



## SUPERINTENDENT'S END-OF-MONTH NOTES

January 2011

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1. On this last day of January, I sincerely hope that you and yours have stayed well during this time of cold, crud, and flu. For me, I’m sick of being sick. Surely, it all ends. As we move ahead committed to *teaching-for-learning-for-all* even amidst looming budget reductions, I am reminded of one of John Maxwell’s axioms in his award-winning book *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork*. To date in these notes, I’ve shared “The Law of Significance,” “The Law of the Big Picture,” “The Law of the Niche,” and “The Law of Mount Everest.” According to Maxwell, “**The Law of Communication**” is another “indisputable law” for successful organizations:

“Interaction fuels action. Effective teams have teammates who are constantly talking, and listening to each other. From leader to teammates, teammates to leader, and among teammates, there should be consistency, clarity, and courtesy. People should be able to disagree openly but with respect. Between the team and the public, responsiveness and openness is key.”

### 2. Results that **Cannot** be Ignored—A Celebration:

- This month five NCSS schools were announced as Title I Distinguished Schools by the Georgia Department of Education. So honored were: **West Newton**, **Heard-Mixon**, **Palmer-Stone**, **Rocky Plains**, and **Oak Hill**. WN, H-M, and P-S have earned federal Adequate Yearly Progress for 8 consecutive years and have been deemed “Distinguished” for 6 years. RP has earned AYP for 5 consecutive years and has been deemed “Distinguished” for three. OH has earned AYP for 3 consecutive years with this the first year deemed “Distinguished.” Distinguished Title I schools in Georgia are academically high-performing sites with a significant free and



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reduced lunch population. As of November 9, 2010, the Free/Reduced Lunch percentages for these distinguished schools were as follows: **WN** (F/R = 79%), **H-M** (F/R = 69%), **P-S** (F/R = 58%), **RP** (F/R = 63%), and **OH** (F/R = 54%).

- **CONGRATULATIONS** to these STUDENTS, FACULTY, PARENTS, and Principals Takila Curry, Lee Peck, Lori Thomas, Miranda Jones, and Brenda Gammans!
  
- 3. Last week, instructional strategist and curriculum expert, Dan Mulligan, worked with NCSS's special education faculty as well as a cross-section of teachers from **West Newton**, **Heard-Mixon**, **Palmer-Stone**, **Rocky Plains**, **South Salem**, **Porterdale**, **Live Oak**, **Livingston**, **Liberty**, **Clements**, **Eastside**, and **Newton H.S.** It was two days of powerful modeling, practicing, debriefing, and understanding the "what and why" of research-based instructional strategies (RBIS)—one strand of our system-level strategy to further build the capacity of personnel to deliver high quality instruction. (**See ATTACHMENT** which cites this strand as shown in our *Strategic Plan for Teaching-for-Learning-for-All*. Let's begin to recall the attached plan so that each of us will have a consistent and constant reminder of what we're to act on in NCSS. **Face it:** It's a lot better than a "strategic plan" consisting of dozens of pages, with dozens of goals, each with dozens of objectives or subgoals, with dozens of timelines, and dozens of responsible parties. To paraphrase Mike Schmoker in *Results Now*, that kind of multi-page planning for instructional improvement has "failed in plain sight" in most K-12 school systems. It's not "recallable," thus not "actionable" by a large group of people acting in a coherent manner. I trust you agree that we should avoid such.)
  
- 4. At last week's Mulligan capacity building sessions (which inevitably result in new knowledge, new skills, and new attitudes for most), he shared many different "**STRUCTURES**," i.e., **research-based frameworks which are content neutral for delivering Marzano's 9 top "high-probability" strategies**. This is where Dr. Mulligan's contribution to our field is quite substantial, i.e., he provides teachers with a way to implement Marzano's research findings on what distinguishes between effective and not-so-effective teaching. Again, the work we continue to reference regarding research-based instructional strategies or "RBIS" is Robert Marzano's *Classroom Instruction That Works*. (A number of schools have purchased this book already. No later than this summer's NCSS Instructional Improvement Institute—week of July 18—we hope that all instructional personnel will have a copy.)
  
- 5. While any number of our schools have been looking at and practicing Marzano's 9, for those who haven't at this point, you're "O.K." **For you, this**



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summer's institute may find Dr. Mulligan your introduction or "kick off" to research-based instructional strategies (RBIS). But, what a kickoff from perhaps one of the very best practitioners [ever] of these strategies! (Dr. Mulligan is a twenty year veteran of math classrooms and a nationally-acclaimed award-winning TEACHER. The inventor of the "Interactive Notebook" per one of Marzano's 9, i.e., "Summarizing and Note Taking," he is also the former Director of Accountability for the Chesapeake, VA, Public Schools. And, to be direct, the funds for his services are those targeted for professional development through a variety of state and federal sources. Put another way, they are not meant for day-to-day salaries within our system.)

As of now, there is a possibility that Dr. Mulligan will offer a Saturday workshop in March and one in April for teachers and administrators featuring the "Interactive Notebook" and "Classroom Management." Frankly, these two topics are by popular demand coming from the growing number of our teachers who have previously attended our work with Dr. Mulligan. These two dates—to be announced—are strictly **voluntary**. However, we suspect we will have overflow crowds if we do not limit participation. As such, we are likely to provide up to 6 or 7 slots per school including at least one administrator. While I am familiar with the Mulligan Interactive Notebook, I have yet to see him do the Classroom Management workshop. That said, if his Classroom Management work with teachers and administrators is anything approximating his work related to research-based instructional strategies (RBIS), I want to sit up front ... ☺ Stay tuned for further information as it becomes available on this possibility.

6. Staying with the theme of capacity building, the NCSS Leadership Team of Principals and Central Office Administrators will be studying Robert Marzano's ***Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement*** during the months of February, March, and April. (Once again, see attachment as this is one of the three strands in our system-level strategy for improving student achievement.) Principals, in turn, are expected to "redeliver" this work in each of our buildings. As I've suggested before, when you look at our NCSS achievement data, the lack of adequate background knowledge is a pervasive finding. Unless students understand academic vocabulary, they are "dead on arrival" on state and national assessments. Obviously, reading with fluency and comprehension are critical, but so is the "academic" vocabulary assessed by the state of Georgia and on tests such as the ACT and SAT. (No way around it, over it, under it, sideways, or any other contortion we can think of!) Marzano's work, the book we will be studying, is a look at "why" and "how" schools should be delivering "background knowledge." **In NCSS, this is indispensable to our future short- and long-term success on multiple measures!** We have a lot of Fill-in-the-Gap instruction to do! Once again, a



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number of schools have made the purchase of this particular book. Not later than this summer's Instructional Improvement Institute, we hope to have this work in the possession of all teachers and administrators for this strand of our system-level strategy related to capacity building.

7. Speaking of capacity building given our latest PSAT/NMSQT, SAT, and AP results, our high school Principals, some Assistant Principals, Guidance Counselors, and several central office personnel met last week in a professional development session led by a representative of the College Board which produces the PSAT/NMSQT, Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT), and Advanced Placement (AP) exams. And as emphasized in Note #6 above, vocabulary ["background knowledge"] was certainly a critical component when examining NCSS results. The session was a "hands on," interactive one that had us pouring over the various reports related to these "college readiness" assessments so important to our students' futures and the overall academic health of our public schools. Using a "Skills Analysis" template, we dissected NCSS's latest PSAT/NMSQT results for our system-as-a-whole and for Alcovy, Eastside, and Newton, respectively, based on last October's test administration. What's really important about the PSAT/NMSQT, from a diagnostic standpoint, is that it is such an accurate predictor of future SAT scores. Given that all of our 10<sup>th</sup> graders take this test, and some again in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, it is possible [and desirable] for us to "intervene" so as to improve performance once the student sits for the actual SAT exam. As Principals now know, especially coming out of last week's professional development, the College Board provides a plethora of "free" reports, etc., geared at assisting teachers and schools in the quest for positive student achievement and college readiness.
8. Also, of particular interest related to improved college readiness results, our College Board presenter shared the **ATTACHED** 6-year profile of 3,000-student Berkmar High School in Lilburn, Georgia. In this school of over 90% minority and almost 80% free/reduced lunch, the number of Advanced Placement (AP) Exams passed has been on a steady increase from less than 250 passed in 2005 to over 750 passed in 2010! Later this morning, a number of NCSS personnel are headed to Berkmar High School to attend a presentation by the school's Principal. Hopefully, we'll learn some "key" things as to the success of this College Board Inspiration Award Winner! If so, we'll put them under the microscope here to see what, if any, benefit we can gain ...
9. In last week's Leadership Team meeting of Principals and Central Office Administrators, we completed our study of Robert Marzano's *District Leadership That Works: Striking the Right Balance*. (No doubt by now, that



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the leading researcher in our profession is quite arguably Dr. Marzano who did much of his work at the Mid-continent Regional Education Lab outside of Denver, Colorado. I like the “scientific” rigor by which his studies have been accomplished. Put another way, he has a disdain for “making stuff up.”) Here are some “key” learnings from the research on central office work:

➤ **Chapter 5** (Delivered by Dr. Hayden and Dr. Skinner)

- Collaborative goal setting, Board alignment, and Allocation of resources are **necessary** to reach non-negotiable goals of increased student achievement and more effective teaching.
- The accountability movement has put school boards in a new, unfamiliar environment. Historically, school boards have not focused on student achievement. But, now, the more effective Boards have established non-negotiable goals in concert with the school superintendent and others.
- Policies must change to ensure that all children have sufficient resources and that incentives to spend these resources wisely are in place. (See my comments in Note #11 below regarding textbooks and digital resources for students.)
- Nations, such as Japan, not only strive to equalize spending across socio-economic status levels but also believe that those students with less resources at home should receive more resources at school.

➤ **Chapters 6 & 7** (Delivered by Christina Sneed and Darren Berry)

- **“High reliability” has become an important aspect of school success.** Schools are now challenged to prevent practically all failures and to close the achievement among student groups—in short, **to ensure highly reliable learning for all students.** [The United States has steadily dropped behind other nations in the percent of college graduates. Additionally, large percentages of students enter U.S. colleges requiring remedial classes in language arts and/or mathematics and most do not graduate.]
- “There is little or no relationship between site-based management and student achievement ... While it is true that schools are unique and must operate in such a way to address their unique needs, it is also true that each school *must* operate as a functional component of a larger system.



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- It is the larger system—the district—that establishes the common work of schools within the district, and it is that common work that becomes the 'glue' holding the district together.
- “A district move to ensuring effective teaching (defined as student knowledge gain brought on by the use of effective teaching strategies) in every classroom would certainly be viewed as a dramatic break from the past in many districts.” [Yet, this is what “effective” districts do.]
- Characteristics of 1<sup>st</sup>-Order Change in Organizations
  - ~ Is perceived as an extension of the past
  - ~ Fits existing paradigms
  - ~ Is consistent with prevailing values and norms
  - ~ Can be implemented with existing knowledge
  - ~ Requires resources currently available to those responsible for implementing the innovations
  - ~ May be accepted because of common agreement that the innovation is necessary
- Characteristics of 2<sup>nd</sup>-Order Change in Organizations
  - ~ Is perceived as a break with the past
  - ~ Lies outside existing paradigms
  - ~ Conflicts with prevailing values and norms
  - ~ Requires the acquisition of new knowledge and skills
  - ~ Requires resources currently not available to those responsible for implementing the innovations
  - ~ May be resisted because only those who have a broad perspective of the school see the innovation as necessary
- “Changing existing norms and values within a district might be one of the primary leadership opportunities for districts wishing to be high-reliability organizations with regard to achievement and instruction.”

In NCSS, at present, I suspect we have a combination of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>-order change at hand given our current student achievement results and our financial challenge. Marzano, in *District Leadership That Works*, would have us recognize this. We are.

10. In a roundtable discussion in which I participated with Georgia's U.S. Senator Isakson on January 20, he suggested that the U.S. Congress would likely reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act [known to many as No-Child-Left-Behind] before 2011 expires! This is certainly contrary to what



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we heard earlier this school year from other sources which suggested that changes in the federal education law would not happen until after the 2012 Presidential election! However, Senator Isakson, who serves on the Education Committee in Congress, indicated that he is in agreement with U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, with whom he had just spoken, as to the 2011 timeframe. More specifically, **Senator Isakson predicted that Congress would insert “a growth model” into federal law replacing the “all-or-nothing” method of the current No-Child-Left-Behind law.** (As you may recall, in my very first set of *End-of-Month Notes* back in July of 2010, I pointed out the result of a non-growth model accountability system which, in part, has NCSS on track to have 19 of our schools failing to meet Adequate Yearly Progress at the end of this school year! I suspect that if Congress acts in 2011, it will be towards the end of 2011. If so, it will not come in time to mitigate that dire prediction for us. Only we can do that ourselves this year even as the bar has been significantly raised by way of NCLB. That said, there’s no doubt that NCSS must perform at a greater clip, especially given current ACT and SAT results foretelling the college readiness of our graduates. Senator Isakson also predicted that federal law would change how special education students are treated in the calculation of AYP in the years ahead. Meanwhile, I was very impressed with Senator Isakson’s candor and with his obvious knowledge of K-12 education and the role of technology in today’s world and in an excellent education for today’s digital youth. (Senator Isakson is a former Chairman of Georgia’s State Board of Education and a noted policy expert.)

11. **If NCSS does not get back on track, the upcoming 2011-12 school year may mark the fourth consecutive year that NCSS has not purchased resources for students through the state of Georgia’s Learning Resources/Instructional Materials Adoption Cycle.** I suspect this is true of many or most of the state’s school systems given the deep recession. (It should be noted that NCSS has purchased “replacement” texts and the like for “lost” materials over the same timeframe.) However, as a school system, I have grave reservations about the continuance of such an approach depriving our students of much needed resources for learning. It strikes me as “fundamental” to our existence that we provide our students with the most up-to-date resources, be they in the form of textbooks and/or digital materials. Since becoming superintendent, I have heard this numerous times from both faculty and parents. Going forward, at some point soon, we must get back on track ... **This, too, makes for the importance of “right-sizing our organization to fit available revenue” even as we realize that the state has shorted NCSS over \$30 million per its own funding formula over the past several years which, in part, has resulted in budget cuts of \$18.3 million in NCSS since 2008-09.**



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### 12. Some **Budget Reduction** Notes:

- The deadline for completing the *Stakeholder Survey Regarding Possible Major Budget Reductions for 2011-2012 School Year* is 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 8, 2011. (A public forum on possible budget cuts will be held at 6:30 p.m., on Thursday, February 3, in the auditorium of Alcovy High School.)
- Once the deadline for taking the survey is past, we will soon, thereafter, make public the results in a “disaggregated” manner, i.e., the results per the website survey for the general public, per each School Council made up of business, parent, and employee membership, per Teacher Forum made up of two teacher representatives per each school, and per the upcoming PTO Presidents’ Roundtable on February 7 consisting of the PTO President and one other PTO member from each of our schools.
- In proposing possible major budget reductions, and in contemplating them now, we have been looking at our expenditures versus a group of eight like-sized Georgia school systems (including Rockdale, Dougherty, Fayette, Coweta, Columbia, Bibb, Douglas, and Newton ranging from 15,524 to 25,015 students). And, as reported in the *Newton Citizen* last week, we have noted the following per the Georgia Department of Education for last 2009-10 school year:
  - ~ **NCSS ranks 7<sup>th</sup> out of 8 like-sized systems in the percent of total expenditures for General Administration (Central Office).** (Put another way, only one of the other seven school systems spends less on General Administration than NCSS and that’s Columbia County.)
  - ~ **NCSS ranks 8<sup>th</sup> out of 8 like-sized systems in the percent of total expenditures for School-Based Administration.** (Put another way, NCSS spends less on school-based administration than any of the other seven school systems.)
  - ~ **NCSS ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> out of 8 like-sized systems in the percent of total expenditures on INSTRUCTION.** (Put another way, NCSS spends a greater percentage on instruction than all but one like-sized school system and that’s Columbia County once again.)

**Note A:** It should be noted that all 8 like-sized school systems spent less than 1% of their total expenditures on General Administration in 2009-10. The same is true for School-Based Administration.

**Note B:** We have also been looking at per pupil costs for various program offerings in NCSS. Should the Board of Education agree, the



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school system will bring its highest cost program at approx. \$21,400 per pupil (alternative education) to that of approx. \$5,600 per pupil.

**Note C:** At the BOE work session on February 8, the NCSS administration has asked representatives from Union Grove High School in neighboring Henry County to share their 7-period day schedule featuring a “Focus” period for the dual purpose of remediation and acceleration or enrichment. (One of the proposed possible budget cuts at present is a \$2.8 million savings by moving from a 4X4 block schedule in our high schools to a 7-period day such as that operated at UGHS.)

**Note D:** Following the tabulation and publication of the results from the *Stakeholder Survey on Possible Major Budget Reductions for 2011-12*, it is the intent of NCSS administration to draft its list of “Tentative Budget Reductions for 2011-12.” It is hoped, too, that in mid- to late February, the Board of Education will meet in an all-day retreat where the major portion of the agenda will be devoted to the administrative recommendations on budget reductions for the coming school year. This way, both the school system and its employees can better prepare for the 2011-12 school year.

**“The key to school success is to be found in identifying or creating engaging schoolwork for students.”**

- Phi Schlechty  
from *Working on the Work*

GSM  
1/31/11