



SUPERINTENDENT'S END-OF-MONTH NOTES

August 2010

OUR MISSION is to provide educational excellence for all students.

IN THIS EDITION:

- "The Law of Significance" (Note #1)
 - RtI / Pol (Note #2)
 - Focus, Focus, Focus (Note #3)
- More Information that Cannot Be Ignored (Note #4)
 - Organizational Learning in NCSS (Note #5)

1. On this last day of August, 2010, it is my good fortune to have visited each of our 24 schools, some more than once. Our folks are in good spirit; looking forward to a great school year; one of change and *improvements* in the work we do with and for students, in the work students *do* themselves. One of my favorite authors on leadership is John Maxwell. In his book, *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork*, he speaks to "The Law of Significance" which reminds us that all of us together are smarter—and more effective—than any one of us alone. Says Maxwell:

"People try to achieve great things by themselves mainly because of the size of their ego, their level of insecurity, or simple naiveté and temperament. **One is too small a number to achieve greatness.**"

Indeed, one is too small a number to achieve greatness or even modest improvements in a large organization such as NCSS. What I see in our schools are teams of professionals putting student achievement outcomes under the microscope, identifying those students who are struggling and those who need acceleration. Both groups are critical to our ultimate success as are any "average" students "in the middle" who need our attention. The job is way too big for any one of us. But, all of us—working together—in and as a team—can make a positive difference—*this year!*

2. Last Monday, teams of teachers and administrators met at Indian Creek to review current updates in the school system's Response to Intervention (RtI)/Pyramid of Interventions (Pol) protocols. While this sounds like a bunch of "jargonese," it may offer one of the best ways to make sure that *all* students are more successful. I would strongly urge each teacher to review—or learn for the first time—what this educational practice is all about. I believe RtI/POI played a strong role in the improvement of academic outcomes I've seen elsewhere. If done with "fidelity," i.e., as intended, RtI/POI can be seen as instruction in several tiers:

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Tier 1: Standards-Based Classroom Learning: All students participate in general education learning that includes:

- Universal screenings to target groups in need of specific instructional support (Typically meant to uncover areas in need of improvement in a student's reading/language/math skills, i.e., in those curricular "areas of extrapolation" or carry-over into all other school subjects.)
- Implementation of the Georgia Performance Standards (*Must* teach the "prescribed" curriculum or else students are short-changed when it comes to high stakes CRCTs and GHS GTs. Do not leave much "daylight" among the *prescribed, taught, and tested* curriculum. Tightly align the three sides of this triangle for best results!)
- Differentiation of instruction including fluid, flexible grouping, multiple means of learning, and demonstration of learning (Stand-up, *lecture only* does *not* provide for student differences. It's so true, in the words of school reformer Ted Sizer: "*That students differ is inconvenient, but it is inescapable.*" Marzano's 9 research-based instructional strategies can help here! Especially helpful to those of us who teach like we were taught by many of our college professors as good as some were.)
- Progress monitoring of learning through multiple formative assessments. ("Formative" *throughout* the course of a lesson or unit of instruction as opposed to the one end-of-unit "summative" and graded assessment or test. Students need feedback *as they learn*, not just at the end of what they were supposed to learn!)

Note: It is my experience that schools and school systems which focus, focus, focus on building the capacity of their teachers to (1) deliver research-based instructional strategies in classrooms, (2) build background knowledge of students through vocabulary, schoolwide reading and mentoring strategies, and (3) use technology as a prime tool for the production and consumption of knowledge are typically way ahead of their peers and best able to successfully implement Tier 1 at high degrees of proficiency, i.e., with 85% or more of students demonstrating proficiency.

Tier 2: Needs-Based Learning: In addition to Tier 1, targeted students participate in learning that is *different* by including:

- Small-group instruction (I observed this being done routinely in Tier 1 instruction at Live Oak Elementary just recently. I'm sure elsewhere, but Live Oak students were actively engaged—class by class—in what appeared to be most effective "differentiated" small-group instruction with technology a key ingredient.) cont'd



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We're now assessing where technology is throughout NCSS in hopes to make improvements even within this difficult economy. **Stay tuned.**

- Use of research-based instructional strategies ("Marzano's 9" and other strategies that work and that teachers know including brain-based methods)
- On-going progress monitoring to measure student progress and guide decision-making

Note: If Tier 1 instruction is "effective," then Tier 2, from my experience, should include no more than approx. 15% of students in a class or in a school. This is not to say that Tier 1 instruction does not include small-groups [it can and does routinely in places], but it is to say that Tier 2 is not likely in operation or very effective void of small-group instruction.

Tier 3: Student Support Team-Driven Learning: In addition to Tier 1 and Tier 2, targeted students participate in learning that is *different* by including:

- Intensive, formalized problem-solving to identify *individual* student needs (One-to-one interventions is the preference here if at all possible. No doubt, *individualized instruction* is the most effective type at Tier 3 given adequate school resources, personnel, and will. Short of this, small-group may have to suffice but still with an eye on the "individual.")
- Targeted research-based interventions tailored to individual needs (For example, for some students, the use of non-linguistic representations, one of the "Marzano 9" classroom-based instructional strategies, may be absolutely "necessary" for a particular student to learn certain concepts/content.)
- Frequent monitoring and analysis of student response to intervention(s) (It's the old adage come true: "What gets monitored, gets done. And what gets monitored and fed back, gets done well." This is true of all learners, but is *especially* true for individuals who really struggle academically.)

Note: Many experts suggest that Tier 3 should have no more than approx. 5 to 7% of a class or school so targeted. Nothing, however, is "magical" about this percentage.

Tier 4: Specially-Designed Learning: In addition to Tiers 1 through 3, targeted students participate in:

- Special education (Student is introduced to "specialized" programs, methodologies, or instructional deliveries) cont'd



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- Greater frequency of progress monitoring of student response to intervention(s)

Note: The national average for students enrolled in special education is approx. 13% at present suggesting that there is still some work to do in making "regular" education more effective prior to students reaching Tier 4 or special education.

Note: With new Director of Special Education, Dr. Sarah West, on board and given our special education results to date, which *can* and *must* be improved upon, I believe we will see much more positive outcomes going forward if "regular education" truly implements research-based instructional strategies and "special education" really hones in on the *individual* students in special education using some of these strategies.

3. *Whew!* Note #2 was long-winded! But, I believe important to NCSS's future in most any accountability framework whether No-Child-Left-Behind or call it by some other name next year or the next. Speaking of focus, focus, focus as noted earlier. **What if we FOCUSED all staff development in NCSS in just three areas** (with the exception of the book studies this year related to the improvement of school-based practice—Mike Schmoker's *Results Now*—and the improvement of district-based practice—Robert Marzano and Timothy Water's *District Leadership That Works*)? What three areas? (1) Research-Based Instructional Strategies, (2) Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement, and (3) Technology Integration. What if we worked on these for the next 5 years? What if teachers mastered one, two, or all three of these? Would our students be better off? Would it show in terms of academic results? What if? Stay tuned...as I am out there talking to you about this concept. *Is less more?*

4. More information that cannot be ignored: With recent 2010 ACT (American College Tests) results just reported in various media for NCSS, I have asked middle and high school Principals and Counselors to meet with me on Thursday of this week. Our objectives will be as follows:

- To ascertain what NCSS is currently doing to prepare students for success on ACT/SAT exams.
- To brief NCSS Principals and Counselors on spring 2010 ACT results, especially related to current "College Readiness" results. (See next page.)

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- To gain any insights from the Georgia Department of Education regarding student preparation for ACT/SAT (Georgia McSwain of GaDOE will make a presentation at Thursday's meeting.)
- To charge the NCSS CIT Department/Principals/Counselors with establishing a NCSS Protocol for ACT/SAT preparation.

Percent of NCSS Students Meeting ACT "College Readiness" Benchmark Scores in Reading, English, Science (Biology), and Math (Algebra) by Race/Ethnicity

All Students (582 test takers) =	10% or 58 students
Black Students (339 test takers) =	3% or 11 students
White Students (188 test takers) =	23% or 44 students
Hispanic Students (15 test takers) =	7% or 2 students
Asian American/Pacific Islander (4 test takers) =	25% or 1 student
American Indian/Alaskan Native (1 test taker) =	0%

Note: We anticipate SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Tests) results during the month of September. Contrary to what many may think, more NCSS students take the ACT than the SAT. Both are important college entrance exams and are "gatekeepers" for many colleges and universities. With the data above, we must look for substantial improvement in how we get students ready to take these important assessments. *Their* futures ride on it! Stay tuned...

5. Organizational Learning in NCSS: Between now and the end of November, Principals and Central Office Administrators will be studying Mike Schmoker's *Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning*. Schmoker's work is a look at prevailing practices in many schools today. He is challenging. He is provocative. And he is someone we can all learn from as we try to better understand and implement best practices. (Put Schmoker under the microscope; your school, too. What similarities and differences can you detect? What changes, if any, should be made in school leadership practices? In curriculum? In classroom instruction?) At various intervals, between now and the end of November, I have asked Principals to "share" our monthly Leadership Team meeting learnings with each of you in our schools as I—and others—believe "a school system" rather than "a system of schools" will render better results in the long-term for our students and their learning. Each Principal may share these learnings in different ways as long as "key" concepts from Schmoker's work are shared with all.

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This may range from a one-page briefing each month to whatever learning experience the Principal believes is best or needed for the faculty.

“Effective district leaders ensure...non-negotiable goals (goals that all staff members must act on) in at least two areas: (1) student achievement and (2) classroom instruction.”

- Robert Marzano & Timothy Waters in *District Leadership That Works: Striking the Right Balance*, Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, 2009

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8/31/10