



KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Closing the Achievement Gap

Three-hour training for experienced school-based decision making membership

Objectives:

- Provide an overview of the Unbridled Learning
- Define gap and unduplicated group
- Understand the expectations defined in *Guidelines for Closing the Gaps for All Students*
- Discuss and select strategies to close the achievement gap most appropriate to assist with your school improvement plan

Session Overview

Kentucky's Unbridled Learning Accountability Model was designed to have a more balanced approach to determine school success by incorporating achievement, program reviews and effective teaching measures. June 2014 marked the third full year of the accountability model implementation and triggered a review of the current accountability model. A key component of the accountability model is closing gaps among student groups. This SBDM training session discusses strategies to ensure school council members understand and plan for closing achievement gaps within their schools.

Student Achievement

The school council's mission is to improve student achievement. Each school council must create an environment in their own schools that will result in students achieving at high levels. All policies and decisions by the school council must contribute to achievement of the overall school mission.

These SBDM training materials were developed by the Kentucky Department of Education for use in training new school council members in implementing school-based decision making.



A letter from Education Commissioner Terry Holliday

July 8, 2011

The vital work of closing achievement gaps between various groups of students cannot be accomplished without the close collaboration of many people and a clearly understandable set of expectations.

This document provides a guideline for the primary actions addressed by the Commissioner's Raising Achievement/Closing Gaps Council (CRACGC).

I've charged CRACGC members with developing a report on next steps, including using the accountability system to close gaps; identifying successful interventions with steps toward their implementation; and developing a communications plan.

After much discussion and plenty of input, the group has developed four expectations:

- Provide information about the overall academic and social status of Kentucky schools and districts in a format that is useful and accessible to the public.
- Ensure that all students, regardless of race, gender, ethnic background, disability or socioeconomic status, have access to a rigorous curriculum and get the support necessary to be successful in a rigorous curriculum.
- Create an environment of high expectations, with administrators, teachers and staff taking ownership for meeting the needs of all students.
- Create open, honest communication about the work of the Kentucky Department of Education, individual districts and schools with all stakeholders.

These expectations will guide our work and can be used by educators, parents, community members, elected officials and others as a model for their own efforts.

With the requirements of 2009's Senate Bill 1 and the accompanying Unbridled Learning initiatives at the Kentucky Department of Education, the need to close achievement gaps has an added imperative. We must ensure that ALL of Kentucky's children have the support, opportunity and resources they need to be successful throughout their public school experience and beyond.

I hope that this document will be the basis for a renewed commitment to equitable learning for children throughout our Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

Terry Holliday, Ph.D.

Unbridled Learning Overview

The Unbridled Learning accountability model is anchored in college and career readiness for all students. The assessment and accountability model is a balanced approach that incorporates all aspects of school and district work and is organized around the Kentucky Board of Education’s four strategic priorities: Next-Generation Learners, Next-Generation Professionals, Next-Generation Support Systems and Next-Generation Schools and Districts. Achievement in reading, mathematics, science, social studies, writing and Program Reviews in arts & humanities, practical living/career studies, writing, world language and kindergarten through 3rd grade program evaluation are the heart of the model.

Kentucky’s Unbridled Learning assessment and accountability system is designed to provide in-depth information about the performance of students, schools, districts and the state as a whole. Kentucky’s public school students participate in annual testing, and the results of those tests are included in the state’s accountability system for schools and districts.

Kentucky’s educational reforms are based upon the principle that schools must be held accountable for the progress of their students. Frequent, meaningful testing is required to assess the extent of student progress toward proficiency; accurate, understandable reporting is required so that all stakeholders in Kentucky education have the data needed for making effective decisions concerning school policies, programs and curricula.

| Unbridled Learning: College- and Career-Ready for All | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| Next-Generation Learners | Next-Generation Instructional Programs and Support | Next-Generation Professionals | = | Next-Generation Schools/Districts |
| Achievement (Proficiency) Gap Growth Readiness for College/Career Graduation Rate | Program Reviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arts/Humanities Practical Living/Career Studies Writing K-3 World Language (adding in 2015-16) | Percent Effective Teachers Percent Effective Leaders | = | Overall Accountability Score (using data from the preceding columns) |

School and district classifications are based on the following measures.

- Achievement – Just as in the past, elementary and middle school students’ scores will be labeled as novice, apprentice, proficient or distinguished. Kentucky’s goal is 100 percent proficiency for all students. At high school, achievement is based on end-of-course exams and an on-demand writing test.
- Gap – Schools will compare test results for African-American, Hispanic, Native American, special education, low income and limited English proficiency students, combined into one gap group, to results for other students who aren’t in those categories.
- Growth – A statistical program will measure how much students’ scores are improving from one year to the next.

- College/Career Readiness – Schools and districts will provide information about how many students are ready for college and/or careers, based on test scores and certifications earned.
- Graduation Rate – Schools and districts will report how many students graduate within four years of high school.

Questions I still have about Unbridled Learning:

Achievement Gap

The definition of achievement gap is found in KRS 158.649. An achievement gap *means a substantive performance difference on each of the tested areas by grade level of the state assessment program between the various groups of students including male and female students, students with and without disabilities, students with and without English proficiency, minority and nonminority students, and students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch and those who are not eligible for free and reduced lunch.*

After a review of KDE's previous work on the achievement gap, Commissioner Holliday charged the Commissioner's Raising Achievement/Closing Gaps Council (CRACGC) with developing a report of next steps for closing the achievement that included:

- Using the accountability system to close gaps
- Identifying successful interventions with steps toward their implementation
- A communication plan

The CRACGC came to consensus on four expectations:

1. Provide information about the overall academic and social status of Kentucky schools and districts in a format that is useful and accessible to the public.
2. Ensure that all students, regardless of race, gender, ethnic background, disability or socioeconomic status, have access to a rigorous curriculum and get the support necessary to be successful in a rigorous curriculum.
3. Create an environment of high expectations, with administrators, teachers and staff taking ownership for meeting the needs of all students.
4. Create open, honest communication about the work of the Kentucky Department of Education, individual districts and school with all stakeholders.

Expectation 1

Let's look more closely at Expectation 1: Provide information about the overall academic and social status of Kentucky schools and districts in a format that is useful and accessible to the public.

Goals 1, 2 and 3 all support Expectation 1.

Let's begin with Goal 1: Utilize information from school and district report cards when developing focus points for District and School Improvement Plans.

To achieve the importance behind Goal 1, we need to look at the sample evidence included. Remember, this is only a sample of the evidence that could be collected and analyzed to reach this goal.

Sample evidence to keep in mind while developing your School or District Improvement Plan include:

- Show how current and longitudinal data from the Kentucky Department of Education is utilized to inform decisions.
- Prioritize data to emphasize proficiency, gap and group growth.
- Develop Improvement Plans with user-friendly language with clear explanations of terms for public review.
- Make the Improvement Plan available in several formats that create easy access for all stakeholders.

Reflection

Which of the above are you currently utilizing? What other evidence could you provide for this goal?

School and District Improvement Plan contents are outlined in 703 KAR 5:225, Section 9. Included in the Resource Guide is an excerpt from the regulation, specifically Section 9.

As a note: School and District Plans are developed in ASSIST (Adaptive System of School Improvement Support Tools) an online platform.

Reflection:

With what components of a school or district improvement plan are you most familiar? On what components do you need more information?

What strategies could a school and district use to address and reach Goal 1? Below is a list of strategy examples. As we read through the list, highlight which strategy would be most beneficial for preparing an improvement plan. What other strategies might you want to consider?

- Provision of increased instructional time in reading, mathematics, other basic skills
- Use of challenging curricula and instructional strategies that engage students' interest, promote inquire/discovery and provide students with a sense of satisfaction from their own efforts
- Application of in-depth, appropriate and ongoing assessments of the performance and progress of each student (e.g., grades, assessment scores, classroom behavior, extracurricular activities) to determine class, program placement and the types of individual supports that should be given
- Decision-making based on data collection/analysis, including review of schoolwide data (e.g., current and prior assessment scores, course enrollment patterns, disciplinary actions), including a comparison of the data with those of other students, schools and areas to determine what overall school changes are likely to improve student performance

What other strategies might you want to consider?

Let's continue and look at Goal 2: Develop District and School Improvement Plans in such a way that they provide necessary details to encourage student, parent and community participation in student and school improvement efforts.

Let's look again at the sample evidence. Does your Improvement Plan include data and strategies to address the following? What other evidence could you provide for this goal?

- Current scores
- Data on proficiency, gap and growth
- School and district rankings (within district and across the state)
- Basic nonacademic data (i.e., retention/dropout rate, faculty and administration experience)
- Grade-level disaggregation within school
- Disaggregated longitudinal data for all student groups
- Cross-referenced disaggregation (i.e., low income – African American, low income – special needs and low income – special needs – white)

What strategies could a school and district use to address and reach Goal 2? One example is below. What are other strategies that could lead to the achievement of Goal 2?

Example: Maintain a culture where learning and achievement are valued and that is sustained and supported by faith-based and social organizations and the media.

Let's go on and look at Goal 3. Remember, we are still looking at Expectation 1.

Goal 3: Develop appropriate response to information provided on report card.

As we look at the sample evidence, reflect back on your thoughts and ideas from the first two goals.

- Identify who is directly responsible (held accountable) for improvement.
- Describe a next steps "attack plan" that parents can understand.
- Collaborate with parents and community members to identify, develop and implement next steps.
- Develop or utilize an existing process for monitoring the effectiveness of the established next steps.

Strategies to address this goal should include assuring that all involved in the development of the response thoroughly understands, can interpret and can communicate the response in a meaningful way.

Reflection:

What are your thoughts on Expectation 1? What is your district/school doing right now to address this expectation? What is one thing that you can bring back to your school council that will address the goals in Expectation 1?

Expectation 2

Let's begin looking now at Expectation 2: Ensure that all students, regardless of race, gender, ethnic background, disability or socioeconomic status, have access to a rigorous curriculum and get the support necessary to be successful in a rigorous curriculum.

Expectation 2 has two goals.

- Goal 4: All schools and districts will foster the development of environments that result in respect of all socio-cultural differences.
- Goal 5: Engage in collaboration with parents and community members to address the academic and social (environmental) needs of the school and its students.

Let's look closer at Goal 4: All schools and districts will foster the development of environments that result in respect of all socio-cultural differences.

Goal 4 includes sample evidence. Again, this is sample evidence. As we look through the list, what other evidence could you provide for this goal?

- Conduct cultural audits to determine the needs of each school and district.
- Engage in ongoing training in culturally responsive instruction for all district- and school-level administrators, teachers, staff and school-based decision making (SBDM) teams.
- Ensure that training addresses diverse areas including ethnicity, economic status, special needs and gender
- Coordinate with other agencies including the Council on Postsecondary Education to implement culturally responsive training for new teachers.
- Provide evidence of a deliberate effort to diversify classified and certified staff.

What are some strategies that a district or school could use to meet this goal? Below is a list of some ideas that could be starting points.

- The entire staff will receive continual professional development experiences both informal and formal that address race and ethnic background, gender, students with disabilities and students receiving free and reduced-price meals.
- Curriculum and instructional leadership will be trained in cultural competencies. They will learn to incorporate equity issues in their program design and professional development and provide guidance for their program area staffs.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for students to discuss issues of fairness, respect and inclusion.
- Host a series of community conversations in culturally specific settings (e.g., ethnicity, language spoken, socio-economic status).
- Initiate inclusive, multicultural advisory committees to provide ongoing dialogue and establish long-term, meaningful school/community partnerships. These partnerships will address the distinctive achievement needs of the students.

Goal 5 is centered on collaboration: Engage in collaboration with parents and community members to address the academic and social (environmental) needs of the school and its students.

As we look at the sample evidence, note what you are already doing. What are some other evidence that that you could provide to address this goal?

- Conduct home visits at all grade levels.
- Utilize the Parent Information Resource Center and the PTA/PTO to assist in the increase of parent involvement.
- Partner with community groups to develop “real-life” strategies for students based on specific needs.
- Create opportunities to “show” parents and community members how the school is progressing.
- Utilize available parent skills in the school and classroom.
- Develop relationships with parents and engage them when determining the needs of their students as well as with strategies to help students succeed in the classroom.

Reflection

What strategies is your school now doing that is effective? How do you know?

Expectation 3

Let's continue on with Expectation 3: Create an environment of high expectations, with administrators, teachers and staff taking ownership for meeting the needs of all students.

Expectation 3 has three goals:

- Goal 6: Utilize available Intervention Research provided by the Kentucky Department of Education or other agencies.
- Goal 7: Reinforce the implementation of professional development at all levels.
- Goal 8: Administrators and teachers should be intentional about changes to help students in the classroom.

Goal 6 focuses on student interventions: Utilize available Intervention Research provided by the Kentucky Department of Education or other agencies.

Do you know your district's or school's intervention plan?

Goal 6 includes sample evidence. As we look through the list, what other evidence could you provide for this goal? How does the evidence support your district or school intervention plan?

- Review present interventions programs to determine value/usefulness toward meeting Kentucky's educational goals.
- Utilize or develop specific needs-based programs for individual schools.
- Provide evidence of how the potential interventions programs and strategies chosen help address the identified needs of a school or district.

Strategies that could address Goal 6 include:

- Provision of learning opportunities at local libraries, museums, and other cultural institutions
- Maintenance of active school partnerships that include helping schools link families with local social services; providing students with mentors, tutors and role models; providing parents with adult basic skills education, job training and parenting classes; and fund raising to increase the resources available to local schools

- Encouragement of parents' participation in school events through a decrease in barriers by provision of babysitting, a meal, transportation aid or other items
- Implementation of rigorous standards that form the basis of curriculum development and instructional practice, specify students' competencies by subject and grade, and define the performance and responsibilities of school administrators and teachers

Reflection

How can your school council strengthen its intervention system?

Goal 7 centers around professional development: Reinforce the implementation of professional development at all levels. Goal 7 sample evidence includes:

- Utilize appropriate rubrics that include indicators of culturally responsive instruction for all teachers and administrators, including those in the teacher internship program.
- Hold administrators responsible for recognizing good implementation and for providing formative assessment for teachers and staff.

Examples of strategies include:

- Provision of required ongoing professional development to help teachers master new curricula and teaching strategies, especially those effective in diverse classrooms;
- Improving students' ability to meet standards; treating and challenging all students equally; internalizing and conveying the idea that race and ethnicity are not indicators of educational achievement abilities; and sharing and solving problems
- High-quality professional development that is focused on students' achievement (e.g., diversity, ELL)

What professional development has your school council planned? How can professional development be used to increase student achievement?



The last goal for Expectation 3 is Goal 8: Administrators and teachers should be intentional about changes to help students in the classroom. Some sample evidence includes:

- Redistribute effort by placing struggling students with experienced teachers who have a record of success and by providing support for new teachers to increase their confidence as they develop their strategies (i.e., no more “silo teaching”).
- Create flexible scheduling to accommodate the instructional needs of all students.
- Consider the use of “peer tutors” to assist students.
- Incorporate literacy skills in all classes and subjects.

Examples of strategies that correlate with meeting Goal 8 include:

- Recruitment and retention of experienced, well-qualified teachers for students at all ability levels who have excellent teaching skills and a good command of their subject specialties and are held accountable for students’ performance
- Recruitment and retention of high-performing administrators who provide pedagogical leadership, require the preparedness and efficacy of the teachers and are held accountable for all their responsibilities
- Provision of required ongoing professional development to help teachers master new curricula and teaching strategies, especially those effective in diverse classrooms; improve students’ ability to meet standards; treat and challenge all students equally; internalize and convey the idea that race and ethnicity do not are not indicators of educational achievement abilities; and share and solve problems
- Application of state-, district- and school-developed standards to curriculum and instruction design, student assessment and teacher evaluation
- Decision-making based on data collection and analysis, including review of schoolwide data – current and past test scores, course enrollment patterns and disciplinary actions – and a comparison of data with those of other students, schools and areas to help determine what overall school changes are likely to improve student performance
- Provision of expanded learning time in reading, mathematics and other basic skills
- Use of challenging curricula and instructional strategies that engage students’ interest, promote inquiry and discovery, and help students develop ownership for their work and actions
- Provision of learning resources (e.g., reading specialist, computer technology and staff trained in its use) and books for a student library, advanced textbooks, consumable workbooks and other high quality print materials
- Provision of supplemental individualized education supports (e.g., tutoring by professionals or trained adult volunteers and peers); expanded learning times; and intensive interventions aid for struggling students

- Provision of access to college-based programs and professionals who can serve as role models and mentors
- Equitable grouping of students that encourages minority students to enroll in high ability classes in the early grades and in higher tracks and college preparatory classes in high school

Expectation 4

Our last expectation is Expectation 4: Create open, honest communication about the work of the Kentucky Department of Education, individual districts and schools with all stakeholders.

Expectation 4 has two goals:

- Goal 9: Provide open communication with all stakeholders on the details of the new reporting system.
- Goals 10: Collaborate with the media outlets to educate the public on new process and its purpose.

Goal 9 relates to communication with stakeholders: Provide open communication with all stakeholders on the details of the new reporting system.

Who are the stakeholders in your school? How do you communicate with them?

Sample evidence for this goal includes:

- Limit the use of acronyms and “edu-speak” without explanations and definitions.
- Collaborate with community groups to determine the best ways to disseminate materials in culturally responsive ways.
- Clarify the roles for all stakeholders.

Looking at this sample evidence, how does the communication right now fit in? What evidence do you have that supports effective communication?

Sample strategies to address goal 9 include openly communicate achievement gaps (e.g., e-mail, flyers, brochures, newspaper, local education channel, one call).

Goal 10 relates to collaborating with the media: Collaborate with the media outlets to educate the public on new process and its purpose.

Sample evidence includes:

- Place a positive focus on meaningful success rather than taking a defensive or accusatory stance based on areas of need.
- Explain clearly how the reporting model, designed to compare a school against itself for growth measures, is being utilized to address the needs of the school and district.

What are some ways that you can create positive news for your school and district?

Some strategies that can be used to address this goal include:

- Provide support for ELL parents to register children for school (e.g., connecting them to community agencies, housing and medical resources).
- Utilize local statistics and demographics, educate community on benefits of closing gaps (e.g., newspapers, television, brochures, one call).
- Contact faith-based organizations, businesses and neighborhood associations to get their help in developing contacts in minority communities.
- Arrange job/college fairs that target specific minority groups.
- Have evening and/or Saturday meetings.
- Utilize buildings in the community.
- Develop incentives to come to meetings (e.g., door prizes and free books; collaborate with other organizations on incentives).
- Maintain a culture where learning and achievement are valued and are sustained and supported by faith-based and social organizations and the media.

Next Steps

Let's review the 4 Expectations and the 10 Goals. Below, working with your school council, make three lists. The first list is strategies that the school has already implemented with fidelity. The second list is strategies that have been considered in the past and currently are not being implemented. Note with this list why (if known) these strategies are not currently being implemented. The third list is strategies that need to be researched as options for future reference to address closing gaps within your school.

Strategies that the school has already implemented with fidelity

Strategies that have been considered in the past and currently are not being implemented

Strategies that need to be researched as options