

EDUCATION REPORT

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How one district overhauled its academic plan

'We needed to do a better job educating our students'

By Mr. Rick Seebeck, Tue., May 20, 2008

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Gladwin Community Schools has traditionally had very high achievement scores, but we realized in the past few years that we had lost our focus – and it showed. Student achievement had slipped to unacceptable levels. Quite frankly, we needed to do a better job educating our students.

After considering several short-term, “quick fix” options, we decided that we needed a system-wide culture change to be more focused on achievement. In this column I would like to describe the revolutionary process we implemented to do just that. Called QUESTions, the process is built on accountability at all levels.

QUESTions is a K-12 initiative designed to facilitate systemic change in the way we educate our children. The process is an extension of the work on professional learning communities by Richard Dufour, and focuses on answering what have become our five curriculum Questions:

- What do we teach? – First and foremost our curriculum must be aligned with state standards. Teachers must be given the time and guidance to become intimately aware of the content expectations.
- When do we teach it? Through the development of pacing guides, our teachers have articulated a focused plan of instruction that will ensure that all objectives are taught at the appropriate grade level.
- How will we know if the students have learned? – Each core content area at each grade level administers a common quarterly assessment. These assessments test the specific content expectations outlined in the pacing guides. The tests are scored at the district level and data is returned to the teachers and administrators within one week of the test date.
- How do we teach? – As our benchmark assessments identify weaknesses in our instructional methods, we have responded with direct and focused professional development.
- What will we do with those students who have not learned? – Following the pyramid of intervention model, teachers and administrators are working collaboratively to institute interventions for those students who do not meet the standard performance level on the benchmark assessments.

Our leadership team met throughout a summer to sketch out this framework for change. We knew that we had a great staff and very capable leadership, but were lacking direction. Our discussions led us first to the Professional Learning Communities concept and, from there, to develop what we call our Curriculum QUESTions vision and process.

This process is unique in that it is a systemic approach to raising achievement. Rather than relying on the trend of the day, or fragmented strategies, our process relies on a change in the way we approach all aspects of the learning process, a true cultural shift.

Teaching staff were given the time to work in content area and grade level teams to study the state content area expectations and to develop pacing guides that articulate when the objectives are to be taught. The pacing guides are common to the particular level.

For instance, all fifth-grade teachers use the same pacing guide in the core content areas, just as all high school algebra teachers use the same pacing guide.

Once the pacing guides were complete, staff was given training and time to develop common assessments aligned with the pacing guide. Each of the assessments was juried by a group of trained staff members prior to being given the first time. These assessments are given quarterly to all students K-12 and are scored at the district level.

Data from the assessments can be accessed, electronically, within one week of the test date. Another unique aspect of our process is our data mining relationship with MiTracker to make our local assessment data available in MiTracker report format.

Our staff can see the results of their benchmark assessments disaggregated according to many different criteria, including all MEAP data fields such as content strand and sub-group. The benchmark assessments provide us with real time data as opposed to waiting for the yearly MEAP reports. **We are now capable of making data driven decisions during the course of the school year in response to our students' actual performance.**

After reviewing the data, individual teachers or small groups of teachers meet with their building leaders to discuss the data and make plans for improvement. These discussions constantly refer back to the five curricular QUESTions. The results of these meetings are shared with the building school improvement teams, who are then tasked with developing the student interventions, professional development or curricular adjustments necessary to increase achievement.

Each building-level improvement team brings its plan to the district-level improvement team for final approval and allocation of funds. This ensures vertical alignment and compatibility across the district. Through this process, we can go from idea to implementation in less than a month.

Another unique aspect of this program is that any approved student intervention, professional development or curricular adjustment is evaluated to determine whether or not the change resulted in an achievement increase. **Strategies that raise achievement are kept while those that do not are modified or abandoned.**

This process is a true revolution in the way we approach teaching our students. The QUESTions have taught us that we cannot increase learning while working in isolation. We must strive to collaborate with and support one another. The teachers in this district should be applauded for their efforts. What they have accomplished in such a short time is truly amazing. The Curricular QUESTions Vision is not a means to an end, but a process that will continuously press us to look at what we are doing and the results that we are getting.

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Rick Seebeck is superintendent of Gladwin Community Schools.

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Education Report Daily

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User Comments

MichelleO

Nowadays, saving money is very crucial and properly investing the money can keep you and your family away from the effect of the financial crisis. The sad news is that a lot of the options for short term funding have been drying up. Short term funding is a necessary thing to have around, and going through traditional channels such as banks isn't an option for a lot of people anymore – basically it's only open to Ken Lewis. Installment loans are an option, but some people, including senior citizens, have been thinking about raiding their retirement fund. Getting into your pension retirement plan or 401(k) funds is the last thing you want to do if you don't qualify for any withdrawals yet. The penalties are substantial, and you'll end up needing installment loans to pay them if you use retirement funds for short term funding.

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QUEEN_BEE_09

I AGREE >>

colonelb

Godfrey-Lee on the west side of the state has been running all-day, every-day kindergarten for several years. >>

BenjaminY

We have a problem in Detroit Public School, their system had cash flow problem for years now. And honestly it getting worst in terms in progression with more children leaving to charter their schools almost every year. The state decided to give the Detroit school districts cash advance of \$70 million so they would meet the schools expenses, as well as payment for teachers. Robert Bobb, the newly appointed emergency financial manager, requested the funds early in order for him to get the house in order before he had to start panicking. President Obama has been giving out large sums of money for troubled school districts, perhaps that's where a generous portion of the aid came from. Getting Detroit Public Schools in working order is a worthy cause.

LINK TO READ FOR MORE INFO:

<http://personalmoneystore.com/moneyblog/2-advance-detroit-public-schools-70m/>

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colonelb

I am all for school choice and think its great that charters are finally moving forward. However, I'm wondering if the research accounts for a playing field that is not level. I can't take my school buildings and move them anywhere I want, nor can I simply close

them anywhere I want, nor can I simply slap up a pole building and make it a school. If anything, public schools need less state regulation and oversight so we can play by the same minimal rules charters do. If you want public schools to compete to improve, remove the barriers to doing so. I will gladly except less funding per pupil if the playing field is level.

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karen

The purpose is to encourage non exercising children to exercise but my daughter's highschool gave her an improper body fat percentage and made my healthy daughter who trains 20 hours a week in tap jazz and ballet believe she was overweaghit instead of a person with muscles. I believe the public schools do not have the right to make the diagnoses with these kids because they are using one measurement and recording it from their arms that they have a certain percertnage of body fat with one arm caliper test.

Does any one have feed back?

>>

deepakp9

Specifically, 81 percent of students in religiously affiliated schools and 82 percent of students in other private schools have parents who report being "very satisfied" with their schools, compared to 55 percent of students in assigned public schools and 63 percent of students in chosen public schools.

High levels of satisfaction among private school parents also extend to opinions about their children's teachers, academic standards of the school, order and discipline at the school, the amount of homework assigned, and interactions with school personnel.

<http://fitt.in> >>

TeenageProblems

Treatment centers offer <A HREF=<http://www.teenageproblems.net/>>stru children treatment in effective and real sense. Center provides expert and professional medical expertise that have years of treatment experience. Center develops spiritual qualities in youths. They encourage teens to become descent.

<http://www.teenageproblems.net/>

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Lisa P

For me, either public or private could give good education to students. It really doesn't matter whether you are in public or private school as long as you are studying and obtaining education, and providing that you can afford the expenses. One of the key ingredients to the success of a modern nation is education. As Americans emerge from the afterglow of the recent presidential elections and president-elect Obama prepares to take the reins of the country, education is a topic on the minds of many. What will he do to improve the lot of students and teachers in America? According to an article at The Apple, Obama's first order of business when it comes to education will be to look at No Child Left Behind. He doesn't want to scrap the program, but he does want to reform it, particularly when it comes to standardized testing. He does not support preparing students all year to "fill out bubbles." Referencing schools, both Obama and vice president-elect Joe Biden support charter schools, as long as they perform up to standard. Teachers at charter schools and others are pleased with Obama's incentives like Teacher Service Scholarships and various pay rewards – this will certainly be a great help. Furthermore, part of the president-elect's main concern is to boost Early Head Start programs and provide tax credit for college education. The course to repair faith in the American educational system through these ideas and more will definitely lead to the kind of credit repair the country needs. Click to learn more about <a title="What is Credit Repair?" href=<http://personalmoneystore.com/money-is-credit-repair/>>Credit Repair. >>

johnson

Now a days most of the parents are looking to join their childerens in private school. Because parents are thinking , Government would not provide good facilities . And also promoting good teachers, Government never concerned about the good quality schools and teachers. so most of the parents

and concerns of most of the parents
interesting to higher in private schools.
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johnson

michigan drug rehab >>

