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Plan advises action on gap

Students target racial disparities

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Restructuring the school day. Changes in policies for cheating, tardiness and skipping classes. More teacher accountability. Better transportation options. Decentralization of large schools into smaller learning communities.

Those and several other actions are needed to help eliminate the achievement gap that exists in the Ann Arbor Public Schools, a student-led research group said Wednesday night.

The Leap the Gap Youth Empowerment Project presented 22 recommendations for action to the school board, capping off more than two years of work that included conducting focus groups and surveys of more than 1,400 Ann Arbor high school students to determine causes of the achievement gap.

The achievement disparity is commonly talked about in terms of a gap between black and white students. In Ann Arbor, the gap shows up in disparities in test scores, failure rates, graduation rates, suspension rates and participation in both remedial and advanced classes.

Many of the recommendations centered on increasing the dialogue between students and staff, the students said.

"The lack of it (dialogue) was a common problem," said Eric Sun, a Pioneer senior. "Students must learn to speak and adults

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See a full list and descriptions of the Leap the Gap project's recommendations and join the discussion about them online at blog.mlive.com/study_hall.

ACHIEVEMENT FROM A1

Transportation access called a key

need to learn to listen.”

The group called for administrators and teachers to work with students to develop personal achievement action plans and to offer students more encouragement, engagement and support resources.

They also asked the district to use professional development to help teachers develop diverse ways of teaching.

The group also looked at the overall community and how it could help. Key in that section of the report was public transportation, said Prithvi Varma, a Huron senior.

“More youth need accessibility to

transportation,” he said. “We would like to see the schools collaborate with the city (in this area).”

Making sure students succeed in schools is vital, said Christina Tzorinizis, a Huron graduate.

“Students feel the school is their community,” she said. “And many feel unprepared leaving their community. That impacts how they function once they leave school.”

The group plans to continue working with the district to implement the recommendations.

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SEE ACHIEVEMENT, BACK PAGE

Leap the Gap plans

The Leap the Gap Youth Empowerment Project issued 22 recommendations for action at the Ann Arbor school board meeting Wednesday night for combating the achievement gap. Following are several of the recommendations:

- Create advisory forums at all high schools.
- Decentralize and personalize large schools into smaller learning communities.
- Update professional development to increase use of diverse teaching methods in support of diverse learning styles and a counseling model to interface with the new system of advisory forums.
- Fully inform and significantly involve students in their own education choices.
- Invest in low-cost information and equitable access to school and community information, opportunities and support resources for students and parents, including contemporary technology and library resources and money for school expenses such as supplies, transportation and activities that otherwise are more accessible to the economically privileged.
- With student leadership, simplify, strengthen and enforce policies for structure and firm standards (skipping class and tardiness policies, cheating, suspension criteria, etc.)
- Restructure student school days to free more time for jobs and participation in other real-life community opportunities.
- Provide more accessibility to and subsidy for public transportation, including additional routes and passes for students with limited means.