

The Achievement Gap, Houston & M-DPCS

En Español

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The best news regarding education in Miami-Dade County Public Schools that I have heard since being elected to the School Board in September 1998 came at our February board meeting. In a conference session scheduled by Board Chair Dr. Solomon C. Stinson, research based strategies and recommendations to narrow the achievement gap in math and language skills between African-American and Hispanic students and their white peers were discussed.

Few programs tries by our schools dent the disturbing disparity among these groups. Why do white non-Hispanic students out perform Hispanic and Black students? And more importantly, what can be done to rectify the situation?

The first good news is that the gap between the SAT scores of minority and white non-Hispanic students has narrowed since 1994. Also, a higher percentage of minority students take advanced math and science classes than in the past.

The presentation bonanza, though, came from Susan Sclafani, Chief of Staff for Educational Services for the Houston independent School district. Our Board salivated as she informed us of the Houston Accountability System, a six-year school project. Basically, the Houston School District refused to accept the notion that Black and Hispanic students could not achieve as well as white Non-Hispanic students and put together an aggressive accountability program for low achieving schools. The results were dramatic. Houston schools zipped past other major school districts in Texas in improving student achievement.

Measures can be replicated here in Miami-Dade County, and the Board quickly asked Superintendent of Schools Roger C. Cuevas to see how the findings may be applied here. Evidence of Miami-Dade County Public Schools' weakness once again points to an inadequate school climate. We all must believe, from the bottom of our hearts, in every child's greatness. Everyone at every school, from the custodian to the parents to the principal, must be dedicated and committed to student achievement.

How wonderful that Houston students achieve more as a result of the accountability program! How wonderful for our entire community if Miami-Dade County does the same.