Campuswide Interventions That Improve Student Achievement

By Ruby K. Payne, Ph.D.
Founder and president of aha! Process, Inc.

"With simpler models of staff development that are operational and involve 100 percent of the staff, the roller coaster ride that students take through school can be significantly lessened."

Conversation between a principal new to the building and a supervisor:

Supervisor: "That campus cannot be low-performing again. I do not have any extra money to give you. With the Title 1 money you have at your campus, your school will need to find a way to raise your achievement significantly."

Principal (to herself as she walks to the car): "And just how would that happen? I have 1,100 students, 80 percent low income, 12 new teachers, a mobility rate of 40 percent. I know it can be done, but in a year?"

Many of our models for staff development and curriculum development do not address realities pressuring schools today. Some of these realities are:

◆ The critical mass needed to impact student achievement. Example: Ninety percent of teachers are doing a particular intervention or strategy versus 10 percent doing it.
◆ The growing knowledge base required of teachers and administrators. Example: Educators are to know about sexual harassment, inclusion, cooperative learning, reading strategies, ADHD, modifications, gifted/talented strategies, legal guidelines, ESL, strategies, etc.
◆ The time frames in which student achievement is to occur and be measured. Example: State and norm-referenced tests are designed for annual measures of learning.
◆ The accountability criteria that schools must meet. Example: In Texas, AEIS data and TAAS data are used to determine accreditation status.
◆ The lack of money and time for extensive training for teachers. Example: Most districts and campuses have five days or less of staff development, which limits the length and/or depth of the training.
◆ The increased numbers of students who come from poverty and/or who lack support systems at home. Example: Educated parents, when the school system does not address their children's needs, tend to provide assistance, pay for a tutor, or request a teacher. In poverty, the student only gets interventions through school.
◆ The increased number of new teachers spurred by the increase in the school-age population. Example: The school-age population in America will increase by 25 percent in the next decade.

Processes and models are available to address these needs. But to do so, an additional model for staff development and curriculum development must be used. This model basically trades in depth learning for critical mass by using a simpler approach. Fullan talks about the importance of critical mass as well as the main criteria teachers use to determine how "user-friendly" the curriculum and training are, i.e., how operational they are. (Fullan, 1991; Fullan, 1996)

In these models, which I have used for several years, the amount of time spent in training is decreased, the model is less complex and totally operational, and 100 percent of the staff is trained.

Figure A outlines some of the basic differences.

What does this information mean?
in practice? With simpler models that are operational and involve 100 percent of the staff, the roller coaster ride that students take through school can be significantly lessened. One of the reasons that middle-class students do better in school is that their parents intervene to lessen the impact of the roller coaster. (These parents do so by paying for tutoring, requesting teachers and providing assistance and instruction at home.)

As you can see in Figure B, the X represents Johnny and his journey through five years of school. In first grade, he had a wonderful teacher who willingly went to every kind of training available. Johnny had a great year and made the expected progress.

In second grade, his teacher was having many health problems and missed quite a few days of school. In addition, Johnny's parents divorced so he was shuttled between homes. In the second grade, Johnny actually regressed.

In the third grade, he had a beginning teacher. She loved the students but did not have the experience or the guidelines to provide the instruction that the other third-grade teacher did. Most of the educated parents had asked for the other teacher because of her excellent reputation. Johnny made progress.

In the fourth grade, Johnny had a teacher who did not participate in staff development. As far as she was concerned, it was a waste of time. Her students tended to do poorly on the state test, but her husband was on the school board. Once again, given her reputation, the educated parents had requested that their children be placed in the other fourth-grade classroom.

In the fifth grade, it was determined that Johnny was now two-and-a-half grade levels behind and should have systemic interventions that can impact achievement through simple yet effective tools and processes.

**Figure A**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Reflective Staff Development</th>
<th>Operational Staff Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>A process: by which a person examines in-depth his learning on a given subject</td>
<td>A method for immediate implementation across the system to address accountability and student achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects of critical mass</td>
<td>Depends on amount of resources and level of attrition; takes at least four to five years</td>
<td>Affects critical mass almost immediately; can have 80 to 90 percent implementation the first year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time required</td>
<td>Four to five days per person for initial training</td>
<td>Two hours to one day of training per person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breadth</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Systemic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost analysis</td>
<td>High per-person cost</td>
<td>Low per-person cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District role</td>
<td>May be contacted or may use district expertise to deliver and provide follow-up</td>
<td>Identify with campuses system needs to be addressed. Works with campuses to reach critical mass. Assists with the operational development of innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up</td>
<td>Provided in small groups or by expert trainer</td>
<td>Provided through accountability measures and the fine tuning from discussions to make innovation more user-friendly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of principal</td>
<td>In liaison with training. May provide resources and follow-up opportunities</td>
<td>Assists with the delivery of training. Provides the insistence, support and accountability for innovation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure B**

Johnny’s progress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Grade 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Benjamin Bloom (1976) did extensive research to determine what makes a difference in learning. He identified four factors: 1) the amount of time to learn; 2) the intervention (s) of the teacher; 3) how clear the focus of the instruction is; and 4) what the student came in knowing. As is readily apparent, the control the individual teacher has over these variables is significantly impacted by what is happening at the campus.
When these interventions are addressed at a campus level in a systematic way, more learning occurs.

Systemic interventions that can impact achievement are:

1. **Reasonable expectations.** This is a simpler model of curriculum mapping that addresses the focus of instruction and the amount of time.

2. **Growth assessments.** These are methods for identifying and assessing the growth a student makes on a regular basis.

3. **Benchmarks.** This is a simpler model of three to four indicators by grading period to show whether a student needs an immediate intervention. *It is absolutely crucial for first-grade reading.* Honig (1995) states that a first-grader who is not in the primer by April of the first-grade year generally does not progress beyond the third-grade reading level.

4. **Interventions for the student.** When students are identified through the growth assessments and benchmarks as making inadequate growth, immediate interventions are provided for the student, one of which is allowing more time during the school day.

   What follows is a description and example for each of the above. **It is important to note that all of these are working documents of one or two pages so that they can constantly be reassessed.** It is analogous to having a road map: all of the details are not present. However, the lay of the land, the choices of the route and the final destination are clear.

**Reasonable expectations**

Reasonable expectations identify what is taught and the amount of time devoted to it. This allows a campus to "data mine." i.e., determine the payoff between what actually gets taught, the amount of time given to it and the corresponding test results. For example, if two hours a day are spent on reading but only 15 minutes is devoted to students actually reading, the payoff will be less than if 45 minutes of that time is devoted to students actually reading.

Figure C is the process used. For each subject area, it requires about 30 to 60 minutes of individual time, one to two hours of grade-level time and three hours of total faculty time.

Figure D is an example from Runyan Elementary in Conroe, Texas. The principal is Nancy Harris.

**Growth assessments**

There are any number of growth assessments available. What makes something a growth assessment is that it identifies movement against a constant set of criteria. What makes a growth assessment different from a test is that the criteria do not change in a growth assessment. Rubrics are one way to measure and identify growth.

Figure E is an example of a reading rubric to measure student growth. It was developed by Sandra Duree, Karen Coffey and me in conjunction with the teachers of Goose Creek ISD. *Becoming a Nation of Readers* identified characteristics of skilled readers, so those characteristics were used to measure growth as a constant over five years. We identified what growth would look like over five years if a student were progressing as a skilled reader.

To develop a growth assessment, a very simple process can be used. Have the teachers in your building (who consistently get the highest achievement, understand the district curriculum and TAAS specs) develop the growth assessment. Keep in mind these guidelines: 1) the purpose is to identify the desired level of

---

**Figure C**

**Simple Yet Effective Tools and Processes**

One of the first pieces of information that a principal and campus need to know is what is actually being taught. Here’s a simple process to help find this out.

1. If you are on a six-weeks grading period, divide a paper into six equal pieces. If you are on a nine-weeks grading period, divide a paper into four equal pieces. Have each teacher for each subject area write the units or skills that they teach in each grading period. In other words, what do they usually manage to teach to that grade level in that subject area in that amount of time?

2. Have each grade level meet and discuss one subject area at a time. Do all the teachers at a grade level basically have the same expectations for that grade level in terms of content and skills? Have they come to a consensus about the expectation for that grade level?

3. Have the faculty as a group compare the grade levels one through five or six through eight or nine through 12. If Johnny was with the school for five years, what would he have the opportunity to learn? What would he not have had the opportunity to learn? Where are the holes in the opportunities to learn?

4. The faculty then uses this information to identify the strengths and weaknesses in the current educational program. Are some things repeated without benefit to achievement? Are some things not ever taught or so lightly brushed to not be of benefit? What is included that could be traded out for something that has a higher payoff in achievement?

5. When the discussion is over, the one-page sheets are revised and given to the appropriate teachers.

6. Twice a year, the principal meets with grade-level teams, and using these sheets, discusses the progress of the learning, adjustments that need to be made, etc. These become working documents, and because of their simplicity, they can be easily revised.
achievement. 2) the growth assessment needs to be simple and easily understood; and 3) student movement or growth toward the desired level of achievement needs to be clear.

These are the steps to creating a growth assessment:
1. Identify three to five criteria.
2. Set up a grid with numerical values. (One through four is usually enough.)
3. Identify what would be an excellent piece of work or demonstration. That becomes number four.
4. Work backwards. Next identify what would be a three and so on.

When the growth assessment is developed, it needs to go back to the faculty for feedback and refinement. When there is substantial agreement and 80 percent buy-in, the faculty needs to move forward with it.

Benchmarks

Figure F is one example.

As you can see from the example, benchmarks are very simple. They identify the critical attributes that students must acquire each six weeks if they are to progress. If the student has not demonstrated these bench-

---

Systemic interventions can identify areas where more time needs to be devoted and can address the effectiveness of both the whole and the component parts of the curriculum.
## Reading Rubric Grade 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Capable</th>
<th>Expert</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fluency</strong></td>
<td>Decodes words haltingly</td>
<td>Decodes sentences haltingly</td>
<td>Knows vowel teams (ea, ee, oa, etc.)</td>
<td>Decodes polysyllabic words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Misses key sounds</td>
<td>Knows conditions for long vowels</td>
<td>Identifies common Spelling patterns</td>
<td>Decodes words in context of paragraphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identifies most letter sounds</td>
<td>Identifies blends and consonants</td>
<td>Uses word attack skills to identify new words in the sections</td>
<td>Decodes words accurately and automatically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identifies short vowels</td>
<td>Decodes diagraphs and &quot;r&quot; control vowels (or, ar, er, etc.)</td>
<td>Reads sentences in a meaningful sequence</td>
<td>Reads paragraphs in a meaningful sequence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Says/recognizes individual words</td>
<td>Reads at rate that doesn't interfere with meaning</td>
<td>Reads with expression</td>
<td>Reads with expression, fluency, appropriate tone and pronunciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constructive</strong></td>
<td>Predictions are incomplete, partial and unrelated</td>
<td>Predicts what might happen next</td>
<td>Predicts story based upon pictures and other clues</td>
<td>Can predict possible endings to story with some accuracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Predictions indicate no or inappropriate prior knowledge</td>
<td>Makes minimal links to personal experience/prior knowledge</td>
<td>Relates story to personal experience/prior knowledge</td>
<td>Can compare/contrast story with personal experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivated</strong></td>
<td>Does not read independently</td>
<td>Reads when parent or teacher requests</td>
<td>Will read for a specific purpose</td>
<td>Initiates reading on own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concentrates on decoding</td>
<td>Eager to use the acquired skills (words and phrases)</td>
<td>Uses new skills frequently in self-selected reading</td>
<td>Reads for pleasure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic</strong></td>
<td>Does not self-correct</td>
<td>Recognizes mistakes but has difficulty in self-correcting</td>
<td>Has strategies for self-correction (reread, read ahead, ask a question, etc.)</td>
<td>Analyzes self-correction strategies for the best strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uncertain as to how parts of a story fit together</td>
<td>Can identify characters and setting in a story</td>
<td>Can identify characters, setting and events of a story</td>
<td>Can talk about story in terms of problem and/or goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process</strong></td>
<td>Cannot tell what has been read</td>
<td>Does not sort important from unimportant</td>
<td>What is important and unimportant can be determined with assistance</td>
<td>Organizes reading by sorting important from unimportant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
marks, then immediate additional interventions must begin.

How does one get benchmarks? Once again, identify the experienced educators who always have high student achievement. Ask them how they know a student will have trouble. They already know the criteria. And by putting it in writing and having a common understanding, teachers, particularly those who are new to teaching or who are not as experienced, can more readily make interventions and address student progress. It then needs to go back to the grade level for their feedback and changes.

Interventions for Students

The issue here is that the intervention be timely and occur at a classroom and a campus level (see Figure G). One other point is simply that for optimal learning, the student needs to stay with the regular instruction, in as much as possible, to have the opportunity to learn what the other students are learning. Additional time for learning must be found (for example, using social studies time to teach nonfiction reading).

Conclusion

What these systemic interventions allow a campus to do is to address the four variables in learning: 1) the amount of time to learn; 2) the intervention(s) of the teacher; 3) how clear the focus of the instruction is; and 4) what the student came in knowing.

It allows the faculty to address the amount of time, the interventions, the clarity of the instructional focus, and what the student had the opportunity to come in knowing. Right now, because of the depth and breadth of most curriculum guides, it is difficult to know that the students actually had the opportunity to learn. By having these systemic items in place, the faculty discussion can truly be data driven; it allows the faculty to talk about student achievement in relationship to the total curriculum.

The discussion can focus on program strengths and weaknesses. It can identify areas where more time needs to be devoted and can address the effectiveness of both the whole and the component parts of the curriculum. It allows a faculty to determine staff development that will address student needs, and it provides one more tool for analyzing TAAS data.

Figure F

Benchmarks for fourth-grade language arts

If a student cannot do the following, then immediate interventions need to be used.

First six weeks
- Edit fragments and run-ons in own writing
- Identify and define figurative and literal meaning
- Write an elaborated, organized descriptive paper
- Be able to choose just right books

Second six weeks
- Identify story structure orally and in written form
- Write an organized, elaborated expressive narrative
- Identify correct subject/verb agreement and use in everyday writing

Third six weeks
- Read a passage and use context clues to decode unknown words
- Read a passage and recall facts and details orally and in writing
- Read a story or paragraph and sequence major events
- Write an organized, elaborated how-to

Fourth six weeks
- Read a passage and identify main idea, orally and in written summary
- Read a passage and paraphrase orally and in writing
- Write an organized, elaborated classificatory paper
- Read a passage and identify the best summary
- Write a three to four sentence paragraph

Fifth six weeks
- Use graphic sources to answer questions
- Read passage and predict outcomes and draw conclusions
- Distinguish between fact and nonfact; between stated and nonstated opinion
- After reading a passage, be able to tell cause of an event or effect of an action
- Write an organized, elaborative persuasive paper

Sixth six weeks
- Write an assessment of chosen portfolio pieces
- Assemble/share a reading and writing portfolio
Currently, many campuses address the best objective they were low in the year before, only to fall in other objectives the next year. It allows a new teacher to have a much better sense of expectations. Parents have a much better sense of the learning opportunities students will have.

It provides a tool for principals to dialogue with teachers about learning. But more importantly, it allows the campus to identify before the damage is great the students who are not making sufficient progress and to make that intervention immediately, as opposed to one or two years down the road.

This is the process I used as a principal. Our math scores made significant improvement within two years. I have used it at the secondary level in language arts with excellent results as well.

These simple models and processes give us the tools to talk about what we are doing and to minimize the roller coaster ride for students.

References


Previously printed in _Instructional Leader_ magazine.

Ruby K. Payne, Ph.D., founder and president of _aha!_ Process, Inc. (1994), with more than 30 years experience as a professional educator, has been sharing her insights about the impact of poverty – and how to help educators and other professionals work effectively with individuals from poverty – in more than a thousand workshop settings through North America, Canada and Australia.

Her seminal work, _A Framework for Understanding Poverty_ teaches the hidden rules of economic class and spreads the message that, despite the obstacles poverty can create in all types of interaction, there are specific strategies for overcoming them. Since publishing _Framework_ in 1995, Dr. Payne also has written or co-authored nearly a dozen books surrounding these issues in such areas as education, social services, the workplace, faith communities and leadership. More information can be found on her website, www.ahaprocess.com.