

One school.

Leveling the education playing field for African-Americans.



Despite the efforts of the past few decades to rectify injustices, black students face an uphill climb in our schools. The problem is clearly not a simple one. Indeed, the one thing we have learned about the issue of lagging African-American school performance is that it has multiple causes. To ignore one causal factor is to undermine efforts at correcting another. But one root cause—typically not addressed by school reform programs—begs special attention because it is so insidious. It is an inadvertent form of racism practiced by the very professionals accountable for leveling the educational playing field. Because this phenomenon of discrimination in schools often goes unnoticed—even by those of us who practice it—it's predictably more difficult to remedy.

A Promising Intervention

The Dismantling Racism Institute For Educators (DRIE)

SCHOOL DISTRICTS/EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS THAT HAVE PARTICIPATED IN DISMANTLING RACISM INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATORS

St. Clair Regional Office of Education	Riverview Gardens
Rockwood	Lindbergh
Bayless	Special School District
Kirkwood	Cahokia High School
Ladue	Hazelwood
St. Louis Public Schools	Clayton
Mehlville	Brentwood
University City	Springfield R-12
Parkway	Affton
Archdiocese of St. Louis	Ferguson Florissant
Webster Groves	Ritenour
Cooperating School District	Washington University
Valley Park	University of Missouri St. Louis
Pattonville	Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville

Since 1994, The National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ) has conducted a very well-received, intensive six-day workshop called the Dismantling Racism Institute. The workshop aims to help diverse participants identify attitudes and behaviors that they themselves harbor, potentially affecting how they deal with race personally and professionally. Attendees have come from businesses, religious organizations, schools and colleges. Several years ago, a group of educators who had participated in the institute petitioned NCCJ to offer a specially designed workshop for educational leaders in the St. Louis area.

The Dismantling Racism Institute for Educators—DRIE—was launched in the summer of 2001. Since then, some 115 school administrators (both district- and building-level) and board members have participated in the six-day institute. Post-session evaluations have given the DRIE consistently high marks: for most participants, the experience was felt to be profoundly beneficial, with significant potential to yield changes in behavior. Participants often referred to the experience as the beginning of an important professional (and personal) journey they have undertaken—one that may, in some respects, never end.



What can be Done?

Don't ignore the poor performance of black children because your aggregated school and district achievement scores seem satisfactory.

Disaggregate the data—as many districts are doing, partly in compliance with the No Child Left Behind Act. This federal initiative aims at making it impossible for poor performance on standardized tests by one subgroup of children to be hidden among the performance of all children.

Expand efforts to reach out to black students and their families.

The initiatives led by DRIE participants and their colleagues provide a variety of fine examples for opening up new lines of communication with African-American stakeholders. They intend to both overcome years of mistrust, and generate new ideas and support for improvement.

1

2

Talk about race in your planning and review conversations.

We often prefer to sidestep the “R” word, but we really can't afford to. One of the really positive outcomes observed in the study was the greater willingness of participants to address racism and race-related issues directly and candidly—and then to take appropriate action.

Consider participation in the DRIE, or related programs—for board members, administrators, faculty and staff.

The DRIE experience is powerful. It is an investment in both dollars and time. But its impact on changing behavior is inarguable—it's one of those rare interventions that causes things to happen.

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WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

For decades, educators and citizens alike have been searching for ways to address differences in achievement. What the DRIE experience has pointed out so clearly is that lingering aspects of racism contribute to maintaining the achievement gap. If educational equity is truly to be a guiding principle by which we design and administer our public education programs, then we need to identify and do away with school policies and practices that discriminate against black children.

Part of the Problem is Ourselves

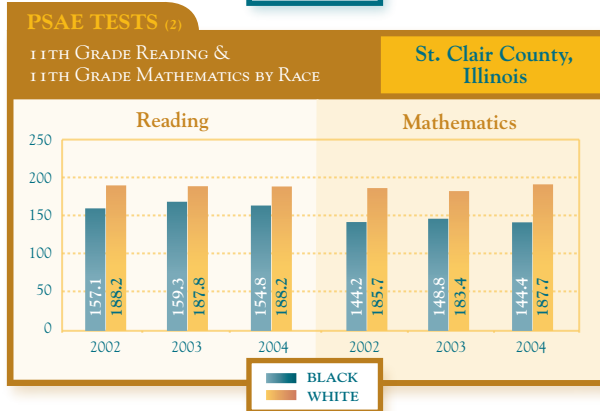
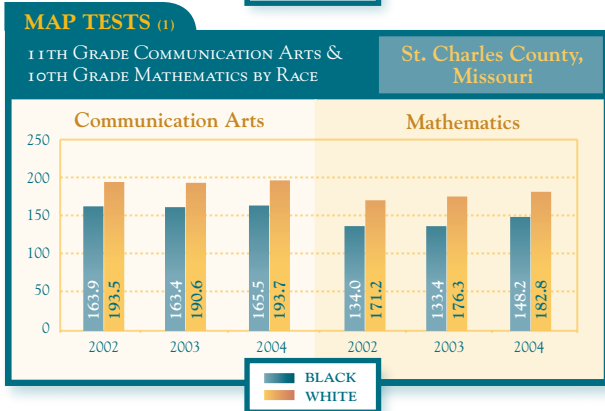
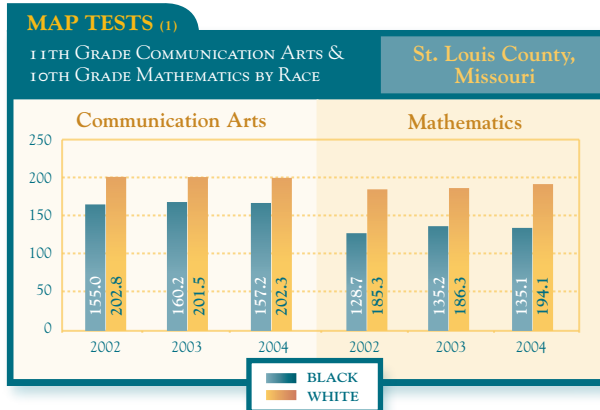
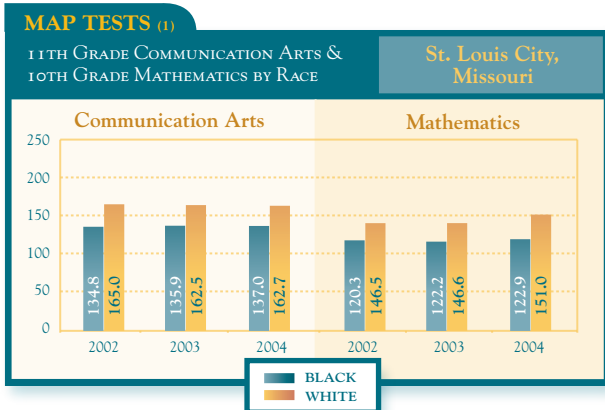


When teachers and administrators hold lower expectations for black students, or employ a double standard for whites and blacks in disciplinary actions, they are practicing a sort of discriminatory behavior. The results are educationally detrimental to black students.

They're also unfair. Both white and black school professionals are complicit in such behavior, but in different ways. The culturally ingrained habits described in the phrase "white privilege" make many white teachers oblivious to the ways they make it harder for black students to succeed in school. And the phrase "internalized oppression" has become more frequently used to describe how black teachers can create barriers for their African-American students. Taken together, these behaviors translate into institutional practices that are counterproductive. Perhaps more importantly, they can seriously undermine significant, well-planned efforts at improving school performance for African-American children.

Despite New Programs and Earnest Efforts, Black Students as a Group Lag Behind

In the school year ending June 2004, several indicators confirmed continuing gaps in the school performance of white and black students. Data is presented for St. Louis City, St. Louis County, St. Charles County and St. Clair County, Missouri and Illinois scores are not comparable.



Measuring the Outcomes of Dismantling Racism Institute for Educators (DRIE)

In the fall of 2004, NCCJ and RegionWise commissioned the Center for Organizational Leadership and Renewal at Saint Louis University to conduct an impact evaluation of DRIE since its inception. The evaluation study sought to answer the question “What behaviors—individual and institutional—might actually have changed after DRIE alums went back to their districts and schools?” The study focused on four area school districts that had sponsored at least ten participants over the several years of DRIE operation. The districts were Hazelwood, Kirkwood, Ladue and Parkway.

27 educational leaders took part in the interviews: 13 held district-level positions (and included several board members), and 14 were building-level administrators.

The study’s strategy was to question participants about three dimensions of potential change:

- Changes in how educational leaders perceived their roles and role priorities
- Changes in when, where and with whom did conversations about racial performance gaps in the schools take place
- Changes in school and district policies and practices

What the Study Found

Impact on role perceptions and priorities

Practically all participants interviewed attested to changes in how they have come to see themselves and their mission as school professionals (or as board members). Most significantly, their descriptions of these changes typically included ways they have come to act differently through their roles. Specifically, these changes included:

- **More time and effort spent in getting to know African-American students (and their parents) as individuals—and not as stereotypes**
- **Greater willingness to talk about racism among colleagues, and with members of another race**
- **Greater motivation to advocate dismantling racism as a professional priority**
- **Less inclination to “blame the victim”—to see failed achievement as inevitable**

DRIE PARTICIPANT COMMENTS

“I can deal with things without that knot in my stomach that it’s about race.”

“It’s like most of us have been ‘rubbernecking,’ but we don’t want to pull over and get out of the car. Now it’s easier for me to do it. Now I’m more likely to act on what I hear, rather than ignore it or let it go.”

“I became more of an advocate for African-American students, raising questions with other board members.”

“I’m now a change agent, trying to deal more effectively with colleagues not on the same page with me on the student achievement gap.”

“I try not to rush to stereotype. I no longer say to myself ‘they’re doing it because they’re black.’”

Impact on involving others in leveling the playing field

Seeing their own role differently held implications for how DRIE participants would communicate to others their sharpened awareness of injustice and discrimination, and their inclination to do something about it. Participants claimed considerable success in engaging others in a new—and productive—conversation about African-American students and fair treatment.

This conversation has taken several forms:

- **With colleague administrators (and board members), the conversation takes place more often, is frequently based on hard data broken down by race, and is more likely to have high stakes attached (e.g., changes in policy, establishing new practices)**
- **With teachers and other school staff, the conversation now extends regularly to staff meetings, faculty workshops, ad hoc committees, and performance reviews**
- **With parents and other community members, the conversation takes place with greater candor, uses data more regularly, and occurs more frequently off-campus (on “neutral turf”)**

Impact on policies and practices

Participants described the impact of the DRIE experience most fully in terms of new district and school practices, and new operating policies. Each district can point to several new strategies it has instituted to close the racial achievement gap and lessen discrimination in the schools. While it is not always possible to claim that the DRIE experience was the sole cause of a new way of doing things, participants readily attributed many new policies and practices at least in part to their DRIE experience. These new initiatives register in six different, but related, categories.

- **Personnel practices:** hiring, promotion and performance evaluation
- **Strategic plans and School Improvement Plans (SIPs):** use of disaggregated data and input from diversity committees (including African-American parents)
- **Special programs for African-American students (and their parents/caregivers):**
 - To increase advanced class enrollment
 - To provide supplemental academic coaching and support
 - To provide adult and peer counseling on negotiating school transitions and career planning
- **School climate and behavior management:** changes regarding student discipline policy, behavior guidelines, and tone and inclusiveness of school communications
- **Staff development:** locally-designed and administered workshops derived from DRIE, to support specific achievement gap or student discipline objectives
- **Curriculum and instruction:** focus on using a variety of instructional approaches to meet the differing needs of all learners (Differentiated Instruction), multicultural texts, and curriculum plans that show sensitivity to diversity

DRIE PARTICIPANT COMMENTS

“The board is now talking more about race-related issues. We review the racial achievement gap every month, after other schools present their MAP data for reading, math and science. Board subcommittees are also more racially balanced.”

“I’m having new kinds of conversations with my teachers based on disaggregated data. DRIE pushed me to use the data more aggressively.”

“We are talking more about expectations and achievement gaps between races in parent-teacher meetings, and in district and school communications with parents. And we’ve taken the conversations to the parents where they live...we’re holding parent-teacher meetings at St. Louis City libraries.”

DRIE PARTICIPANT COMMENTS

“‘Respecting and understanding diversity’ is a stated goal of the district. It’s called out in the Faculty Handbook and serves as a major criterion for teacher evaluation.”

“This year we added to our performance evaluation plan for teachers, an item called ‘culturally-relevant instruction.’”

“...We’re also probing for remnants of racially oriented tracking (pre-requisites, teacher recommendations, curriculum sequencing—particularly in math and science).”

“We’ve looked at the suspension rate: it’s double for African-Americans. Then we discovered that behavior referrals were also disproportionately high. These data were introduced at an administrators’ meeting and we talked it over. Out of this discussion came an initiative to design a new Behavior Management Plan.”

“We want all teachers to handle discipline in a consistent way. We’re now monitoring this more closely, and tracking by individual teachers. Assistant principals will talk with teachers individually using the data.”

The information in this document is based on an evaluation study conducted by Dr. Robert Mai, Center for Organizational Leadership and Renewal, College of Public Service at Saint Louis University. Dr. Daniel Keck and Melanie Gottschalk provided data-collecting assistance. Dr. Mai wrote the document with editorial support from RegionWise staff: Dr. Barbara Holmes, Brenda Bobo-Fisher, and Ruth Sergenian.

The National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ), founded in 1927 as The National Conference of Christians and Jews, is a human relations organization dedicated to fighting bias, bigotry and racism in America. The NCCJ promotes understanding and respect among all races, religions and cultures through advocacy, conflict resolution and education. The full report of the DRIE Impact Study is available on the NCCJ Web site (www.nccjstl.org). Call DRIE Program Director at (314) 241-5103 or e-mail stlouis@nccj.org for information about DRIE.

Sources

Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) Performance

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education uses five performance level designations:

STEP 1:

Students are substantially behind in terms of meeting the Show-Me Standards. They demonstrate only a minimal understanding of fundamental concepts, and little or no ability to apply that knowledge.

PROGRESSING:

Students are beginning to use their knowledge of simple concepts to solve basic problems, but they still make many errors.

NEARING PROFICIENT:

Students understand many key concepts, although their application of that knowledge is limited.

PROFICIENT:

This is the desired achievement level for all students. Students demonstrate the knowledge and skills called for by the Show-Me Standards.

ADVANCED:

Students demonstrate in-depth understanding of all concepts and apply that knowledge in complex ways.

MAP Index* = (pct Step 1*1)+(pct Progressing*1.5)+(pct Nearing Proficient*2)+(pct Proficient*2.5)+(pct Advanced*3)

Source: Missouri Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education—**Missouri Assessment Program (MAP)**

Note: Missouri and Illinois indices are not comparable.

Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE) Performance

The Illinois State Board of Education uses four performance level designations—*academic warning*, *below standards*, *meets standards* and *exceeds standards*—to report student progress in reading, writing, mathematics, science and social science. Illinois educators created performance definitions for the four levels in all subject areas and levels. These definitions are used to determine how student test results are classified in the four performance levels, answering the question, “How good is good enough?” for each standard. Here are general definitions of the performance levels applicable for all subject areas:

ACADEMIC WARNING:

Student work demonstrates limited knowledge and skills in the subject. Because of major gaps in learning, students apply knowledge and skills ineffectively.

BELOW STANDARDS:

Student work demonstrates basic knowledge and skills in the subject. However, because of gaps in learning, students apply knowledge and skills in limited ways.

MEETS STANDARDS:

Student work demonstrates proficient knowledge and skills in the subject. Students effectively apply knowledge and skills to solve problems.

EXCEEDS STANDARDS:

Student work demonstrates advanced knowledge and skills in the subject. Students creatively apply knowledge and skills to solve problems and evaluate the results.

PSAE Index = (pct Academic Warning*1)+(pct Below Standards*1.5)+(pct Meets Standards*2)+(pct Exceeds Standards*2.5)

Source: Illinois State Board of Education—**Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE)**

Note: Missouri and Illinois indices are not comparable.

Contact Information for School Districts Participating in the Study

Hazelwood School District

Sandra Jordan
Director of Communications
& Media Relations
(314) 953-5185

Kirkwood School District

Nona King
Director of Public Information
(314) 213-6100 ext. 7901

Ladue School District

Kathy Reznikov
Director of Communications
(314) 994-7080
(314) 993-9822 fax

Parkway School District

Diana Stewart
Coordinator of Government and
Community Affairs
(314) 415-8077
(314) 415-8009 fax