

Leadership for Learning 2007: Closing the Implementation Gap

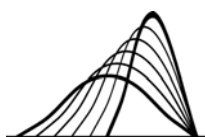
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The Four Questions

- What do students need to learn?
- How do we know that they have learned it (before the end of year tests)?
- What are the most effective teaching and learning strategies?
- How do we know that schools and systems are effectively supporting learning?

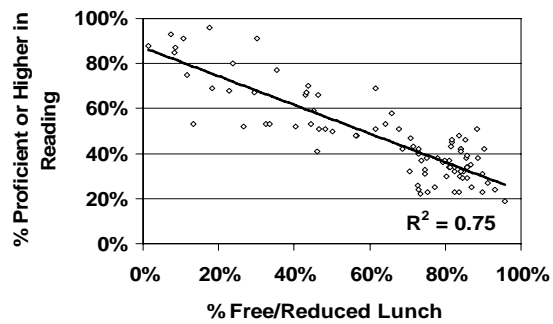
New Evidence for 2007

- Equity Gaps Can Be Closed
- Lessons in Linearity
- Specific Leadership and Teaching Decisions Have Enormous Influence
- It's Our Culture, not *Their* Culture
- Change Barriers
- Change Tools

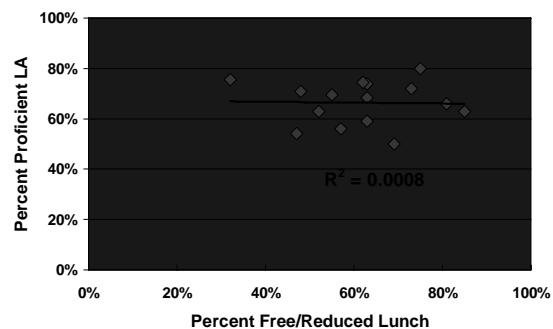


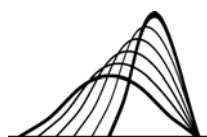
Equity Gaps Can Be Closed

The Typical Scenario



Poverty and Student Achievement

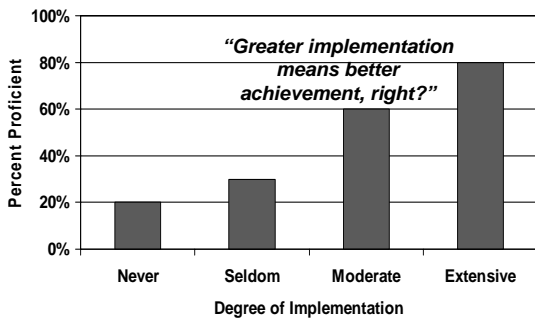




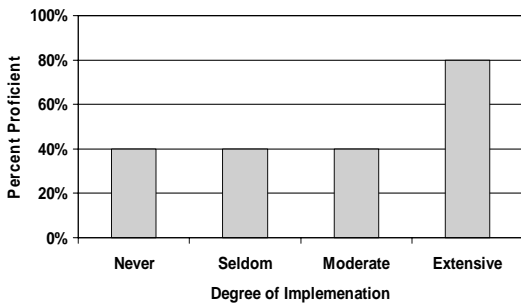
Lessons in Linearity

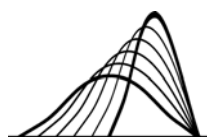
Or
“What if brand name programs are not the answer?”

The Myth of Linearity



The Non-Linear Path of School Improvement





In the real world of the classroom, it's **CRITICAL MASS** that matters.

The central message today:

DEEP implementation of a FEW things beats superficial implementation of many things.

What's New for 2007?

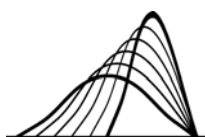
- Latest Evidence on Leadership Maps™
- 129,000+ students from 205 schools
- Synthesis of multiple research sources on teaching, leadership, and organizational effectiveness
- Direct links to student achievement
- Preliminary analysis -- evidence and analysis continues to evolve

Leadership Maps™

Achievement of Results

<p>Lucky High Results, Low Understanding of Antecedents Replication of Success Unlikely</p>	<p>Leading High Results, High Understanding of Antecedents Replication of Success Likely</p>
<p>Losing Low Results, Low Understanding of Antecedents D'oh!</p>	<p>Learning Low Results, High Understanding of Antecedents Replication of Success Likely</p>

Causes: The Antecedents of Excellence



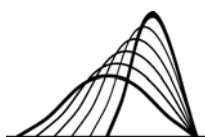
Most Effective Strategies

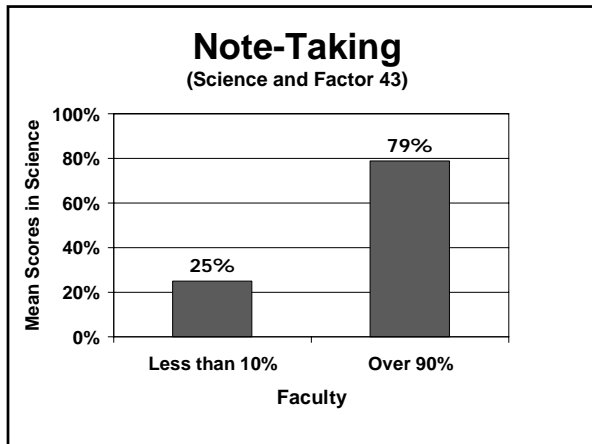
- **WRITING and Note-Taking**
- **RECOGNITION of Achievement**
- **ALIGNMENT of Standards, Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment**
- **ASSIGNMENT of Teachers Based on Need**

Most Effective Strategies

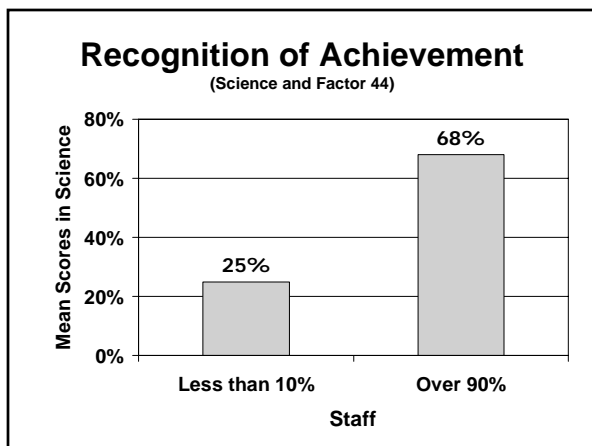
- **DEEP CONTENT ANALYSIS, including big ideas and essential questions**
- **MONITORING that is frequent and visible**
- **INTERDISCIPLINARY assessment**
- **TEACHING STRATEGIES including comparisons and questions**
- **STUDENT ENGAGEMENT**

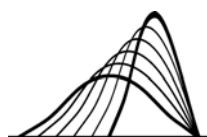
Writing and Note-Taking





Recognition of Achievement

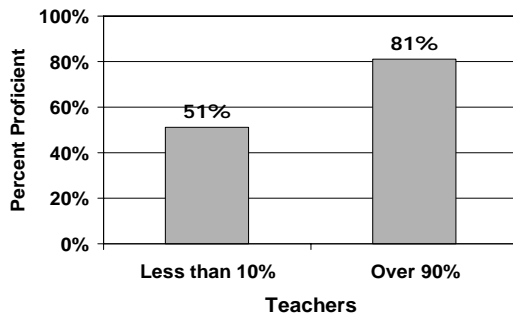




ALIGNMENT of Standards, Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

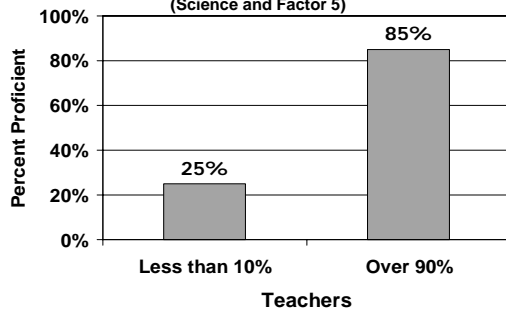
Aligned Curriculum, Assessments, Instructions, and Standards

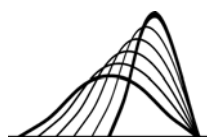
(Math and Factor 5)



Alignment of Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, and Standards

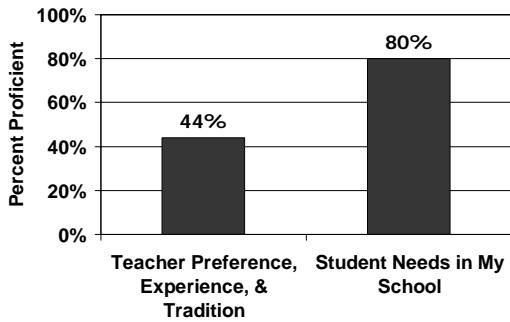
(Science and Factor 5)



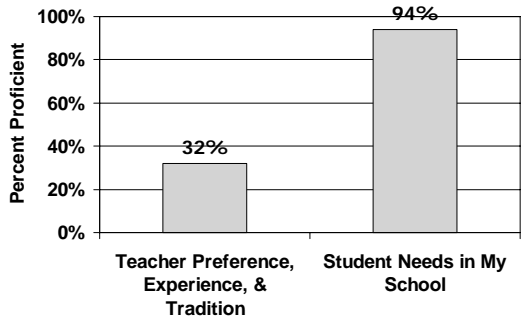


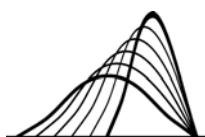
ASSIGNMENT of Teachers Based on Student Need

Assignment of Teachers (English and Factor 13)



Assignment of Teachers (Science and Factor 13)

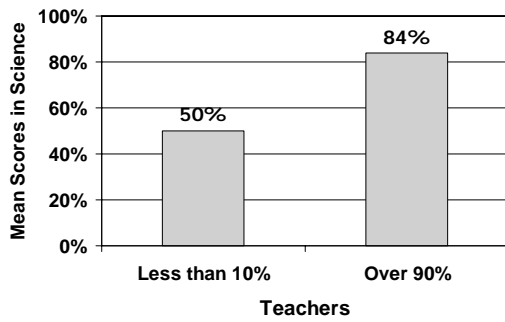




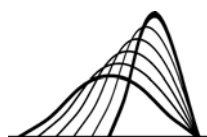
**MODELING and
MENTORING
of Instructional Strategies**

**Mentoring and Modeling of
Instructional Strategies *Weekly***

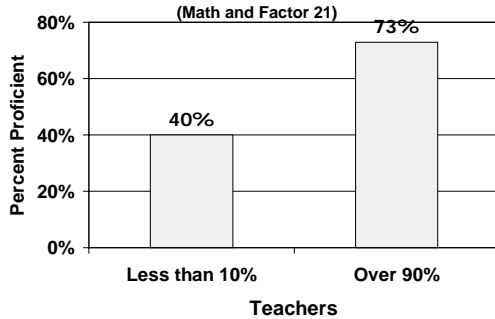
(Science and Factor 14)



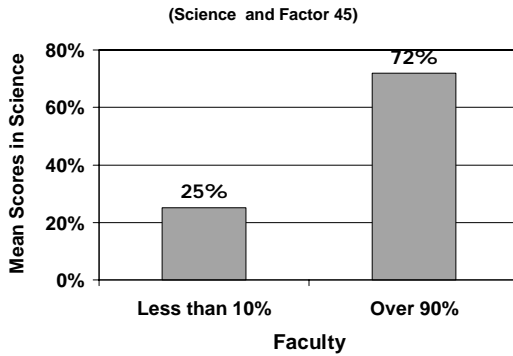
**ENGAGING Classroom
Environments**



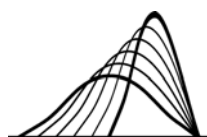
Classroom Environments -- Posting Standards, Displaying Excellent Student Work



Post Clear Objectives for Every Lesson

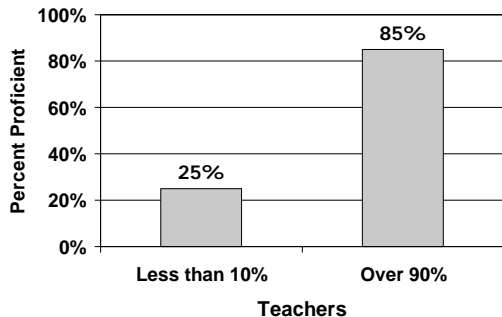


DEEP CONTENT ANALYSIS, Including Big Ideas and Essential Questions



Big Ideas and Essential Questions

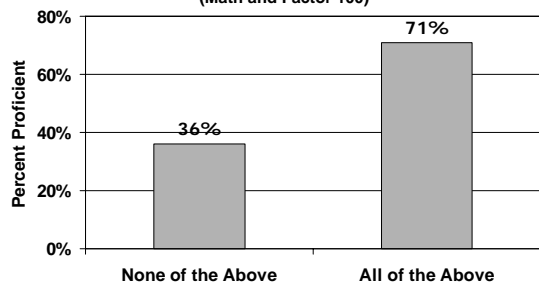
(Science and Factor 55)

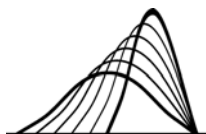


MONITORING that is
Frequent and Visible

Monitoring, Specific Actions, Timelines, and Methods to Gather Evidence

(Math and Factor 100)

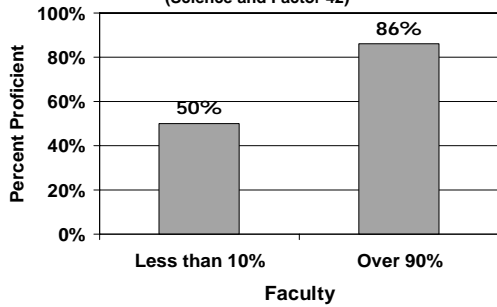




TEACHING STRATEGIES Including Comparisons and Questions

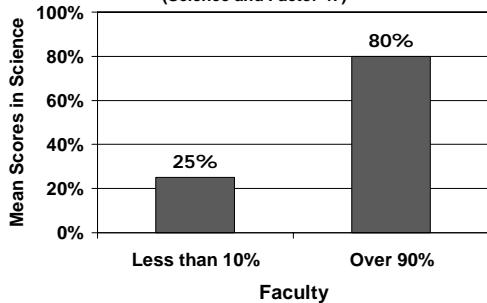
“Doing Marzano” Metaphors, Similes, and Analogies in Daily Practice

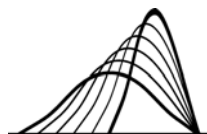
(Science and Factor 42)



“Doing Marzano” Part II Questions, Cues, Advance Organizers

(Science and Factor 47)





The Good News . . . And the Bad

■ Good News:

- Standards, curriculum, and assessment remain the heart of effective classroom instruction
- These are core competencies that exist SOMEWHERE in almost every school system

■ Bad News:

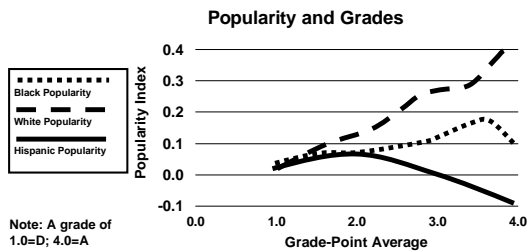
- We are assuming WAY TOO MUCH about the widespread understanding and IMPLEMENTATION of standards and assessment in the classroom
- The general notion of "we've already done standards" is spurious

It's *Their* Culture

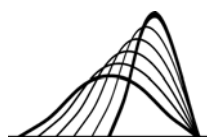
No . . . It's *OUR* Culture

The Culture of Achievement

The popularity of white students increases as their grades increase. For black and Hispanic students, there is a drop off in popularity for those with higher GPAs.



Source: Fryer, R. G. (Winter 2006). *Education Next*. Calculations from National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health data.



It's Their Fault, Right?

- Students come to school valuing achievement
- In 2nd and 4th grade, the other students that "I want to be like" are high achieving students – boys and girls, Anglo, African-American, and Latino
- By 7th Grade, low-achieving student become the role model

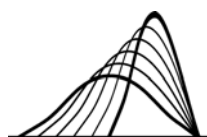
Source: Taylor, April Z and Sandra Graham, "An examination of the relationship between achievement values and perceptions of barriers among Low SES African American and Latino Students," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, February 2007, p. 52-64.

Change Leaders

... And Change Killers

Change Killers

- **Toxic Feedback**
- **Hierarchy**
- **Blame**



An Experiment in Grading Policy

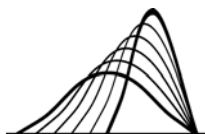
- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| ■ C | Group 1 |
| ■ C | ■ A = 100 |
| ■ MA = Missing Assignment | ■ B = 90 |
| ■ D | ■ C = 80 |
| ■ C | ■ D = 70 |
| ■ B | Group 2 |
| ■ MA = Missing Assignment | ■ A = 4 |
| ■ MA = Missing Assignment | ■ B = 3 |
| ■ B | ■ C = 2 |
| | ■ D = 1 |
| | Group 3 |
| | ■ Choose your own system |

Toxic Grading Practices and Alternatives

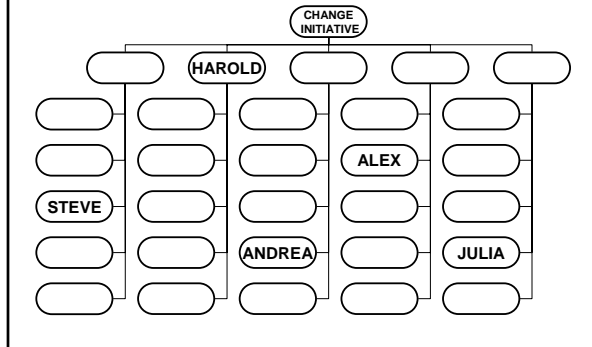
- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ Zeroes for missing work | ■ Larry the Cable Guy and missing work |
| ■ Average/mean | ■ Best representation of work |
| ■ Semester killer – one test or project | ■ Resilience – menu and personal responsibility |

Change Killer #1: Toxic Feedback

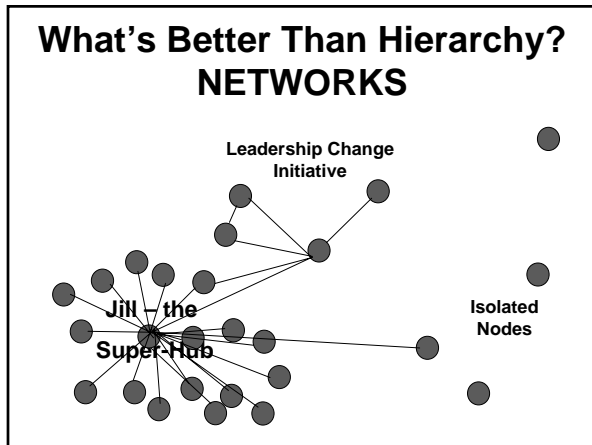
- Feedback to Students – indefensible grading systems
- Feedback to Teachers – “I can tell you what’s wrong in 5 minutes”
- Feedback to Leaders – “Your contract is about to expire – it’s time for your evaluation”



Change Killer #2: Hierarchical Communication

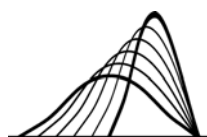


What's Better Than Hierarchy? NETWORKS

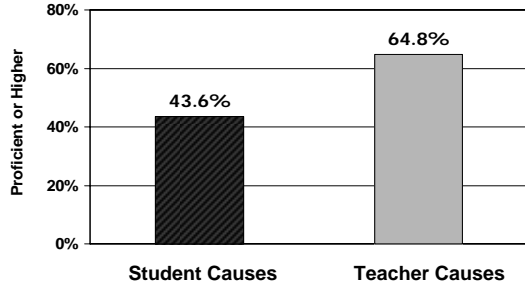


Change Killer #3: Blame

- Ask your colleagues, *“What are the primary causes of student achievement?”*
- This is the INQUIRY variable – one of the most powerful variables in leadership and teaching
- 2006 and 2007 studies of more than 300,000 students

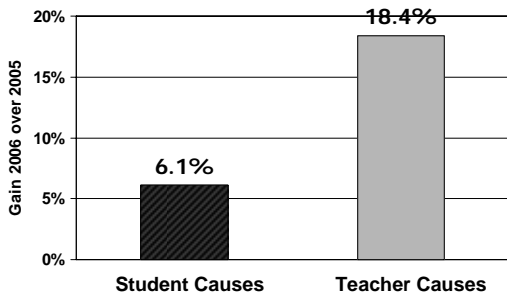


If You Think That Teachers and Leaders Influence Student Achievement, You Are Right



Source: Reeves, D. B. (2006). *The Learning Leader*. ASCD.

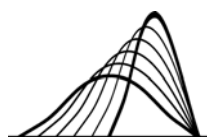
Your Expectations of Your Professional Efficacy and GAINS



Source: Reeves, D. B. (2007, in press) *Framework for Teacher Leadership*.

Tools for Effective Change

- **PIM™** – Planning, Implementation, and Monitoring
- **Leadership Maps™**
- **Differentiated Professional Development**
- **Holistic Accountability**



**Tool #1 for Effective Change
PIM™ – Planning, Implementation,
and Monitoring**

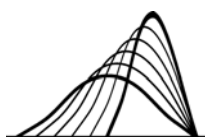
- *Double-blind rubric for assessing school plan quality*
- *Differentiate between format and effectiveness*
- *Validate the work of teachers and leaders*

Three Key PIM™ Findings

- **Monitoring** – “Do we watch the adults as carefully as we watch the kids?”
- **Inquiry** – “What and who are the causes of student achievement?”
- **Evaluation** – “is it working?”

**Tool #2 for Effective Change
Leadership Maps™**

- **Focus on the degree of implementation**
- **Map every school and central office department**
- **Track progress DURING THE YEAR** – not just after test scores come out
- **Horizontal precedes vertical** – leadership actions precede student achievement



Tool #3 for Effective Change Differentiated Professional Development

- **Conduct 4,3,2,1 analysis**
 - 4 – “I will lead this initiative and teach my colleagues”
 - 3 – “I will model it in my classroom”
 - 2 – “I know about it, but don’t use it”
 - 1 – “I am not familiar with it”
- **Build capacity with the 4’s and 3’s**
- **Monitor implementation for the 2’s and 1’s**

Tool #4 for Effective Change Holistic Accountability

- **“Science Fair for Adults”**
- **The single best spur to professional conversations around specific teaching and leadership practices**
- **Remove the excuses**
- **Local evidence trumps outside experts**

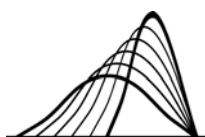
Questions and Discussion

*For a complete set of slides, please
give me your business card.*

Thanks!

Douglas B. Reeves, Ph.D.
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- Improving student writing skills and test scores
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Speakers

ERIN GRUWELL, *Educator and Catalyst for Social Change*

Erin Gruwell has earned an award-winning reputation for her steadfast commitment to the future of children and education. Her impact as a change agent runs deep. So deep, in fact, that her story attracted Hollywood's attention. In January 2007, Paramount Pictures released *Freedom Writers*, starring Hilary Swank as Erin. The film is based on *The Freedom Writers Diary*, the #1 *New York Times* bestseller that chronicled Erin's extraordinary journey with 150 high school students.

ANGELA PEERY, creator of the *Writing to Learn* seminars and author of *Deep Change: Professional Development from the Inside Out* and *ARRIVE: Improving Instruction through Reflective Journaling*.

ALICE GREINER, author of *The Write Tools: Strategies that Make an Immediate Difference in the Classroom* and President of The Write Tools, LLC, an organization providing staff development to schools across the country.

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1.866.399.6019 ext. 231.

The Case Against the Zero

Even those who subscribe to the “punishment” theory of grading might want to reconsider the way they use zeros, Mr. Reeves suggests.

BY DOUGLAS B. REEVES

THIS IS not a trick question. If you are using a grading scale in which the numbers 4, 3, 2, 1, and 0 correspond to grades of A, B, C, D, and F, then what number is awarded to a student who fails to turn in an assignment? If you responded with a unanimous chorus of “zero,” then you may have a great deal of company. There might be a few people who are familiar with the research that asserts that grading as punishment is an ineffective strategy,¹ but many of us curmudgeons want to give the miscreants who failed to complete our assignments the punishment that they richly deserve. No work, no credit — end of story.

Groups as diverse as the New York State United Teachers and the Thomas Fordham Foundation rally around this position.² Let us, for the sake of argument, accept the point. With the grading system described above, the failure to turn in work would receive a zero. The four-point scale is a rational system, as the increment between each letter grade is proportionate to the increment between each numerical grade — one point.

But the common use of the zero today is based not on a four-point scale but on a 100-point scale. This defies logic and mathematical accuracy. On a 100-point scale, the interval between numerical and letter grades is typically 10 points, with the break points at 90, 80, 70, and so on. But when the grade of zero is applied to a 100-point scale, the interval between the D and F is not 10 points but 60 points. Most state standards in mathematics require that fifth-grade students un-

Missing assignment: **F**

*DOUGLAS B. REEVES is the chairman and founder of the Center for Performance Assessment, Boston, Mass. His most recent publications are *Assessing Educational Leaders* (Corwin Press, 2004) and *Accountability for Learning* (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2004).*

derstand the principles of ratios — for example, A is to B as 4 is to 3; D is to F as 1 is to zero. Yet the persistence of the zero on a 100-point scale indicates that many people with advanced degrees, including those with more background in mathematics than the typical teacher, have not applied the ratio standard to their own professional practices. To insist on the use of a zero on a 100-point scale is to assert that work that is not turned in deserves a penalty that is many times more severe than that assessed for work that is done wretchedly and is worth a D. Readers were asked earlier how many points would be awarded to a student who failed to turn in work on a grading scale of 4, 3, 2, 1, 0, but I'll bet not a single person arrived at the answer "minus 6." Yet that is precisely the logic that is employed when the zero is awarded on a 100-point scale.

There are two issues at hand. The first, and most important, is to determine the appropriate consequence for students who fail to complete an assignment. The most common answer is to punish these students. Evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, there is an almost fanatical belief that punishment through grades will motivate students. In contrast, there are at least a few educators experimenting with the notion that the appropriate consequence for failing to complete an assignment is to require the student to complete the assignment. That is, students lose privileges — free time and unstructured class or study-hall time — and are required to complete the assignment. The price of freedom is proficiency, and students are motivated not by threats of failure but by the opportunity to earn greater freedom and discretion by completing work accurately and on time. I know my colleagues well enough to understand that this argument will not persuade many of them. Rewards and punishments are part of the psyche of schools, particularly at the secondary level.

But if I concede this first point, the second issue is much more straightforward. Even if we want to punish the little miscreants who fail to complete our assignments — and I admit that on more than one occasion with both my students and my own children, my emotions have run in that direction — then what is the fair, appropriate, and mathematically accurate punishment? However vengeful I may feel on my worst days, I'm fairly certain that the appropriate punishment is not the electric chair. Even if I were to engage in a typically fact-free debate in which my personal preference for punishment were elevated above efficacy, I would nevertheless be forced to admit that giving a zero on a 100-


point scale for missing work is a mathematical inaccuracy.

If I were using a four-point grading system, I could give a zero. If I am using a 100-point system, however, then the lowest possible grade is the numerical value of a D, minus the same interval that separates every other grade. In the example in which the interval between grades is 10 points and the value of D is 60, then the mathematically accurate value of an F is 50 points. This is not — contrary to popular mythology — "giving" students 50 points; rather, it is awarding a punishment that fits the crime. The students failed to turn in an assignment, so they receive a failing grade. They are not sent to a Siberian labor camp.

There is, of course, an important difference. Sentences at Siberian labor camps ultimately come to an end, while grades of zero on a 100-point scale last forever. Just two or three zeros are sufficient to cause failure for an entire semester, and just a few course failures can lead a student to drop out of high school, incurring a lifetime of personal and social consequences.

This issue is as emotional as anything I have encountered since the phonics versus whole language debate. Scholars regress to the persuasive tactics of professional wrestlers (no offense intended to wrestlers — this article will generate enough hate mail as it is), and research and logic are subordinated to vengeance masquerading as high standards. Because the emotional attachment to the zero is so strong, I have given up advocating that 50 points should represent the lowest grade. What I do think we can do to preserve some level of sanity in our grading system is to return to a four-point system. A's no longer equal 100 points, but four points. If there is a need for greater specificity, then we can choose an infinite number of digits to the right of the decimal point and thus differentiate between the 3.449 and 3.448 to our heart's content. But at the end of the day in such a system, the F is a zero — one point below the D. It is fair, accurate, and, some people may believe, motivational. But at least the zero on a four-point scale is not the mathematical travesty that it is when applied to a 100-point system.

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Science in the Spotlight Pages 92-94

Leading to Change / How Do You Change School Culture?

Douglas Reeves

Consider the following laments that I have heard recently from school leaders: “We can't change the grading policy—it's part of our culture.” “Public displays of data won't work here—the culture won't allow it.” “The parents just don't understand—you can't change the culture by passing a law.” Each of these statements includes the word *culture*, but the meaning of the term ranges from policies and procedures to personal preferences to deeply embedded belief systems.

Cultural change, although challenging and time-consuming, is not only possible but necessary—especially in organizations in which stakeholders use the word “culture” as a rhetorical talisman to block leadership initiatives, stifle innovation, and maintain the status quo. In the last decade, the education standards movement has taught us that policy change without cultural change is an exercise in futility and frustration.

How do you change the culture of schools? When it comes to lasting cultural change, four essentials are consistent across many leadership contexts.

First, *define what you will not change*. Identify specific values, traditions, and relationships that you will preserve. Rather than make every change a battle that exhausts political capital and diminishes trust, effective leaders place change in the context of stability. They take care not to convey the message, “Everything you have been doing in the past was ineffective, and your experience and professional judgment are irrelevant.” A more thoughtful message is, “I am only going to ask you to engage in changes that will have meaning and value for you and every stakeholder we serve.” For example, many schools have cherished traditions of excellence in athletics, music, or art—traditions that can be threatened when the leader says that academic achievement must be the top priority. Effective change leaders identify and build on traditions rather than compete with them. The trophy case bursting with evidence of athletic championships can share space with exceptional student artwork, outstanding science projects, and superb essays.

Second, *recognize the importance of actions*. Speeches and announcements are not enough. To lead challenging reform efforts, you must be willing to make personal changes in decision-making policies (Who has the authority to decide what?); personal time allocation (Which



December 2006/
January 2007

meeting invitations do you accept and which do you decline?); and collegial relationships (Do you make time to listen to the personal stories of your colleagues?).

The greatest impediment to meaningful cultural change is the gap between what leaders say they value and what they actually do. Staff members are not seduced by a leader's claim of "collaborative culture" when every meeting is a series of lectures, announcements, and warnings. Claims about a "culture of high expectations" are undermined when school policies encourage good grades for poor student work. The "culture of respect" is undermined by every imperious, demanding, or angry e-mail and voice mail coming from the principal. Leaders speak most clearly with their actions. When staff members hear the call for transformation from a leader whose personal actions remain unchanged, their hope turns to cynicism.

Third, *use the right change tools for your school or district*. Christensen, Marx, and Stevenson (2006) differentiate *culture tools*, such as rituals and traditions; *power tools*, such as threats and coercion; *management tools*, such as training, procedures, and measurement systems; and *leadership tools*, such as role modeling and vision. Leaders must choose the appropriate change tools on the basis of a combination of factors, including the extent to which staff members agree on what they want and how to get there. Leaders who approach reform determined to apply a particular change method are making the mistake of the person holding a hammer who therefore sees only nails.

Fourth, *be willing to do the "scut work."* In *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World*, Tracy Kidder (2004) describes a renowned infectious disease specialist and leader in international health care. Farmer has revolutionized the beliefs and practices of stakeholders ranging from the poorest rural villagers in Haiti to the faculty of Harvard Medical School to policymakers at the United Nations. Combining his extensive field experience with sophisticated research and medical analyses, Farmer has upended traditional notions of health care. What does Farmer cite as one of his secrets? The willingness to do "unglamorous scut work."

Although education leaders must make speeches and attend board meetings, leaders aspiring to change school cultures will take the risk, as Superintendent Stan Scheer of Murrieta Valley Unified School District in California has done, of taking a turn as a substitute teacher or spending time with bus drivers at 5:00 on a frosty morning. When the school leader puts down the briefcase and picks up a stack of trays in the cafeteria or a pile of writing portfolios for personal review, then everyone knows that the leader takes every job in the school seriously. If you believe that every job has value and there is no such thing as unimportant work in schools, then demonstrate that belief through your actions.

Meaningful school improvement begins with cultural change—and cultural change begins with the school leader.

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Top Ten Things High Schools Can Do To Improve Achievement NOW

**By
Douglas B. Reeves***

1. Start a WIN – Work in Now! – Program. The reason many high school students fail is missing homework. Some schools are dramatically reducing course failures by requiring SAME DAY after-school detention for ANY missing homework. Students quickly find that it's more convenient to get the work done.
2. DOUBLE the time devoted to literacy and math. When students are struggling in 9th grade English and math classes, they are very likely struggling in every other class as well. Schools that have doubled time in these subjects significantly reduce the failure rate. Sometimes, this means moving a science and social studies sequence from grades 9, 10, 11 to grades 10, 11, 12. Increasing time on literacy reduces the dropout rate because it reduces grade 9 failures.
3. EXTEND the time when grades are due from teachers to the administration after final exams. One high school reduced 9th grade course failures from over 1,000 to fewer than 400 when it gave teachers four weeks after finals to turn in grades. During that time, students facing failure were able to complete missing labs, finish term papers, or do other projects. If they were missing only a single major project, it did not make sense for them to repeat the entire class.
4. TEACH project management, time management, and self-discipline. One recent study found that these skills are significantly more influential on high school success than IQ in predicting high school grades and post-secondary education participation.
5. RESTRICT student choice for any student reading below grade level. Students do not have a constitutional right to electives. In fact, the best way to increase electives is to decrease choice for students who are risking failure. After all, students who drop out of school are not taking electives in 11th and 12th grade.
6. Require NON-FICTION WRITING in every class. One high school developed a simplified rubric for non-fiction writing and required every class – no exceptions – to have at least one nonfiction writing assessment every semester.

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7. INCREASE student feedback, providing daily or weekly feedback. The typical 9-week report card is too late – an educational autopsy. If students are to use feedback to improve performance, then the feedback must be immediate.
8. COLLABORATE among teachers for the evaluation of core skills. If teachers do not agree on what the word “proficient” means, then students will get mixed messages about what level of quality is acceptable. Only when teachers look at the same piece of anonymous student work and collaboratively score that work will there be a true professional learning community.
9. Create COMMON ASSESSMENTS at least once per quarter. Certainly teachers can have freedom and flexibility in many areas, but the core expectations of a class must be consistent. It is the only way that students have an equal and fair opportunity to be prepared for the next level of instruction. Curriculum mapping is not enough. Teachers must have Power Standards and common assessments, agreeing on the most important standards and agreeing on what they will assess.
10. BAN ADMINISTRATIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS in faculty meetings. Time in meetings is too precious to waste on announcements that could be made by e-mail or delivered in writing. Use every second of meeting time for professional collaboration.

Educational Leadership

November 2006 | Volume 64 | Number 3

NCLB: Taking Stock, Looking Forward Pages 88-89

Leading to Change / Preventing 1,000 Failures

Douglas Reeves

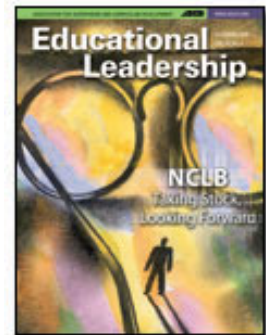
What would preventing 1,000 course failures mean for your school system? For administrators, it would mean 1,000 fewer repeated courses that have to be worked into students' schedules. For teachers, it would mean hundreds of students who are more likely to be motivated and engaged instead of angry, disengaged, and discouraged. Most important, for students, it would mean an opportunity to learn that persisting, listening to teacher feedback, and working hard do make a difference. It would mean the chance to say with confidence, "I am a successful student."

The teachers and leadership of Ben Davis High School in Indianapolis, Indiana, engaged in a "no failure" campaign in spring 2006 and reduced the number of course failures by an astounding 1,006 compared with the previous year. This comprehensive high school serving more than 3,000 students has a student population that includes 43 percent minority students, 9 percent English language learners, and 45 percent students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Student mobility is on the rise, and the number of low-income and second-language students is growing. The teachers are dedicated and hardworking, but they had those characteristics long before the school's dramatic reduction in student failures. How did teachers and school leaders prevent student failures? According to Principal Joel McKinney, seven strategies were the key.

Early, frequent, and decisive intervention. "Every three weeks throughout the school year, teachers give us the names of students who are at risk of failure," explains McKinney. "We use this information to give students personalized assistance and avoid failures." Teachers, counselors, and administrators meet with the student and parents to arrange support, ranging from assistance with homework to basic literacy tutoring to instruction in time management and guidance in keeping an assignment notebook.

At Ben Davis, teachers identify students' reading challenges immediately. All incoming students receive a reading assessment. It takes less than one half-hour and tells counselors immediately whether a student needs help in reading.

Personal connection with struggling students. Within weeks of the beginning of each semester, teachers at Ben Davis know which students are at risk of failure. The faculty of this large high



November 2006

school has learned to “think small” as teachers, counselors, and administrators meet with students individually and enter into learning contracts with them. Students meet regularly with counselors and academic coaches who provide support, guidance, and most of all, the clear signal that adults in the school care about them as individuals.

Parent connections. Rather than wait for a course failure to meet with parents, school officials contact parents or guardians as soon as a student has been identified as at risk of a course failure, and they schedule individual meetings to plan for additional support.

Tutoring, both personal and electronic. In addition to providing personal connections with teachers, paraprofessionals, and peers, the district has enjoyed some success with Web-based programs that score student writing. Such programs take advantage of what Jeff Howard of the Efficacy Institute has described as the “Nintendo Effect”: Kids respond to feedback from electronic games because that feedback is immediate, accurate, and incremental. When students receive a rating of 2 on their electronically scored essay, they are as eager to submit a revised essay as they would be to get to the next level in a video game. Computerized scoring will never replace teachers, but education leaders can leverage teachers' time by making maximum use of technology.

Managing students' choices with decisive curriculum interventions. Although educators' respect for students and parents is evident, this high school has put into place the radical notion that the adult professionals are in charge of the curriculum. Principal McKinney insists that students “can make a lot of choices, but we won't let them choose to fail.” Administrators change student schedules in the middle of the semester if necessary to provide additional instruction, intervention, and assistance to students in need.

In-school assistance. Many high school students have jobs, and some live in homes where parents are distracted and exhausted at the end of the day. Even when parents are deeply committed to the education of their children, by the time students are in secondary school they are largely making their own choices about homework, commitment, planning, and follow-through. Therefore, Ben Davis does not rely exclusively on after-school or summer school programs to intervene with students in danger of failure; instead, the school provides daily intervention and support.

Reformed grading systems. The Ben Davis staff is well versed in the research on student feedback, grading, and motivation. This research provides abundant evidence that grading systems are only effective if they are accurate, fair, and timely (Guskey & Bailey, 2001; Marzano, 2000; Reeves, 2004). At Ben Davis, teachers have largely eliminated the use of a zero grade, the inappropriate use of averages, and the assignment of poor grades as punishment. They know that it is not how students start each semester that counts, but how they finish.

Ben Davis is hardly alone in grading reforms. In Douglas County, Colorado, for example, the middle school grading policy explicitly states that later grades have more weight than earlier grades. A growing number of schools differentiate between academic proficiency and work habits because they recognize that students can be proficient in math and deficient in work

habits; and students can be delightful, compliant, and sociable, yet deficient in math.

The literature on high school reform is full of exaggerated claims and breathless enthusiasm for the latest silver bullet. In contrast, educators at Ben Davis—and at many other schools—are developing solid, comprehensive programs based on research, hard work, and the determination that no student will slip through the cracks. As Principal McKinney notes, “It just works.”

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Author's note: Your stories of leadership for change are always welcome. Please e-mail your contributions to DReeves@LeadAndLearn.com.

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