



**A Small, Public, “College-Prep” Elementary School
in the Oakland Unified School District**

Vision: All Think College Now students will have the tools to choose their life’s path and desired occupation with an equitable opportunity to attend college and pursue their dreams.

Making a difference...Together, Yes We Can!



**David Silver, Principal and Founder
Think College Now Elementary
Oakland Unified School District**



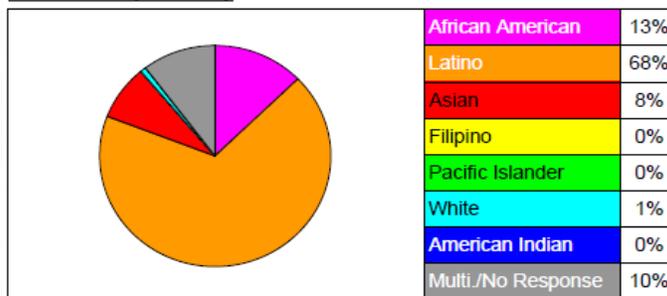
www.thinkcollegenow.org

My name is David Silver, Principal and Founder of Think College Now Elementary – a public college-prep elementary school in a low-income area of Oakland, California. (Slide 1)

Why Think College Now? It was founded to reverse a harsh reality - that less than 1 of 20 students of Oakland public school students are eligible to attend a University of California school. Most Oakland students parents have never been to college, are living in poverty, and are Latino or African-American. When a group of families, educators and myself heard the 1 of 20 statistic, we knew we had to take action. We came together to form Think College Now (TCN), a “college-prep” public elementary school within the Oakland Unified School District. 95% of our students receive free and reduced lunch, the vast majority of our families have never been to college, two-thirds of our students are English Language Learners, and more than 90% of our students are Latino, African-American or multi-racial. Our mission is to close the achievement gap and ensure that all of our students can go to college and pursue their dreams



Enrollment by Ethnicity

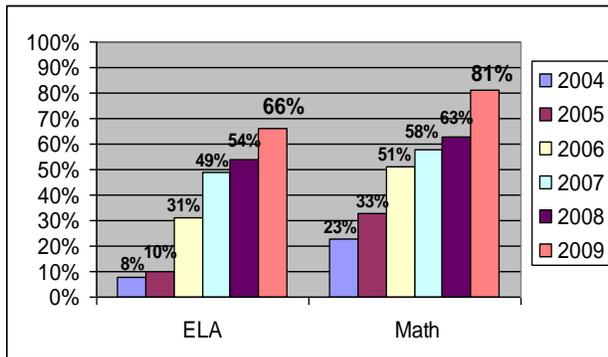


- **Grades: K-5**
- **Free/Reduced Lunch: 95%**
- **English Language Learners: 65%**

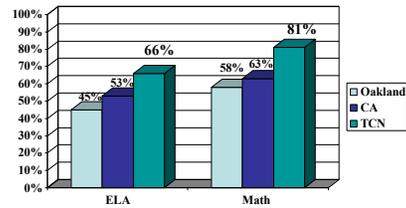
Student Population: 280
Special Education: 10%

What have we achieved? (Slide 2)

Percent of TCN students who score Proficient and Advanced on the California State Test (CST) over time

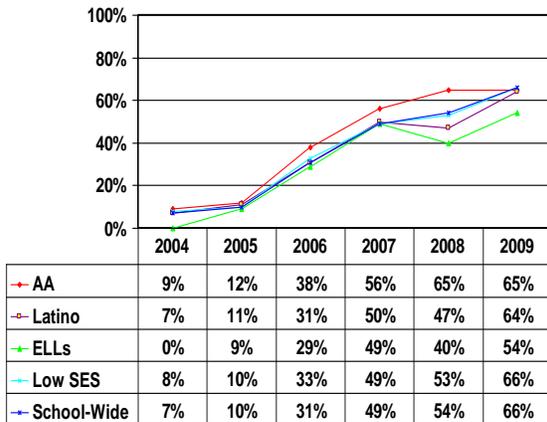


TCN Scores Compared to Oakland and CA Averages

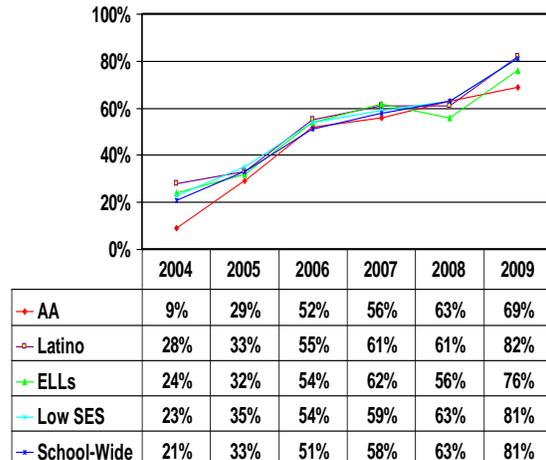


- TCN students are performing better, on average, than those in the district and the state of California in both ELA and math.

TCN Subgroup Performance in English Language Arts Over Time



TCN Subgroup Performance in Math Over Time



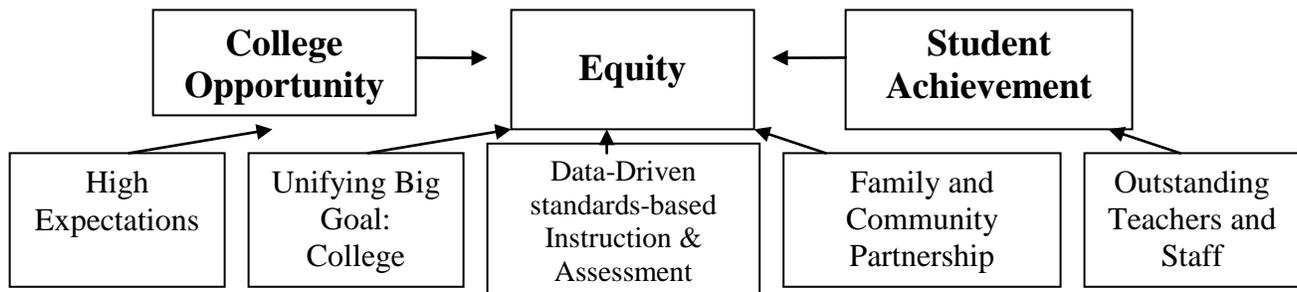
What have we achieved?

When we opened our doors, only 8% of our students were achieving at or above grade-level (Proficient or Advanced) in English Language Arts (ELA) and 23% in Math as measured by the California Standards Test (CST).

- We now have 66% of our students at or above grade-level in ELA and 81% in math, a gain of over 800% in ELA and over 300% in Math.
- What's more, every single sub-group –including African-Americans, Latinos, English Language Learners and students receiving free and reduced lunch, all rose over 50% in both math and ELA.
- We have gained 263 points to far surpass both district and the state averages with an API of 848, a score close to the API of White students in the state.
- Because of these dramatic gains, Think College Now was named one of only 50 schools in California to be receive both a California Distinguished School and Title I Academic Achievement Award in 2008.

How did we do it? (Slide 3)

Think College Now's Theory of Action



Our focus is equity in action, a vision of student achievement and college opportunity for all students. Our theory of action is defined by five elements:

- 1) Early College focus: Entire community united in our big goal - college
- 2) High Expectations for all students, staff, parents – No excuses
- 3) Standards-based, data-driven instruction and assessment
- 4) Strong Family Involvement and Community Partnerships
- 5) Outstanding Staff with a sense of urgency to reach our goals

1. Unite the entire community in our big goal - college

Principle: Elementary school students in higher-income neighborhoods know they are expected to go to college. Our students and families do, too. We deliberately begin “thinking college” in kindergarten.

- We develop early awareness of college through campus visits, college t-shirt days, a college-going family resource center, and the use of "college talk" in every classroom.
- Our entire community -- from teachers to staff to families to students – is united and working toward the same big goal – to go to college. If you ask any one of those people at TCN, why are you here, the answer would be the same: "to go to college."

II. High Expectations for all students, staff, parents – No Excuses

Principle: Students are expected to make significant gains in literacy and math each year and attain grade-level mastery in all subjects.

- We expect more from administration, staff, teachers, parents, and students in order to achieve different results and stronger student outcomes. We are creating a culture where achievement is the norm, and failure is not an option.
- As families come in the doors, we say, “Expect more from me as a principal, from teachers, from parents – if we are going to get different results for our children!” Families who questioned whether reading at home was important are now reading daily with their children.
- Teachers observe at other high-achieving schools and expect their students to compete with and achieve at the same level as students in more affluent areas.

III. Effective Standards-based, data-driven instruction and assessment

Principle: Using data to drive instruction and monitor progress will increase learning and improve student achievement

- Teachers participate in 6-8 week cycles in math and English Language Arts. Grade-level teams create a standards-based pacing calendar, develop standards-based lessons and deliver high-quality instruction.

- Teachers assess student mastery using standards-aligned assessments and use this assessment data to group students for classroom re-teaching and interventions. We monitor progress through data –based goals conferences, and teachers communicate relevant assessment results and next steps to students, families, and administration.

IV. Strong Family Involvement and Community Partnerships

Principle: We know that we cannot reach our goals alone.

- We partner with families and several outside organizations for support, resources, and funding.
- Family involvement is the heart of TCN – more than 50% of kindergarten families read daily in class with their children when they drop off their kids, attend college visits and workshops through our on-site family resource center, and sign contracts to commit to attend conferences and work daily at home with their child. At TCN, we are not just a school, but a community.

V. Outstanding Teachers and Staff with a sense of urgency to reach our goals

Principle: Dedicated, high-achieving teachers and staff members are the backbone of a school's success.

- We have an intense recruitment and selection process that helps us hire passionate, highly effective teachers and staff members; and relentlessly work to support and retain our teachers. Over 80% of teachers and staff return annually.
- *“I feel so privileged to work with such a talented and committed staff,”* says Principal David Silver, *“I would put our teachers and staff up against any in the state, if not the country,”*
- Empower teachers to reach outcomes, monitor progress, provide support and resources they need. There is a level of trust where teachers are expected to get their students to achieve and administration is expected to support them to get there.

Think College Now Team

“I feel so proud to be part of this team. I would put our staff up against any in the state – if not the country.” - David Silver, Principal.



David Silver, Principal/Founder – Think College Now
Elementary, Oakland Unified School District

Recommendations (Slide 4)

Create Conditions that Support Schools to Achieve:

- I. Provide Schools Autonomy in Hiring, Budget, Curriculum and Assessments
- II. Expect Accountability through data and student achievement outcomes
- III. Support Schools with standards-based data systems and increased federal dollars to title I schools

Ia. Ensure sites can choose their own teachers and staff.

- TCN Example: As part of the small autonomous schools movement, we were able to have the flexibility to choose our own staff the first few years. This invested our teachers and staff in our vision and created a strong, high-achieving culture. Presently, we do not have this autonomy - any school in our district may or may not be able to choose its own staff.
- NCLB Application: Principals are held accountable for results. They need to be able to work with a team of teachers, parents and community to choose their own staff. It hurts the culture of the school to have someone assigned to a school by the district office who is not aligned with the school's vision. Equally important, it should be possible to quickly (within a year) remove someone who is not performing. The current arduous process for teacher removal is bad for all involved. In short, it is virtually impossible to move someone who has tenure and impossible to keep a more effective, younger teacher who is bumped based on seniority every time there is a budget shortfall. I applaud the language that a site should be able to select its staff and hope it can be implemented more broadly. It is the most important lever to increase student achievement at a school

Ib. Maximize Budget Flexibility and decision-making at districts and sites

- TCN Example: By having budget autonomy (results-based budgeting), as a principal I am able to support teachers better by putting resources where they are needed. For example, we have prioritized academic interventions for our most at-risk students, as well as increased prep time to increase collaboration and help retain teachers.
- NCLB Application: I commend the language in the new bill that gives sites and districts increased budget flexibility. We need to focus on outcomes and less on compliance. In Oakland, we have piloted Results-Based Budgeting which has helped us have the highest achievement growth of any large urban district over the last three years. It also increases recruitment and retention of strong principals. Sites need to be held accountable for results but not without full control of their budgets and how they will spend their resources. This is imperative to ensure that tax dollars lead to student achievement.

II. Connect Principal/Teacher evaluation & compensation to academic achievement results

- TCN Example: While we cannot legally evaluate or compensate teachers presently based on academic achievement, we have created a culture focused on student outcomes. There is public accountability of data at the school, classroom, and student level. Our goals conferences focus on student outcomes instead of just teacher inputs.
- NCLB Application: Teachers, principals and schools should be evaluated – in large part - by how well their students are achieving. There are two ways to win, have a high percentage of students of all sub-groups score proficient or have a high percentage of students make significant gains. When this is achieved, there need to be local and state mechanisms for recognition and replication. Where schools are not winning with their students, there needs to be remediation. I support the language that begins to differentiate teachers not just on seniority but on their ability to increase student achievement.

IIIa. Ensure that all sites and districts have standards-based benchmark assessments with access to timely data to inform instruction and monitor progress

- TCN Example: Curricular and assessment autonomy helped us to focus on standards mastery instead of fidelity to a commercial curriculum. We piloted standards-based assessments that now have been adopted by the entire district. We have a laser-like focus on outcomes, without being wedded to “one way” to get there. This has led not only to increased achievement but also to an ability to recruit and retain strong teachers. Strong teachers love to work in a school that gives them the time and tools to be effective!
- NCLB Application: It is imperative that each site gives 3-4 standards-based benchmark assessments in ELA, math and Science (at a minimum) aligned with the high-stakes assessment during the school year so they can use this to ensure standards mastery, use the data to inform instruction, and engage in a re-teaching of standards not yet mastered. A bank of standards-based questions and quick feedback are the key ingredients. I appreciate any language with respect to increased access to data and a connection to teacher training programs, teacher collaboration time, teachers helping teachers, and sites monitoring their progress and inform instruction.

IIIb. Increase Federal dollars going to all Title I schools

- TCN Example: The federal stimulus money not only helped us to offset a 5% budget cut, but also helped replicate our best practices across the school. The resources enabled our teacher of the year to increase interventions and coaching for all upper-grade teachers resulting in increased teacher capacity and student outcomes. Without continual federal support, our student interventions and teacher coaching are at-risk.
- NCLB Application: In addition to incentives to bring in resources to districts and sites, sites that have high-poverty populations need more financial resources – period. It is not fair to demand annual achievement growth while decreasing resources. With states cutting 5-10% of funds to districts, this is what is essentially being asked. While more affluent parents can fundraise for their schools to offset the difference, low-income families cannot.

Questions? Contact David Silver – www.thinkcollegenow.org (David@thinkcollegenow.org)

