

Minnesota Principals Academy- Action Learning Project  
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High Poverty/ High Expectations  
Abstract

This Action Learning Project was initiated to address the many needs of our high poverty student population. Our school vision “All Students Will and Can Succeed” lead me to ask staff what we could do as a team to deliver our vision every day in each of our classrooms! Many of their ideas were then infused into our vision. ( see Vision statement below) This project has served to guide me in our vision and to obtain the goal of every student demonstrating significant growth both academically and socially.

**Vision: All Students Will and Can Succeed!**

We Will:

1. Eliminate blame and confront low expectations
2. Build relationships with each student
3. Develop an accurate understanding of poverty
4. Engage parents/families as partners
5. Review data, demonstrate continuous improvement and be accountable

Our vision is that every teacher will set high expectations for every student in their classroom! If we are going to accomplish that all of our students are successful, then we will need each staff member to commit to meeting each student’s academic and social needs.

**Background/Content**

Harrison is a high poverty school with approximately 64% of our students qualifying for free and reduced meals, 27% of our population qualifies for special education services and we have a 34% mobility rate. All of these factors provide many challenges for our building. However, they can not determine the success of any student. According to Eric Jensen(2017), during the last 75 years,engaging low SES students have been a challenge to public and private school teachers alike. Although, most teachers have traditionally succeeded in reaching students who come from middle and upper income homes, teachers struggle to reach economically disadvantaged students. What can we do? Hanushek, (2015) tells us that quality teaching can completely offset the devastating effects of poverty has on student’s academic performance. So, how do we get an entire building to set high expectations academically and behaviorally?

Program Rationale/ Why a change?

It is a moral disgrace that children remain the poorest age group in the United States! Research shows us that children growing up in poverty are less likely to grow up healthy and succeed in school.

So, how do we address this issue? Eric Jensen states that the answer is with our teachers. The classroom teacher is still the single most significant contributor to student achievement. The effect of a quality teacher is greater than that of parents, peers, or poverty! However, teachers have to believe that every single student can improve a great deal and that they are willing and able to make it happen!

#### **WHAT WE DID:**

- **Review and discuss homework policy**
- **I provided training and communication on poverty and high expectations**
- **Build relationships with students**
- **Provide basic needs for our students- clothing, supplies, food**
- **Create student surveys on our school climate**
- **Survey families on what we do well and what we need to improve on**
- **Review data monthly-both academic and behavior**
- **Meet monthly with teaching assistants**
- **Make staff meetings meaningful**
- **Provide social and emotional programming in every classroom by staff**
- **Review supports/interventions that best serve students of poverty**
- **Provide parent training**
- **Specialists also become tutors-listening to students read**
- **Create a building wide leadership team**

#### **What we found out:**

**We succeeded in building a climate where students wanted to be. This was accomplished with student surveys.**

**We succeeded in fostering positive relationships with families. This was measured with family surveys.**

**Following behavior data resulted in student aggression being lowered significantly! However, MCA test scores did not meet our building goal.**

#### **Implications for 2019-2020:**

- **At the start of the school year, review previous year's lists of special education students and their needs**
- **Develop stronger systems for follow up with families with new students**
- **Create more parent training opportunities for our families**
- **Celebrate our student survey results**
- **Celebrate our family survey results**
- **Transfer staff to where they will best serve the needs of our students**
- **Specialists will tutor students where they have openings in their schedules**
- **Celebrate the reduction of aggressive behaviors within our student population**
- **Report behaviors to all staff on a monthly basis**
- **Review academic assessment results on a monthly basis**

- **Monitor attendance and make contact with the student home early- teacher makes the first contact home, then the office**
- **Provide PD on Poverty**
- **Provide PD on Engagement**
- **Impact on staff- Make connections with each and every student**  
     **Demonstrate that you care about each student**  
     **Be positive**
- **Continue to provide social skills training in each of our classrooms on a weekly basis-**
- **Continue to provide the Second Step Curriculum in each of our classrooms K-4**
- **Continue to provide Drama club for student 2-4th grade**
- **Continue to provide Art Club 2-4th grade**

**When you provide a climate within a school that allows every student to know that the staff in that building care about them, then student want to come to school. As we know, high poverty schools face many challenges. However, if we develop routines to make every student feel welcome, commit to involving families, carefully monitor students academic and behavior achievements, set high expectations, build in opportunities for the arts and foster a supportive learning environment, students will want to come to school and learn!**

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