



This is an important year. It will be a year of challenges but also a year of opportunity. A chance to achieve real equity in the classroom.

From their first day at kindergarten until their last day of high school, students and parents of color report a different experience, often negative, from school administrators, office staff and teachers. Our challenge is to recognize that in spite of all our efforts, most of us are not successful in having the same high expectations for our students of color.

While there are some successes, overall, students of color are not achieving academically at the same rates of other students. Perhaps we need to begin with the students who are thriving. Research shows student success is often relational, that another adult has supported and helped them flourish academically and emotionally. This means we need to recognize the importance of having an authentic relationship with our students. Our interactions, or lack thereof, can determine how the student sees themselves and their belief in their ability to succeed.

Many economically disadvantaged students live in a chronic state of stress, with symptoms mimicking those of ADHD. They are labeled as discipline problems. To combat the impact of poverty in the classroom, we need to have more empathy and avoid judging students, understanding kids don't choose the situation they live in.¹

Our district is beginning to acknowledge their part in this problem and realize top down programs don't work or promote meaningful change. They have started to recognize why Professional Development needs to be relevant to modern teaching practices and differentiated to the needs of specific fields (SPED, SLP, Nurses, etc.). This year the district has promised to clarify teaching priorities and student "master" standards by grade level. We applaud this effort, as it will be helpful for all of us to work from the same blueprint.

We are also moving towards becoming sincere Professional Learning Communities. We want to learn from teachers and administrators at schools where collaboration between teachers is working. We all know of teachers that have been very successful with their students of color. They should be the ones to lead us in culturally relevant professional development, to help us accomplish our greater goal of impactful learning for all students.

We can take this challenge by promising to do three things.

1. Make a real effort to build a relationship with each of your students, but set aside focus for students of color, LGBTQ and those with special needs.
2. Keep your standards high for all students
3. Open your mind and heart to new strategies and to respectful sharing.

This is our problem. We cannot abdicate our responsibility to create change. We must all work better together.

Thank you for all you do.
Sarah Braff SMMCTA President

¹ Education Dive – Measuring the impact of poverty in education. Written by Jarrett Carter, August 8th, 2016