

NUA helps San Francisco school narrow achievement gap with double-digit gains



For years, George Washington High School in San Francisco has enjoyed a reputation as a high-performing school. But this status belied an uncomfortable truth – a widening achievement gap among racial, ethnic and socioeconomic differences.

Early in her tenure as the school’s principal, Ericka Lovrin set her sights on reducing, and ultimately eliminating, that achievement gap and enlisted the help of the National Urban Alliance for Effective Education to help her meet this goal during the 2009-2010 school year.

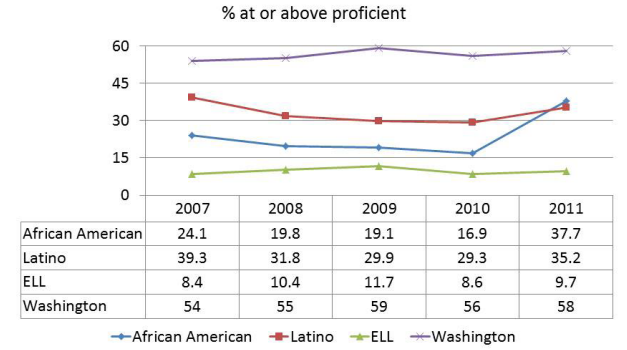
“In our ever-changing society, I saw that we needed to focus on an instructional strategy that would be culturally relevant and help us ensure that what we were teaching, the students were learning,” Lovrin says.

Because NUA’s trainers are teachers, Lovrin says her staff immediately sensed a mutual respect that helped them embrace changes. “NUA’s trainers are teachers, not just a company,” Lovrin says. “Our trainers were fantastic. Using NUA’s strategies, teachers were able to see their students becoming more involved and interested in what was going on in the classroom. NUA is not another curriculum, it’s more of a system of strategies that focus on student engagement and priming the brain for learning.”

Specifically, Lovrin praises NUA’s techniques such as “thinking maps” and “community builders,” and a leadership component that trains the administrative team in walk-throughs, instructional rounds and the Pedagogy of Confidence. All of NUA strategies are meant to build a “Mediative Learning Community,” which strengthens the school from all areas—student, teacher, parent, community and administrator.

Lovrin says NUA’s focus on brain development and how that affects learning has been instructive and inspiring for her and her teaching staff. NUA is not only a strategy, but a “whole thought process about using thinking that the brain is a muscle, and that instead of focusing on rote memorization we are priming students to be prepared for the teacher’s instruction and really engaged so they can

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get the most out of class time,” Lovrin says.

“NUA is not just giving you a set of ideas, they are looking at the whole child,” Lovrin adds. “They didn’t come in and say, ‘This is how you raise test scores.’ They said, ‘This is how you engage students,’ and from that you will see increased achievement.”

To help tackle the achievement gap, Lovrin and her staff decided to focus on students of color and other historically underachieving students. “We had an achievement gap,” Lovrin said, noting as an example a 30 percentage point difference in number of Asian American students compared to African American students.

Proud of the school’s progress in narrowing that achievement gap, Lovrin says she also is mindful to continue giving her highest-achieving students the resources they need to reach even greater heights as well as providing those “students in the middle” the attention they need to excel.

“NUA’s strategy helps keep teachers accountable for the engagement of students,” Lovrin says. “I wanted teachers to remember why they became teachers and for them to feel that passion when the light bulb goes off for students in their classes.”

National Urban Alliance | www.nuatc.org
33 Queens Street Suite 100 | Syosset, NY 11791
(800) NUA-4556 or (516) 802-4192