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ABSTRACT

This booklet contains essays by three principals in which they describe why they chose to organize their schools around standards and the challenges and successes they encountered along the way. It details the themes associated with the successful implementation of standards, such as continuous learning, patience, resourcefulness, creativity, supportiveness, and advocacy. Present throughout the essays is the notion that principals are the ones who place standards at the center of teaching and learning. The document is intended to provide principals guidance for implementing standards-based education and encourages principals to view themselves as critical players in improving student performance. It recounts the stories of three principals, one from an elementary school, one from a middle school, and one from a high school, and their efforts to implement standards in their schools. Each principal's account details the difficulties in instituting standards-based education and the need for hard work, community support, and teachers' endorsement. The essays touch on participatory leadership, the establishment of goals, the need for conflict management and parental support, expectations for students, a rigorous process of assessment, schoolwide portfolio meetings, inclusive leadership, the use of academies, the importance of scheduling, and the positive changes attributed to standards. (RJM)

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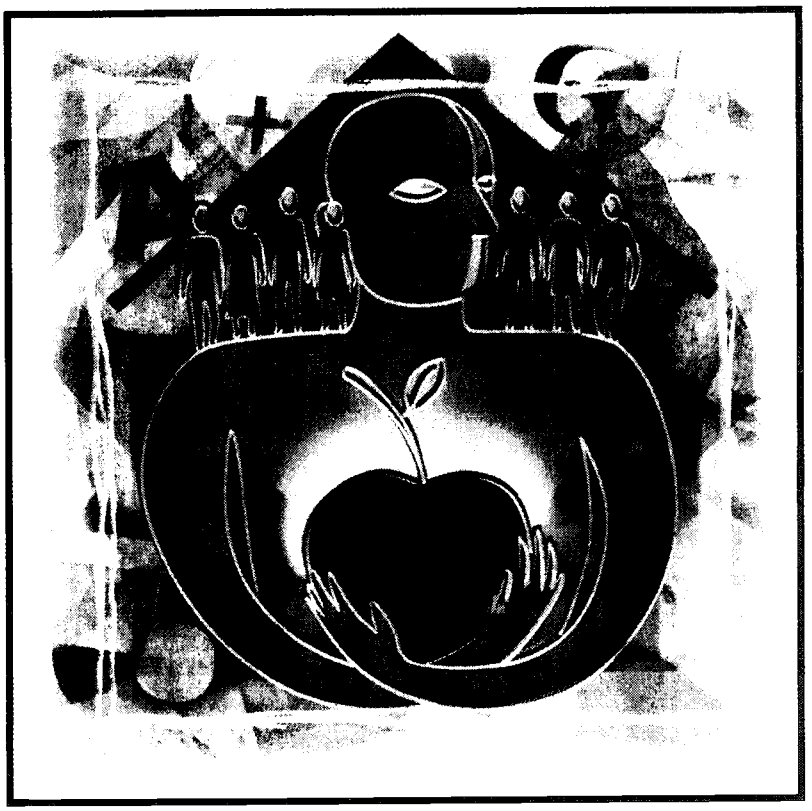
Standards Principles



for Principals

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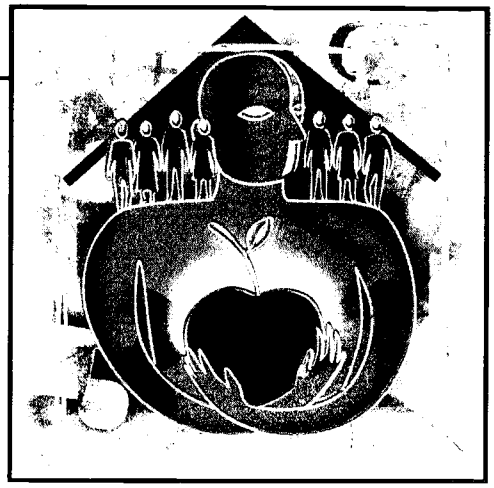

Standards Principles for Principals

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Standards Principles for Principals

Principles Are the Key to Standards-based Education

by Norma Paulus

Norma Paulus is Oregon's state superintendent of public instruction, overseeing 1,200 public schools.

In a standards-based system of education, decisions about how to improve student performance to meet state standards must be made at the local level. But improving student achievement is very much a team effort. Elected officials, department staff, and professional organizations join forces at the state level to implement rigorous academic standards and assessments. In schools and districts, staff, administrators, and school boards work together to align curriculum and instruction with the new, higher standards. But it is the principal who is becoming an increasingly important figure in improving student performance. Principals provide leadership, build staff capacity to enhance the staff's own learning, and inspire efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their buildings. Principals are responsible for making decisions about how to go about meeting state standards.

This booklet contains essays by elementary, middle, and high school principals describing why they chose to organize their schools around standards and what challenges and successes they encountered along the way. Their stories contain both inspiring ideas and practical guidance to others seeking to implement standards in their buildings and districts. These essays show that principals are essential players in standards-based education. They are the ones who place standards at the center of teaching and learning in their buildings—despite changes in teaching staff, student and parent populations, and district administration.

Key Qualities

In conversations with principals in Oregon who are effectively implementing standards-based education in their schools, several common themes emerged. These principals present six key attributes as useful in improving student performance.

Continuous learning: Effective principals create a culture of a learning partnership. They do not adopt a hierarchical structure where they act as sole decision makers and authorities. Instead, they act as facilitators and partners, emphasizing that they do not have all the answers and encouraging teachers and staff to dig into issues and find solutions for themselves.

Patience: Effective principals are comfortable allowing staff members to spend time delving into questions and do not need to force "solutions" too quickly. They recognize that hasty action may result in lost learning for both teachers and students. These principals are comfortable with the process; they can stay with the question and support staff in the inquiry. They do not rush to take action for the sake of acting. They recognize that worthwhile solutions may take time to emerge.

Resourcefulness: Effective principals continuously scout for books, materials, and other resources to support teachers and inform instruction. They stay current on educational research and publications to gain ideas that may help staff resolve issues or enhance their learning.

Creativity: Effective principals schedule regular times each week for staff to work together to ask questions, generate answers, and plan and prepare for class. They also create opportunities for teachers to share what they know with each other. One elementary school principal in Oregon and her staff invited teachers from across the state to an annual day-long Saturday conference, where they described the changes they were making in their school to improve student learning. In three years, the conference raised $35,000, which the school used to buy technology. Further, the principal called it the best staff development she had ever seen—teachers developed an even deeper understanding of their work so they could explain it to their peers.

Supportiveness: Effective principals help staff members gain confidence by reviewing assessment data and setting attainable goals for improvement. These principals focus on progress: growth from week to week, over the course of the school year or between benchmark levels, for example—to help teachers see that they do have a positive effect on student learning. When teachers see growth occurring, they gradually shift from being threatened by data to being drawn to it. Even low assessment results can be viewed in a positive light; they indicate that focused attention to the area of low performance will lead nowhere but up.

Advocacy: Principals connect the school with parents, the community, and the central office. Effective principals make sure district bus schedules and cafeteria food services do not interfere with teachers' efforts to improve student achievement. They place leverage where needed to improve student learning. They build relationships with parents and the larger community, inviting them to participate in education. Principals also get to know the students in their building.

They do not accept the idea that students from troubled or disadvantaged backgrounds cannot be expected to perform at the same high level as other students. Instead, these principals expect their staff to focus on the standards and help all students progress toward them.

Ten years ago, we established the Principals Leadership Institute in Oregon with funding from state and federal grants. In the institute's first year, 250 principals participated. This year, 425 are participating—more than a third of the state's principals. The year-long program combines statewide conferences, regional meetings, and small study groups. As part of this year's institute, some districts are looking at a standards-based system for performance evaluation of administrators and teachers.

This booklet contains even more guidance for implementing standards-based education in school buildings. It encourages principals to view themselves as critical players in improving student performance. We hope this publication will motivate you to delve more deeply into this subject.

Principals are a central force in implementing standards-based education in their schools. Principals are not just strong administrators—they are now called upon to be visionary educational leaders, too. With leadership and team work, they can guide a school to improved student learning.

Standards Principles for Principals

Building a Standards-based Elementary School, One Step at a Time

by Marcie Bartley

Marcie Bartley has been principal of Clarence Haaff Elementary School in Pueblo, Colorado, since 1993. She has taught at the elementary, middle, and high school levels and was a curriculum specialist for the Pueblo School District.

When I arrived at Clarence Haaff Elementary School, I became its sixth principal in ten years. I experienced what I imagine most of my colleagues have experienced: when starting at a new school, the first year is spent learning about the school's culture. A smart principal will wait to make changes. Still, we needed to make some changes right away, because children grow quickly and are only with us for a short time.

In my early months at the school, I planned a few changes I wanted to see in the first years, ideas that would be "catches" for the teachers. In my days as a curriculum specialist with central administration, I became familiar with science curriculum designed around marine life, which interested me because I am a scuba diver. I had sent some teachers from Pueblo School District to Santa Cruz, California, for two weeks to be trained in the curriculum. The "catch" was the opportunity for the schools to get their hands on good, rich curriculum and training. The curriculum had been established in Clarence Haaff under the previous principal, so when I arrived three teachers were already using it. The curriculum caught fire with other teachers; they liked it and were pleased that it met some of the national science standards. One unit was not enough, though. We needed this work to connect to other work our students were doing, to create a focus on where our students were headed in their learning from kindergarten through the fifth grade. An integrated program would tell us how we were going to get there and what benchmarks we needed to meet along the way to meet *all* the national science standards for the elementary years.

As administrators and faculty, we began to ask key questions. We had so many great things going on in the school and we had teachers doing favorite thematic units, but what did that have to do with student achievement? The strong individual units were interesting and fun to the students, but what did they mean? Were they just fun? How were they part of the big picture of what students should learn?

At about this time, district administrators approached us to see if we would like to get involved in a standards-based project to examine student work and ask whether it met the standard. We sprang forward. I asked the teachers if they would be willing to form a cadre of people committed to taking a few risks, to try some things we were not accustomed to doing. I presented my request to the teachers in a spirit of cooperation and adventure. I did not want to force this on them—I wanted them to think it could be interesting and challenging.

Every principal knows that major change does not simply happen because the principal says it should. I believe there were two keys to our school's eventual success in bringing about improved student learning through standards-driven reform.

First, I was able to work with some excellent teachers. Out of a teaching and aide staff of eighteen, a nucleus of five or six were truly excited about standards. We shared the same vision, and they became cheerleaders and coaches, encouraging other teachers as we talked about the possibility of going forward with this effort to look at student work in light of standards. Of the group of seven teachers who eventually worked together on this project, four were veterans. One had taught for 25 years, another for 24, a third for 18, and the fourth for 9 years. This was a group of superior and very experienced teachers, but they had taught one way, the same way, all through their careers. For a few teachers, this project renewed their teaching career. One second-grade teacher was considering retirement because the colleague with whom she team-taught for years had just retired. Then she was offered the chance to become involved in the project, I began feeding her information so she could see its merits, and she is now a strong advocate for the standards movement, spearheading the effort in our school. Her teaching career has been rejuvenated, and not only do I benefit, more importantly, her students benefit.

The second key is that I was visible and knowledgeable. Teachers saw me involved in the academic focus of the school, not simply in administrative issues, and saw that I knew what I was talking about. The teachers at our school had confidence in me because I knew curricula. I was originally a fine arts teacher in middle school and high school and eventually moved into elementary education. Because I had taught for so long, and in more than one field, they knew I understood the issues they faced. I used that background to put forth ideas that excited them, ideas that would help them be more effective and efficient in their jobs.

At the start of our effort to link student work to standards, I began to build among the faculty a clear vision of where we needed to move so our students could receive a consistently high-quality education. Some teachers were beginning to see that we needed to plan in new ways. We needed to work toward meeting state and national standards, which clearly stated what students should know and be able to do.

By this point, about three-quarters of the faculty was supportive of the standards-based work, to one degree or another. The teachers who still needed to be convinced came on board through a mentor teaching system in which one teacher "adopts" another. At each grade level that teacher is responsible for helping maintain the standards. Some teachers still struggle, but with the help of the mentor teachers, all are coming along.

I did need to involuntarily transfer four people out of the building, one of whom had been there 24 years. That was risky, but I felt it was important to set the tone in the building, to make clear the expectations for all of us. The teachers who remained believed in what I was doing, believed it was right for their students, and believed that the old rote, paper, pencil, and workbook business was not enough. The teachers who stayed came to see that what we were doing was cutting edge, and they were excited about it.

To shift our focus to standards, we used a fairly straightforward process. The initial group of seven people met weekly, student work and standards in hand. At first, we only discussed student work, but we soon became bored with that. It wasn't long before we realized that our approach did not make sense, because we wanted, and needed, to engage the students.

All the advice we had heard about implementing standards boiled down to this: Give teachers the standards and benchmarks and they will teach to them. But we decided to take a different tack and shift the focus to the students. Instead of simply looking at student work and seeing how it measured up, we took a step back and rewrote the standards and the benchmarks into what we called "kid talk." For instance, one reading standard says *Students will be able to read and understand a variety of materials.* The second-grade benchmark requires students to *use comprehension skills such as previewing, predicting, inferring, comparing, contrasting, re-reading, and self-monitoring.* In kid talk, the standard might become I can read and understand a variety of materials. That made

sense to our second graders. Once the standards were revised, we simplified the benchmarks and broke them into smaller pieces. One piece for the second graders might be *I can predict and infer in reading my story.*

Students worked alongside faculty in this rewriting process. We would take standards to students and ask, "What do you think that means?" The children would offer an alternative, saying, "We need to write it this way, so we can understand it better." Students also helped develop the rubrics, or scoring guides, for student work based on the standards and benchmarks. Students would begin by writing descriptions of advanced performance, then work their way down into the mid-range and low performance levels.

Eventually, we rewrote all the state standards in kid talk and still preserved the high expectations set by the state. People from around the country came to look at our process and the work we were getting from students as a result, and they were impressed. For instance, second graders working with Venn diagrams could get up in front of their class and state exactly what it meant to be proficient in knowledge and use of the Venn diagrams. The children participated in developing the scoring indicators, delivering the performance assessments, and scoring their fellow students' work. They were fair, but tough! By the time our students reach third grade, they are no longer interested in the bottom portions of the scoring rubrics. They want to know what is the very best work, and what is average. They eliminate any consideration of the lowest level of performance—they have no interest in working at that level. The teachers now are not the only ones setting higher standards.

Besides involving students and rewriting standards in language that was clear to them, two other elements of our efforts to create a standards-driven school are worth mentioning. These two vital and closely linked efforts were (1) the acceptance of many ideas and (2) simple trial and error. Although I am the principal and the instructional leader in our school, I value everybody's opinion. Certainly at times I have had to say, "No, we're not going there." But in general my response to teachers' ideas is to say, "Okay, let's try it that way." Sometimes at the planning table we would recognize that an idea was not working, but we would proceed to talk about it and how it could be adjusted. Occasionally an idea was thrown out after a trial period, but more often than not we would discover that the ideas were rich and useful.

I learned that, as the building leader, my most effective role is that of coach. A principal must be prepared to make decisions and be in charge but must also be willing to let faculty and staff pursue a direction that might initially seem misguided. At Clarence Haaff, we have found that it is better to learn from mistakes than to insist on doing things in a certain way. The role of our mentor teachers was similar to mine; that is, to be coaches. Yet, like me, they talked with the teachers who were not as immersed as we in the standards work, listened respectfully, and consequently gained a rich load of ideas from a previously untapped vein.

Parents at Clarence Haaff Elementary School are wonderfully supportive of our standards-based initiatives. We garnered this support by helping them understand, in concrete terms, exactly what their children gain from learning with a standards-based focus.

We introduce our standards approach to the parents the very first day of school, rather than waiting for the traditional mid-September open house. We want to introduce our expectations right at the start. I discuss standards with the parents and give them a scoring guide for the standards-based lesson the teachers will deliver to them later in the evening. That enables parents to do exactly what their children do when preparing to demonstrate what they have learned. Parents understand before the evening's lesson begins what it means to be advanced or proficient in the new material, and they begin to get a sense of how the children and the teachers score performance. For practice, we send them off to the classrooms, where teachers deliver a lesson and parents assess what they have learned.

That first day of school is the most important day. The principal has the chance to tell all the parents about the standards, to make clear what the expectations are for their children, and to let parents know what kind of work they will see coming home. We follow up this introduction with mini workshops throughout the year (conducted with the students), continuing to use the delivery of standards-based lessons as a way to educate the parents as well as their children. Parents also have copies of the standards to take home with them. As a result of this outreach, the parent community has been absolutely supportive and has come to expect a focus on standards.

A benefit of our focus on providing information for parents is that we can now offer the same clear information on standards to new teachers. We are currently developing materials for parents that show expectations for students in various lessons and point out how lessons address benchmarks. After we rewrote these descriptions in simple, straightforward language for parents, we found that the revised descriptions also aided new teachers. Initially we developed checklists, but we discovered that lists are too abstract, too far removed from what really happens in a standards-based lesson. We are now developing material that includes graphics and role playing to illustrate the links between standards and lessons. Thanks to this training, teachers have learned how to respond to specific situations. For instance, when parents come in and say, "I don't understand this reading standard," teachers can turn to the child's portfolio, pull out a piece of work, and show the parents actual work that meets the standard and other work that is related.

A central idea of the national standards movement is that all children can learn if they are aware of the standard they are expected to meet. This has caused worry among parents of high-achieving children, who fear that "standards everyone should meet" really means "low standards." They are afraid their children will no longer be expected to do as much as before, under a "tracked" system in which content varies from level to level. That fear has not been realized at Clarence Haaff Elementary. Our high-achieving students continue to earn high scores on tests. There has been a change for our lower-achieving students, though. On the state assessment of student progress last year, our students scored in the 80th percentile in reading/language arts. Scores among our minority students soared. The next highest school score in the district was the 64th percentile. The student mobility rate (percentage of students who leave or enter during the school year) at that school is 18%; ours is 41%.

If you are just beginning to shift to standards in your school, assume that the process of change will take at least three years. It would be wonderful if the process took just one year, but the truth is, the first year is devoted mainly to learning. Start that first year with a small group of people deeply committed to standards. Begin, if possible, with one teacher per grade level. Those teachers become your foundation; other teachers can build upon their experience and insight. That core group of teachers is essential to your success, because teachers learn more readily from each other than they do from the principal.

Teachers will be coming into the standard-driven reform at your school at different times in the process, from different points of view, and with different strengths, struggles, hopes, and fears. Therefore, be prepared to work hard on team building. Conflict that arises because one teacher perceives another as doing "too well" (a problem we experienced) is still conflict. Focus on your mentoring system and on listening to all ideas so that everyone who is working toward the standards feels supported and necessary to the work of the school.

If given the chance, would I do anything differently than we did at first? Yes. Our first year was too intense. That was true for me as well as for the teachers. The principal always has to be there, because he or she is an integral part of this process. I took turns teaching, and I attended every meeting. We did not always have substitutes available. As we began our second year of this work, we decided to scale back from meeting weekly to meeting twice a month, after school. We restructured our meeting times to coincide with contractual planning days so we could ensure less disruption to teaching.

For a principal, one of the most pressing problems in undertaking reform of this magnitude is time commitment. We are responsible to central administration, who makes many other demands on our time. We should be first and foremost our schools' instructional leaders, but that will not keep other issues away from our desks. Perhaps it sounds trite, but it is true: Effective leadership of standards-driven reform in our schools can only happen if we make it a priority. We must figure out what is less important and let that go, and spend time and energy where it matters most.

This is hard work. As yet there is no step-by-step how-to manual—perhaps there never will be. In the meantime, read everything you can about standards so you can begin your reform with as much knowledge as possible. Start with a small team of teachers who are strong, smart, flexible, and energetic. Be thoroughly familiar with the standards and benchmarks you plan to use and be prepared to toss out favorite units that do not support accomplishment of the standards. Ask your faculty what it is they want students to know and be able to do. Then turn to your standards and start the long and arduous but wonderfully rewarding work it takes to change a school. As your school changes, you will change. Everybody will claim to be an expert about what works best, but the methods will be somewhat different in every school and every community. Finally, be fully immersed in the process—do not simply dip a toe into the water. Many will believe that "this too shall pass." It will not. Standards work, and are here to stay.

Standards Principles for Principals
In Middle Schools, Everyone Learns

by Robbie White

Robbie White is the assistant principal of Moses Lake Middle School in Moses Lake, Washington. She has taught second grade and junior high school English language arts and reading. She has been involved with assessment at the local, state, and national levels and was part of the group of teachers that helped design the Washington State Assessment of Student Learning for grade seven.

Using standards to raise expectations in our school has required a shared understanding of, and commitment to, clearly articulated educational goals for student knowledge, skill, ability, and performance. To realize specific academic standards for our students, we have relied on the knowledge, commitment, capacity, and encouragement of dedicated educators; the support and understanding of the learning process in our students' homes; the prevailing winds of the larger educational context of our state, determined in part by needs identified by the legislature, our community, and businesses; and—the focus of this piece—administrative leadership.

Moses Lake Middle School's involvement in standards-driven reform is best understood against the backdrop of state reform efforts. As of 1995, 49 states were engaged in developing content standards for student learning, and at least 31 were linking assessment to these standards (CSL Policy Briefs). Washington State's Education Reform Act, which established common learning goals for all Washington students, was established in 1993. As part of a comprehensive effort to establish a system to raise standards and student achievement, the state legislature created the Commission on Student Learning (CSL), and charged it with the following tasks:

- To establish essential academic learning requirements (in other words, standards) that define what all students need to know and be able to do in the areas of reading, writing, communication, mathematics, science, social studies, arts, and health/fitness.
- To develop a performance-based assessment system to measure student progress toward achieving the standards.
- To recommend an accountability system that would recognize and reward schools in which students were achieving the performance standards, and provide support and assistance to those schools in which students were not reaching the standards.

To guide progress toward those ends, four learning goals were articulated:

- **Goal 1:** Read with comprehension, write with skill, and communicate effectively and responsibly in a variety of ways and settings.
- **Goal 2:** Know and apply the core concepts and principles of mathematics; social, physical, and life sciences; civics and history; geography; arts; and health and fitness.
- **Goal 3:** Think analytically, logically, and creatively, and integrate experience and knowledge to form reasoned judgments and solve problems.
- **Goal 4:** Understand the importance of work and how performance, effort, and decisions directly affect career and educational opportunities.

In September 1995, the state commission selected Riverside Publishing to work with teachers in developing a new state assessment system. This assessment system was designed to support performance standards aligned with the essential academic learning requirements, or standards. There are four major components of the system:

- State-level assessments of student performance, based directly on the standards, at grades 4, 7, and 10.
- Guidelines and models for classroom-based evidence of student performance linked to the standards for all grade levels.
- Professional development to assist teachers in aligning their instruction to the standards and in collecting and using assessment information in systematic, reliable, and valid ways. (Assessment networking teams have been established in each Educational Service District, through whom assessment training and materials are rolled out to district assessment teams.)
- A set of system indicators to collect important information other than student assessment scores about school and system effectiveness.

The assessment system will be phased in; full implementation and mandatory school participation are scheduled for the 2000-2001 school year. School participation is voluntary up to that time, but many districts have chosen to administer the state assessments once they had been piloted and put into use. The advantages of this type of participation seem obvious. Early exposure gives

educators more time to align curriculum, practice, and assessment measures to ensure student success. Participation in the pilot phase also fosters teachers' professional growth; it encourages the development of knowledge and skills that will enable teachers to better focus on curriculum content, learning standards, and evidence of student learning and growth.

Two keys to the success of Washington State's current educational reform movements are increased public awareness of, and expectations for, our schools' efforts to improve student learning. This demand for higher levels of accountability for student performance has implications for everyone involved in education. Principals must recognize that their active participation in addressing and achieving these expectations is crucial. Successful implementation of standards-driven education reform is not just the job of teachers or curriculum planners. The type of leadership essential to the success of today's schools and students includes several factors. As I consider the needs of the middle school in which I work, the following have been most important aspects of my role as an administrator.

Participatory Leadership. Principals must be actively involved with the planning, work, and evaluation necessary to implement standards and the curricular, instructional, and assessment goals that flow from them. This means that administrators need to be thoroughly familiar with the standards, and they must encourage this expertise in their teachers. An understanding of how solid instructional and assessment practices are linked to curriculum and academic standards is paramount. This understanding forms a foundation from which principals can effectively support teachers as they work to align curriculum to the standards and evaluate existing systems for teaching students.

Principals must also expand their understanding of assessment. One of the exciting changes in Washington State has been a focus on assessment as a key means of establishing what is, in my estimation, a critical accountability tool for producing educational excellence. Our success in establishing a system through which students will attain higher educational standards will in large measure depend upon our ability to assess student growth on an ongoing basis, gain meaningful information about what they know and can do, and make sensible use of assessment results. This includes using the results to inform curriculum decisions, instructional systems, program design, and other aspects of a school community that encourage and drive student learning.

Principals must take the lead in providing opportunities for staff, students, and parents to understand what quality assessment is and how purposeful assessments support student learning. They must work with teachers to develop and implement methods to accurately determine student progress toward content and performance standards. It is no longer sufficient for a principal to have merely a superficial knowledge of assessment and its significance in teaching and learning. They must model and share a thorough understanding, then encourage it in others.

In a policy brief from the CSL, Rick Stiggens cites the following as essential skills and knowledge principals must have about assessment (CSL Policy Briefs):

1. The principal knows the attributes of sound student assessment and how to apply them to the assessments used in the school building.
2. The principal knows the attributes of a sound assessment system and how to integrate them into an assessment system.
3. The principal knows the issues surrounding unethical and inappropriate use of assessment information and how to protect students and staff from such misuses.
4. The principal knows the importance and features of assessment policies and regulations that contribute to the development and use of sound assessments at all levels.
5. The principal knows the importance of, and can work with staff to set, specific goals for the integration of assessment competencies and can build such evaluations into the supervision process.
6. The principal knows the importance of and can evaluate teachers' classroom assessment competencies and can build such evaluations into the supervision process.
7. The principal knows the importance of, and can plan and present or secure the presentation of, staff development experiences for staff that contribute to the development and use of sound assessment at all levels of decision making.
8. The principal knows the importance of, and how to use, assessment results for instructional improvement at the building level.

9. The principal knows how to accurately analyze and interpret building-level assessment information.
10. The principal acts upon assessment information.
11. The principal knows, and can create the conditions necessary for, the appropriate use of achievement information.
12. The principal can communicate effectively with all interested members of the school community about assessment results and their relationship to instruction.

These principles outline challenging work and describe the heart of a healthy educational system. As indicated above, the principal must have a practical understanding of what assessment results tell us about student learning and growth and of how content, instruction, assessment, and learning are woven throughout the learning process. These responsibilities further underscore the importance of a principal and other administrators working alongside staff, participating in learning, and using new knowledge and skills to promote improved student performance. In schools, everyone learns!

Working with staff members encourages their involvement and effort and allows the principal the opportunity to foster and monitor progress from the intimate view that only a participant can have. Collaboration also adds credibility to the principal's efforts, supports a culture more open to the different voices and perspectives inherent in a school, and affords opportunity to more accurately assess the effectiveness of the school and its individuals as they progress toward commonly agreed-upon goals.

As assistant principal of Moses Lake Middle School, I am committed to supporting my staff as we work *together* to create a learning climate conducive to realizing high academic standards. At our school, the staff has determined areas of focus to which professional growth opportunities are linked. Much of my time as assistant principal is spent working with teams, sometimes in the lead role, sometimes as a facilitator, but most often in a capacity based on shared responsibility. The following situations illustrate how my role has taken shape at Moses Lake:

- **School-wide portfolio meetings**. These are planned and facilitated by me and by our district's curriculum specialist. Subsequent meetings are designed based on building goals and needs identified by those in attendance.

- **District assessment team training sessions**. A district training team, of which I am part, receives training from a district educational service team, then plans and conducts training sessions for individual school teams. As assistant principal, I support and participate with our team as they work with other school staff.
- **Profession development planning team**. A core team, for which I serve as facilitator, addresses the in-service needs of our staff.
- **Design and delivery of in-service sessions**. I have shared responsibility as part of a team that focuses on providing teachers with knowledge, skills, strategies, and tools to help them teach, to help them strengthen students' critical thinking skills, and to better address the reading and literacy need of their students.
- **Attendance and participation at departmental meetings addressing curriculum, instruction, and assessment**.
- **Designed and conducted in-service for middle-level educators regarding student-led conferences (anchored through a child's portfolio)**.
- **Participation in work sessions designed to analyze students' written responses and scoring students' papers**. Student scores are used to gather individual and school-wide information and set a performance baseline against which growth will be gauged.
- **Resource for curriculum, instruction, and assessment information**. I am continually reading, researching, and sharing information regarding specific educational questions and concerns when they arise and contributing to ongoing discussion and development.

Given the multitude of issues with which a principal must deal—from maintenance, to fiscal operations, to supervision, to discipline, to parent concerns, to district meetings, to special programs, and so on—just finding time for hands-on work with curriculum and assessment can be quite challenging. I can say from experience, though, that confronting this type of challenge is not only well worth the effort, but critical to the success of a school, the morale of the teachers, and the professional growth of its administrators.

Inclusive Leadership. "The real difference between success and failure in an organization can very often be traced to how well the culture brings out the great energies and talents of its people" (Sharratt and Schmitz, 1997). A successful

leader helps create a culture that encourages the investment of individual strengths to maintain the health of the whole. A skillful administrator will acknowledge diversity, seek opinion, open processes to active involvement, and support and measure growth in terms of commonly agreed-upon goals. In schools, it behooves us to remember that those "outcomes," those standards, must always be anchored in what is in the best interest of the students and their learning.

It seems almost too obvious a statement, but in the interest of our students, it is necessary to express frequently: A district will benefit greatly by investing in and utilizing the strengths of the individuals within that system. Our school district has been able to tap into the knowledge, experience, and skill of our own teachers to plan, create, and conduct ongoing professional growth opportunities related to academic standards for our students. Staff members are part of the decision-making process—at all levels—when it relates to student learning. In my experience as a teacher and administrator, I have found that when individuals are focused on student interest, they feel encouraged to contribute to decisions. At our school, it is typical to see teachers and administrators working in a collaborative effort to develop, deliver, and assess learning experiences.

As principals work and grow during this very healthy period of change for schools across the nation, we must keep in mind that "...leadership is not what leaders do. Rather, leadership is what leaders and followers do together for the collective mood. No longer does a single leader have all the answers and the power to make substantial changes" (Brungardt). It is only when we work together that we are able to bring about significant changes that address our mutual purposes.

Conflict Management. A degree of ambiguity, fear, and conflict accompanies any transitional period. This is certainly true of this period of educational reform—we are asking educators to analyze, evaluate, and modify many of the practices with which they have grown quite comfortable. Evaluation and growth, though not always comfortable processes, are a part of any healthy system. We must remember this as we analyze what works, and what can work more effectively, in meeting the needs of our students. It is essential during this period that school leaders keep a focus on the student and the educational goals that have been established to strengthen the student's educational experiences.

At no other time during my professional experience has there been such a

shared, positive focus on education and on what everyone must know and be able to do to promote student growth. Teachers, administrators, and parents are analyzing, evaluating, and asking important questions about our existing system, what components we can build upon to enhance student learning, and what changes we need to make to better prepare our children to be active participants in society.

Given our state's legislation regarding assessment and standards, anything educators in Washington State discuss regarding instruction, curriculum, and assessment is done with the understanding that there will be accountability for the growth our students demonstrate relative to the state benchmark test (the Washington Assessment of Student Learning) and through analysis of classroom-based evidence. The ramifications of system and self-analysis will continue to create some discomfort, fear, and uncertainty. It will help to remember that this is a natural reaction, and it should be anticipated and addressed. However, despite the fears they will provoke, these changes will help us better identify and meet the needs of students and can provide specific and appropriate evidence of their growth. This is an exciting—and critical—aspect of any effective educational system. It is what is best for the student, and it is imperative that we keep this in mind.

Jerry Patterson (1993) identifies five values that define and encourage growth of an organization that is purposefully anchored in "a shared commitment to core values." Schools and their leaders have much to glean through consideration of the organizational components he articulates: openness to participation, diversity, conflict, reflection, and openness to mistakes. This last refers to the ability to acknowledge mistakes and apply what we have learned to strengthen the organization and ourselves. What a wonderful learning model for our students!

When turmoil arises, and it certainly will, the importance of reiterating these values and reinforcing commitment to them will aid in addressing immediate problems, seeking their resolution, and maintaining a focus on long-term goals. The reform movement in Washington State has created a means for focusing on goals that educators support, namely, strengthening the knowledge and skills we need to ensure that both educators and students learn and grow.

As we continue to address and put into practice standards-driven education reform, all of us—from principals to teachers to parents—must (1) keep our focus on the goals that guide the reform, (2) encourage everyone to express themselves (even those with opposing views!), (3) make sure the reform process is open to all, and (4) ensure that those involved conduct themselves in a responsible, professional manner. An administrator who has done what he or she promised; who has treated others with respect and dignity; who has been a true participant in, advocate for, and knowledgeable leader of sound educational practice; who has sought out and involved others; who has listened with heart; and who has established an atmosphere of trust will more effectively navigate the invigorating waters of change.

This is an exciting time to be involved with education. Teachers and administrators are focused on meeting the needs of our children. Educators across the nation share common goals and language. We build from quality materials: dedicated professionals; parents who want the best for their children; administrators who encourage the talents, skills, and knowledge of the individuals with whom they work; successful elements of past practice from which we can learn; and a shared commitment to providing a high-quality education for our students.

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by Thomas Welch

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My office desk is piled high. Communications from the state Department of Education are crowded next to letters from students and parents about this issue or that coach, purchase orders to be signed, and letters of recommendation to write. In the midst of everything sits the bright yellow guide introducing our school's standards-based academy model to students and their parents. As I begin to write, it is mid-February, and frankly, considering our usual April and May scramble to register, I am amazed that we are already finished with the scheduling process for most of next year's students. But even that is not the reason this year's accomplishment is so significant. After several years of exploration, discussion, and planning, we are ready to implement a curricular change that will affect every element of our school life. I remember thinking that the change to block scheduling was complex, controversial, and time-consuming. It was just a warm-up exercise.

There is no paucity of materials detailing the virtues and vices of standards; no scarcity of experts ready to praise or reject not just specific standards but the entire notion of holding students responsible for meeting standards of knowledge and skill beyond the expectations set by the classroom teacher. As I stopped in the teachers' workroom this morning, a social studies teacher asked me to take a look at the thick binder in her hands. It contained the distilled blood, sweat, and tears of our teachers' initial efforts to translate the concept of a standards-based approach into a tangible product. For our school, standards are no longer just something to talk or read about.

How did we get to this point, and what was my role as principal in the process of using standards to transform our school? In 1990, Kentucky committed itself to a complete reform of the state's K-12 educational process. Pivotal to that change was a commitment to the idea that all children can learn, and most at high levels, and we were prepared to honor that commitment. The challenge for Kentucky was to define those levels; ours was to devise methods and structures to encourage students' success in learning. What followed our commitment to that challenge was a seemingly endless round of meetings and calling of

committees to try to define not only to which standards each child should be held, but what content a student should be required to know.

My experience as a member of the task force that worked on the national standards for foreign language education helped solidify my thinking about the wisdom of implementing standards that would clearly define what a student should know and be able to do. In addition, I became familiar with the work being done by educators around the country who were grappling with the notions of standards and outcomes, of core content and essential skills. It was the same situation in my local district, as articles and discussions about standards and expectations became part of our common knowledge. Concurrently, our district decided that the time had come to build a second high school. The superintendent issued the challenge that this be conceived as a high school where we could implement reform and help students achieve at high levels. As principal-to-be, I worked with architects and school staff to design a school which would reinforce our commitment to achievement and success.

Another factor that helped convince me of the need for a substantial change in the way we approached schooling was the notion of grades. I had been in the classroom for a decade and a half. I had taught both English and foreign language, and had worked with students at both ends of the "ability spectrum" and every point in between. I had given tests and quizzes, assigned and graded homework until my eyes were bleary, and recorded those final grades for student report cards. The more years went by, the more convinced I became that many grades on report cards were absolutely meaningless. They missed the mark, so to speak. Instead of communicating something significant and understandable about a student's ability or progress, they provided only a relative measure of student performance. There was never any way to tell whether the grade was relative to other students in that particular class; compared with department, school, or district goals; or compared with a textbook publisher's expectations. I was frustrated as a parent, teacher, and later as an administrator because there was absolutely no way to look at the assessments of progress that students received and determine what they knew or could do! It was the status quo for grading and scoring, but the status quo just was not good enough for our students.

From the outset we knew we wanted our school to be one where success was visible and where standards of achievement could be accurately measured and

clearly expressed. One of our biggest concerns was the "line of best fit" between our long-range school and district plans and our vision for a standards-based program. Determining that fit became a major objective of our planning. In some ways this was easy because of our far-reaching focus on boosting student success from every perspective. It was important to us that students see the school as a place where they could learn and be successful across the board. This meant, among other things, closing the gap between extracurricular and curricular facets of school. Everything should involve learning.

As I write now, several months have passed, and we have had the opportunity to see that belief put into action. We suggested to the basketball coach, for instance, that he ask the students in the school to estimate how many miles the team would travel in the season, to plot travel routes on a large map in the lobby, and to keep and use statistics on the team's play. When we brought Coca-Cola representatives into the school to talk about installing vending machines so we could earn money from them, we explained our whole-school focus on learning. Consequently, we now have a partnership with the Coca Cola corporation; our students are working with the corporation's marketing staff to help develop a marketing campaign and are developing videos and PowerPoint presentations for corporate use. The students also will be collecting statistical data on sales to produce analyses from the consumer's and vendor's points of view. Thus, they use their current knowledge to produce something meaningful and gain new knowledge in the process.

East Jessamine High School students had the opportunity to be present for the June 1998 launch of the space shuttle, an opportunity arranged by a phone call from our superintendent. Students on site—in the press box alongside journalists from *Time*, CBS, NBC, and others—participated in the press conference and interviewed the astronauts while others back home coordinated a live broadcast of the interview and launch via the state's compressed video network, Kentucky Tele-Linking Network (KTLN).

Our initial research phase was one factor that helped a great deal in the development of ideas to implement standards. Looking back, I no longer recall where we first heard of the concept of "academies," but it seemed to describe at least some of what we were looking for in our school. Briefly, in this model schools are organized into academies, or areas of concentration students use to focus their studies. The area of concentration for the academy in which a

student is enrolled is used to align all the other elements of the student's education. Internet searches for information on academies, reviews of the literature, and conversations with colleagues in other districts around the country yielded results. An article in *Education Week* about a Baltimore school where an academy model had been instituted seemed to appear at just the right time; we were able to combine a trip to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's annual conference in Baltimore with a visit to the school. While an inner-city school in a large metropolis may have many different characteristics from a small high school in a rural area, the visit afforded us the chance to see one manifestation of the idea in operation.

Using district and school mission statements and state and national standards as a guide, our efforts began to take shape. By this point, we had decided that both the original high school and the new one would be focused around standards and academies. Because we needed a tremendous amount of time to ponder and flesh out the big ideas and the details of such substantive change in two schools, we held several day-long meetings with representatives from each content area, building administrators, parents, our district technology coordinator, and curriculum resource teachers. Even though our building has a comfortable meeting room, we decided to gather off-site in the meeting room of the local public library. This quiet space allowed the two dozen or so individuals involved the chance to focus on new directions instead of responding to ringing telephones and the "emergencies" that seem to be a defining part of our daily routine.

It was exciting to see the idea begin to take shape. We started out looking at some of the popular models for academies, trying to figure out how to make them work in our district. We discussed the relationship between our commitment to a standards-based approach and the structure provided by the focused approach to learning inherent in the academy model. In the models we researched, students were allowed to choose a focus area for their study. This focus led to a student's assignment to a particular "academy"; instruction in each academy was geared toward those particular student interest areas. For example, students in a math and science academy were taught by a team of teachers who could focus instruction and practice on concepts relating to math and science careers and experiences. Students in a health and human services academy were scheduled together to allow for instruction and assessment focused on concepts and careers in those fields.

To our planning team, this seemed to be a very logical approach—that is, allow students to choose broad areas of interest based on career choices. Students could study in their areas of interest during their freshman year. At the same time they would benefit from our continued commitment to a highly successful initiative which divides our freshmen into teams for four core content subjects (math, science, social studies, and language arts) and then allows them to choose an elective where they are in class with the upperclassmen. After students completed their freshman year, we would tailor instruction in the academies to their interest areas and then hold all students accountable to the same high national standards. Students would reach mastery of the standards in different ways, but the same assessments based on national standards would be used for students from all academies.

With approximately 1,750 high school students in the district, we decided that forming four academies would give us the right number of students, so we began there. Subtracting approximately 450 freshmen from that total, we would aim for four academies with about 300 to 325 students each.

Next, we began to discuss possible areas of academic focus for the academies. The new school had been designed with a wonderful auditorium. It seemed only natural that we would host some sort of a fine arts academy. The other school housed an extensive agricultural program, which had won national recognition. It seemed obvious that they would host an "ag" academy. As we debated the merits and locations of a number of other focused academies—math and science, health and human services—the list began to grow.

In the midst of these discussions, though, two difficulties began to emerge. First, splitting the district in half for the two high schools had created a perception problem, which we needed to overcome. At each step in the sometimes painful splitting of the high school, parents in the district expressed the desire for "equality." They wanted to be sure that no matter which school their child attended, there would be equal opportunity for success. A rail line still went through the middle of the district, and no one wanted either of the schools to be perceived as being "on the wrong side of the tracks." Also, we did not want to deny a particular academy focus to half the students in the district. Academies at both schools would have to be the same.

The second problem seemed even more daunting. Each school would have approximately 625 students in grades 10 to 12. We could easily see that it would

be a scheduling nightmare if we expected to divide individual teachers and subject sections by academy. We knew there would be no way to avoid having students from both academies in the same section of many classes, especially at the upper levels. We went back to the drawing board.

What emerged from subsequent meetings and discussions promises to work well. During their freshman year students will study in the four core areas already defined. The majority of time in their advisory period (25 minutes a day) will be spent preparing to choose and enter one of the two academies at each school (finally decided upon as math and science and human services). In their sophomore year, they will focus on preparing to successfully complete assessments leading to a "Certificate of Initial Mastery," or CIM. Accomplishing this will allow them to enter the senior division of the academy, a two-year course of study during which they will combine focused academic study with job-shadowing and mentoring opportunities, some postsecondary study, and preparation of their "capstone" project under the guidance of a project director and a mentor.

Concerns over scheduling were resolved by moving to a scheme that shifts some of the responsibility for focus on an academy interest to the student. Teachers will have students from both academies enrolled in the same classes. Targeted expectations based on national standards will remain the same, but student work to reach those standards will vary according to academy interest area.

Once we believed we had a workable plan for implementing a standards-based approach, we began the challenge of presenting those plans to the school, to our Board of Education, and to the community as a whole. We began a series of meetings with everyone from the school community. The first thing we did was discuss the plan with students so that they could go home and tell parents about it. Then we began a series of meetings with parents. Of course, all meetings of school personnel are open to the public, but it is not always possible to schedule them at a time when parents can attend. For that reason we hosted a series of meetings in the early evening hours and at a variety of sites.

As the principal, what were my expectations for involving parents as partners in the process of shaping our new school? Like many high schools, we struggle continually with parental involvement. It is nearly always the same group of parents, dedicated and committed, who come to school for meetings, volunteer for committees, and demonstrate a willingness to be involved closely with their

children's academic lives. This group is typically a very small one, however, and even when it came to this significant change in curriculum, the story was the same. The announcements to students and the notifications and phone calls to parents yielded a very small percentage willing to be involved. We hope we will see parental involvement increase as our efforts become more focused.

We also worked hard all along the way to make sure that the faculty had a clear understanding of the level of change that was coming and of the role they would be asked to play in bringing that change to pass. The increasing focus over the past few years on preparing students to successfully meet state standards has been a good preparation for the next step—to change and coordinate courses to match national standards.

The information campaign for teachers, students, and parents has evidently been successful. In April, approximately 75 students sat for the initial exam leading to entry into the senior academy. This series of exams in mathematics, language arts, and science is part of a pilot program of the New Standards initiative. As I sat at lunch this spring in the cafeteria with a group of students, they began talking about the upcoming exams and pulled out their study guides. It was obvious they were taking the challenge of the exams seriously, but they were also motivated by the opportunities they saw opening up if they were successful in securing admission to the initially small group of students in the pilot year of the senior academy. When results came back in May, we were delighted to see early evidence of the effectiveness of our standards-based approach: Not only did every student pass the initial battery of exams, but some did extremely well.

I eventually headed back from that lunch conversation to my office, stopping along the way to discuss next year's supply needs with a faculty member. I stopped again to answer a student's questions about cap and gown arrivals and visited with a couple of other students about their parking lot cleanup responsibilities. I finally made it back to my office, glanced at the pile of mail and phone messages, and pulled up to the computer to begin answering the ever-present avalanche of e-mail. As I did so, I glanced again at the bright yellow guide. Our new standards-based curriculum will work.

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