

# Improving Academic Achievement

*We've come a long way... yet there is still work to be done*

## Executive Summary

Schools of Hope began in 1995 as a civic journalism project of the Wisconsin State Journal and WISC-TV that looked at critical issues in the Madison Metropolitan School District, including safety, discipline, cost, race, culture, family involvement, and academic standards and achievement. A Leadership Team (the list of partners can be found on page 3), convened and chaired by United Way of Dane County, recognized that the achievement gap between students of color and their white peers was growing larger despite millions of dollars and significant efforts that had been attempted over the past twenty years at the school district. To address this need, they created a community effort to support the work of schools to reduce the racial achievement gap.

## Goals

By June 2005 increase the proportion of African American, Latino, Southeast Asian and American Indian students who

1. Score at or above the state standards on Third Grade Reading Test
  - Increase the percentage and number of students taking the Third Grade Reading Test
  - Increase Kindergarten readiness
2. Score at the basic level or higher on Math and Reading in the Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS) standardized tests in fourth, eighth and tenth grades.
3. Increase the percentage of students completing algebra before 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

## Strategies

To obtain the best results, research was used to develop the following strategies

- Utilize trained tutors to motivate students to do school work and see academic achievement as important.
- Emphasize the important role that homework plays in academic achievement. Offer tutoring and academic support connected to what's happening in the classroom to impact achievement.
- Encourage small classes and small schools. Research shows that they are strongly related to high academic achievement.
- Encourage parents to know and understand school rules, procedures and expectations.
- Assist the community in their knowledge and understanding of the importance of cultural and linguistic differences.
- Support recreational activities, sports and other in-school alternatives for children that reinforce home/school connections, reduce school alienation and increase academic achievement.

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## Tactics

Two methods proved most successful

- Tutoring
- Smaller class sizes

Tutoring has been taken to scale. Last year alone, over 500 tutors worked with 3,000 students grades K – 3 in concert with the classroom teacher. Over the 10 years of the project more than 16,000 students have benefited from trained tutors. Through a grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service, there are 13 VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) volunteer coordinators in 24 of the Madison Metropolitan School District elementary schools. RSVP of Dane County has taken the lead in recruiting and training volunteers to tutor students.

Starting at Glendale School in 1997-98, MMSD was able to lower the K-3 class room sizes in 27 of the 30 elementary schools as of the 2000-2001 school year. In addition MMSD developed new reading curriculum, extensive teacher training and in class assessments.

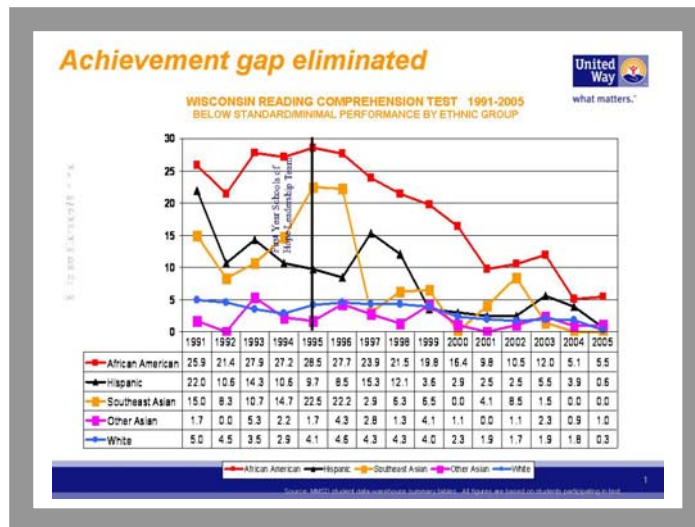
## Results

As the two graphs on this page illustrate, the performance goals for the Third Grade Reading Test are being accomplished.

- The percentage of students of color at or above the state standards has risen to a point where race is no longer an accurate predictor of test outcome.

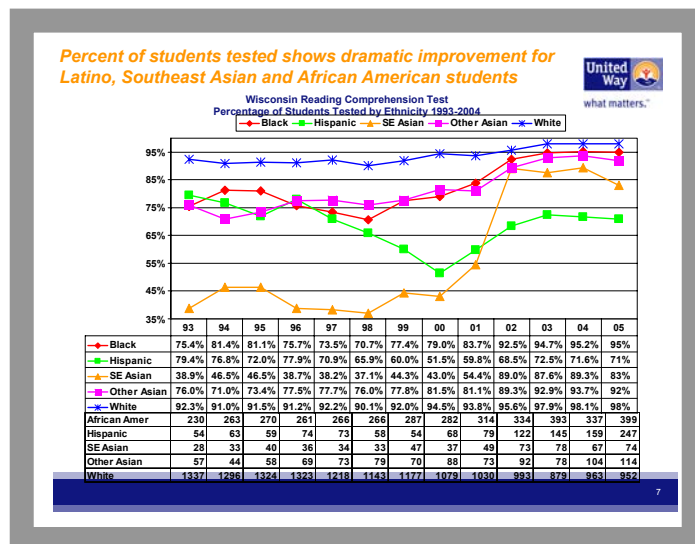
“The results had been going in the wrong direction for so long that the biggest challenge was convincing people this could change.”

-Leslie Ann Howard



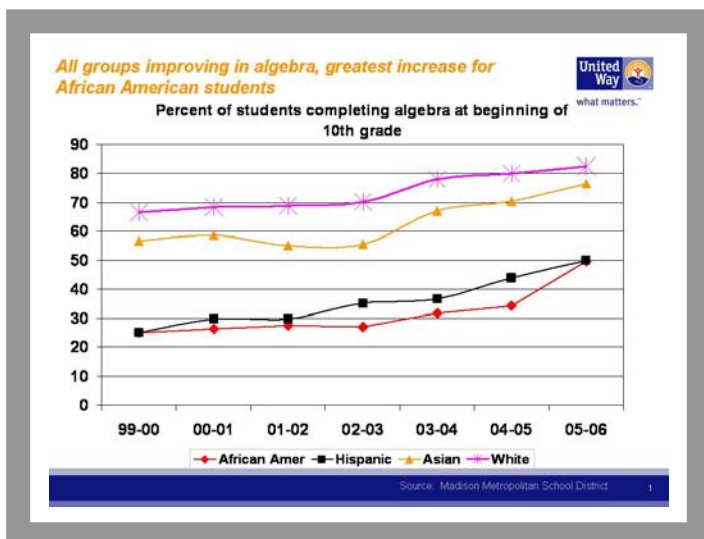
The percentages of students below standard/minimal on the Third Grade Reading Test by racial group from 1995 to 2005 are:

- African American students—from 28.5% to 5.5%
- Latino/Hispanic students—from 9.7% to 6%
- Southeast Asian students—from 22.5% to 0%
- Other Asian students—from 1.7% to 1%
- White students—from 4.1% to 3%



From 1998 through 2005 there has been an increase in the percent of students taking this test, which, by racial group, is as follows:

- African American students: from 71% to 95%
- Latino students: 66% to 71%  
(68 students in 1998 vs. 247 students in 2005)
- Southeast Asian students: from 37% to 88%
- Other Asian students: from 76% to 92%
- White students: from 90% to 98%



## The Next Steps

### Passing Algebra by 10<sup>th</sup> Grade

Algebra is what teachers call a gateway course you have to go through it to reach the possibilities beyond. It is the language of math and science, and the language of problem solving. It deals in abstractions that expand thinking skills. Also, middle school represents the second most available time for brain development and our ability to influence student learning.

A child from a low-income family who succeeds in algebra stands virtually the same chance of going to college as a child from an upper-income family who passes the course. (Source: GEAR Up Program)

Just as 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading scores became our thermometer of success, passing algebra by 10<sup>th</sup> grade will also measure the difference our efforts are making.

#### Results so far

In the 1999-2000 school year, only 25% of Madison Schools' African Americans passed algebra. Currently 50% of African American students are passing algebra by 10<sup>th</sup> grade. (Source: MMSD).

78% of students who receive tutoring are not referred to summer school for math.

#### Tactics

When we first looked at this issue, there were many efforts going on in the middle schools but little coordination.

### Schools of Hope Leadership Team

United Way of Dane County, Lead Organization  
100 Black Men  
Centro Hispano  
Dane County Executive  
Dane County Juvenile Court  
Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce  
MMSD Board of Education  
Madison Area Technical College  
Madison Community Foundation  
Madison Jewish Community Council  
Madison Teachers, Inc.  
Mayor, City of Madison  
Parents  
Superintendent, Madison Metro School District  
University of Wisconsin School of Education  
United Way Growing Up Getting Ready Team  
Urban League of Greater Madison  
Wisconsin State Journal  
WISC-TV

Urban League and MMSD have taken the lead in coordinating this effort. Since the 2000-2001 school year, the Urban League has been providing academic support and enrichment services through its Schools of Hope initiative.

In partnership with MMSD, Urban League has volunteer coordinators in nine of the eleven Madison middle schools. They recruit, train and place volunteer tutors and also work to coordinate the variety of programs that offer tutoring services to this population, including Centro Hispano's Juventud Program. MMSD provides technical assistance and program support to ensure that volunteers understand the current curriculum taught to students in the classroom.

Collectively, we've recruited over 490 volunteers to work with more than 900 students. Volunteers have reported feeling successful in their work with students, but there is still work to be done on closing the achievement gap.

Students receive one-on-one and small group tutoring services during the regular school day and after school enrichment programs. The Urban League focuses on building community-school partnership through aligning with the school district's goal of increasing regular school attendance, and successful completion of algebra during the students' first year in high school.

Our primary challenges continue to be recruiting tutors of color and male tutors.

## Getting Off to the Right Start

Recent research on kindergarten entry levels indicates that children who enter kindergarten without basic readiness skills tend to continue to lag behind their peers unless intensive and informed intervention is provided. On the spring 2005 Kindergarten Screener, children from families in poverty, children of color, and English language learners scored significantly lower than did children from middle-income families, white families, and English-proficient families.

### Goal

Ensuring that children are cared for and have fun as they prepare for school is a top priority. We are working in several areas to help children become prepared for school.

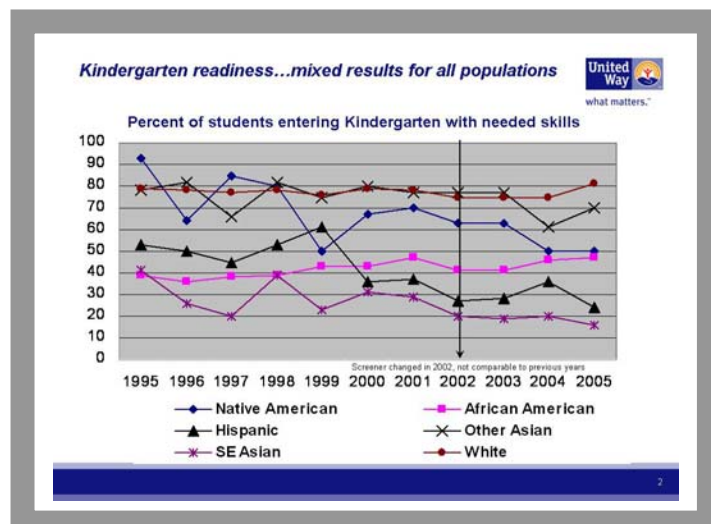
### Strategies

#### Home Visitation

Research indicates that the best time to influence parenting is when the first child is born. The best strategy is to provide support for the family in their home. Trained paraprofessionals provide support on a weekly basis for up to one year for families that are deemed by their physician to be at risk for child abuse and neglect.

#### Parenting Education

According to research, adults vary greatly in the way they seek information. As a result we support a variety of services that provide parenting education so there is something for everyone. Examples include parenting support groups, classes, research based newsletters, crisis childcare and crisis phone support.



### Preschools of Hope

Using Schools of Hope as our model, Preschools of Hope focuses on placing literacy volunteers in non profit preschools and working in the summer K-Ready classrooms for MMSD. VISTA volunteer coordinators in non profit preschools support volunteers to provide an additional boost to literacy in the preschool setting. A new, exciting component to our project is SPARC-EL (School, Parents And Reading Connection - Early Literacy) where we provide early literacy kits for preschools, which are distributed to families to encourage time for literacy in the home.

In the summer, VISTAs become literacy tutors in K-Ready classrooms. Students attending these summer sessions have been identified as needing a boost to be at the same level as their peers when they get to kindergarten. An evaluation in the first year of the program showed that children in the classrooms that had VISTAs improved their skills at a higher rate than those in classrooms without VISTAs.

early childhood

## Results

### Preschools of Hope

Over the two years of this project, we have engaged 150 community volunteers in our preschool efforts. These volunteers have provided volunteer literacy support to children in 16 nonprofit preschools. We have 10 VISTAs as volunteer coordinators who monitor and evaluate the successes we are having on volunteers, students and preschools in the community. It is too soon to tell what impact we are having for these children. An evaluation of the program will be conducted in 2007.

### Home Visitation and Parent Education

In both of these strategies we know from parent self evaluations that parents feel more confident about their own skills and more aware of support services available to them should the need arise.

Low-income children now comprise roughly 50% of all incoming kindergartners in Madison. High quality early childhood care and education experiences have been proven to have a significant impact on kindergarten entry level. Home visitation and quality parenting education have been proven to prevent child abuse and neglect. Through the support of trained, consistent volunteers in each of the participating preschools, and the trained professionals providing home visitation and parent education, our work will assist in closing the gap at kindergarten entry.

## *Continuing Efforts –Reading, Math and Preschool*

The SOH Leadership team met in December of 2005 to celebrate ten years of focus on this issue and the ensuing success. They have determined that we will continue our efforts, which have reduced the racial achievement gap at below standard and minimal performance between students of color and white students for K-3.

We will continue to further develop the volunteer tutoring effort at Pre-K level to increase preschoolers' skills so that more students enter kindergarten ready to be successful.

We will further develop volunteer tutoring at the middle and high school level to increase the percent of students of color passing algebra by the beginning of 10th grade, continuing to foster the relationship between teachers and volunteer tutors.

All of these efforts will have an increased focus on Latino students and low income African American students. The Leadership team will also be looking at ways to continue the tutoring relationship between tutors and students during the summer and through ninth grade.

We have recently expanded our SOH Elementary model to the Sun Prairie Area School District, working in two of their elementary schools. The Verona Area School District in discussing starting a program in the fall of 2006. These efforts will bring hope and success to more of our Dane County children.

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