
THE OPPORTUNITY:

From “Brutal Facts” to the Best
Schools We’ve Ever Had

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INTRODUCTION: DO WE *TRULY* *WANT* BETTER SCHOOLS?

Because organizations only improve...

“where the **truth** is told and
the brutal facts confronted”

Jim Collins

BRUTAL FACTS:

Only 7% of low-income students will ever earn a college degree

BRUTAL FACTS:

Only 32% of our *college-bound* students are adequately prepared for college

“Understanding University Success”
Center for Educational Policy Research

THE HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE GAP

- “I never cried because I was homesick in college. The only reason I cried was because I felt dumb. One night I called my cousin and I was like, ‘I feel stupid. I shouldn’t be here.’”

Educational Leadership, April 2007, p. 45

COLLEGE SUCCESS:

ANALYTICAL READING & DISCUSSION
PERSUASIVE WRITING

- Drawing inferences/conclusions from texts
- Analyzing conflicting source documents
- Supporting arguments with evidence
- Solving complex problems with no obvious answer

David Conley

College Knowledge

COLLEGE and LIFE SUCCESS DEPEND ON...

- “The TEACHER EFFECT makes all other differences pale in comparison”
William Sanders
- Five years of effective teaching can completely close the gap between low-income students and others.

Marzano; Kain & Hanushek

IMPACT of TEACHING

- Pittsburgh Schools: 69% range of difference
- Mortimore & Sammons: teaching has 6 to 10 times as much impact as other factors
- Dylan Wiliam: 400% “speed of learning” differences

REALITY CHECK

- “Effective practices never take root in more than a small proportion of classrooms and schools”

Tyack and Cuban

- “Effective teaching is quite different from the teaching that is typically found in most classrooms”

Odden and Kelley

THE REAL OPPORTUNITY...

- “Most of us in education are mediocre at what we do”

Tony Wagner

Harvard Graduate School of Education

- EVERY STUDY of classroom practice reveals that most teaching is mediocre--or worse

Goodlad; Sizer; Resnick; Powell, Farrar & Cohen; Learning 24/7 Classroom Study

BRUTAL FACTS

- After decades of reform, we still DO NOT INSPECT instruction, i.e.:
 1. *WHAT* we teach (essential standards)
or
 2. *HOW* we teach
(effective lessons/units)

Gordon; Elmore; Marzano; Tyack & Cuban; Hess; Berliner

The case of SEAN CONNORS

EFFECTIVE LESSON: WHAT & HOW

- Clarity @ essential standard being learned that day (“introductory paragraphs”)
- “Scaffolded” (step-by-step) instruction
 - **“Check for understanding”**/formative assessment *between each step or “chunk”*
 - **Models/exemplars**: students studied these in pairs
- Engagement & attentiveness—students monitored/called on randomly
- Students write own intro. paragraph...
only when most/all students are ready

WHY IS MOST TEACHING MEDIocre?

- “The administrative superstructure of schools ...exists to ‘buffer’ teaching from
OUTSIDE INSPECTION”

Richard Elmore

**YOU CAN'T EXPECT WHAT YOU DON'T
INSPECT**

Peter Senge

PRIMARY TASK: Improve WHAT and HOW we teach

- I. **REPLACE “IMPROVEMENT PLANNING” WITH
TEAM-BASED EFFORTS TO IMPROVE
WHAT IS TAUGHT and HOW WELL**
- II. **“GUARANTEED & VIABLE CURRICULUM”
 (“WHAT”)**
- III. **SIMPLIFY “LEADERSHIP”**
- IV. **RADICALLY REDEFINE
LITERACY INSTRUCTION**

I. FIRST: TYPICAL “STRATEGIC” or “IMPROVEMENT PLANNING” MODELS...

- superficial; time-consuming
- counterproductive, distracting actions that PREVENT

rapid, team-based cycles of instruction → assessment → improvement of instruction

I. LEARNING COMMUNITIES: AN ASTONISHING CONCURRENCE

“The most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is building the capacity of school personnel to function as a professional learning community.”

Milbrey McLaughlin (cited in *Professional Learning Communities at Work* by Dufour and Eaker)

I. LEARNING COMMUNITIES: AN ASTONISHING CONCURRENCE

“Professionals do not work alone; they work in teams... to accomplish the goal—to heal the patient, win the lawsuit, plan the building.”

Arthur Wise: *Teaching Teams: a 21st – Century
Paradigm For Organizing America’s Schools*

I. FIRST: ADOPT “SIMPLE PLANS” to create PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

- 1. DATA - driven (academic!) priorities**
- 2. GOALS: that are measurable/tied to an assessment**
- 3. TEAMWORK that produces *short-term* assessment results**

...Anchored by a

GUARANTEED & VIABLE CURRICULUM

DATA: “S.M.A.R.T.” GOALS

1. SET measurable, annual goals for:

Math; Art; Writing; P.E.—tied to an ASSESSMENT

GOAL: Our team will improve in
(Physics; Math; Writing; French;)

from: 62% (2008)

to: 66% (2009)

- Peter Senge: “More than ? goals is the same as none at all.”

DATA DRIVEN PRIORITIES

2. IDENTIFY lowest - scoring standards—from ASSESSMENTS

- ❑ MATH: “measurement; operations with negative and positive integers”
- ❑ WRITING: “voice”; “word choice”
- ❑ P.E. “volleyball unit; personal health plan”
“maim your opponent in dodge ball”

3. USE formative assessment data (results from lessons, units, etc)

Stiggins; William & Black

AUTHENTIC TEAM-BASED PLC's:

plan lesson/unit → teach it →
assess its impact → adjust
instruction

- **Amphi High:** Thesis statement/introduction
- **Adlai Stevenson:** Physics: how a rainbow works
- **Lake Havasu High School:** Operations with negative & positive integers

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES: FACTS

- **The “PLC” concept (by whatever name) is indisputably the STATE OF THE ART for improving instruction but alas...**

**authentic, team-based PLC’s are
EXCEEDINGLY RARE.**

II. "GUARANTEED & VIABLE CURRICULUM"

How important is this?

The NUMBER ONE FACTOR

for increasing levels of learning

Marzano; Porter; Lezotte

II. GUARANTEED...?

- Do America's schools now ensure that a "guaranteed & viable curriculum" *actually gets taught?*
-

II. GUARANTEED & VIABLE CURRICULUM? BRUTAL FACTS:

- ROSENHOLTZ: teachers provide a "self-selected jumble" of standards
- BERLINER/WALBERG: wild variation from teacher to teacher; no alignment with agreed-upon, viable curriculum standards or assessments
- LITTLE; SIZER; ALLINGTON; CALKINS: "curricular chaos" in English & language arts

II. GUARANTEED CURRICULUM: MAP the STANDARDS*

1st quarter: NUMBER SENSE

DATA ANALYSIS & PROBABILITY

2ND quarter: PATTERNS, ALGEBRA & FUNCTIONS

GEOMETRY

3rd quarter: MEASUREMENT & DISCRETE MATH

MATHEMATICAL STRUCTURE/LOGIC

4th quarter: **REVIEW: for YEAR END ASSESSMENT**

END OF EACH QUARTER: common assessment...with ample
“higher-order” component (analysis, evaluation etc.)

III. LEADERSHIP in the Professional Learning Community

- “No institution can survive if it needs geniuses or supermen to manage it. It must be organized to get along under a leadership of average human beings.”

Peter Drucker

THE LEADERSHIP ILLUSION

The actions of administrators, including all forms of improvement planning & staff development, have virtually no impact on the quality of teaching in the school.

Richard Elmore 2000

*This is not a matter of work ethic;
it is a matter of misplaced priorities.*

MONITORING 1. INSTRUCTION and 2. GUARANTEED & VIABLE CURRICULUM

- LEADERS (administrators, dept. heads) must
 1. Conduct at least one unannounced classroom walk-through each month, looking for schoolwide patterns of strength/weakness with regard to...
 - Clear focus on essential standards
 - College prep: critical reasoning/higher-order reading, writing, thinking
 - Essential elements of an effective lesson

September: “4 of 15 classes teaching essential standards”

October: “__ of 15 classes...” (SMART goal)

MONITORING 1. INSTRUCTION and
2. GUARANTEED & VIABLE CURRICULUM

“If you can not
measure it, you
cannot improve it.”

British scientist Lord Kelvin

LEADERSHIP: Team Management for “GUARANTEED & VIABLE CURRICULUM”

(D. Reeves; R. Marzano; R. DuFour)

QUARTERLY CURRICULUM REVIEW: Leaders & Teams discuss...

- ❑ quarterly assessments (success rate; areas of strength/weakness)
- ❑ grade books (lowest-scoring assessments)
- ❑ scored work samples (weak/strong areas)

IS THIS A FAIR, REASONABLE REQUIREMENT?

MEETINGS: STRATEGIZE TO ACHIEVE—& to RECOGNIZE/CELEBRATE every “SMALL WIN”

- _____ schools have a “steering committee”
- _____ of our 6 elementary teams: developed meeting protocols
- _____ of 28 teams completed 1.) quarterly “standards maps”;
2.) common end-of-quarter assessments
- _____ of our **25 course-alike teams** have created a
SUCCESSFUL LESSON (e.g. 87% succeeded)
- MARCH: 6 of 15 classrooms—essential standard being taught
- APRIL: 13 of 15 classrooms—essential standard taught!

NO SMALL WINS = NO PROGRESS

RECOGNIZE & CELEBRATE

measurable “SMALL WINS” to overcome resistance & **promote MOMENTUM**

The #1 LEVER FOR IMPROVING MORALE AND EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

Nelson; Blasé and Kirby

- The single best, low cost, high-leverage **way to improve performance, morale, and the climate for change** is to *dramatically increase the levels of meaningful recognition for educators*

Robert Evans

RESULTS of Guaranteed and Viable
Curriculum; Effective Teamwork;
Frequent Recognition & Celebration

ADLAI STEVENSON HIGH SCHOOL

- 10+ years of record-breaking gains on every national, state & end-of-course assessment
 - 800% increase in AP success
 - Average ACT score: 21 to 25*
-

IV. UNPARALLELED OPPORTUNITY: LITERACY INSTRUCTION

“Under-developed literacy skills are the number one reason why students are retained, assigned to special education, given long-term remedial services and why they fail to graduate from high school.”

Ferrandino and Tirozzi: presidents of
NAESP and NASSP

BRUTAL FACTS; GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY*

- “Reading and Writing vs. ‘stuff’ ratio”
- Lucy Calkins: 1/15 reading to “stuff” ratio
- “Literature based Arts and Crafts”:
 - dioramas; game boards; **worksheets**;
posters; **presentations**; coats-of-arms;
mobiles; movies; cutting, pasting; designing
book jackets; skits; collages

The CRAYOLA CURRICULUM

“I can only summarize the findings by saying that we’ve been stunned...

kids are given more coloring assignments than mathematics and writing assignments...

I want to repeat that, because I’m not joking, nor am I exaggerating.”

Katie Haycock

HIGH SCHOOL English

- 9th grade: *To Kill A Mockingbird* (100 points total)
 - Draw “head or full body shot” of any character—use “crayons, colored pencils” (20 points)
 - Create a model of Maycomb (wood, plastic or styrefoam) (20 points)

HIGH SCHOOL English

“Honors” Sophomore English:

- **Two schools—collage as 6-week assessment of literary unit**
- ***Frankenstein* assessment: make a mobile or collage**
- ***Siddhartha* Assessment**
 - 8-pages of worksheets (96 questions)
 - $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch of space to answer each question
 - NO DISCUSSION OR WRITING**

HIGH SCHOOL English

- AP Literature: “Memories” Scrapbook (200 points)
 - **Second-semester project**
 - **For each page of text [no criteria for quality of written work] draw illustration (using various media)**
-

LITERARY TERMS: essential?

indirect characterization

direct characterization

static character

internal conflict

external conflict

rising action

omniscient point of view

third-person limited point
of view

complication

foreshadowing

suspense

resolution

climax

plot

anadiplosis

chiasmus

synecdoche

A BETTER WAY: READ, WRITE and TALK

- After close reading of innumerable books and articles, students
“wrote and talked,
wrote and talked”
their way toward understanding.

Mike Rose: *Lives on the Boundary*

K-12/COLLEGE SUCCESS:

ANALYTICAL READING & DISCUSSION
PERSUASIVE WRITING

- Draw inferences and conclusions
- Analyze conflicting source documents
- Solve complex problems with no obvious answer
- (Prepare students to) Write multiple 3-5-page papers supporting arguments with evidence
- Read far more books, articles & essays than they now read in high school [in class!]

College Knowledge by David Conley

WRITING: IMPORTANT?

- Writing is the **litmus paper of thought** ...the very CENTER OF SCHOOLING

Ted Sizer

*Writing aids in cognitive development to such an extent that the **upper reaches of Bloom's taxonomy could not be reached** without the use of some form of writing .*

Kurt and Farris 1990

BRUTAL FACTS

- Writing is rarely assigned, even more rarely *taught*.

William Zinsser; National
Commission on Writing

- Even U.S. student's "best writing is mediocre."

NAEP report on "best" US high school writing

- Students "with 3.8 GPAs," in highly selective colleges, write poorly.

NAEP writing Study

BRUTAL FACTS

“If we could institute only one change to make students more college ready, it should be to increase the amount and quality of writing students are expected to produce.”

David Conley
author of *College Knowledge*

K-12/COLLEGE SUCCESS:

ANALYTICAL READING & PERSUASIVE WRITING

SIMPLE STEPS → MAJOR REVOLUTION

- **“Who would make a better friend—
Spider or Turtle?”**
- **“Old Dan or Little Anne: which admire most?”**
- **“What do you think are the most important
lessons of WWI?”**
- **Evaluate for most/least effective, significant;
interesting--presidents; explorers; scientists etc.**

SIMPLE STEPS → MAJOR REVOLUTION: EACH QUARTER

DEVELOP ARGUMENTS/PROPOSALS:

■ SCIENCE:

- PRO/CON: Drill in Arctic National Wildlife Refuge
- Environmental sustainability

■ HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES:

- Illegal Immigration; Middle East issue(s)
- Evaluation of two presidents
- Case for liberal/conservative policy/politics

THE OPPORTUNITY

- “We don’t know the half of what these kids can do”

Ted Sizer

- “We now have 100/100/100 schools – every kid poor and minority, and every one of them meeting standards – including 100% of special education kids (the typical average is about 15%)” Doug Reeves/e-mail

FOR SWIFT, DRAMATIC IMPROVEMENT, FOCUS ON:

- **TEAM-BASED PLC's** (“WHAT” & “HOW”)
- **GUARANTEED & VIABLE Curriculum**
- **RADICAL** changes to literacy instruction

CELEBRATE every “SMALL WIN” in these areas at **EVERY faculty & admin. meeting**

WHY?: 35-50 percentile gain in

THREE YEARS (Marzano; Sanders; Bracey)