #2: *Build the Capacity of Key OSD Client Groups to Lead for Diversity*

This recommendation centers on two primary OSD audiences: administrators in training and school-based staff development teachers. By nature of their instructional leadership positions in schools, these two groups possess a high potential for effecting schoolwide change that results in improved student achievement. By identifying administrators in training, the school system is taking a proactive approach to the preparation of future principals.

By virtue of their job description, staff development teachers are uniquely situated to introduce and support implementation of research-based strategies for closing the gap. Their leadership in institutionalizing changes in practice that may not serve all students equitably is key to the goals of the school system.

Recommendation #3: *Build Principal Capacity to Lead for Diversity*

Principals have the ultimate responsibility in schools for the implementation of an instructional program that recognizes and supports the potential of all students. Building capacity to lead for diversity is a core administrative competency.

Diversity training and development for sitting principals will be addressed through a cluster or quad cluster configuration that can promote continuous improvement through ongoing dialogue and cumulative skill building. This model capitalizes on the strength of the professional learning communities established by community superintendents and directors of school performance. It also profits by the skills of the staff development specialists assigned to the quad clusters. Under the direction of the community superintendents, diversity team members in collaboration with staff development specialists can structure professional development experiences that meet the expressed needs of principals.

Diversity staff will solicit input from principals' professional organizations and through principals' meetings with directors of instruction to determine the content, format, and processes that will best support principals. This input will be used to inform future administrative diversity offerings.

Recommendation #4: *Build School Staff Capacity to Implement Culturally Relevant Instruction*

The ability of diversity staff to provide meaningful, ongoing staff development to school staff is limited. Therefore, each diversity staff members will identify a limited number of schools for staff development support that will extend throughout the school year. The plan is to avoid conducting one-time, whole staff training that superficially addresses the issues. Instead staff will use a wide variety of professional development experiences including, study groups, action research, and technology-based products to build a critical mass of school staff who can lead changes in the instructional program. Planning for FY2005 has begun in nine schools and it is anticipated that an additional twenty schools will be identified.

Recommendation #5: *Build Capacity of MCPS Offices to Eliminate Disparities in Systemwide Disaggregated Data*

The data points defined in *The Call To Action* clearly focus the entire school system on closing the achievement gap. Diversity staff has begun collaborations with two MCPS offices to support efforts to correct existing inequities. These offices were initially identified because of the responsibility they have for a major system priority. The first of these collaborations is with the Division of Accelerated and Enriched Programs. Collaboration with a unit charged with the delivery of rigorous academic programming is an opportunity to communicate the school system's high expectations for all students and to address the under identification of minority students in gifted and talented programs. An emerging issue is the lack of appropriate services to support the success of minority students included in gifted and talented programs. Training of the Accelerated and Enriched Programs staff, school-based G&T liaisons, and .5 Title I G&T teachers is underway and will be extend in the coming school year.

Diversity staff and staff from the Division of Academic Support, Federal and State Programs have received extensive professional development on strategies for working effectively with

students from poverty. As a result, several schools have received initial training on this topic. However, a systematic approach for delivering this training has not occurred. A preliminary plan for implementing a cohesive staff development program around the issues of socio-economics must begin by training all members in Academic Support to support the implementation of effective strategies for working with students from poverty. Instructional leadership teams from the 17 Title I schools must then be trained to support the consistent use of effective strategies on a daily basis by all teachers. It will be important to provide ongoing training and opportunities to share best practices and to engage in collaborative problem solving to instructional leadership teams.

A third initial collaboration with potential to have widespread results on student achievement is with the School Counseling Services Unit. Given the critical gatekeeping role that counselors have in recruiting, advising, and placing students in rigorous secondary classes, it is important that they develop skill recognizing and encouraging students of color and students from poverty to enroll in higher level coursework. Some preliminary discussions have occurred and further discussions are planned.

Recommendation #6: Use Technology to Widen Access to Diversity Training and to Follow-up Directed Training

Research indicates that teachers need more than explanation and modeling of new strategies during training. They need multiple images of what a new strategy looks like and sounds like in the classroom before it is adopted as usual practice. Discussions with in-house experts and outside consultants have resulted in a plan to develop computer-based products that can serve a variety of audiences and functions.

Technology tools developed during FY2005 will focus on high expectations and cooperative learning. Both are well documented in the research as effective means of improving student achievement and closing the achievement gap. The products to be developed on high expectations will provide teachers with images of the specific, observable, and measurable behaviors that communicate high expectations to students. Plans also are underway to develop a self-assessment that will allow teachers to reflect critically on their expectation practices. This self-assessment will be modified as a student feedback form thereby allowing teachers to compare their self-perceptions with those of their students. Ideas for changing low expectations behaviors to high expectations behaviors based on the self and student assessments will be developed. These products will be available directly to teachers for their own professional development, used by school leadership staff as a resource for school-based staff development, or as a follow-up to directed training.

An online course on cooperative learning will familiarize teachers with the differences between structured small group work (cooperative learning) and traditional small group work. Very specific cooperative learning structures will be presented and participating teachers will be expected to use new structures with their students as well as to collect and analyze data about the effectiveness of implementation.

Information, activities, and strategies for working with diverse students will be embedded into computer-based in-service courses. Currently, diversity staff is collaborating with OSD and

Global Access staff on the development of the MCPS computer-based course, *EB-60, Teaching The ESOL Student in the Mainstream Classroom*. Future collaborations are anticipated as other courses are converted to online access.

A new website will offer research links, online video demonstrations, information on training opportunities, and mini-courses on understanding teaching and learning from cultures represented in the student population. In addition, credit-bearing online courses and workshops will be developed for administrators, teachers, and supporting services staff. These online courses will afford flexibility to participants who find it difficult to commit to the rigid schedule of a long-term, face-to-face course.