

## Our Path to First Choice No. 22

Everyone,

Here is Path Note No. 22. My apologies for the delay!

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### Our Path Topic

For a change of pace this week let's look at something a little different. A number of years ago, educational experts were looking at school district's that were failing, had high poverty, and were made up of minority populations. What they found was that there were a number of those districts that were as defined above, but not failing. They were called 90-90-90 schools.

We too often jump to the conclusion that schools with high poverty and high minority populations will not succeed. These schools face many other challenges as crime and school funding. Nevertheless, they seem to prevail. As a district, WASD faces challenges that are similar. Perhaps not as bad or extreme, but some may say that we do have students that are economically and socially challenged. Let's look at 90-90-90 schools and what they have done to be successful. Although the research started years ago, the characteristics are still very accurate.

So what is a 90-90-90 school?

- These schools are more than 90% eligible for free and reduced lunch—low income families.
- More than 90 percent of the students are from ethnic minorities.
- More than 90 percent of the students met or achieved high academic standards, according to independently conducted tests of academic achievement.

There is a very common and unfortunate belief that schools with such populations of students just can't do it or achieve as other schools with less diversity achieve. That is just simply not true.

The original research on these schools was done by Douglass Reeves in 1995 in which he studied the Milwaukee, Wisconsin schools. The study was performed over the period of 1995-1998.

What the research found was basically five characteristics of all the variety of schools they studied. Here are the characteristics:

- A focus on academic achievement
- Clear curriculum choices
- Frequent assessment of student progress and multiple opportunities for improvement
- An emphasis on nonfiction writing
- Collaborative scoring of student work

So what do these five characteristics mean? Let's look at each one.

*Focus on achievement* is celebrated and publicized throughout the school and throughout the community. Graphs, charts, and pictures of success are posted and displayed in classrooms, hallways, offices, and in local stores. High praise is rewarded for high achievement. No more than five areas of focus in a school. Up to three hours of interventions are set up for each student who does not reach those high standards.

*Clear curriculum choices* focus on only a few areas, math, language arts, and reading, and these areas are covered in all content areas. The point is that test scores go up in all areas, and not just in focus areas.

*Frequent assessments* are given to students throughout the school year. When students do poorly on assessments, they are given multiple opportunities to succeed. They are not “failures”, they just need more time to succeed. Student learning is the goal, not grading. Weekly assessments of progress are made by the teacher, and the students are encouraged to show improvement in the next week.

*Non-fiction writing* is one of the most common characteristics of high performing schools. A single rubric for all writing assignments in all content areas is used. This helps teachers to do a better job of evaluating student needs across the curriculum.

Finally, *Collaborative and external scoring* allows schools to develop a common assessment practice. It becomes the norm for teachers to work with a common rubric and to have a common understanding of the rubric. External scoring provides an overall approach, and not just one person's idea of a successful writing.

For this to be successful, Douglass Reeves describes the STAR Model for success. The STAR Model is:

- Ongoing and focused professional development
- Modeling of effective teaching and assessment practices
- Ongoing professional collaboration
- Effective communication between school staff, parents, and students
- Visible tracking of student progress on a frequent and regular basis

He also recommends that multiple school assessment practices must be implemented.

Through the research of Reeves' Realities of Most Schools and Realities of Successful Schools, below are a few recommendations:

- Most schools use State norm testing. Successful schools use multiple and ongoing assessment with a shared rubric known to all.
- Most schools have Professional Development Days. Successful schools have ongoing collaboration and modeling based on research (structured peer coaching).
- Most schools teach all standards. Successful schools teach focused standards that lead to improvement in all areas.
- Most schools, students work for a grade. In successful schools, student work leads to improved achievement.
- Most schools, teachers grade and assess alone. In successful schools, teachers grade based on a shared assessment.
- Most schools, Reading is an isolated subject. In successful schools, Reading skills are taught and practiced through all content areas.
- Most schools, writing is a skill. In successful schools, Writing is an ongoing assessment practice.
- Most schools, classroom order is most important. In successful schools, classroom order is necessary and must use multiple strategies to maintain the order.
- Most schools, parent notification is periodically done. In successful schools, parent notification is regular.

Other observations of the study were:

- Collaboration was impactful
- More frequent feedback was key
- Finding larger chunks of time through creative scheduling was evident
- Data analysis was critical
- Use of common assessments
- All adults in the school were valued and helped to educate
- Cross Disciplinary Integration
- Accountability and equity

With all this in mind, how can each one of us as team members do our part?

1. Teachers—most of these can be applied by you and your colleagues. Most of these are nothing new.
2. Support staff—there are many things you can do. Let's look at some possibilities.
  - a. Language is very important to a child's education. When speaking to a student., Encourage them to talk (more than one or two words). Ask them to explain or describe things.
  - b. Work with students to be good listeners. Have the student summarize or retell a story you were making. These are only a couple of ideas.

There is so much more that can be done, so together we can make a difference and help our students achieve to their fullest.

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#### Review for You

- What is root cause analysis?

#### Events

- The High School Educational Planning Night is the 25<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 PM.
- The High School District Chorus Festival is January 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>.

#### Piece of the Puzzle

- This week's Piece of the Puzzle is Becky Hess. Becky, our Food Service Secretary/Bookkeeper, is a hard worker and always willing to take on new tasks. She has worked in various positions during her career at WASD. Becky started her career with the district as a Food Service cashier at the High School. She ran "Becky's Booth selling a la carte items. She moved to a full time position as the Bookkeeper at WASHS. She was moved from this position to part time Human Resources and part time Secretary to Alternative Education. She was moved from that position to part time Child Accounting and part time Food Service Secretary. Her next move was to part time Food Service Secretary/Bookkeeper and Alternative Ed Class Room Monitor keeping the Alternative Ed Secretary position. During these moves, Becky also took care of Use of Facilities for the District. Becky's final move is now as the full time Secretary/Bookkeeper for Food Service and she is still takes care of Use of Facilities for the district. Becky has been a huge asset to Food Service. She has been instrumental in streamlining the on line Free/Reduced process which allows the district to identify more students who qualify for these benefits. Becky continues to use her skills to improve

the **processes** in the Food Service Department. Food Service is delighted to have her as an integral part of their team! When you see Becky Hess, congratulate her for being WASD's Piece of the Puzzle this week.

### Review Answers

- It is the factor that caused an issue or problem and should be eliminated through process improvement. Root cause analysis is a collective term that describes a wide range of strategies, tools, and approaches used to learn of the causes of problems.
  - Examples—Five Whys, Fishbone Diagram (Ishikawa), Pareto chart, and Scatter diagram. A good topic for a future Path Update!
- *If you can define the problem correctly, you almost have the solution.*—Steve Jobs

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### Final Thoughts

- *I'll do whatever it takes to win games, whether it's sitting on a bench waving a towel, handing a cup of water to a teammate, or hitting the game-winning shot.*—Kobe Bryant
- *There is a canyon of difference between doing your best to glorify God and doing whatever it takes to glorify yourself. The quest for excellence is a mark of maturity. The quest for power is childish.*—Max Lucado
- *I must be willing to give whatever it takes to do good to others. This requires that I be willing to give until it hurts. Otherwise, there is no true love in me, and I bring injustice, not peace, to those around me.*—Mother Teresa.
- *It comes down to one thing and one thing only; do you choose to remain the same, or are you willing to do whatever it takes to achieve your goal. You can't have it both ways, either you do whatever it takes, or you don't.*—Nav-Vi.
- *If you're interested, you'll do what is convenient; if you're committed, you'll do whatever it takes.*—John Assaraf.
- *Don't do your best, do whatever it takes.*--Anonymous

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Have a great rest of the week. Thank you for all you do. Is it spring, yet?  
Tod