

RESPONDING TO OUR STUDENTS

BY CHANGING THE CURRICULUM & HOW WE TEACH IT

DECEMBER 2017

The Schenectady City School District has been partnering with The Institute for Learning (IFL) over the last few years to help our teachers become the best teachers they can be, and our administrators to become stronger instructional leaders. The IFL is guiding and supporting SCSD through the process of developing more rigorous, culturally relevant curriculum and helping us improve the way we deliver instruction. Our goal is to meet the needs of all students.

The IFL, which is an outreach of the University of Pittsburgh's Learning Research and Development Center, has experience working with districts who serve large, diverse populations with high percentages of students who live in poverty. This work, along with some of our other efforts—for example, addressing disproportionality and developing trauma sensitive schools— are steps toward ensuring that race, economics and disability are not predictors of student achievement and that every student has an opportunity to be academically successful.

The collaboration with the IFL began with a focus on English Language Arts (ELA), literacy and the notion of nested learning communities.

A nested, or interconnected, learning community is one in which members align with a shared set of principles and strategies, and take responsibility for achieving a shared learning goal. As such, we should expect high levels of learning and our educators should instruct to high expectations in order for all students to continue to grow academically.

As a result of this work, our classrooms are beginning to fill with **Accountable Talk**. This is when students ask one another about their thinking and building on the responses of others.



Our work is to ensure that race, economics and disability no longer serve as predictors of student achievement.

Accountable Talk

- ⇒ I agree with you because ...
- ⇒ I disagree with you because ...
- ⇒ Why do you think that?
- ⇒ I know my answer is right because ...
- ⇒ I solved this problem by ...
- ⇒ Another way to solve this problem is ...

Why is Accountable Talk Important? When students participate in accountable talk, they engage in richer and deeper conversations that go beyond surface-level thinking. With accountable talk, students are able to process lesson material much more deeply than teacher-centered talk and they take an active role in their learning

A major component of our work with the IFL is the focus on the development of **culturally relevant curriculum** and **responsive classrooms**.

Culturally relevant curriculum or responsive teaching is when the curriculum and instructor recognizes and honors the various cultural differences in the classroom and enables students to relate course content to his or her cultural context (environment relevant to beliefs, values and practices). A culturally responsive teacher reflects on his or her own culture, and understands the assumptions that people make about students because of their own life experiences. **It means knowing your students as individuals, not as labels or based on assumptions.**

A **responsive classroom** approach is a way of teaching that emphasizes social, emotional and academic growth in a strong and safe school community. It is a positive climate in which all students feel engaged in their learning.

This work is important toward our commitment of ensuring equity and excellence—which means every student has access to the opportunities necessary to satisfy their essential needs, advance their well being and reach full potential.

Engaging, rigorous instruction that uses Accountable Talk, and other principles of learning, is the cornerstone of our work with the IFL.

Our work with the IFL, the work that we are doing to develop **Trauma Sensitive Schools**, and the rigorous training that is underway to address disproportionate outcomes, are important problem-solving initiatives that require us to think differently in order to be responsive to student needs. Our goal is to ensure that race, economics, and disability no longer serve as predictors of student achievement.

We are committed to removing barriers, being aware and understanding, adopting culturally responsive curriculum and practices and ensuring that every student in the Schenectady City School District has an opportunity to be academically successful.

Next month, we will tell you about our the work we are doing to develop Trauma Sensitive Schools.

Why The IFL?

The IFL offers experience, a framework and tools that focus on teaching, learning and leadership and bring us an array of expertise, research, instructional models and ongoing support to help us ensure that **race, economics and disability will no longer serve as predictors of student achievement.**



Schenectady's
**Trauma Sensitive
Schools**