Part I: A Vision of Schooling

Chapter 1 - What is the Mission of Schooling?
Chapter 2 - What Should Curriculum Accomplish?
Chapter 3 - How Should Curriculum be Re-formed?
Chapter 4 - How Should Teaching be Depersonalized?
Chapter 5 - What is the Teacher’s Job When Teaching?
Chapter 6 - What is the Teacher’s Job When Not Teaching?
Chapter 7 - What is the Job of an Academic Leader?
The key to lasting change: intrinsic incentives

- A powerful vision in relation to mission - worthy, rich, valued, specific images of our aim
- Credible, timely, and useful information about how we are doing against our goals - constant feedback
- Owning the gap - acting on the (inevitable) discrepancy between vision and reality

Same logic applies to programs

- What is the ‘mission’ of the math, language arts, science, arts, history, phys ed. Programs?
- How does long-term mission affect short-term planning? How must syllabi, units, and lessons be designed to reflect program mission and shorter-term performance goals?
- What’s the current reality?
- What therefore needs changing?

On the other hand: a “humility axiom”

We must plan to adjust - our initial plan will never adequately predict the complex reality

- Like the coach, we must perfect the art of timely & ongoing adjustments, based on feedback against our long-term core goals (not just short-term results)
From Good to Great, by Jim Collins

“All good-to-great organizations began the process of finding a path to greatness by confronting the brutal facts of their current reality.”

* “When you start with an honest and diligent effort to determine the truth of your situations, the right decisions often become self-evident.
* “A primary task in taking an organization from good to great is to create a culture wherein people have a tremendous opportunity to be heard and, ultimately, for the truth to be heard.”

5 “brutal facts” few schools willingly face

- Few teachers construct valid assessments against state standards, school Mission, or Program Mission
- The textbook is a resource, not the syllabus - but most teachers think they should just march through the book. They thus misunderstand their job, which is to cause learning, not just cover stuff.
- Upper-level teachers lecture far too much and help learners learn how to learn far too little. Their habit of coverage is just that - a bad habit that many teachers rationalize.
- Most teachers will not happily and regularly seek feedback from students and parents, and act on that feedback.
- Local grades are a scandal. There is often no consistency in grades, and grades rarely predict test scores.
Mission & Vision

- **Mission:**
  - what you are in business to accomplish;
  - the long-term goals that, if met, signify success;
  - the purpose of school

- **Vision:**
  - What we would see IF mission were accomplished
  - A real and detailed picture of exemplary performance
“Understanding” is central to the Mission of any school

To “get it” means you can -

- Explain or show why and how (e.g. show your work, say why it works, defend your view, make connections on your own, etc.)
- Apply what you have learned to a new situation (e.g. use it, adapt it, teach it, solve new problems, etc.)

Thoughts on Mission

- “The first job of the leaders in a non-profit institution is to turn the organization’s mission statement into specifics.”
  - Peter Drucker

Thoughts on Mission

- “In the social sectors, the critical question is not ‘How much money do we make per dollar of invested capital?’ but ‘How effectively do we deliver on our mission and make a distinctive impact, relative to our resources?’”
  - Jim Collins, Good to Great
Leadership goal: alignment of practices to mission

4 “brutal facts” about Mission
• Many Mission statements are vapid platitudes, not a statement of purpose (see EX p. 2)
• Mission statements are ignored in day to day schooling - there are no structures and policies to ensure that they are honored
• Few teachers have designed their courses and teaching strategies to deliberately honor long-term goals (e.g. critical thinking)
• Curriculum writing and local assessment ensure that Mission and other long-term goals are ignored and lost.

Clarify the Mission - Exercise
What does Mission imply for day-to-day schooling?
1. Pick an aspect of your Mission, or use one of the examples below:
   • student who are careful and critical thinkers
   • effective problem solvers both in and out of the classroom
   • pro-active and autonomous (hence) life-long learners
   • tolerant of ambiguity and setbacks
2 real TX examples

- The mission of the Galena Park Independent School District is to prepare students to become productive citizens and lifelong learners.
- Kinkaid’s mission is to promote educational excellence, personal responsibility, and balanced growth, and thereby to help its students to discover and develop their talents and to fulfill their best potentials.

How is a school’s Mission like the keel of a sailboat?

- It provides stability when sailing.
- It buffers the effects of strong winds and currents.
- It helps you stay on course.

If this is our -

MISSION

What logically follows for -

- CURRICULUM and ASSESSMENT
- INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS and PRACTICES
- PERSONNEL - HIRING, APPRAISAL, PROF. DEVELOPMENT
- POLICIES, STRUCTURES, GOVERNANCE, RESOURCE ALLOCATION
Clarify the Mission Exercise

*What does Mission imply for day-to-day schooling?*

- See the exercise on page 3 in the Worksheets

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Action Research Questions

- To what extent does our Mission directly influence our planning and actions?
- To what extent do staff, students and parents know our school Mission?
- Where do we most honor Mission in day to day schooling? Why there, and how has Mission been embedded in planning and action?
- Where are we least honoring Mission? Why do we lose our way there or systematically ignore Mission without realizing it?

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Action Research Questions - 2

- To what extent do our Programs and their Goals derive from Mission AND directly influence our lesson planning?
- To what extent do staff, students and parents know our Program Goals?
- Where do we most honor Program Goals in day to day schooling? Why there, and how has Mission been embedded in planning and action?
- Where are we least honoring Program Goals? Why do we lose our way there or systematically ignore Mission without realizing it?
TEKS ELA Program Priorities

English: High school students are expected to plan, draft, and complete written compositions on a regular basis. Students edit their papers for clarity, engaging language, and the correct use of the conventions and mechanics of written English and produce final, error-free drafts. In English I, students practice all forms of writing. An emphasis is placed on organizing logical arguments with clearly expressed related definitions, theses, and evidence. Students write to persuade and to report and describe. English I students read extensively in multiple genres from world literature such as reading selected stories, dramas, novels, and poetry originally written in English or translated to English from oriental, classical Greek, European, African, South American, and North American cultures. Students learn literary forms and terms associated with selections being read. Students interpret the possible influences of the historical context on a literary work.

TEKS Program Goals & Priorities: Social Studies

(3) The eight strands of the essential knowledge and skills for social studies are intended to be integrated for instructional purposes with the history and geography strands establishing a sense of time and a sense of place. Skills listed in the geography and social studies skills strands in subsection (c) of this section should be incorporated into the teaching of all essential knowledge and skills for social studies. A greater depth of understanding of complex content material can be attained when integrated social studies content from the various disciplines and critical-thinking skills are taught together.

(4) Throughout social studies in Kindergarten-Grade 12, students build a foundation in history, geography, economics, government, citizenship, culture, science, technology, and society, and social studies skills. The content, as appropriate for the grade level or course, enables students to understand the importance of patriotism, function in a free enterprise society, and appreciate the basic democratic values of our state and nation.

Social studies skills...The student is expected to:

(A) locate and use primary and secondary sources such as computer software, databases, media and news services, biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about the United States;

(B) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions;

(C) explain and apply different methods that historians use to interpret the past, including the use of primary and secondary sources, points of view, frames of reference, and historical context;

(D) use the process of historical inquiry to research, interpret, and use multiple sources of evidence;

(E) evaluate the validity of a source based on language, corroboration with other sources, and information about the author;

(F) identify bias in written, oral, and visual material...
3 Stages of Backward Design

1. Identify desired results.
2. Determine acceptable evidence.
3. Plan learning experiences & instruction.

Applying Backward Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Leadership Action Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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3 Stages of backward Design applied to leadership

1. Identify desired results related to mission.
2. Determine valid evidence and get feedback.
3. Develop the appropriate action plan.
Typical Error

1. Identify vague goals and platitudes.

2. Take initial actions.


The 3 Stages in Prof. Development

What should staff be able to do well?

What counts as evidence that they can?

So, what learning will help them to get it and do it well?

Appropriately de-personalizing our profession

Agreed-upon Mission and Goals

Agreed-upon Policies/Protocols

Agreed-upon Assessment Evidence

Agreed-upon Criteria and Performance Standards

Agreed-upon Learning Principles
The appropriate depersonalizing of our profession

1. Based on Research
2. Staff Consensus and “sign off”
3. Agreed-upon Learning Principles
4. Guide Educational Decision Making
5. Inform Instruction

LbD Learning Principles

1. The goal of all learning is fluent and flexible transfer - effective use of knowledge and skill.
2. Transfer depends upon understanding the big ideas that connect otherwise-isolated facts, skills, and experiences.
3. An understanding is a learner realization about the power of an idea. Formal learning at its best engineers such understandings by design rather than by good fortune.
4. The capacity to learn greatly depends on learning how to learn and the willingness to learn anew - the development and exercise of disciplined habits of mind.
Learning Principles (continued)

5. Persistent learning requires seeing the value of what we are asked to learn, and being provided with the right blend of challenge and support in learning it.

6. Instruction is most effective when it is personalized — when the learners’ interests, curiosity, strengths, contributions and prior knowledge are regularly honored.

7. Learners need clear priorities, an understanding of how goals are best achieved, and helpful feedback in order to produce quality work.

8. The complexity of learning and the variety of learners require a thoughtful plan based on a rich repertoire of strategies, carefully matched to learning goals.

9. All learning-related work in schools should be peer reviewed against clear, valid, and public standards.

Key: Shared Principles

The mantra must become: “Nothing personal, but that doesn’t fit with our principles”

- The learning principles that follow can be adapted locally as an example
- See our article on this approach in the March 2006 issue of Educational Leadership
So, which ones? And what do they imply?

At your table:
- Using the worksheet on pp. 7-8, identify two learning principles everyone can agree to in your group (edited as needed)
- Consider the implications of each of the 2 principles using the start/more and stop/less columns

Key visioning exercise: What is exemplary design of learning?

- P. 9 Exercises: What was the best-designed learning experience you ever had? Focus on the design (the tasks, goals, methods, sequence, resources used, etc.) - not your interests or the talents/style of the teacher. ‘Best’ here means: it resulted in highly engaged and effective learning.
- What do the best-designed lessons have in common? i.e. Against what criteria should our design work be judged?

Share stories with a neighbor, and generalize: “The best designs....”

Use the structure of this exercise to en-vision

Adapt the exercise to address a local issue of significance
- Examples: Best - teacher, course, assessment, boss, feedback, assignment, etc.
- Follow up the exercise with action research
- The goal: staff commitment to principles that they come up with
- There is no change without such ‘owned’ principles against which to compare current practice (and the inevitable need to change)
How people learn

“Students develop flexible understanding of when, where, why, and how to use their knowledge to solve new problems if they learn how to extract underlying principles and themes from their learning exercises.”

How People Learn, p. 224

Bloom’s “application” = transfer

Taxonomy said it 50 years ago:

- "Application is different from simple comprehension: the student is not prompted to give specific knowledge, nor is the problem old-hat."
- "The tests must involve situations new to the student... Ideally we are seeking a problem which will test the extent to which the individual has learned to apply an abstraction in a practical way."

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3 “brutal facts” about curriculum

- Most teachers have no course syllabus and/or yearly goals. They mistakenly treat the textbook as the syllabus.
- When we “write curriculum” we mistakenly write it as content + activities instead of “backward” from Mission and desired accomplishments.
- In almost every school no one is required to publish a defensible course syllabus in which learning goals (and how they will be achieved) is specified.

2 more unpleasant facts

- Fact: the textbook is a resource, not a syllabus. Teaching the textbook without an independent set of goals and criteria is like teaching the dictionary to develop language fluency.
- Fact: “Covering content” is not the job; causing long-term learning in which content is effectively used is the job.

Implications for curriculum

*Design backward from accomplishments, not content coverage*
- The curriculum must be designed backwards -
  - from the transfer tasks at the heart of Mission, program goals & standards
  - From the big ideas that connect subject matter and permit transfer
- As in coaching, the demands of performance shape the curriculum and the instruction
Backward Design from...!

- NOT “content” but “thoughtful and effective use of content” -- i.e. transfer
- NOT “Knowledge” and “skill” but “Important accomplishments requiring big ideas, knowledge, and skill”

Summary of “best design” characteristics (most common)
- Explicit goals and performance requirements up front
- Models and modeling provided
- The bigger picture - the ‘why!’ - is made clear
- Working back and forth from whole/part
- A genuine challenge frames the work - it stretches you
- Teacher more of a facilitator; immersion in experience
- Work culminates in real or realistic application
- Trial and error, reflection and adjustment are needed & expected, and thus designed into the work
- Constant helpful feedback opportunities, and many chances to adjust in time
- Safe environment for trying out, getting feedback, adjusting: choice, variety, personalization

Establishing Clear Learning Priorities via Ideas & Transfer

- “nice to know”
- Important knowledge & skill
- Important to know & do
- Big ideas & core transfer tasks
- “big ideas” & core transfer tasks at the heart of the subject
Establishing priorities: Language Arts

The difference a big idea makes:

The difference a big idea framed as a Q makes:
Primary Examples of Essential Questions for common topics

- Which method of telling time works best, when? What should you use if the best way isn’t available?
- Who is a true friend? Which community helper is most important, and why?
- What’s the difference between a “good” stranger and a “bad” stranger?
- What happened? What should we do when we don’t agree about what really happened?
- How can we best become able to do things on our own? [i.e. autonomy, self-reliance]
- Which method - counting, adding, estimating - works best, when?
- What’s the pattern? How sure are you?

The difference a big idea framed as a Q makes:

If it is a big idea, then.

The learner must be helped to construct and/or realize the importance of the idea:

- The idea must be explored from different perspectives
- Course work and experiences must reveal the power of the idea (it can’t just be claimed by the teacher or text)

Try the exercise on p. 10
Essential Questions for focusing on big ideas

What questions -
● are important to argue about?
● are at the heart of the subject?
● recur - and should recur?
● raise more questions - provoking and sustaining engaged inquiry?
● must become habits of mind when we face real problems?
● often raise important conceptual or strategic issues in the subject?
● can provide organizing purpose for meaningful & connected learning?

Sample Essential Questions:

● Does a good read differ from a ‘great book’?
● To what extent is geography destiny?
● What is the government’s proper role?
● Have I understood the native speaker? If not, what should I do next?
● How different is a scientific theory from a plausible belief?
● Is that an insightful anomaly or an error in the data?
● How “rational” is the stock market?
● Why write?

Framing a course in World History by Questions:

1. What role has religious belief played in history? When for good and when for ill?
3. Why do some cultures thrive and others barely survive or fail?
4. Who are our global friends and enemies? Why? How and why has the answer changed over time?
5. To what extent is history the account by the “winners”? With what implications?
6. 9/11 - How and why was it predictable or unpredictable, historically speaking? What’s the best timeline for putting it in context?
Science Essential Q’s

- How sure are you? To what degree of precision? What’s the evidence? What can you say and what can’t you say with confidence?
- Is it coincidence or correlation? How do you know?
- What are the strengths and what are the weaknesses of current models (of gravitational force, evolution, diseases, atomic structure, etc.)?
- Where are the puzzles, anomalies, and questionable ideas in current theory? What are the critical findings that support or call into question key theory?
- How well can we understand big things by understanding little things?

* From a recent talk by Nobel physicist D. Gross, on the 25 key questions of physics

Questions for US History:

- Who is an American? Why? Says who?
- Who is telling the story? How true is it that history is the story of the winners? Who gets heard and who doesn’t? Why? How cynical should we be about “official” history?
- Who has the power? Why? How is power gained, legitimized, lost?
- What is a democracy? In what ways are we and aren’t we a “true” democracy? When have we been most or least true to our ideals, why?
- What is the ideal role of our government? When is it too much? too little? Just right? When have we most disagreed? Why do we disagree?
- Who are our heroes and villains? What causes our views to change over time?

Big Ideas -> Questions

- Try to turn your big ideas into essential questions
- Exercises & Examples, pp. 11 - 18
The Questions ARE the core curriculum, not the “content”!

Framing curricula around questions helps clarify priorities for learners and teachers

- Don’t confuse ‘teaching via questions’ with framing a curriculum and assessment system on penetrating and important questions in each field

3 different but interconnected goals

All effective units of study coordinate these three goals:

- Acquisition of knowledge and skill
- Ability to make meaning from challenging/puzzling facts, texts, and situations
- Transfer of prior learning to new situations

Transfer: Geography “Why there?”

Pre-test: give each student a large topographical map of the US, and ask them to identify places where big cities are most likely and least likely to be & say why.
Acquire Information

*Read the relevant textbook sections on the relation between geography and population settlement*

- Quiz on the chapter

EQ: Why do they live *here* and not *there*?

*Further meaning-making inquiry:*

- Why is (a small town like) Austin the capital of Texas?
- What are the capitals of New Jersey, Maryland, and California; and why are they there?
- Further reading in the text on settlement and growth

Transfer Your Learning

- You are a geographer hired to make predictions about population trends over the next 50 years, based on current maps, climate and trade data. Based on your understanding of the link between geography, settlement, migration, trade, and transportation, advise the planning agencies of the government on what they can expect.

*Students are presented with topographical maps*

- Can involve current maps, maps from colonial times, ancient river civilizations that they have not yet studied, etc.
Math unit: “What is Fair? Can math help?”

Intro problem: Four 7th-grade classes had a race of all the students. Devise as many ways as you can to determine a fair ranking of the 4 classes, given the individual runner results in the table. Summarize the 2-3 top ways you think would be most fair, and be prepared to discuss your answers.

Individual ranking of runners in a race by all 7th-grade classes

Other question-framing activities/discussions

- What do we mean when we say that the rules of a game of chance are “not fair”? What role does math play in our judgment?
- Why is it fair to have one person cut the cake and the other person to choose the piece?
- When is straight majority voting “fair” and when is it “not fair”?
- When is it “fair” to consider an “average” in ranking performance (e.g. salaries, home prices, batting average) and when is it “unfair”?

The content is learned on the way, as a means

- What mathematical tools are well suited to judging fairness?
  - Measures of central tendency:
    - Mean
    - Median
    - Mode
  - Standard Deviation (range/variance)
  - Quizzes to check for skill development

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Final task in the unit on mean/median/mode

So, what is a fair grade?

- Based on our study in this unit of various measures of central tendency, and the pros and cons of using “averages” (and other such measures) in various situations, Propose and defend a “fair” grading system for use in this school. How should everyone’s grade in classes be calculated? Why is your system more fair than the current system (or: why is the current system most fair?)

- Require a final reflection on the unit, based on the essential question for the unit

Compare & Contrast, then Generalize: What follows?

Geography and math unit

Typical units

In general, units designed for transfer...

Goal: Understanding.
Problem: frequently Absent

- In even our best students and their work, we see frequent -
  - focus on unimportant details
  - misunderstanding
  - rigid knowledge, no transfer

Sound familiar?
Commonly-cited learner deficits by educators

- Inability to analyze/interpret texts and events; students end up just retelling
- Inability to see how today’s problem in math requires the same skills we have been working on, though the content or wording of the problem is different
- Inability to use the new foreign language in a simulated situation that calls for what was just taught
- Failure to use the writing process if not prompted to do so

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MCAS (MASS) test item: 10th-grade English reading item

A fellow fourth grader broke the news to me after she saw my effort on a class assignment involving scissors and construction paper. “You cut out a purple bluebird,” she said. There was no reproach in her voice, just a certain puzzlement. Her observation opened my eyes— not that my eyes particularly help—to the fact that I am colorblind. In the 36 years since, I’ve been trying to understand what that means. I’m still not sure I do…

Unlike left-handers, however, we seem disinclined to rally round our deviation from the norm. Thus there’s no ready source of information about how many presidents, or military heroes, or rock singers have been colorblind. Based on the law of averages, though, there must have been some. We are everywhere, trying to cope, trying to blend in. Usually we succeed. Until someone spots our purple bluebirds. Then the jig is up.

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The most wrong item on the state test: 71% incorrect!

- This selection is best described as
- A. a biography.
- B. a scientific article.
- C. an essay.
- D. an investigative report.

Many students said it could not be an essay because “it was funny” and because “it had more than 5 paragraphs.”
State test Qs require transfer

To get from his high school to his home, Jamal travels 5.0 miles east and then 4.0 miles north. When Sheila goes to her home from the same high school, she travels 8.0 miles east and 2.0 miles south. What is the measure of the shortest distance, to the nearest tenth of a mile, between Jamal’s home and Sheila’s home?

Transfer tasks: different types

- Construct a valid story from varied (incomplete & conflicting) primary & secondary sources
- Find a pattern/relation/function in messy data, with outliers and “error”
- Read and make meaning, on your own, of an ironic/allegorical/puzzling text - “The Lottery”, “A Modest Proposal,” etc.
- Communicate successfully in challenging situations, with native speakers who speak quickly and with accents

Try the exercise on p. 22

It only assesses transfer if...

- The student must draw from a repertoire for a complex task
- The teacher gives minimal cues, prompts, graphic organizers
- The learner has to be mindful of a particular context - this setting, audience, purpose, etc.
Transfer Example: Math

- “Hoops” McGinty wants to donate millions of dollars from his salary and sports-drink earnings toward a special exhibit in the Rose Planetarium area of the Museum of Natural History. Hoops wants there to be a 3-D scale model of our planetary system. There is a catch, however. The size of the planets and the distance of each planet from the sun must be exactly to scale - where the sun is represented by a regulation NBA basketball. The nervous folks in the gifts department of the Museum call you up to their office because of your expertise in astronomy.
- What will you advise them about the feasibility of the plan? What approach toward a scale model will work best to ensure a basketball-related design?

Mission-based Curriculum

Note on the Humility Axiom, applied to Curriculum

A results-focused curriculum must include:
- Valid formative assessments of course goals - pre, during, post
- Unplanned days in the syllabus built in for acting on the results of formative assessment (don’t overplan!)
- A troubleshooting guide, when things don’t work out as planned
Can this work in Texas, given our standards?

Sure, as long as you do the work of grouping and prioritizing standards around big ideas and transfer tasks

- Check out the social studies instructional resources: they are based on our work
  - http://www.tea.state.tx.us/ssc/ubd.html

ELA Standard

10. Reading/literary response. The student expresses and supports responses to various types of texts. The student is expected to:

- (A) respond to informational and aesthetic elements in texts such as discussions, journals, oral interpretations, and dramatizations;
- (B) use elements of text to defend his/her own responses and interpretations; and
- (C) compare reviews of literature, film, and performance with his/her own responses.

Sample Eqs & implied transfer task of a critique

- Is the book worth reading?
- Is the movie worth seeing?
- Which version is most true to the text?
- For which audience is this intended, with what desired impact? Did it work?
- What’s the difference, if any, between a “good read” and a great book?
Algebra

Foundations for functions:
(1) The student *understands* that a function represents a dependence of one quantity on another and can be described in a variety of ways.
(3) The student *understands* there are situations modeled by functions that are neither linear nor quadratic and models the situations.

Sample EQs

- What’s the pattern? How confident am I, and have I factored in error and anomalies?
- What function does this remind me of?
- If that’s the pattern, what does it suggest about the nature of the relationship?

Then: a transfer task

- You are a researcher at the Center for Disease Control, and you need to project the likely course of an outbreak of influenza for the year, so that flu vaccines can be developed. Given the initial data, what’s the likely number of cases?
  - [The data starts by looking linear, with outliers]
- Now what’s going on? How should your model be altered, if at all?
  - [In Part II, the data plateaus and goes down, as most flu data do. They will have to explain the pattern and correct their model accordingly]
OK, your turn: what is implied for instruction & assessment?

- 11. Reading/literary concepts. The student analyzes literary elements for their contributions to meaning in literary texts. The student is expected to:
  - (A) recognize the theme (general observation about life or human nature) within a text;
  - (B) analyze the relevance of setting and time frame to text’s meaning;
  - (C) analyze characters and identify time and point of view...

OK, your turn: what is implied for instruction & assessment?

- ELEM Math (1.7) Measurement. The student uses nonstandard units to describe length, weight, and capacity.
- MS Math (7.1) Number, operation, and quantitative reasoning. The student represents and uses numbers in a variety of equivalent forms.
- (7.8) Geometry and spatial reasoning. The student uses geometry to model and describe the physical world.

4 “brutal facts” about local assessment

- Local assessment typically overemphasizes low-level recall and ‘plug and chug’
- Many assessments are invalid measures of local goals and state Standards
- Little attempt is made to ensure fairness and consistency in teacher testing
Research into Local Assessment Practices*

Year 1 - Collected all assessments given during a seven week period from December - January, 2000-2001 (640 total assessments).
• A random sample (20% or 142) of these were analyzed.

* Jacques Gibble - Donegal School District, PA

Analysis Process

• % of assessment formats (e.g., selected-response, essay, performance tasks, etc.)
• % of assessment at various cognitive levels (Bloom’s Taxonomy)
• number and quality of assessments requiring writing and/or problem solving
• number and quality of rubrics

Findings...

1. Testing the lower-levels of cognition (knowledge and comprehension levels on Bloom’s Taxonomy) predominated at all levels. (75.5%)

2. Traditional selected-response formats of multiple choice, true and false, matching, dominated all other types. (80%)
Findings continued...

3. Short answer writing (one or two sentences) was never scored using a rubric. (0%)

4. Essay formats were very rarely used (5%) and when used were rarely scored with a rubric. (2%)

5. Rubrics that were available were poorly crafted with checklist-formats sometimes (33%) being represented as rubrics.

Findings continued...

6. Mathematics assessments at all levels involved only comprehension types of problem solving (i.e., algorithmic “plug-in”), rather than authentic, real-world applications. Students were rarely called upon to write to justify or explain their process or the appropriateness of the answer to the problem posed. (4%)

Findings continued...

7. Performance assessments, where they existed, consisted mostly of products to be graded by a score sheet. Rubrics rarely existed for such assessments. (4%)

8. Essay writing at the elementary level was non-existent (in the samples). (0%)
Impact of this Research

Year 2 - After results shared and discussed:

- District offered focused staff development on improving classroom assessment practice.
- Data show significant improvement in variety and quality of assessments during the next 2 years.

Pondering Action

- Think big.
- Start small.
- Go for an “early win in Iowa.”

Anticipating Concerns

“Yes, but...”

But we have to prepare for the state test.

We already do this.

This too shall pass!

We have too much content to cover.

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“How Schools Sustain Success”

- Summarizes a study comparing 83 low-performing CA schools showing sustained achievement gains over 2 consecutive years with 273 similar school showing only one-year gain.
- Schools that showed sustained gains took specific actions in 4 key areas:

Teacher Leadership
“How Schools Sustain Success,” Educational Leadership, Feb. 2005

Teachers met regularly in grade/dept. to:
- collaboratively develop lessons/units
- review student work
- conduct informal action research
- share successful strategies
- recommend professional development based on “results” and needs

Principal Leadership
“How Schools Sustain Success,” Educational Leadership, Feb. 2005

The principals:
- created time for teacher collaboration
- provided info. on successful programs, practices, staff develop.
- made frequent classroom visits
- regularly reviewed achievement data with staff & made needed changes based on data
**District Leadership**

"How Schools Sustain Success," Educational Leadership, Feb. 2005

The school district:
- provided benchmark assessments for tracking student progress
- presented disaggregated achievement data to schools
- focused professional development on pedagogy
- conducted cohort principal meetings

**Programs and Practices**

"How Schools Sustain Success," Educational Leadership, Feb. 2005

Schools and the district had:
- a coherent curricular framework
- a clear focus on, and commitment to, improving achievement
- targeted instructional support (including personal intervention and pullout programs) for ESL and other struggling students

"May I be excused? My brain is full."
for further information

Contact me:

- email: grant@authenticeducation.org
- Book: Schooling by Design [summer 2007] and Understanding by Design (2005), both co-authored with Jay McTighe
- Related Resources: http://www.bigideas.org