Poverty Series—Part IV

Campuswide Interventions That Improve Student Achievement

by Ruby K. Payne, Ph.D.

Conversation between a principal new to the building and a supervisor:

> **Supervisor:** "That campus cannot be low-performing again. I do not have any extra money to give you. With the Title I money you have at your campus, your school will need to find a way to raise your achievement significantly."
>
> **Principal (to herself as she walks to the car):** "And just how would that happen? I have 1,100 students of whom 80% are low-income, 12 new teachers, and a mobility rate of 40 percent. I know it can be done, but in a year?"

Many of our models for staff and curriculum development do not address realities pressuring schools today. Some of these realities are:

- The critical mass needed to impact student achievement. Example: 90% of teachers are doing a particular intervention or strategy versus 10% not doing it.
- The growing knowledge base required of teachers and administrators. Example: Educators are to know about sexual harassment, inclusion, cooperative learning, reading strategies, ADHD, modifications, gifted/talented strategies, legal guidelines, ESL strategies, etc.
- The time frames in which student achievement is to occur and be measured. Example: State and norm referenced tests are designed for annual measures of learning.
- The accountability criteria that schools must meet.
- The lack of money and time for extensive training for teachers. Example: Most districts and campuses have five days or less allocated for staff development, which limits the length and/or depth of the training.
- The increased numbers of students who come from poverty and/or who lack support systems at home. The increased numbers of students with emotional and mental health issues. Example: Educated parents, when the school system does not address their children's needs, tend to provide assistance, pay for a tutor, or request a teacher. In poverty, the student only gets interventions through school.
- The increased number of new teachers spurred by the exodus of teachers from teaching.

Processes and models are available to address these needs, but to put these in place, an additional model for staff development and curriculum development must be used. This model basically trades in-depth learning for critical mass by using a simpler approach. Fullan talks about the importance of critical mass as well as the main criteria teachers use to determine how "user-friendly" the curriculum and training are, i.e., how operational they are (Fullan, 1991; Fullan, 1996).

In these models, which I have used for several years, the amount of time spent in training is decreased, the model is less complex and totally operational, and 100% of the staff is trained. We still need reflective staff development; we just need an additional model to help address some of the issues above.

Figure A outlines some of the basic differences.

What does this information mean in practice? With simpler models that are operational and involve 100% of the staff, the roller-coaster ride that students take through school can be significantly lessened. One of the reasons that middle class students do better in school is that their parents intervene to lessen the impact of the roller coaster. (These parents do so by paying for tutoring, requesting teachers, and providing assistance and instruction at home.)

As you can see in Figure B, the X represents Johnny and his journey through five years of school. In first grade, he had a wonderful teacher who willingly went to every kind of training available. Johnny had a great year and made the expected progress.

Figure A

Definition	**Reflective staff development** A process by which a person examines in-depth his learning on a given subject	**Operational staff development** A method for immediate implementation across the system to address accountability and student achievement
Purpose	To build in-depth learning and change	To impact the system quickly; to build in connections/linkages across the system
Effects of critical mass	Depends on amount of resources and level of attrition; takes at least four to five years	Affects critical mass almost immediately; can have 80% to 90% implementation the first year
Time required	Four to five days per person for initial training	Two hours to one day of training per person
Breadth	Limited	Systemic
Cost analysis	High per-person cost	Low per-person cost
District role	May be contacted or may use district expertise to deliver and provide follow-up	Identifies which campus systems need to be addressed; works with campuses to reach critical mass; assists with the operational development of innovation
Follow-up	Provided in small groups or by expert trainer	Provided through accountability measures and the fine-tuning from discussions to make innovation more user-friendly
Role of principal	In liaison with training; may provide resources and follow-up opportunities	Assists with the delivery of training; provides the insistence, support, and accountability for innovation

Figure B

Johnny's progress	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Grade 1	X				
Grade 2	X				
Grade 3		X			
Grade 4		X			
Grade 5			X		

In second grade, his teacher was having many health problems and missed quite a few days of school. In addition, Johnny's parents divorced so he was shuttled between homes. In the second grade, Johnny actually regressed.

In the third grade, he had a beginning teacher. She loved the students but did not have the experience or the guidelines to provide the instruction that the other third-grade teacher did. Most of the educated parents had asked for the other teacher because of her excellent reputation. Johnny made progress.

In the fourth grade, Johnny had a teacher who did not participate in staff development. As far as she was concerned, it was a waste of time.

Her students tended to do poorly on the state test, but her husband was on the school board. Once again, given her reputation, the educated parents had requested that their children be placed in the other fourth-grade classroom.

In the fifth grade, it was determined that Johnny was now two and a half grade levels behind and should repeat the grade. That caused him to be separated from his peers, which, in the research, students often view as emotionally devastating as a death.

How can we address this problem? With systemic interventions that can impact achievement through simple yet effective tools and processes.

Benjamin Bloom (1976) did extensive research to determine what makes a difference in learning. He identified four factors: 1) the amount of time to learn, 2) the intervention(s) of the teacher, 3) how clear the focus of the instruction is, and 4) what the student came in knowing. As is readily apparent, the control the individual teacher has over these variables is significantly impacted by what is happening at the campus.

When these interventions are addressed at a campus level in a systematic way, more learning occurs.

Systemic interventions that can impact achievement are:

1. **Reasonable expectations.** This is a simpler model of curriculum mapping that addresses the focus of instruction and the amount of time.

2. **Growth assessments.** These are methods for identifying and assessing the growth a student makes on a regular basis.

3. **Benchmarks.** This is a simpler model of three to four indicators by grading period to show whether a student needs an immediate intervention. It is absolutely crucial for first-grade reading. Honig (1995) states that a first-grader who is not in the primer by April of the first-grade year generally does not progress beyond the third-grade reading level.

4. **Interventions for the student.** When students are identified through the growth assessments and benchmarks as making inadequate growth, immediate interventions are provided for the student, one of which is allowing more time during the school day.

What follows is a description and example for each of the above. It is important to note that all of these are working documents of one or two pages so that they can constantly be reassessed. It is analogous to having a road map: all of the details are not present. However, the lay of the land, the choices of the route, and the final destination are clear.

Reasonable Expectations

Reasonable expectations identify what is taught and the amount of time devoted to it. This allows a campus to "data mine," i.e., determine the payoff between what actually gets taught, the amount of time given to it, and the corresponding test results.

For example, if two hours a day are spent on reading but only 15 minutes is devoted to students actually reading, the payoff will be less than 45 minutes of that time being devoted to students actually reading.

Figure C is the process used. For each subject area, it requires about 30 to 60 minutes of individual time, one to two hours of grade-level time, and three hours of total faculty time.

Figure D is an example from Runyan Elementary in Conroe, Texas. The principal is Nancy Harris.

There are any number of growth assessments available. What makes something a growth assessment is that it identifies movement against a constant set of criteria. What makes a growth assessment different from a test is that the criteria do not change in a growth assessment. Rubrics are one way to measure and identify growth.

Figure C

Simple Yet Effective Tools and Processes

One of the first pieces of information that a principal and campus need to know is what is actually being taught. Here's a simple process to help find this out.

1. If you are on a six-week grading period, divide a paper into six equal pieces. If you are on a nine-week grading period, divide a paper into four equal pieces. Have each teacher for each subject area write the units or skills that they teach in each grading period. In other words, what do they usually manage to teach to that grade level in that subject area in that amount of time?
2. Have each grade level meet and discuss one subject area at a time. Do all the teachers at a grade level basically have the same expectations for that grade level in terms of content and skills? Have they come to a consensus about the expectation for that grade level?
3. Have the faculty as a group compare the grade levels one through five or six through eight or nine through 12. If Johnny was with the school for five years, what would he have the opportunity to learn? What would he not have had the opportunity to learn? Where are the holes in the opportunities to learn?
4. The faculty then uses this information to identify the strengths and weaknesses in the current educational program. Are some things repeated without benefit to achievement? Are some things not ever taught or so lightly brushed to not be of benefit? What is included that could be traded out for something that has a higher payoff in achievement?
5. When the discussion is over, the one-page sheets are revised and given to the appropriate teachers.
6. Twice a year, the principal meets with grade-level teams, and using these sheets, discusses the progress of the learning, adjustments that need to be made, etc. These become working documents, and because of their simplicity, they can be easily revised.

Figure E is an example of a reading rubric to measure student growth. It was developed by Sandra Duree, Karen Coffey, and me in conjunction with the teachers of Goose Creek ISD. *Becoming a Nation of Readers* identified characteristics of skilled readers, so those characteristics were used to measure growth as a constant over five years. We identified what growth would look like over five years if a student were progressing as a skilled reader.

To develop a growth assessment, a very simple process can be used. Have the teachers in your building (who consistently get the highest achievement and understand the district curriculum and TAAS specs) develop the growth

Figure D

Second-Grade Language Arts Curriculum (70% fiction, 30% nonfiction)		
First six weeks **Reading–60 minutes** Drop Everything and Read (DEAR)–10 minutes Teacher reading to students Reading workshop–50 minutes **Spelling–15 minutes (60 words total)** 10 words per week **Writing**–45 minutes Personal narrative two to three sentences same subject Daily Oral Language (DOL)–15 minutes Writing workshop–30 minutes **Vocabulary (integrated)–5 words per week** **Skills–20 minutes** Choosing a just right book Characters Predicting Distinguishing between fiction and nonfiction	**Second six weeks** **Reading–60 minutes** DEAR–10 minutes Teacher reading to students Reading workshop–50 minutes **Spelling–15 minutes (60 words total)** 10 words per week **Writing–45 minutes** Six to seven lines on same subject for how-to DOL–15 minutes Writing workshop–30 minutes **Vocabulary (integrated)–5 words per week** **Skills–20 minutes** Setting Beginning, middle, end of story Parts of speech; noun, verb Sequential order Comprehension Compound words Contractions	**Third six weeks** **Spelling–15 minutes (60 words total)** 10 words per week **Writing–45 minutes** Five to seven steps in paragraph, sequential for how-to DOL–15 minutes Writing workshop–30 minutes **Vocabulary (integrated)–5 words per week** **Skills–20 minutes** Main idea Prefix, suffix Context clues Synonyms, antonyms, homophones, homonym Comprehension Compound words Contractions
Fourth six weeks **Reading–60 minutes** DEAR–15 minutes Teacher reading to students Reading workshop–45 minutes **Spelling–15 minutes (60 words total)** 10 words per week Alphabetical order to second letter **Writing–45 minutes** How-to five to seven steps in paragraph form DOL–15 minutes TAAS form Writing workshop–30 minutes **Vocabulary (integrated)–5 words per week** **Skills–20 minutes** Quotes Draw conclusions Main inferences Adjectives/adverbs Comprehension Possessives Compound words Contractions	**Fifth six weeks** **Reading–60 minutes** DEAR–15 minutes Teacher reading to students Reading workshop–45 minutes **Spelling–15 minutes (60 words total)** 10 words per week Alphabetical order to third letter Writing–45 minutes Descriptive writing–7 sentences Compare/contrast DOL–15 minutes TAAS form Writing workshop–30 minutes **Vocabulary (integrated)–5 words per week** **Skills–20 minutes** Main idea distinguished from details Fact/opinion Cause/effect Comprehension Possessives Compound words Contractions	**Sixth six weeks** **Reading–60 minutes** DEAR–15 minutes Teacher reading to students Reading workshop–45 minutes **Spelling–15 minutes (60 words total)** 10 words per week Alphabetical order to third letter **Writing–45 minutes** Summary Compare/contrast DOL–15 minutes TAAS form Writing workshop–30 minutes **Vocabulary (integrated)–5 words per week** **Skills–20 minutes** Recognize propaganda and point of view Comprehension Possessives Compound words Contractions

assessment. Keep in mind these guidelines: 1) the purpose is to identify the desired level of achievement, 2) the growth assessment needs to be simple and easily understood, and 3) student movement or growth toward the desired level of achievement needs to be clear.

These are the steps to creating a growth assessment:

1. Identify three to five criteria.
2. Set up a grid with numerical values (one through four is usually enough).
3. Identify what would be an excellent piece of work or demonstration. That becomes number four.
4. Work backwards. Next, identify what would be a three, and so on.

"Systemic interventions can identify areas where more time needs to be devoted and can address the effectiveness of both the whole and the component parts of the curriculum."

When the growth assessment is developed, it needs to go back to the faculty for feedback and refinement. When there is substantial agreement and 80% buy-in, the faculty needs to move forward with it.

Benchmarks

Figure F is one example. As you can see from the example, benchmarks are very simple. They identify the critical attributes that students must acquire each six weeks if they are to progress. If the student has not demonstrated these benchmarks, then immediate additional interventions must begin.

How does one get benchmarks? Once again, identify the experienced educators who always have high student achievement. Ask them how they know a student will have trouble. They already know the criteria. And by putting it in writing and having a common understanding, teachers, particularly those who are new to teaching or who are not as experienced, can more readily make interventions and address student progress. It then needs to go back to the grade level for their feedback and changes.

Interventions for Students

The issue here is that the intervention be timely and occur at a classroom and campus level (see Figure G). One other point is simply that, for optimal learning, the student needs to stay with the regular instruction, as much as possible, to have the opportunity to learn what the other students are learning. Additional time for learning must be found (for example, using social studies time to teach nonfiction reading).

What these systemic interventions allow a campus to do is to address the four variables in learning: 1) the amount of time to learn, 2) the intervention(s) of the teacher, 3) how clear the focus of the instruction is, and 4) what the student came in knowing.

It allows the faculty to address the amount of time, the interventions, the clarity of the instructional focus, and what the student had the opportunity to come in knowing. Right now, because of the depth and breadth of most curriculum guides, it is difficult to know that the students actually had the opportunity to learn. By having these systemic items in place, the faculty discussion can truly be data-driven; it allows the faculty to talk about student achievement in relationship to the total curriculum.

Figure E

Reading Rubric Grade 1

Student name:_____ School year: _____

Campus: _____ Grade: _____

	Beginning	Developing	Capable	Expert
Fluency	Decodes words haltingly	Decodes sentences haltingly	Knows vowel teams (ea, ee, oa, etc.)	Decodes polysyllabic words
	Misses key sounds	Knows conditions for long vowels	Identifies common spelling patterns	Decodes words in context of paragraphs
	Identifies most letter sounds	Identifies blends and consonants	Uses word attack skills to identify new words in the sections	Decodes words accurately and automatically
	Identifies short vowels	Decodes diagraphs and "r" control vowels (or, ar, er, etc.)	Reads sentences in a meaningful sequence	Reads paragraphs in a meaningful sequence
	Says/recognizes individual words	Reads at rate that doesn't interfere with meaning	Reads with expression	Reads with expression, fluency, appropriate tone, and pronunciation
Constructive	Predictions are incomplete, partial, and unrelated	Predicts what might happen next	Predicts story based upon pictures and other clues	Can predict possible endings to story with some accuracy
	Predictions indicate no or inappropriate prior knowledge	Makes minimal links to personal experience/ prior knowledge	Relates story to personal experience/ prior knowledge	Can compare/contrast story with personal experience
Motivated	Does not read independently	Reads when parent or teacher requests	Reads for a specific purpose	Initiates reading on own
	Concentrates on decoding	Eager to use the acquired skills (words and phrases)	Uses new skills frequently in self-selected reading	Reads for pleasure
Strategic	Does not self-correct	Recognizes mistakes but has difficulty in self-correcting	Has strategies for self-correction (reread, read ahead, ask a question, etc.)	Analyzes self-correction strategies for the best strategy
	Uncertain as to how parts of a story fit together	Can identify characters and setting in a story	Can identify characters, setting, and events of a story	Can talk about story in terms of problem and/ or goal
Process	Cannot tell what has been read	Does not sort important from unimportant	What is important and unimportant can be determined with assistance	Organizes reading by sorting important from unimportant

Figure G

Campus Interventions	Classroom Interventions (Just a few of many possible)
▪ Curriculum linkages across and within grade levels	▪ Goal-setting/controlling impulsivity activities
▪ Assess time allocation by subject, by activity, and by student	▪ Teaching procedures
▪ Staff agreement on common language and processes for problem solving, etc.	▪ Having students write multiple -choice questions
▪ Identify reasonable expectations and benchmarks	▪ Using music to put learning into long-term memory
▪ Work with master schedule to identify additional time blocks for interventions	▪ Increasing the amount of time the student actually reads and writes
	▪ Activities that use figural, kinesthetic, and symbolic approaches to learning

This is the process I used as a principal. Our math scores made significant improvement within two years. I have used it at the secondary level in language arts with excellent results as well.

These simple models and processes give us the tools to talk about what we are doing and to minimize the roller-coaster ride for students.

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Figure F

Benchmarks for Fourth-Grade Language Arts

If a student cannot do the following, then immediate interventions need to be used.

First six weeks

- Edit fragments and run-ons in own writing
- Identify and define figurative and literal meaning
- Write an elaborated, organized descriptive paper
- Be able to choose just-right books

Second six weeks

- Identify story structure orally and in written form
- Write an organized, elaborated expressive narrative
- Identify correct subject/verb agreement, and use in everyday writing

Third six weeks

- Read a passage and use context clues to decode unknown words
- Read a passage and recall facts and details orally and in writing
- Read a story or paragraph and sequence major events
- Write an organized, elaborated how-to

Fourth six weeks

- Read a passage and identify main idea, orally and in written summary
- Read a passage and paraphrase orally and in writing
- Write an organized, elaborated classificatory paper
- Read a passage and identify the best summary
- Write a three- to four-sentence paragraph

Fifth six weeks

- Use graphic sources to answer questions
- Read passage and predict outcomes and draw conclusions
- Distinguish between fact and non-fact, between stated and non-stated opinion
- After reading a passage, be able to tell cause of an event or effect of an action
- Write an organized, elaborative, persuasive paper

Sixth six weeks

- Write an assessment of chosen portfolio pieces
- Assemble/share a reading and writing portfolio

The discussion can focus on program strengths and weaknesses. It can identify areas where more time needs to be devoted and can address the effectiveness of both the whole and the component parts of the curriculum. It allows a faculty to determine staff development that will address student needs, and it provides one more tool for analyzing TAAS data.

Currently, many campuses address the best objective they were low in the year before, only to fall in other objectives the next year. The strategies described in this document allow a new teacher to have a much better sense of expectations. Parents have a much better sense of the learning opportunities students will have.

The aforementioned approaches provide a tool for principals to dialogue with teachers about learning. But more importantly, they allow the campus to identify before the damage is great the students who are not making sufficient progress and to make that intervention immediately, as opposed to one or two years down the road.