



Strengthening Education Policy Through Teacher Insight



CLIENT QUOTE

“The recommendations in this report have changed the way we think about education in our Gateway Cities. The teachers developed recommendations that will make schools more effective and improve the lives of our students by making schools true communities that are bound together by shared goals, shared resources and shared solutions.”

-- -- Benjamin Forman,
Research Director



THE NUMBERS

Partners: Massachusetts Teachers Association

Geographic Reach: 26 communities within Massachusetts

Idea Exchange Participants: 170

Timeframe Start to Finish: 44 days

Number of Recommendations: 6

TO READ A COMPLETE REPORT ON THIS VIVA IDEA EXCHANGE, go to: <http://vivateachers.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/MTA-VIVA-Report.pdf>

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Addressing Educational Inequities: Proposals for Narrowing the Achievement Gaps in Massachusetts' Gateway Cities

CASE STUDY

The VIVA Project and its partner, the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA), invited classroom teachers from 26 “gateway” communities to participate in a VIVA Idea Exchange. Gateway cities are smaller urban centers across the state that have traditionally been hubs of manufacturing and settlement areas for new immigrant populations. These cities face many of the same challenges as Boston but do not have the same resources as Boston. Teachers were asked for their best ideas for a coherent, equitable statewide urban education policy for closing the achievement gaps that exist between Gateway City School Districts (GCSD) and other Massachusetts communities. Powered by an innovative online platform and expert facilitation, these teachers were able to develop actionable recommendations to narrow the achievement gap by focusing on:

- Shifting the culture of learning through establishing culturally appropriate family engagement programs
- Expanding teacher training in strategies to support ELL students in and out of school
- Restructuring both the school day and the school year
- Contributing to the professional learning and growth of educators
- Recognizing the resilience and positive attributes that urban students bring to our schools
- Promoting restorative justice programs in their schools

AS A RESULT:

On June 23, 2012, members of the writing collaborative presented their ideas to the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Teachers Association. The presentation continued on August 5, when the teachers presented a revised version of their report, incorporating suggestions from MTA Board members.

- The MTA leadership then used this report as part of its legislative agenda and presented the report to the Governor, Secretary of Education and Commissioner of Education, key legislators and various education policymakers.
- The MTA partnered with MassINC, a highly respected policy and advocacy organization focused on improving quality of life and the economic viability of Gateway cities, to incorporate the recommendations/report into its platform
- Their work generated investment from state budget and program initiatives in these 26 communities to implement many of the ideas presented by the teachers and continues to be part of their legislative efforts.

VIVA IDEA EXCHANGE DISCUSSION QUESTION

The VIVA Project’s Idea Exchange process and carefully crafted question were designed to inspire teachers’ creativity while focusing their discussion on developing strategies to narrow the achievement gaps that persist within their schools, their districts and across the Commonwealth:

Massachusetts is ranked first in the nation in delivering a quality public education to our schoolchildren, and there is a consensus that every child deserves a great teacher. Even so, in many schools across the Commonwealth, there is an ‘achievement gap.’ What are your ideas for closing the achievement gap in your classroom, school or district? What types of support do you need to make that happen?”

KEY OUTCOMES

The teachers articulated a stance that the linguistic, racial and cultural diversity represented in the Gateway Cities schools must be acknowledged as adding to the rich intellectual capital for Massachusetts as they look to compete in the global economy of the 21st century.

- Teachers saw value and importance in making a large investment in these communities and recognized that schools play a vital role in anchoring these communities.
- Instead of seeing these communities as a liability, they need to be embraced as opportunities toward becoming a global city.

VOICES

IDEAS

VISION

ACTION