**Vista High School Best Practices to Raise Student Achievement**

**Introduction**

The purpose of this case study is to associate the gaps of student achievement in low socioeconomic status (SES) Hispanic students versus non SES Hispanic students using the percentages of proficient and advanced achievement from the 2013 California State Test (CST) results for Vista High School with school wide best practices that can aid in lowering the achievement gap between these populations of students. The results from the first case study show that students who are economically disadvantaged and Hispanic perform at levels that are significantly lower than students who are not economically disadvantaged and non-Hispanic. Current best practices at Vista High School include development and implementation of professional learning communities (PLC) and instructional rounds.

**Best Practices for Low SES Hispanic Students**

Annotated bibliographies gathered from students in the Masters in educational administration program at CSUSM will be used to provide a possible set of best practices that will address the achievement gap that is present between economically disadvantaged Hispanic students and non-economically disadvantaged non-Hispanic students at Vista High School.

A best practice that can be used by a school to support struggling students is to improve the way that teachers assess their students. The use of a teacher’s biased judgment to assess students was seen in Pedulla, Airasian, and Madaus’ (1980) study in which teachers predicted the student’s performance on standardized tests based on ratings of classroom behavior and academics. These teachers were not able to separate their non-academic judgments with the actual academic performance of their students. However, research completed by Martinez, Stecher, and Borko (2009) suggests that predicting the level of achievement by students can be done when teachers incorporate high standards. When this is implemented, the teachers are more likely to be able to predict the level of student achievement on standardized tests. Bonesrønning (2004) noted in his research that students who are exposed to difficult grading practices perform significantly better than other students while high-achieving students perform at an even higher rate when grading practices have high levels of accountability. While rigor is an important aspect in assessment it is also important to understand that teachers who assign more importance on standardized tests will have a negative impact on their ability to correlate their own grading system to the standardized tests (Martinez, Stecher, & Borko, 2009). This can be seen when teachers manipulate student data through the teacher’s perceived levels of student achievement (Bonesrønning, 2004). Marzano and Heflebower (2010) explain how past grading systems that involve adding points and then assigning letter grades to various percentages of points accumulated by the student do not offer a holistic view of the achievement of the student. In order to accomplish this, assessment practices should allow students to have clarity in the task that they are given, have relevance in the curriculum they are learning, and have potential to be successful because of confidence obtained from effective teacher feedback (McTighe & O’Conner, 2005). Completing a rubric scale that uses proficiencies to determine student level of understanding for each topic can do this. This can then be used as an alternative to archaic point systems (Marzano & Heflebower, 2010).

Another best practice that can be used in lowering the gap of student achievement is encouraging economically disadvantaged Hispanic students and their families to enroll in Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). In their research, Huerta, Watt, and Butcher (2013) found that students who were enrolled in AVID classes before high school were more likely to be prepared for the rigors of high school and college than those students who were not in AVID. Students who complete AVID in middle school were also more likely to take challenging classes in high school and college. Research by Dean (2009) suggests that AVID classes were effective in giving students the opportunity to access their academic potential. Dean states that AVID will “help educators particularly those who teach in a minority and lower socioeconomic areas, close the widening gap in academic performance between their students and those in the more affluent neighborhoods” (p. 5). In a different study AVID had shown to increase graduation rates, advance course enrollment, and Advanced Placement exam results. The research showed that minority groups and students of lower income families could show success by being enrolled in AVID (Watt, Powell, Mendiola, & Cossio, 2006).

**Conclusion**

In summary, existing practices at Vista High School to assist underachieving students include professional learning communities and the beginning stages of implementing instructional rounds. Due to the continued low achievement of economically disadvantaged Hispanic students when compared to achievement of non-economically disadvantaged non-Hispanics at Vista High School, the researched interventions of enrolling more students into the AVID program and improving the way that teachers assess their students will be considered in an action plan to lower the gap in achievement.

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