December, 2009

To: Teachers and Staff
From: Dr. Yigal Joseph
Subject: Thinking Maps and Our School’s Success

It was suggested by a Columbus teacher that I share the following exchange between Estee Lopez and me in the hopes that we will all be able to see how dramatically Columbus has grown over the years. I had earlier shared with you that the district received a grant for a professional film on our Thinking Maps work. As a follow up on behalf of the director and editor, Estee wrote the following: “It is always great speaking to you. As we discussed the overall theme is mentioned on the subject of this email. ... Share with me your thoughts about:

- The changing demographics (ELLS) and high stakes assessments
- What did the data show?
- What did the Thinking Maps do for you and teachers?
- Define how the cognitive bridge to literacy was manifested through the Thinking Maps and how did this meet or exceed your expectations?

Below please find my response to their questions.

Columbus school always had a high proportion of ELLs and students receiving free and reduced lunch. But ten year trends are instructive:

In 1999 based on state data, there were 728 students registered in Columbus: 66% Hispanic, 20% Caucasian, and 13% African American. Of the total register, 65% were entitled to free or reduced lunch (a need statistic,) while 44% were designated Limited English Proficient (or ELLs so to speak.)

Ten years later, in the fall of 2008, there were 777 students on register, of which 82% were Hispanic, 7% Caucasian and 9% African American. Of the total register, 79% were entitled to free or reduced lunch, while 37% were designated Limited English Proficient. Of the latter ELL students, 27% scored in the Proficient range on the state NYSESLAT that year.

In the 1999 - 2000 school year, our fourth grade ELA and Math scores at Level 3 and 4 combined (i.e., Proficiency) were 66% and 68%, respectively. In 2008-2009, our fourth grade proficiency scores were: 81% on ELA and 96% on Math. This includes ELL students with only one year of attendance in US schools.
Comparisons can be made in other variables accounted by the state:

- Social Studies: In Nov 2002 we had 79% of fifth graders score at Level 3 and 4; whereas in Nov 2009 we had 93% of fifth graders at Level 3 and 4.
- Science: In May 2000 76% of 4th graders scored in the Proficient range; whereas in May 2009 98% scored in the Proficient range.
- Attendance rate: between 1999 (they year before I took over) and 2008: 85% vs 99%.
- Number of computers between 1999 and 2008: 155 vs. 326.
- Number of library books between 1999 and 2008: 14,500 vs. 16,600.

I would have to discuss with you further the issue regarding “The cognitive bridge to literacy” because that is really not the motivation for the Thinking Maps work we do at Columbus:

My view is that literacy and numeracy are tools for authentic problem-solving, critical thinking and decision making (You can hear that in my interview). At Columbus, we emphasize a higher-order thinking curriculum to attain those ends; literacy and numeracy are vehicles for the implementation and expression of those ends. Thinking Maps serve as the metaphors, the scaffolding and the visual organization of deep cortical thought processes and structures. Our students have developed proficiency in critical thinking, which as it turns out, supports the development of the neuronal pathways that lead to language proficiency and mathematical proficiency.

The staff member who suggested I share this data with you made an excellent point: sometimes we get so caught up in the hard work of teaching and learning that we lose sight of the remarkable distances we have traveled and the mountains of achievement we have climbed.

I am, as always, proud of your dedication, effort and accomplishment.

c: Dr. Korostoff