High Expectations
for Washington High Schools:
Making Changes and Meeting Challenges
to Serve ALL Students
This edition of Curriculum in Context marks several transitions. First is the transition in editorship of the journal from the capable hands of Greg Fritzberg, associate professor at Seattle Pacific University, and coeditor Debora Gonzalez, most recently assistant superintendent for Learning and Teaching at Puget Sound ESD. Greg became the editor of Curriculum in Context in 2001. Deborah joined him as coeditor in 2003. During their tenure, the journal continued its tradition of excellence, and earned four awards from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Greg and Deborah brought the journal to a new level of thoughtful discussion of the issues confronting schools today. Greg dubbed WSASCD as the “practitioner’s best friend,” a distinction that has served the membership of the Washington State ASCD very well. I join with all of WSASCD in thanking Greg and Deborah for their distinguished stewardship of the journal.

The second transition is the transfer of the editorship from Seattle Pacific University to Washington State University. Keeping with the tradition, WSASCD turns to a university partner to host the journal. This WSASCD/university partnership has been integral to the award-winning stature of Curriculum in Context. Education in our state and across our nation is a birth to post-secondary proposition, and the success of our early learning, K-12, and higher education systems is critical to our future.

It is my privilege to serve as editor of Curriculum in Context. I am currently a member of the educational leadership faculty at Washington State University and academic director for the College of Education programs offered at WSU Spokane. Prior to coming to WSU, I was a school administrator in the Mead School District and for Spokane Public Schools, and I taught middle and high school English in the Medical Lake School District. My K-12 school experience has fueled my commitment to public education and to supporting truly great schools and educators in the work of educating all students. I have been given the opportunity to view education from a K-20 perspective, and it is my hope to continue the tradition of excellence in Curriculum in Context as a journal for thoughtful discourse among practitioners and scholars in education.

Washington State University Spokane is lending its support to the publication of the journal through provision of a graduate assistant, Kevin Foster, who will serve as assistant editor. Kevin is a doctoral student at WSU, and a coordinator for school improvement for Spokane Public Schools. The WSU staff also will include Kelly LaGrutta, academic coordinator for the College of Education at WSU Spokane. Kelly brings her considerable experience and talent to the design and layout of the journal.

WSASCD is in the midst of another transition as Kathy Clayton assumes the duties of executive director from her predecessor, Joann Mychals. Joann served WSASCD from 2000 to July of 2006. Through her administrative insight and guidance, WSASCD developed the financial stability to fully engage its professional development and advocacy role. With considerable style, Joann advanced WSASCD as the professional association for all educators in Washington State.

Given these many transitions, it is fitting that this edition of Curriculum in Context chronicles the thoughtful transitions occurring in high schools across our state. High Expectations for Washington High Schools: Making Changes & Meeting Challenges to Serve All Students provides a timely discussion of the significant restructuring that is occurring in our high schools. In this issue, you will learn about North Central High School’s academic press, Mount Vernon High School’s first class of AVID graduates, and Eisenhower High School’s innovative work to connect student learning to its community. Articles on the importance of school leadership and the essentials of high school reform provide key insights for practitioners. The outline of Navigation 101 and the steps of the NCLB required improvement process will also serve as useful considerations for practice. The thoughts of our state superintendent, a student, a teacher, and the WSASCD president further expand the discussion on high school reform in this issue. These articles and the information provided will offer significant insight into the progress that is being made and the context within which high schools serve their students. We have evidence across our state that good practice supports high academic achievement for all students.

Finally, we mourn a transition of another sort, that of former editor Dr. Richard Wolfe. Dr. Wolfe died August 26, and the entire WSASCD family extends its condolences and respectful regard to the Wolfe family. Dick Wolfe was professor emeritus, Gonzaga University, and served as editor of Curriculum in Context for six years. His professional involvement with ASCD at the state and national levels was an important part of his distinguished career. Dr. Wolfe was a respected mentor to many in education, and he contributed to the award-winning distinction of Curriculum in Context. We extend our sincere appreciation for his life of service and for his many contributions to WSASCD.
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Curriculum in Context is published twice a year. Manuscripts should be addressed to Joan Kingrey, Washington State University Spokane, PO Box 1495 Spokane, WA 99210-1495 • Telephone: (509) 358-7930; Fax: (509) 359-7933, E-mail: kingrey@wsu.edu. The editorial committee seeks articles that provide perspectives, research and practical information about the issues of and ways to improve learning and teaching in Washington State.
At North Central High School, we are pursuing school reform along three interrelated pathways: instructional improvement, social support, and academic press.

We have developed our common understandings and strategies for improvement from a broad foundation of educational research. At the heart of this research are studies that show students perform better academically in schools with high levels of academic press and social support (Lee & Smith, 1999; Shouse, 1996).

Figure #1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Press</th>
<th>Instructional Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students succeed at each grade level and graduate from high school well prepared for a variety of post-secondary pursuits in our democratic society.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Social Support</td>
<td></td>
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Basis for Academic Press

This article focuses on academic press. There has been considerable research and activity around student social support and instructional improvement, but less is known about what strategies improve academic press in a high school. Academic press is the extent to which school members, including teachers and students, experience a normative emphasis on academic success and conformity to specific standards of achievement (McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1986). In effect, academic press is the internal push that a school has towards high academic performance for all students. The literature clearly states that students do better in schools where high levels of academic press exist. However, it is more elusive to devise and implement strategies that will transform a school with a history of inconsistent academic expectations to one where the norm is rigorous coursework and high achievement for all students.

Schools must take an active, intentional role in creating an environment of academic press within communities where it does not already exist. Researchers have found that some communities, usually communities with affluent parents, actually impose high expectations and challenging academic environments upon their schools. In effect, families actually create the expectations for the students, and the schools need to do very little to create academic press within their walls. Other schools, where the demand for academic press does not come from outside, need to make much more deliberate efforts to create a culture of academic press within their walls.

North Central High School has a student population of approximately 1500 students from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds. About half of our students qualify for free and reduced lunch. We need to make deliberate, continuous efforts to create and maintain an environment of academic press within our building. While we do not claim to have arrived, we have implemented several strategies that have yielded some promising gains.

Core curriculum for all

Clifford Adelman’s study *Answers in the Toolbox* (1999) brought to light the significance of academic press. In this seminal study, Adelman demonstrated that the biggest single predictor of students’ post-secondary success is the quality and intensity of their academic program in high school. As a result, the Adelman study has sparked a range of reports (Ed Trust, 2003; ACT, 2004; Achieve, 2006) calling for all students to complete a more intense course of study in high school.

At North Central High School, we embraced the course of study aspect of academic press in multiple ways. First, we eliminated all courses that tracked students or did not provide the curriculum necessary for post-secondary success. For example, we eliminated low rigor business math courses, science classes for juniors and seniors that were not stepping stones to post-secondary success, and English classes that divided our students into three levels of expectations. These changes allowed us to eliminate the possibility that some of our students would experience only low-expectation, low-rigor courses.

Second, we increased the expecta-
tions for what courses students would take at North Central. Prior to our academic press efforts, only 37 percent of our students graduated with the core curriculum necessary for entry into four-year colleges. This means that almost two-thirds of our students left our building without the academic background and preparation necessary for success beyond our school. Consequently, we undertook an ambitious effort to create the “College by Design” course of study for all of our students. Our immediate goal is to graduate 75 percent of our students with a transcript that will allow them to apply to a four-year university if that is the route they choose.

One strategy for steering more students to more rigorous courses has been through our registration process. Prior to our emphasis on academic press, students received registration forms outlining class “choices” for their junior and senior years of school. The forms listed only the minimum courses required for graduation, all the other spaces were simply labeled “Elective” (see Figure #2).

We found that many families interpreted the word “elective” very differently. Some families knew that their children would need to take additional math, science, world language, and art as electives in order to allow their sons and daughters to qualify for college entrance and to prepare them academically for the world of work. However, most families at our school were not aware that courses taken in the junior and senior years would have an impact on post-secondary choices and success. Therefore, we altered the registration forms and process (see Figure #3) to show families what courses were recommended.

The results were dramatic. Our enrollment in advanced science (see Figure #4), mathematics, and world language grew significantly as students stepped up to the challenge placed before them.

For the majority of students this is now the default curriculum, and it has not required any change in the graduation requirements of the school district. Students who choose a different pathway have to meet with counselors and administrators to discuss post-secondary plans and options. This ensures that we have a “college by design” pathway established as opposed to the “college by

**Figure #2 Registration materials prior to academic press**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Junior Year</th>
<th>Senior Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English 11</td>
<td>English 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Studies</td>
<td>CWP/Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elective</td>
<td>Elective</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elective</td>
<td>Elective</td>
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<td>Elective</td>
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</table>

**Figure #3 Registration materials after academic press**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Junior Year</th>
<th>Senior Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English 11</td>
<td>English 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Studies</td>
<td>CWP/Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Science (Choose chemistry, physics, advanced biology, AP chemistry AP physics, human biology)</td>
<td>Advanced Science (Choose chemistry, physics, advanced biology, AP chemistry AP physics, human biology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Language</td>
<td>World Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elective</td>
<td>Elective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure #4 Increase in advanced science sections after changing registration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Physics</th>
<th>Chemistry</th>
<th>Human Biology/Advanced Biology</th>
<th>Outdoor Living</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4 (1 AP)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4 (1 AP)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4 (1 AP)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>3 (1 AP)</td>
<td>5 (1 AP)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

chance” pathway that existed before.

Now that more students were enrolled in our college by design pathway, we pushed to increase the numbers of students taking advanced placement and honors courses in our school. First, we increased the number of courses available by adding AP World History, AP Physics, AP Art Studio, AP Environmental Science, and AP Statistics in the past two years. We simultaneously eliminated all barriers for students to enter these courses. Currently, there are no prerequisites to enter any of our AP offerings. Students who want to take AP and honors classes are allowed to enroll. Additionally, we intentionally enrolled more students in these courses by recruiting students who had done well in previous courses at our high school. Through our registration process and active recruitment, we increased the numbers of students in our advanced placement and honors courses significantly. Again, students have stepped up to the challenge. Finally, we sent approximately 25 staff members to AP Institutes and vertical team planning sessions to provide the professional development necessary to make instructional and curricular shifts in their courses.

Furthermore, we made a concentrated effort to communicate our high academic expectations to our community. Through parent meetings, college nights, print materials, and registration materials, we informed families that the courses their children select during the last two years of high school would have a profound impact on their performance and opportunities beyond high school. Toward this end, counselors played a critical role in advising students, disseminating information, and creating the expectation for all students to take a full schedule of six courses throughout their four years of high school.

Supporting students in the middle

Another aspect of academic press has focused on supporting students from historically underserved populations of college attendees (e.g. students who would be the first in their families to attend college, ethnic groups historically underrepresented in post-secondary institutions, etc.). To help students from the middle move to our new expectations we adopted the AVID program at our site.

AVID (Advancement Via Individualized Determination) is a program that started in San Diego over 25 years ago. The purpose of the program is to serve the forgotten students in the middle who have potential for high academic performance but may not have the support structures to navigate through high school and prepare for college. This program places thirty students with one staff member for four years. In the AVID elective, students focus on writing, inquiry, collaboration, and reading. They are provided with college tutors, support towards a college level curriculum, encouragement to take honors and advanced placement courses, motivational speakers, access to colleges, and assistance in applying for and entering college. Families are also provided with focused seminars and information to help support their child over the four years.

Rigor of the coursework

The most difficult aspect of our academic press efforts has been around the last factor of the Answers in the Toolbox study – intensity of the coursework. How does a school ensure that the quality of their curriculum is adequate to prepare students for post-secondary success? How do we know the curriculum we offer at North Central is equivalent to the best college preparatory schools across the nation?

One advantage we have is the work the Spokane School District has undertaken in the development of curriculum and program guides for courses in the school district. These curriculum and program guides outline what curriculum should be taught in a given course. They suggest timelines for covering curriculum, show teachers approved district resources to support their teaching, and most importantly outline assessment tools to monitor student progress.

As powerful as these tools have been to help focus staff members, we still do not have curriculum guides and program guides for many of our courses. Because of the state and national ac-
countability measures, understandably, the focus of the Spokane School District has been on developing tools and assessments for courses in the 9th and 10th grade. However, this has left many of our post-certificate of mastery courses without clear guidelines.

Subsequently, we have worked on multiple fronts to build upon the rigor in our district’s curriculum. One area has been to create a clear focus around literacy. Using the literacy plan from the High Schools that Work organization from the Southern Regional Educational Board (2003), we have worked on including literacy in all areas of our curriculum. Examples of the goals we established include writing a research paper in every course, establishing weekly writing goals for every course, having all students read the equivalent of twenty-five books a year through their coursework, and using literacy strategies and constructivist teaching strategies to support student work in the acquisition of these strategies. Additionally, we have worked to assure that all upper level courses, honors courses, and advanced placement courses deliver the curriculum necessary for student success.

Creating a college-going culture
In addition to moving toward a rigorous core curriculum for all students and supporting our students in the middle, we have been working on creating a college-going culture within our school. For this aspect of academic press, we have only started to scratch the surface. One significant strategy is to encourage and support more students to take college admissions tests. Prior to our academic press initiative, we had fewer than 25 percent of our junior class taking the PSAT during a given school year. In our effort to create a college-going culture, we took steps to make college entrance testing the norm rather than the exception. First, we moved the PSAT from Saturday to Wednesday; which allowed students to avoid transportation issues to the testing site and demonstrated our commitment to the importance of this test. Second, we made a huge push to sign students up for the test. The first year we ran out of test booklets and turned students away even though we more than doubled the numbers of booklets that we ordered. This year, we increased our order of test booklets by almost four fold (around 450 booklets). We also increased the number of test fee waivers from the College Board for our school. Our long-term goal is to secure long-term funding to allow all of our sophomores and juniors to take the PSAT test every year. We also have similar ambitions for our juniors with the ACT and/or SAT.

In order to build on our college-going culture, we have a number of supporting initiatives planned this year. One effort will place a college corner in every classroom in our school. In this corner, staff members will display their college alma mater and post degrees that they have received to date. We also plan to have college days where staff members will wear clothing from their alma mater. Additionally, we will create a map of where seniors are accepted to college during the school year. The purpose of all of these efforts is to bombard students and families with the message of the necessity of post-secondary education and to intentionally spark conversations about post-secondary pursuits on a daily basis.

Conclusion
Even though we are just getting started on creating an environment of academic press at our high school, we are very encouraged. We see dramatic changes in student course-taking patterns, student testing, and interest from families around post-secondary pursuits. We believe creating this environment is imperative to leveling the playing field for our students to access and succeed in post-secondary education and life.

References


AVID
A framework for relationships, relevance and rigor

As WASL scores once again hit the headlines throughout Washington State, consider an elective class of 25 sophomore students, all who qualify for free or reduced lunch. Seventeen of them are Latino/Latina, most with Spanish-speaking parents. One hundred percent of this cohort met standard on the reading portion of the 2006 WASL, 96 percent met standard in writing and 83 percent met standard in math (one student was absent). The 2005 WASL data for a previous elective class of sophomores was only slightly less impressive and the student demographics were almost the same. Likewise, a group of students with the same kind of demographics graduated with their class of 2006. 100 percent of these students are going to college this fall and 13 of the 19 member cohort received scholarships. These 19 students are the first graduating AVID class from the state of Washington.

These impressive, high achieving students are all from Mount Vernon High School. Mount Vernon, like so many towns nationwide, is experiencing rapidly changing demographics. It is no longer a simple middle class town surrounded by farmland. Mount Vernon High School has become ‘an urban school in a rural setting’ with mobility rates reaching 128 percent. In 2006, the high school has a 53 percent free and reduced lunch population in a district with a 68 percent average. Additionally, the percentage of Latino students has grown to 40 percent and the bilingual program to 29 percent of the overall student population.

Responding to these challenging conditions, district administrators, teachers and board members began to read the research and attend seminars on schools with similar demographics that had been successful in narrowing the achievement gap for students of poverty, those of Latino/Latina background and English Language Learners. The district studied research from Katie Haycock and the Educational Trust, as well as Doug Reeves and Robert Marzano’s work on schools that have been successful despite challenging demographics. These and other studies and presentations highlighted the importance of the new “Three R’s,” rigor, relevance and relationships. Other experts in the field also underscored the importance of scaffolded rigor for all students. Therefore, in what may seem like a counter intuitive approach, both Mount Vernon High School and LaVenture Middle School began an active pursuit of a program that requires students from groups rarely represented in honors and AP courses to pursue those rigorous classes and set goals leading to university entrance and completion.

The program known as Advance- ment Via Individual Determination (AVID) has received national acclaim as the number one research-based model for moving Latino/Latina students successfully into higher education. It has also been listed as one of the effective educational reform models by the U.S. Department of Education. At the heart of AVID is an elective class currently implemented in grades 7 through 12 in the Mount Vernon School District.

Rigor
Strong, Silver, and Perini (2001) defined rigor as the goal of helping students develop the capacity to understand content that is complex, ambiguous, provocative, and personally or emotionally challenging. It is this definition of rigor that AVID insists upon for program participants.

AVID is designed to ensure that all students, most especially the least served students, succeed in rigorous curriculum, participate in mainstream activities at school, enroll in four-year colleges, and become educated and responsible participants and leaders in a democratic society. Participants, both students and staff, take part by their own choice. The school must be committed to full implementation of the program, with the AVID year-long elective class available within the regular academic school day. Students pursue a course of study that enables them to meet requirements for university enrollment. This intentional approach includes requiring honors and AP classes that are scaffolded so that students can acquire the study habits, conceptual background and literacy skills that ensure students are not just admitted to college, but excel there as well.

Students who are identified as having potential, but performing below their ability, are placed in the AVID elective class that supports and scaffolds them to academic success. AVID defines the target student as ‘in the middle’ grade-wise. Typical students would be the first in their families to go to college, and the intended population includes groups that are under-represented in honors, AP classes and four year universities. In Mount Vernon that includes Latino/Latina students as well as those who qualify for free

Curriculum in Context
and reduced lunch. AVID site teams in Mount Vernon carefully select students who meet the criteria, noting individual determination as the number one factor for accepting a student into the elective class. Students invited to apply for the class must be willing to give up an elective period to take a course that supports them with study skills and the tools to increase their reading and writing skills in the content areas. They also participate in higher level questioning formats including Socratic Seminars, Philosophical Chairs and tutorials that scaffold the rigorous AP and honors courses they are required to take. The acronym for this curriculum is WIC-R which stands for writing, inquiry, collaboration and reading. Guest speakers and field trips to college campuses are also included in the class. Parents and/or guardians are required to sign a contract that they, too, will support their AVID student and attend meetings to learn about navigating the college financial and entrance maze.

There are now over 200 students in these secondary elective classes district-wide. A positive side effect has been the growth of Advanced Placement (AP) classes at Mount Vernon High School. Four years ago only two courses were available. Today there are nine AP electives to choose from, with two more slated for 2007-08. The first sophomore AP course, world history, opens with three sections in fall 2006. All students are benefiting from this new level of rigorous curriculum and the support of AVID strategies, including Cornell Notes, at the middle level (grades seven & eight) and in several departments at Mount Vernon High School. Mary Catherine Swanson, founder of the AVID program, stated, “Rigor without support is a prescription for failure. Support without rigor is a tragic waste of potential.” Mount Vernon students have taken up the challenge of rigorous coursework and Mount Vernon staff are delivering on the promise of support.

Relationships
The AVID elective teacher is part coach, part parent, and full-time teacher. The intent is to keep the cohort with their teacher for the entire school experience. At the middle level, the teachers follow the elective class from grade seven to eight and then loop back to pick up a new group. The students are then handed off to their high school AVID teacher who will shepherd them through the final four years. The elective teacher does not teach AVID full time. Intentionally, this class is only part of his or her assignment. Focusing on one to two cohorts and ensuring they are successful throughout the day is enough. Mount Vernon, like many participating districts, wants to spread the research-based instructional strategies used in the elective class into the teachers’ other assignments. Currently, three teachers from three different departments are modeling and sharing these strategies with their content area peers.

Tutorial time is scheduled regularly into the AVID class. Tutors are typically college students who have backgrounds and stories similar to the AVID students they serve. Tutors receive training in inquiry process, and rather than supplying the ‘correct answers’ to complete homework assignments, they become coaches. The students learn to rely on themselves and their tutorial study group to find answers in their Cornell Notes, the curriculum materials, or by discourse within the group. The tutors are powerful role models who inspire and encourage the AVID students. In 2006, the first Mount Vernon AVID graduates, now college students, will return as tutors at both the middle and high school. These former students will receive college credit and/or pay as we forge formal partnerships with nearby colleges to fill this need.

AVID students also bond as a cohort. As one student shared, “In the AVID classroom it is OK to be a scholar. I have my AVID friends as well as my friends who are not into school like I am.” Another student put it simply, “AVID is a safe place to study. Mr. Oliver believes in us and the students in this class are my friends. I trust them.”

Students also have “study buddies” who become their lifeline when they are absent or a partner to study with outside of class. These partnerships often turn into lasting friendships.

Relevance
College and career goals become relevant for these students, many of whom have parents who did not graduate from high school. Personalized individual student learning plans are updated annually. AVID students understand, through short and long-term goal setting and self-designed action plans, that the courses they take in middle and high school do matter to in order to fulfill their dreams for the future.

Students who do not match middle class norms are re-engaged in this setting, partially because they have scaffolded success, but more specifically because they are taught the hidden rules or “Culture of Power” of school (Delpit, 1995). This begins the first day in the AVID elective class when the students are asked to “SLANT.” This means to sit in front, lean forward, ask questions,
nod your head and talk to the teacher. Time management and organizational skills are also intentionally taught, expected, and graded. Students are required to participate in extra-curricular activities including service clubs. Elective teachers help them identify offerings that match their interests and fit into schedules that often include caring for family members or work.

**Taking AVID school-wide**

As high schools become the focus of school reform under the lens of NCLB, schools with demographics like Mount Vernon High School continue to seek out best practices to enhance learning for all students. A school with a poverty level of over 50 percent has additional challenges. As Ruby Payne (2001) tells us, “When 40 percent of the school practices a set of values, language and habits, those practices become the culture of the entire school.” Changing a school from a culture of poverty to one of academic success, a college-going atmosphere, benefits from AVID schoolwide strategies. These include collecting and analyzing data, modeling instructional practices, strategies, and methodologies which have proven effective.

Additional AVID components that schools have put into practice across all departments include Socratic Seminars, Cornell Notes, binder checks, and Philosophical Chairs. During the past two years, every secondary teacher in the district has had at least one day of “Path” training which highlights the WIC-R strategies. OSPI supported this training with Advanced Placement (APIP) grant dollars.

These schoolwide efforts have paid handsome dividends in many California districts, and we look forward to similar results in Mount Vernon. We visited a school just two miles north of the Mexican border that had implemented AVID schoolwide. Twelve hundred of their two thousand students attended AP classes and their state test scores rivaled those of Torrey Pines High School in an affluent suburb of San Diego. The former principal was quick to explain that this was a very intentional effort. He stated passionately that, “My goal was to ensure that all students have the education necessary to realize their dreams, including a four-year college education, whether they think they are going to college now or in the future. This is my charge as a high school principal.”

John Yochelson (2006) reinforced this view in an interview on increasing the number of science and math majors in American colleges: “Defined outcomes, persistence, challenging content, engaged adults, and personalization are the five things that matter most. And they are part of the AVID legacy” (p.5).

In Mount Vernon, we have initiated some next steps through implementing the elementary (K-6) AVID all-student strategies at some sites and we look forward to implementing these strategies district wide.

**Closing the gap**

Twenty-six years ago AVID was founded by Mary Catherine Swanson, a high school English teacher in San Diego, California. Today the program is in more than 40 US states (over 2,000 schools) and in over 15 foreign countries including Canada. California and Texas have state funding line items for AVID. The Chicago Public Schools is implementing district-wide.

The book *Wall of Fame: One Teacher, One Class, and the Power to Save Schools and Transform Lives* (2001) chronicles Swanson’s journey with students who were bussed from impoverished areas of San Diego to her affluent high school where they benefited from her vision of access and equity to rigorous curriculum and college dreams.

Mount Vernon has its own “Wall of Fame,” the AVID class of 2006. Those 19 students are the first AVID cohort to graduate in the state. Their demographics mirror the current sophomore cohort; largely Latino, many with parents whose first language is not English. All 19 have been accepted to college. One class member, whose first language is Spanish, received the top SAT writing exam score at Mount Vernon High School. 78 percent of them are going to four-year colleges. Those going to community colleges have their four-year scholarships saved and a plan to transfer at the end of two years. This cohort has been awarded over $500,000 in scholarships. One student has been on her own since her sophomore year when her parents moved away. Another is a new mother who only missed one week of school when she had her child. Her words, perhaps, sum up what AVID has meant to so many, “AVID has provided me with a way to get a college education. I want this for myself and for my son so he can have that education as well.”

Sydney Harris (1973) said, “The purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows.” In Mount Vernon the windows and doors to the future are wide open.
Susan Bergman is the director of curriculum and instruction for the Mount Vernon School District. She also serves as AVID district director.

References


Another program? Another acronym to remember? One more bright idea to try out on these kids? These were questions running through my mind four years ago, when I learned of Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). As a 22-year veteran teacher, I had heard of and used, or tried to use, more programs that made lofty promises to help educate our students than I cared to think about. I was getting cynical about all those programs. Another program? Maybe they’re kidding!

Three years later, Advancement Via Individual Determination or AVID, (yes, “another program”) is very much a strong, welcomed component of my classroom, school and even my life! As I reflect on the past three years, I can see several reasons why I really like AVID. AVID targets the very students I used to worry about the most—the kids in the middle. These are the students who get OK, but not great grades. They have good test scores, but not the best ones. They come from homes where no one ever went to college. They do not have the benefit of parents who talk about those good ‘ole’ college days, like my parents did at our dinner table. These students want to succeed in life but often do not know how. AVID elective students must volunteer to be in the class. It is no secret that they will have more homework than anyone else, yet they still volunteer. The program is designed to help those students who stand to gain the most from it!

New programs often mean using new teaching methods, frequently just at the time I really feel comfortable with the last great method. AVID asks me to apply the best methods I already use and then adds other learning activities. It does not force me to throw out stuff I like—it lets me add to my own stuff! Its basic components are boiled down to Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration and Reading (WIC-R). The students are taught to learn (and think) for themselves using any or all of WIC-R. I was already using all four components in my instruction; this framework became an affirmation for what I was already doing and gave me plenty of great new ideas and activities.

Some of my favorite new activity-based strategies are debate oriented, such as Socratic Seminar and Philosophical Chairs. These are fun, safe, collaborative ways to discuss and argue that encourage good WASL behaviors like “citing from the text.” Biweekly tutorial sessions cause my students to ask genuine questions from their other classes. Their tutors are real college students who have been trained to get the students to answer their own questions and to THINK! We try to save Fridays for guest speakers. We invite people with college degrees to our classroom to talk about their careers. I usually learn as much as the kids, and the speakers often tell me the same thing!

My school has also changed because of AVID. I first realized the power on a school level when I pulled a surprise notebook check on my reading and ESL classes, and almost all of my students had their notebooks organized in the approved format. At our school, since beginning the program, all students have their notebook checked during first period on Fridays.

Another clue was when I asked my second period reading class to take notes and they took out paper and pen and divided their papers into two columns to take Cornell Notes (another AVID strategy). These days I have gangster-type kids coming to me to beg to be in AVID! Being a “schoolboy” is suddenly “cool”! Our school has become an AVID school. AVID has even changed my life. Before AVID, I was feeling tired and sick of banging my head against a wall! I really worried about kids. I had them for such a short time. They either were English learners who left me as they gained English ability, or they needed some serious help in reading and left me as soon as their reading score went up. I’d get to know them, get them going, and then say goodbye. My AVID elective students stay with me for one period a day for both of the two years of middle school. I know them well and they know me. I know their parents and families. I pass my students on to my friends who teach the high school elective classes (we got to know each other through AVID district site team meetings and trainings). My students will stay with their assigned elective class teacher at the high school all four years. I will get to be there to see them graduate. I will know them when they are in college and beyond. I am thrilled!

Tina Hardin is a teacher in the Mount Vernon School District.
Leadership still matters in guiding high schools to success

Leadership in the contemporary American high school is inextricably connected to the issues and challenges related to school and curricular reform and to student achievement. These issues and challenges are to be found in the changing demographics of students, the need to be accountable to multiple educational constituencies, the mandate to apply research-based findings to the processes of teaching and learning, the imperative to collaboratively focus on student data to advance student achievement, the need of curriculum to address in new ways the different learning styles of students, including students with learning disabilities, and the public call to measure the performance of principals and teachers through the mandated achievement of students. Importantly, the era of reform ushered in by No Child Left Behind requires that high school principals and teachers make connections between academic data and excellence and that they employ strategic thinking and innovations in developing partnerships with a variety of constituent groups. This is a daunting task that requires collaboration and connection in the fullest sense between leadership in schools and the instructional practices taking place within classrooms. Principals and teachers are called upon to exercise their unique leadership talents and abilities to align resources and practices to research-based innovations with proven outcomes of achievement for students. Principals and teachers are challenged to use and understand data in ways that make an impact upon leadership and instructional practices.

As co-chair of the National Task Force on the Principalship of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), and as editor of the NASSP Bulletin, the scholarly and peer-reviewed publication of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), I am constantly reminded of the need for principals and teachers to forge an educational alliance through collaborative leadership that will ensure student growth, development, and achievement in an era of high stakes testing. In practically all instances this new found alliance coalesces in a strategy of school improvement plans and projects whereby schools re-conceptualize their vision and mission for student achievement. Such a strategic plan calls for a reinvention of the roles of both principals and teachers if this collaborative educational alliance is to reap true benefits for student achievement.


**Visionary leadership** that epitomizes energy, commitment, an entrepreneurial spirit; values convictions that all children can and will learn at high levels of achievement; and inspires others with this same vision inside and outside of the school building;

**Community-based leadership** that is based in big-picture awareness of the societal role of the school; shared leadership among educators and community interests; close relationships with parents, community-based business and philanthropic interests, and community residents; and advocacy for building school capacity and greater resource development;

**Instructional leadership** that focuses on strengthening teaching and learning, bridging the achievement gap; fostering professional development among teachers; employing data-driven decision making and accountability; and

**Culturally proficient leadership** that respects and honors diversity among students and views a culturally inclusive educational environment as a benefit for teaching and learning that results in academic achievement for all students (National Association of Secondary School Principals, forthcoming).

For teachers this educational alliance will mean that they will have “to throw open their classrooms to collaboratively focus on student data, share instructional practice, and apply research findings” (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2006). In many schools and school districts throughout the country, the formation of learning communities and professional learning teams is connecting the work and
expertise of principals and teachers in creating optimal environments for learning and achievement. This alliance is not an easy feat in many instances because principals and teachers have traditionally viewed their work through different lenses. The research literature is replete with both successes and failures as principals and teachers attempt to create “relational trust” to foster the work of student achievement (Bryk and Schneider, 2002, as cited in National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2006). What remains abundantly clear in this relational journey is that if students are to experience optimal levels of learning within dynamic and creative environments, principals and teachers must become partners in the total process. The traditional pattern of roles where school administrators manage and teachers teach will no longer be sufficient to affect school achievement. Both principals and teachers must become learners and leaders who question, investigate and seek solutions for school improvement (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2006, forthcoming).

As technology has become pervasive in the daily lives of students, parents, and their communities, high schools face the challenge and opportunity to utilize technology and telecommunications to advance teaching and learning and to stay connected with their multiple constituencies. Every prospective parent, student, and interested community member expects to know what is going on at the high school and the use of Web sites is becoming an important vehicle for connecting the purposes and programs of the school to the interests and concerns of the community in which the school is located. Parents expect principals and teachers to communicate with them instantly through e-mail and homework sites. Traditional paper trails thwart efforts of parents to be informed at every moment of their children’s educational journey within the school, and parents expect school administrators and teachers to be available for consultation and guidance about their students’ issues as quickly as e-mail messages can be forwarded. This is an expectation that will only increase as schools become more connected and interactive through use of advanced technological applications. At a more important level, there is a need to discern how technology actually impacts the day to day learning within high schools. To date, secondary schools have made extensive use of technology in disaggregating data about student learning gaps, but very few school improvement plans have deliberately addressed how the use of technology can be conceptualized by principals and teachers to sustain both improvement and advancement in learning. Further, new and emerging structures and collaborations about how the secondary school curriculum and experience will be delivered (e.g., virtual high schools, magnet schools, and dual enrollment agreements with colleges and universities) will require school districts and systems to rethink how to best use technology to respond to a variety of new structural configurations that challenge the traditional thinking about secondary education. This is an area of practice at the high school level that is ripe for research and for dissemination of successful models.

Effective high school principals and teacher leaders will have to learn the ropes of good public relations as a vehicle for garnering internal and external support for the work of the school. NCLB and other high stakes mandates have thrust schools into the public spotlight like no other previous movements in school history. The challenge that school officials will have to meet is to be proactive rather than reactive in the face of new public expectations for the performance of principals, teachers, and students. The degree to which schools can be transparent in their successes and diligent in addressing key issues that impact teaching and learning can determine the types of community partner-
ships that are possible to support their future goals and activities. No school can tackle the immense responsibilities inherent in teaching and learning today without the support of effective community networks and partnerships. These networks and partnerships require strong connections to the local and state communities.

Getting the driver’s license and first car have always been the dreams of high school students in their quest to exercise freedom and individuality. Access to computers and to the World Wide Web has further increased the abilities of students to forge new terrains of exploration and freedom. Wise school leaders and parents realize that traditional and newly emerging vistas for communication, learning, and freedom must be grounded in strong values that foster learning, growth, and development in responsible and caring environments. This latter realization remains a prime directive for those principals and teacher leaders who take the charge and responsibility of leading our young people who are diverse in their representation and in their goals and expectations into the future. And, perhaps at no greater time in our educational history is this mandate more needed and appropriate. As Fullan (2001) astutely observes, “Leadership, then is not mobilizing others to solve problems we already know how to solve, but to help them confront problems that have never yet been successfully addressed” (p.3). Leadership still matters.

References


Navigation 101
Charting a course to more personalized student learning

If we truly have the courage to personalize our high schools, then we must have the courage to ask our students challenging questions and truly listen to their answers. These are questions that even adults find difficult to answer, such as: “Who am I? What are my interests? What are my goals? Are they connected? How will I get from here to there?” Questions such as these provide a guiding framework for districts throughout the state as they implement Navigation 101, the student planning curriculum that teaches students to successfully steer through middle and high school, establish plans for their lives, and in so doing, learn to tell their own stories.

Mead School District’s journey has been very similar to that of other districts across the state. In 2001, we began the long overdue process of reviewing our existing district graduation requirements and creating a plan to incorporate the new state High School and Beyond Plan and Culminating Project requirements. From the beginning, Mead sought to go beyond simple compliance with these changes to something that was meaningful and genuinely engaging to our students. And, in fact, we have been successful. The program that grew from the work we began in 2001 now routinely receives 90 percent approval ratings from our freshmen—quite an accomplishment!

What did we do? While searching for an approach that would prove meaningful and engaging, Mead came across what was then referred to as “The Franklin Pierce Model,” now better known as Navigation 101. What was exciting to the teachers, parents, and administrators who were part of the exploration process in Mead was that Navigation 101 addressed tough questions that we, and others across the state, had been asking: How can we keep teens genuinely engaged in learning rather than just going through the motions? How can we help students understand the connection between working hard in school and having a satisfying adult life? What motivates students to take advantage of new and more challenging opportunities? How can schools keep parents informed and involved in the middle and high school years? (OSPI, 2004) The opportunities Navigation 101 creates for educators, parents and students to get to the heart of these issues are compelling. More than a program, Navigation 101 enhances all aspects of the school system and contributes to the overall culture of a school and district.

Learning about Navigation 101 was just the beginning. From there, we went through an extensive process of gathering input from parents, staff, and students to determine whether Navigation 101, or one of several other models under consideration, fit best for Mead students. Ultimately, there was strong consensus around Navigation 101. One year after we began our exploration, the Mead school board approved new policy and procedures that supported implementing advisory, portfolios, student-led conferences and culminating presentations. We established a district-wide leadership team and, with tremendous support from Navigation 101 pioneers Tim Stensager and Dan Barrett of the Franklin Pierce School District, the journey continued. One of the biggest challenges we faced initially was student buy-in. We implemented in phases, starting with freshmen. This approach made the startup manageable and avoided adding unanticipated expectations and requirements to upperclassmen mid-way through their high school experience. At first, however, the freshmen expressed that they felt this was being done “to them.” With persistence and hard work, they gradually saw that Navigation 101 was helping them succeed in school, which is part of why the eventual 90 percent approval ratings from this group in 2006 were so affirming.

We were not the only ones to discover this gem. Because of its success in Franklin Pierce, Navigation 101 has been adopted by a growing number of districts across the state. The number will continue to grow during the 2006-2007 school year and beyond, as the Washington State Legislature has provided support for Navigation 101. In 2006-2007, approximately 100 school districts across the state will receive state funding.

Kyra Kester, Special Assistant for Partnerships at OSPI, helped Navigation 101 gain the widespread support that led to funding by the state legislature. Kyra continues to provide statewide leadership for Navigation 101 and comments, “Several years ago Superintendent Bergeson recognized the power of Navigation 101 to change school culture and improve student performance. This year, Governor Gregoire and the state legislature added their support and funding, acknowledging that Navigation 101 can play a crucial role in making education reform real -- and as transformational as it should be.”

A key reason that Navigation 101 is
transformational is that Navigation 101 recognizes that traditionally only some students, often those with an economic advantage, received information and support for educational planning and development. Navigation 101 ensures that all students and families receive quality information and ample levels of support regarding development of their preferred future.

Definition and key elements

Navigation 101 is a creative and systematic approach to enhancing student achievement, building meaningful relationships, involving parents, and equipping students with planning skills for high school and beyond. Through the support of Navigation 101’s life skills and planning curriculum, students have support in making clear, careful and creative plans for life beyond high school.

Here is a summary of the key elements of Navigation 101:

- **Educator-advisors**: Each student is assigned an educator-advisor for his or her entire time in the school. This establishes an adult-student relationship that matures across time and gives parents their own continuing contact inside the school. This personal, long-term relationship is crucial to the success of the program.

- **Curriculum-driven student advisories**: Throughout the school year, students meet regularly with their educator-advisor in classes of about 20 students. Advisories meet at least once per month, but often more. Advisories are guided by curriculum for teaching the navigational and planning skills students need to get the most out of middle school and high school, as well as plan and prepare for their post-high school lives. Curriculum assures student advisories are structured and students develop crucial skills. The curriculum is grounded in the American School Counselors Association’s (ASCA) standards, which include the following three domains:
  - academic development
  - career development
  - personal/social development

Through the advisory curriculum, students collect, organize and reflect on their work in a portfolio planner.

- **Student-led conferences**: Referred to by some as the gem of Navigation 101, students lead a conference with their parent/guardians and advisor at least once a year, during which they present their planner-portfolios, explain their performance, identify their course selections for the coming year and discuss their future goals. Students develop the ability to interpret their own performance, explain their goals, and discuss with caring adults how the two intersect. Ultimately, the student presentation can satisfy the High School and Beyond Plan and Culminating Project graduation requirements.

- **Student-driven registration and master plan**: As a result of their goal setting and student-led conferences, students submit their registrations for the coming year (or, as seniors, present their High School and Beyond Plan and Culminating Project). With more information about the skills that matter to their personal goals, students will select more rigorous schedules. Merging long-term planning with year-by-year registrations, students tackle more challenging coursework that prepares them for any post-high school work or education experience.

- **Data and continuous improvement**: Districts engaged in Navigation 101 record and analyze students’ course-taking patterns, as well as their success in classes. They track students’ on-time matriculation from grade to grade to watch for students who may be falling behind. Districts survey parents and students to assure that they understand and value the planning activities. And in all cases, districts use this information to adjust and improve their delivery of student and parent supports. Districts also link the analysis of individual student performance to their school and district improvement plans.

Encouraging results

As indicated previously, Navigation 101 recognizes the importance of data. While data collection on Navigation 101 is limited at present, it will grow as additional districts participate. Listed below are just a few examples of the types of results reported thus far:

- Ninety-two percent and above parent satisfaction rating for student-led conferences. (Reported by schools in Bremerton, Highline, Grandview, Vancouver, Mead, and Franklin Pierce school districts.)
- Parent attendance at student-led conferences consistently doubled, and in a couple of cases, tripled when compared to traditional conferences. This is measured by the number of students represented by at least one adult. (Reported by schools in Bremerton, Highline, Grandview, Vancouver, Mead, and Franklin Pierce school districts.)
- The proportion of students taking Chemistry, Physics, and Pre-Calculus rose from 18 percent to 28 percent over the course of five years. Within that group, the percentage of students on free and reduced lunch rose from 20 percent to 32 percent. (Reported by the Franklin Pierce School District.)

Note: According to the Trusty (2004) study on the effects of high school experiences on the completion of the bachelor’s degree, when students take at least one high-school unit in intensive math, their likelihood of completing a bachelor’s degree increased by 73 percent. One unit in intensive science increased the likelihood of completing a bachelor’s degree by 45 percent.
Thirty-five percent decrease in student suspensions. (reported by Keithley Middle School, in Franklin Pierce School District)

Ninety-eight percent staff and 88 percent student (grades 9-11) satisfaction. (Mead School District)

The grant and lighthouse districts

The legislature has allocated support for Navigation 101 for the 2006-2007 school year and, as a result, approximately 100 districts will receive funding. In addition to accessing state-developed Navigation 101 curriculum, these districts will be supported by regional “lighthouse” districts as they provide technical assistance to other implementing districts in the region. Five districts: Franklin Pierce, Bremerton, Grandview, Mead, and Vancouver, have been identified as “lighthouse” districts because of their own effective implementation of Navigation 101. One of the promising aspects of Navigation 101 is that it has proven replicable in these and other districts, which represent a wide range of diversity in terms of size, socioeconomics, and ethnicity.

Arcella Hall, principal at Grandview High School, comments, “Here at Grandview High School, Navigation 101 has had a powerful impact. Many of our students are first generation high school graduates and most of them will be first generation college. As students start to see the connection between achieving their goals and taking rigorous course work, we have doubled the number of students taking high-level math and science courses. Based on student demand, we have added seven AP classes over the last three years. Navigation 101 has been a powerful engine for change.”

Conclusion

While the data in support of Navigation 101 is convincing, I would personally argue that the less quantifiable elements such as improved parent-student connections, student self-reflection, and the power of student-led conferences are even more compelling. Parents continue to report that they learned something new about their children at the student led conferences. One Mead student, who showed up for her conference despite the fact that her parents chose not to attend, was asked, “So why did you come?” Her first response was “Because my assistant principal told me I had to.” She paused…and then corrected herself, “Really, I came because I wanted to be heard.” In addition to very important life and planning skills, what better gift can we give our students – as we seek to personalize high schools - than the gift of truly listening to them?

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The essentials of high school reform
by Deborah Gonzalez

Comprehensive high schools have been repeatedly criticized as impersonal institutions where too many students disappear in bureaucratic systems of selection and sorting. The past few years have seen numerous studies conducted to show the problems with the current high school structure. Many show large school size negatively impacts traditional measures of school success such as student achievement, drop-out rates, and college enrollment. These studies also often point out that large school sizes combined with high poverty rates create compounded problems for schools struggling to improve based on these standard measures of success. Many see the urgent problems evident in comprehensive high schools as a call for strong leadership willing and able to move beyond managing the status quo. Regardless of the size of the high school, this call emphasizes the need for instructional leaders who actively promote improving learning in the classroom, engaging the broader community, and creating a variety of structures to support the development of more personal relationships with students.

The structural organization and the culture of the comprehensive high school have many critics, but the traditional notion of high school is cherished as an icon of America. Principals who try to change the structure or the culture often face strong opposition from both teachers and communities who fiercely protect what they know as an American tradition (NASSP, 2004). Principals often find themselves caught between the moral imperative to respond to the diverse needs of students and community pressure to retain the structures that characterize the traditional American high school. Joyce Baldwin (2000) explained, “The traditional high school with its seven-period days punctuated by the ringing of bells and the changing of classes has achieved iconic status as a cherished American icon” (p. 2). Established to serve as an efficient mechanism to meet the diverse educational needs of children living in urban centers, the American high school was designed to sort children into learning tracks that send some to low skill jobs and others to college and careers. In spite of rapid changes in our economy and society, the comprehensive high school has continued to function in much the same way (Baldwin, 2000).

In a study analyzing comprehensive school restructuring efforts in 820 high schools nationwide, Lee, Smith, & Croninger (1995) found reports of dissatisfaction with academic performance and career preparation. This dissatisfaction most often resulted in restructuring efforts focused on higher standards and increased levels of teacher accountability. The researchers described these efforts as “bureaucratic controls” and reported these controls alone did not bring about desired results but rather served to diminish teacher commitment and satisfaction.

In a recent report commissioned by the National High School Alliance, Harvey and Houseman (2004) analyzed conversations around high school restructuring from a series of seven national conferences focused on high school reform. Their purpose was to understand the underlying assumptions around the comprehensive American high school. The researchers’ analysis of these conversations found two distinct lines of discourse; the first, a discourse of “crisis,” and the second, a discourse of “possibility.” Both conversations marked an agreement that the current system is not serving students or society well, and changes in the structures and cultures of high schools is necessary (Harvey & Houseman, 2004). The report shared Kati Haycock’s assessment of the situation as she explained, as cited in Harvey & Houseman (2004), “American students enter high school better prepared in both reading and math than students twenty years ago, but they are worse off when they leave.” [1]

Given that across the nation we have seen increasing numbers of students meeting state standards at the elementary and middle school levels, there is some indication this claim is true.

Note 1. This comment is taken as a direct quote by Harvey and Houseman who credit Kati Haycock of the Education Trust for the ideas expressed. The comments were made at the meeting sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, “The High School Leadership Summit,” October 8, 2003, Washington, DC.
The promise and potential of reform models

As the issue of high school reform becomes the focus of national debate, many see the solution in the movement to create small learning communities within high schools. Others call for more intensive career and technical education programs. Still others call for a return to a rigorous core academic program marked by high standards and greater teacher accountability. The solution is likely not any single approach. Understanding the promise in any of these approaches and the research base that helps to shape their theories of action can provide insights into creating meaningful reform efforts that improve learning conditions for our high school students.

Academic engagement

Ask any teacher or principal what makes a great lesson, and they will talk about engaged learners. There are several ways students may be engaged, but what matters is that they are engaged in the learning. In fact, there is growing research that engagement is a necessary condition for learning (Voke, 2002). Successful programs do not lose sight of the focus on academic engagement. The notion of academic rigor is important from a variety of perspectives and a number of research reports point to schools’ success in terms of how well they support the achievement of all students to meet higher standards. Whether we view high school as a place to prepare students for college or career, academic rigor is valued by the colleges as well as by the workplace. A recent report from Educational Testing Service, High School Reform and Work: Facing Labor Market Realities points out that in the occupations growing most rapidly, higher literacy skills are required (Barton, 2006 p. 17). While the author is quick to caution that the number of growing occupations is relatively small and can potentially skew the data to reflect greater demand than is actually present, he also stresses that regardless of the occupation, all jobs reported require greater responsibility and continuous learning to stay up to date with technological advances.

Academic rigor is important for future employers or colleges, but it is also important to students. In a recent report commissioned by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts the researchers interviewed self-identified dropouts in twenty-five states. While their findings acknowledge there are a myriad of reasons students drop out, the most frequently cited reasons were lack of academic rigor followed by the lack of support or interest from an adult to encourage the students to take rigorous courses and succeed.

Pro-social engagement

While academic engagement is important, so is opportunity for pro-social engagement. This is an important factor in understanding what makes high schools successful in terms of high levels of student achievement, increased graduation rates, lower drop-out rates, and successful transition to post-secondary job or school opportunities. Schools that create opportunities for students to participate in social activities such as athletics, performing arts, and other extra-curricular activities provide meaningful engagement for students to explore interests with their peers. This leads to positive inclusion and reduces the likelihood of involvement in risky behaviors that may negatively impact students’ lives.

The other advantage of these opportunities is the chance to form a relationship with an adult who is keenly aware of the students’ interests and in their success in all aspects of school. A key component found in students’ willingness to engage in school was the belief that adults cared about education and about them (Voke, 2002). This notion is supported in reading the student voices represented in The Silent Epidemic. Their stories indicate a slow but persistent process of disengagement from school. The report states, “As complex as these individual circumstances may be, for almost all young people, dropping out of high school is not a sudden act, but a gradual process of disengagement. “Attendance patterns are a clear early sign” (Civic Enterprises, pp. 7-8).

Many schools that are showing success are doing so not by focusing on preparing students to be better test takers, but by attending to the social-emotional aspects of learning. These schools include the arts as a core subject and build in opportunities for students to join clubs, take specialized classes, or explore career possibilities through externships or vocational licensure programs within the school. They also include advisory structures where an adult spends time attending to the social-emotional needs of students while supporting their academic work and their attendance in school.

These schools do not accept failing grades and actively work to address absences by reviewing in-class attendance rates and by providing timely monitoring and reporting of course grades. When students’ attendance rates or grades drop, the adults take an active role in working with the student to reverse these trends. They offer before and after school sessions as well as sessions throughout the day for individualized tutoring and support. Adults in these schools collaborate in teams to find ways to support the learning needs of their students. The adults are vigilant in sending messages about how much they care by insisting on the students’ very best efforts. The voices in The Silent Epidemic describe the students’ struggles in school that are compounded by the struggles in their personal lives and become reasons to drop out. Students often continue by saying they regret dropping out and if an adult in their life...
insisted they stay, showed an interest in their personal lives, and supported their learning, they believe they likely would have continued in school.

**Relevant learning**

Engagement is easier when the learning is interesting and the adults demonstrate they care about students as individuals. But engagement also requires individual interest and relevance. It is argued that engagement “…lays a foundation for civic engagement. Historically, one of the primary missions of public education in the United States has been to prepare children for democratic citizenship. Research shows that student engagement in schools transfers to citizen engagement in democratic public life” (Voke, p.2).

The refrain often heard from high school students is school is boring; teachers just lecture to them instead of getting the students involved. This depersonalized view of high school is the norm rather than the exception. Even in previous efforts to restructure schools with block schedules or smaller academies, what actually happens in most classrooms changed very little. Students who have opportunities to apply their learning in real life settings, to work in discourse with their peers, and to engage in rigorous academics are more desirable as future college students and as workers. The ETS report *High School Reform and Work* states high schools must be focused on more than academic programs developed to prepare students for college. They point out in their analysis of the options available to students upon graduating from high school that employers and colleges alike are interested in evidence that students are strong communicators, have experience in group dynamics, are skilled in interpersonal decision-making, and have the characteristics of life-long learners.

Schools that have specialized school to career programs that combine a core discipline such as science or the arts with real world application are examples of ways students are engaged in relevant and applicable learning. These schools do not decrease their instruction in core academics, but they place special emphasis on learning in context and provide externships in the areas of interest for students to apply their learning in workplace settings. Students learn from their classroom teachers, from experts in the field, and from the practical experience of the world of work. In some programs students earn industry licenses so they leave high school earning a wage as certified technicians. Often employers are willing to support their continued learning in the field.

Schools have a particular obligation to ensure equitable access to career to school programs. Because high school students from low-income families have the lowest employment rates, they are least likely to experience the world of work or connect school with career development. As Barton explains, “Youth from low-income families may need money more than others, but have the fewest jobs. As a result, they are getting the least real work experience and, are therefore, setting themselves up for difficulties later on” (p.27).

Each of these examples is based on personalized learning that includes three facets: rigorous academic program, relationships with caring adults, and applied learning in real-world contexts. Schools should not be cookie cutter replicas of one another, but all schools should provide as a foundation the three areas discussed here. The solution is likely not any single model or structure. Understanding how any promising reform design contains these three core elements may help realize the promise of the educators in our schools who have the power to create powerful high school learning experiences. Different students need different schools, and the structures we create today must be sensitive enough to accurately monitor the individual needs of students and flexible enough to bend to meet those changing needs. Really, in the end, no matter the structure, it is the teachers and other adults in the school who will know the needs and interests of their students and connect them with rigorous, relevant, personalized learning.

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Leaders of today’s American high schools face a daunting task in preparing young adults for citizenship in a world that is changing at an incredible rate. In the face of unprecedented educational reform and mandates ranging from federal NCLB legislation to state standards, leaders strive to implement strategies that address growing concerns over dropout rates, graduation rates, absenteeism, and graduation requirements. Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) maintain that because of technological and societal changes and pressures, the walls of the school have - and should - “come tumbling down” (p. vii). Social issues that were once “out there” are now intruding more and more into schools. Schools must engage and connect more openly and deeply with the wider community - with all its complexities, problems, and rapid change - if they want their students ready to be full participants in that community. As Hargreaves and Fullan argue, it is vitally important that educators not ignore these outside forces, “for if they are unprepared, they will only fall prey to their most damaging effects” (p. 61). Consequently, school leaders must embrace opportunities to use real life experiences to authentically connect student learning with the community beyond the walls of the school.

Training ground
High schools are complex institutions. They act as “training grounds” where young people grow into adulthood. In school, young people should have the opportunity to safely experience success and failure with the support of their teachers and other adults. In addition, a school environment that encourages learning through real world experiences is critical to student achievement, an environment Saphier and King (1985) describe as “… built through the everyday business of school life. It is the way business is handled that both forms and reflects the culture” (p.72). In situations involving the success of school-based reform Roland Barth raises the question, “Who are those who model voracious, passionate learning in my schoolhouse? To what extent am I such a role model?”

Case in Point: Eisenhower High School and Immigration
Eisenhower is a four year comprehensive high school of approximately 2000 students located on a 40-acre site in Yakima, Washington. Our school is approximately 45 percent Hispanic and 55 percent free and reduced lunch. The Yakima Valley is an agricultural Mecca that employs many seasonal workers.

March 27, 2006, was a Monday morning just like any other Monday morning, or so I thought. I greeted students as they arrived on campus and welcomed them to school. The morning seemed quite normal until I walked through the main office at 8 a.m. and our office manager pointed out a mass of students migrating off campus to the east. About this time security called and informed me that approximately 300 of our students were headed downtown for a walkout to protest proposed legislation on illegal immigration. I asked security to quickly round up as many students as they could and head them back to our theatre for a conversation. Fifteen returned. I spent about 30 minutes listening to these students. They were very upset with our government and feared for their families. They wanted to protest and be heard. I let them know I was listening and asked for a day to think about how to best get their message out.

I met up with the police and followed the rest of our students around town and eventually to a park. Throughout the day news media, FBI, ATF, gang units, and Eisenhower High School administration patrolled the area as students refused to go back to class and planned to march every day. I was very concerned that this could get quite ugly, quite quickly. I needed a plan to transform this into a real life opportunity to teach our students about First Amendment Rights, school responsibilities, and community citizenship.

On March 28, 2006, I met with the student organizers. We decided they would post signs requesting that everyone who wanted to participate in the immigration issue should meet at the stadium during lunch. I stood back from the crowd and supported the student leaders as they addressed their peers. They were angry, passionate, and fearful. I waited until they called me in to talk to the entire group. I discussed with them about the right way to be heard. They listened. We scheduled an officially sanctioned protest for the next day. I briefed our staff on the intensity of the issue and the plan that was in place.

On March 29, 2006, we invited Tomas Villanueva, former Yakima Valley Farm Workers Union organizer and president to address our students prior to the march. I quickly checked their signs, posters, and flags. I contacted the
media and arranged a police escort at both ends of the march. The students marched for approximately 40 minutes on two major roadways during lunch. They were awesome. The students rallied back to the start, talked with the media about their experience and received autographs from Tomas. The event was a great success. Teachers were happy students were back in class, students were happy they were heard, and our Hispanic community was happy they were supported.

On March 30, 2006, I arranged for pizza and drinks for the student organizers, thanked them for their efforts, and talked about what they had learned. It was over, except for the media and community phone calls. The media wanted to know if we were going to use lock downs as some California schools had done to keep students in school and punish them for their behavior. It was apparently difficult for many to comprehend that we had successfully brought the issue to a close and the entire school had learned and grown through an authentic experience that connected students with their community.

In conclusion
Our immigration march would not have been successful had we not developed a culture where students could embrace real life experiences and feel supported. Blanca Ramos, a senior at Eisenhower, comments, “Once we were done organizing all the things necessary for the march, the day came, everyone brought a different flag and everything went great.” Senior Michelle Estrada states, “Both protests were different. The one at school was organized, had permission, and wasn’t out of control with the law. The other was not organized, had no permission, just rebels disobeying the law, and had little effect on people because we were skipping school, yelling at people, and our point was not effective in the end.” The unrest over immigration continues to be a concern in our valley. Daily, editorials present passionate opinions on both sides of the issue. The “City of Ike,” as I call it, has returned its primary focus to rigorous classroom learning, but our students are now better prepared to participate effectively when controversy arises in our diverse community.

Final thoughts
Integrating classroom learning with the real world is essential to preparing students for life beyond high school. School leaders should continue to work with teachers and community members to intentionally connect curriculum, assessment, and instructional strategies with relevant real world situations. Protests, elections, natural disasters, and civic celebrations can then become features of the ‘training ground’ where students learn to apply their learning through critical thinking and problem solving skills. School leaders will continue to be challenged to balance the pressure to produce higher test scores with their obligation to prepare all students for success in a rapidly changing global society. The key will be educational leaders who are passionate and committed to providing direction and exercising influence in the communities that they serve.

References

As a freshman, the thought of graduation getting closer and closer can be extremely daunting. I was just starting my high school career and the only thing I could think about was how absolutely terrified I was of the coming years. What were the requirements for graduation? How would I know what I should consider as a career? Who could I talk to about all the questions I had about … absolutely everything?! There are so many twists and turns, bumps and pitfalls on the road that is high school that I felt helpless. My head was swimming with all these horrendous visions of what would happen when I showed up as a senior with no requirements completed and absolutely no idea what to do with my life. I could clearly see all my friends strolling across the stage as their names were read from the list of graduates. I would be there too, but sitting in the front row of the audience, a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach because my name wasn't on that list. I was terrified, scared to death, that this would be my fate, until I found out about advisory.

Advisory is a wonderful program. It helps all the students get a chance to really sit down and think about their futures. During my first year of advisory I was able to learn what all the requirements for graduation are, which allowed me to breathe much easier and just enjoy the rest of my freshmen year. I also got a chance to examine my interests. Knowing my interests provided me with countless ideas for what to pursue after high school. I also love getting to know the kids in my class and my advisor. My advisor is an absolute life-saver. When I first went to school, I really didn’t know any of the teachers and so I didn’t know who I could really talk to about my interests and dreams. That all changed when I met my advisor. I know that I could go to him to talk to him about anything. It really makes school easier knowing that I have at least one adult supporting me

By Ashley Alley

the whole way through it. I think the best thing about this entire program would be the student-led conferences. I feel like I have done some of my best work during my high school years and I want a chance to show them off. I don’t like to brag, but the student-led conferences gave me a chance to show my parents my work and hint at, if not completely shout out, how excited I was about what I had completed. My mom told me afterwards that she also enjoyed the chance to see exactly what I have been doing since we don’t always get a chance to discuss my high school experience. It was a nice way to reconnect with my parents after a long, work-filled year.

I love what advisory has done for me, but like all wonderful programs, it is only as useful as the student makes it. There are students out there who don’t reap the benefits of this program because they can’t see what it truly has to offer. Hopefully, they will be able to see all its potential to help direct their lives, before it is too late. I know I have.

Ashely Alley is a sophomore at Mead High School where she participates in an advisory program modeled on Navigation 101.
Six secondary schools in the state of Washington will face a new challenge during the 2006-2007 school year. They are among the eight schools in six school districts that will move from AYP Step 4 (planning) to Step 5 (implementation). These schools represent the first wave of Washington schools moving along the continuum of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements for restructuring. The intent of Step 5 under NCLB is to significantly alter school governance and/or structures to ensure that student learning and performance results are sufficiently improved.

The six districts are required to select from the actions for school improvement listed in the following table when a school moves to Step 5.

- Re-open the school as a charter school;
- Reconstitute the school by replacing all or most of the school staff who are relevant to the school’s ability to make adequate progress (this may include the principal);
- Enter into a contract with an entity, such as a private management company, with a demonstrated record of effectiveness, to operate the school as a public school;
- Turn the operation of the school over to the State Educational Agency (SEA), if the State agrees; or
- Implement “any other major restructuring of the school’s governance arrangement that makes fundamental reforms, such as significant changes in the school’s staffing and governance, to improve student academic achievement in the school and that has substantial promise of enabling the school to make adequate yearly progress . . . “ (Section 1116(8)(v)).

Of these choices, the only one that continues district and school ownership of the improvement process is to restructure school governance. It is natural for Step 4 to Step 5 school stakeholders to question the NCLB requirement, or the role of the district, to alter the school’s governance structure. Some view the process as punitive. However, a review of school governance creates an opportunity for each school, regardless of their position on the APY continuum, to visit the relationship between governance and student learning. It should be a common practice for each school, not just those on program improvement. Fox (2005) suggests:

The monitoring and improvement of school governance should be a standard component in the school’s culture of continuous improvement. Effective school governance promotes continuous assessment of student progress, ongoing evaluation of instructional practice, and adjustments in instructional practice based on student growth. When students fail to make satisfactory academic progress, one of the variables that are routinely reviewed is school governance.

Even if NCLB didn’t exist, shouldn’t the staff periodically review the school governance to determine if it is meeting the needs of students” (p. 44)?

The purpose of Step 4 restructuring is to determine “if and how” the school’s governance is impeding the students’ AYP and how the effectiveness of its governance can be improved (Fox, 2005). (The goal is to improve student learning; the central goal of every educator, school and district.) All of the eight schools moving from Step 4 to Step 5 have identified and submitted their “restructuring of governance” plans to OSPI for review, comment and technical support. These plans will be monitored to ensure effective implementation and a positive impact on student learning. The NCLB requirements for program improvement Step 4 to Step 5 schools pose major challenges for the district staff responsible for this task (Fox, 2005). Three of the major questions that must be addressed include:

- Is the school’s governance impeding the school’s AYP?
If so, how is the school’s governance impeding the school’s AYP?
Which particular form of alternative governance or restructuring will increase the likelihood the school will make AYP?

Planning tools available for support
While there are a variety of “tools” available to help develop and review school restructuring plans for Step 4 to Step 5, this article will focus on one tool developed from a collaborative effort between the Northwest Regional Comprehensive Center (Linda Griffin, griffinl@nwrel.org) at NWREL, OSPI, ESD 105 and ESD 123. This useful tool is designed to promote discussion among school and district leaders regarding the many facets of school governance described in the seven key elements identified in the “Washington State School Accountability Status and Required Actions” that need to be considered when developing a restructuring plan. These seven elements are described in the following table:

| • Policies and practices that are barriers to improving school achievement; |
| • Leadership assignments and/or leadership development needed among both administrators and teachers; |
| • Teacher qualifications are considered when making assignments and action steps taken to assure all staff are highly qualified; |
| • System support that shows evidence of, not only planning, but the level of support that will be provided during implementation; |
| • Decision-making model being utilized is results-oriented and makes provisions for participation of all stakeholders; |
| • Allocation of resources to ensure that time, space, money, and personnel are utilized effectively and that all resources are focused on improving student achievement; and |
| • Need for change to establish understanding among all stakeholders of the sense of urgency for which the school must act. |

The Northwest Regional Comprehensive Center guide, Tool for Developing and Reviewing School Restructuring Plans for Step 4 School and District Leaders in Washington, provides a matrix to address the seven elements and encourages each school to reflect on its current school improvement status by reviewing AYP data and considering the effects of current school improvement efforts. Each page is dedicated to one of the seven elements and includes questions that guide school and district leaders as they uncover the strengths and challenges in the school’s current governance. Discussion around these questions surfaces elements of school governance that have the potential to strengthen school improvement efforts and to positively impact the restructuring plan. The questions listed under each element are the result of a synthesis of four resources (Waits, et al., 2006; Fox, 2005; Williams, Kirst, Haertel, et al., 2005; and the Georgia Department of Education, 2005). Throughout the process of district and building review, the guide strongly encourages consideration of the following question: “What evidence indicates that this key element of restructuring impedes or enhances the progress of students in subgroups and subjects not making AYP?”

Implications for Secondary Schools
In submitting their plans to OSPI, each school effectively met the challenge of determining how the school’s current governance was affecting their students’ AYP. The substance of these plans target the themes of organization, systems, policies, procedures, practices and personnel. Examples for each of these themes are found in the school improvement plans:

Organization
• Implement a summer school program for identified incoming high school students who are deficient in reading, math, and writing skills.
• Implement “advisory programs” connecting all students with a professional staff member in order to forge relationships, provide a connection with the school, and provide a liaison between students, teachers, and parents.
• Structure and organize student-led conferences where discussion is centered around student initiatives.
• Establish tutorial classes before and after school.
• Implement a two-hour after school program emphasizing both enrichment activities and tutoring in the core areas of reading, math, writing, ELL and science, depending on student needs.
• Establish and facilitate common planning times for building and school-level teams.
• Organize teacher meetings within and across grade levels to share common information about students and to develop strategies for improving student performance.
• Provide 9th grade students with additional assistance, i.e., common teacher planning time, block scheduling for core subjects, and providing mentoring opportunities between 9th grade students and upper classmen within the same building.
Systems
- Ensure student assessment data is used to inform instructional practices and leads to continuous student learning.
- Provide student assessment data to parents, teachers and administrators to effectively monitor and plan for increased student learning.
- Facilitate the use of multiple data assessment measures to ensure a comprehensive review of student learning.
- Ensure formative assessments are used to monitor on-going student and school progress.

Personnel
- Develop extensive, and ongoing, professional staff development in the areas of designing a culturally competent school, effective instructional strategies in the areas of reading, math, writing and science, implementing a professional learning community, the effective use of data to inform instructional strategies, and best practices for English Language Learners.

Policies
- Implement attendance, out-of-school student recovery, and discipline policies that ensure all students are actively participating in the learning opportunities available at school.
- Ensure the Nine Characteristics of High Performing School principles are reflected in both the building and district school improvement plans.

Procedures
- Implement system of contacting parents when students are struggling to jointly develop plan of improvement.

Practices
- Align curriculum with Grade Level Expectations.
- Extend practice of writing and reading across the curriculum.
- Increase the number of students taking Algebra I in 8th grade, while increasing rigor in all middle and high school classes.
- Providing “double dose” and “Second Shot” reading and math opportunities for struggling students.

Several of the Step 4 to Step 5 schools utilized additional resources in the development of their governance plans. Poirier (2005), in concert with the OSPI Secondary Education Office, provides a comprehensive and valuable guide to high school improvement that has also been utilized in the restructuring plans of the Step 5 districts. This publication, Improving Washington High Schools: Project Graduation, offers ideas for implementing the components of the Washington Framework in high school restructuring plans.

Ultimately, all of the plans of the Step 5 schools will have implications for other schools interested in improving student learning. While the NCLB requirements have framed the options available to these schools, their work to meet the Step 5 challenge will inform other schools across the state. These schools are breaking new ground, and learning new lessons in the process.

References


Meeting challenges to serve ALL students

by Terry Bergeson

Secondary school reform isn’t rocket science. It’s more difficult and complicated than rocket science. Anyone who has tried to change a middle or high school knows this. The obstacles to change in middle and high schools are formidable.

Perhaps the largest is the weight of tradition – the expectation on the part of parents, teachers, students and communities that high school is an immutable American institution. Many parents (oddly enough, even parents who didn’t really do very well in school) want their kids to have the same high school experience they did.

Traditional expectations for students are another roadblock. After a decade of effort, we are still working to universalize the understanding that all students can learn at the higher levels represented by today’s academic standards and graduation requirements. And it’s a struggle to change the expectation that since not all students will go on to a four-year college, not all students need a rigorous, college-prep curriculum. In the 21st century, we know that the level of skill and knowledge needed for college is the same that’s needed for an apprenticeship program or a decent job. But in some schools, that news hasn’t really sunk in yet – or, if it has, it hasn’t been translated into consistent, focused action to ensure that every student gets this higher level of 21st century skills.

The plain fact is that economic and social change have raised the demands on students and schools. Today’s economy requires that all students learn more – the struggling students who are having trouble passing the 10th grade WASL, the students in the middle, the advanced students who face tougher competition for college admission, and the disaffected students who are at risk of dropping out. To succeed, schools need to meet the needs of every kind of student, from every culture and income group, and with every learning style. That’s a much, much taller order than we’ve ever had before.

The level of accountability for fulfilling it is also tougher. Getting students to meet today’s graduation requirements and meeting the terms of NCLB make many educators feel that we’re being asked to do the impossible.

And if high school improvement is hard, middle school reform is even harder. Middle schools face the obstacle of virtual invisibility: whenever the conversation turns to secondary school reform, the topic tends to focus on high schools. Middle schools truly are the neglected middle child in the education system. All across the nation, we see a dip in student achievement in middle school – the legacy of an outdated but persistent belief that middle school is all about hormones and self esteem.

Finally, there is the most difficult obstacle of all: the chronic under-funding of our K-12 schools.

In spite of all this, heroic educators and the communities that support them are expanding educational achievement and opportunity in middle and high schools across our state. Our 10th grade WASL scores show that we have doubled the number of students who meet our academic standards in the last decade. Successful schools are becoming more rigorous, offering more advanced classes for those who want to soar ahead, and more interventions to help those who are struggling. They are working to create more meaningful relationships between teachers and students, and more relevant and culturally appropriate curriculum and instructional methods.

In rural high schools like Mabton, Mary Walker and Walu, principals and teachers are dramatically expanding students’ opportunities to take Advanced Placement courses. In Grandview and Granger, talented principals have inspired staff to work together in new ways to create student-centered schools that keep kids engaged in learning. In tiny Glenwood, all five sophomores – three of whom are Native American – passed their WASLs with flying colors. At Franklin Pierce, a pair of innovators pioneered a new guidance system – Navigation 101 – that is now being funded by the legislature and replicated across the state.

In school after school, educators are catapulting past obstacles and creating genuine improvement. They are aligning curriculum to standards, increasing rigor for all students, personalizing learning by connecting it to students’ futures, and thinking beyond the WASL to preparing students for success after graduation.

These educators give us all reason for hope and optimism.
They inspire a spirit of determination and pride, and a commitment to keep trying. Their successes make it impossible for the rest of us to let obstacles become excuses for inaction.

Even if we didn’t have a growing number of lighthouse schools and stellar leaders to show the way, the changing economic landscape would urge us on to greater effort and academic rigor. We are all educators because we care deeply about kids and their future. We know that in the decades ahead, our students will need more skill, more knowledge, and more education than ever before. And we know that our work will shape their lives, and their children’s lives. If we succeed, they will, too. If we let them down – by expecting too little of them or ourselves – we consign them to lives of poverty, failure and frustration.

The stakes have never been this high before. Educators have always had the future in our hands when we faced a classroom of students. But in today’s knowledge-driven economy and society, the classroom is truly the center of the universe. It’s our work that will determine whether American society succeeds or fails in the coming century. It isn’t just the accountability measures that drive us to try harder; it’s the economic and social necessity for higher levels of skill that underlie those measures.

That’s why the lights are on late at OSPI. We’re working to support the heroes who lead the way, and to replicate their best work. We are offering grants to middle and high schools to start Navigation 101 programs, dispersing funding for the Promoting Academic Success program to fund extra help to prepare students to pass the 10th grade WASL, sponsoring conferences that provide professional development, offering practical support for school improvement, compiling timely research and data, and advocating for the resources educators need.

This year, we are also investing focused time and attention to Washington Learns, Governor Gregoire’s 18-month study of how to finance education in this state, and how to create a more seamless system of early learning, public schools, and post-secondary education and training. That effort will culminate with a report due out in mid-November, and with recommendations for a ten year plan to create a stable and adequate funding system. In January, that plan will be the subject of legislative debate and action. That’s when all of us – educators, parents and students from every one of our 296 school districts – will need to gather our forces to speak up about what we need to succeed, and why schools are the best investment of taxpayers’ dollars.

Terry Bergeson is Washington State Superintendent of Public Instruction.
It’s an important topic, but too often the details around important educational issues get lost in translation and left on the Capitol Hill steps. This Curriculum in Context issue is timely and relevant in its focus on high schools.

This year, the Washington State ASCD wants to bring to life for lawmakers all of the complicated issues surrounding high school reform. So ASCD is launching “Bring Your Legislator to School.” This new program gives us the opportunity to host legislative forums in high schools across Washington State to bring the voices of high school students themselves along with the voices of their teachers and school leaders to the national debate on these topics. The forums will be held in five educational service district regions. Key legislators from each region and chairs of the education committee will be invited by the superintendent, high school principal and WSASCD board member to participate in WSASCD’s “Bring Your Legislator to School.”

By bringing legislators to the buildings, we give them a chance to see the schools in the areas they serve. We provide a broad range of student voices to emphasize why flexibility and appropriate resources are imperative to the success of innovative high school reform efforts. Students, each with different circumstances, will share their ideas and insights around the high stakes use of the WASL as a determination for graduation so legislators hear first hand the stories of how their policy decisions have impacted the students, their teachers, and the administrators they are working to help.

The ability to provide first-hand stories and show up close and personal the impact of these and future decisions should underscore the importance of an approach that goes beyond a single solution. The issues of accountability and reform are nuanced and each requires thoughtful solutions to create flexible programming that can meet the varying needs of the stakeholders involved. WSASCD hopes these events will result in the following outcomes:

• Broader statewide representation in communicating the diverse needs of students and educators around our state in meeting challenging standards.

• Revisiting the legislation around WASL requirements for graduation to allow multiple measures to be considered further.

• Attention to allocating increased resources to support the development of instructional enhancements to assist students in meeting high standards and in the allocation of resources to develop quality indicators of success in meeting those standards.

• Initiation of a conversation to support increased flexibility and resources for innovative high school reform efforts.

• Increased active and ongoing participation in the democratic process by educators and students alike to realize their voices are important factors in making legislative decisions.

Gene Carter, ASCD executive director, states: “International ASCD recognizes the issues surrounding high schools and has made high school reform one of the association’s top legislative priorities for 2006. The association is exploring how to improve the overall high school experience and spur greater involvement with communities and businesses. We are guided by the knowledge that today’s high school needs greater innovation, increased student engagement, and a rich and rigorous curriculum that is more educationally meaningful for students.” ASCD calls upon the U.S. Congress to become a partner in high school reform. In September, Washington State ASCD board members, Josh Garcia and Faith Chapel and WSASCD Executive Director Kathy Clayton spent a day on Capitol Hill carrying messages from Washington State to staffers in the offices of Senator Patty Murray, Senator Maria Cantwell, Representative Cathy McMorris, and Congressman Jay Inslee.

They carried key messages surrounding the need for high school reform. Key messages connected to high school reform from the ASCD legislative agenda include:

• We must improve high school so that it is more educationally meaningful for students and better prepares them for continued education or work in a global marketplace.

• High school reform is as varied as the more than 18,000 high schools in the United States. We must give states
and districts flexibility and resources to create innovative reforms that meet their local needs.

- Any reform plan should focus on building student engagement and providing courses that are both rigorous and relevant.

WSASCD is committed to focusing on the challenges surrounding high school reform and educating the whole child. I hope you are booked to attend our annual conference, “Orchestrating Students Success: A 21st Century Symphony” this November 2-4. Highlights include keynote presenters Dr. Jennifer James, renown cultural anthropologist, and Ray McNulty, executive director of the Successful Practices Network at the International Center for Leadership Education. His work with Dr. Bill Daggett focuses on researching future trends and their impact on schools and society. The conference program and speaker line-up continue to feature the best in the country – nationally and internationally known education experts who will share promising practices to meet the range of learner needs. These presenters include:

- Pam Robbins - Leadership Practices That Foster Quality Teaching and Student Learning
- Vera Blake - Making School Improvement Happen with What Works in Schools
- Dr. Sandra Atkins - Developing Computational Fluency
- Dr. Janet Jones - Building Millennial Minds: Preparing Today’s Learners for Tomorrow’s World
- Carol Santa - Creating Independence Through Student Owned Strategies (CRISS)
- Deborah Burns - Differentiating Instruction
- Darla Wood Walters - Early Learning

The Saturday conference finale will feature Dr. Ruby Payne. Dr. Payne returns to Washington State with enhanced information on issues of poverty and culture. Dr. Payne will discuss 12 key points in understanding poverty, resources and case studies, registers of language, story structure, cognitive development, family structure, hidden rules, discipline interventions, and building relationships.

The 2006 program is another outstanding, learning-focused, and over-all awesome event! We say with confidence that EVERY school district should be represented at WSASCD Annual Conference in Spokane, November 2-4.
ARE YOU AND YOUR COLLEAGUES serving K-12 students in creative ways? Can you shed light on legislative trends that might benefit educators across the state? Can you illustrate recent educational research claims through stories from schools and classrooms on the front lines? If so, consider taking some time to clearly and persuasively contribute to the intellectual life of the WSASCD community. Please e-mail a 50-100 word preview of your contribution to kingrey@wsu.edu and we will promptly send a submission guidelines form for your 1000-2500 word article. If you have questions, please e-mail editor Joan Kingrey at the above address.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE
Spring/Summer 2007 — January 1, 2007
Fall/Winter 2007 — July 1, 2007