

STEPHAN BLANFORD CONVERSATION: SUMMARY

THURSDAY, JANUARY 2018 @ EL CENTRO DE LA RAZA

WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO CLOSE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN SEATTLE?

- Because educational leadership is crucial to sustained gap closure, Seattle needs a new superintendent with a documentable history of performance and a *laser focus* on gap closure.
 - For instance, the pending McCleary decision will give districts a lot of discretion with regard to spending their funds, so each school district is responsible for allocating those funds. There is a critical opportunity for Seattle Public Schools to reverse their pattern of allocating those funds inequitably, instead of bolstering proven strategies to close the achievement gap.
 - In Stephan's opinion, any successful Seattle Public Schools superintendent candidate needs to have a *history of success with closing achievement gaps*.
- Superintendent needs to work to ensure all teachers have the belief system that all their students are capable of learning, because of the foundational role of teacher belief systems in gap closure.
 - This mindset is critical to the College of Education's pre-service and professional learning programs for teachers throughout Washington state

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL BOARD & SUPERINTENDENT:

- Role of superintendent is to coalesce community, schools, and school board around the community's goals for its students and schools, then to achieve system alignment. . Role of School Board is to provide policy governance, and represent the community's voice in the district agenda and operations.
 - Many School Board Directors are not educators by training, and learn a lot about the daily realities of education while in this role. Even with a recent doctorate from the UW College of Education, Stephan felt like an 'amateur' compared to the educators who work in Seattle Public Schools, and considered the superintendent and staff to be the 'experts.'
- The seven School Board Directors in Seattle often have disagreements about which programs and services to prioritize. Stephan frequently found himself opposing their 'silver bullet solutions,' which he saw as having unintended negative consequences on the district's most underserved students.

ADVICE TO COMMUNITY ADVOCATES IN ANY DISTRICT:

- Use your voice to *counter* narratives that don't resonate with the students and community that you represent. School Board meetings are the key way Directors learn what their constituents need and care about.
- *Organize* others who share your beliefs about what is and isn't working in your school district, and have regular, consistent and personal engagement with individual board members as well as the collective.



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- **Create a critical mass** by engaging your network and neighbors, and connecting to organizations with similar goals, like local PTA's, community based organizations, and candidates for school board, city council and Mayor.
- *Build relationships* with School Board Directors and other public officials by attending public forums and initiating private meetings.
- **Use research generated by the UW College of Education and other institutions to fuel your advocacy.** Though citing academic studies is not the most effective way to win over most board members, being able to refer to evidence may counter some of the anti-equity policies and 'silver bullet solutions' that school boards are pushed by some constituents to adopt.

