Learning Community Students Close Achievement Gaps
NECAP (New England Common Assessment Program) Results, 2013

The Learning Community, a K-8 public school serving students from Central Falls, Providence and Pawtucket, continues to dramatically close the achievement gap. The Learning Community is proving that, with excellent instruction, true teacher leadership, systems of coordinated support and strong family engagement, students in every community can develop their voices and achieve.

Learning Community students are selected through a random lottery and in 2013-14 have a poverty rate of 87%. Testing data only tells one part of the story, but we are proud to report:

**Our low-income students outperformed the state average for students at ALL income levels.**
Students at The Learning Community are proving the achievement gap can be closed.

**Our students have CLOSED one of the largest Latino achievement gaps in the nation.**
Our Latino students are outperforming their RI Latino peers by enormous margins: 33 points in math, 30 points in writing.

**We are the state’s highest performing urban elementary school in math.**
Learning Community students had a higher proficiency rate in math than 96% of the urban ring elementary schools and 35% of the suburban elementary schools in RI.

**We have the smallest achievement gap of any middle school in RI for low-income students and English Language Learners.**
The RI Department of Education analyzed data for schools with substantial populations in these areas and shared their findings with the RI Board of Education.

**Our English Language Learner (ELL) students outperformed their peers statewide** by more than 20 points in reading and math.
ELL students have a first language other than English and are identified as needing English language support. Children in RI’s public schools speak 84 different languages.

We are extremely proud of our students, families and team members and their commitment to rigor, critical thinking and personal expression.

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Data compared for grades tested at The Learning Community with same grades at state level.
Confidence interval of ±1 to ±8 points (depending on group size) should be assumed. source: http://www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/Assessment/NECAPAssessment/NECAPResults.asp
In 2011 Rhode Island was cited as having one of the nation’s most dramatic achievement gaps between Latino students and their white peers. At The Learning Community, where 80% of students are Latino, students have CLOSED that gap. The Learning Community is the state’s highest performing school serving a Latino population of more than 50%.

Percentage points Learning Community Latino students are above the 2013 state Latino average in:

- **Math**: 33
- **Writing**: 30
- **Reading**: 23

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1. Achievement Gaps: How Hispanic and White Students in Public Schools Perform in Mathematics and Reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, National Center for Education Statistics, June 2011. Confidence interval of ±1 to ±8 points (depending on group size) should be assumed. source: [http://www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/Assessment/NECAPAssessment/NECAPResults.aspx](http://www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/Assessment/NECAPAssessment/NECAPResults.aspx)
The Learning Community was founded on the belief that poverty need not be a barrier to student achievement if schools are given the latitude and resources to make nimble choices on behalf of excellent teaching and learning. The Learning Community’s low-income students, 87% of our student body, not only dramatically exceeded state averages for low-income students but also outperformed the state average for all students (see chart at right), dispelling the myth that poverty dictates academic destiny.

Learning Community Low Income v. RI Low Income:
Percentage points Learning Community Low-income students are above the 2013 State Low-income average

Math: ↑26
Writing: ↑22
Reading: ↑16

The charts below show every elementary and middle school in the state, their performance in math and the % of low-income students they serve. Learning Community students (blue dot ●) outperformed predicted performance by 39 and 23 percentage points respectively.

Low-Income Students: Trends
Learning Community Low-income student performance v. RI Low-income averages in grades tested at The Learning Community.
On the 2013 NECAP Learning Community English Language Learner (ELL) students outperformed the state average for ELL students by more than 20 points in both Reading and Math.

Elementary English Language Learner (ELL) students at the Learning Community dramatically outperformed their ELL peers statewide by 39 points in Reading and 49 points in Math.

What is our approach to instruction with English Language Learner (ELL) students?

For the past two years we have had a school-wide effort to explore new ways to develop the academic language skills of English Language Learner (ELL) students. 31% of our students are designated ELL (compared with 6% statewide), which is determined by a home language use survey and their performance on the WIDA MODEL, a national assessment of language proficiency. Contrary to popular belief, not all ELL students are immigrants; many have been born in this country.

As with all other areas of our work, our approach to ELL instruction has been based on a culture of respect, a commitment from all members of our team, working in partnership with families, rigorous examination of data and a national search for best practices. Some of the methods we are honing in our work include:

- A school-wide culture of respecting multiple languages as an asset and acknowledging language skills that may not be in English
- Viewing supporting English language development as every educator’s job
- ELL students are integrated into general education classrooms with their peers for instruction, not grouped in special ESL classrooms.
- 30 minutes per day of systematic oral English Language Development in grades K-4 using a proven curriculum that includes conversations about how language works
- Direct in-class support for academic language development K-8 by ELL Teacher/Coordinator and trained para-professionals
- Bilingual Teaching Partners in Kindergarten classrooms provide in-classroom support for ELL students
- A rethinking of the ELL Teacher/Coordinator role to include coaching and building capacity of classroom teachers and other instructional team members in addition to direct work with ELL students

Data compared for grades tested at The Learning Community with same grades at state level. Confidence interval of ±1 to ±8 points (depending on group size) should be assumed. sources: RIDE October 2013 enrollment; 2013 NECAP Results

http://www.ride.gov/InstructionAssessment/Assessment/NECAPAssessment/NECAPResults.aspx
How does The Learning Community do it?

**Continuous focus on excellent instruction.** We believe that excellent teaching should impact NECAP performance, and more importantly, success in life. We use quality children’s literature and rich classroom libraries in our research-based, teacher-developed curriculum. We use practices such as Interactive Read Alouds in which students form opinions, agree and disagree. We believe literacy is a fundamental part of a strong democracy. Our math instruction is grounded in national research, giving students the habits of mind of strong mathematicians.

**Emphasizing learner independence.** Our classrooms are designed to encourage students to be independent, make choices and take responsibility for their work. We know this will nurture critical thinking, but we also believe that learner independence can build student confidence in taking tests.

**Embracing a culture of data.** We have a professional culture of using data to inform our work. We have hard conversations driven by data, and we meet often to analyze data together. Every teacher works as part of a team to support student growth.

**A laser-like focus on the results.** Individual student performance from a range of assessments and classroom assignments is analyzed regularly by teachers, instructional coaches and consultants. Teachers analyze results and help identify gaps in our curriculum. For example, by examining data and best practices in math teachers decided to include more mental math, number sense, real life problem solving and multi-step math problems.

**An in-house interim assessment system.** We developed an in-house system of interim assessments using a national bank of released test items. We administer these tests three times during the year across all grade levels. The results help highlight gaps in the curriculum.

**Supporting students to learn about tests and taking tests.** We help students understand the language of tests and strategies good test takers use. Interim assessments give students specific strategies for writing in a testing environment. This approach is integrated into our curriculum without sacrificing deep learning ---- tests are one genre, like poetry.

**Marshaling the entire school community.** We hold annual meetings with families to explain the tests and how they can support their child’s performance. Families try and discuss sample test questions. The whole school sends positive messages — parent posters, videos from younger students, and special notes from every team member.

**Not letting students fall behind.** Throughout the year our academic safety net offers support to students who need more time to master specific skills in reading, writing and math. Our math safety net includes small group and afterschool tutorials. A four-week, half-day summer academic program includes students identified through classroom, NECAP and interim assessments who needed a push to reach their potential regardless of their level of proficiency.

**Constantly seeking new best practices.** We bring a range of nationally-known consultants to work directly with teachers on deepening content knowledge and refining curriculum. In 2012 our Director of Instruction learned of new research about summer reading interventions to boost student achievement. Within weeks the research was shared with teachers and parents and a fundraising drive was in place to loan every student books of their choice for the summer.

The Learning Community | www.thelearningcommunity.com
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