

**Concerns on How the Focus of Maryland's School System Propagates the Achievement Gap.**

In Maryland, our upward-focused school system leaves behind students who wallow at the undesirable end of the Achievement Gap.

The following is rationale behind this statement.

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**Upward Focus**

When schools and educators are evaluated based on student performance data, an **upward focus** is created. Graduation rates, test scores, attendance rates, and SLOs are among those data values. This focus leaves behind the in-school needs of the low-achieving, low socio-economic students in our schools. In this context, our schools are unresponsive.

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**Students above the 2.0 GPA line . . .**

The current upward focus in our State's school system is transparent to most students who are above the 2.0 line. The higher a student's GPA, the more transparent is this upward focus to the student.

These kids are likely to succeed in most any school setting.

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**Students below the 2.0 GPA line . . .**

To the students who have < 2.0 GPA, and are in the low socio-economic life situation, this upward focus is also transparent , but for a different reason.

These kids come and go as ghosts, to and from school. For those who graduate, their only "academic success" is passing the high-stakes tests, and earning enough credit to graduate.

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**For students below the 2.0 GPA line . . .**

These kids have only added to numbers used in the evaluation of schools and educators.

Passing standardized tests, and graduating from high school – these alone do not prepare anyone for college or career readiness.

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**College or Career Readiness . . .**

Efforts to produce high school graduates across our State who are College or Career Ready are pointing at the right target.

However, the current means is a ball-and-chain to any effort to bring the low-achieving, low-socio economic student to College or Career Readiness.

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In order to address the Achievement Gap in Maryland, Maryland's K-12 Education system needs to begin a transition from being *unresponsive* to *responsive*.

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## Unresponsive School System

### Three Characteristics of an Unresponsive School System

1. Principals are unable to assert effective focus on in-school needs of low-achieving portion of student population.
2. The low-achieving portion of student population remains academically deficient until they either drop-out, or graduate.
3. Despite performance of the low-achieving student population, administrator and educator focus remains on producing acceptable numbers – particularly graduation rates, and passing rates for high stakes tests, as required by the agency above.

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## Responsive School System

### Six Characteristics of a Responsive School System

1. Principals have freedom to assert focus on in-school needs of the low-achieving student in their school.
2. A key focus of the District Office is to support initiatives at the school-level. Initiatives are identified and negotiated between the school Principal and the District Office. (Example - use of AVID in grades 10-12 for sub-2.0 students at end of Grade 9.)
3. The Low-achieving portion of student population is targeted for *during* and *after* school academic support.

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### Responsive School System *(continued)*

- 4. Low-achievement (< 2.0) triggers school administration (or team leader) attention – not in order to fix data requirements, but rather to bring attention to *during* and *after* school needs of student.
- 5. The State Department of Education monitors and receives data on successes and failures of the different programs in the form of a Library. This can be tied to the MLDS.
- 6. The State Department of Education has no obligations to an agency above.

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### Summary

In summary, addressing the Achievement Gap requires a responsive school system that empowers school Principals to direct focus, resources, and support toward the low-achieving, low socio-economic student.

The focus must be on students, not on student data.

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