



# Diversity & Beyond

WORCESTER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS      OCTOBER 2009

**2009 MSA, Ranking  
Of Worcester  
County African  
American Students  
Compared To The  
State**

**Mathematics  
1st in Grade 3  
1st in Grade 8**



*“We are continually faced by great opportunities brilliantly disguised as insoluble problems.”*

*Anonymous*

## What Do Your Words Say About Your Beliefs?

**A**s an educator, you dream of seeing a light bulb flicker in a student’s mind, indicating that he or she understands the concepts that are being taught. Teachers want to transfer information to their students and they want their students to acquire that knowledge. Although a repertoire of teaching strategies are employed and continuous effort is put forth to accomplish this task, teachers may hold beliefs that keep them from fully realizing the potential of every student in their classroom.

The following is a sample of commonly held beliefs that teachers say in conversation about what they do to meet the learning needs of their students. If acted upon, these statements undoubtedly will have a negative impact on the teacher’s expectations and ultimately on student success. As you examine each statement, think about the degree to which each statement reflects your approach to teaching students.

- **I don’t see the color or ethnicity of my students when I teach. I am colorblind.**

When teachers say they are colorblind, they usually mean that they do not discriminate and that they may treat all their students equally. This is vital to effective teaching; however, race and ethnicity often play crucial roles in a student’s identity. These factors contribute to a student’s culture, their beliefs, and their behavior. When this issue is ignored, teachers overlook opportunities to help students connect with what is being taught. Realizing that race and ethnicity affect student learning enables teachers to be responsive to students’ individual learning needs.

- **I know the abilities of my students so I give them assignments that I know they can do to keep them from becoming frustrated.**



Students do need to experience success in the classroom. Giving them work they can handle seems very logical. The potential downside to this is that it will lead to lower expectations by both students and teachers. The challenge for teachers becomes understanding the standards that have been established and engaging students in increasingly rigorous work in order to meet those standards. Rigorous coursework with the appropriate support produces high achievement levels for students.

- **The achievement gap among students is about poverty, not race.**

Research shows that a student’s family income is a significant correlate of low achievement; yet even when students’ socioeconomic status is taken into account, race often accounts for variance in student performance. Many experts disagree about why this happens. Some believe that the racial influence on achievement lies in the experiences that some students of color may encounter in school - lowered expectations, unequal access to opportunities, and teaching that does not sufficiently respond to differences in student interest and learning needs. Other researchers believe in “stereotype-threat” - the risk of a student confirming a negative stereotype placed on a group by society. This discourages students from seeking to achieve at high levels.

What are you saying that could hinder a student’s success? Which students in your classroom need you to truly analyze your beliefs about them? Taking a minute to reflect, could make all the difference.

## A Teacher's Perspective

Throughout the county, teachers were asked what strategies they were implementing to increase the academic achievement of all students. Here's what Ali Giska, 2009 Worcester County Teacher of the Year, and State Finalist, had to say.

**Know your students.** Know your subject matter, but most importantly, know your students. Learn about each one and love and appreciate their differences. One reason I love teaching in our school system is because Worcester County is so wonderfully diverse. I have taught surfers, farmers, watermen, hunters, ballerinas, football players, artists, video game experts, readers, striving readers, and students who are learning English as their second language. Embrace and respect this diversity by learning everything you can about each of your students.

**Raise the bar high.** In a diverse classroom, high expectations are paramount! Take a close look at

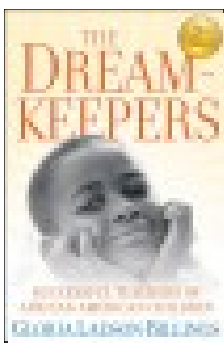


*Ali Giska*  
2009 Worcester County  
Teacher of the Year and  
State Finalist

each student in your classroom and consider their strengths and talents. Remember that every student regardless of race, culture or background, has the potential to be successful. Develop a "no excuses" attitude that sends the message, "Yes, you can do this!"

**Be proud.** Be proud of who you are and what you are doing. Do not ever say, "Oh, I'm only a teacher." For some students you have just met, *you are everything*. Teaching is a remarkable profession, and we are lucky to be teachers in a remarkable county. Take a moment to think of all the young faces in your class and the lives that you will undoubtedly change. Do not underestimate the power of your words and actions. You hold more influence than you could ever imagine.

## Reading Matters



What strategies can be used to increase the achievement of all students, particularly African American students? In *Dreamkeepers*, Gloria Ladson-Billings answers this question by telling the story of educators who are living examples of good teaching. These eight teachers share their experiences of how they have successfully increased the achievement of all students in their classrooms. The author confirms the importance of using the strengths that students bring to the classroom to teach them.



*Do your students need role models?*

*Invite parents to your classroom in October to share their experiences in celebration of Parent Involvement Month!*



## Mission Statement

The mission of Worcester County Public Schools is to empower all students to:

- grow physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially, and culturally with enthusiasm for life-long learning;
- achieve high academic and performance standards; and to
- function responsibly as productive citizens.

