The Achievement Gap in Belmont

April 25, 2017

Agenda

- Introduction
- What does the Achievement Gap look like in Belmont?
- What actions are we taking to close the gap?
- What are our next steps?

Achievement Gap Task Force:

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Belmont Public Schools Mission

With a commitment to teaching and learning, the Belmont Public Schools strive to nurture the knowledge, skills, and emotional development of each student in order to create a community of engaged learners who contribute to the common good and are of service to others.

Core Beliefs

All students are capable of learning at high levels.

Everyone deserves to learn in a safe and supported learning environment in which all members of the school community demonstrate respect for each other.

Achievement Data & High Needs Subgroup

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education holds districts accountable for the achievement and growth of all students and the "high needs" subgroup.

- English Learners
- Students with disabilities
- Economically disadvantaged students

We feel it's also very important to pay attention to the achievement and growth of students who identify as African-American/Black (solely or partly).

Strategic Plan

2015-16
A2. Develop a short and long term plan to address student performance achievement gaps

2016-17
A1. Implement short term plans and develop long term vision to address student achievement gaps.

Social Emotional Learning and the Achievement Gap

"The human brain has evolved to learn best when not under threat, when it can marshal all of its neural networks and processes for concentration, reflection, and synthesis." (Poliner and Benson, 2017).

We know that we are not doing enough to welcome, value, and validate our African-American/Black students. This is evident in:

→ Climate Survey Data
→ Professional Learning Team Social/Emotional Learning Survey Data
→ Professional Learning Team focus group conversations with high school students

Implicit Bias

- Consists of unconscious attitudes that shape our responses to certain groups

- Operates involuntarily, often without one's awareness or intentional control

- Is different from explicit racism

- Uses the brain shortcut known as "stereotyping" to process large amounts of incoming data

--Kirwan Institute, 2013
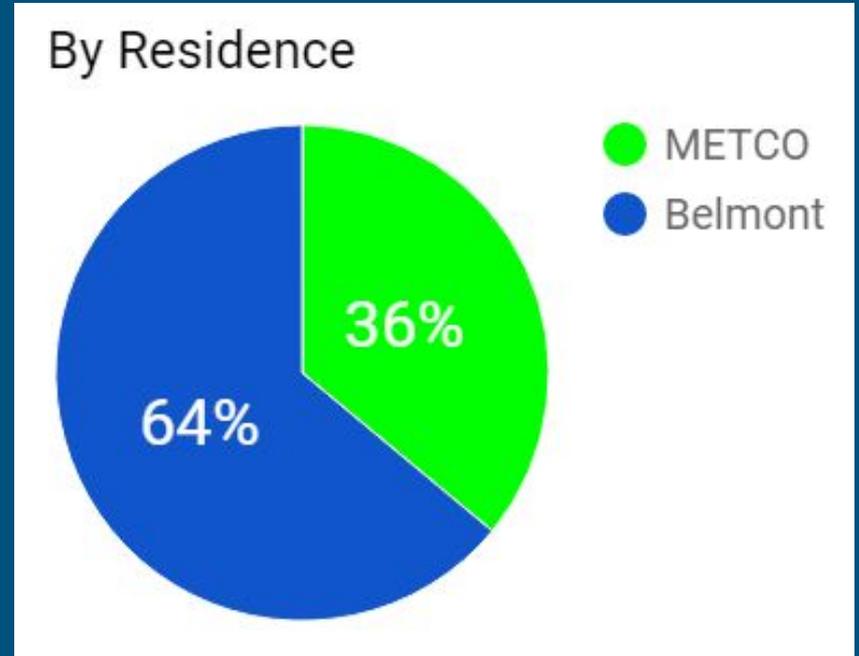(as cited in Hammond, 2014)

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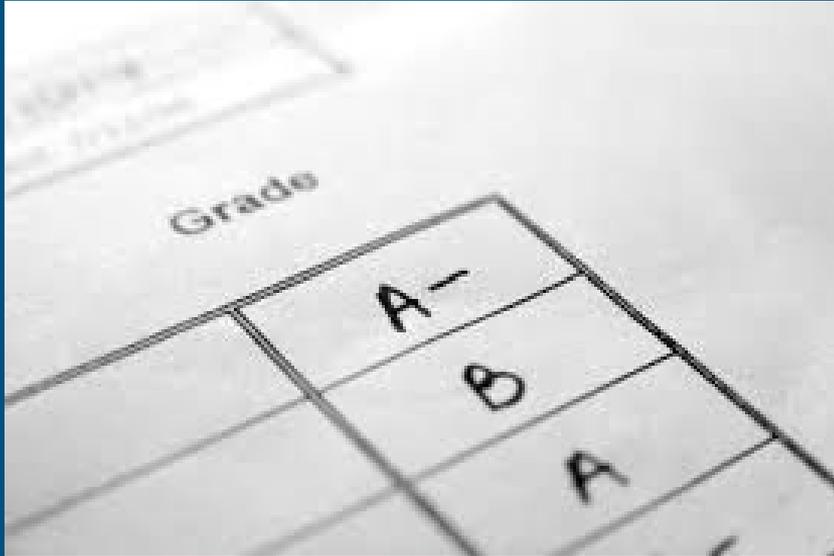- What are our next steps?

Our Subgroup: African-American/Black Students in Belmont

205

African-American/Black Students K-12, March 2017

By Residence

- METCO
- Belmont
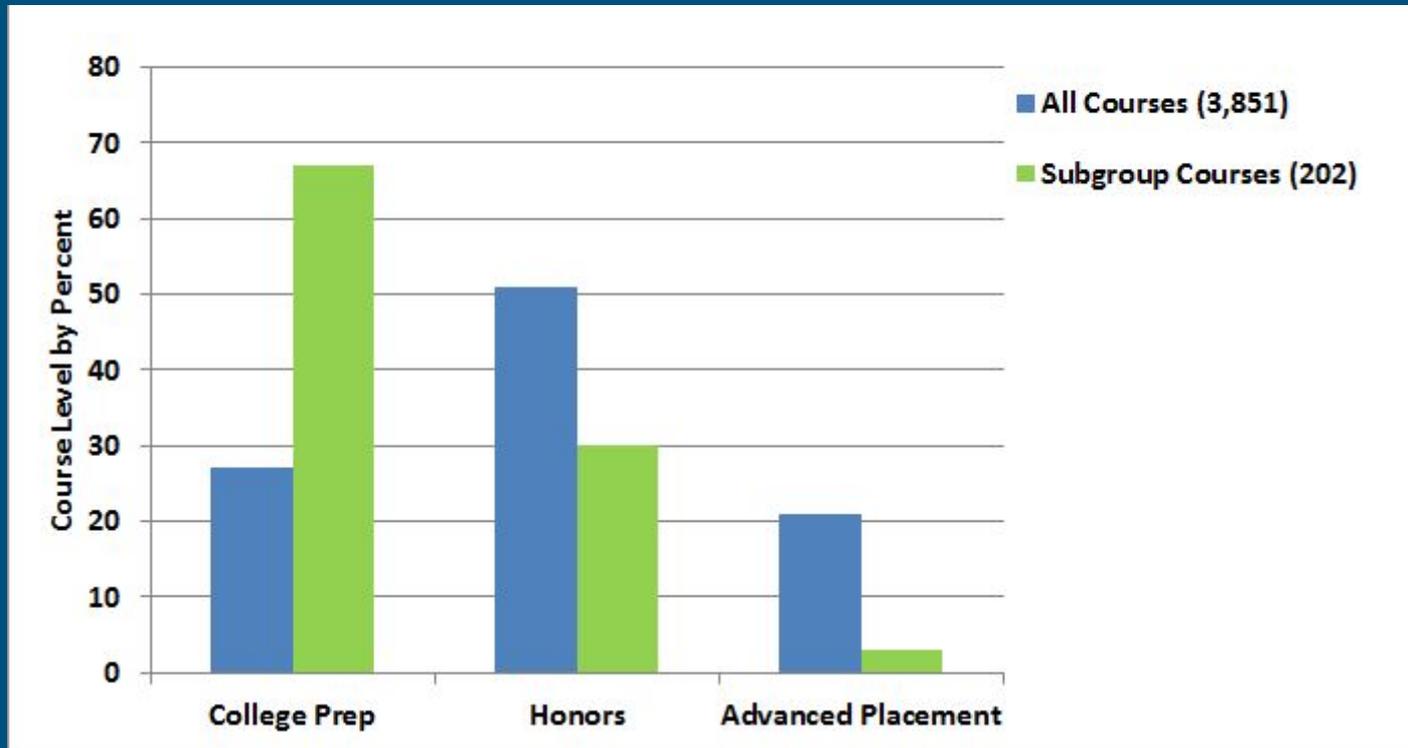
36%

64%

Local Measures of Academic Achievement

Grades

Report card data shows subgroup students had 3-4 times as many Cs, Ds, or Fs as the total student body

(grades 6-12; quarter 2 report card)

State Measures of Academic Achievement: Progress and Performance Index

	All Belmont Public Schools Students	African-American/Black Belmont Students
2014	96	58
2015	104	67
2016	104	58

The Annual Progress and Performance Index measures student improvement against seven targets, including reducing Warning/Failing MCAS scores, increasing Advanced MCAS scores, improved student growth on MCAS, and reducing high school dropout rates.

Social-Emotional Experiences

- 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 our subgroup's responses and other students' responses were around issues of **fairness** and **respect**.

The Perception of Fairness

- Only 68% of Black/Afr. Amer. students feel their teachers treat them fairly, compared to 82% of Asian students and 85% of white students

- 49% of Black/Afr. Amer. students felt that teachers punish them without knowing what really happened, compared to 29% of Asian students and 35% of white students.

Listening to Students

- 42% of African American / Black students feel that adults at school don't often listen when they have something to say, compared with 24% of Asian and 20% of white students.

Trusted Adults at School

- 27% 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.

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Achievement Gap Task Force

- Local Data Review

- Literature Review

- Set Short Term Goals

- Set Long Term Goals: How do we shift our culture to enable all African-American/Black students to achieve results comparable to their peers?

Action Steps: 2016 - 2017

Educate staff about our achievement gap
- METCO Director's conference
- SEL workshop series on SEL & Achievement Gap
- Engaging Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Students & Families in Secondary Schools training
- How to Have Courageous Conversations training
- SMART goals and PLT presentations addressing the achievement gap

Action Steps: 2016 - 2017

Support African-American / Black students who are struggling to meet learning expectations

- Implement a Math RTI Pilot Program at CMS in grade 5
- Provide math instruction and tutorial 2x/cycle
- PLTs
- SMART Goals

Action Steps: 2016 - 2017

Support African-American / Black students who are meeting expectations so they are ready for more honors and AP courses

- Identify high achievers and set placement goals
- Monitor enrollment and success in increased number of Honors/AP courses
- Run Physics Achievement Gap PLT
- Bring representatives from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to Belmont High School

Action Steps: 2016 - 2017

Provide professional development for staff: recognize and counter implicit racial bias in our institution and culture

- Conduct focus groups with students, staff, and parents to gather more local data
- Research how similar school systems are working to end the achievement gap and share successful initiatives
- Plan October Early Release Professional Development: how to talk about racial identity development

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Long Term Goals

How do we shift our culture to enable all African-American / Black students to achieve results comparable to their peers?

- Provide professional development for staff
- Provide improved academic support
- Explore the issues raised by PLTs
- Continue to gather local data
- Involve families and older African-American / Black students in problem solving

Questions?