

Best Practices Newsletter

This newsletter describes best practices presented at the 32nd Annual HSTW Staff Development Conference in Orlando, Florida, July 2018.

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Ashley Maker, English/Creative Writing, Dewey High School

Reading With Deeper Understanding

Getting students to open a book and read can be a challenge, especially during their tween years in the middle grades. But it's crucial for teachers to find ways to motivate and encourage students to read and help them read with understanding.

Ashley Maker, a former teacher at **Hominy Middle School in Hominy, Oklahoma**, knows firsthand how challenging it can be. "I had students not reading, but just sitting," laments Maker. "They weren't motivated. I tried to have them independently talk in small groups, but without my guiding them, they easily became distracted and off-task," she adds.

Maker, who now teaches 10th-grade English at **Dewey High School in Dewey, Oklahoma**, says it's not just middle graders who resist reading — high schoolers do too. "They have so much technology at their fingertips. Students don't want to slow down and read a book, but once you get them to read, they seem to have an enjoyment for it."

SOCRATIC SEMINARS

Maker uses Socratic Seminars as an instructional practice to engage students in reading. In a Socratic Seminar activity, students help one another understand ideas, meaning and issues reflected in text through dialogue and group discussion. The purpose is not to debate or prove a point but to understand what the author is saying.

MIDDLE GRADES SCHOOL

Teachers may take different approaches in structuring Socratic Seminars. For example, in one middle grades school assignment, Maker asked students to read and annotate Merlyn's speech when he was offering advice to the young King Arthur in *The Once and Future King*, a book by T.H. White. Students were asked to identify four unique phrases and phrases that were repeated in the speech.

After students completed this active reading strategy, they participated in a structured Socratic Seminar based on the following teacher-directed questions:

- First round: What's the best line from the speech?
- Opening question: What does Merlyn attempt to teach Arthur in this speech?
- Mid-seminar question: Merlyn is very passionate about his belief that "learning does not fail us." What technique does the author use to get readers to understand learning is important? Is there one example that best shows his belief about learning?
- Closing question: To what extent does Merlyn's key idea apply today? For whom? Why?

The structured questions prompted students to read, extract information from the text, talk and share that information with classmates. They were no longer “sitting and not reading,” notes Maker. After the seminar, students used the information they collected from the text and discussions with classmates to write a short essay explaining how the author used grammatical structure to highlight what is important in Merlyn’s speech.

After reading and scoring the students’ work, Maker observed that students demonstrated a deeper understanding of the text, were actively engaged in learning and showed confidence and ownership of their work.

HIGH SCHOOL

With her 10th-graders, Maker uses another approach. She assigns a reading passage and holds the Socratic Seminar at the end.

She splits the room in half with students facing each other. Maker opens the discussion with a question to get students thinking about the topic. Students have one minute to write their answers to the question. To keep order, she passes around a foam puzzle piece. Only the student with the puzzle piece can talk. When the first student finishes answering the questions, he or she passes the piece to someone else. Altogether, three minutes are devoted to discussion.

“They absolutely love it,” says Maker. She said even the students commented it was nice to hear everybody’s opinions, not just the kids who speak up all the time. “Some of the most insightful comments came from those kids who are very quiet and don’t normally speak up in class,” she notes.

DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

Regardless of the grade level, Socratic Seminars are helpful in engaging students in reading and deepening their level of understanding. Maker notes, “It’s a good way for students to hear different perspectives and take it all in. A lot of times, they listen to their peers more than they listen to the teacher.”

“I had a test after the Socratic Seminar and test scores went up,” says Maker, not just in one class, but in all her classes. Students have commented that they sometimes didn’t understand the reading assignment while reading, but after hearing their peers and different perspectives and explanations in the discussion, it suddenly clicked for them. “I don’t know if it helps them want to read a book, but it does help with understanding themes and messages,” maintains Maker.

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Teaching Literacy: Whose Job Is It Anyway?

Traditionally, teaching literacy has been the sole responsibility of reading and language arts teachers. But more and more, instructional leaders realize it should be the responsibility of all teachers — math, science, art, career and technical education teachers and others. After all, students need to be able to read, write and understand in all content areas.

Two South Carolina administrators share their journey in distributing the responsibility for literacy across all classrooms at **Camden Middle School** and **Lugoff-Elgin Middle School**, in **Kershaw County, South Carolina**. The need became apparent when the state adopted new academic standards in 2015. The standards resulted in increased rigor within the curricula, but decreased student achievement as evidenced by lower student test scores.

To address this issue, Camden Middle School principal Byron Johnson and Tammy Small, a former assistant administrator at Lugoff-Elgin Middle School and now assistant principal at Pine Tree Hill Elementary, distributed the responsibility of teaching literacy to all teachers using SREB’s **[Powerful Literacy Practices](#)** as their instructional model.

“Teachers wanted to use the same practices to address changing standards,” says Small. Instead, educators should use instructional practices that prepare students to meet the demands of challenging curricula.

Socratic Seminar Procedure

1. Select text that provides opportunities for interpretation and discussion.
2. Give students time to prepare ideas and annotate text before discussion.
3. Develop classroom rules such as refer to evidence from the text to support your ideas; respect the ideas of other students; or ask questions when you don’t understand what someone says.
4. Begin with a discussion leader, a student or teacher, asking an open-ended question.
5. Reflect and evaluate by giving students a chance to assess the process.

After reading and scoring the students’ work, Maker observed that students demonstrated a deeper understanding of the text, were actively engaged in learning and showed confidence and ownership of their work.

Powerful literacy practices distribute responsibility for literacy across all content areas. PLPs also help teachers of all academic disciplines and CTE to plan instruction that engages students in reading complex grade-level texts and presenting their understanding of content orally and through authentic, standards-based writing assignments. Students apply multiple literacy strategies to create written products that are authentic to the course discipline.

SREB uses a three-year approach to prepare teachers, schools and districts to implement the PLP framework in classrooms. But the road to achieving teacher buy-in and building capacity can be challenging.

BUILDING CAPACITY AND IDENTIFYING CHEERLEADERS

To build the case for a change in instructional practices, both school leaders pointed to students' decreased state test scores. Data sharing prompted some teachers to welcome a change in their instructional practices. A small cadre of teachers at both schools volunteered to be trained in SREB's Powerful Literacy Practices. Both school leaders also strategically selected teachers they knew would be willing to try new practices, share their journeys openly, and document and share examples of student success after implementing the PLPs with fidelity. They called this strategy "identifying the cheerleaders."

With an increased number of teachers willing to try out the PLPs, teachers and their school administrators attended nine days of intensive off-site training over several months to learn how to use PLP tools and strategies in their classrooms.

PROVIDING ANSWERS TO INCREASE BUY-IN

"Changing teacher attitudes was a major hurdle," explained Johnson. Both leaders were prepared to discuss the rationale for the change at any time. They initiated and engaged in conversations during recess, at lunch, in the parking lot, in the front office and in hallways. Johnson and Small were frequently asked what they called the "Big Questions":

1. Why are we using the Powerful Literacy Practices?
2. Do we have to do this?
3. Why would I use literacy in physical education, math, science and social studies?

To demonstrate success, provide practical examples and alleviate concerns, the cheerleaders' classrooms were transformed into learning labs. Teachers who hadn't bought into the PLPs had the opportunity to visit and observe implementation in real-time.

Combining the "why" and "how" helped improve teacher attitudes toward making a shift to the PLPs. The next steps were to create structures within the school for ongoing learning and support. This meant changing school professional development structures and holding teachers accountable for implementing the practices they learned.

FINDING WHAT WORKS FOR YOU

Johnson kicked off with a deep-dive training with his first-year cohort. "Then we came back with our second-year team and used the online resources prior to meeting as a group. We engaged in lots of discussion. The key for us was using the online library as a resource and not having to worry about creating lessons from scratch. Teachers could focus on getting what they need from students, which is deeper understanding and having opportunities to get disciplinary literacy," he says.

RESULTS

After adopting PLPs, administrators leveraged professional learning communities to support the learning and implementation of the PLPs. Johnson and Small followed up with walkthroughs to provide timely feedback and coaching support. "We were looking at whether the instruction matched what they wanted to get for the assessment. We observe the whole lesson, meet with the teachers, explain what we see and talk about some ways to make it more rigorous," Small explains.

Both schools are designated by [The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform as Schools to Watch](#). Schools to Watch identifies middle grades schools across the country that are meeting or exceeding a set of strict criteria for excellence. Only 400 middle grades schools in the country share this honor. In 2018, 71 percent of students scored "Approaches Expectations" or



*Tammy Small, Assistant Principal,
Pine Tree Hill Elementary*



*Byron Johnson, Principal,
Camden Middle School*

above on the South Carolina College-and-Career Ready Assessment in English language arts at Camden Middle. At Lugoff-Elgin, over 76 percent of students scored “Approaches Expectations” or above.

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CTE Dual Enrollment That Works

“Some of our students have never set foot on a college campus,” says Jonathan Phillips, director of the **DeKalb County Technology Center in Rainsville, Alabama.**

That’s a point of pride at DCTC. Although the center is known for providing quality career and technical education courses and industry credentials, it also offers academic courses that satisfy graduation requirements and dual enrollment courses that put students on the fast track to credential and degree attainment.

DCTC students who meet [state eligibility requirements](#) for dual enrollment, including a 2.5 GPA, can earn up to 30 college credits during their junior and senior years. Dual enrollment credits count toward graduation and a college certificate, credential or degree at an Alabama college or university.

FLEXIBLE SCHEDULING

DCTC students typically take regular high school courses during the day and dual enrollment courses in the evening on Monday, Tuesday or Thursday at the center. Students can also take courses on the campus of Northeast Alabama Community College, located just three miles away. Select courses are offered in the summer at DCTC and on the college campus.

“It’s all about geography and what works best for students,” says Russell McFall, DCTC’s welding instructor. McFall’s status as an adjunct faculty member at Northeast Alabama Community College ensures that the dual enrollment courses he teaches meet accreditation and certification guidelines no matter where they’re taught.

Course schedules meet students’ needs. In DCTC’s welding program, for example, students take dual enrollment courses one night each week at the center. “Because many of our students have to work, it helps to offer dual enrollment courses for six hours one night each week,” says Phillips. “That schedule also allows instructors to spend more intensive one-on-one time with students.”

LOW OR NO COST

Dual enrollment usually costs students nothing. That’s because state workforce development funds, supported by industry, provide over \$11 million each year in scholarship support for CTE dual enrollment in high-demand career fields. As Joshua Laney, senior director for workforce development at the Alabama State Department of Education, explains, dollars first go to the Alabama Community College System. Individual colleges then call on the System office to support student enrollment in dual enrollment. Colleges can also apply CTE dual enrollment scholarship funds toward textbooks, tools and supplies.



Jonathan Phillips, Director of the DeKalb County Technology Center in Rainsville, Alabama, is interviewed at the 32nd Annual High Schools That Work Staff Development Conference in Orlando, Florida.



DCTC welding students who helped DCTC break state records for pipe certifications.

AT DCTC, DUAL ENROLLMENT = CAREER AND COLLEGE SUCCESS

All of DCTC’s dually enrolled welding students in the class of 2018 earned a postsecondary short-term certificate and enough college credits to complete an associate degree within a semester or two after graduation.

“Many of our students choose that short-term certificate so they can put it to work right away,” says Phillips. “We’re now doing more advising focused on helping students get those associate degrees before they graduate.”

DCTC students are also earning valuable industry-recognized credentials. All welding students are expected to earn the [National Center for Construction Education & Research \(NCCER\) Core](#), an [Occupational Safety and Health Administration 10-hour completion card](#) and a range of American Welding Society certifications — the same credentials held by adults in the workforce.

DCTC's welding students are shattering state records for certifications. Every welding student in DCTC's 2018 senior class — McFall's first graduating class as an instructor — earned the NCCER Core. What's more, the number of DCTC welding students who earned an AWS certification rose from four in 2017 to 34 in 2018. Overall, in 2018, DCTC's welding students earned:

- **22 open root pipe certifications** — a record for Alabama high school welding programs.
- **15 6G open root pipe certifications** — the state's previous record for a high school welding program was seven 6G open root pipe certifications in one year.

ONE STUDENT'S SUCCESS

Before she graduated in 2018, Anna Daniels, pictured at right, participated in dual enrollment and was an active SkillsUSA member.

In the fall of 2017, McFall observed Daniels performing her first gas tungsten arc weld on a round pipe in the 2G position. As he relates, this is a particularly challenging weld to achieve due to the pipe's changing angle. Once Daniels finished the weld root and capped the pipe, McFall was so impressed with her nearly flawless results that he decided to mail the pipe to be X-rayed at a testing lab in Bessemer.

"I did some research and found that Anna is the first young woman in the state of Alabama to pass a 100 percent X-ray tested pipe certification at the high school level," says McFall.

In March 2018, [Daniels won a Go Build Alabama Student of the Month scholarship award](#) of \$1,000 that she can use to continue her education at an Alabama postsecondary institution. Go Build Alabama, an initiative of the Alabama Construction Recruitment Institute, educates young people about training and career opportunities in the construction industry.

MORE ACCOLADES FOR DCTC

DCTC was awarded a 2018 James E. Bottoms Pacesetter School award at the High Schools That Work Staff Development Conference in Orlando, Florida, in recognition of its outstanding efforts to collaborate with business, community and postsecondary partners to educate students and parents about careers.

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"We're doing more advising focused on helping students get those associate degrees before they graduate."

Jonathan Phillips
DeKalb County Technology Center



DCTC won a James E. Bottoms Pacesetter School Award at the 2018 HSTW Staff Development Conference.

Helping Students Graduate With a Foot Forward



*Craig Carson, Assistant Superintendent,
Ozark School District*

How can you build relationships with students, parents and advisers to help students graduate high school with more than a diploma? **The Ozark School District in Ozark, Missouri**, develops these relationships through its Diploma & Recognition program to ensure student success. The program's mission is for all graduates to walk across the stage to receive their diploma and a foot forward in the world, whether that be in college, the workforce or the military.

The Diploma & Recognition process begins with an Individual Career and Academic Plan for each student. The ICAP is a fluid plan that helps students pursue their interests while providing a focus on the path they wish to follow. In the eighth grade, the student, parent and advisory teacher work together to develop this personal plan of study.

The district uses Naviance, a comprehensive college and career readiness solution that helps align student strengths and interests to postsecondary goals. Naviance aids students, parents and advisers with career exploration, academic planning and self-discovery.

“During the year, students do inventories and think about what they want to do in high school and what their passions are,” explains Craig Carson, assistant superintendent, Ozark School District. “Then they create a plan for grades nine through 12. Each spring, they meet again with their parents and advisory teacher and look at their plan for the next year. Last year, 80 percent of students attended a meeting with their parents and advisory teachers.”

In the Diploma & Recognition program, the goal is for all students to graduate with a diploma and one of the following:

- Qualify for the **A+ program** to attend a Missouri community or technical college with up to two years of free tuition.
- Earn **advanced industry credentials** through career and technical education programs to gain an edge when entering the workforce.
- Get a head start on a postsecondary credential or degree by earning **college credit** through the Ozark Technical College Fast Track program, Advanced Placement, articulated credits, dual credit or International Baccalaureate.
- Receive college credit or a foot forward in the workforce by earning the **Seal of Biliteracy** for being literate in English and another language.
- Acquire **job experience** and soft skills through programs such as agriculture, automotive, child development, construction trades, GO CAPS, marketing and ProStart.
- Complete three credits of JROTC to qualify for **advanced military enlistment** as high as an E-3.
- Create a plan with job shadowing, job coaching or mock interviews through a **vocational rehabilitation plan**, for students who qualify.

The value is evident as participation rates are increasing: In 2017-18, more than 75 percent of students participated in Diploma & Recognition. That’s an increase from 52 percent in 2015-16 and 64 percent in 2016-17.

MAINTAINING STUDENT AND PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Parent participation in the ICAP meetings is important because students with involved parents are more likely to have higher attendance and achievement levels, according to research by John Hattie. These students also demonstrate better social skills, improved behavior, higher graduation rates and better school adaptation.

“Parents feel they’re actually part of the process,” says Carson. In addition to standard communication, Ozark uses social media to keep parents informed. Parents are incentivized because attending these meetings helps ensure their child can register early for the classes they want.

Research also shows that “the more students are involved in co-curricular and extracurricular activities, the more of a sense of belonging they have and the higher their GPA,” Carson says. “We have a duty as a school to make sure students are engaged and involved. Diploma & Recognition helps us be accountable for all students’ participation and involvement across all of our pathways.”

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Rethinking Student Advisory

Whale Branch Early College High School has declared war on mediocrity with grades, behavior and attendance. In 2017-18, the school created a Counseling for Careers (C4C) advisory program designed to awaken students to their full potential and put them on a path to college and career readiness. The C4C committee is comprised of two school counselors, an instructional coach, three teachers and the principal.

The school serves nearly 450 students in grades nine through 12 in rural **Seabrook, South Carolina**. The C4C program uses several approaches to connect with students academically, socially and emotionally. These approaches include Warrior Time homerooms, an ABC check-in form, a student referral form and community involvement.

ADVISORY IN ACTION

Counselors must see the big picture when helping students plan for their futures. That means building a relationship with students, offering course, college and career guidance, and holding students accountable.



Pretel Simmons-Hill and Kathryn Cooke, Whale Branch teachers and C4C committee members

Students in grades 10 through 12 have the same homeroom teacher throughout high school, and Whale Branch seeks to ensure there's a student-teacher relationship with the homeroom teacher. "Every student needs an advocate," says Kathryn Cooke, a band teacher who is a member of the C4C committee. Research suggests if students have a meaningful relationship with an adult in the school building, they are more likely to succeed academically.

WARRIOR TIME AND ABC CHECK-IN FORMS

Warrior Time homerooms, named for the school's mascot, are at the heart of advisory. Students meet for homeroom three Fridays out of the month for 30 minutes. One Friday is dedicated to ACT and other test preparation.

During homeroom, several topics may be covered ranging from lessons about college and career readiness, paying for college, career guidance, administrative schoolwide need-to-know information and pre-planned lessons from teachers that address students' knowledge gaps.

A key component of homeroom is ABC check-in — a student wellness form used to gather data on students' grades, attendance, behavior, and emotional and academic well-being. "We make sure we're understanding the well-being of the whole child," says Cooke.

Students are asked questions in a Google form such as, how confident are you about your overall high school success? Or, what grade do you believe you can achieve this semester? When asked the latter question, Cooke says 31 percent of Whale Branch students said they would earn a B and 39 percent said they would earn an A. "I'm going to hold them accountable for what they said they can do," maintains Cooke.

"Our graduation rate has improved, and the number of discipline referrals have decreased."

Kimberly Brown
Whale Branch school counselor

REFERRAL FORMS

Students also answer questions about whether they are emotionally distressed or in need of guidance services during the ABC check-in. Teachers then fill out a student referral form to get students the specialized help they need, whether it's a referral to the school counselor or to the school's social worker.

Pretel Simmons-Hill, a science teacher and member of the C4C committee, notes a Response to Intervention program is available for students who are struggling academically. If students need extra help or have makeup work to complete, they may get that help in homeroom for 30 minutes each week Monday through Thursday.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Community involvement is a big part of Whale Branch's C4C, and the entire Whale Branch cluster gets involved. The elementary school and middle grades school join Whale Branch in sponsoring a community day. Parents, students, pastors, vendors and others are invited to enjoy community day activities. Students network, strengthen their interpersonal skills and have fun. It's also a fundraiser for the schools.



Whale Branch Early College High School won the Platinum-Level Certification Readiness Award for literacy and math at the HSTW Staff Development Conference in Orlando, Florida in 2018.

COLLEGE AND CAREERS

To expose students to a variety of college and career opportunities, counselors take juniors and seniors to visit local two- and four-year colleges at least once a month. They also attend county career fairs. Some students take dual enrollment classes at the technical college satellite campus.

POSITIVE IMPACT ON STUDENTS

The C4C program has only been in place for one academic school year, but the school is already seeing positive results. "Our graduation rate has improved, and the number of discipline referrals have decreased," says school counselor Kimberly Brown. In the 2016-17 school year, Whale Branch's graduation rate was 82 percent, but it climbed to 85 percent in 2017-18. There were 665 discipline referrals in 2016-17, but that figure dropped to less than 570 in 2017-18.

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Career Coaches for College and Careers

In Alabama's **DeKalb County School System**, career coaches help students navigate college and career opportunities before graduation through the statewide career coach initiative. The initiative aims to help students achieve the state's standard for college and career readiness: Every child a graduate – every graduate prepared for college, work and adulthood in the 21st century.

Career coaches play a vital role in preparing DeKalb County students for college and careers by working with school counselors, teachers and parents to help identify student interests and create and monitor plans to help them reach their goals.

In 2017, there were 1,534 school counselors in Alabama, which amounted to one counselor for every 479 students. The efforts of career coaches throughout the state resulted in:

- 54,054 student contacts
- 166,225 career assessments
- 26,673 classroom presentations to a total of 296,737 students
- 1,020 career events for 189,194 students
- 450 job shadowing events for 3,774 students
- Assistance with 52,874 college applications



David Holt and Jessica Blalock, Career Coaches, DeKalb County, Alabama

Although teachers in all disciplines work together to prepare students, career coaches are the cheerleaders of career and technical education, providing career development and guidance for high school students with an emphasis on CTE programs. For students interested in attending college, coaches help with research, scholarships and applications.

David Holt is a career coach for DeKalb County Technology Center and four more high schools in the county. Jessica Blalock coaches at Fort Payne High School in addition to four other high schools. Their goal is to visit each school at least once per week.

EXPLORING CAREERS WITH LOCAL INDUSTRY

Blalock and Holt host career fairs for their high schools and invite local industry partners to participate. Students learn as they rotate through each job position at the fair, ask questions and gain understanding of what each job entails.

"We just had an event where we did mock interviews with the junior class. Our industry partners conducted the interviews just as they would do with their own business. For each industry, one student was offered a pretend job," Holt says.



A career fair facilitated by Jessica Blalock

Gaining industry support isn't difficult. "Local industries are saying they don't have the workers they need to meet their demands, so they are happy to partner with the schools to provide exposure to the local job market," says Holt.

COLLEGE AND CAREER PLANNING

“We use the Kuder résumé builder and perform job searches and scholarship searches,” says Blalock. Kuder is Alabama’s career planning system. It provides students with education and career planning resources, educators with tools to measure success, and local businesses with a way to connect with and shape their future workforce.

“Alabama mandated each student have a career preparedness course to graduate and Kuder is a big part of that. Students can do career research and ideally, we want students to revisit that inventory each year,” Blalock explains.

Holt uses Kuder to monitor student progress. “We go in and approve students’ four-year plans. We help counselors make sure the students are on track and taking the courses they need to earn their high school diploma. Sometimes we have seniors who don’t have a clue what they want to do. We can go back to Kuder and have them do career exploration. We can take them on a tour of a facility, see different jobs or job shadow. Our goal is help them leave high school and be successful in the workplace or in furthering their education,” he explains.

WATCHING IT WORK

Holt shares, “We had a student who went on a tour of Auburn University, fell in love with the campus, came back to high school and told his teacher that he needed a score of 31 on his ACT. He was tutored, made that 31 and is now on full scholarship to Auburn. Without the guidance of a career coach who provided him with the opportunity to visit Auburn, this student would not have been aware of the options available to him, much less how to pursue his postsecondary goals.”

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