

Background

*Federal Way Public Schools (FWPS) is a leader in continual innovation among public schools in the state and nation.* Bold words, indeed. But Seattle Pacific University and Standard and Poor’s, back up that claim. FWPS was included in a list of the ten highest-performing districts in the state, based on WASL scores and other factors, by the Washington School Research Center at Seattle Pacific University in 2004. In June 2006, Standard and Poor’s announced that three of the district’s high schools -- Federal Way, Thomas Jefferson and Todd Beamer High Schools -- were among 51 schools in the state recognized for narrowing the achievement gap. In fact, Federal Way the only district in the state to have more than one high school on the *Standard and Poor’s list*. These achievements are not by pure chance. Since 1996, FWPS has been implementing bold new programs and policies to help all students achieve their academic best. We’ve raised the bar and applied targeted attention in key areas. We are also working to align curriculum, from Kindergarten through 12th grade, with the state, national and international standards. At the same time, the district is focusing attention on professional development and coaching for our instructional staff. This work is based on broad and authoritative research that indicates, “*Quality instruction is the single most significant factor that affects student achievement.*” (McKinsey & Company, 2007). Our goal is to provide quality instruction every day, every moment, for every child.

The district has 23 elementary schools, seven middle schools and five high schools. In addition, the district has several programs geared to providing students with alternative learning experiences. All comprehensive high schools in the district offer higher education readiness classes; Federal Way High School serves as the only West-coast site of the Cambridge Program. Lakota and Sacajawea Middle Schools offer the Cambridge Checkpoint Program for high-achieving sixth through eighth grade students.

### Purpose of the Study

This session will explain how the Federal Way Public Schools’ (FWPS) is *using data to evaluate teacher effectiveness* in an urban school district. Through a process of defining *High Quality Instruction*, and the tenets of *High Quality Assessment*, FWPS is using the beliefs of the Cambridge program to build a comprehensive professional development plan and using student assessment data to measure “added-value.”

### Statement of the Problem

Can we really go wrong by doing “what is best for kids”? Today’s education setting stands at a critical juncture; with dwindling resources and increasing accountability, the role of advocacy has moved from a desired state to a necessity of survival. Advocacy is, “the act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy; active support” (Houghton Mifflin, 2003). What cause, idea or policy do we have in public education that dares to influence the outcomes of such things as policy and resource allocation (Cohen, 2001)? I would like to propose that educators and administrators alike have a responsibility to advocate for the implementation of high quality instruction (HQI) every period of everyday for every child. For years, we have known that teachers who use specific techniques or strategies in a highly effective and consistent manner can increase student achievement. Yet, we fail to advocate the importance and basic need of those strategies to be available for each student, each day and in each classroom. Marzano, Pickering and Pollock (2001), state, “if we can identify what those quality teachers do, then even more of the differences in student achievement can be accounted for” (p. 3). Prior to actively supporting or advocating for HQI we must first start by defining what “it” is and what it looks like at the local level.

For educators, HQI is what Jim Collins describes as a ‘hedgehog concept’ in his book from *Good to Great* (2001). A hedgehog concept is at the core of the world’s best organizational

models. Collins notes that there are three intersecting circles or principles to the hedge hog concept; “*what is the organization passionate about, what drives the organization’s economic engine, and what can they be the best in the world at*” (p. 118). Professionals within these institutions know their respective hedgehog concept, can easily describe it, and understand how it impacts their daily work. These same three principles are easily applied to modern public education. As educators, are we not passionate about delivering HQI? Do we not believe that the way to improve student learning outcomes is to improve instruction? Do we not want to be the best in the world at delivering HQI for every student, every day?

In order to bring to reality the idea that every student, every class, every day, should have access to HQI, we must begin by asking ourselves the following questions: *What would it look like at a district level; What would it look like at a building level; What would it look like at a classroom level; and What would it look like at home/community level?* Have we identified what HQI is at our institution? Does each of your colleagues succinctly describe how HQI impacts their daily work? More importantly, is it in the best interest of our students for educators to be clear and consistent about what HQI is? If so, start by advocating for a definition of HQI in your district, in your building or in your classroom.

### Significance and Need for the Study

There are no silver bullets in education. If you are looking for the “one right answer”, stop reading now. This paper is not going to give you the answer. This work is designed to guide your journey. Too often in education, we look for the “one solution” the one “silver bullet” to a complex problem. Helping every child achieve at a high level is complex. Educators have long understood variable issues such as peer pressure, environment, home life, and social economic status. The “Silver Bullet” approach may be applicable if we could control every variable in education, then we might be able to “cause” learning. Can we control which students we teach;

student academic, social, and emotional backgrounds; local state and federal mandates; and other cultural complexities? No we can't. So what now? In today's urgency to meet high stakes accountability targets, have we lost sight of the purpose of education? Education comes from the Latin term *educari*, “draw knowledge out”. In order to draw knowledge out, we must start by identifying important questions, questions that have no right to go away. First, we must admit there is no “silver bullet” and begin to feel comfortable being “lost”.

We are critical point in history, a point that is in every hero's journey to greatness, a journey to help every student learn at the highest levels. In Daniel Pink's, “*Whole New Mind*”, he describes Joseph Campbell's ‘hero's journey’. Pink states, “The hero's journey has three main parts: Departure, Initiation, and Return: (pg 105). This is the same journey we are on in American Public Education. First, educators must *depart* from the gravity of tradition and belief of causation. Then and only then we can move to the *initiation* of collaboratively defining, implementing, evaluating and fostering high quality instruction. Along this journey we will face many challenges that can only be addressed through telling our own stories and listening to the stories of others. Through these stories, educators will be able to create the meaning of student learning and academic achievement. Then and only then can our education system *return* to original intent, to draw knowledge out and breathe life in.

So where do we start? There is a science and artistry to developing assessments. Great assessment systems can tell a story of an individual child or entire school system. When done right, they can become the heartbeat of solid instructional decisions. When done wrong, they can lead to despair and be a closing door for student growth. Assessments are all about telling a *story*.

School systems need to develop an assessment system that has many chapters. Each chapter must be linked together to tell a meaningful story, full of consistent language, aligned

intentionally story line, providing the reader contrast, repetition, and texture. Unfortunately, many in today’s society only are looking at the final chapter. School leaders have a moral and ethical responsibility to change the way we read our student stories, change how we understand the assessment chapters. We must start by identifying the questions that need to be continually asked. When developing a highly effective assessment system, what are the questions that have “no right to go away?”

How can an effective assessment system create sustainable instructional change?

Creating systemic sustainable instructional change requires schools and systems to have a clear vision of how instructional and assessments are not only connected, but more importantly can’t be separated. School districts must begin to design systems that are *comprehensive* (assess all students in a tiered model), *efficient* (minimizes the loss of instructional time) and *constant* (developing an assessment cycle that promotes professional conversations). The vision of the assessment system must be so clear for all employees and students that it is easily understood. It must also clearly address the local, state and federal mandates and the capacity of those in the system. Without this clarity the assessment system will cause confusion, frustration, and ultimately a sense of failure for students and adults alike.

How do we assess all students in a tiered model (*comprehensive*)? Assessment alignment within the school system is needed to ensure that every student is assessed in an effective and efficient manner. Many schools face the challenge today to gather data that can help drive instruction and help ensure that this data is connected to the standards being taught. However, when does the pursuit of data become an end in and of itself? At what point do we examine the number of summative assessments that educators administer each year at each grade level. In an effort to gather data and progress monitor, educators are administering mini-summative assessments. Questioning how this data is used to drive instruction can help educators decide on

what assessments can be eliminated and what assessments need to be added. Assessing students in a tiered approach can help educators determine which students are meeting standard, which students need more diagnostic information and how to monitor their progress. If assessments are not used to drive instruction, then they are a *waste* of instruction time and potential loss of *added value*.

How do we create an assessment system that is *efficient*? Often in school leaders’ desire to create data and monitor progress, they often lose sight of the functionality of the system. The balance between effective and efficient is a conversation that has no right to go away. School systems must continually examine the added value of any data and eliminate any waste. What is waste? Waste in today’s school systems is all those things that don’t provide information that is critical to improving student achievement. Every dollar we spend on waste is a dollar that is not adding value. An “Assessment Matrix” needs to be defined at the local level and communicated with all constituents. School leaders must begin by eliminating any assessment that is redundant and that cannot be used to inform instruction.

It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the most responsive to change (Darwin, 1859/2005)

How do we create an assessment system that is *constant*? Do school leaders have the patience to be loyal and faithful to measuring student progress? Often assessment systems only take a snapshot of student achievement. This approach is similar to opening up a novel and only reading one of the middle chapters. There is no context of the beginning or the end of the story and ultimately we only get false reality of student achievement. School leaders must design an assessment system that provides a balanced approach to measuring student progress. This balanced approach should include minute by minute formative assessments, common benchmark

## MEASURING INSTRUCTIONAL “ADDED-VALUE” THROUGH ASSESSMENTS

assessments (or formative assessments) and summative assessments. The FWPS has designed an assessment system that accomplish this balanced approach by providing ongoing training on how to conduct minute by minute formative assessment, creating time for staff to analyze student data around common formative assessments and measures summative assessment growth by cohort groups.

### Instructional Added Value

The Federal Way Public Schools will use quantitative data to measure instructional effectiveness in year 1 through 3 of the program. Quantitative data will be measuring instructional "added-value" through assessment data. We will be using local, state, and international benchmarks to determine student growth and instructional effectiveness. Variance in growth will be the indicator of teacher effectiveness and will be measured by class averages. The tools to measure growth will be locally developed benchmark assessments K-10, our Washington State assessment, which is changing in 2009/2010, and international assessments such University of Cambridge Exams at the respective grades. Working In partnership with the Cambridge program to deliver high-quality and leading-edge assessment services, we are focused on delivering quality instruction to each of our students. We have partnered with Cambridge International to provide high-quality, leading-edge qualifications for our students that meet the ongoing demands of employers and educators across the world.

### Conclusions

McKinsey and Company (2007), an independent organization examined, what the top performing school systems from around the world were doing different or better than the rest. According to the report, the top performing school systems stated “the first part of the challenge

is to define what great instruction looks like” (pg. 26). As simple or trivial as this may seem, this is a step that many educators haven taken for granted.

Thomas Friedman (2005), re-claimed the “world is flat”, why do we think schools are any differently? Is your school district a system of schools or a school system? This is an excellent question to start your conversations and begin to frame an infra-structure for schools. Is there a difference? The difference is the philosophical difference between being an individual of a larger group of individuals and being a member of a team that is working together to accomplish a single goal (what is your product?). A system of schools provides a tremendous amount of autonomy to the individual sites. This model may serve the needs of individual teachers and school sites but does not work to address the needs of individual students as they travel from school to school and from grade level to grade level. Additionally, this system fosters an unhealthy competitiveness for limited resources, knowledge acquisition, and shared learnings. On the other hand, a school system can align resources for students and staff, assist in transitions and support, and foster a K-12 alignment that can assist in increasing student achievement.

Schools can no longer be satisfied with isolation. School districts must begin to design professional development systems that are comprehensive (provide a connected conversation), efficient (aligning resource to provide differentiated professional development opportunities) and *constant* (a connected conversation at each level). Establishing a school system takes time, trust and continuous conversations that foster the development of each individual creating meaning of the work.

### Summary

Daniel Pink writes about six basic principles that everyone should consider in their career in his book, *The Adventures of Jonny Bunko* (2007). One of these principles is persistence



trumps talent. In many ways Pink describes an urgent need in America’s public education system. How can we be persistent in developing, fostering and evolving the capacity of each teacher’s ability to deliver HQI? Why should we be persistent and ultimately relentless in this pursuit? Top performing school systems recognize that teachers are the single most significant influence on student achievement, “the available evidence and research suggests that the main driver in the variation of student learning at school is the quality of the teachers” (McKinsey, 2007). Teacher quality can improve through continuous quality professional development (including data analysis) and focused coaching. Thus, it is critical that educators are persistent at identifying and developing the vital elements of HQI and the powerful role of effective assessments.

The intent of this paper is to create a conversation, not give a single answer for a complex problem. We encourage your reflection and the beginning of new conversations in your institutions by posing the following questions:

*What did I learn about my own ability to define what quality instruction looks like?*

*What was the central point to this new learning?*

*So what? How will this impact the way you work/teach?*

*Will this learning change the way you teach or lead? Why or why not?*

*Can this new learning impact student achievement? How will you know?*

*Knowing what you know now, what will you do differently?*

*When, where and why?*

Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of this paper, the following definitions were ascribed:

*Added-Value.* Added-Value refers to the difference between the beginning level of achievement by a student plus the increase of growth over a given time period.

*No Child Left Behind Act.* “This law reauthorizes and amends federal education programs established under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965” (OSPI, 2003, p. 6). Additionally, it mandates that all students demonstrate proficiency on state standards by the 2014.

*Cambridge International Examinations.* “University of Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) is the world’s largest provider of international qualifications for 14–19 year olds. We are part of the University of Cambridge and a not-for-profit organisation” (<http://www.cie.org.uk/aboutcie>, 2009).

*High Quality Instruction.* “The instruction the organization is passionate about delivering, instruction that drives the organization’s student achievement, and the instruction that the organization can be the best in the world at delivering.”

*Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI).* “The office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is the primary agency charged with overseeing K-12 education in Washington State . . . OSPI works with the state’s 296 school districts to administer basic education programs and implement education reform on behalf of more than one million public school students” (OSPI, 2003).

*Standard and Poor’s list.* “S&P Analysts have been involved in education research for many years, and have analyzed academic, financial, and demographic circumstances and trends in public schools at the local, state, and national levels. Based on their knowledge, S&P developed a service that looked beyond student performance and financial information

## MEASURING INSTRUCTIONAL “ADDED-VALUE” THROUGH ASSESSMENTS

and, instead, focused on a comprehensive review of all education information. From this idea, S&P created a new business unit, School Evaluation Services, and developed its unique Return on Resources framework to synthesize student performance, financial information, and community and school demographics to help better explain school and school district performance” (<http://www.schoolmatters.com/schools.aspx/q/page=ab>, 2009)”

*Washington State Assessment of Learning (WASL)*. “The WASL is a criterion-referenced test that measures the application of basic skills to questions that require higher-level thinking skills” (OSPI, 2003, p. 4). It is designed to measure student achievement on the EALR’s, in the areas of mathematics, English, reading and listening.

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MEASURING INSTRUCTIONAL “ADDED-VALUE” THROUGH ASSESSMENTS

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