



SUPERINTENDENT'S END-OF-MONTH NOTES

November 2010

OUR MISSION is to provide educational excellence for all students.

IN THIS EDITION:

- Results that **Cannot** be Ignored—**A Celebration** (Notes #1, #2, #3)
 - Results that **Cannot** be Ignored—**A Celebration** (Note #4)
 - Results that **Cannot** be Ignored—**A Celebration** (Note #5)
- Some Key Points from Chapter 10 & Conclusion of *Results Now* (Notes #6, #7)
- “Marrying Up” System-Level Capacity Building with School-Based PLCs (Note #8)
 - Some November Activities (Note #9)
 - Upcoming Meetings of Interest (Note #10)
 - “The Law of Mount Everest” (Note #11)

1. **Results** that **Cannot** be Ignored—**A Celebration:**

- Based on this September’s administration of the Georgia High School Writing Test (GHSWT), **95%** of 1,081 NCSS students recorded a **“meets or exceeds standards,”** up five points from last 09-10 school year! Both NCSS and the state are now at 95%. Required for graduation, the GHSWT is a persuasive piece of writing. The 2009 prompt, for example, asked students to *“Write a letter to convince your U.S. Congressional representative to either continue funding space exploration or to redirect those funds to other projects. Include specific details and examples to support your position.”* Writing samples are scored by two different raters in the following four domains:
 - **Ideas:** the degree to which the writer establishes a controlling idea and elaborates the main points with examples, illustrations, facts, or details that are appropriate to the persuasive form of writing.
 - **Organization:** the degree to which the writer’s ideas are arranged in a clear order and the overall structure of the response is consistent with the persuasive form of writing.
 - **Style:** the degree to which the writer controls language to engage the reader.
 - **Conventions:** the degree to which the writer demonstrates control of sentence formation, usage, and mechanics.

2. As always, student achievement has a multi-dimensional side to it inclusive of how our GHSWT results compare to last spring’s results on college-entrance exams like the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). Last spring, our average SAT writing score (451) was below the state (475) and the nation (492). The essay portion of the SAT requires students to respond to a broad question such as this prompt from a past test:

“Are there some heroes who will be remembered forever? Or are all heroes doomed to be forgotten one day? Plan your response, and then write an essay to explain your views on this issue. Be sure to support your position with specific points and examples. You may use personal examples or examples from your reading, observations, or, knowledge of subjects such as history,



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literature, science."

3. When you compare the two writing prompts above, GHSWT vs. SAT Writing, **both require "background knowledge"** for a thoughtful, well-reasoned response, i.e., vocabulary *and* a broad knowledge of subject matter, though more sophisticated on the college-level as the SAT expects the student to draw from multi-disciplines. (Just how important is it, then, for us to know, comprehend, and "act on" the research findings noted in Robert Marzano's book, *Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement?* We'll look at this work—as a system—beginning [formally] in February. I say, "formally," as some schools may be onto this work now ...)
4. **Results** that **Cannot** be Ignored—**A Celebration**:
 - 449 of 508 NCSS Seniors (88.39%) were declared "Work Ready" by the state of Georgia based on last year's work ready assessments (necessary basic math and language arts skills and ability to locate information *needed* to hold an entry-level job right out of high school). The 508 test takers in 2009-10, roughly half of last year's seniors, will be surpassed in number in 2010-11 when *all* seniors in NCSS will be assessed. Newton County, which has been declared "Work Ready" by the State of Georgia, enjoys this positive signal for prospective commerce and industry when considering relocation to or continuance in our community. To build on this achievement, in deeper and in more sophisticated ways, will be the new **Newton College** and **Career Academy (NCCA)** set to open in January of 2012! Targeting local needs, and providing our students with more career choices, NCCA is a timely and most important development in our school system and community-at-large!
5. **Results** that **Cannot** be Ignored—**A Celebration**:
 - In results announced a couple of weeks ago, NCSS students enrolled in our English Language Learners (ELL) program exceeded the state of Georgia's target performance for them (49%) recording 65.5% passage on the state's ELL assessment. Over 30 languages are taught in NCSS!
6. The month of November concludes the formal study of Mike Schmoker's *Results Now* in meetings of Principals and Central Office administrators. More specifically, what follows are the highlights from Chapter 10 and the Conclusion:

Some Key Points from Chapter 10 of Mike Schmoker's *Results Now*:

- Teachers and school leaders succeed when they: (1) focus on what's vital [**increased student achievement**/**more effective teaching**], (2) monitor it, and (3) celebrate its successes
- District Office meetings must provide clarity, priorities, and persistence. (Redundantly describe, reinforce, and model what success looks like.)



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~~ "The real path to greatness, it turns out, requires simplicity and diligence. It requires clarity, not instant illumination. It demands each of us to focus on what's vital—and to eliminate all of the EXTRANEIOUS distractions."

Some Key Points from the Conclusion of Mike Schmoker's *Results Now*:

~~ Why have too many students been short-changed in many contemporary educational settings?

- Teachers working *alone*, and therefore less effectively.
- Instruction has been largely unsupervised.
- Curriculum—good or bad—has too often depended largely on which teacher your child happens to get.
- Students too often deprived of the opportunity to read and write and learn in ways that engage the intellect—while their enthusiasm for learning, their intellectual and career prospects suffer irretrievably.
- "Our best plan is: to arrange for teachers to analyze their achievement data, set goals, and then meet ... That way, they can help one another ensure that they are teaching essential standards and using assessment results to improve the quality of their lessons [real, "authentic" Professional Learning Communities]."

7. As was noted in my *End-of-Month Notes*, #5, in August 2010, Mike Schmoker's conclusions in *Results Now* are **both provocative and challenging**. If we plan to work "smarter" and not just "harder," I trust we will put his assertions [well documented] under the microscope and compare our work-to-date with his analysis of contemporary schooling. If so, it may be that we, too, can achieve what he calls "unprecedented improvements in teaching and learning." Our data trends reveal that we must—for the kids—*not* just some, but all—and for our community-at-large.
8. In addition to our focus on capacity building [system-level related to research-based instructional strategies in our classrooms, building background knowledge of students, and technology integration], a reading of *Results Now* would have us "marry up" this system-level work with school-based Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Here's why from pages 113-114 of Schmoker's work:
 - **PLCs** ensure follow-up and reflection on instruction and its impact.
 - **PLCs** are results-oriented. (The assessment piece—so often left out—becomes the basis for further adjustment or improvement.)
 - **PLCs** reinforce a focus on essential common standards aligned with state assessments, providing a guaranteed and viable curriculum.
 - **PLCs** are social. They create the best kind of accountability—which relies on our commitment to people we know and care about, our colleagues and students. (As PLC advocate Rick Dufour notes: "Loyalty runs strongest at the smallest unit—the team—where people work together to achieve common



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goals.” Put another way, teachers should advocate strong and productive PLCs, not for the Superintendent’s sake, the School Board’s sake, or the Principal’s sake, but rather for their sake and more so, for their students’ learning sake ...)

- **PLCs** honor and empower teachers and their intelligence, capturing the vast reserves of expertise in any team and school.

Note: Naturally, the above presumes that there is an understood “protocol” in place for the work of PLCs, i.e., a time, place, and method of meeting “centered around instruction and its impact” to quote Schmoker. Short of these characteristics, it is *not* a PLC ...

9. The month of November has been a most busy one for me inclusive of:

- ~~ classroom observations and visits to schools
- ~~ participation in The Leadership Collaborative (planning for *Newton 2050*-community development plan)
- ~~ attendance at Griffin RESA professional development session on “Capturing Time for Extended Learning” (building in PLC time for faculty and remediation time for students)
- ~~ meeting with **Clements** and **Indian Creek** Faculty (where are we /where we’re going/Q&A)
- ~~ calling of the roll at **Cousins’** Veterans Day ceremony
- ~~ participation in videotaped interview with **South Salem** After-School Academic Program (A.S.A.P.) students (kids did great!)
- ~~ served as presenter for “Leadership Newton” (Chamber-sponsored leadership class for area residents)
- ~~ attended **Eastside’s** “Give My Regards to Broadway” performance (Excellent! Kids could really act, dance, and sing!)
- ~~ taught Ms. Musgrove’s **Alcovy** class on college preparation (Loved it!)
- ~~ participated in Channel 11 and area juvenile judges’ “Hang Up and Drive” program at **Alcovy** (stop texting while driving! I can speak from experience!)
- ~~ attended Educators’ Sunday at Springfield Baptist Church along with Principals Dubois, Scavella, Lockhart, and other educators
- ~~ reviewed Schmoker conclusions in *Results Now* and budget challenge for 2011-12 in Teacher Forum
- ~~ held a New Board Member Orientation with Ms. Henderson-Baker, Ms. Coggin, and Mr. Meadors (reviewed student achievement data, NCSS non-negotiable goals, school improvement initiatives—capacity building and Professional Learning Communities, departmental operations, policies, Georgia Code of Ethics for Boards of Education, and budget)
- ~~ served as Grand Marshall of **Mansfield’s** Annual Literacy Parade (kids and teachers and staff were all decked out celebrating their book of interest; a P.E. teacher—Ms. Massey—drove the marshall past parents lining the streets with “her hair on fire” and Rafe Esquith’s book—*Teach Like Your Hair’s on Fire*—in hand. What a sight! ☺)



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-- a mutual exchange of ideas between the Rockdale School District Cabinet and the Newton School System Executive Leadership Team (We learned from Georgia's largest AYP-earning school system the following emphases: [data-driven, results-focused school-based Professional Learning Communities and central office](#), [use of benchmark assessments in elementary/middle/high and "real time" intervention for students](#), [the presence of multiple "safety nets" and enrichment opportunities for students](#), [capacity-building for staff in cultural competence](#), and [staffing of schools based on "equity" concerns](#), i.e., "x" percent of low socio-economic and transient students provides additional staff for the school. At present, we will be comparing our staffing model to theirs. But first, this caveat: Both Rockdale and Newton will experience budget reductions in 2011-12, thus rendering improvements in staffing challenging if not impossible, at least in NCSS ...)

10. Upcoming Meetings of Interest

- Public Meeting on Proposed Elementary Rezoning: Nov. 30/6 p.m./Eastside HS
- Public Meeting on Proposed Elementary Rezoning: Dec. 6/6 p.m./Alcovy HS
- Public Meeting on Proposed Elementary Rezoning: Dec. 7/6 p.m./Newton HS
- Combined BOE Work Session/Regular Meeting: Dec. 14/7 p.m./Board Room (Rezoning Vote Anticipated)
- Public Meeting on 2011-12 Budget Challenge: January Date/Time/Location to be determined

11. "The Law of Mount Everest": As I noted in my *End-of-Month Notes* for August, 2010, Note #1, John Maxwell's book, *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork*, remind me of our current challenges of budget, rezoning, student achievement, and the like. Here's what he says: "As the challenge escalates, the need for teamwork elevates. Focus on the team and the dream should take care of itself. The type of challenge determines the type of team you require: A 'new challenge' requires a creative team. An ever-changing challenge requires a fast, flexible team. An Everest-size challenge requires an experienced team." Looking forward, we will need all of these ... But, whether budget, rezoning, or student achievement, "It is what it is." And we, too, like others, will prevail ... for the children ...

"When people tell us that we can't fix public schools until we fix poverty, we should tell them that they have it backwards. We cannot fix poverty until we fix our public schools."

■ Kati Haycock, President, Education Trust

GSM
11/30/10