

LOCAL

Finding barriers to learning

Students find there's no easy solution to achievement gap

BY DAVID JESSE
News Staff Reporter

Reading and sorting 800 pages of focus group transcripts showed the student leaders of the "Leap the Gap" project that there is no easy solution to bridge the achievement gap in Ann Arbor schools.

"We discovered that the achievement gap is a lot more complex than the common belief," Huron High School senior Matseo Mbala-Nkanga said.

The achievement gap is

commonly identified as the difference between white and minority students, especially black students, in test scores, grade-point averages, graduation rates and dropout rates.

Barriers to achievement that students identified include the way students perceive themselves, the way teachers interact with them, what their friends pressure them to do, what the expectations of their parents are, and how much access they have to a variety of resources.

The group of students has distilled comments from fo-

cus groups of their peers into 23 youth-defined barriers to achievement.

They presented several of those findings to the school board Wednesday night. On Monday, the group, along with teachers, administrators and parents, will spend all day working on developing recommendations toward solving those barriers. Adults and students can still register to attend by e-mailing senate@youthempowerment.com.

One barrier identified was

SEE ACHIEVEMENT, A4

Leap the Gap project

The Leap the Gap project has identified several barriers to student achievement. Among them are:

- Negative peer influence.
- Stereotyping or lack of cultural understanding from peers.
- Lack of encouragement and support from teachers, counselors, administrators and all staff.
- Limited level of relationship between students and staff.
- Lack of understanding of and sensitivity to cultural factors (religion, gender, ethnicity, race, youth culture, income).
- Lack of information and access to resources and opportunities.
- Stereotyping by adults.

OVER →