

# Promising Practices Newsletter

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Spotlighting promising practices from the 2019 College- and Career-Readiness Standards Networking Conferences

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## Taking the Bias Out of Teacher Evaluations

By Diane James, SREB

An evaluation system that fosters a growth mindset and truly improves teaching and learning is something teachers *and* administrators can get excited about. Such a system is not tied to the stress of determining teachers' pay raises but instead results in feedback that is linked to effective teaching and students' mastery of standards.



Tammy Whitlock, Ouachita Parish School Board, presents during the IGNITE! closing session at the 2019 Networking Conference.

Tammy Whitlock, an Instructional Coordinator in **Ouachita Parish School Board** in **Monroe, Louisiana**, believes SREB's [Powerful Literacy Practices rubric](#) is a useful evaluation tool. "It diminishes subjectivity and bias," says Whitlock.

The rubric is based upon a 4-point scale and analyzes classroom instruction on six indicators: literacy-based assignments, lesson sequence, learning targets, literacy strategies, student discourse and formative assessment.

Whitlock's district is beginning its third year using SREB's Powerful Literacy Practices to advance teaching and learning.

In her three years as an SREB Certified Local Trainer, Whitlock has worked with teachers to effectively implement and sustain the PLPs to develop students' reading, writing and thinking skills within a variety of academic disciplines, not just in English language arts.

When it comes to growing teachers, "These last three years with SREB have been a game-changer," says Whitlock. She sees a correlation between students' test scores and teachers who effectively implement the PLPs. "When you have data, you can't hide from it any longer. It moves from excuses to raising the question — how do we get to solutions," she adds.

### 350 Teachers Observed

Ouachita Parish serves over 19,500 students. In the 2018-19 school year, Whitlock says her team of four evaluated 100 percent of teachers in grades six through 12 four times. That's a total of 1,100 observations across 350 teachers in English language arts, social studies, science and career and technical education. "Every 20 minutes that we're in a classroom, we're going to grow a teacher," notes Whitlock.

### How It Works

**Classroom Observation:** During a typical visit, coaches from Whitlock's team and one administrator — preferably the principal — observe a classroom for five to 15 minutes. Principal participation is critical: "Both observation scores and student achievement increase when principals are actively involved in the district observation schedule and administrative meetings," says Whitlock.



Ouachita Parish School System is awarded the 2019 Outstanding District Award at SREB's College- and Career- Readiness Standards Networking Conference in Baltimore.

**Rating Teachers:** Using the PLP rubric, the team rates teachers on such indicators as:

- Are assignments aligned to state standards?
- Did the teacher choose literacy strategies that scaffold reading, writing, speaking and listening skills?
- Did students practice the strategies collaboratively and independently?
- Did students ask questions of peers and actively listen to deepen understanding?

Literacy strategies, mini-tasks (reading, writing, speaking and/or listening) are embedded into lessons to support the learning of skills and content		
<p><b>The teacher</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>chooses literacy strategies that scaffold reading, writing, speaking, and listening to accomplish the purpose of the strategy and assess the learning target and literacy skills</li> <li>uses a variety of literacy strategies to scaffold reading, writing, speaking, and listening to accomplish the purpose of the strategy</li> </ul>	<p><b>The students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide the strategies collaboratively and independently</li> <li>have opportunities to check and revise their work based on teacher and peer feedback</li> <li>are using strategies to correct, organize, and clarify their thinking</li> <li>can explain how the strategy is improving their literacy skills and ability to complete the assignment</li> </ul>	<p><b>Literacy strategies that scaffold reading, writing, speaking, and listening</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are used to set a purpose for reading or writing</li> <li>are used to set a purpose for speaking or listening</li> <li>are used to set a purpose for writing or speaking</li> <li>are used to set a purpose for reading or listening</li> <li>are used to set a purpose for writing or listening</li> </ul>
Student discourse is integrated to support student ownership of learning		
<p><b>The teacher</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>facilitates discussion around content materials to assess or evaluate concrete evidence from different perspectives</li> <li>asks higher-order questions</li> <li>monitors discussion of content, involving all students in active listening and speaking activities</li> <li>uses discussion structures to help students connect the reading to their writing product</li> </ul>	<p><b>The students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ask questions of peers and actively listen to different perspectives</li> <li>examine different sides of issues when making independent decisions on how to use evidence to demonstrate understanding through writing</li> <li>know the process for collaborative learning and discussion</li> </ul>	<p><b>Students engage in conversations and discussion that</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is a clarifying writing event</li> <li>explores multiple perspectives (which appear to be based on reading genre-level skills)</li> <li>connect what they have read to what they are going to write</li> <li>teach students how to collaborate appropriately</li> </ul>
Formative and summative assessments are used in all aspects of the learning process		
<p><b>The teacher</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>uses formative and summative assessments to assess student learning</li> <li>uses formative and summative assessments to assess student learning</li> <li>uses formative and summative assessments to assess student learning</li> <li>uses formative and summative assessments to assess student learning</li> </ul>	<p><b>The students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ask questions of peers and actively listen to different perspectives</li> <li>examine different sides of issues when making independent decisions on how to use evidence to demonstrate understanding through writing</li> <li>know the process for collaborative learning and discussion</li> </ul>	<p><b>Students work with evidence of</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>revisions based on teacher and student feedback</li> <li>descriptive commentary from the teacher</li> <li>teacher feedback that includes strategies</li> <li>mastery of standards</li> </ul>

A sample of a Powerful Literacy Practices Rubric that was annotated during a classroom observation.

The goal is to move teachers to a 3 or a 4 on the rubric in everyday practice, notes Whitlock.

**Debriefing:** When the evaluation is complete, the team debriefs with the teacher. “The debrief is the most powerful thing you can do,” insists Whitlock. During the debriefing, the team focuses on “glows” and “grows.” They take a highlighter and mark up the rubric so that teachers can see where they glow — the things they do well — and discuss their grows — areas that need improvement.

**Teacher Self-Reflection:** Whitlock’s team leaves teachers with a rubric form and asks them to evaluate themselves. This helps with growth buy-in and self-ownership and gives the PLP coach valuable data for determining next steps for the teacher and the school.

**Meeting with Administration:** Before departing, the team meets with the principal and other administrators to review and compare findings with teachers’ previous observations and ratings. This process shows whether teachers are helping students grow or not. “This collaboration often leads to principals being more supportive of the PLP process,” Whitlock emphasizes.

## The Data and Professional Development

Later, Whitlock records data in a Google form that gives the principal a visual representation of how well teachers are doing and how much students are growing.

This year, Ouachita Parish will compare teachers’ PLP data with their students’ achievement scores at the beginning of the year and their scores at the end of the year. Did the students grow, or did their scores fall? The data tell the story — and may result in principals making tough staffing decisions as they consider ways to best support the students who are most in need.

The district and schools use data from this process for targeted professional development. For example, when teachers’ classroom instruction, assignments and assessments are not tightly aligned to standards, the district provides support for lesson planning around the standards. Ouachita Parish also targets teachers, schools and departments with ratings that average below 2 on the 4-point scale for specific support.

## Results

As a result of using SREB’s Powerful Literacy Practices, evaluations and follow-up support, student achievement has increased in the middle grades and high schools across Ouachita Parish. Teachers have gained strength in their instructional practices, and students are more engaged and successful in reading, writing, speaking and listening.

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Join us in New Orleans for the 2020 Making Schools Work Conference, July 7 – 10.

