

Academic Learning Sense Making Team: “What is the story we want to tell?”

Dominant Story	Our SMT-informed Story
<p>When it comes to academic learning, learning is a linear process and professionals know best what that looks like. Some students are so far behind that it's impossible to catch them up, and it's too hard for teachers to teach such a wide range in a group together. Some students are ready and others are not: students living in poverty and students of color are distracted by other unfortunate things in their lives, have difficulty learning and are more likely to misbehave. Some students also don't choose to take advantage of all the great opportunities that are available to them. Many students who don't do well get into a 'I don't like school' attitude that creates a cycle too difficult to break. It's the 'luck of the draw' in getting good teachers. Educators have too much to cover in classes that they can't possibly make sure that all students' experiences and backgrounds are represented in every class. There are good and bad students in our system, and also good and bad schools.</p>	<p>Our SMT-informed Story: What is being held up as the standard for academic learning (Honors/AP classes, MCAS) is not being questioned.¹ There is wide variation in classroom teaching and in 'interventions' and no consensus on what quality academic learning looks like.² Students can describe successful and powerful learning experiences but feel that it is 'the luck of the draw' in who gets those, and it's not clear that they all look the same - or that they match up to how teachers or students are assessed in our system.³ Without a consensus, academic learning and academic success are thus defined narrowly according to traditional, white supremacist values and our system is set up to perpetuate that. These values - consciously or not - inhibit relationships between mostly white teachers and students of color.⁴ Many stakeholders recognize the importance of quality relationships for students' engagement, and cite the quality of student/adult relationships in out-of-school spaces, while noting that the many external demands placed on teachers make building similar relationships difficult in the structure of the school day.⁵ The current system of leveling is not flexible (as it is imagined to be) and requires cultural and social capital to navigate.⁶ Even though students of color, on average, have Bs and Cs when they are included in Honors and AP classes, nothing really changes in terms of pedagogy/instructional strategies - they are expected to simply "fit in" and thus often don't feel like they really "belong."⁷ Being valued and believed in is essential for academic learning.⁸ Classroom community is important for learning and the teacher's responsibility in creating that culture is under-supported and under-emphasized.⁹ Teachers ideas of what students need - and what students say they need - are not always the same, both in relationships and academic learning.¹⁰</p>

¹ AP/Honors data, YPAR data, focus on MCAS in District Plan

² CPAR data, focus group data

³ Focus group data, YPAR data

⁴ AP/Honors data

⁵ Focus group report

⁶ AP/Honors data, Panorama data

⁷ AP/Honors data

⁸ CPAR data

⁹ CPAR data, focus group data

¹⁰ CPAR, YPAR, Focus Group data