



# **Closing Opportunity Gaps through Effective Practices: Lessons Learned from MSAN**

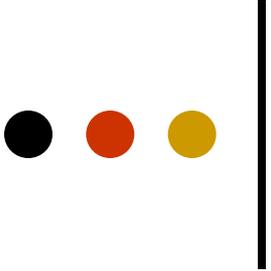
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Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN)

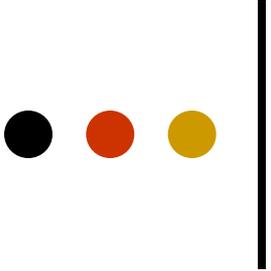
University of Wisconsin-Madison

October 26, 2015



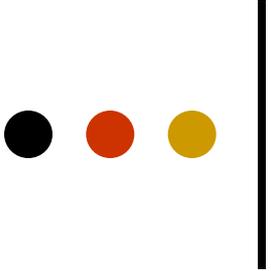
# Purpose of Session

- Share promising practices and current research that have assisted MSAN school districts in Wisconsin and across the U.S. in understanding and eliminating opportunity gaps that persist in our schools.



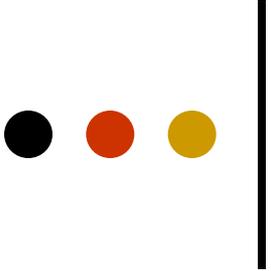
# Agenda

- What is **MSAN**?
- Why is **changing the narrative** from “achievement gap” to “opportunity gaps” an essential step in ensuring racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students are successful in our schools?
- What classroom, school, and district-level **initiatives** have been shown to be successful in closing these gaps?



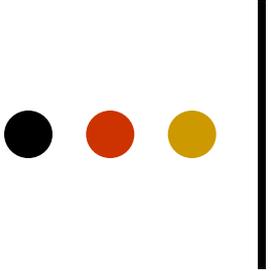
# ● ● ● | Agenda (What do you need today?)

- What are the most significant challenges your school is facing regarding the education of students of color?
- Think (3) – Pair (2) – Share (1)
- 3 x 3 x 3
  - 3 Resources
  - 3 People
  - 3 Next Steps



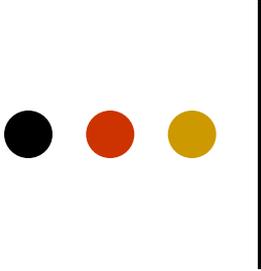
## What is **MSAN**?

- A national coalition of 28 multiracial, suburban-urban school districts working together to understand and eliminate opportunity gaps that persist in our schools.
- MSAN districts share strikingly similar and disturbing disaggregated achievement data.
- MSAN's mission is to discover and propose strategies to change school practices and structures that keep opportunity gaps in place.



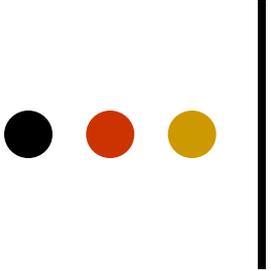
# MSAN Districts

- Student populations between 3,000 and 34,000.
- Share a history of high academic achievement and racial integration.
- Connections to universities or research organizations.
- Demonstrated efforts to confront institutionalized racism as it manifests across educational policies and practices.



# MSAN District Demographics

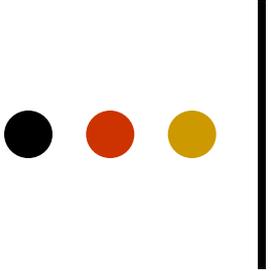
- Total Student Population
  - 3,000-34,000
- Students of Color
  - 20%-98%
- Free/Reduced Lunch
  - 6%-100%
- Special Education Placement Rate
  - 8%-19%
- English Language Learners
  - 2%-31%



# Core Practices

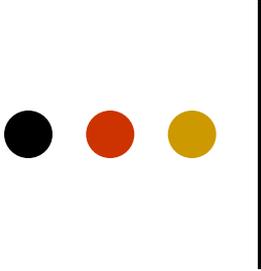
- Engage in **collaborative research** in which practitioners and researchers are equal partners in designing, conducting, and publishing research.
- Conduct **training and professional development** activities for district teachers and administrators.
- Create opportunities for **students to guide the work** of the organization.
- **Disseminate** results of Network activities among MSAN districts and the larger educational community.

**NETWORKING - CONVENING - RESEARCH**



# Areas of R&D

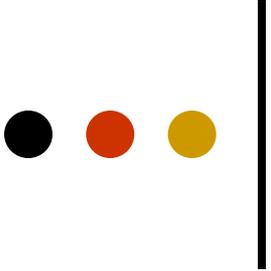
- Student-Teacher Relationships
- Disproportionality
- Cultural Competency Training
- Detracking
- Conversations about Race and Achievement
- Math and Literacy Interventions
- Supports for English Language Learners
- Social Psychology that Undergirds Academic Achievement of Diverse Students



# Changing the Narrative:

## Educational Practices that Build Opportunity

- Changing the narrative from “achievement gap” to “opportunity gaps” is an essential step in ensuring racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students are successful in our schools.
- Changing the narrative requires educators to examine **deeply held beliefs and assumptions**.
- Focus becomes on changing/creating structures and practices not students and families.

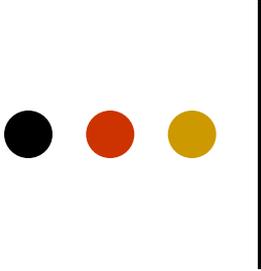


# The Power of Beliefs

- What do you believe?

“Do I - deep inside where my most firmly held and private beliefs reside - truly believe it is possible in the immediate future to create and sustain schools in which literally all children will be highly successful?”

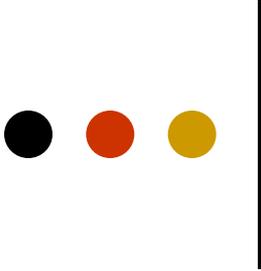
Scheurich & Skrla (2003) p. 10



# Changing the Narrative:

## From Deficit Thinking...

- **Deficit Thinking** (Valencia, 1997) is “a person-centered explanation of school failure among individuals as linked to group membership.”
- The cause of school failure is inherent in the child or the family, thus, academic success is no longer the responsibility of educators.
  - genetic explanations
  - social explanation



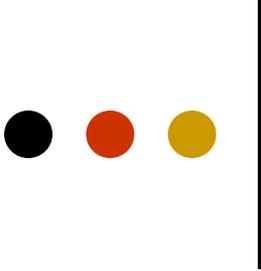
# Changing the Narrative:

## Shifting Mindsets...

### **A Diversity and Opportunity Gap Framework**

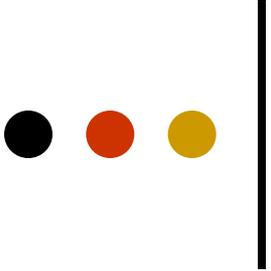
by Richard Milner (2010)

- Framework is used to analyze educators' thinking and practices.
- Meant to challenge educators to broaden their belief systems, shift their mindsets, and transform their practices in order to better address opportunity gaps that prevail in PK-12 education.



# Milner's Diversity and Opportunity Gap Framework

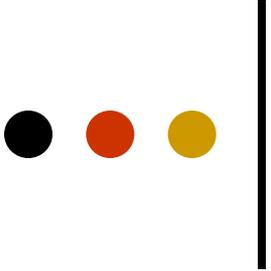
1. Rejection of **colorblindness**
2. Ability and skill to understand, work through, and transcend **cultural conflicts**
3. Ability to understand how **meritocracy** operates
4. Ability to recognize and shift **low expectations** and **deficit mindsets**
5. Rejection of **context-neutral** mindsets and practices



# MSAN Districts are Changing the Narrative

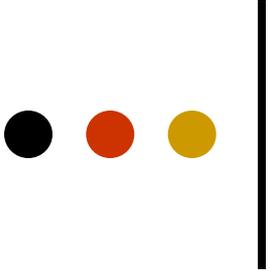
## Engaging in “Gap-Closing” Practices

1. “Right Conditions” for closing gaps
2. Sustained focus on building cultural competency among ALL staff
3. School-based equity teams
4. Racial affinity groups/MSAN courses
5. Clear equity-focused goals



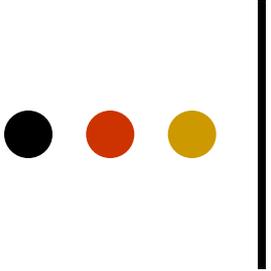
## ● ● ● | “Right Conditions” (Smith, et al., 2011)

- Admit there is a problem and put the data that demonstrate the problem front and center in a form that can be understood easily.
- Measure and report progress consistently.
- Set for everyone in the organization the priority of eliminating or narrowing gaps.
- Distribute equitably resources directed toward achieving the goal.
- Implement measures that focus on **key variables** early and consistently.



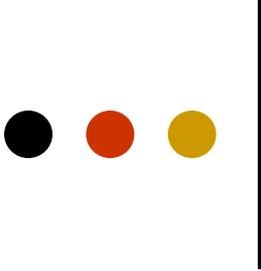
## “Key Variables” (Smith, et al., 2011)

- Expectations of teachers, parents, community members, and students that all students will learn to high levels.
- Quality of instruction, including teaching methods and relationships established in the classroom.
- Access to rigorous educational opportunities.
- Parent and community involvement and support.



## **Sustained focus on building cultural competency among ALL staff**

- MSAN districts “closing gaps” engage all of their staff in developing cultural competency or equity knowledge and skills (teachers, bus drivers, front office staff, parents, school board members, etc.).
- Regardless of the specific content, districts have a process in place for talking about the role race and racism play in how their students and families experience schools, AND what they as educators can do to ameliorate the effects.

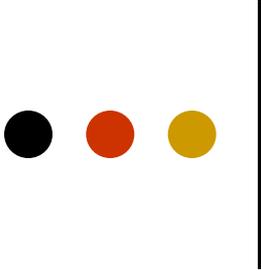


# Students' Six: Student Voices on Effective Practice

## Blue Ribbon Mentor Advocate Program

Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools • Chapel Hill, NC

- 1) **Visibility** - Making every student feel acknowledged and included in the classroom.
- 2) **Proximity** - Using physical space to engage students and reduce perceived threat.
- 3) **Engaging Students' Cultures** - Incorporating positive elements of students' culture into classroom learning and community building.



## **Students' Six: Student Voices on Effective Practice (cont.)**

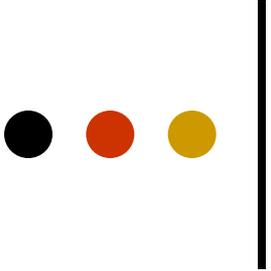
**4) Addressing Race** - Talking openly about racial dynamics and how they impact the student experience.

**5) Connection to Students' Lives** - Making linkages between classroom content and student experiences and perspectives.

**6) Connection to Future Selves** - Helping students identify their future paths and using classroom experiences to guide students towards personal goals.

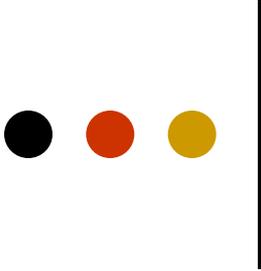
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## **School-based equity teams**

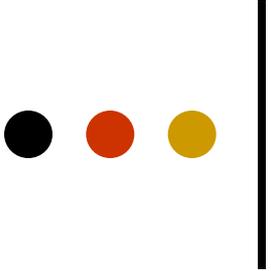
- Building-based teams are successful because they are most familiar with the school culture and individual students and families.
- These teams serve on/work with the district-level equity team to ensure district-wide goals are being implemented across buildings.



## Racial affinity groups/MSAN courses

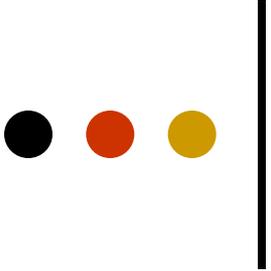
- MSAN-focused student groups meet on a regular basis to **understand** oppressive structures within their schools and create actions to **change** them.
- MSAN districts are committed to creating opportunities for **students to guide the work** of the organization.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXthCBkPGGk&feature=youtu.be>



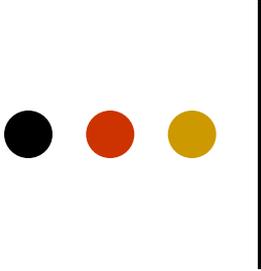
## Clear equity-focused goals

- Have a clearly articulated equity goal and a process for achieving it.
  - Increasing the number of students of color taking and receiving a C or better in AP/Honors classes
  - On-grade level reading by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade
  - Induction program or coaching for teachers to support their knowledge and practice of culturally responsive instruction.
- Verona Area School District
- Evanston Township High School District



**Next Steps = 3 x 3 x 3**

- ❑ 3 Resources
- ❑ 3 People
- ❑ 3 Next Steps



# For More Information...



<http://msan.wceruw.org/>

## **RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS**

Madeline Hafner

Wisconsin Center for Education Research

University of Wisconsin-Madison

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