

## ***Give Excellence A Chance! Discussion Guide***

**The purpose of this video (Part 1 of a 3-part series) is to raise awareness of excellence gaps in our schools. Through a series of interviews, Dr. Jonathan Plucker of Johns Hopkins University, and three educational leaders in Kentucky share their perspectives.**

**This guide is designed to facilitate discussion prompted by the video. Its use is up to the facilitator and should differ based on the audience. Whether answered in writing during the viewing, prompting oral discussion after viewing, or a mixture of the two, the questions should not only aid in understanding, but they should also encourage continued thinking and action concerning the Excellence Gap. Suggested ideas follow each question.**

### **1. What is the Excellence Gap?**

*The Excellence Gap is essentially the achievement gap at the advanced level of student achievement. Jonathan Plucker and his colleagues at several different universities have analyzed the state-by-state results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. This research revealed that lower socio-economic demographic groups, as well as English language learners, Hispanic and African American students were underrepresented at the highest levels of academic achievement. Their results were far below their counterparts.*

### **2. Why is the Excellence Gap important to schools and districts?**

*I think from the public's perspective it's probably two big reasons why these Excellence Gaps and their pervasiveness are really, really troubling. The first is just economically and culturally the vast majority of our highest performing students come from a fairly small group of our student population, and as we move forward we live in a culture, we live in an economy that has a tremendous thirst for talent. This country thrives on talent, on ideas, on creativity, on innovation.*

*Unfortunately, the fastest growing parts of our student population are the groups that are suffering the worst of the excellence gap and that's just not long term sustainable for this country. The second area is just fairness-- if you have a really talented student, a student who has so much potential, a student who lives in the inner city and not of great means, not a lot of family support or not attending great schools but who has the potential to be the person on that team that finally helps us solve pancreatic cancer or is the person who is going to come up with that great idea that makes colonizing other planets possible--those students are out there. Getting them to grade level and declaring victory doesn't make a lot of sense. Grade level proficiency is not the finish line. It really is a mile marker to the start of this long talent run. We really focus so much now on getting students up to grade level-- if we can do that we've accomplished*

*a lot. We have, but we have not changed that student's life to the extent that we really, really should.*

### **3. Describe the Excellence Gap in Kentucky.**

*The 2015 NAEP data shows the percentage of Kentucky Grade 4 students scoring at the advanced level in mathematics to be over four times greater for students who are not eligible for free/reduced price school lunch than for students who were eligible for free/reduced lunch. The NAEP mathematics data for Grade 8 students showed similar results.*

*Our Kentucky K-PREP results mirrored the NAEP Data. The percentage of students not eligible for free or reduced lunch scoring at the distinguished level on the K-PREP has increased at a much faster rate than their less advantaged peers.*

*When considering ethnicity, the data are just as disturbing for Hispanic and African American students. Note the large Excellence Gaps between white students and minorities. Only 10% of Hispanic students and only 6% of African American students scored at the distinguished level on the K-PREP at the elementary level. It is even more dismal at the middle school level with only 7% of Hispanic students and 3% of African American students scoring distinguished. Unless we address these Excellence Gaps now with targeted, purposeful measures, these students may never catch up with their peers.*

### **4. Think about the Excellence Gap in your school or district. What do you predict you will find in the data? Why?**

### **5. What policy questions should we be asking?**

*One thing that we often recommend to people is really a series of two distinct questions:*

***How will the proposed policy impact our highest achieving students?*** *The first question is, "How could this policy potentially impact advanced students?" For example, they may put things in place that actually make it harder to graduate early, which a lot of advanced students can and probably should do.*

***How will the proposed policy help more students achieve at the highest levels?*** *The second question is equally important from an Excellence Gap perspective. This question is "How can this policy potentially get more students to be scoring advanced, to be performing at advanced levels, to be excelling?" We don't ask that question enough and I think there is some unintentional bias and that again we think getting students to grade level is victory. It's not a victory if they have the potential to go so much further.*

*\*Feel free to substitute the word decision for policy.*

### **6. Select a policy in your school or district. Ask those two questions in regards to the policy and analyze the answers.**

*Possibilities include using national versus local norms in identification, setting a strict percentage to identify, only allotting one Algebra class in 7<sup>th</sup> grade regardless of readiness of students, early graduation policy, etc.*

**7. What can you do to raise awareness of Excellence Gaps in your school or district?**

*Possible responses include sharing the data with the faculty, staff, and parents; provide professional development for faculty, staff, and parents; run a mini public relations campaign, etc.*

**8. Why does closing the Excellence Gap matter? How will getting rid of the Excellence Gap impact our society?**

*Encourage young people to use gifts to make positive impact on community; talent development in all arenas that would impact the future (e.g., medicine, law, education, etc.); develop innovators in creativity and innovation, etc.*

**9. How can the Excellence Gap be reduced?**

*Nontraditional identification measures such as Young Scholars Model; awareness campaign; using local norms; cluster grouping; focus on talent development; mentors, etc.*

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