

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TEAM REPORT

School Year: 2015-2016

PLT Title

African-American Experiences in Our Schools

Blurb for PLT Conference Brochure

Over 80% of US teachers are white. Almost half of US students are non-white. That gap has given rise to a growing body of research about culturally responsive teaching and increased attention on the achievement gap, particularly between African-American and white students. Our PLT group wondered, how do our own students feel differently about their experiences in school when disaggregated by race? Our presentation will share survey findings that asked students about their social-emotional experiences with their teachers and their peers. We found some encouraging news about what positive messages from teachers are being heard, but also serious disparities that do exist, particularly around questions of fairness and equity. We make recommendations for ways that we, as a district and as individuals, might proceed.

Contact Information (Write * next to facilitator's name.)

Name	School	Grade Level or Subject
*Lindsey Rinder	all	English/ESL/Reading
Diane Wiltshire	all	METCO
Sherri Turner	BHS	admin
Colleen Foley	CMS/BHS	foreign language
Kim Thompson	CMS	7 th grade English
Karen Duff	CMS	library/media
Mike Bruno	BHS	special ed

PLT SMART Goal

Through research and student and possibly parent feedback, the team will gain a deeper understanding of African-American experiences in our schools in order to guide future planning for improving those experiences and student outcomes.

This PLT Goal is also

- A Professional Practice Goal
- A Student Learning Goal
- Neither

Key Actions

1. Read professional literature on this topic and review existing data
2. Define our inquiry question
3. Write surveys and interview questions
4. Gather student (and family?) feedback
5. Analyze and synthesize results

Findings

Students who self-reported as Black or African-American (solely or in part) on our survey were **more likely to report negative social-emotional experiences** in most aspects of school. They were also **more likely to report a positive self-image in some ways**, but not all. The most striking differences between African-American / Black students and other students were around issues of **fairness** and **respect**.

There was not as much difference between the groups when reporting on the level of expectation, caring, and pride their teachers communicate; there was a significant, and negative, difference when reporting how they felt teachers and other adults treated students in terms of fairness: **nearly 54% of Black or African-American students we surveyed disagreed or strongly disagreed that teachers treat students fairly**, as compared to 16% of Asian students and 13% of white students. **25% of Black or African-American students we surveyed disagreed that they trusted teachers and other adults**; only 7% of Asian students and 13% of white students disagreed. **25% of Black or African-American students disagreed that teachers and other adults listen when they have something to say**; 3% of Asian and white students disagreed with that statement.

African-American or Black students reported some of the same issues with fellow students, as well as with levels of care and respect. **45% of Black or African-American students disagreed that students are kind and supportive** of one another; 17% of Asian and 21% of white students disagreed. **46% of Black or African-American students disagreed that students treat one another with respect**; 25% of Asian and white students disagreed. **33% of Black / African-American students disagreed that students treat those who are different fairly** at school; 18% of Asian and 20% of white students disagreed (only around 5% of all students disagreed that they were encouraged to learn about and respect students who are different at school). **58% of Black /African-American students agreed that other students make fun of those who don't look or dress the "right" way**; 31% of Asian and 34% of white students agree. **Over 20% of African-American / Black students reported being bullied, teased, or made fun of in class** more than 1-2 times; 9% of Asian and 11% of white students reported the same. The classroom was the most likely place for all students to experience bullying, teasing, or being made fun of (in comparison with hallways, the bathrooms, locker rooms, and the cafeteria).

Recommendations / Next Steps

Social-Emotional Learning Matters...

- Research shows that **strong relationships with teachers** can make a big difference for students of color.
- Choose a K-12 **professional goal focused on improving social-emotional outcomes** for African-American / Black students: choices will include family communication, student engagement, classroom climate, reflective practice, etc.
- **Take advantage of professional development** opportunities in SEL, including the METCO Directors' Association Educators Conference in December

Listening Matters...

- Use protocols like whip-arounds, think-pair-share, or Save the Last Word to help **ensure all voices are heard** in class discussions
- When there is a behavioral incident, make it visible to all students that you are giving **each person a chance to tell his or her side of the story**
- When responding to students after listening, **mirror back** each person's side of the story to make it clear you heard

Advocacy Matters...

- **Advocate for your African-American / Black students** in matters such as course placement

- **Increase communication frequency**, both over email and phone, with the families of African-American / Black students to open a two-way dialogue
- **Check in frequently** with African-American / Black students, especially if there are only one or two in a class, to see if anything has felt uncomfortable
- **Include positive stories and experiences** from African-American / Black history and culture in your curriculum (not just slavery and civil rights)
- Seek out **professional development** not just in SEL, but also in culturally responsive teaching or anti-racist teaching (EDCO, Primary Source, Southern Poverty Law Center, Teaching Tolerance...)