



SUPERINTENDENT'S END-OF-MONTH NOTES

April 2011

OUR MISSION is to provide educational excellence for all students.

IN THIS EDITION:

- Chapter 5 of *Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement* (Note #1)
 - Chapter 6 of *BBK* (Note #2)
 - Chapter 7 of *BBK* (Note #3)
- “HOW WE TEACH”—Chapter 3 of Mike Schmoker’s *Focus* (Notes #4, #5, #6, & #7)
 - Instructional Strategist Dan Mulligan Back Tomorrow—Saturday—with *Classroom Management That Works* (Note #8)
 - Budget Update & 2011-12 Contract Issuance (Notes #9 & #10)
- 1. In this month’s Leadership Team Meeting of Principals and Central Office Administrators, Rocky Plains Principal Miranda Jones and Elementary Instructional Coach Andria Bunner presented Chapter 5 (“Six Steps to Effective Vocabulary Instruction”) of Robert Marzano’s *Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement*. Taking all of us on a **video field trip** to Rocky Plains Elementary School, we observed the explanation of Marzano’s six steps by students and the demonstration of each by 5th grade teacher Jessica Allred. Additionally, each of us was engaged in applying the six steps as Dr. Jones and Ms. Bunner taught us via Mike Schmoker’s “chunking” of the lesson, i.e., observe video, interact with content in repeated cycles. Among the key learnings from Chapter 5 are the following:
 - **Step One: Teacher presents the term in “student friendly” language.**
 - Describe the term.
 - Explain the term.
 - Give an example of the term.
 - **Step Two: Students restate term in their own words.**
 - Rely on background knowledge and experience.
 - Use description, example, explanation of their own.
 - Form links between new term and those already known.
 - **Step Three: Students represent term using a graphic, picture, or pictographic form (nonlinguistic representation).**
 - Allows processing of information in new modality.
 - Provides second processing of the information to reinforce and deepen meaning.



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- **Step Four: Students periodically do activities that help them add to their knowledge of vocabulary terms.**
 - ` Real world application
 - ` Compare and contrast
 - ` Classifying
 - ` Generating metaphors and/or analogies using terms
 - ` Revising initial descriptions or nonlinguistic representations of terms
 - ` Using understanding of roots and affixes to deepen knowledge of terms
 - **Step Five: Periodically students discuss the terms with peers adding to their understanding of the term.**
 - ` Students can write about their understanding in their notebook.
 - ` Discuss understanding of terms with classmates “as part of regular subject matter instruction.”
 - **Step Six: Periodically students are involved in games that allow them to play with the terms.**
 - ` Various games will provide further exposure to the new term.
 - ` Students will gain a deeper integration of the word by its continued review.
2. **Key learnings from Chapter 6 (“Defining an Academic Vocabulary”) include the following:**
- Effective vocabulary instruction focuses on terms that are important to the content presented in school. (“If we select terms that do *not* relate to specific academic subjects as the target for instruction, we cannot expect much of an effect on academic background ... Subject-specific terms are the best target for direct vocabulary instruction.”)
 - Terms taken from lists of high-frequency words are probably *not* the best source of target words for direct instruction. (“How frequently words appear tells us little about their difficulty and nothing about their relevance to specific subject areas.”)
- Note:** In NCSS, we have now identified the essential subject-matter vocabulary for grades 6-12 in the four core subject areas. The same will be true for K-5 when school opens next fall. Naturally, these lists will be modified, as necessary, when Georgia moves to the Common Core GPS, i.e., the national curriculum standards as applied in Georgia.



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3. Key learnings from Chapter 7 (“Setting Up A Schoolwide or Districtwide Program”) include the following:
 - To quote Marzano in Chapter 7, when it comes to a comprehensive approach to enhancing students’ academic background knowledge, “I have proposed two basic interventions”:
 - **The first is a sustained silent reading (SSR) program** that focuses on students reading nonfiction and fiction materials in a variety of formats (e.g., books, magazines, Internet) on topics of their choice. “Key to the success of this [SSR] approach is to systematically engage students in sustained reading, reflection, and interaction with other students.” Says Marzano, “I proposed using the academic notebook for students’ written reflections regarding the readings. To implement such an intervention, schools must schedule appropriate time for SSR, gather the reading material identified by student interests, and then follow the suggested steps outlined in Chapter 3 (‘Tapping the Power of Wide Reading and Language Experience’). Although these steps are not easy tasks, they are relatively straightforward.” **Note:** SSR, in the coming 2011-12 school year, is “optional.” However, as noted previously in these notes, some schools are on to this approach now ...
 - Marzano: **“The second recommended intervention is a program of direct vocabulary instruction (DVI) focusing on the terms and phrases that students will encounter in their academic subjects.** This intervention also uses the academic notebook. Students record their understandings and representations of the terms presented in their subject area classes in the academic notebook.” **Note:** As mentioned in Note #2, herein, NCSS will begin K-12 implementation of DVI in the coming 2011-12 school year. And, remember, it’s not just the right “terms” we need to offer in classrooms, it’s also the right “steps” [herein these notes] as per what the preponderance of research has to say about what works in vocabulary instruction.
4. Also, in this month’s Leadership Team Meeting, we continued our look at Mike Schmoker’s new work entitled *Focus: Elevating the Essentials to Radically Improve Student Learning*. In his Chapter 3, “How We Teach,” we highlighted the following key learnings:
 - “Improved classroom instruction is the prime factor to improve student achievement gains.”



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- “Linda Darling Hammond argues that the single most important determinant of success for students is the knowledge and skills of that child’s teacher.”
- “It is now a well-established fact that even three years of fairly ordinary but effective teaching can completely change the trajectory of low-achieving students—vaulting them from the lowest to the highest quartile.”
- “If good teaching can have this much impact, then we had better be perfectly clear about what it is ... Moreover, we cannot afford to overcomplicate the elements of effective teaching.”
- Schmoker: “Effective Lessons: A Refresher Course”
 - **A Clear Learning Objective**
 - **Provision of Background Knowledge / Create Interest in the Topic**
 - **Teaching** [Research-Based Instructional Strategies/Technology Integration, *GSM emphasis*]
 - **Guided Practice**
 - **Checks for Understanding/Formative Assessment**
 - **Independent Practice/Assessment** (which can be one in the same)
- Lessons that include effective use of formative assessment and checks for understanding ...
 - Would have 20 to 30 times as much positive impact on learning than most popular initiatives.
 - Are about 10 times as cost-effective as reducing class size.
 - Would add between 6 and 9 months of additional learning growth per year.
 - Would have students learn four times as fast as result of consistent use.
- **Formative Assessment Goes to College**
 - **Ohio State Physics Professors:** began to use increasingly popular “clicker” technology which allows the professor to conduct ongoing checks for understanding. These formative assessment data allow them to make adjustments to the pace of the lecture and to clarify difficult concepts before moving on. (We have this “clicker” technology in a number of NCSS classrooms now.)



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- **The results have been dramatic.** Students in the classes using formative assessment perform a full letter grade better than those in classes without it. In addition, the previously large gap between male and female achievement in physics has been eliminated.
 - **Harvard Physics Professors:** Physics Professor, Eric Mazur, was used to blaming student failure in his physics courses on indolence or inability (sound familiar?)—until, that is, he began to check for understanding by punctuating his lectures with opportunities for students to solve one or two short problems, alone or in pairs. He would then ask them for their answers, which they would give either by a show of hands or by using “clicker” technology. If fewer than 90% of his students understood the material, he would stop and have them pair up to justify their answers for each other. As they talked, Mazur would circulate, listening for insights that allowed him to address misconceptions immediately, before moving on to the next step or “chunk” of the lesson.
 - **Mazur’s methods, like those at Ohio State, had a dramatic and immediate impact on learning that was NOT lost on his Harvard Physics colleagues.** They soon adopted his methods and realized the same kinds of gains. Success rates in Harvard physics now hover around 95%, and the gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups has dramatically narrowed.
 - **“Perhaps the most promising finding was that interactive lecture and the simplest versions of formative assessment work for anyone.** They [interactive lecture and formative assessment] increase achievement independent of the personality of the instructor.”
5. Also featured in Chapter 3 (“How We Teach”) of Schmoker’s book, *Focus*, are the following two simple [but effective] templates for lecture and literacy lessons:
- **TEMPLATE 1: INTERACTIVE LECTURE AND DIRECT TEACHING** where the focus is on the teacher’s words and directions, *but* students take part in lots of pair-sharing, note-taking, or quick writing. (“Happily, the term ‘interactive lecture’ is gaining traction. At its heart, we find guided practice, formative assessment, and ongoing adjustments to instruction.”) **Note:** If one of the Marzano 9 “high probability” strategies known as “**advance organizer**” is used in concert with interactive lecture and direct teaching, many of you well know the “power” of this strategy.



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• **TEMPLATE 2: LITERACY-BASED LESSONS (READ, TALK, AND WRITE)** with a focus on any text, which requires more lengthy treatment and would be used more often than the lecture template in most subjects.

- Close reading/underlining and annotation of text
- Discussion of text
- Writing about the text informed by close reading, discussion, or annotation

Says Schmoker: “For centuries, the above activities have been the **“heart of both what we learn and how we learn,”** the key to acquiring both the knowledge and intellectual acumen that transform lives and overcome poverty like no other factor. Ironically, 30 years of school innovation have had the *bizarre* consequence of driving authentic literacy underground and supplanting it almost to extinction [what Gallagher, 2009, calls “readicide”].

Note: Obviously, there is “**more than one way to skin a cat when it comes to ‘effective instruction.’**” Marzano’s nine (9) “high probability” classroom strategies found in *Classroom Instruction That Works*, as well as Schmoker’s two templates found in *Focus*, are all time-proven strategies that work well when implemented with “due diligence” (planned with attention to detail).

6. Also from Chapter 3 of *Focus*, “How We Teach,” the following key learnings were highlighted:

➤ Modeling Higher-Order Reading

• “Any teacher who got through college or has been in a good book club *can read critically and annotate*. With little practice, teachers can quickly learn to model such reading. **Be confident: YOU** are the best reader in the room.” (Chapters 4 thru 7, in *Focus*, highlight how to do such modeling in every subject area.)

➤ Student Writing, with Reference to the Text

• WRITING, from short scribbles to more formal pieces, profits from the previous process of close reading, annotation, and discussion of one or more texts. Armed with these understandings, students should return to the text and do the following:



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- Quietly review and re-read their notes, underlinings, or annotations to decide which they will write about and which would best serve the purpose of the assignment (to argue, draw conclusions, problem solve, reconcile or synthesize conflicting views).
- Arrange or organize the best of these thoughts, quotes, and data into a quick list or formal outline. Then, they write.
- “In all subjects, but especially in language arts, teaching will be greatly enhanced and learning will be accelerated by having students analyze EXEMPLAR papers written by students or professionals.”
- “*Nothing enhances the power of a writing lesson like an actual example.* Students need to **see** how good writers organize their arguments, write effective sentences, and choose appropriate language.”
- “Every teacher team, in every subject, should have a good collection of papers for this [exemplar] purpose.”

7. CONCLUSION FROM “HOW WE TEACH” (Chapter 3 of Schmoker’s *Focus*)

- “**Used right**, the templates [Interactive Lecture/Direct Teaching *and* Authentic Literacy—Read, Talk, Write] directly address the essential intellectual skills described by David Conley (2005):
 - ` the ability to read for inference
 - ` analyze and synthesize conflicting viewpoints
 - ` support argument with evidence
 - ` solve open-ended problems
- “**Any teacher** can begin implementing and refining the use of the two templates in team-based professional learning communities. If we learned and implemented them in conjunction with a coherent curriculum (read/write/talk/present and not just multiple choice), students would receive an education that equips them, like never before, for the rigors and pleasures of contributive citizenship, careers, or college.”

8. Instructional Strategist Dan Mulligan will work with seven volunteers, per each of our schools, in a session tomorrow devoted to *Classroom Management That Works*. (Light refreshments begin at 8:00 a.m. The



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session begins at 8:30 a.m. and ends at approx. 3:30 p.m. Lunch is on your own.) Location: DeKalb Technical College—Newton Center, 8100 Bob Williams Parkway, Covington Hope to see you there! ☺

- Budget Update & 2011-12 Contract Issuance**: As for contracts, Principals should have distributed 2011-12 contracts this week for certified personnel. Please return your contract to your Principal by May 4, 2011, as contracts not signed and returned by May 4th become null and void. As for 2011-12 budget, GaDOE Deputy Superintendent for Finance & Business Operations, Scott Austensen, told the state's superintendents last week that systems could expect official state budget allocations on Friday of this week and that there would be *no surprises* given what the media has already reported in terms of K-12 budgets. For example, he confirmed additional contributions that systems would have to make for classified employee health insurance as well as a 1% reduction in the state's basic funding formula for public schools (QBE—Quality Basic Education). These two items—coupled with almost \$800,000 now categorized as an “expense” for NCSS related to “maintenance of effort in special education” *and* declining local and federal revenue—confirm the \$8.2 million in recent cuts made by the Newton County Board of Education for school year 2011-12.
- Will there be any more budget cuts for 2011-12?** My recommendation is “no” regarding certified personnel with one exception [I do *not* intend to replace the Associate Superintendent position at BOE with another body, but I do intend to “reorganize” in Curriculum, Instruction, & Technology using existing personnel]. As for certain non-certified personnel based on staffing requirements for next fall, we may still have some cuts. (Stay tuned as we should know specifics in the next week or so.) We'll also have a more accurate projection of “Ending Fund Balance” for 2011-12 in the next couple of weeks. Additionally, we can look ahead a year or so out and project Ending Fund Balances for 2012-13 and 2013-14 presuming no more/no less revenue. This way, we at least have a reasonable “heads up” as to the financial future. I'm praying for a huge come-back for the economy. But, whatever the case, we will need to be ready with eyes wide open and with budget numbers in the public domain ...

“The Law of Countability: Teammates must be able to count on each other when it counts. Is your integrity unquestionable? Do you perform your work with excellence? Are you dedicated to the team's success? Can people depend on you? Do your actions bring the team together or rip it apart?”

■ John Maxwell
The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork

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