

Leadership and Learning 2008:

Connecting Every Level of Leadership from the Boardroom to the Classroom

Dr. Reeves is the founder of The Leadership and Learning Center. He has worked with education, business, nonprofit, and government organizations throughout the world. The author of more than 20 books and many articles on leadership and organizational effectiveness, he has twice been named to the Harvard University Distinguished Authors Series. His monthly column on change leadership appears in Educational Leadership. Dr. Reeves was named the Brock International Laureate for his contributions to education. He also received the Distinguished Service Award from the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Parents Choice Award for his writing for children and parents.

For a free copy of all research slides, contact:

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Reframing the Debate in Pennsylvania

- **35,300 Pennsylvania Dropouts** (Alliance for Excellent Education, February 2008)
- **Cost of dropouts from class of 2007 in Pennsylvania: \$9.2 billion in lost wages, taxes, and productivity.**
- **State could save more than \$505.5 million in Medicaid and expenditures for uninsured care.**

What if we can only increase graduation by 5%?

- **If we increase graduate rate of male students in Pennsylvania by only 5%, it could lead to combined savings and revenue of almost \$288 million each year by reducing crime-related costs**



Overview

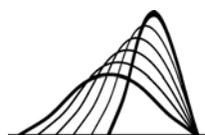
- Why before how: The research foundation
- Creating a culture of hypothesis testing
- New 2008 evidence
- Confronting change killers
- Reframing teacher leadership
- Getting accountability right

Core Research Findings from The Leadership and Learning Center 1997-2007:

- 1) Defeating the “failure hypotheses”
- 2) The 90 90 90 schools
- 3) The collaborative imperative
- 4) Impact of nonfiction writing
- 5) From the bell curve to the mountain

Core Research Findings from The Leadership and Learning Center 1997-2007:

- 6) The “Pygmalion Effect” for adults
- 7) The futility of format
- 8) Critical mass of implementation
- 9) Networks beat hierarchies
- 10) Accountability is more than test scores



The Culture of Hypothesis Testing

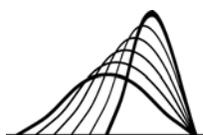
- “If . . . then statements”
- *“If there are high percentages of poor students in your school, then it is impossible to improve student achievement”*
- *“If you spend more time on nonfiction writing, you won’t have time for test prep and achievement will decline”*
- Complete Learning Activity #1

New 2008 Evidence

- School planning: From document drills to impact
- The power of monitoring (more than test scores)
- The imperative of focus (the “rule of six”)
- Reframing teacher leadership
- Confronting change killers

School Planning: From Document Drills to Impact

- PIM™ Study – Planning, Implementation, Monitoring
- More than 2,000 schools, more than 1.5 million students
- Economically, geographically, ethnically, linguistically diverse
- Rigorous double-blind review with high reliability



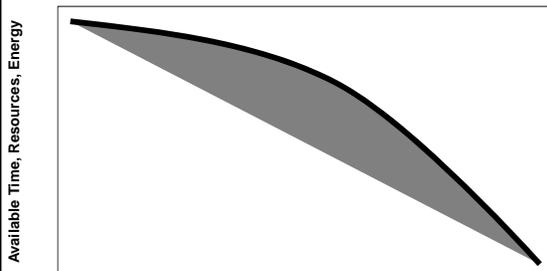
Keys to Effective Monitoring

- Monitor *adult actions*, not just test scores
- Monitor *frequently* – many schools have Data Team meetings twice a week. Absolute minimum is once a month
- Monitor *constructively* – it’s a “treasure hunt” – not a witch hunt

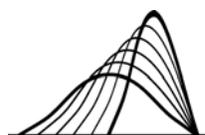
Focus

- Self-Assessment – How many “Hot New Initiatives” can you list in your school system in the past 24 months?
- Complete Learning Activity #2

The Law of Initiative Fatigue



Number of Initiatives



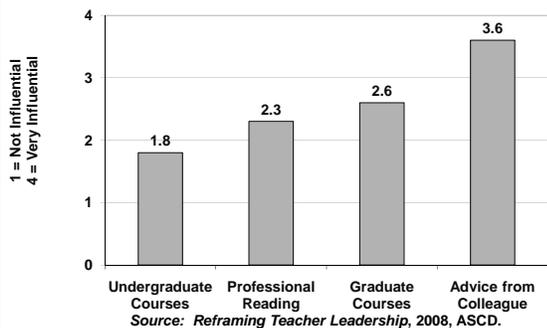
The Latest Evidence on Focus

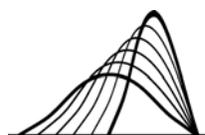
- Fewer goals – the “rule of six”
- The focus/monitoring relationships: **FIVE TIMES GREATER GAINS** in achievement with improved monitoring. How many initiatives can you monitor on a frequent and specific basis?
- The most important part of SMART goals: specificity and measurability

Reframing Teacher Leadership

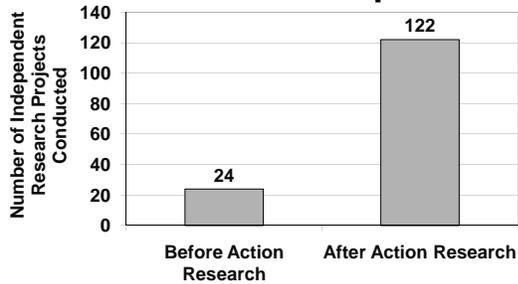
- Published spring 2008 by ASCD
- Synthesis of 81 action research projects
- Consistent and significant impact on achievement, discipline, and engagement
- Wide range of disciplines, grades, and student characteristics

What Influences Teacher Professional Practice?





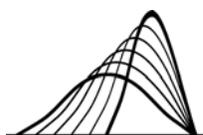
Sustainability: Teacher Leadership from Action Research Has Network Impact



Teacher Leadership Strategies

Strategy #1: Compelling Questions

- Sense of urgency
- Personal relevance
- Keeps you awake at night
- Answers - "What's in it for me?"



Sample Compelling Questions

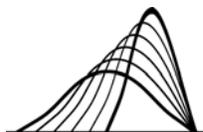
- How can we reduce failure within a single classroom year?
- How can we increase the number of students who attend school 90% or more of the time?
- How can we achieve a higher degree of implementation of effective strategies?
- How can we improve engagement by students and teachers?
- How can we restore electives to a priority place in the curriculum?

Strategy #2: Action Research

- The single greatest impact on teacher practices
- Radically redefine traditional professional development
- 7:1 rule – 7 hours of implementation for each one hour of seminar, workshop, or other traditional learning
- Accept the trade-offs – the “right kind of experimental bias”
- The transparency imperative

Strategy #3: Public Exposition

- “I’ve done many action research projects in the past, but this is the first time I ever shared my work publicly with colleagues.”
- “Science Fair for Adults” – Three-panel displays of teacher research:
 - Left – Data
 - Middle – Adult Actions
 - Right – Inferences and Conclusions



Strategy #4: Evidence-Based Decisions

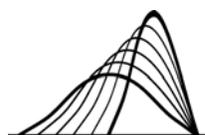
- “Who will listen to us?”
- “Even if we are right, will the administration change?”
- “What if my colleagues refuse to change and I’m the only person doing this?”
- WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE TO EVIDENCE?

Sample Action Research Project

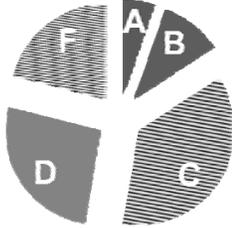
- **Research Question:**
How do differences in grading policy (and not differences in student performance) influence student failure rates?
- **Method:**
Faculty members examine identical student academic performance and provide a grade
- **Analysis:**
Similarities indicate consistency and fairness; dissimilarities indicate differences based on faculty decisions, not student performance
- **Complete Learning Activity #3**

■ Calculate the Final Grade:

- C
 - MA (Missing Assignment)
 - D
 - C
 - B
 - MA
 - MA
 - B
 - A
- Group 1: A = 100; B = 90; C = 80; D = 70
 - Group 2: A = 4; B = 3; C = 2; D = 1
 - Group 3: Your own system



10,000 Teachers Can't Be Wrong, Right?

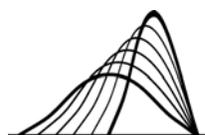


Grades for SAME Student
and SAME Performance

Toxic Grading Practices and Alternatives

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Zeroes for missing work■ Average/mean■ Semester killer – one test or project | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Right consequences for missing work■ Best representation of work■ Resilience – menu and personal responsibility |
|--|---|

Your questions, challenges, and success stories



How to move to “double block”

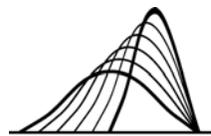
- Not the same content done more slowly
- Opportunities for multiple teaching strategies and ideas
- Multiple grouping strategies
- Checks for understanding
- Time is not the only variable, but it’s a VERY SIGNIFICANT variable
- Consider for ALL students, not just under-performing

How to get consistent grading practices with many classes?

- Define BOUNDARIES – not micro-managed grading systems
- Boundaries:
 - Accuracy
 - Fairness
 - Effectiveness
- ENCOURAGE action research and experimentation within those boundaries

How to celebrate teacher successes in a way that is not threatening?

- It’s “the way we do business” – not self-promotion, but universal
- Teacher journals – part of every meeting
- Science fair – universal participation



How about autism and special education?

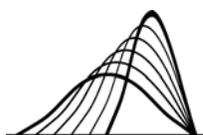
- Alternative assessments – **THROUGHOUT THE YEAR**, not just on the state test
- Individualized reports – IEP, not “she’s in special ed so we had to give her a B”
- Beware of generalizations – many IEP students **CAN** do well with appropriate adaptations and more time

Does emphasis on writing and writing inhibit ability to pursue music and art?

- See Educational Leadership February 2008
- **AFTER** reducing failures with better interventions and grading policies, music, art, and other electives increased **DRAMATICALLY**
- **NO** contradiction between literacy success and music and art
- When kids fail and drop out, they don’t get music and art

If students get extra time to get work done, ...

- It is difficult for other students -- perception is that bad kids get better treatment
- **OK** – how about a system that is fair to everybody - the standard is proficiency, not speed
- The incentive is to get work done early and on time – no discrimination in favor of “bad” kids
- Be prepared for parent arguments



Where do we find time for extra literacy time

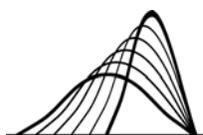
- Easiest solution is extra time for ALL students
- Pull outs during literacy is NOT “extra time”
- Alternate some subjects – it is NOT TRUE that every day science is effective if kids cannot read the book
- Ask high school teachers what “content” students most need

How do I get all of my colleagues to believe?

- You don't – it's not a matter of “buy-in”
- Behavior PRECEDES belief – do it first, see the results, THEN you get belief and support

How to provide parents with information and comfort with changes?

- Include them in the process
- Clear communication – the “refrigerator curriculum”
- Be clear about your values – they may in fact be challenging to many other people
- WHEN do teachers get thanked?



What if we don't have busses for after-school suspension?

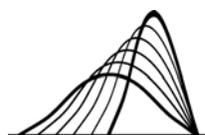
- OK – no football and basketball practice?
- If impossible, then put interventions in place during the day. There are MANY minutes to work with – study hall, home room, academic advisory, quiet tables at lunch, etc.

Higher education still uses mid-terms and finals

- Some do, some don't - difficult to generalize about every college, department, and class
- We don't prepare students for bad assessment practices by engaging in bad assessment practices

What to do to ensure teachers remain in the field?

- Money is important – but not alone sufficient
- Course and school assignment practices systematically drive out new teachers
- Why do teachers leave?
- Safety
- Time
- R-E-S-P-E-C-T



How to create urgency without fear?

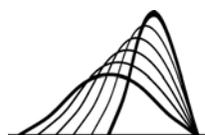
- The fear is perplexing, as it is very difficult to find a teacher anywhere who was really terminated for low scores
- Morale is NOT great in schools with low achievement
- Morale IS great in schools that show dramatic improvement – people of all ages like being successful

What about district-wide computerized grading programs

- At the very least, change the scale to 4 points, not 100 points – it CAN be done
- Prohibit the worst policies – zeroes and averages
- Consider “Menu” system --

Do home lives of students make no difference?

- External variables – housing, parents, language, health care, nutrition – are VERY important
- The question is, are these factors so overwhelming that teaching quality does not make a difference?
- See Darling-Hammond’s thoughtful balancing of variables



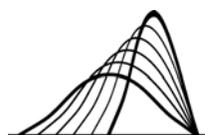
Most effective strategies for teacher-leadership?

- Define it appropriately – influencing professional practices of others
- Opportunities for influence – science fairs, informal observation
- Teacher-led faculty meetings
- Teacher-led professional development

In defense of poetry . . .

What evidence is necessary for student performance?

- More than claims and observations
- Specific rubric-based performance
- So clear that students know it, as do their peers

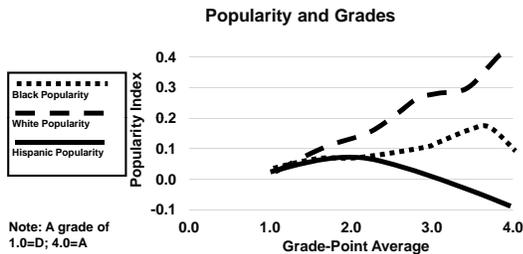


Confronting Change Killers

- **Create a sense of urgency** – education as a public health and safety issue
- **Measure implementation** and secure short-term wins
- **Nurture “change champions”** – the real centers of influence in your system
- **Models, mascots, and mentors**
- **Complete Learning Activity #4**

The Culture of Achievement

The popularity of white students increases as their grades increase. For black and Hispanic students, there is a drop off in popularity for those with higher GPAs.

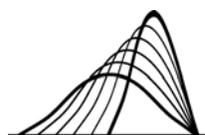


Source: Fryer, R. G. (Winter 2006). *Education Next*. Calculations from National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health data.

It's Their Fault, Right?

- **Students come to school valuing achievement**
- **In 2nd and 4th grade, the other students that “I want to be like” are high achieving students – boys and girls, Anglo, African-American, and Latino**
- **By 7th Grade, low-achieving student become the role model**

Source: Taylor, April Z and Sandra Graham, “An examination of the relationship between achievement values and perceptions of barriers among Low SES African American and Latino Students,” *Journal of Educational Psychology*, February 2007, p. 52-64.



Transforming Research into Action

- What will you do in the next four days?
- What will you do in the next 100 days?
- What will be your defining moments?

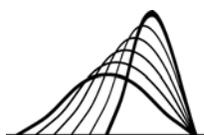
Questions and Discussion

For a complete set of slides, please give me your business card.

Thanks!

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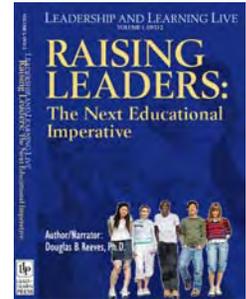


Leadership and Learning Live DVD Subscription

Hosted by Dr. Douglas Reeves

DESCRIPTION:

This subscription includes four self-contained DVDs which teach leadership and curriculum-based instruction based on Dr. Reeves' leadership keynote speeches, latest research, and most recent publications. In each DVD, Dr. Reeves will lead a study focused around his newest findings in the following areas: *Closing the Implementation Gap*, *Raising Leaders*, *Effective Grading Practices*, and *Educational Accountability: It's More Than Test Scores*. Each DVD contains a companion book study guide which highlights discussion points and reflection questions. Included in this subscription or single DVD purchase is access to Dr. Douglas Reeves and other senior leaders input on your educational issues.



- DVD 1 – *Closing the Implementation Gap*
- DVD 2 – *Raising Leaders*
- DVD 3 – *Effective Grading Practices*
- DVD 4 – *Educational Accountability: It's More Than Test Scores*

WHO WOULD BENEFIT:

Ideal for district, building, grade-level, and departmental professional learning communities.

FORMAT & COST:

Each DVD is approximately 60 minutes in length, with 10-15 minute segments followed by guiding questions for discussion. \$99.00 individually or \$199.00 for a subscription to all four.

AVAILABILITY:

The first two DVDs are available, with each subsequent volume released on a quarterly basis.



FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, please contact us at Info@LeadandLearn.com or by phone 866-399-6019 ext. 213.

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Leadership and Learning Live DVD Subscription

DVD 1 - *Closing the Implementation Gap*

In this new keynote address for 2007, Dr. Douglas Reeves addresses the central issue facing teachers and educational leaders today. Based on new research findings from hundreds of thousands of students, Dr. Reeves has identified critical factors for closing the implementation gap. Highlights of this new presentation focus on essential questions: Who are the essential change agents in your system? How can you identify, nurture, and encourage them? What are the conditions for effective change? How can teachers and leaders lay the groundwork to optimize the value of every change? Where is the greatest leadership leverage? What specific actions can we take? When do we know that change efforts are successful? When do we modify or abandon change efforts? How do I give my colleagues the tools they need? Why are changes in organization, professional practice, and culture essential for every successful system?

DVD 2 - *Raising Leaders: How to Create a New Generation of Student Leaders in Every School and Every Neighborhood*

In his stunning new research, Dr. Douglas Reeves arrives at two compelling conclusions: 1) The world faces a leadership crisis in every sector of the economy; 2) Schools and communities can and must do a better job of developing student leadership. From school administrators to labor unions, nonprofit organizations to for-profit businesses, governmental entities to hospitals, Reeves demonstrates that there will be an enormous turnover in leadership in the next seven years. Developments in science, technology, health care, and the economy are all contingent upon successful progression of the next generation of leaders. Unfortunately, student leadership roles in many schools are so over-managed by adults that students accumulate leadership titles without ever experiencing the challenges, disappointments, and rewards of leadership. Dr. Reeves is the author of more than twenty books on leadership and education and has twice been named to the Harvard University Distinguished Authors Series. He was named the 2006 Brock International Laureate for his contributions to education and recently received the 2007 Distinguished Service Award from the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

DVD 3 – *Effective Grading Practices*

In this session, Dr. Reeves present a compelling case improvement of grading practices. He'll argue that school-wide implementation of a consistent and effective grading system will have an immediate impact on reducing failures and improving student achievement, teacher morale, student behavior, and parental engagement. In the DVD Dr. Reeves will lead interactive learning exercises: to teach the elements of effective grading, analyze common grading systems; experiment with alternative systems; create improved feedback strategies; and develop an implementation plan that participants can be immediately applied.

DVD 4 - *Educational Accountability: It's More Than Test Scores*

Every school and district has a story to tell about the work of students, teachers, parents, and school leaders. Unfortunately, the accountability systems that are created in response to federal and state requirements rely exclusively on lists of test scores. However important test scores may be, they do not provide a comprehensive view of the activities of a school or district. Moreover, a list of test scores fails to allow school leaders and policymakers to analyze the relationship between cause variables, such as teaching practices, curriculum, assessments, and effect variables, such as student achievement indicators. Only a holistic accountability system includes the important activities of central office departments, extracurricular activities, parent involvement, and many other influences on student achievement.



SENIOR LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

Third Annual Institute
November 5-7, 2008
Cambridge, MA

**JOIN AN EXCLUSIVE GROUP OF SENIOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS
LED BY DR. DOUGLAS REEVES
WITH SUPPORT FROM TOP EDUCATIONAL LEADERS WORLDWIDE**



Your membership in the Senior Leadership Institute begins with a gathering of senior leaders that includes superintendents, board presidents, chief academic officers, and others who face the unique challenges of senior educational leadership.

Dr. Douglas Reeves, Dr. Michael Fullan, Dr. Brian McNulty, Dr. Elle Allison, and Dr. Mike Wasta will lead interactive learning sessions packed with new research on leadership effectiveness. Curriculum highlights include:

- **High Impact Learning: New Insights for Improving Leadership, Teaching, and Student Achievement** – Dr. Douglas Reeves previews research from his latest book, *High Impact Learning*, to be published in 2009. This large-scale study asks the essential question, “Which professional learning strategies have the greatest impact on organizational effectiveness and student success?” The surprising answers have important implications for senior leaders at the district, state, provincial, and national levels.
- **The Six Secrets of Change** – Dr. Michael Fullan presents compelling evidence regarding the six essential elements for effective change.
- **Leadership Matters: How Senior Leaders Influence Student Performance** – Dr. Brian McNulty returns to the Senior Leadership Institute with his unique mix of cutting-edge research and practical insights, delivered in his singular good-humored style. Dr. McNulty brings a synthesis of the latest research to empower educational leaders to zero in on top priorities to improve student results.
- **Renewal Coaching** – Dr. Elle Allison, a true innovator in leadership research on wisdom, resonance, and renewal, shares her multidisciplinary insights into how senior leaders can seek and analyze feedback for improved personal performance, leading to personal and organizational renewal.
- **Change Readiness Assessment** – Dr. Mike Wasta facilitates an interactive session to help participants gauge and prioritize the changes that will most immediately improve results.



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**As an attendee of the Senior Leadership Institute,
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- Your choice of **six months of personal, confidential, one-to-one coaching or a comprehensive Hallmarks Performance Assessment and interpretive session.**
- Effective implementation is a key factor for leadership success, but a missing ingredient of most leadership programs. Our Senior Leadership Institute provides this critical coaching element or Hallmarks Performance Assessment to help ensure each participant's success.
- Attendance at Senior Leadership Institute at the prestigious Charles Hotel in Cambridge Square. Tuition, materials, and all meals during the institute, including breakfasts, snacks, lunches, an evening reception, and one dinner are included.
- One-year Leadership Maps™ subscription
- **Quarterly webinars, exclusively for Ed-Leadership Forum members**
Dr. Reeves facilitates these quarterly discussions on topics most pertinent to senior leaders.
- **Senior Leadership Bulletin**
This quarterly newsletter features newly released and previously unpublished research about leadership effectiveness, strategies for improved success, interviews with key leaders in education, and other topics focused exclusively on the unique challenges faced by senior leaders.

*Membership is for a term of one year and is limited to a maximum of
200 educational leaders throughout the world.*

Cost: \$4,995 for a one-year membership

For further information, please contact Client Relations at The Leadership and Learning Center or Julie Abels, Senior Director of Conferences: JAbels@LeadandLearn.com or 866.399.6019 ext 231 / +1.303.504.9312 ext 231.



REFRAMING TEACHER LEADERSHIP
&
EFFECTIVE GRADING PRACTICES

JULY 31 - AUGUST 1, 2008
DENVER, COLORADO

Don't miss this rare opportunity to spend the day with Dr. Douglas Reeves, author of *Reframing Teacher Leadership*, ASCD's selected spring 2008 Member Book!

On day one of this Institute, Dr. Reeves will lead participants through an interactive seminar designed to:

- Illustrate the importance of teacher leadership and the differences between teacher leadership and administrative leadership.
- Reflect on the most important sources of influence on participants' professional practices.
- Investigate the criteria for effective change implementation.
- Apply the New Framework to a specific topic that holds compelling personal and professional interest.
- Create an action plan for teacher leadership and action research that will directly support the personal and professional responsibilities of each participant.

On day two, The Leadership and Learning Center team will share new research on **Effective Grading Practices**, demonstrating how changes in grading policies will help your entire school by reducing failures and disciplinary problems while increasing faculty morale and student engagement. Through a combination of interactive learning exercises, personal reflections, teamwork, and whole group activities, participants will leave this seminar equipped to make *immediate* changes in grading practices.

**Classroom educators and school administrators
will want to attend this results-based Institute!**

To register or for further information, visit LeadandLearn.com or contact Julie Abels, Senior Director of Conferences, at Jabels@LeadandLearn.com or 1.866.399.6019 ext 231.



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Leading to Change / How Do You Change School Culture?

Douglas Reeves

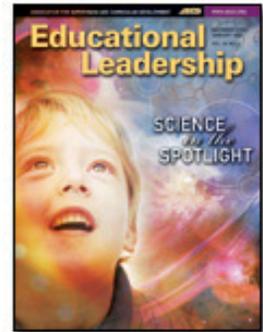
Consider the following laments that I have heard recently from school leaders: “We can't change the grading policy—it's part of our culture.” “Public displays of data won't work here—the culture won't allow it.” “The parents just don't understand—you can't change the culture by passing a law.” Each of these statements includes the word *culture*, but the meaning of the term ranges from policies and procedures to personal preferences to deeply embedded belief systems.

Cultural change, although challenging and time-consuming, is not only possible but necessary—especially in organizations in which stakeholders use the word “culture” as a rhetorical talisman to block leadership initiatives, stifle innovation, and maintain the status quo. In the last decade, the education standards movement has taught us that policy change without cultural change is an exercise in futility and frustration.

How do you change the culture of schools? When it comes to lasting cultural change, four essentials are consistent across many leadership contexts.

First, *define what you will not change*. Identify specific values, traditions, and relationships that you will preserve. Rather than make every change a battle that exhausts political capital and diminishes trust, effective leaders place change in the context of stability. They take care not to convey the message, “Everything you have been doing in the past was ineffective, and your experience and professional judgment are irrelevant.” A more thoughtful message is, “I am only going to ask you to engage in changes that will have meaning and value for you and every stakeholder we serve.” For example, many schools have cherished traditions of excellence in athletics, music, or art—traditions that can be threatened when the leader says that academic achievement must be the top priority. Effective change leaders identify and build on traditions rather than compete with them. The trophy case bursting with evidence of athletic championships can share space with exceptional student artwork, outstanding science projects, and superb essays.

Second, *recognize the importance of actions*. Speeches and announcements are not enough. To lead challenging reform efforts, you must be willing to make personal changes in decision-making policies (Who has the authority to decide what?); personal time allocation (Which



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meeting invitations do you accept and which do you decline?); and collegial relationships (Do you make time to listen to the personal stories of your colleagues?).

The greatest impediment to meaningful cultural change is the gap between what leaders say they value and what they actually do. Staff members are not seduced by a leader's claim of "collaborative culture" when every meeting is a series of lectures, announcements, and warnings. Claims about a "culture of high expectations" are undermined when school policies encourage good grades for poor student work. The "culture of respect" is undermined by every imperious, demanding, or angry e-mail and voice mail coming from the principal. Leaders speak most clearly with their actions. When staff members hear the call for transformation from a leader whose personal actions remain unchanged, their hope turns to cynicism.

Third, *use the right change tools for your school or district*. Christensen, Marx, and Stevenson (2006) differentiate *culture tools*, such as rituals and traditions; *power tools*, such as threats and coercion; *management tools*, such as training, procedures, and measurement systems; and *leadership tools*, such as role modeling and vision. Leaders must choose the appropriate change tools on the basis of a combination of factors, including the extent to which staff members agree on what they want and how to get there. Leaders who approach reform determined to apply a particular change method are making the mistake of the person holding a hammer who therefore sees only nails.

Fourth, *be willing to do the "scut work."* In *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World*, Tracy Kidder (2004) describes a renowned infectious disease specialist and leader in international health care. Farmer has revolutionized the beliefs and practices of stakeholders ranging from the poorest rural villagers in Haiti to the faculty of Harvard Medical School to policymakers at the United Nations. Combining his extensive field experience with sophisticated research and medical analyses, Farmer has upended traditional notions of health care. What does Farmer cite as one of his secrets? The willingness to do "unglamorous scut work."

Although education leaders must make speeches and attend board meetings, leaders aspiring to change school cultures will take the risk, as Superintendent Stan Scheer of Murrieta Valley Unified School District in California has done, of taking a turn as a substitute teacher or spending time with bus drivers at 5:00 on a frosty morning. When the school leader puts down the briefcase and picks up a stack of trays in the cafeteria or a pile of writing portfolios for personal review, then everyone knows that the leader takes every job in the school seriously. If you believe that every job has value and there is no such thing as unimportant work in schools, then demonstrate that belief through your actions.

Meaningful school improvement begins with cultural change—and cultural change begins with the school leader.

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Leading to Change / Effective Grading Practices

Douglas B. Reeves

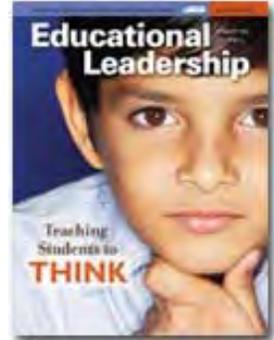
If you wanted to make just one change that would immediately reduce student failure rates, then the most effective place to start would be challenging prevailing grading practices. How can I be so sure? Try this experiment in your next faculty meeting. Ask your colleagues to calculate the final grade for a student who receives the following 10 grades during a semester: *C, C, MA (Missing Assignment), D, C, B, MA, MA, B, A*. I have done this experiment with thousands of teachers and administrators in the United States, Canada, and Argentina. Every time—bar none—I get the same results: The final grades range from *F* to *A* and include everything in between.

As this experiment demonstrates, the difference between failure and the honor roll often depends on the grading policies of the teacher. To reduce the failure rate, schools don't need a new curriculum, a new principal, new teachers, or new technology. They just need a better grading system.

Ineffective Grading

The results of my experiment are not surprising. Guskey and Bailey (2001) and Marzano (2000) have synthesized decades of research with similar findings. Neither the weight of scholarship nor common sense seems to have influenced grading policies in many schools. Practices vary greatly among teachers in the same school—and even worse, the practices best supported by research are rarely in evidence.

For example, the most effective grading practices provide accurate, specific, timely feedback designed to improve student performance (Marzano 2000, 2007; O'Connor, 2007). In the best classrooms, grades are only one of many types of feedback provided to students. Music teachers and athletic coaches routinely provide abundant feedback to students and only occasionally associate a grade with the feedback. Teachers in visual arts, drafting, culinary arts, or computer programming allow students to create a portfolio to show their best work, knowing that the mistakes made in the course of the semester were not failures, but lessons learned on the way to success. In each of these cases, "failures" along the way are not averaged into a calculation of the final grade.



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Contrast these effective practices with three commonly used grading policies that are so ineffective they can be labeled as toxic. First is the use of zeroes for missing work. Despite evidence that grading as punishment does not work (Guskey, 2000) and the mathematical flaw in the use of the zero on a 100-point scale (Reeves, 2004), many teachers routinely maintain this policy in the mistaken belief that it will lead to improved student performance. Defenders of the zero claim that students need to have consequences for flouting the teacher's authority and failing to turn in work on time. They're right, but the appropriate consequence is not a zero; it's *completing the work*—before, during, or after school, during study periods, at "quiet tables" at lunch, or in other settings.

Second is the practice of using the average of all scores throughout the semester, a formula that presumes that the learning early in the semester is as important as learning at the end of the semester (Marzano, 2000; O'Connor, 2007). Interestingly, when teachers and administrators have been students in my graduate courses, they routinely insist that they should be evaluated on the basis of their understanding at the end of the semester rather than their work throughout the term.

Third is the use of the "semester killer"—the single project, test, lab, paper, or other assignment that will make or break students. This practice puts 18 weeks of work at risk based on a project that might, at most, have consumed four weeks of the semester.

A small but growing number of school systems are tackling the issue head-on with comprehensive plans for effective grading practices. (The policy developed by one such district, Grand Island Public Schools in Nebraska, is available at <http://wikiassessments.editme.com/files/GradingandReporting/G%26R%20Guiding%20Docs.pdf>.)

But even in districts that have attempted to put effective grading policies in place, enforcement is often inconsistent. Grading seems to be regarded as the last frontier of individual teacher discretion. The same school leaders and community members who would be indignant if sports referees were inconsistent in their rulings continue to tolerate inconsistencies that have devastating effects on student achievement.

High-Stakes Grading

The Alliance for Excellent Education estimated that the annual cost of high school failure exceeds \$330 billion ("An Economic Case," 2007). Some of these failures are no doubt caused by excessive absences and poor student performance. But, as the experiment at the beginning of this column clearly indicates, many failures are caused by the differences in teacher grading policies.

Do another experiment: Randomly select 30 course failures from the last semester, and determine the cause for failure. Two common causes are missing homework and poor performance on a single major assignment—a term paper, lab, or project. What would it mean to your school if you could reduce the number of failing grades resulting solely from uncompleted homework?

The stakes of grading practices are not limited to student failure. When grading policies

improve, discipline and morale almost always follow. For example, Ben Davis High School in Indianapolis, Indiana, achieved a remarkable reduction in course failures through focused attention on improved feedback and intervention for students (Reeves, 2006). I recently checked in with the school, and Principal Joel McKinney reported that the success of this challenging urban school (74 percent free and reduced-price lunch, high mobility, and increasing numbers of English language learners) did not stop with reducing 9th and 10th grade failures. As of fall 2007, enrollment in advanced placement classes had increased 32 percent; suspensions had declined 67 percent; elective opportunities in music, art, and technology had increased; class cuts and tardiness had fallen significantly; teacher morale and school climate had noticeably improved—and the course failure rate had continued to decline (personal communication, December 5, 2007). When schools take steps to reduce failures, lots of good things happen.

The Steps to Take

Although changing grading systems is a challenging leadership task, the benefits are so great that it's worth doing.

First, create a sense of urgency. Identify the exact cost of inconsistent grading practices. How many failures can we prevent this semester if we improve our grading practices?

Second, identify teacher leaders who are already improving policies. Chances are that some teachers in your school have already eliminated the use of the average and the zero on a 100-point scale and created meaningful opportunities for corrective feedback outside of grades. Provide a forum for these teachers to share their insights with colleagues and lead the effort to develop improved policies.

Third, get the facts; gather evidence that will create a rationale for decision making. At the end of the day, your choices about teaching practice must be guided by evidence, not opinions. For example, although many people sincerely believe that giving poor grades as a punishment is effective, Guskey (2000) has marshaled 90 years of evidence to the contrary.

Fourth, reassure parents, students, and teachers that certain things will *not* change. Students will still have letter grades, transcripts, honor rolls, individualized education plans, and everything else that they have counted on as part of their grading system. What they won't have is irrational grading policies that give students widely different grades for the same work.

The benefits of effective grading practices are not limited to a reduced failure rate—although that benefit alone is sufficient to justify change. When student failures decrease, student behavior improves, faculty morale is better, resources allocated to remedial courses and course repetitions are reduced, and resources invested in electives and advanced courses increase. When was the last time a single change in your school accomplished all that?

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The Case Against the Zero

Even those who subscribe to the “punishment” theory of grading might want to reconsider the way they use zeros, Mr. Reeves suggests.

BY DOUGLAS B. REEVES

THIS IS not a trick question. If you are using a grading scale in which the numbers 4, 3, 2, 1, and 0 correspond to grades of A, B, C, D, and F, then what number is awarded to a student who fails to turn in an assignment? If you responded with a unanimous chorus of “zero,” then you may have a great deal of company. There might be a few people who are familiar with the research that asserts that grading as punishment is an ineffective strategy,¹ but many of us curmudgeons want to give the miscreants who failed to complete our assignments the punishment that they richly deserve. No work, no credit — end of story.

Groups as diverse as the New York State United Teachers and the Thomas Fordham Foundation rally around this position.² Let us, for the sake of argument, accept the point. With the grading system described above, the failure to turn in work would receive a zero. The four-point scale is a rational system, as the increment between each letter grade is proportionate to the increment between each numerical grade — one point.

But the common use of the zero today is based not on a four-point scale but on a 100-point scale. This defies logic and mathematical accuracy. On a 100-point scale, the interval between numerical and letter grades is typically 10 points, with the break points at 90, 80, 70, and so on. But when the grade of zero is applied to a 100-point scale, the interval between the D and F is not 10 points but 60 points. Most state standards in mathematics require that fifth-grade students un-

Missing assignment: **F**

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derstand the principles of ratios — for example, A is to B as 4 is to 3; D is to F as 1 is to zero. Yet the persistence of the zero on a 100-point scale indicates that many people with advanced degrees, including those with more background in mathematics than the typical teacher, have not applied the ratio standard to their own professional practices. To insist on the use of a zero on a 100-point scale is to assert that work that is not turned in deserves a penalty that is many times more severe than that assessed for work that is done wretchedly and is worth a D. Readers were asked earlier how many points would be awarded to a student who failed to turn in work on a grading scale of 4, 3, 2, 1, 0, but I'll bet not a single person arrived at the answer "minus 6." Yet that is precisely the logic that is employed when the zero is awarded on a 100-point scale.

There are two issues at hand. The first, and most important, is to determine the appropriate consequence for students who fail to complete an assignment. The most common answer is to punish these students. Evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, there is an almost fanatical belief that punishment through grades will motivate students. In contrast, there are at least a few educators experimenting with the notion that the appropriate consequence for failing to complete an assignment is to require the student to complete the assignment. That is, students lose privileges — free time and unstructured class or study-hall time — and are required to complete the assignment. The price of freedom is proficiency, and students are motivated not by threats of failure but by the opportunity to earn greater freedom and discretion by completing work accurately and on time. I know my colleagues well enough to understand that this argument will not persuade many of them. Rewards and punishments are part of the psyche of schools, particularly at the secondary level.

But if I concede this first point, the second issue is much more straightforward. Even if we want to punish the little miscreants who fail to complete our assignments — and I admit that on more than one occasion with both my students and my own children, my emotions have run in that direction — then what is the fair, appropriate, and mathematically accurate punishment? However vengeful I may feel on my worst days, I'm fairly certain that the appropriate punishment is not the electric chair. Even if I were to engage in a typically fact-free debate in which my personal preference for punishment were elevated above efficacy, I would nevertheless be forced to admit that giving a zero on a 100-

point scale for missing work is a mathematical inaccuracy.

If I were using a four-point grading system, I could give a zero. If I am using a 100-point system, however, then the lowest possible grade is the numerical value of a D, minus the same interval that separates every other grade. In the example in which the interval between grades is 10 points and the value of D is 60, then the mathematically accurate value of an F is 50 points. This is not — contrary to popular mythology — "giving" students 50 points; rather, it is awarding a punishment that fits the crime. The students failed to turn in an assignment, so they receive a failing grade. They are not sent to a Siberian labor camp.

There is, of course, an important difference. Sentences at Siberian labor camps ultimately come to an end, while grades of zero on a 100-point scale last forever. Just two or three zeros are sufficient to cause failure for an entire semester, and just a few course failures can lead a student to drop out of high school, incurring a lifetime of personal and social consequences.

This issue is as emotional as anything I have encountered since the phonics versus whole language debate. Scholars regress to the persuasive tactics of professional wrestlers (no offense intended to wrestlers — this article will generate enough hate mail as it is), and research and logic are subordinated to vengeance masquerading as high standards. Because the emotional attachment to the zero is so strong, I have given up advocating that 50 points should represent the lowest grade. What I do think we can do to preserve some level of sanity in our grading system is to return to a four-point system. A's no longer equal 100 points, but four points. If there is a need for greater specificity, then we can choose an infinite number of digits to the right of the decimal point and thus differentiate between the 3.449 and 3.448 to our heart's content. But at the end of the day in such a system, the F is a zero — one point below the D. It is fair, accurate, and, some people may believe, motivational. But at least the zero on a four-point scale is not the mathematical travesty that it is when applied to a 100-point system.

1. Thomas R. Guskey and Jane M. Bailey, *Developing Grading and Reporting Systems for Student Learning* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 2001).

2. Clarisse Butler, "Are Students Getting a Free Ride?," *New York Teacher*, 2 June 2004, available at www.nysut.org/newyorkteacher/2003-2004/040602grading.html; and Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, "Minimum Grades, Minimum Motivation," *The Education Gadfly*, 3 June 2004, available at www.edexcellence.net/foundation/gadfly/issue.cfm?id=151#1850. 

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