

National Conference on Education

February 14-17, 2008 | Tampa, Florida



American Association of
School Administrators

Facing Race: Closing Subgroup “Achievement Gaps” District- and Region-Wide

Stephen Price, Circe Stumbo, and Raymond Terrell



Readers are free to copy, display, and distribute this PowerPoint presentation, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and West Wind Education Policy, Inc., it is distributed for non-commercial purposes only, and no alteration or transformation is made in the work. All other uses must be approved by the author(s) or West Wind. Please send any comments to westwind@westwinded.com.



Agenda

- Introduction
- Defining the Problem: Realities of “Racial Achievement Gaps”
- The Consortium on Racial Equity in K–12 Education
- Our Framework
- What Can a Superintendent Do?
- How Districts Can Move Forward to Create Equity Leadership Plans
- Q&A



Defining the Problem: Realities of Racial “Achievement Gaps”

Discussion:

How do you talk about racial achievement gaps in your district?
What words do you use when you talk about racial achievement gaps?

What are you doing to close gaps?



Realities of Racial “Achievement Gaps”

- How we frame a problem defines the solutions we consider.
- How we frame the problem of “achievement gaps” reinforces dominant stories of the inferiority of students of color—and it does not force us to look at historic inequities in the system.
- Our solutions tend to focus on “fixing the kids” and not fixing the system.



Realities of Racial “Achievement Gaps”

- If the problem is *underachieving students*, the solution is remediation.
- If the problem is *underserved students*, the solution is to target resources.
- If the problem is *systemic racism*, the solution is anti-racist school leadership and courageous conversations about race.



Realities of Racial “Achievement Gaps”

Reflection:

How is the world described in the way we talk about the achievement gap?

What stories have we been telling about the patterns we describe?

Where does the problem reside in our stories about the patterns?

What are some alternate ways of looking at the patterns?



Consortium on Racial Equity in K-12 Education

- One model for getting training and building allies
- Six districts in southwest Ohio, the state department of education, and two universities
- Year One: Base-building year for superintendents
- Year Two: 3-day Kick-Off Institute; bi-monthly Workshops; Coaching; External Review of Draft Equity Leadership Plans
- Years Three and Beyond: Ongoing training and coaching as we implement action plans for change



Key Questions We Ask

- What are our roles in disrupting the pattern of racial disparity?
- What changes are we willing to undergo to improve student performance?



We Focus on Race

- Why Focusing on Race Matters:
 - We aren't used to talking about race.
 - We avoid conversations about race.
 - We aren't well-prepared to face white privilege.
 - We need to see the formal *and informal* structures that perpetuate inequity.

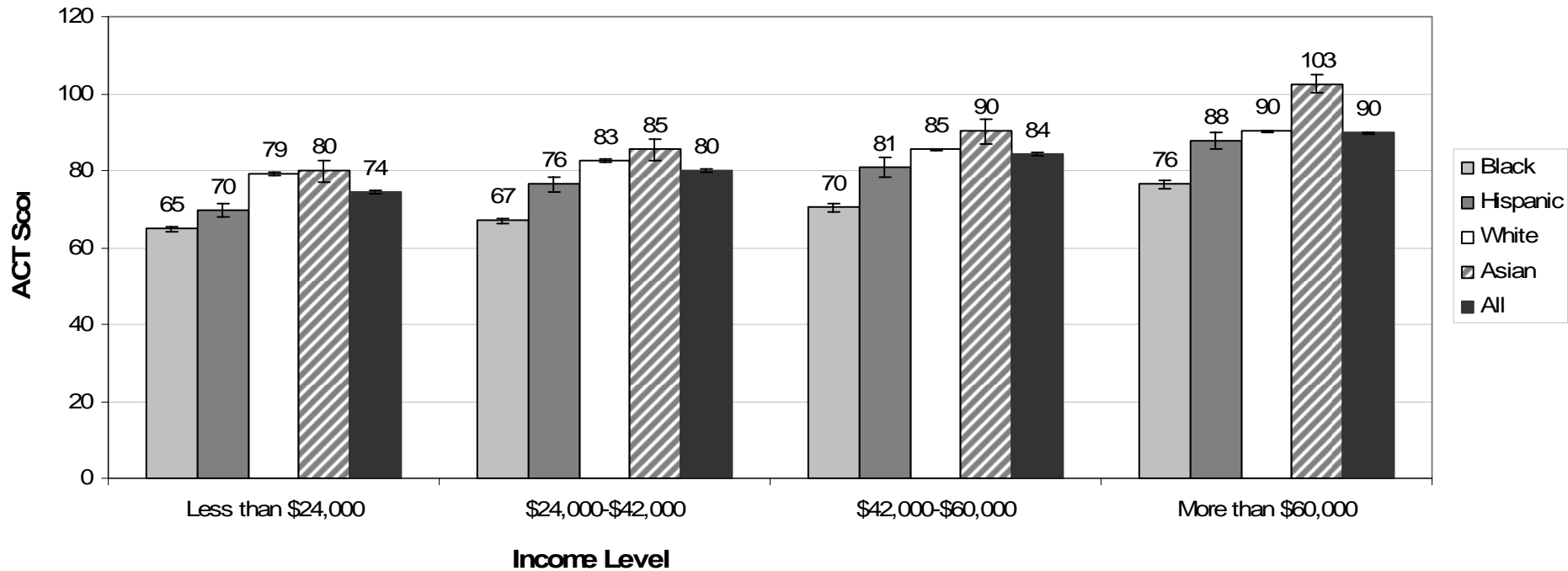


Our Work Started with Traditional Achievement Gap Investigations

- Our goal was to “close racial achievements gaps while raising the achievement of all students”
- The data on race were compelling...



Average ACT Scores by Parental Income and Race/Ethnicity in Ohio, School Year 2005-2006





Watching the Way We Talk

- Yet, we worried that the way we use these data may reinscribe dominant beliefs about children and communities of color.
- We are working to develop local capacity to investigate racial inequities like the inequities evident in student achievement data—and to go beyond.



Our Framework

- Courageous Conversations About Race
- Learning Organizations and Systems Thinking
- Anti-Racist School Leadership Development



Why Have a Framework for the Work?

- We don't share a common and compelling direction **or** shared sense of current reality.
- We disagree about the cause of major problems in the system.
- We lack the skills to talk about race.
 - Nelda Cambron-McCabe



Our Framework: Courageous Conversations About Race

- Based on Pacific Educational Group's *Courageous Conversations About Race* and Ray Terrell's work on Cultural Competency
- 4 Agreements; 6 Conditions
- The Compass
- Passion, Practice, Persistence
- Students at the Center, Leadership, Learning and Teaching, Community and Family Empowerment



Four Agreements

- Stay Engaged
- Speak Your Truth
- Experience Discomfort
- Expect and Accept Non-Closure



Six Conditions

- Focus on personal, local, and immediate
- Isolate race
- Normalize social construction & multiple perspectives
- Monitor agreements & conditions, and establish parameters
- Use a “working definition” for race
- Examine the presence and role of “Whiteness”



Believing
Soul

Thinking
Head

Moral

Intellectual

**Courageous
Conversations
Compass**

Emotional

Relational

Heart

*Hands &
Feet*

Feeling

Acting

Source:
Pacific
Educational
Group



How Courageous Conversations Work

- It's not all about theory (though it is grounded in theory) or just about talk (though we get started by talking).
- Now that we are combining Courageous Conversation with the exercise of Anti-racist School Leadership, we are beginning to close the “knowing and doing gap.”

—Steve Price



Our Framework: Learning Organizations and Systems Thinking

- Based on Peter Senge's *Fifth Discipline* framework
- Attention to collective learning, mental models, and systems thinking
- Systems thinking examines the linkages and interactions between elements of the entire system; involves structures, policies, procedures, cultures, people; reflects and reinforces attitudes, beliefs, values, feelings.

National Conference on Education

February 14-17, 2008 | Tampa, Florida



American Association of
School Administrators

We do not
describe the world
we see,
we see the world
we know how to describe.



Systems Thinking

- Systems are perfectly designed to get the results they get.
- Systems involve structures, policies, procedures, cultures, people; Systems exchange information, energy, resources.
- Systems thinking examines the linkages and interactions between elements of the entire system.



Systems Thinking

- This is not only a problem of individuals, it is a problem of the system.
 - The system is structured by its histories, stories, norms, and understandings.



Systems Thinking

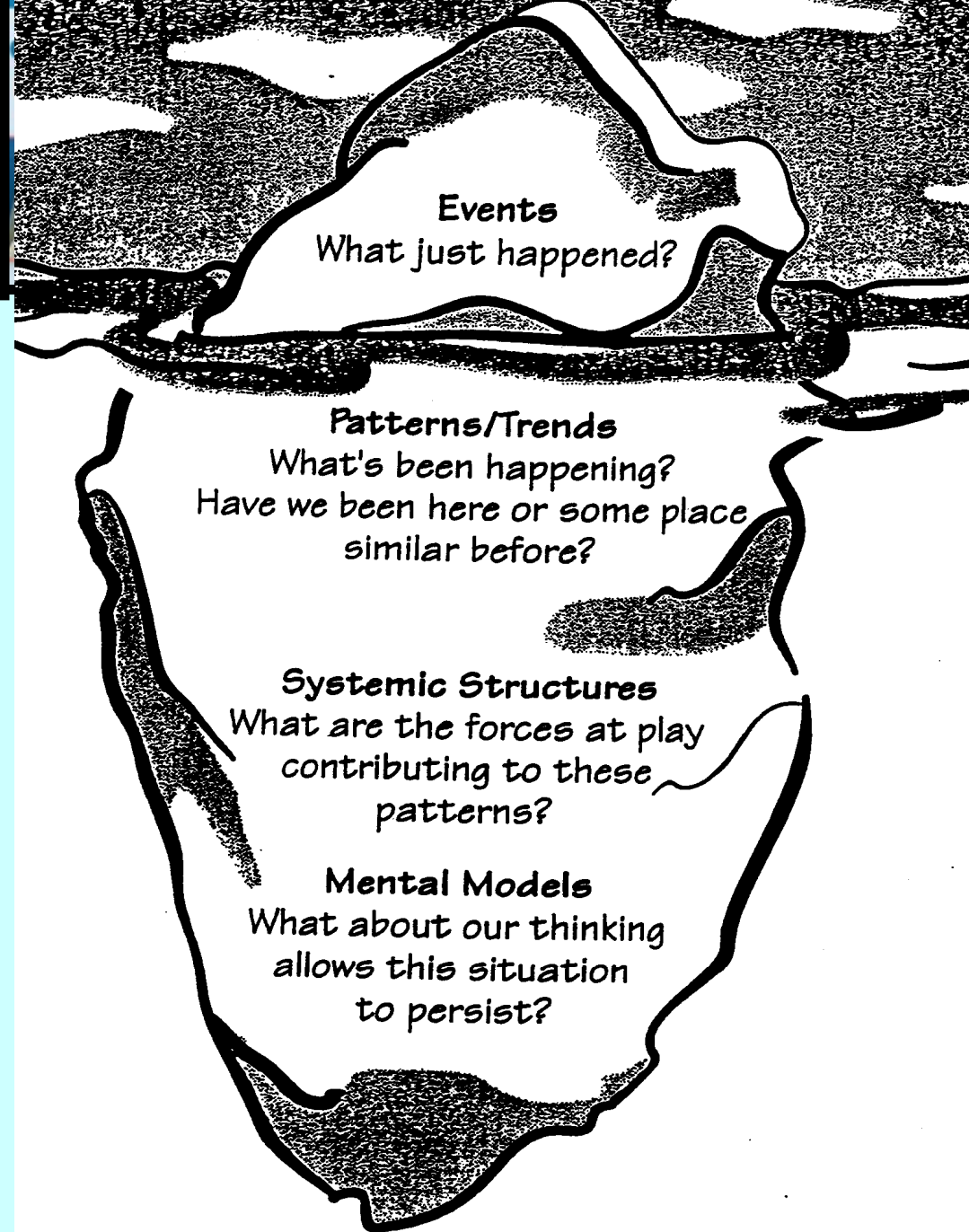
- Formal structures within systems can change; often, however, if informal structures do not also change, results remain constant.
- One of the biggest problems is that changing formal structures can make people believe the system has changed—and render invisible the informal structures that remain.
- What are some examples of this from our discussion of achievement gaps?



So, what do we do?

- Use the lens of race to look anew at the system.
- Use tools like the iceberg and the ladder of inference to discover the mental models underlying certain attitudes and behaviors.

The Iceberg



The Iceberg

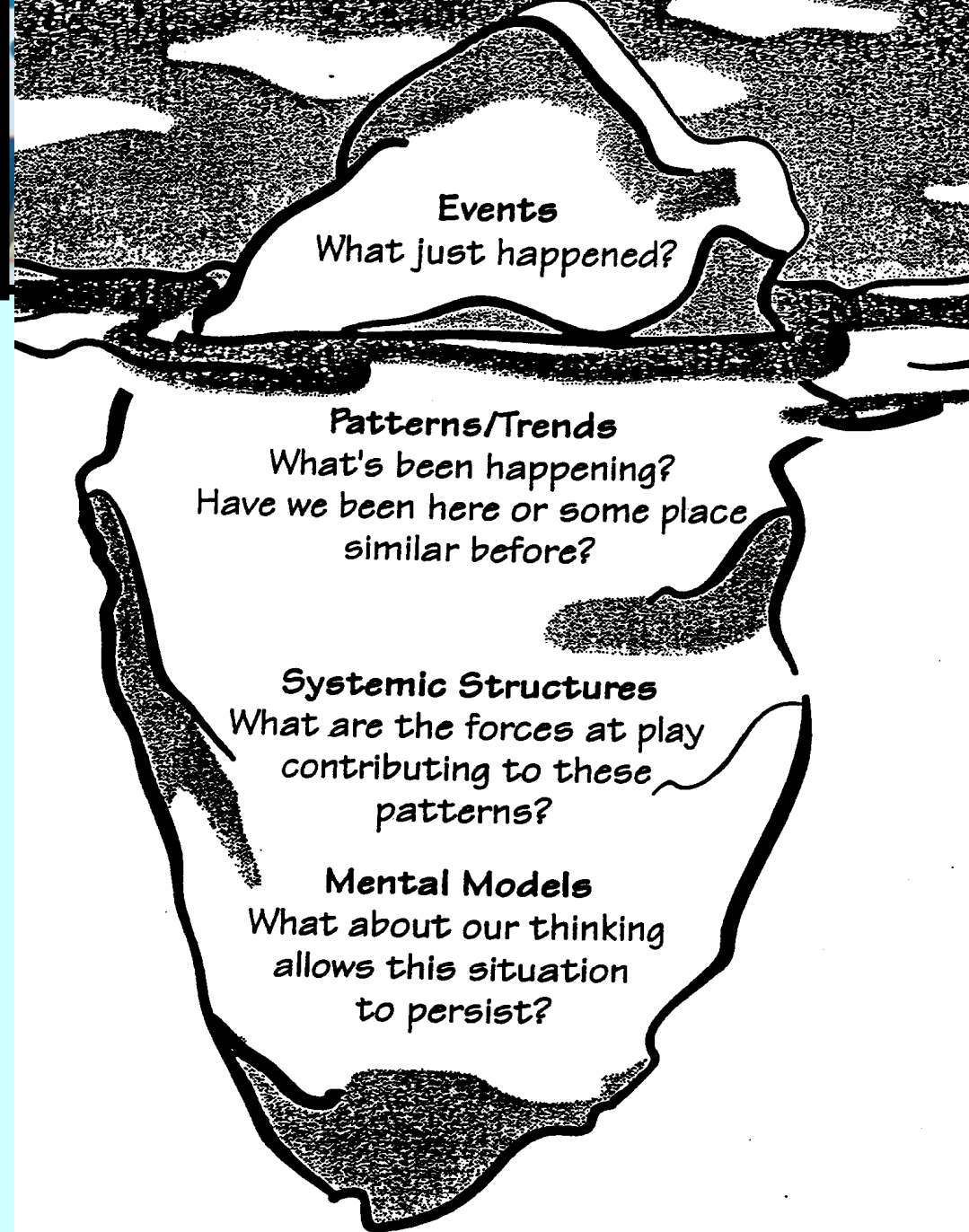
As we experience the Iceberg we:

React to Events

Predict Patterns and Trends

Design Systemic Structures

Transform Mental Models





Our Framework: Anti-Racist School Leadership Development

- Based on theories of Adaptive Leadership™
- Based on Critical Race Theory analyses of race in education
- Entails intentional actions:
 - to reveal the forces within systems that have created racial inequities in education;
 - to disrupt those systems; and
 - to create new and better systems.



Key Tenets of Adaptive Leadership™

- Leadership and Authority
- Adaptive and Technical Change



Key Features of Critical Race Theory

- CRT places race at the center of the conversation.
- CRT recognizes race as a social construct but addresses race as “real” in the sense that law and society treat it as such.
- CRT works toward eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of eliminating all forms of oppression.



Some Anti-Racist Leadership Activities

- Conducting Courageous Conversations
- Privileging the subordinate voice
- Developing, enacting, and implementing affirmative policies and practices to advantage people of color



Summing It Up: What Can a Superintendent Do?

- Conduct Courageous Conversations About Race
- Exercise Anti-Racist School Leadership
- Create Learning Organizations and Engage in Systems Thinking



How Districts Can Move Forward

- Convene a cross-cutting, multi-racial Equity Leadership Team.
- Get training (on our framework, cultural competency, etc.).
- Spend extra time in observation and interpretation *before* intervention.
- Find allies, engage students and community.
- Analyze your own policies and procedures, as well as teaching practices and procedures.



For More Information

- **Circe Stumbo**, President, West Wind Education Policy, Inc.
1700 S. First Avenue, Suite 17, Iowa City, IA 52240
circe@westwinded.com
- **Stephen Price**, Superintendent, Middletown City Schools
1515 Girard Ave., Middletown, Ohio 45044
sprice@middletowncityschools.com
- **Raymond Terrell**, Assistant Dean, School of Education and Allied Professions
207C McGuffey Hall, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio 45056
terrelr@muohio.edu