

Date: Thursday, October 1, 2015  
To: Larry Nyland, Superintendent  
From: Michael F. Tolley, Associate Superintendent for Teaching and Learning  
Re: Friday Memo for October 2, 2015

## **DIVISION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING:**

### **Department of Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction**

#### **Targeted Universalism, Formative Practice and MTSS:**

A primary focus of our work in the Department of Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction is formative practice and its potential to close opportunity gaps for all of our struggling students, regardless of class, race or other factors.

Our goal is to strengthen teacher collaboration around student data to transform teaching practice for the benefit of every student. As we state in our Theory of Action: **If schools have high-functioning teams of teachers collaborating to analyze common formative assessments, then teachers will make instructional shifts that result in opportunity gaps closing.**

Three key concepts:

- 1. Formative practice benefits EVERY student.** This work exemplifies the concept of “targeted universalism” – the practice of following targeted strategies to reach universal goals. Formative practice targets struggling students but ultimately benefits all students, universally. Our strategies target struggling students, but when we can document that opportunity gaps are closing for them, this helps confirm our overall success. In other words, a boost in their achievement tends to reflect a universal boost for all.
- 2. Formative practice strengthens teaching.** Our data-based focus also helps teachers push past their own potential implicit bias – the sense that students may not be capable of improvement due to perceived class or cultural barriers. With formative practice, every student is evaluated based on data. By providing guidance and models through our formative practice training, we boost teachers’ sense of self-efficacy around student achievement. They believe they are able to reach struggling students because we have created a system of peer support, concrete tools and workable strategies that enable them to do that.
- 3. Formative practice strengthens students’ belief in themselves.** Teachers are expected to engage each student with his or her own data so that he or she can identify where to grow academically – and how to make that happen. This growth mindset can really empower struggling students. When students can identify where they are struggling and are given tools to improve, research shows they are far more likely to succeed.

Our school leaders and teachers can attest to the value of this approach: In this video, hear the Dearborn Park International School principal and two of its teachers discuss how collaboration

around data and student engagement with this data transformed their teaching and their students' learning: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpSDR2fAvF4>.