



Set Grade-Level Expectations and Provide Extra Help and Support for All Students

Schools making progress in raising student achievement have set high expectations for all students. The increased standards cover not only academic achievement but also relationships among students and interactions between teachers and students. When schools raise standards, they need to provide extra help and time for students to meet expectations. Successful schools create an environment that ensures support, mentoring and encouragement for all students.

SREB

Maintain High Expectations for How Teachers Treat Students and How Students Treat Adults and Each Other



M A Y
2 0 1 3

Lessons From the Back of the Classroom

With an alarming dropout rate nationally, educators are rethinking how they reach and interact with students, particularly those who sit in the back of the classroom. “Most teachers are trained to teach at the front of the classroom,” said **Joe Hendershott**, co-founder and president of *Hope 4 the Wounded* educational seminars in Ashland, Ohio. “This practice isolates other students and deprives them of the social interaction that facilitates learning.”

A former high school administrator, Hendershott has an extensive background dealing with difficult and troubled youth in the school system.

He describes these young people as “wounded” and offers strategies to involve them in daily classroom activities.

Hendershott gives reasons that students retreat to the back of the classroom: Poor academic skills may cause them to “hide” to minimize participation. Problems at home, with peers or authorities may prompt them to seek the safety and security of a back seat. A disconnect with what is being taught may result in disinterest and separation from the rest of the class.

“Students give relationships and relevancy as the top reasons they drop out,” Hendershott said. **“If we don’t pay attention to the core longings of our children, we are going to lose them. Understanding students’ perspectives and dreams can enhance the learning experience.”**

Hendershott encourages teachers to take a deeper look at a student’s identity. He believes that looking beneath the “iceberg” is just as important as seeing the “surface” of a student. “Students begin to develop their attachments in early childhood,” he said. “Those who do not attach or bond at an early age could have a distorted view of their identity.”

What can teachers do to reach students at the back of the classroom? Hendershott offers five recommendations:

- Get an idea of what is happening by observing another teacher from the back of the class. See what is being done that involves or separates students.
- Add more group time to develop students’ critical thinking and social skills. Students will be less isolated and will begin to feel included.

- Assign students to keep journals that will assist them in processing their thoughts and feelings in a safe and secure manner.
- Ask students to create “peer praise notes.” Each student is asked to write personal notes to their peers, expressing genuine appreciation for unique qualities. “This activity causes recipients to feel better about themselves and makes the writers aware of the value of other students as individuals,” Hendershott said. “It can make a powerful impact on students’ perspectives of themselves and their peers.”
- Redesign the classroom to have students facing each other across the room. This will allow teachers to walk through the classroom rather than side-to-side in front of the board. Another arrangement is to group desks in small clusters.

“All of these exercises are vital to students’ self-identity and feelings of belonging,” Hendershott said.

Joe Hendershott: joe@hope4thewounded.org

Provide Extra Time and Support for High School Students as They Prepare for Postsecondary Studies and Careers

Extraordinary Effort From Ordinary Students: Classroom Strategies for Assessment and Grading

Jamin Swift, math teacher at **Raymore-Peculiar High School** in Peculiar, Missouri, believes traditional grading and assessment practices can limit students’ creativity and willingness to take risks. “The power of student goal setting and self-assessment while using standards-based grading can make a significant impact on student achievement,” he said. “Ordinary students can learn to achieve extraordinary results.”

Swift heard examples of alternative grading methods at HSTW staff development conferences but admits he was reluctant to apply the strategies until recently. “I was afraid students would lack motivation and initiative if I put the responsibility for practice into their hands,” he said. “When I gave the strategies a try, the results were phenomenal.”

Does a football team get extra points on the scoreboard for having a great practice the week before? Are the players penalized for practicing poorly? Should players who skip practice be allowed to participate in the game? “It would be unethical for a coach to allow an unprepared player to participate in a contest,” Swift said. “Yet, teachers often give high-stakes tests to students who haven’t practiced adequately.”

That reality, paired with an approach known as “The Power of I” for “Incomplete,” set the scene for Swift to change the way he grades students. “I don’t accept Incompletes, and I require students to pass all formative assessments with a grade of C or higher,” he said. “Students are given the freedom to correct and complete the assessments as many times as needed before the summative assessment date.” In The Power of I, students have choices about how to make up their work. After they meet the requirements and/or show mastery of specific topics, the “I” becomes a grade.

After changing his grading practices, Swift began to see positive results:

- He started requiring homework to be completed before testing.
- Students grade their own practice (homework) daily.
- Homework is worth only 5 percent of a student’s grade. The main emphasis is on summative assessment (chapter exams).



With “The Power of I” for “Incomplete,” “Students are given the freedom to correct and complete the assessments as many times as needed before the summative assessment date.”

Jamin Swift, Raymore-Peculiar High School

- Students are required to pass all proficiency checks (quizzes) at 80 percent before testing. “Students who complete all practice work and pass all proficiency checks at 80 percent are amazingly well prepared for tests,” Swift said. “This approach has increased test scores and inspired and motivated students to work harder.”

Swift uses the work of Ken O’Connor, a consultant known as “The Grade Doctor,” to make several points about communicating student achievement:

- Don’t curve grades or give extra-credit points.
- Exclude behavior as part of the grading process.
- Involve students by letting them grade some of their papers.

“Because students can set goals and feel hopeful about what they can accomplish, they have stopped believing and saying that they will fail math,” Swift said. “Instead, they feel empowered to give it their best effort with less pressure and higher motivation.”

Students in geometry (lower level) and Algebra II (mixture of advanced and regular) at Raymore-Peculiar High School scored impressive gains on Missouri’s end-of-course exams from 2010 to 2012. The percentages of geometry students scoring at Proficient or higher rose from 40 percent in 2010 to 49 percent in 2011 to 80 percent in 2012. Those reaching the Advanced level increased from 2 percent in 2010 to 8 percent in 2011 to 22 percent in 2012.

The Algebra II students scoring at the level of Proficient or higher grew from 60 percent in 2010 to 79 percent in 2011 to 99 percent in 2012. Those scoring at the Advanced level climbed from 40 percent in 2010 to 50 percent in 2011 to 74 percent in 2012.

The 2011 scores in both geometry and Algebra II already exceeded the state averages, Swift pointed out.

Jamin Swift: jswift@raypec.k12.mo.us

Algebra Awakenings: Trash the Text and ‘Wake Up’ the Underachievers

Can a teacher with more than 20 years of experience undergo an “awakening” and radically change the way he teaches algebra? Can math-challenged high school freshmen “wake up” in time to pass a rigorous state end-of-course algebra assessment on the first try? The answer to both questions is “yes” in the case of **Matt McGlothlin** and his students at **Scottsburg High School (SHS)** in Scottsburg, Indiana.

Eight years ago, McGlothlin dramatically altered his teaching methods so that students would have a better understanding of math and greater success in applying what they were taught. His algebra students now pass the course and the end-of-course state exam with flying colors. The most recent year for which data are available (2012) shows a passing rate of 97 percent for McGlothlin’s students in the course and on the exam.

Scottsburg High School is a small rural school in a county where employment continues to decline, and less than 10 percent of adults have completed a bachelor’s degree. All incoming freshmen are enrolled in Indiana’s college prep curriculum, a Core 40 diploma curriculum that requires students to take a math or a quantitative reasoning course each year of high school. Algebra I, geometry and Algebra II or Integrated Math I, II and III are required. Usually, 90 percent of the 850 students at SHS are enrolled in algebra as freshmen.

McGlothlin currently teaches six Algebra I classes with an average of 23 students per class. All SHS students complete Algebra I in two semesters as freshmen. (The only exceptions are students who take Algebra I in grade eight.) Upon completing the

Algebra I course, all freshmen take the Indiana Algebra End-of-Course Assessment (ECA). In the 2011-2012 school year, 83 of McGlothlin’s 86 freshmen passed the Indiana Algebra ECA.

Five basic key principles of the McGlothlin teaching method:

1. **Use defragment of course content.** McGlothlin came to believe that textbooks presented math content in a way that led to fragmented learning. “I noticed that students had difficulty at the end of a unit when they were asked to demonstrate understanding of how math concepts work together in order to solve new, complex problems,” McGlothlin said. “Suddenly, it seemed they had forgotten that all of the tiny steps make up the whole.” Repeated failure caused many students to stop trying. They doubted they would ever learn or pass algebra.

McGlothlin opted for a “radically new immersion” approach to the algebra curriculum. He begins each nine-week session with a pretest on the set of concepts or standards he wants students to master during the session. Usually, the percentage of mastery on the pretest is very low. “We begin working daily on the complete set of 20 to 25 concepts,” McGlothlin said. “Some days are practice days when I am more of a resource, while others are focus days when I lecture in front of the class.” At the end of each week, students are retested on the same set of concepts and begin working toward mastery level. “We are constantly setting new goals for progression toward mastery,” McGlothlin said. “I want my classes to top out at around 90 percent.”

2. **Use repetition — the right way.** Instead of practicing the same skill 20 times on one assignment, students practice the skill once a day for eight or nine weeks. “That is repetition the right way,” McGlothlin said. All practices require students to work on the smaller pieces as well as higher-level problems that apply the smaller pieces. Students get to see the pieces come together every day in every practice and in every focus or lecture. The weekly instructional schedule is designed to tackle repetition without being boring.

Monday: Students focus on seeing and hearing things done right.

Tuesday: On this practice day, the teacher is out of the way but available to help while students work on assignments.

Wednesday: The teacher is back at the front of the class and the students see and hear everything the right way from practice on Tuesday.

Thursday: Students are back to work on the concepts. They can use pre-recorded videos made in class to help when they struggle.

Friday: Students take a weekly exam on all concepts from the unit. All concepts are taught and discussed daily.

McGlothlin assigns very little homework, because students have practice days. “If students don’t finish a practice in class, they have videos of classroom instruction to use at home,” he said. “I encourage them to practice for the Friday tests with video viewing at home on Thursdays. This gives them an opportunity to revisit both the big picture and specific skills.”

McGlothlin records himself with a document camera doing the practice sessions and makes videos from the recordings. “It’s like when we were in school and turned to the back of the book to find solutions,” he said. “Now a student can pull up a video for any problem when having trouble or can just view the video to check an answer.” The videos are available to students throughout the district via the district’s online support service (My Big Campus). Students can download the videos and watch the day’s lesson to see McGlothlin solve sample problems step by step.

3. **Retrieve mental files with vocabulary.** Conceptual knowledge can be compared to a set of tools that are understood fully only through use. “We often find that students can manipulate algorithms, routines and definitions when discussed, demonstrated and applied in isolation, but they have no idea what to do when they are asked to select and apply the knowledge to unique problems,” McGlothlin said. “Vocabulary is an effective device to help students organize and retrieve math knowledge and concepts.”

When teaching a focus lesson, McGlothlin names the concept he is teaching and describes the process. In practices and on assessments, students are required to write a vocabulary term (concept name) and describe the process they will use for each problem. To underscore the value of “naming” a process, McGlothlin gives points for vocabulary. “I usually give one point for the name, one point for the description and three points for correct math for a total of five points,” he said. When working on 20 concepts, the total is 100 points. When working on 25 concepts, McGlothlin gives one point for the name, one point for the description and two points for the math for a total of four points each or 100 points for 25 concepts.

4. **Set goals for mastery.** McGlothlin’s students are assessed each Friday. Early in each week, he sets a goal. “The goal is set for the class average, so it makes our effort more of a team effort,” he said. If the class average on the test meets or exceeds the goal, the class gets the following Monday off. “It is very common for classes to meet their goals,” McGlothlin said. He also gives individual awards (candy, sodas) to the student with the highest grade on the assessment and to the student with the greatest score increase from the previous assessment. “Occasionally, I set a jackpot goal for extra motivation,” he said. “The jackpot goal is always very difficult to reach.” If students hit the jackpot, they get the following week off. “I’ve had only one class to hit the jackpot,” McGlothlin said.

5. **Focus on progress rather than percentages.** “Underachieving students are not motivated by letter grades and percentage scores,” McGlothlin said. “Students who succeed are motivated by the good feeling of seeing their progress, knowing they can learn and be successful.” McGlothlin said one of the main strengths of this method is he can get a student to look past a percentage score on any given exam. “I never want a student to be demoralized by a percent grade on a test,” he said. “I always want my students to see opportunities for progress.” For example, “Most teachers would think that 35 percent is a terrible score on a test,” he continued. “In my class 35 percent is a major success if a student improves from 20 percent on a previous test. I can then encourage the student to master more concepts the following week and make more progress. If the student averages 10 percent improvement every week for the next five weeks, he goes from 35 percent mastery to 85 percent mastery.”

McGlothlin uses creative grading methods to diminish the effect of low grades early in the process. He often drops the first two or three assessment scores. “I offer pardon weeks late in the process,” McGlothlin said. “For example, week eight might be a pardon week in which the score on the test replaces the lowest previous score. I’m far more interested in the end product than in any score along the way. I want my students to make constant progress toward mastery.”

Results

Each year, more of McGlothlin's students experience the "awakening." McGlothlin tells a story of one student.

A freshman named Tim was stuck in an algebra "coma" for several months. Midway through the year, he gave the McGlothlin method a chance and began to focus and practice math. Within a few weeks, he "came alive." His level of mastery, which had been less than 20 percent, was pushing 90 percent. He began to volunteer to answer problems in class — something he had never done. Tim passed the Indiana end-of-course assessment with ease and came within a few points of earning a Pass Plus rating. Tim's geometry teacher reports that he "definitely takes pride in his algebra skills. He raises his hand and wants to help whenever algebra is needed to solve a problem."

The McGlothlin method has been shown to produce a high degree of mastery for a large percentage of students. "In the 2011-2012 Indiana algebra end-of-course assessment, the raw score cutoff for passing was 564 and the cutoff for getting a Pass Plus was 665," McGlothlin said. "My students averaged 654, so they nearly averaged a Pass Plus. Of the 83 students that passed, 80 of them scored over 600. Sixty-five of them scored over 630. Thirty-two of them were Pass Plus."

Matt McGlothlin: mandmmcglathlin@yahoo.com

Technical Center Prepares Students for College and Career Success

The **Career and Technical Center of Fort Osage** in Independence, Missouri, has taken steps to make the senior year more meaningful as students prepare for college and careers. "We wanted to reduce the amount of remediation taking place among our graduates who attend college," said Assistant Director **Susie Gouldsmith**.

After participating in a *Technology Centers That Work (TCTW)* site development workshop, the center embarked on a program to use the ACT COMPASS computerized assessments of reading, writing, math and English to identify the needs of juniors attending the center and to establish extra-help activities for those requiring further preparation to be at college level prior to graduation. "We are using COMPASS rather than a previous test that did not measure students' college readiness," Gouldsmith said.

All students attend a remedial program in a classroom with computers loaded with A+ software that targets individual skills for students needing remedial work. Students achieving at a higher level are recruited to mentor peers needing additional skills. A certified English teacher supervises the support room and oversees students' progress toward the goal of college readiness. Classroom teachers support the program by including time in their schedules for students to participate in supplementary work in the classroom.

The new initiative has prompted several instructional changes in the classroom, including weekly writing assignments in all career/technical (CT) classes, bi-weekly math instruction that is content related, and journal writing and mental math (in which students do the calculations in their heads) integrated into the course curricula. CT teachers also purchased math textbooks that target specific CT curricula.

Metropolitan Community College, which enrolls many of the center's graduates, pays the fees for the COMPASS pre- and post-tests. "After the first year of completed data, we realized that we needed to improve our math instruction," Gouldsmith said. "Our math post-test scores were 20 percent lower than our reading and writing scores. As a result, we have expanded our school improvement goal to include a stronger emphasis on math and have implemented a number of ways to improve math scores."

The multi-faceted approach includes a variety of strategies:

- **Increasing math instruction in CT classrooms**
- **Improving instructional practices by attending *TCTW* professional development workshops and inviting an SREB school improvement consultant to work with the faculty**
- **Providing remediation through the use of COMPASS prep software**
- **Making a math coach available to teachers twice a week**
- **Advising students to take four years of high school math**



"It is exciting to see faculty members and administrators involved in raising student achievement and collaborating to implement school reform at the center."

Susie Gouldsmith, Career and Technical Center of Fort Osage

“It is exciting to see faculty members and administrators involved in raising student achievement and collaborating to implement school reform at the center,” Gouldsmith said. “We are already seeing improvement in students’ skills and are looking forward to higher achievement scores in the future.”

Susie Gouldsmith: sgouldsmith@fortosage.net

An Alternative School Raises the Graduation Rate

Whiddon-Rogers Education Center is an alternative school for students in grades eight through 12 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The center offers a variety of ways for students to earn credits and complete credit recovery to maximize chances for graduation. Students have the opportunity to turn failure into success.

Bringing students back into a school they left is a hard and challenging job. Whiddon-Rogers has discovered “what works” in retaining students. The center designed and implemented a target graduation team consisting of a school administrator, a curriculum specialist, curriculum coaches, a behavior specialist, a guidance counselor, a school social worker, a Broward Advocate for Career Education (BRACE) adviser and senior teachers.

The graduation team has a number of responsibilities:

- Identify target students.
- Meet weekly to review the progress of these students.
- Assign a “target watchdog” for each target graduation student.
- Work with teachers to modify and enrich the curriculum.
- Work with the guidance department to continuously monitor student scheduling.

“Students who perform poorly on a standardized test usually continue to perform poorly on the same test,” said Assistant Principal **Elizabeth Tatum**. “Our students struggled with the FCAT — the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test — and it is required for graduation.”

Florida recognizes a concordant ACT or SAT score as a testing requirement, so the center took action to improve students’ scores on these assessments:

- Six of the center’s best teachers became Princeton Review trained.
- The center established a rigorous ACT prep pull-out schedule for students registered for the ACT.

- Students were registered in mass for the ACT through the year, utilizing waivers for dollars. Since the center has a certain percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, it is entitled to waivers allowing these students to take the ACT free twice.
- The center continued to remediate for FCAT and required all students to sit for retakes twice a year to provide more than one assessment possibility.

Triple A is a schoolwide initiative to encourage school attendance. Students who miss two or fewer days in a specific time period receive membership to Triple A, where they are eligible to receive rewards denied to nonmembers. The rewards include lunch specials, waived assignments and free entry to school sporting events.

“The results of these efforts have been outstanding,” Tatum said. The graduation rate at the center rose from 3.8 percent in 2010 to 4.9 in 2011 to 11.2 in 2012. The dropout rate declined from 13.4 percent in 2010 to 7.8 in 2011 to 6.4 in 2012.

“Our staff constantly challenges the idea that once a failure, always a failure,” Tatum said. “As we move forward into heightened accountability with common core and end-of-course exams, we are making plans to ensure that we don’t just focus on academics but continue to focus on the student as a whole. This practice has been the leader in our success so far. The forefront of our program will continue to be mentoring, fostering respect and responsibility, and leading students into the future.”

Elizabeth Tatum: liztatum@browardschools.com

Create a Culture of Success With Support, Mentoring and Encouragement for Students to Meet or Exceed Grade-Level Standards and Expectations

Closing the Attitude Gap for the Black Male Learner

No matter if you are black, white, male or female, you have the ability to encourage students to succeed and make a difference in their lives. That is the philosophy of **Principal Baruti Kafele**, an educational consultant and motivational speaker from Jersey City, New Jersey. Kafele combines more than 20 years in education and his own high school experiences in addressing the topic of how to raise the achievement of black male students. He is the author of the book and DVD *Motivating Black Males to Achieve in School and in Life*.

“Teachers and administrators need to understand the culture of a student to connect with them,” Kafele said, “and this may include the student’s music and videos.” He urged schools to create an oasis in which students feel safe enough to stop “hiding behind a mask” and engage in learning.

Kafele described the “attitude gap” as existing between students who have the will to strive for academic excellence and those who are destined to fail and drop out. He offered six conditions that he said are needed to close the attitude gap.

- Compassion for students
- Attitude toward students
- Relationships with students
- Environment for learning
- Empowerment for success
- Relevance in instruction

“To ensure that instruction is relevant, educators of black males must become familiar with literature and professional development that specifically address the learning, cultural, and social and emotional needs of black male learners,” Kafele said.

He recommended three questions for teachers to consider during lesson planning:

- Are my lessons culturally responsive?
- Do my lessons take into consideration all of the learners in my classroom?
- Have I read enough in this area to make my lessons culturally responsive for all learners in my classroom?

To be more culturally responsive, teachers can meet in groups to identify specific approaches or strategies they are already using that take into consideration the history, cultures and experiences of students in the classroom. Kafele suggests that teachers summarize their strategies and share them with others in the group and the school.

Kafele speaks of the need to have models for black male students so that they can understand the importance of education in achieving manhood. “This may mean bringing men from the community into the school to help students learn about success,” Kafele said, “or it may mean providing information about historic black males who have achieved acclaim in various walks of life.”

Baruti Kafele: bkafele@earthlink.net www.PrincipalKafele.com www.Twitter.com/PrincipalKafele www.Facebook.com/PrincipalKafele

The Saga of an Urban School’s Struggles to Achieve

After a period of decline, **W. H. Maxwell Career and Technical Education High School** in Brooklyn, New York, is on the road to recovery. The school enrolls 610 students, including 71 percent black, 28 percent Hispanic and 1 percent other ethnicities. One-fourth of the students have been identified as special-needs students.

“Attendance was low, discipline was out of control and the student failure rate was high,” said Principal Jocelyn Badette. “We began to ask the difficult questions: What do we need to do to serve our students? What role do the students play? What should the staff do?”

These questions stimulated dialogue that led to developing and implementing a plan to address students’ needs. Teachers and

administrators established a rapport with students through several strategies:

- **Creating an “open door policy” for students and staff**
- **Demanding respect from students and the faculty toward each other**
- **Creating an understanding of student demographics and giving students the tools to succeed**
- **Understanding students’ challenges and not making excuses for them**
- **Making the faculty available to help students before and after school and via email**
- **Knowing each student by face, name and needs**

- **Using data to design instruction**
- **Collecting, analyzing and sharing data on attendance, scholarship, graduation, and reading and mathematics levels by gender, age, ethnicity and career pathway**

The school took a number of actions to resolve problems, improve the school environment and raise student achievement:

- **The school developed a systematic plan for mediation to assist with conflict resolution.** Students who have difficulty dealing with other students or find themselves in a confrontational situation are brought to an office where a trained mediator works to resolve issues with students. Upon successful resolution of a problem, all involved parties sign a contract to improve behavior.
- **The school provided intervention for drug abuse.** A staff counselor visits classrooms to discuss drugs and other issues. The counselor is also available to talk with students in private.
- **An in-house suspension plan was implemented to address discipline issues and help keep students in school.** Students who break the discipline code and receive a suspension may be given the option of staying in the suspension room for several hours in the morning while still receiving instruction and classwork from their teachers. This arrangement depends on the type and degree of infraction. It gives suspended students a chance to continue their studies at school.
- **After-school detention was implemented.** Students are held accountable for actions as well as education. Students receive detention for reasons such as being tardy, not wearing uniforms, cutting class or misbehaving in class. The school culture encourages high expectations for all students.
- **The staff developed professional relationships in small learning communities (SLCs).** Each faculty member

belongs to an SLC. Each SLC has a common prep period.

- **The staff conducted hallway sweeps to ensure students were attending classes.** Teachers stand in the doorway at the beginning of a class period to make sure students enter the appropriate classrooms. Deans, security agents and teachers who are not teaching in the classroom that period walk the halls (sweeping) to find students who are cutting or delaying getting to class.
- **A uniform dress policy was developed and implemented.**

“Our goals are to improve student achievement, raise the attendance rate and improve the graduation rate,” Badette said. **“The average attendance rate for students rose from 69 percent in 2006-2007 to 81 percent in 2011-2012. The graduation rate climbed from 43 percent in 2007-2008 to 67 percent in 2011-2012. The special-education graduation rate grew from only 9 percent in 2008-2009 to 59 percent in 2011-2012. Each year, more and more of our graduating seniors are receiving Regents diplomas, career/technical education-certified diplomas and advanced Regents diplomas.”**

The New York City school progress report system awarded Maxwell an “A” in 2010-2011, compared with a “D” in 2007-2008.

“The New York City school progress reports show a gradual improvement over a period of four years,” Badette said. “This represents a gradual change in school culture. Teachers receive professional development based on classroom observations and walk-throughs. The administration understands every teacher’s needs in order to provide the tools to promote student achievement. Differentiated instruction is the norm in our classrooms. Every student can go to college, and that is why Maxwell is a college-bound school.”

Jocelyn Badette: jbadett@schools.nyc.gov

Focusing on Rigor: Great Expectations Through Formative Instructional Practices

Glenwood High School (GHS) in New Boston, Ohio, serves 180 students in grades seven through 12 in one of the more impoverished communities in the state. Ninety-three percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, and 75 percent are transient.

With state achievement at a low level, the school district revisited its vision for student expectations. After analyzing student achievement data, school leaders decided to focus on rigor by using the *HSTW* definition: *“Rigor is the expectation that students will perform at all levels of cognitive complexity necessary for proficiency at each grade level, college and the workplace.”*

The answer was to implement highly engaging formative instructional practices to raise teachers’ and students’ expectations. The practices are strategically aligned to students’ needs. “To provide the necessary time to formatively assess students, the district converted the school day to 80-minute block scheduling,” said **Jimmy Bailey**, intervention specialist. “The new schedule provided the format to implement the formative strategies.”

The 80-minute format includes a 40-minute accelerated lesson followed by 40 minutes of formative assessment of the lesson. During the assessment, teachers use strategies prepared by Judy VanVoorhis, senior director of the Ohio Appalachian Collaborative.

GHS teachers use three formative assessment strategies that can be monitored by school leaders and easily measured:

- **Admit/Exit Slips** — Students are given short prompts to write about upon entering the room. The prompts are generally about the previous day's lesson. Alternatively, students are given two or three minutes at the end of class to summarize what they learned in that day's lesson.
- **Muddiest Point** — This assessment is similar to the one-minute paper in which students use the last few minutes of a class period to write about "the most important thing learned today and what I understood least." However, in the muddiest point, students describe what they didn't understand and what they think might help. They communicate the exact point at which a misconception occurs.
- **Think-Pair-Share** — The teacher engages students to think with a prompt, a reading, a visual or an observation. Using designated partners, students pair up to discuss their respective responses. Students share their thinking with the rest of the class.

The district chose to implement a course during the third semester to target students considered at-risk for not achieving Proficiency on the Ohio Graduation Test. This block course is divided into two 40-minute sessions, with accelerated lessons in the first half and formative assessments in the second half. "This approach provides instant feedback to students and allows the teacher to adjust the instruction," said **Beth Smith**, language arts teacher and *HSTW* site coordinator. "Teachers are able to provide one-on-one support to target students' specific needs."

As the school continues to build capacity among students and teachers, it has made significant gains in state achievement scores. The school's state rating was "Continuous Improvement" for more than five years. After focusing on rigor in the classroom as well as formative instructional practices, the school received a state rating of "Excellent" in 2011. "This rating includes all state assessments of students in grades seven through 12," Smith said.

"When we implemented the block schedule in 2008-2009, our students averaged 54 percent for Proficiency on the state assessments," Smith continued. "After implementing the block schedule and formative instructional practices, we jumped to 90 percent for Proficiency in 2009-2010. We have been able to maintain these high assessment scores."

"We are seeing the development of a school culture of higher expectations aligned with the rigor needed by students to be successful in college and careers," Smith concluded.

Jimmy Bailey: jimmy.bailey@newboston.k12.oh.us **Beth Smith:** beth.smith1@newboston.k12.oh.us

Data Meetings: Raising Expectations and Achievement

Pincipal **Wade Whitney** addresses all students and staff at **Mary G. Montgomery High School** in Semmes, Alabama, on closed circuit television each morning to remind them that their school is "the best." Schools that expect to be the best must use data to implement changes in curriculum and instruction, according to Whitney.

Montgomery High School enrolls 2,000 students — the population is 81 percent white, 15 percent black and 4 percent other ethnicities. Fifty-seven percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. Twenty-three percent are identified as special-education students.

"If a school is not using data to drive instruction, it needs to get started," Whitney said. His school uses two types of monthly data meetings that teachers must attend. The dates are announced at the beginning of the school year.



"After implementing the block schedule and formative instructional practices, we jumped to 90 percent for Proficiency in 2009-2010. We have been able to maintain these high assessment scores."

Beth Smith, Glenwood High School

- **Subject Area Data Meetings** focus on a subject area or a department. An administrator facilitates the meeting and teachers meet in teams to discuss what is and is not working. Participants use a data analysis form to look at recent exam results or quarterly district-issued final assessments. The data analysis form contains the names of students who score below 59 percent and between 60 percent and 79 percent. Each teacher is responsible for bringing a completed data analysis form and a copy of the assessment that was administered. Teachers discuss the root causes for low student scores and the strategies they will use to reteach objectives. Administrators suggest additional strategies. Teachers are encouraged to work together to help students who are scoring below the Proficient level.

- **Problem Solving Team (PST) Meetings** are scheduled during planning block periods. They involve an administrator, a guidance counselor and a number of teachers. These meetings focus on course failures and strategies to prevent failures in the future. Each teacher brings a completed data form or a progress calendar to the meeting. These PST meetings are the result of Response to Instruction (RTI) developed by the Alabama Department of Education to ensure that standards-based instruction reaches the classroom. RTI integrates core instruction, assessment and intervention in a multitier system.

With the implementation of data meetings, Montgomery High School saw major increases in district-issued end-of-quarter exam scores from 2010-2011 to 2011-2012.

The results showed that 13 of 17 subjects tested in the second quarter had student proficiency scores higher than those of the previous year. The increases occurred in 17 of 19 subjects tested in the third quarter and all 18 subjects tested in the fourth quarter.

Montgomery High School received a Gold Achievement Award from *HSTW* in 2012.

Wade Whitney: wwhitney@mcpss.com

This newsletter of “best practices” in implementing the *High Schools That Work (HSTW)*, *Making Middle Grades Work (MMGW)* and *Technology Centers That Work (TCTW)* school improvement models is based on presentations at the 26th Annual *HSTW* Staff Development Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana, in summer 2012.

(13V07w)