

100% college-bound at Minneapolis College Prep

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.
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By now, it is no secret that Minneapolis and much of the surrounding Twin Cities has one of the worst student achievement gaps in the nation when it comes to children of color.

It is also no secret that to date, no true across-the-board plan has been implemented to reduce the gap and better educate children of various ethnic minorities. And with much of the talk being about enhancing student achievement, for the most part, students have been left out of the conversation.

This was not the case when students from the newly formed Minneapolis College Preparatory School, 2131 12th Ave. N., Minneapolis, recently sat with various members of the community, including a representative from Sen. Al Franken's office to discuss reasons for – and possible solutions to – the broad achievement gap in the area.

And while curriculum was a part of the discussion, much of the discussion centered on external factors leading to the gap.

“You can give the students what they need (scholastically) but there has to be that extra push because of what may be going on at the home, especially for minority students,” said Suhaylah Purcell, a student attending Minneapolis Prep. “If the parent doesn't show that education is important then the kid won't see the value of education either.”

All the students in the inaugural class at Minneapolis Prep are freshmen.

Minneapolis College Prep opened in August, 2012. The foundation of Minneapolis College Prep is providing a structured, disciplined, and safe environment for a rigorous, college preparatory education. The school's goal is for 100 percent of its students to attend and graduate from selective four-year universities. All Minneapolis College Prep students are admitted via lottery, with the only requirements being that they complete the application on time, and successfully meet their 8th grade graduation requirements.

Minneapolis College Prep is a public charter school authorized by the Office of New Schools (Minneapolis Public Schools).

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Ann Prichard, a community member invited to participate in the roundtable agreed that a child's home situation plays a major role in scholastic achievement.

"I was talking to a young kid and the kid never wanted to go home and I wondered why he didn't want to go home; come to find out his mother was always high on drugs," said Prichard, who said as a student she was initially an underachiever. "I was a Title I (one) student, and I was failing everything – not because I couldn't learn but because I didn't have teachers reaching out to assess my needs."

Title I is a provision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act passed in 1965 designed to distribute funding to schools and school districts with a high percentage of students from low-income families. Today, Prichard is an author whose books are written to assist students in reading and to encourage children to stay in school.

Dan Soloman, the education director for Franken said the gap in education is a gap in access.

"I call it an opportunity gap, where certain kids have access to educational opportunities that others don't because of resources," said Soloman. "We need a stronger economy so parents don't have to work three jobs and can be home more with their children."

Molly Bahneman, associate dean of student development and services at St. Paul College, said solving the achievement gap is difficult because of the underlying social implications.

"Race and culture play a major role in the lives of the haves and the have nots; that's a really difficult conversation to have," said Bahneman.

Though many outside factors exist when it comes to educating children of color, Paul Dixon, an African-American, said teachers play a key role.

"There are some lawyers who should instead be teachers and some doctors who should be teachers, and there are also some teachers who should be doing other things," said Dixon.

Dixon referred to what he calls the "Sunday Night Factor."

If you're a teacher on Sunday night and you're not excited about getting to work the next day then this isn't the profession for you," said Dixon.

Anne Krocak, deputy director with AchiveMpls agreed.

"Imagine every day going to school and hearing from a counselor, 'College isn't for everybody, let's just get you through high school,' versus, if you (the student) show up everyday and the culture is 'You will go to college, you will succeed; we expect you to do well,'" said Krocak.