

RACE AND CLASS:
A Community Forum on Problems and Solutions
in Marin County's Education System

A Community Grassroots Perspective

Forum Report

And

2008 Marin County Education Equity Initiative
Strategic Plan

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This report and initiative is dedicated to all underserved students of color, poor students, and their families in Marin County whom we have failed as a community in providing adequate and equal educational opportunities in one of the richest counties in the United States.

“Power is the strength required to bring about social, political and economic change....Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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About ACPC

Action Coalition for People of Color (ACPC) is a Marin County-wide grassroots organization composed of community leaders, concerned citizens, advocates, and activists of color who work to combat racial discrimination and other forms of oppression by seeking social, economic, and political solutions and equity. ACPC is also a non-funded and non-partisan organization that actively supports and endorses issues, initiatives, and other endeavors that positively impact communities of color and poor communities in Marin County.

Mission

The mission of ACPC is to promote and foster a united community voice among and within communities of color in Marin County to achieve inclusion and justice.

Goal

ACPC's underlying goal is to bring about institutional, systemic, and community change in Marin County by confronting and reducing racial discrimination and inequities.

Objectives

Through dialogue, education, advocacy, organizing, and participation in community events and activities, ACPC is committed to developing and maintaining partnerships and alliances with individuals, communities, and organizations who share common interests and goals.

Since its inception in 2004, ACPC has supported, organized, and sponsored community events such as the recognition dinner to welcome and honor women educators of color to Marin County, a Candidates' Night forum, Education Equity forums, and the Tuskegee Airmen Congressional Gold Medal ceremony and Veteran's Day celebration event. ACPC continues to advocate for individuals, groups, and communities of color who face and/or experience racial discrimination in Marin County.

RACE AND CLASS

“A Community Forum on Problems and Solutions in Marin County’s Education System”

Introduction

Marin County has had a proud history of providing high-quality education to young and adult learners for many years. In fact, in the July, 2007 issue of Forbes magazine, Marin County public schools was awarded first place in a new national review of education. Year after year most Marin public schools consistently rank as one of the highest performing and achieving institutions throughout California as evidenced by the yearly STAR Test results which sets the state’s education standards and measures the academic gains that are made by students from elementary school through high school.

However, Marin County’s public schools, though similar to public schools in other counties and states throughout the United States, have consistently failed to provide similar high-quality education to African American, Latino, and socio-economically disadvantaged students. Moreover, due to the abundant amount of acknowledgment and focus on Marin County public schools’ successes, an unintended consequence has occurred. Overlooked are the disparate and disproportionate numbers of failing African American, Latino, and economically disadvantaged students in Marin County public schools as compared to their counterparts. There is now an increasing awareness of the problem called the “achievement gap.” The extent and severity of the achievement gap in Marin County’s public schools can no longer be swept under the carpet of the public schools’ successes. We must confront the problem by first acknowledging that there is a problem.

Overview

In October, 2007, ACPC set its agenda by focusing its efforts and energy on addressing and dealing with Marin County’s achievement gap problem. Based on earlier public events that ACPC endorsed and supported such as the Marin Education Fund’s and Youth Leadership Institute’s Education Equity Weeks and initiatives in the spring of 2007, ACPC decided to take an equally active role in advancing knowledge of the achievement gap problem in hopes of building on to and complementing existing efforts and endeavors that had already begun. Titled **Race and Class: “A Community Forum on Problems and Solutions to Marin County Education System,”** ACPC also decided to use this educational event as a spring board to an initiative that is now called the **Marin County Education Equity Initiative.**

Co-sponsors of the event included Youth Leadership Institute, MarinLink, Marin County Human Rights Commission, College of Marin’s Students for Social Responsibility, and Marin County Youth Commission. For greater list of other supporters and endorsers see Appendix A.

Planning Process

ACPC formed a planning committee which was composed of some of its steering committee members, newly recruited volunteers, a representative of the Youth Leadership Institute, a member of the Marin County Human Rights Commission and a representative of College of Marin's Students for Social Responsibility. Consistent to the time of the formation of the planning committee, ACPC also voted to work with MarinLink as its fiscal agency sponsor for the event and initiative.

With the exception of the representative from the Youth Leadership Institute, all members of the planning committee were volunteers whose time, labor, and skills were donated. *It is important to note this fact as it is consistent with the intention and philosophy of ACPC in which it honors, embraces, and practices the whole spirit and literal meaning of grassroots, bottom up, volunteer-driven, community organizing.* Hundreds of hours were spent meeting, planning, coordinating, fundraising, and outreaching for this event, while operating from a "shoe string" budget. All financial contributions raised were exclusively spent towards the complete cost of the event except for a nominal administrative fee to ACPC's fiscal agency. Lastly, the planning committee also relied on in-kind contributions from its sponsoring and supporting organizations which included the facility used at College of Marin, Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) for supplies and materials, art designs by young people of YLI, and translation services/devices by Fair Housing of Marin, County of Marin's Health and Human Services Department's Cultural Competence Committee and staff volunteers, and other community volunteers.

The food vendor hired by the planning committee to serve lunch was Homeward Bound's culinary program, a non-profit, vocational, culinary arts program that assists homeless adults in acquiring work skills and find gainful employment in the food industry. Marin Youth Center's Generation Chefs, another organization that provides youth education and mentoring support for the next generation of chefs, was hired to provide breakfast.

Goals of the Event

- 1 To engage 200 Marin residents and members of the education community to participate in the forum
- 2 To provide participants with accurate and up-to-date information about Marin's current education system related to student performance/achievement gaps
- 3 To provide participants an opportunity to examine root causes of current challenges in Marin's education system and evidenced-based, best practice strategies and solutions to existing problems
- 4 To increase participants' understanding and knowledge of race and class as they relate to education
- 5 To solicit interest and participation from participants towards civic engagement
- 6 To begin to plan for short and long-term processes with participants that will lead to a county-wide education initiative

Narrative Description of the Event

The day-long forum was held on Saturday, January 26, 2008 between 9:00am- 4:00pm at College of Marin's Student Services Building. Registration began at 8:15am and a free continental breakfast was available for all participants. Upon registration, participants were given their name tags and a folder of information (see Appendix A) that would be discussed during the forum.

The moderated forum began at approximately 9am and the first keynote speaker, Mr. Paul Kivel, began the forum with a few perspectives on race and class, led a silent and interactive exercise with the participants, and shared insights into action-oriented solutions.

Representatives from Canal Alliance and Marin Education Fund then presented data about the extent of the achievement gap between and among African American and Latino students compared to White and Asian students. Also mentioned in the presentation was the "justice gap" which provided information about the racial/ethnic breakdown of students who are involved in Marin County's juvenile justice system.

A panel group discussion followed in which the panel members were asked to provide their personal testimonies and experiences of racism and classism in Marin County public schools. After sharing their experiences, a question and answer session was moderated between the participants and the panel group.

In the afternoon, the second keynote speaker, Mr. Carlos E. Barron, spoke about the historical context of racism and classism in public education, particularly among the African American and Latino communities. He then offered various perspectives on different ways to systematically address the achievement gap through an educational approach in the form of curricula development with an emphasis on language arts.

In the second and final half of the afternoon, three action groups were offered for the participants to participate in. The action groups were:

- 1. Program and Curriculum Development**
- 2. Policy/Enforcement**
- 3. Advocacy**

After all the small action groups met, forum participants gathered again to report out the summary of each group discussion which produced a host of ideas and action steps that would work towards solutions to eliminating all inequities in Marin's public schools (see Appendix E). The day concluded with one of the planning committee members describing the overall next action steps which is the development and implementation of the initiative called **Race and Class: Marin County Education Equity Initiative.**

Outcomes of the Event

1. To engage 200 Marin residents and members of the education community to participate in the forum

185 Marin County residents RSVP'd throughout the course of the forum's outreach efforts. Of the 185, 120 attended while 50 walk-in participants registered on the day of the event totaling 170 participants who participated.

2. To provide participants with accurate and up-to-date information about Marin's current education system as it relates to student performance/achievement gaps

The planning committee researched Marin County public schools' up-to-date demographic information and test measurement performance results by various grade levels, racial/ethnic breakdown, and socioeconomic status. Due to the large body of information obtained from the research, the planning committee carefully selected information to disseminate at the forum which illustrated the achievement gap problem in Marin County public schools based on race and class. Other relevant information such as racial/ethnic breakdown of students and teachers in Marin County and the racial/ethnic breakdown of students involved in the juvenile justice system was also researched and presented during the forum (see Appendix B).

3. To provide participants an opportunity to examine root causes of current challenges in Marin's education system, and evidenced-based, best practice strategies and solutions to existing problems

The forum was designed to provide the participants a framework for understanding the root causes of existing problems in Marin's education system. The first keynote speaker, Paul Kivel, a nationally known educator, author, and activist shared his expertise, offered his insights, and led participants through an interactive exercise and discussion on practical steps in dealing with some of the existing problems facing Marin's public schools. The second keynote speaker, Carlos E. Barron, a long time educator and school administrator from Southern California, brought his expertise around educational teaching strategies and other evidence-based practices that have proven to be effective in accommodating diverse learning styles among different racial, ethnic, and other cultural groups. Based on evaluations submitted by participants after the forum, 98% of respondents reported that the forum increased their knowledge of how racism and classism affects Marin's education system.

4. To increase participants' understanding and knowledge of race and class as they relate to education

Based on the number of evaluation forms obtained during the forum, a question asking participants if they believe racism and classism exist in Marin's education

system, 100% of respondents agreed that racism and classism exist in Marin County's education system.

5. To solicit interest and participation from participants towards civic engagement

A total of 52 respondents completed and submitted their interest cards indicating their interest in actively participating towards civic engagement in various ways.

6. To begin to plan for short and long-term processes with participants that will lead to a county-wide education initiative

The forum offered three break-out action groups which included **Advocacy, Policy/Enforcement** and **Program and Curriculum Development**. Each group was asked to answer a guiding question related to the topic of discussion. That led to many ideas and several concrete action steps that individuals or groups of people committed to following-up after the event (see Appendix E). As mentioned earlier in this report, the forum planning committee also informed the participants about its next steps action plan that would pave the way for the initiative to begin. These steps are also included in this report.

Findings

Prior to the development of the planning committee and forum planning, several organizations had already begun to publicly educate Marin residents about the achievement gap problem in Marin's public school system. For example, The Youth Leadership Institute and the Marin County Youth Commission hosted and sponsored an Education Equity Forum which focused on finding ways to improve the cultural competence of school educators and administrators, thus, reducing discrimination. Also highlighted at that forum were issues around improving communication between parents, students, and school counselors, and finding ways to remove barriers to students completing A-G coursework. Also, at or around that time, California Senator Carole Migden met with Marin residents. That meeting was comprised of students, parents, educators, and concerned citizens who voiced their concerns about the achievement gap problem by discussing the possible development of new legislation that would reduce the achievement gap. The Marin Education Fund also has, for several years, organized Education Equity Week. Lastly, community members in Marin City have organized a 700 Day Campaign to improve the academic of their students.

The planning committee, however, believed that the achievement gap was not “the” problem but “a” consequence of a greater underlying problem – racism and socioeconomic classism. Therefore, the planning committee offered a forum dedicated to examining racism and classism as some of the root causes and driving forces behind the achievement gap and inequities that have been occurring in Marin's public schools. The forum planning committee also believed that racism and classism stem from a combination of unconscious and conscious forms of prejudices and discriminatory

beliefs, attitudes and behaviors towards people, particularly towards African American, Latino, and poor students. Until communities and individuals recognize and/or become aware of the nature and depth of these problems, any solutions to eliminate the achievement gap will only serve as band-aids that will usually result in failed results and continued discourse between the affected groups and non-affected groups in Marin County's education system.

During the forum, several themes resonated throughout the course of the day. For example, discussions surfaced around the enforcement of the **zero tolerance** policies against violence that are employed by school districts. This will be further discussed in the analysis section of this report. Concerns were raised and correlations were made about the application and/or misapplication of this policy in relationship to how African American, Latino, and poor students are negatively impacted which could help explain the achievement gaps and other existing inequities.

The No Child Left Behind Act was also a central issue that was examined at the forum. A general consensus among and within the small and large group discussions agreed that this act unfairly punishes schools and school districts by restricting, reducing, withholding, and/or threatening already financially struggling schools by creating unreasonable standards to achieve. Moreover, this act seems to operate from a premise that all districts are operating from an “even playing field,” thus, enforcing a “one size fits all” approach in measuring and holding school districts accountable to performance standards without any regard to other significant factors such as, but not limited to, racial and socioeconomic student demographics.

The term and concept of student “**dropout**” was also discussed and explored. An alternative perspective was offered in which the term dropout should be more appropriately termed as student “**pushout**” which will also be further explored in the analysis section of this report. The working assumptions based on this concept are that students genuinely want to go to school for the obvious benefits that education brings. However, due to the school systems’ poor policies and practices that foster an atmosphere of apathy, prejudice, and discrimination, coupled by the lack of culturally incompetent school administrators and educators and antiquated curricula, these common experiences by students, particularly African American, Latino, and poor students, often go unaddressed.

Another form of racism identified during the forum pertained to a school district’s name, **Dixie School District**. Although the authors of this report do not take a position nor purport to fully understand the historical context of the name Dixie, it is worth noting that for many African Americans in Marin County, and as expressed by many African American participants during the forum, the name Dixie is insensitive and insulting. The name carries with it negative connotations from the perspective and experiences of many African Americans symbolizing the negative historical association with the slavery and segregation era in the United States. To have a school district named Dixie, in their view, is quite simply insensitive and appears bigoted, intentionally or unintentionally.

With regards to teaching standards and strategies that effectively engage and motivate students to learn, many ideas and solutions were also discussed. Appropriate and culturally competent teaching methods and culturally relevant curricula were thematically discussed and examined. Of note, however, the concept of **evidence-based best practice(s)** was mentioned during the day. A question posed about the meaning of this term surfaced due to its popularity in many institutions and the fact that it is now being widely used. However, a general question surfaced about the intentional meaning of this concept, "For which cultural and socioeconomic groups is evidence-based best practice(s) relevant?" Some participants expressed skepticism about the true effectiveness of evidenced-based best practice(s) because it is often measured through the dominant and mainstream culture's ideological viewpoint and standards, often with very little regard or consideration to the sensitive and culturally unique needs of the historically disenfranchised communities.

The aforementioned themes and issues discussed throughout the day were also supported by data about the existing disparities between African American, Latino and socio-economically disadvantaged students and their counterparts in Marin County's public education system. Some of the data information from the 2007 California Department of Education statistics are as follows:

- **Low income students** – 19% of Marin students are socio-economically disadvantaged.
- **Student Racial Breakdown** – County-wide 64% of students are White, 20% Latino, 6% Asian and 3% African American. **Some schools are very segregated.** For example, Bahia Vista Elementary School in San Rafael is 99% students of color; MLK Academy in Marin City is 100% students of color; and Lynwood Elementary School in Novato is 64% students of color.
- **California Standards Test for 11th grade English Language Arts (2007)** – 70% of White and Asian students scored at the Proficient/Advanced level compared to only 23% for African American students and 20% for Latino students. 65% of economically advantaged students scored Proficient/Advanced compared to only 20% for economically disadvantaged students.
- **Algebra II (Grades 8-11)** – 37% of White students are Proficient/Advanced; 48% for Asians; 15% for Latinos; Only 10 African American students tested in Algebra II.
- **10th graders passing the High School Exit Exam** – 96% of White and Asian students passed the high school exit exam in 2007 while only 67% of Latino students and 62% of African American students reported passing.
- **"Drop out" rates** – The "dropout" rate for Whites is 2.1% and Asians is 1.0% while Latinos account for 7.4% and 9.0% for African Americans.

- **Graduating College Ready (with classes needed to enter a UC or CSU) in 2006** – 52% of Marin students graduated college ready. 62% of Asian students and 59% of White students graduated college ready, compared to 28% of African American students and 15% of Latino students. Statewide average for Latino is 26% and African American students is also 26%.
- **Marin County Teacher's Racial/Ethnic Diversity is below state average** – 92% White (state average = 71.6%), 3.9% Latino (state average = 15.6%), 2.4% Asian (state average = 6.4%), 0.7% African American (state average = 4.5%)

Other Notable Information

- **A disproportionate number of African American and Latino youth in Marin are in the juvenile justice system** – While 76.9% White, 13.4% Latino and 3.5% African Americans make up Marin County's population (excluding other racial/ethnic population), referrals to juvenile probation in 2007 comprised of 54% White, 28% Latinos, and 15.2% African Americans.

On any given average day in Marin County Juvenile Hall approximately 35% of incarcerated youth are African Americans, 42% are Latinos and 24% are White.

Youth who are court ordered for out-of-home group home placements due to behavioral and other problems are 43% African Americans, 32% Latinos and 23% White youth. Within Proposition 21 cases (youth charged as adults) 64% are Latinos, 27% African Americans and 9% White.

- **Economic Effect of the Achievement Gap:**

\$9,538 = California's average annual spending per student
 \$43,287 = California Department of Corrections annual spending per prisoner (see Appendix B)

Lastly, after careful review of the event's participant evaluations, interest cards, and comments made by participants throughout the day, the event organizers have concluded that the many people, adults and young people alike, are and have been waiting to get involved in processes, events, and activities that will directly confront racism and classism in Marin County's education system. **Participants from the forum and beyond have already committed to volunteer or contribute their time, energy, and other resources to ensure that a broader community of people is formed and maintained who will actively and effectively address and deal with racism and classism on all levels and in various forms.**

Analysis

Based on the body of information and knowledge gained from the forum and beyond, it is important to offer a working definition of the words “racism” and “socioeconomic classism” in order to appropriately set in context the true nature and complexity of these issues. The authors of this report define racism and classism interchangeably as both are often synonymous to each other in the United States, historically and currently. In one of its basic senses, racism, similar to classism, is defined as:

"The systematic and institutionalized (and routine) mistreatment of one group by another when the groups are differentiated by perceived or imputed skin color...because racism is institutional, the power is always on the side of the institutions, which favor white people....racism is not about prejudice; it is about power, and in American society only white people are placed in position to enforce racism." (Paul Kivel & Allan Creighton, Teens Need Teens; 1985)

Racism and prejudice, however, come from both unconscious and conscious levels which in turn perpetuate and/or enforce discrimination. It is not to say that white people do not experience prejudice based on their skin color in the United States from ethnic minorities. However, because racism is institutional, the power is always on the side of the institutions which favor white people.

In utilizing this working definition as a context to examine racism and classism, it becomes the guideline to analyze the underpinnings of the achievement gap problem that Marin County, California, and the United States have been experiencing for generations. Through the lenses of policies, program/curriculum development, and advocacy, the interconnections and workings of racism and classism in Marin County's Education system will hopefully illuminate the depth and pervasiveness of these problems in which the consequences, intentional or unintentional, are clearly understood not merely by defining the problem as the "achievement gap," but the root causes that underlie it.

Policy

This area of discussion during the forum was approached by asking a basic guiding question: **"What policies, systems and procedures are in place in Marin County public schools that promote and/or foster educational inequities?"** The central themes that emerged from these discussions and the information shared by experts during the forum were the schools' **zero tolerance** policies on violence and the unwritten systematic process of preventing **"White flight"** while preserving the **"Not In My Backyard (NIMBYism)"** syndrome.

The zero tolerance policy on school campus violence gained its prominence, and its legal basis and eventual development, in the 1990s as a direct result of the emerging and increasing on-campus mass killings by students across the United States, particularly in the American suburbs. Although the political and moral justification for the development of this and other similar policies is appropriate and necessary, it is the misapplication and

abuse in enforcement of this policy that is placed into question. The misapplication and misuse of the zero tolerance policy against violence in many Marin schools often targets Latino, African Americans, and poor students as evidenced by some of the data, particularly the disproportionate number of Latino and African American students who currently attend continuation schools, and the disproportionate number of Latino and African American students involved with the juvenile justice system. Several anecdotal testimonies were provided during the forum (see Appendix C).

In addition, the increased role, involvement, and legal intervention of local law enforcement agencies in the schools to quell or settle disputes from what used to be "typical" student-to-student conflicts and other problems, also plays a big factor in determining which students will usually get targeted for suspensions, expulsions, and citations, especially if the student appears to be "gang involved." In this case, "gang involved" has increasingly become a common code term which racially profiles students of color who appears to be a gang member due to their style of clothes, vocabulary and/or their living situations in particular neighborhoods in Marin County such as the Canal and Marin City. Therefore, the targeted student is more easily and readily scrutinized by not only school officials but also by local law enforcement agencies, thus, systematically paving the way for him/her to be placed at greater risk to be expelled, criminalized, and/or to simply "dropout."

Another factor that contributes to the inequities that are going on in Marin County schools is the inter-related dynamics of the **White flight** and the **NIMBY** syndrome. Many educators, administrators and school parents have acknowledged that there are continued and tremendous efforts and emphasis to retain middle, upper middle, and affluent students and their families in public schools by unfairly accommodating their needs and interests over the average working student and his/her family. The fear of losing these students and their families to private education, and the loss of revenues from financial contributions made by these families, create a dynamic by which school leaders often find themselves working for the interest of only this segment of the school population. In addition, perceptions and fears that if these economically advantaged and high achieving students were to leave public schools, there would be a "lowering" of academic test scores including the standardized **STAR Test** which is used to measure school districts and their students' performances and are directly related to state and federal funding allocations for the schools. These perceptions and fears contribute to the continued unequal treatment of disenfranchised students and their families by school leaders.

The connection between the White flight and **NIMBYism**, a form of discrimination, is based on a fear-based premise that NIMBYism is necessary in order to prevent the deterioration of the "quality of life" issues which is defined as, but not limited to, maintaining quality schools, preservation of property values, discouragement of "undesirable" people "encroaching" in their communities, and so on. For the economically advantaged communities, if these earned or unearned privileges are threatened, then the threat by these communities against the schools emerges in a form of the White flight syndrome.

Due to these fears, real or perceived, many local school districts have, by definition, become agents of **institutional racism and classism**, consciously or unconsciously, for the purpose of securing and/or maintaining adequate funding to benefit the already high achieving students and their families at the expense of poor students and their families, particularly African Americans and Latinos. It is not to say, however, that the high achieving students should be less deserving of high quality education, resources, and opportunities. The central issue is that all too often decisions and efforts are made unequally and unfairly favoring economically advantaged and high achieving students and their families. When threats against them are experienced, then the syndrome of "blaming the victim" emerges by placing responsibility/blame on these already disenfranchised communities for the schools' failures to provide adequate education, resources, and services. The discriminatory beliefs and attitudes generally conveyed are that if it were not for these "low achieving and highly needy" students, that the schools would be better off. Hardly mentioned or acknowledged, however, is how the schools' systems' policies and practices on all levels of the school environment perpetuate situations that keep these students "low achieving," and thus, become more "highly needy."

Program/Curriculum Development

One of the keynote speakers, Carlos E. Barron, led a discussion about the significance and importance of the educator community working towards the development of a culturally appropriate curriculum consistent to the learning styles and needs of African American and Latino students. He mentioned the importance of having a curriculum in which the vast contributions made by African Americans and Latinos throughout U.S. history in core subjects such as language arts, history, science and mathematics are mentioned and studied. He emphasized the relevance of this paradigm shift from the use of an antiquated, conventional curricula into existing "evidenced-based best practices" of teaching core subjects which are directly connected to the students' motivation to learn, to stay in school, and to increase hopes to obtain a higher education beyond the 12th grade.

Mr. Barron also underscored the importance of having Marin schools, its administrators, and boards prioritize their efforts to recruit and retain more qualified teachers of color. He recommended that, to the extent possible, ongoing training, workshops, and other opportunities for the entire school community, particularly educators, would be provided to stimulate dialogue and increase the likelihood of achieving some level of cultural competence. For the purpose of understanding what **cultural competence** actually means and how one becomes more culturally competent, the authors of this report offer a working definition of this term.

"Cultural competence is defined as a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals, and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations (Cross et al., 1989; Isaacs & Benjamin, 1991). Operationally defined, cultural competence is the integration and transformation of knowledge about

individuals and groups of people, into specific standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of services; thereby producing better outcomes (Davis, 1997 referring to health outcomes)" (Source: National Center for Cultural Competence)

Or a more simplistic definition is:

"Cultural competence is a developmental process that evolves over an extended period. Both individuals and organizations are at various levels of awareness, knowledge and skills along the cultural competence continuum." (Adapted from Cross et al, 1989)

Due to the wealth of information about the subject of cultural competence, there are also varying degrees of differences and similarities in defining cultural competence. The greatest distinctions that have been found between and among many individuals and organizations that are doing, or have done, this work are in the fields of educational disciplines and scope of competence/expertise, ethical/ideological values, and model approaches, framework and methodology of delivery under which they have been trained.

For example, one can obtain training in cultural competence through several approaches or models such as legal compliance, color-blind, prejudice reduction, and so on. Within these and other approaches are systematic ways to achieve cultural competence. However, the depth and genuineness of achieving cultural competence as defined above is suspect at best. Therefore, any individuals and organizations who desire to work towards increased cultural competence must understand and be careful that there are many schools of thoughts based on educational disciplines, scope of competence/expertise, values, and approaches in achieving such goals. A private hospital may want to retain training services to increase its personnel's cultural competence by hiring a psychologist whose training orientation is within the scope of his/her discipline in psychology. Conversely, a school who desires, or is perhaps mandated, to collaborate with a diverse community made up of teachers, parents, students, policy makers, administrators, and community partners who have different professional/personal ethical responsibilities, ideologies, obligations, mandates, and/or needs may want to consider choosing a process which draws from an eclectic approach using systems/education/social models that will most closely meet the communities' collective goals and objectives.

With regards to additional or adjunct programs that were talked about during the forum, the use and implementation of effectively proven and existing programs have yet to be fully taken advantage of by Marin County schools. For example, there are several community-based programs such as Marin YMCA's Youth Court that have the flexibility to also work within school sites and to collaboratively work with all school stakeholders to assist and support the schools in developing conflict resolution/mediation programs. Operating under a **"community restorative justice model and initiative,"** such programs have an abundant amount of benefits and other untapped potentials for the entire community to invest in. Unfortunately, all too often these types of programs,

despite their successes and proven positive outcomes, are not given fair opportunities to make a greater impact on the broader community due to limited funding and other factors.

Advocacy

Advocacy was one of the major focuses of the forum's discussions in terms of developing solutions. Advocacy was discussed on three levels, **micro** (direct), **mezzo** (community/organizational) and **macro** (institutional). There was a general consensus among the experts and participants alike who expressed their concerns about the lack of meaningful accountable systems, procedures, and collaborative processes that openly and respectfully confront issues of racism and classism on all levels in Marin County's school system. These procedures are lacking even when blatant and illegal practices of these forms of discrimination are being employed especially against Latino, African American and poor students. Despite of the fact that there are many people in all areas of the education community who desire to eliminate racism and classism in the school environment, they report, unfortunately, often feeling helpless due to issues of retaliation, harassment, and intimidation tactics used by people in positions of authority. This easily dissuades them from speaking up, and thus, eventually feeling apathetic to injustices that are occurring in their school environment.

Another major factor that contributes to the educational inequities that was discussed is the lack of political courage, vision, and wisdom by some elected officials and appointed school administrators throughout Marin County school districts. Many taxpayers and voters supported these administrators specifically to address these issues. At times, education leaders and administrators themselves have fostered and promoted racism and classism in their schools and school districts. This is evidenced by their own inactions, ignorance, or incompetence in addressing issues of discrimination, which result in further inequities, ultimately leading to the continued cycle of perpetuating the achievement gap problem.

For example, from a macro (institutional) perspective, in addition to the negative connotations that the name Dixie School District symbolizes for many African Americans in Marin County, equally hurtful is the use of Native peoples as a mascot through the use of the word "**Braves**" by Tomales High School in Marin County. Furthermore, the insistence of some school leaders who continued to pursue their interest to preserve the actual logo of a Native face and wearing a headdress further illustrates the lack of understanding about the effects that this have on Native Americans and the perpetuation of further misinformation about their heritage.

Despite the sociopolitical nature of this and other similar issues, the bottom line for many Native American families and their children is that it is offensive, degrading, and serves as another concrete reminder that racism is still alive, supposedly in one of the most "enlightened and educated" places in this country. The familiar experiences of many historically disenfranchised communities such as African Americans and Native

Americans with regards to these issues is that the dominant culture, who already live in an affirmed world by virtue of their social, political, and/or economic privileges and status, often continually insist that their intentions are not meant to insult groups of people, but rather to "celebrate" and/or "preserve" their subjective social constructs or interpretations of history and/or standards.

Another theme that was challenged is the term, "**drop out.**" The fundamental premise of this argument is that Latino, African American, and poor students do not desire to dropout of school. Instead, due to the powerful nature and forces behind racism and classism, these students are eventually "**pushed out**" of schools. Similar to the term, "zero tolerance policy" on violence, a question was posed in which we, as a community, were challenged to imagine a school where zero tolerance to suspensions and expulsions was equally valued, and where strong efforts were made to ensure that students are not pushed out. Although such a concept may seem all too altruistic, the idea of such a shift in paradigm could serve as a positive vision or direction not only for Marin County schools but for the entire country.

On a micro (direct) level, all members of the forum's organizing committee observed that the majority of participants during the forum shared their own personal experiences of racism, discrimination, and other forms of mistreatment. The event and/or topics covered brought a tremendous amount of justified anger and set off frustrations to which many participants expressed gratitude to the event organizers for creating an event that validated their negative experiences. By sharing each others' stories to one another, many people during the event indicated that their experiences had been acknowledged and they felt more compelled/empowered to take future actions by directly confronting racism and/or classism as it comes up in their daily lives.

An example of what racism looked like in the eyes of a parent was her recent experience with a white school administrator. An African American mother of a high school student in one of Marin County's public high school was called by the principal for a meeting. Apparently, her son was brought in to the principal's office by a school liaison police officer for allegedly creating a disturbance after school in or around a surrounding neighborhood. The mother and her son attempted to get a reasonable explanation from the principal as to why the liaison officer returned her son to school and into his office. After indirect attempts by the principal to explain to her about any rules or laws that he may have violated, according to the mother the principal bluntly said to her, "This is a lily white neighborhood and we want to keep it that way."

These, and many other similar examples of experiences and treatment, are all too common incidences within communities of color and among poor people. These incidences, unfortunately, are not given much attention by school authorities and eventually go unnoticed by those who are not direct beneficiaries of these types of discrimination. Furthermore, there are also incidences in which parents of students complain about the attitudes and behaviors of teachers and administrators that are racist and/or classist which too often gets minimized or denied by the accused. Although there are incidences in which students and parents sometimes over-react to these kinds of

unfortunate interactions and their perceptions can sometimes be placed out of context, the patterns and the effects of discrimination, real or imagined, have severe negative psychological consequences, especially when gone unaddressed or dealt with inadequately. Consequently, issues of mistrust or resentment builds or becomes re-enforced not only against the individual accused but against the school as a whole.

In as much as there are systems of accountability in place in schools that supposedly work to investigate these types of complaints, these systems are fundamentally weak and inadequate. In addition, due to the lack of meaningful direct advocacy support or services in Marin County where parents and students can possibly go for any possible redress or resolution, the problems of racism and classism continue to be perpetrated, unconsciously and consciously, in all areas of the Marin County's education system. One suggested solution identified at the forum is the development of a county-wide accountability and/or oversight organization that may be able to work in dealing with not only racism and classism on a micro level, but on an institutional level as well through education, advocacy, mediation, and perhaps legal or political actions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Marin County's education system provides one of the best educational opportunities and services throughout California. Year after year, most schools in Marin County rank amongst the highest performing schools statewide as evidenced by the state's standardized STAR Test results. However, many Marin County schools also share their own challenges which most schools in the nation continue to grapple with, the achievement gap. After much research into the root causes of the achievement gap problem, racism and socioeconomic classism play significant roles in creating and maintaining disparate and unequal treatment of students and their families which consequently re-enforce the disproportionate number of African American, Latino, and economically disadvantaged students who are failing in Marin's school system.

During the day-long event titled Race and Class: "Problems and Solutions in Marin County's Education System" that was held in January, 2008, it became evident that long-standing patterns and practices of racism and classism on all levels of the education system have, by and large, gone unaddressed and/or inadequately dealt with. Moreover, the lack of understanding about the subjects of race and class, and how they negatively impact Marin County schools and the community as a whole has mischaracterized what underlies today's achievement gap that has been occurring in Marin County schools.

The achievement gap problem in Marin County schools and beyond did not occur over night. In fact, the authors of this report have found and believe that most school leaders who value quality education for all students are well intentioned to ensure that everyone is afforded the same great opportunities and services that Marin County schools offer. However, due to the lack of understanding about the unconscious and conscious levels and forms of racism and classism that reside in all schools, similar to many other institutions, systems and communities (especially where there are diverse people who

have diverse needs), the unintended and/or intended consequence has resulted in an educational achievement gap in Marin County schools and negatively affects everyone.

Most people from all sectors of the school communities throughout Marin County genuinely desire to have a school environment and atmosphere free of all forms of discrimination. However, in the absence of any meaningful dialogue, partnerships, collaborations, and processes that would enable people to share their common struggles, frustrations, and sense of helplessness in combating racism, classism and other forms of discrimination, many feel, or have felt, isolated, mistrustful, apathetic, and hopeless in creating positive changes. Consequently, the cycle and pervasiveness of these problems just continues and goes unaddressed and unchallenged.

In addition, recognizing that the Marin's education system has, and will continue to, face economic hardships, short and long-term, there is no better time than now to work collaboratively in addressing the achievement gap problem. Operating from the position of strength, in that there is an abundant amount of natural and untapped resources, skills and talents available in Marin County schools and the communities at large, the authors of this report believe that to eliminate racism and classism should not require a lot of money. Rather, it will require individual and collective will, high commitment, leadership, courage, and partnerships from people, adults, and young people alike, to work towards the elimination of the achievement gap and its root causes. Although there are no existing ways to eliminate people's hateful, misguided and bigoted beliefs and attitudes, the authors of this report firmly believe that the small few who consciously perpetrate acts of racism, classism, and other forms of discrimination in Marin County schools can and should be held accountable for their behaviors by people whom they serve.

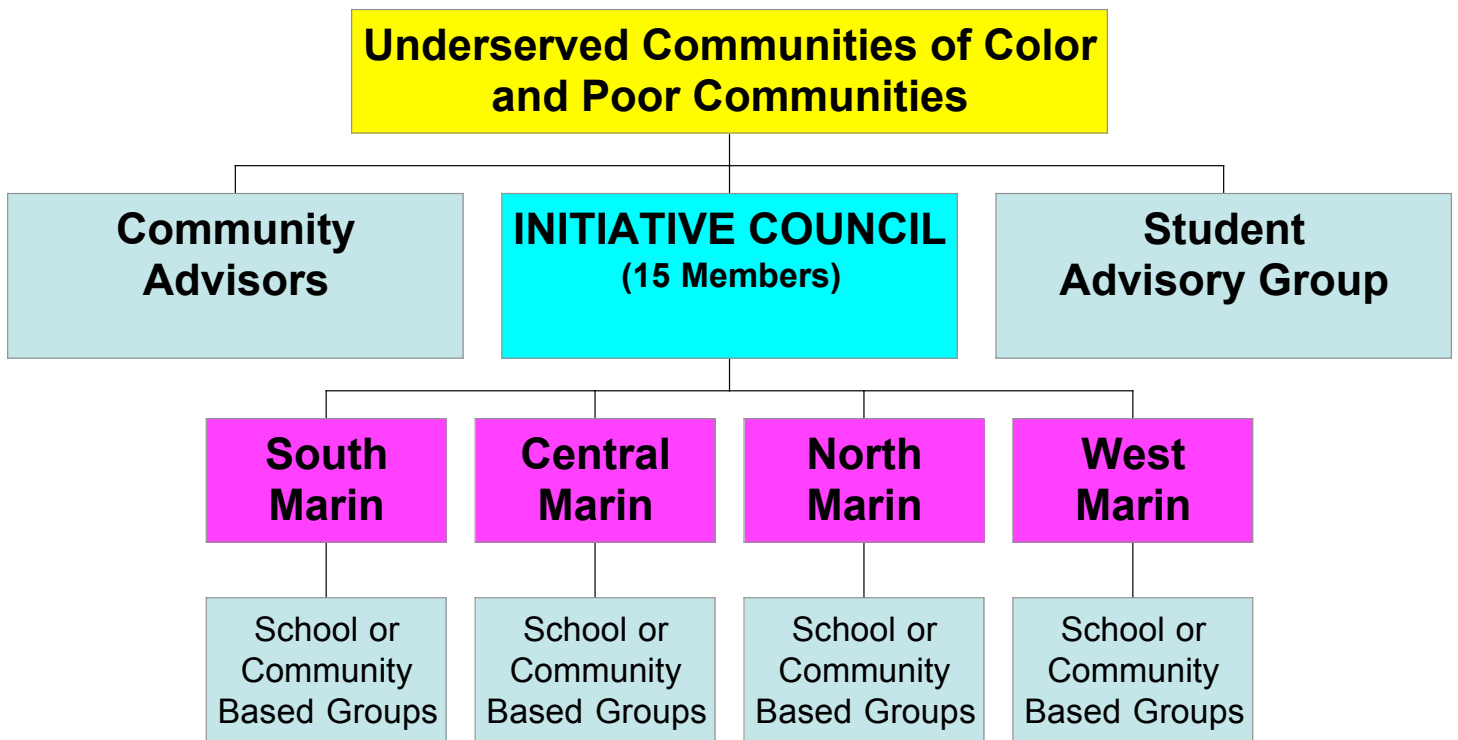
The authors of this report do not claim to be, nor are interested in, creating concrete solutions that would eliminate Marin County's achievement gap problem and what underlies it. However, the authors of this report are committed and will recommend that a process by which meaningful dialogue through education, collaborations, partnerships, and community empowerment be developed. That being said, a **“ground-up,” community, grassroots-driven process** will be developed and implemented in the subsequent months and years that follow. Billed as the **Race and Class: Marin County Education Equity Initiative**, this initiative will endeavor to create a sustainable strategic plan that will work towards the elimination of the achievement gap problem in Marin County schools.

Through active civic engagement and participation by as many people as possible in Marin County who believe in quality education for all, this inclusive initiative will solicit and recruit the energy, time, and resources of Marin County residents and other stakeholders in various forms and levels in hopes of creating greater partnerships with Marin County school leaders and educators.

RACE AND CLASS:

MARIN COUNTY EDUCATION EQUITY INITIATIVE

MARIN COUNTY RACE & CLASS EDUCATION INITIATIVE



RACE AND CLASS

2008 Marin County Education Equity Initiative

THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

Purpose

The purpose of the Marin County Education Initiative is to develop, plan for, and implement a sustainable county-wide effort that will work to eliminate educational disparities and inequities in Marin County's education system.

Mission Statement of the Initiative

The mission of the initiative is to eliminate educational inequities in Marin County's education system.

Initiative's Working Philosophy and Practices

- The initiative is committed to a **“bottom-up”**, community-driven, organizing process and approach.
- The initiative believes that the parent and student communities are **equal partners** in shaping and developing policies and best-practice programs and resources.
- The initiative is committed to **working with all** individuals, organizations, and communities who are working to eliminate educational inequities in Marin County.
- The initiative will work to **address barriers** where they exist in Marin County's education system that prevent equal access, opportunities, and treatment of students, particularly among students of color and low income students and their families.
- The initiative will work towards **long-term, sustainable solutions** towards institutional and systemic changes in Marin County's education system to achieve equality.
- The initiative will be **transparent and accountable** to its constituents (underachieving students of color, and low income students and their families) and to the community at-large.

Goals

1. **To develop and maintain a sustainable community process of engagement that will work towards its stated mission.**
2. **To support and coordinate similar efforts that are currently being undertaken in eliminating educational inequities in Marin County's education system.**

Objectives

The initiative will employ various strategies to accomplish its mission and its goals through:

- **Education**
- **Policy and legislation**
- **Advocacy (macro, mezzo, and micro levels)**
- **Action-oriented public events and activities**

Method

The initiative will endeavor to create an organizing process that will be approached on three levels. They are:

1. **Community/Capacity Building** through education and dialogue
2. **Engagement** through advocacy and mobilization of resources and efforts: macro, mezzo and micro levels
3. **Sustainability** of ongoing accountability and institutionalization of policies, procedures, and best practices that will work to achieve the initiative's mission

The initiative will develop an organizational structure called the **INITIATIVE COUNCIL** that will promote and foster collaboration and partnership. The decision-making body of the initiative will be made up of a maximum of fifteen voting **(15) council members**. For the purpose of preserving the integrity of the initiative's philosophy of having the process come from the "bottom up," the council will designate seven **(7) parents or adult community members** who **ARE NOT** receiving benefits,

and/or **DO NOT** have any direct or indirect personal ties for the purpose of benefiting him/herself and/or his/her organization, three **(3) high school or college students** (no older than 21 years old), and five **(5) school or community organization representatives**.

The Council will also have two additional systems—**Community Advisory** and **Student Advisory Groups** in place for other interested individuals and organizations who would like to directly get involved on this level. The purpose of these groups is to advise the Initiative Council on issues and subjects related to the initiative’s mission, purpose, goals, and objectives. However, the advisory boards do not hold any voting rights or privileges. All Initiative Council meetings are open to the public with an opportunity for the any member of the public to address the Council during the designated open times within each meeting.

The initiative will designate four **(4) regional districts** in Marin County – North, South, Central and West – to develop its own **DISTRICT STEERING COMMITTEES** with its own group structures and rules. The purpose of these committees will be to establish a support network and to develop a support system consistent to their needs and goals. The purpose of this design is to promote regional autonomy while continuing to work with other districts in Marin County towards a coordinated collaboration and partnership.

Lastly, within each regional district, it is recommended that the steering committees assist and support the development of **HOME GROUPS**. Home groups could serve a similar purpose and function as the district steering committees by being a school site-specific support group for the school community with similar autonomy. In addition, Home Groups could also serve as a source to recruit parents and students who can play an active role as a delegate(s) to the District Steering Committees.

To the extent possible and feasible, the INITIATIVE COUNCIL shall be representative of the four regional areas in Marin County. Initiative organizers will carefully recruit, outreach, and solicit active participation and membership from all regional districts to achieve geographic balance of representation.

2008 Initiative Work Plan

Community, Capacity and Partnership Building (Year One)

1. Initiative organizers will offer and conduct free educational trainings and support organizing and capacity building in each regional district for the purpose of providing support and assistance to interested community members who are willing and able to be a part of the initiative. (This will be offered throughout the first year).
2. Initiative organizers will establish communication systems with Initiative members, supporters, and partners.

3. Initiative organizers will support other efforts in Marin County that share a similar mission, goals, and objectives.
4. Initiative organizers will recruit and provide support to the Initiative Council's overall development.

Engagement (Year Two)

1. Initiative organizers will begin and/or continue to develop and maintain relationships and partnerships by engaging in dialogue and actions about problems and solutions with people in power/authority who can facilitate positive changes.
2. Initiative organizers will continue to advocate for and/or on behalf of underserved students of color and poor students on a macro, mezzo and micro level.

Sustainability (Year Three)

1. Upon the development of the Initiative Council, the Steering Committees and/or Home Groups, Initiative organizers will continue to seek various forms of support to ensure that the Initiative transforms to an institutionalized mechanism for positive change and sustainability in Marin County's education system.

Memorandum of Understanding

Organization Criterion for Joining the Initiative

1. A willingness to commit to the initiative's mission, goals, objectives, principles, and values.
2. A willingness to commit to work for and with the parent and student communities towards empowerment.
3. Recognizing and accepting that the parent and student communities are co-leaders and equal decision makers on all levels of the initiative.
4. Any and all intention and/or plan to pursue funding opportunities and allocations are communicated to the Initiative Council prior to the submission of the Request for Proposals (RFP).

Community Member Criterion for Joining the Initiative

1. A willingness to commit to the initiative's mission, goals, objectives, principles, and values.
2. A willingness to work with a diverse group of people and organizations involved within the initiative.