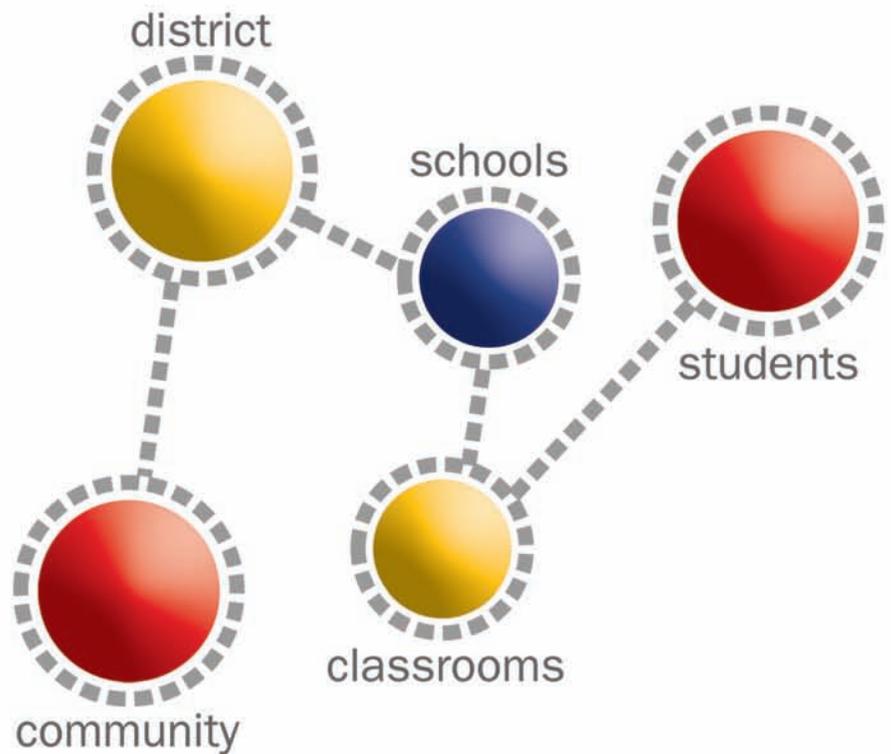


## Connecting the Dots:



## How Does District Change Affect Instructional Practice?

Fall 2007

By

Brinton S. Ramsey  
Catherine A. Wallach



Case Studies  
of Systems Change

Connecting the Dots:  
How Does District Change  
Affect Instructional Practice?

Case Studies of Systems Change  
First in a Series

Fall 2007

By

Brinton S. Ramsey  
Catherine A. Wallach

### **About the Small Schools Project**

The Small Schools Project, part of the Coalition of Essential Schools Northwest, was created in 2000 to promote the understanding and development of small schools committed to providing rigorous, relevant learning experiences for all students, based on powerful relationships that support this learning. We provide support and assistance to high schools and districts committed to high school redesign and to graduating all students college- and work-ready.

The Project offers a range of services, including school and district coaching and professional development activities for educators and administrators. We produce a variety of publications about small schools and create hands-on tools to use in the classroom, school, district, and community. For more information see our website (<http://www.smallschoolsproject.org>).

### **Acknowledgements**

The authors wish to acknowledge the contributions of the following individuals who gave thoughtful input into the design and content of the case studies: A.T. Birmingham-Young, Lois Frank, Jude Garnier, Joe Hall, Ron Jones, Mary Beth Lambert, Rick Lear, Katie Whitney Luers, John McGean, Trish McNeil, Harriette Rasmussen, Kathy Squires, Jesse Vohs, and Pam Wise. The West Coast SLC-Small Schools Technical Assistance Providers Networking Group also provided valuable feedback.

The authors would like to offer special thanks to the research participants in both districts who gave generously of their time, opened up their practice to our scrutiny, and answered our questions with thoughtful consideration. We hope that our work here reflects the spirit of collegial inquiry and reflection that we found so consistently in both districts.

These case studies were funded in part by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Washington Educational Research Association (WERA). We appreciate the support, and acknowledge that the descriptions and conclusions in these case studies are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Foundation or WERA.

Design: Suzanne Helms Creative Services

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
The Series .....	1
This Publication.....	1
A Word About Qualitative Case Studies .....	2
How to Use This Publication .....	2
<b>Cascades School District Case Study</b>	<b>5</b>
Teaching Context for the Screening .....	8
District Support for Instructional Improvement.....	10
Professional Development and Instructional Best Practices (IBP) .....	11
Perspectives on Applying IBP.....	13
Building Support for Instructional Improvement.....	15
Use of IBP at Glacier High School .....	15
House Support for Instructional Improvement.....	16
Nick’s Quandary: Getting Feedback on His Practice .....	20
Making the Connections .....	21
Self-Study Questions .....	22
Exhibits .....	23
A - Coalition of Essential Schools Ten Common Principles .....	23
B - Classroom Support Materials .....	24
C - Cascades School District Demographic Data .....	31
D - Cascades School District Organizational Chart .....	32
E - Glacier High School Demographic Data.....	33
F - Classroom Observation Materials.....	34
<b>Olympic School District Case Study</b>	<b>43</b>
A Closer Look at Data.....	45
School Perspective on Data .....	46
Making Data a Priority.....	47
Pushing for Change .....	49
District Perspective on Data .....	50
Looking at Student Data .....	50
Data Initiatives.....	51
Follow-Through .....	53
The Broad View .....	54
Self-Study Questions .....	55
Exhibits .....	56
A - Final Grading Rubric.....	56
B - Olympic School District Demographic Data .....	57
C - Achieve Academy Demographic Data.....	58
D - Coalition of Essential Schools Ten Common Principles .....	59

**CONTENTS**

---

E - Olympic School District Organizational Chart..... 60  
F - Board Policy for High School Redesign.....61  
G - High School Metrics .....62  
H - Accountability Plan Guiding Principles .....63

**Tools for Using Case Studies 67**

Questions for Reflection and Comparison.....67  
District Case Study Group Discussion Protocol .....68

## The Series

The Small Schools Project series Case Studies of Systems Change is intended to illuminate challenges of district and high school redesign processes and to be used as a learning tool for district and high school personnel, technical assistance providers, and others involved in school redesign efforts. We seek to build knowledge about how a district changes its own policies and practices to drive and support changes at the building, small school, and classroom levels.

The school districts studied in this series all received district change grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. These districts have also committed to aligning their school district systems in support of their stated goal of graduating every student college-, work-, and citizenship-ready by creating highly personalized learning environments in their high schools and improving teaching and learning in every classroom.

## This Publication

The first set of case studies in our series, **Connecting the Dots: How Does District Change Affect Instructional Practice?**, examines the supports for instructional improvement in two school districts through the experience of individual teachers who are trying to change their practice in accordance with the district's reform work and their small school's vision and mission. Our overarching research question for these case studies was: *What supports this teacher in changing his or her classroom practice and what gets in the way?*

Beginning with the area of practice identified by the teacher, we describe what we saw in the classroom, what we saw and heard in faculty meetings, professional development activities, and principal's offices, and what we saw and heard in the central office from coaches, directors of teaching and learning, superintendents, and others about instruction. Like a picture that only reveals itself as we draw lines between dots, these case studies describe the structure of instructional support at each level (classroom, school, central office) but leave it to the reader to make the connections and develop the whole picture. In doing this, readers will be able to reflect on specific practices and policies, district-wide, that support and that inhibit instructional improvement in service of student achievement. Because the teacher determined the instructional focus of each case study, the case studies highlight different approaches to instructional change and are very different in structure.

Data for these studies were collected from November 2006 to June 2007. Researchers spent three to four weeks in a teacher's classroom, observing a unit of study and conducting several informal interviews with the teacher, observing professional development meetings, faculty meetings, and other such activities. After the initial classroom observations, researchers followed lines of connection from the participating teacher to the small school, building, and central office levels, observing and job-shadowing administrators, documenting professional development activities and meetings, conducting document analysis, and interviewing teachers, school, and district administrators in order to understand the connections between district and classroom policies and practices.

All proper names of participants and locations have been changed, and some identifying characteristics have been modified to protect confidentiality.

### **A Word About Qualitative Case Studies**

Case study research is a type of qualitative research that is particularly suited to developing insights rather than testing hypotheses. Researchers use multiple sources of evidence and employ ethnographic research methods such as participant observation, holistic and contextualized data collection and interpretation, and detailed depiction and analysis of social relations and culture to develop a case. Case studies examine a phenomenon or issue within its real-life context, uncovering the interactions and relationships that influence or affect the “case.”

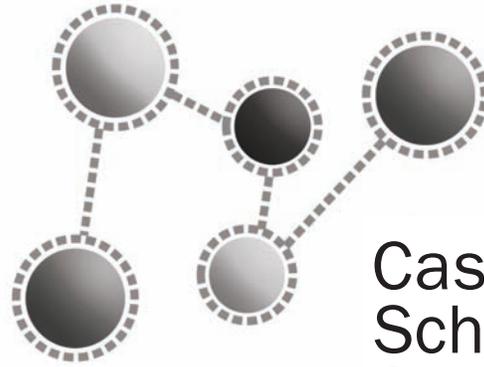
In education, for example, case study researchers often collect information about such things as expectations (student, teacher, parent, administrator), organizational routines and structures, language used and types of conversations engaged in, daily activities and work, behaviors in different contexts, interactions and relationships between different individuals or groups of people, and the physical environment. This data, when added to information gathered from document analysis and more formal interviews, allows researchers to develop a complex and “thick” description of the case. For this reason, case studies are particularly suited to situations with complex variables that are difficult to separate, and to examinations of process. Case studies provide a systematic way of looking at a phenomenon to gain an understanding of how and why it is structured the way it is, what meanings people make from how it works, and what further information may be needed to address the issue.

Case studies take an in-depth and contextualized look at a particular phenomenon, but they are not an account of an entire system. They are a “slice,” designed to highlight a particular process and its relation to the whole at a particular point in time.

### **How to Use This Publication**

We intend that these case studies be used to examine themes, patterns, and possible gaps in understanding about instructional improvement in service of student achievement. To that end, we have included self-study questions after each case study (pages 22 and 55) to guide thinking and analysis of the studies. We have also included exhibits to give readers further detail about the school district. *You may find it helpful to review the self-study questions and the exhibits before reading the case.* We encourage you to examine the cases individually and to compare across the two studies to see what might be learned. Questions for reflection and comparison across the two studies are included at the end of the publication.

We believe that the richest learning opportunities happen in discussions with colleagues, and we encourage readers to use the protocol, also included at the end of the publication, designed to facilitate group discussion and analysis of the studies.



# Cascades School District Case Study

By  
Brinton S. Ramsey

The screening of the student oral history documentary in Nick Johnson’s U.S. History classroom was just beginning. An audience of teachers, administrators, and community members sat at tables facing a laptop, projector, and screen. Bottles of water and small bags of chips were spread out on a table behind them. Two students move to the front of the room to begin.

Marita: Welcome and thank you for coming to the screening of the U.S. History class documentary.

Fredo: The documentaries you’ll see today are 100 percent shot and edited by students. We chose these topics because we believe that these topics are important to the development of Cascades City.

Marita: We chose to do this documentary because it was a creative way to show what we learned.

Fredo: Currently we’re in process of doing one documentary, but today you’ll see multiple pieces of it.

Marita: We’ll answer questions after the show. Thank you very much.

The first of four video segments addresses the topic of business in Cascades City, primarily the replacement of Cascades Mall with Cascades Towne Center (the old mall was refurbished and the site upgraded with new stores). The video takes the audience on a tour of the Cascades City business district, and the student narrator discusses the problematic arrival of Wal-Mart and its challenge to smaller businesses in the area. The video ends positively, with the student narrator noting that light rail is bringing business to Cascades City. The rough video has some interesting aspects to it, and clearly the students who made it had the technology figured out – there is sound, movement, different kinds of shots, and visual perspectives.

After a brief pause, a student loads the second video. Technically this one is a little rougher than the first but still includes sound and visual elements. The video focuses on Cascades City politics, describing the political structure of the city. This video includes footage of students reporting on the oral history interviews they had conducted with community members, particularly with a member of the Cascades City Historical Society and author of a book on Cascades City history, and with a local retired businesswoman who is also present in the audience. After a longer pause, the third video comes up on the screen. This video has no student narration and no sound at all. The group sits in silence and watches the slides about the Cascades School District that include graphs and pie charts, pictures of staff and school, and some explanatory text. This video was created by one student working independently rather than by a group of students as the other videos were.

The fourth and final video is the least polished. The topic is the military influence on Cascades City, and the audience once again sits in silence and watches a slideshow – this one with pictures of some of the military bases in the area. There is no narration and no explanation by the students present about the point they are trying to make with their video segment.

Showing all four video segments takes about 10 minutes. After the final segment, Nick asks his students to stand at the front of the room and asks if the audience has any questions about the documentary.

BR: [community member] I know you all worked on pieces of this, but have you had a chance to come together and draw some conclusions about Cascades City as a whole from your work?

Omar: [student] We haven't had time.

Jane: [assistant principal] There seem to be different kinds of media that you chose to use. Someone tell me a little about the different media you used.

Jason: [student] Well I had some still photos and some video, and I drove around and took different pictures to give different perspectives.

Jane: How did you put it together?

Jason: I used video editing software.

Gloria: [student] The last two sections [of the second video] were photo shoots from the library. Kind of like a PowerPoint but using audio.

Ms. R: [a teacher from another small school] I thought the first one was really well done. You were talking about how the Cascades Mall left a bad taste in Cascades City and the wrong crowd. Who was the wrong crowd?

Jason: My information came from interviews and research. I think it was generally like vandalism and stuff like that.

Ms. R: You talked about how Cascades Towne Center is doing better. How are local businesses competing with the big chain stores doing?

Jason: I think the bigger stores are focused in the town center, but the smaller businesses, the way they're keeping afloat is by cutting prices and offering things equivalent to what the bigger stores are offering.

Jane: So a lot of you did interviews. I didn't see any pictures of you interviewing or of your interviewees.

Miguel: [student] Well originally this was supposed to be a paper, and we didn't decide to do a video until after.

MB: [community member] Could you talk about how this learning has or hasn't been different for you compared to the other classes here?

Gloria: We have much more freedom to get our learning. We had control rather than the book controlling us. We had the ability to experience the history rather than just reading and studying it. And [we] have a better understanding.

MB: How did you experience it?

Miguel: The interviews really helped with that.

Tom: [student] It was more active.

Gloria: I think also working with the software and the media we used.

Deshawn: [student] Instead of learning about things in the past we studied something much more current, so we were more understanding of what we studied.

Tom: Also for me, like, communication skills.

Gloria: And that we're working in groups because there are group projects in school, but the teachers still have a lot to say about what you're doing, but in this we go in groups and they said, "okay do it."

WB: [community member] I wondered how you drew the conclusions that were stated in the video. You quoted [the person from the Cascades City Historical Society] to say that the city needed to do more to be business friendly, and you drew a conclusion about Wal-Mart and was that from one source?

Jason: About Wal-Mart, I had done a lot of reading about smaller businesses not competing and when I spoke to [the person from the Cascades Historical Society] he said that too.

WB: So did you talk to some small businesses?

Jason: That's something that I would do.

WB: I recommend you talk to Cascades City Paint and Hardware. Everyone thought they would go out of business when Lowes moved in and they didn't. You had a couple of factual errors, and my question is about fact checking and how you know your interview was accurate and how another source might corroborate or contradict your source?

Jason: We interviewed one person but several of us interviewed the same person separately. And we did research as well. I think they pretty much had the same view as the others.

WB: Well this was more about the historical fact. And you want to be sure about the facts or people won't take the video as seriously if your facts are not on the money.

Ms. R: What is Cascades School District doing that you think was effective to raise the achievement gap?

Gloria: Like taking more English classes or science classes.

Ms. R: And how are we raising [standardized test] scores, did you find out anything about that? Because you had that in your video.

Deshawn: I think it's basically that students know in class what the teachers are teaching.

Isabel: [student] And also after school we have [standardized test] practice that you can take, and some teachers are incorporating [this] practice into their classes.

Ms. K: [teacher from Juniper] I think I missed your Essential Question. What was the Essential Question that guided this whole project?

Jason: How politics affected Cascades City.

WB: Could you expand on that a little, particularly with regard to the military bases and the economics? I didn't see a real clear connection between those segments and the Essential Question.

Miguel: We started with the politics one and that's when we did the interviews. Then we were trying to decide what to do with the information after we did the interviews and that expanded into all the different aspects of Cascades City.

WB: So that implies that you need to change the Essential Question, and can you change it after you get started?

Miguel: We can look back at the Essential Question because it did switch.

Deshawn: We probably could change the Essential Question due to the documentary and the outcome of it.

Nick: [teacher - to the students] Thank you guys. [The students sit down.] [to the audience] Thank you guys for coming and, just so you know, this is the first screening and the first time we've seen it all together.

When the lights come on, Nick passes out a comment form for the audience to complete about the screening with general questions such as, what did you like about this presentation?, what worked and didn't work?, what stood out for you?, what suggestions do you have for improvement? After completing the form, the audience stands up and chats briefly among themselves before leaving the room. What had they seen here today? Clearly the students feel some ownership over their work, over the project, and over the presentation itself. And they had to give the teacher kudos for allowing the students such freedom to display their understanding of what they learned. But what did the students learn exactly? The students didn't seem to have done very much background research and were not able to answer questions from the audience in any depth. The connection between some of the sections and the Essential Question for the unit was unclear.

The comments from the community members and teachers during the discussion highlight some holes in the students' research and thinking. To draw conclusions about the teaching and learning represented here, we'll need some context. The following sections describe how Nick's instruction is aligned with and supported by the rest of the system and illustrate the different contexts that affect Nick's instructional practice.

## Teaching Context for the Screening

Nick Johnson is a third-year teacher and house leader in Juniper, one of four "houses" (smaller learning communities) at Glacier High School (GHS).<sup>1</sup> He teaches 11th grade Humanities, 11th grade AP U.S. History, and a 10th grade leadership/advisory class. Nick did his student teaching at GHS and then was hired the following year to take the place of his mentor teacher. He came to GHS because he felt that the building and house administrators were accepting of his teaching style, and they were willing to let him experiment and try new things. During the 2006-2007 school year, Nick completed a masters degree in education, and he is working on his professional certification portfolio.

Nick's goals for his classroom practice for 2006-2007 were to incorporate service learning into all of his classes and to operationalize for himself the Coalition of Essential Schools' principle of "teacher as coach, student as worker."<sup>2</sup> To accomplish these goals, Nick focused his efforts on project-based learning (PBL), particularly in his U.S. History class.

Nick's U.S. History class decided early in the year to set aside the textbook and to base their learning on a series of projects that would help them reach the grade-level expectations and district expectations. After discussions with students about their interests, Nick made contact with the Cascades City History Museum and, as a result, developed a service-learning project for his students that they could work on for most of the year (see Exhibit B Classroom Support Materials). Nick describes how the project came about:

I started this year by using one class as my guinea pigs. They actually came in and said that they hated the history program and the book, and they were really bored. So we had a big conversation. ...I believe students should have complete voice in everything. So we talked about what the grade-level expectations are and what the district wants, and what they have to learn by the end of the year. Then we talked about how they could put that into a project, into their own learning. They talked about specific areas they wanted to study. Then we talked about what parts of history are boring and why they're boring. They said that museums were really, really boring. So we talked about the State History Museum. [We decided to work] throughout the entire year [to] create museum exhibits for the State History Museum and the Cascades City History Museum. So they are doing oral history projects and working with the museum's director to make sure they have exhibits in the museum that will be permanently displayed there.

Students worked on the research for this oral history project for a month. They did actual interviews with community members (e.g., the deputy mayor, the superintendent, historical society members) and their assignment included doing additional research to supplement what they learned in the interviews. They had several days of library time and reserved time on computers to do online research.

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this study the term "house" (e.g., Juniper) refers to a smaller learning community (SLC). At times the houses are also referred to as "small schools." All three terms are used at GHS interchangeably. We use the term "building" to refer to the larger building-wide administrative structure and physical plant within which the houses operate.

<sup>2</sup> The Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) is a national network of schools and centers engaged in redesigning schools to raise student achievement. CES schools share a common commitment to a set of beliefs about whole school change called the Common Principles. Glacier High School became a CES school in 1999 (see Exhibit A CES Ten Common Principles).

Originally, the final product for the oral history project was to be both a research paper and a museum exhibit. However, three weeks into the project and after the oral history interview process, the students decided to create a video documentary rather than a research paper. Nick supported this decision and helped the students rework their timeline.

As Nick and his students delved into their sustained project-based learning and service-learning experiences, Nick was faced with scheduling conflicts and questions about grading that he had to work out.

Conflicts occurred when Nick tried to schedule student time to complete independent work on the various projects. The U.S. History 11th graders were already doing service-learning projects in their advisories, in preparation for their junior exhibitions at the end of the year. Their project work with Nick began to cause scheduling and time problems for the students and their advisors. Realizing that his students were struggling to balance advisory projects with U.S. History projects, Nick went to all of the 11th grade advisors to ask if they would allow the U.S. History students to use the U.S. History project for their junior exhibition, rather than having the students do two service-learning projects. All but one advisor agreed initially, but the issue created tensions between Nick and these other teachers who felt he was undermining their advisory plans.

An additional question for Nick involved grading. As the oral history project took shape, Nick struggled with how to reflect ongoing, but not completed, work on early report cards. His option at the time was to give the students an incomplete, which resulted in pushback from parents who wanted to know why it looked like their son or daughter was failing his class when they were doing all the work. The structure of the grade reports didn't allow him to note progress rather than completion.

Related to that grading question was the question of how to evaluate the projects themselves. Initially, Nick and his students decided that the criteria for the exhibition should be the determining factor in grading. As the oral history project evolved though, Nick struggled with how to reflect all the work that the students did and the outside expectations of the museum for the final product, the video. Ultimately, the students were graded on the comment forms completed by the audience at the AP History documentary screening and by one another based on their efforts rather than on whether the museum used their videos. The museum only used two of the videos (the ones on business and politics) and Nick felt that he could not fail the 75 percent of the class whose videos were not accepted and thus discount all of their work. In student reflections on their process and product, out of 10 reflections turned in (of 13 students in the class), 5 students thought they deserved an A because they worked hard and put thought into their part of the work, three students felt they deserved a B because they contributed but not as much, one student gave herself a C because she didn't do very much work, and one student felt she deserved a D because she didn't do anything.

In his own estimation of his students' work on the oral history project and exhibition, Nick reported,

I think they did really well on gathering information and doing thorough histories and working with the community members. Then most of them had to spot check and research and make sure that what the person was saying was accurate. Some of them

maybe didn't do so well on that. But the hard part came when they had to turn that into a presentation. The technology they stumbled on some. One group did exceptionally well, and the rest fell into place behind them. I think [they understood] why they were doing it. They knew that they were making this project for the museum. They felt connected to the content, because it was Cascades City. But I'm not sure if they really felt connected to the project. Through conversations [after the exhibition], the students started really pulling apart what they were doing, reflecting on it, and then thinking about how they could make it better. But at first it was like "Okay, here. We're done."

Nick received very little feedback from anyone else after the exhibition. Jane Richards, his supervisor and house administrator for Juniper, said, "that was great." Nick wrote to many of those who attended to ask for feedback on what the students did well and what they needed to work on and got no response. In the absence of detailed feedback on his students' work and on his own practice in light of this screening, Nick was not clear about where he should focus his efforts to improve his teaching.

In the next sections, we'll explore the structures and policies in place at the district, building, and house levels that frame instructional practice in Cascades School District.

## District Support for Instructional Improvement

Alison Beck, the director of teaching and learning, came to Cascades School District three years ago, attracted by the leadership and by the district goals of closing the achievement gap and preparing all students for college. Alison came with 20 years of teaching experience and extensive training and experience as an external school coach and facilitator. In her current role, Alison (with her staff) facilitates the curriculum writing process for Cascades teachers who write the curriculum, supervises textbook adoptions, and coordinates all of the professional development for the district. Her primary initiatives are "to articulate our curriculum K-12, and to insure instructional best practices are evident in every classroom." Alison's approach to her role and to professional development reflects her training and experience. As she describes it,

I see my role differently than how school principals and teachers have interacted with district administrators in the past. That comes from my previous job, where I was an outside facilitator. It was really easy for me in that role to ask probing questions and hard questions and lay things out there, like, "How is this working for you?" I still try to play that role. It's a very different role than what principals and teachers are used to in a central office administrator, who is more apt to set the rule or the law. So it has taken a while for us to negotiate that, and I'm still not there with everybody.

### Cascades School District at a Glance

Cascades School District is located in Cascades City, a small West Coast urban area surrounded by the urban sprawl of a larger city. The district's catchment area is economically and racially diverse and highly mobile. District administrators and staff throughout the system have committed to redesigning their high schools and graduating all students college-ready. Two of the district's four secondary schools (Glacier High School and Hood High School) have converted to smaller learning communities. The third secondary school (Adams High School) is an alternative school and the fourth school (Peaks) is a stand-alone small school. Cascades School District schools serve students in grades K-12 about 3,000 of these are in grades 9-12. In 2006-2007, 64 percent of the Cascades City community voted for a bond giving the school district \$65 million to make capital improvements to its buildings and to develop community partnerships something that is considered a major accomplishment and testament to the school district's increasingly intentional focus on their relationship with the Cascades City community (see Exhibit C Cascades School District Demographic Data).

<sup>3</sup> At least one Instructional Facilitator (IF) is assigned to each school in the Cascades School District. IFs report to and ideally work and plan professional development activities with the building principal but are funded through Alison's budget. IFs are also required to send Alison a copy of their professional development calendars, agendas, or planning tools each month which she "reads" and comments on. Glacier High School has four IFs. Two are funded through Alison's office and two are paid through the GHS budget.

In her role, Alison has no evaluative authority over principals, but she does train all of the school-based instructional facilitators (IFs) and collaborates with school administrators in selecting IFs.<sup>3</sup> The primary evaluator for IFs is the building principal. Alison also has evaluative authority over IFs but leaves that role to the building principals as much as she can (see Exhibit D Cascades School District Organizational Chart).

When Alison came on board, she joined a district that had already started working on school reform issues. In the 1990s, the district had shifted to site-based management, and schools were asked to pick a national model to implement. These shifts forced school personnel to think about their practice and students in relation to site-based goals and to interact with one another in new ways, which laid the groundwork for what was to follow. Alison credits the superintendent with the vision and foresight to build on what was happening rather than start all over with another strategy.

Most district policy decisions, particularly concerning instruction, are made collaboratively and with input and representation from all schools, as well as the relevant departments at the central office, without losing sight of the focus on the district's goals for student achievement. Curriculum decisions, testing schedules, professional development topics, textbook adoptions, and hiring decisions are all made collaboratively, through committees or work groups composed of representative stakeholders (district administrators, IFs, building administrators, teachers, and outside contractors in some cases). Alison and her staff read all written reflections (regarded as an important part of any professional development activity), and consider all of the feedback in planning the next activity. They also review reflections with participants in subsequent activities to help participants link their learning experiences and track their thinking about what they are learning. Designed to collect and incorporate stakeholders' input into ongoing professional development and other decisions, this reflection process, followed at professional development meetings at every level (district, school, classroom) throughout the district, creates an atmosphere of transparency and community among participants.

### **Professional Development and Instructional Best Practices (IBP)**

If you think of site-based management as a pendulum, anybody who was here when it was implemented will tell you it went too far. We got to the point where site-based was so site-based that we had 25 separate entities going completely opposite directions. So what we're trying to do is shift everybody to heading [toward] the same focus, but still maintain site-based [management]. There might be some principals who don't like that, because they are being asked to take their arrow that is pointing this direction and shift it a little. But they are not being asked to make their arrow just like everybody else's.  
[Alison Beck]

Professional development throughout the Cascades School District has slowly started to coalesce around an increasingly unified set of ideas, processes, and practices at all levels of the system. There is an intense focus on instruction, and attention to values and processes of collaboration, transparency, capacity building, and the idea that everyone is a learner. These values are reflected at professional development trainings, administrative meetings, and in conversations at every level. Alison models the focus on these values and on the district instructional goals in her work, as do the deputy and assistant superintendents.

Alison describes her focus in this way:

What I try to do is to keep the administrivia part to less than 20 percent of my job, so that 80 percent of [my work] is whatever the actual work is – the actual planning of the content, the working on curriculum writing or whatever. ...I've found that if you spend your time on the content, on the instruction, on the curriculum, the decisions become very apparent. There's really nothing to discuss or argue about. It's clear what decision needs to be made...The other piece I would add to that is to have lots of feedback. Because if you get a significant enough body of feedback, that also makes the decision very evident. The data speaks for itself.

The common focus for all district-supported professional development is the Instructional Best Practices initiative (IBP), which sets forth, in a set of documents, the district's current vision of quality instruction. IBP is supported and extended primarily through professional development vehicles (delivered to different groupings of administrators, instructional facilitators, and teachers) that encourage community building across job levels and schools. The primary professional development vehicles are:

- Regular ongoing trainings for instructional facilitators (school-based coaches), which Alison and her staff plan and facilitate.<sup>4</sup>

- “Cohort” meetings attended by IFs and school administrators (principals and assistant principals) who are working on the same IBP element. These meetings are led by school administrators based on agendas developed at cohort planning meetings, which are facilitated by Alison and attended by school administrators.

- Principal-only professional development meetings. For 2006-2007, principals (and assistant principals) have three choices for professional development but must choose one: five sessions with Ron Ritchhart (author of *Intellectual Character* and outside contractor for the district), 20 hours of Lens on Learning (led by another outside contractor), or 20 hours of IBP led by Alison. This professional development ensures that principals get similar professional development to that of IFs and thus “stay ahead” of teachers.

- IBP colleague groups formed by grade level and made up of teachers from different schools that are working on the same IBP element. Colleague groups are led primarily by IFs (although at Glacier High School they share the leadership with the school administrators). Teachers are required to attend colleague group meetings.

The IBP documents were created by a committee of central office administrators, building administrators from each school, teachers, and instructional facilitators and have been revised slightly, again by a representative group of stakeholders, after the first year of implementation. These documents are written specifically enough to create a common vision and goals for professional development throughout the district, but they are also broad enough so there is room for site-based differentiation among schools. Beginning two years ago, schools were asked to choose one of the six IBP elements to focus on during a year and then form colleague groups (one per grade level) with other schools, which are working on the same element. Colleague groups meet 14 days

**IBP is demonstrated by the following six elements:**

- Development of disciplinary understanding
- Rigorous instructional strategies
- Ongoing relevant assessment
- Intentional planning
- Personal and collaborative reflection
- Personalized instruction/Building significant relationships

<sup>4</sup> The district-wide Essential Question used in all of the professional development for administrators and instructional facilitators this year has been: *How do instructional leaders develop the knowledge, skills, and strength of character to hold teachers accountable for integrating what they have learned in professional development into their ongoing practice?* In addition to the professional development vehicles listed here, district personnel also connect to schools and teachers through their membership on school site councils (every district administrator is on at least one). Some administrators also attend student exhibitions and serve on committees with teachers.

(or the equivalent number of half-days) throughout the year, with the exception of Glacier High School, which negotiated a different arrangement. Teachers from within GHS and across all four houses make up colleague groups, which are formed by discipline rather than grade level.

Although IBP constitutes a substantial part of the professional development offered to everyone, administrators cannot use IBP elements as part of teacher evaluations per their current agreement with the teachers union. The district continues to work on this issue with the union. Currently teachers can only be evaluated on whether or not they participate in IBP professional development activities but not on implementation of IBP into their lessons.

Nevertheless, the focus on IBP is beginning to be felt at the school and classroom level. A routine audit by the state in November 2005 noted that every teacher in every building could tell them what IBP was and what teachers were doing with it in their building. In addition, in a teacher-wide survey in March of 2007 there was evidence that teacher attitudes toward IBP were changing from widespread skepticism and varying levels of resistance to a growing understanding of how IBP could improve their practice. Teachers reported that after two years of meeting in colleague groups and focusing on IBP elements, they were much more focused on the curriculum, they were reflecting on their practice more with colleagues and students, and there was improved communication between schools. Many teachers commented that they felt IBP was impacting students by helping teachers be more focused on the curriculum and by adopting a range of assessments.

Teachers in a colleague group meeting at the end of the year mentioned that the consistent focus and regular colleague group meetings have created enough of a sense of trust that they want to move deeper into the work, looking more specifically and critically at their own work and posing harder questions of each other and their practice. This desire to move toward more probing, more specific, and more critical questions was also reflected in the IF trainings where IFs examined their norms and pushed themselves to not just “play nice” but to really ask difficult questions of themselves and of the teachers they are coaching, pushing teachers toward more reflection and greater rigor.

### **Perspectives on Applying IBP**

While teachers know about IBP and have spent two years looking at elements of IBP and thinking about the applications to their classrooms, some teachers, administrators, and instructional facilitators still lack clarity about the purpose of the IBP documents and their relationship to the curriculum. Several high school IFs reported during an IF training day that there is a lack of continuity and connection between what happens on collaborative planning days (the school-run professional development days) and in IBP colleague groups. Several principals also reported in a cohort planning meeting that some IFs don't seem to see how they can use the IBP documents to drive the work of instructional improvement even though many of them were on the committee that created the documents. In discussing this issue, Alison and her staff wonder whether IFs and teachers understand that IBP is the district's common vision of quality instruction and consider how to strengthen this message. They realize that they have not used or

referred to the IBP documents enough themselves in the trainings they provide for IFs and principals. They decide that they need to do more to model the use of the documents in their own work and in the professional development meetings they facilitate. Alison notes that for teachers and administrators, coming to understand what IBP is and what the district is expecting takes time. Ultimately what the district is asking for, Alison asserts, is not a concrete curriculum change or edict that everyone should move to project-based learning, for example. IBP asks teachers to engage in a more ambiguous process of becoming a learner even while they are teaching, and this challenges deeply rooted behaviors and accompanying beliefs about teaching and learning and the role of the district, school, and classroom teacher.

For some teachers there also seems to be a lingering sense of distrust toward what is still seen as a “top-down” district initiative. During an IBP colleague group discussion, a few teachers were still expressing worry that they would not have control over their classrooms. Comments from a teacher from one of the houses at Glacier High School reflected this worry about loss of site-based (school-based) autonomy and decision-making:

I guess I want some consistency in terms of alignment and working within our house. What I don't want [IBP] to turn into is a top-down-driven thing where I have less autonomy and less choice about how I teach and what I teach. ...I want this to be about [teachers] developing this conversation based on the curriculum documents. It's got to come from our work and what our kids need.

At the same time, at the district level, staff is striving to bridge the traditional gap between schools and central office so that the work of improving instruction is seen as everyone's work and is balanced between a central vision and expectations for good instruction and site-based implementation. Alison says,

We are working really hard here centrally for people to understand that there isn't a difference [between what's school-based and what's district-based work]. It's all the same work. ...We have our vision. We have our goal. We have our destination. Where we do try to differentiate is when we think, “Where is this school right now? What do they need?” But that conversation is also tempered with, “What holds them back?” You set that same high expectation for schools, and they have to figure out how to get there. So that kind of balance.

One issue that exemplifies the balancing act that goes on between central office and school autonomy with regard to IBP arose as schools were deciding which IBP elements to focus on for the next school year. District administrators explained at several meetings (attended by all school administrators) that the district could only support three elements at one time and asked the schools to focus on one of these three elements: *development of disciplinary understanding, ongoing relevant assessment, or rigorous instructional strategies*. One elementary school had wanted to work on one of the relationship elements and asked to do that. Although Alison agreed they were ready to move to that element, she said the district could not support a fourth element and asked them to return to one of the three the district was supporting. When asked whether this was an issue of resources, Alison explained that it was an issue of capacity, meaning that the work of IBP is done in colleague groups and if this school was the only school working on that particular element, they would not have a colleague group to work with. She also tried to reassure school administrators that IBP is not going away and that every

school will get to every element over time. She noted every school has its own professional development budget and can pay for professional development on other topics in addition to IBP if they choose.

## Building Support for Instructional Improvement

Glacier High School has a long history of being committed to reform. In 1999 GHS joined the Coalition of Essential Schools and adopted the Common Principles to guide their site-based, whole-school reform efforts (Exhibit A). These principles emphasize high expectations, student responsibility, and teaching as a coaching and mentoring process. In 2001,

GHS was awarded a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and restructured itself into four houses, each led by a house administrator (an assistant principal) and a house leader (teacher-leader from within the house). Each house was also assigned a designated counselor. All of these changes cultivated a climate that supported reflection and collaboration and a focus on instructional improvement. Several of the staff, including the principal, Bill Wheeler, and Jane Richards, assistant principal for Juniper, came to GHS from another well-established CES school and have formed a nucleus of like-minded (and reform-minded) instructional leaders and facilitators at the school.

One outcome of these structural and philosophical moves toward school reform was that GHS administrators and staff jumped into instructional improvement efforts even before the district refined its thinking and process into the IBP initiative. With their CES and Gates grant money, the high school was able to buy professional development half-days for houses to meet and begin to work on instructional improvement. Part of the Gates grant also provided coaches who worked with the individual houses to develop a process for instructional improvement that met the teaching and learning needs of the particular members

(staff and students) of that house. When the district began the IBP initiative, several GHS administrators and one of their IFs were part of the committee of stakeholders that defined what IBP instruction might look like and what the elements would be. With the award of a federal service-learning grant in the Fall of 2006, GHS (and, in particular, Juniper) has also taken the lead in the district in building deeper relationships with the Cascades City community, something that district administrators strongly support. GHS principal Bill Wheeler noted that he does not have to deal with a lot of micromanaging and oversight from the district because, in general, the school's teaching and learning philosophy, vision, and practices are in line with those of the district.

## Use of IBP at Glacier High School

Because GHS and its four houses already had a strong site-based culture that valued autonomy and house-based decision making, GHS staff members advocated for an IBP structure that would allow time for house staffs to meet apart from IBP colleague groups. GHS also wanted to stay within their houses for the IBP colleague groups, choosing to emphasize their collaborative house-based professional development model over the district's cross-school collaborative model. A compromise was reached with the district

### Glacier High School at a Glance (2006-2007)

Enrollment: 1400

Ethnicity:

American Indian: 2%

Asian/Pacific Islander: 13%

Black: 26

Hispanic: 15

White: 44%

Free/Reduced-Price Lunch: 65%

Graduation Rate: 71%

Converted to smaller learning communities within the building in 2001

(See Exhibit E Glacier High School Demographic Data.)

and the result was that at GHS the 14 IBP days would be split, with three of the days set aside for IBP colleague groups and eleven days set aside for collaborative planning time within the houses.<sup>5</sup>

On IBP colleague days, teachers across all four houses meet in disciplinary groups to discuss the particular IBP element the school as a whole has chosen to study that year.<sup>6</sup> Instructional facilitators and house and building administrators plan and lead these IBP colleague days. To accommodate the district's desire for cross-school communications and collaboration, teachers from Adams and Peaks High Schools join GHS staff for these colleague days. This joining has been frustrating for everyone however, because the schools do not share the same approach to reform and have different student populations. Staff from Adams High School in particular often expresses resentment at the lack of relevance to their particular situation and at feeling "talked down to" in these meetings. This has led to ongoing tensions in the IBP colleague groups at GHS and changes in the arrangement for next year.

During house collaborative planning time the faculty of each house meets to share lessons, discuss students, plan advisory, and conduct business meetings. The professional development section of this house half-day is often planned and led by the house leader, house administrator, and IF. Topics focus on the professional development plan developed by the house (described in the next section) and don't necessarily include a specific focus on IBP, although there are often overlaps.

Building and house administrators have pushed instructional improvement at GHS for at least three years with coaching and professional development support, and some teachers have made changes in their instructional practice. Many teachers are using Essential Questions to frame their lessons and units, some teachers have moved into more project-based teaching and learning, and several teachers are opening up their practice to colleagues in professional development activities. However, both GHS and district administrators agree that there is still much work to be done in moving teachers toward the benchmarks set out by the IBP documents and the district goal of preparing all students for college, work, and citizenship. Jane Richards notes that "one of the challenges we have is moving from the management- and work-oriented classroom to the thinking classroom."

### House Support for Instructional Improvement

Most of Nick's direct support and instructional guidance comes from within his house structure. His supervisor and house administrator, Jane Richards, one of the nucleus of reform-minded people who came from another CES school, has been at GHS for five years as assistant principal. Before coming to GHS Jane was a teacher for eight years and also served as department chair, site council chair, dean of students, and internal coach, helping to organize professional development activities.

As Juniper house administrator, Jane reports to Bill Wheeler, the building principal, but has primary responsibility for overseeing the administration of the house, dealing with student disciplinary issues (primarily with Juniper students), planning and facilitating Juniper professional development activities (in collaboration with IFs), and observing and evaluating Juniper teachers. As assistant principal, Jane also attends planning

<sup>5</sup> In 2006-2007 at GHS, IBP colleague groups met for three full days and three half-days. Small school collaborative planning groups met for eleven half-days.

<sup>6</sup> All four houses study the same IBP element. GHS's IBP focus for 2006-2007 was *development of disciplinary understanding* (referring to understanding key disciplinary content, standards of evidence and practice in a particular subject area discipline, and knowledge of pedagogical needs and curriculum within the discipline).

meetings and professional development meetings for administrators, attends district administrative leadership team meetings and cluster (GHS and all of its feeder schools) meetings, and has taken on responsibility for developing the master schedule for the entire school every year (with assistance from house leaders). Easily 40 percent of her time is spent on disciplinary issues – lunch duty, tracking down tardy and late students, assigning detention, calling parents about students, signing forms. She reports that she spends 30 percent of her time on instruction – observing teachers, meeting with teachers, planning professional development meetings, attending professional development meetings. Administrative duties for the building, including doing the master scheduling, budget work, and preparing packets about GHS for distribution to middle schools, take up about 20 percent of her time and administrative work on behalf of the district (e.g., committees) takes up about 10 percent. Commenting on this breakdown of her time, Jane says,

I know originally coming into administration and to an assistant principal [position], I had the idea that I would be working a lot as an instructional leader. I think I probably do that less than I had hoped. However, the reality is that I do it more than most assistant principals. I think that has a lot to do with small schools and the way we are set up. It also has to do with the time [we have] to collaborate.

During hall and lunchroom duty, Jane addresses most students by name (especially those in Juniper) and stops to chat with students briefly, primarily about their work or attendance. Apart from this, much of her direct contact with students happens in disciplinary activities, although she does speak with students when she is observing teachers. Two years ago she taught an advisory and hopes to do that again “because it was at least a more positive interaction, and then I got to know their friends. I got to know some of the kids not through discipline, but through service-learning or their activities.”

As an instructional leader for Juniper, Jane also actively participates in planning and leading house and IBP professional development sessions. For the past five years, Juniper has had a specific plan, separate from IBP, which drives their professional development. This plan is not formally linked to IBP although Jane does try to make some connections between the two. She describes the house professional development focus and its relation to IBP in this way:

I use the 3 Rs<sup>7</sup> to improve instruction in order to improve student achievement. So for two years we worked on relationships and that manifested itself in several ways. We looked at peer observations and how we collaborate together because that was very new, so we had to build a learning community by building trust. We also looked at...personalization, and we looked into studying advisory very carefully and decided to do a pilot with the teachers who were ready to roll, learning to do scaffolding, kid talk, diversity. We probably have the strongest collaborative culture of the small schools here.

The next thing we worked on was rigor. With all of these I had the IFs here to help me, and the Gates coach. So we looked at our curriculum, we used Understanding by Design as a template, we looked at our instructional techniques and having high expectations. We worked on that for two years. And then where we're moving into this third year is connecting relevance, and we all decided we wanted to do inquiry-based units but want to make sure they're relevant for kids. So we looked at service-learning and other things. We've just started that road. How it connects to IBP, when we were doing rigor, that connected. Right now in IBP we're doing disciplinary understanding, which also connects to what we've already done in rigor and planning inquiry units.

<sup>7</sup> The 3 Rs: Relationships with adults that help students succeed; Relevant curriculum; Rigorous instruction.

Jane explains how she thinks the Juniper professional development focus on the 3 Rs is being implemented in Nick's U.S. History project and screening:

The relationships and trust, the environment was safe for the kids, and I thought it was very unique the way he set it up. The students wanted to do a documentary, and Nick didn't know how to do it, but he brought in an expert who gave them important criteria and from that the students wrote their rubric. They had no exemplar but they knew what the criteria were. The content is also rigorous. It demands a lot of the students. The hard part was maybe the scaffolding. But they were in groups so they had each other for support and that turns out to be another learning process for the kids, how do we communicate and who is responsible for what piece? They're also reflecting on their learning and you don't always see the time for that. That makes it more rigorous when they think about their work and self-evaluate.

As an exercise for her own learning and to contribute to a unit-tuning exercise during a house professional development activity, Jane took her year-long professional development plan and goals and put them into the Understanding by Design framework that she was asking teachers to use for their units. She listed her Essential Questions, goals, the professional development activities (as lesson plans), and the teacher exhibition as a performance assessment. As she put it,

I was surprised at how well it worked...and how clearly it helped me see things. There was stuff I reflected on. Was this too much? Is this depth or breadth? I wondered if there were too many things going on. When I looked at my goals, I thought, "These are a lot of goals." I had six. Well, at least two of those are ongoing [like] "apply CES standards and practices" [and] "collaboration." Those we have been doing from year to year. I still wondered if it was too much, too ambitious. Was there scaffolding? Were the expectations too high? I thought they were not, because I have teachers at the high end. I am also accepting that teachers at the low end aren't going to get some of that stuff. I'm also looking at repeating some of the same professional development plan next year and focusing in deeper in certain areas.

In addition to being involved with planning and leading professional development activities, Jane also conducts classroom observations and evaluations of Juniper teachers. The district requires Jane to do either an hour-long observation or two 30-minute observations of each teacher every year. Jane reports that the first observation of the year is formal and uses a pre- and post-observation conference, as well as a written self-evaluation/reflection by the teacher, in addition to the actual observation. Jane uses a district observation form that includes the seven criteria mandated by the district for evaluating teacher performance and practice (see Exhibit F Classroom Observation Materials).

To assist her in breaking down the district criteria and focusing on observed behaviors, Jane has developed several supporting documents she also uses, including a standard memo outlining her instructional expectations which she sends to the teacher before the observation; an observation summary form for her own use that prompts her to note objectives, evidence, and questions; a checklist of specific behaviors and activities that she may or may not see in a classroom; and a list of reminders for her own use about, for example, Juniper's particular professional development focus (service-learning, project-based learning) and the IBP element for the year (disciplinary understanding). She keeps all of her rubrics and forms in a clipboard that she brings with her to every observation. During observations she notes teacher and student behavior and tries to speak with several students about what they are learning, why, and how they know

whether their work is good. She shares all of this information with the teacher during the post-observation conference.

After the first formal observation, Jane says she goes back into the same teacher's classroom two or three times more during the year, sometimes unannounced, for varying lengths of time, depending on how well she thinks the teacher is doing. Second and third evaluations are not as formal and usually don't include the pre-conference component. She reports that she is more directive with beginning teachers and more likely to ask questions of veteran teachers. Last year, she says, she was "really tough" (more specific and directive) on two first-year teachers. She describes this change in her practice:

Instead of giving them a break when their instruction was not there...I told them that they do not meet standard, and they need to work on those areas. Previously I probably would have said 'met standard' but in the comments [I would have] said, "you need to work on this." I gave them specific things they needed to work on. Then they had until the end of the year.

For teachers in their third year and beyond, Jane says she is "not quite as tough, but I'm real blunt. I say, 'you need to work on your classroom management.'" She says she expects veteran teachers to accomplish more and encourages them to set goals for themselves based on the professional development they are participating in. She describes her primary focus for observations of teachers:

The two big categories are instruction and class management. But the one most important thing is, are they checking for understanding of their students daily? Are you taking continuous informal assessments of whether they got it? Then, I would probably look for some routines in place. Class management is a kind of routine. There's kind of a business routine. Are they using thinking routines? Do they have discussion routines? That might really be focused around, have they planned intentionally? Then, the other piece is: are they real clear about their instructional objectives? And, is that matched with their assessment? So, kind of planning backwards. That's why this year we really wanted to look at unit planning. Thinking of the whole unit with the end in mind. Is that performance connected to match your objectives? What did you do all the way to build and scaffold that? Were you taking an ongoing assessment?

With respect to Nick in particular, Jane said she encouraged him to seek out IFs more to help reflect on his work and to make more use of the logistical support Jane already provides for projects rather than do it all himself. According to Nick, Jane's evaluations of Nick's teaching usually include comments about how student-centered his class is and suggestions that he be more transparent in his teaching (e.g., making sure he has student work and the rubric posted along with the assignment, so students and visitors know what the context for learning was). As Nick describes the feedback, "it's been pretty positive and focused on noticing that the students know what's going on and why they're doing what they're doing." He reports that Jane does not spend a lot of time in his classroom. However, because Nick is also the house leader for Juniper, he sees Jane regularly, allowing opportunity for informal conversation about Nick's teaching and the progress of his projects. Jane has been working with Nick to plan and facilitate professional development half-days for the small school and to build his capacity as a leader. Although they do talk about his instructional practice in this context, Nick says, "We've talked about my work but it's usually been, 'this was great. Can you help other teachers do this?'"

## Nick's Quandary: Getting Feedback on His Practice

When I became a teacher, I didn't want to be a traditional teacher. That's what I hated about school. I'm one of the teachers that hated school and wanted to make a difference. Finally stepping into this project – because it is something I had wanted to do – really affirms what I believe in, my philosophies as a teacher.

Moving into a more project-based approach to his curriculum has challenged Nick's teaching practice. As he worked to give more ownership over the class to students, particularly in his U.S. History class, Nick began to see changes in his relationships with students and changes in the demands made of him as a teacher. He found that students working on projects needed more and different information from him, and he found that he was doing more research on his own to keep up with what students were asking of him. He also found himself needing different kinds of feedback and coaching from his supervisors, IFs, and professors.

Nick tended to work in isolation from other teachers, partly due to personality and work style, but also because he felt no one else was doing what he was doing, so they had no experience to share with him. He asked instructional facilitators to help him with specific tasks, such as showing students how to video and then edit video for their documentaries, write story boards, etc. He did a lot of his own research online and asked for help from his professors at the university. He went to his house administrator and the building principal to tell them what he was doing and ask for feedback. They supported him by providing resources (substitute teachers, conferences, books, transportation, etc.) and encouraging him to share what he was doing in presentations to house faculty and at other conferences. He had a peer observer (the special ed teacher) who was looking at what kind of ongoing assessment Nick was doing but with whom he rarely talked. He also shared some of his work in small school professional development meetings as well as in IBP colleague groups. With all of this, one of the major challenges Nick says he faced was the lack of support.

It's been challenging to not have that much support. It's like "Nick, you're doing great stuff." So I must not need help with anything. That has been hard...sometimes it's nice to have someone on your sideline, helping you out, and not just saying, "you're doing great." Not so much cheering you on, but coaching you and helping you.

In discussing getting help with his issue about how to grade the oral history projects, Nick talked about why he didn't feel supported, referring to the tension between giving his students credit for their work while at the same time holding them accountable to an outside standard (the museum's standard for exhibitions):

I've been trying to figure out how to ask the right question to get an answer that I want. So maybe that's biased because I want the answer that I already have. ...It's just when I have asked questions like [how do I assess this project?] it's been, "well you could give them a rubric," and that's what I don't want to do. I don't want to be the one assessing this. And maybe I have the students create a rubric...but that's not as powerful because this is a documentary going into a professional setting. And no one else has done that so there's no one to talk to about what they did. I've even asked [my] professors at the university and [their suggestions] go back to the traditional forms.

Nick met once a month with other Humanities teachers from across all of the Glacier High School houses in IBP colleague groups led by IFs and Bill Wheeler, the building principal. These sessions focused on identifying and creating disciplinary understanding, examining how disciplinary understanding can serve as a basis for the creation of curriculum, and thinking about what disciplinary understanding looks like in practice. Colleague groups read articles, looked at teacher and student work, practiced protocols, and used collaborative time to tune or create lessons. While Nick's project-based learning and teacher-as-coach approach to teaching was supported by the IBP elements, he did not find the IBP professional development days useful in answering the questions uppermost in his mind. He reported:

The hard part with the IBP peer group is that it's everyone from the whole school and sometimes other schools in the district that teach Humanities. But we never talk to each other any other time throughout the year. So I'd bring my work in, and I might get a couple of pieces of advice, but then that's it. Nothing else. No follow-through. Most of the time, it's like, "Wow. I never thought about doing that." It's really kind of a shallow conversation. That might be because there isn't a strong sense of community. There aren't a lot of relationships in the large colleague groups.

## **Making the Connections**

Cascades School District has made a concerted effort to move toward its goal of graduating all students ready for college, work, and citizenship through an intentional focus on instruction, professional development, and capacity building. However, the example of Nick's U.S. History class highlights some systemic issues that continue to impact instructional practice in the district, in spite of all of the structures in place to support instruction and in spite of Nick's willingness to take risks and try new things. What light does this case shed on the connections between district initiatives and school and classroom practices?

## Self-Study Questions

Questions to consider about system supports for instructional change:

1. What kinds of supports are in place for the teacher at all levels (classroom, school, central office) of this district system? What obstacles did he face in trying to improve his practice?
2. How is the concept of “support” defined at different levels of the system?
3. How would you characterize the instructional leadership at each level of the system?
4. What are the primary strategies in place at each level (classroom, school, central office) to reach the goal of graduating each student ready for college, career, and citizenship?
5. How would you characterize the connections and/or disconnections between strategies at each level of the system?
6. Given what you now understand about the system, what suggestions would you make to the teacher, assistant principal, Director of Teaching & Learning or other system personnel about system supports for instruction?
7. What specific lessons and insights did you gain from this case study and how might they apply to your own work to support instructional change in service of increased student achievement?

**EXHIBIT A - COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS (CES) TEN COMMON PRINCIPLES**

1. The school should focus on helping young people learn to use their minds well. Schools should not be comprehensive if such a claim is made at the expense of the school's central intellectual purpose.
2. The school's goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. While these skills and areas will, to varying degrees, reflect the traditional academic disciplines, the program's design should be shaped by the intellectual and imaginative powers and competencies that the students need, rather than by "subjects" as conventionally defined. The aphorism "less is more" should dominate: curricular decisions should be guided by the aim of thorough student mastery and achievement rather than by an effort to merely cover content.
3. The school's goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary. School practice should be tailor-made to meet the needs of every group or class of students.
4. Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent. Efforts should be directed toward a goal that no teacher have direct responsibility for more than 80 students in the high school and middle school and no more than 20 in the elementary school. To capitalize on this personalization, decisions about the details of the course of study, the use of students' and teachers' time and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff.
5. The governing practical metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker, rather than the more familiar metaphor of teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services. Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be coaching, to provoke students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves.
6. Teaching and learning should be documented and assessed with tools based on student performance of real tasks. Students not yet at appropriate levels of competence should be provided intensive support and resources to assist them quickly to meet those standards. Multiple forms of evidence, ranging from ongoing observation of the learner to completion of specific projects, should be used to better understand the learner's strengths and needs, and to plan for further assistance. Students should have opportunities to exhibit their expertise before family and community. The diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation – an "Exhibition." As the diploma is awarded when earned, the school's program proceeds with no strict age grading and with no system of credits earned by "time spent" in class. The emphasis is on the students' demonstration that they can do important things.
7. The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress values of unanxious expectation ("I won't threaten you but I expect much of you"), of trust (until abused) and of decency (the values of fairness, generosity, and tolerance). Incentives appropriate to the school's particular students and teachers should be emphasized. Parents should be key collaborators and vital members of the school community.
8. The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first (teachers and scholars in general education) and specialists second (experts in but one particular discipline). Staff should expect multiple obligations (teacher-counselor-manager) and a sense of commitment to the entire school.
9. Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include, in addition to total student loads per teacher of 80 or fewer pupils on the high school and middle school levels and 20 or fewer on the elementary level, substantial time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries for staff, and an ultimate per pupil cost not to exceed that at traditional schools by more than 10 percent. To accomplish this, administrative plans may have to show the phased reduction or elimination of some services now provided students in many traditional schools.
10. The school should demonstrate non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, practices, and pedagogies. It should model democratic practices that involve all who are directly affected by the school. The school should honor diversity and build on the strength of its communities, deliberately and explicitly challenging all forms of inequity.

See <http://www.essentialschools.org> for more information

**EXHIBIT B - CLASSROOM SUPPORT MATERIALS**  
**CONTEMPORARY MUSEUM PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

**Student-Created Essential Question:**

How has politics influenced change within society?

**Materials:**

Criteria for Oral History Project

Final Product Guidelines (student-created, based on museum exhibit criteria)

Juniper Oral History Project Assessment Rubric

**Goal:**

The goal of this project is for students to be able to compare and discriminate between historical ideas and identify how changes in United States history had a direct impact on people living in the Cascades City Area. The final product will be several museum exhibits that will focus on the student-created Essential Questions and will be on display for the public to view.

**Objectives:**

- The students will be able to compare and discriminate between ideas throughout history.
- The students will be able to compare the history of the United States to the local history through oral histories, primary and secondary source evaluation, and various forms of research.
- The students will be able to assess the value of certain histories, and describe why some histories are not prevalent in society.
- The Students will be able to relate knowledge from several areas, drawing conclusions and making personal predictions.
- The students will be able to design a museum exhibit piece for each one of their research components.
- The students will be able to plan and create a proposal for each step of the research and exhibit process throughout the year.
- The students will be able to communicate with community members and museum curators the purpose and goal of their projects and how they relate to history.
- The students will be able to recognize hidden meanings in history and find a way to include hidden histories in their exhibit.
- The students will be able to work together as a team when creating their exhibit and throughout their research process.
- The students will be able to state specific causes and effects throughout the history of the United States and how these events tie to the local history.

**Core Academic Learnings (CALs):**

Throughout the year this project will hit on all of the History, Civics, Social Studies, Communication, and Writing CALs.

**Civics:**

- 1.2 Examine key ideals of United States democracy such as individual human dignity, liberty, justice, equality, and the rule of law
- 1.3 Examine representative government and citizen participation
- 2.1 Understand and explain the organization of government at the federal, state, and local level including the executive, legislative, and judicial branches
- 2.2 Understand the function and effect of law
- 2.3 Compare and contrast democracies with other forms of government
- 4.1 Understand individual rights and their accompanying responsibilities including problem solving and decision making at the local, state, national, and international level
- 4.2 Identify and demonstrate rights of United States citizenship related to school, local, state, national, and international issues
- 4.3 Explain how various stakeholders influence public policy

The documents in Exhibit B were created and adapted by Nick Johnson for his U.S. History class.

**Communication:**

- 1.1 Use listening and observation skills and strategies to focus attention and interpret information
- 1.2 Understand, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate information from a variety of sources
- 2.1 Use language to interact effectively and responsibly in a multicultural context
- 2.2 Use interpersonal skills and strategies in a multicultural context to work collaboratively, solve problems, and perform tasks
- 2.3 Use skills and strategies to communicate intercultural understanding
- 3.1 Use knowledge of topic/theme, audience, and purpose to plan presentations
- 3.2 Use media and other resources to support presentations
- 3.3 Use effective delivery

**Project Set Up:**

The students and I began to think of ways that they could relate to U.S. history; as a group we decided to look at how the history of the United States influenced the history of Cascades City. The students thought they could relate the history of the U.S. to the history of Cascades City through oral histories, photography, documentary, and various projects. This is where I worked out a contact with the Cascades City Historical Society. The Cascades City Historical Society outlined several needs including oral histories, exhibit-type materials, and various project-related products that the students could complete to be showcased in the upcoming Cascades City History Museum. When these needs were outlined and identified the students wanted to know what a museum exhibit should represent. We began searching for museum exhibit criteria and are currently working on creating that criteria for our exhibits. The students then created a proposal for their projects and are currently working on various rubrics and criteria for their research.

**How the Class Looks:**

The students identified areas that they feel are interesting and important for a contemporary museum. They have currently outlined several units of study and have outlined how they feel the course should be organized. When we are finished with the introductory project the class will begin with a reflection activity surrounding the current topic. Current events and their relation to the community will be discussed. Then there will be a lecture/discussion on the topic and then project work time. Currently students are working on their own Essential Questions to familiarize themselves with their identified proposal, research, and product process. The next step would be to identify community partners that can help with their work. The unit topics are: cults and secret societies; the influence of women on history; immigration; politics; human rights; and music. Through each topic the students and I are working on outlining my role as the teacher to help coach them through the learning. The projects and the new learning relate to the district curriculum, as well as connect several interdisciplinary CALs and district objectives.

**Community Resources:**

Cascades City Historical Society	Contact _____
State History Museum	Contact _____
Cascades City History Museum	Contact _____
Community Member	Contact _____

**The Final Product:**

The students have outlined areas that they are interested in creating exhibits for, using outlined criteria established while doing research into various museum exhibit requirements. These exhibits will be completed over the course of the year, approximately 7 exhibits per student. At the conclusion of the year the students' culminating project for the U.S. history course will be to create a museum exhibit. This may include a preview display at Glacier High School. The Cascades City Museum is interested in displaying some of the students' work, as well as creating a short-term exhibit for the State History Museum. In addition to exhibit work, students are writing a research paper for their topics. There has been some conversation surrounding publishing the students' research and the project through a service-learning grant sponsored by Learn and Serve America.

**EXHIBIT B - CLASSROOM SUPPORT MATERIALS**

**CRITERIA FOR ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

Unit of study: **Politics and Immigration**

You will be responsible for interviewing a person from the city of Cascades City that has been impacted or can relate to your Essential Question. Your oral history must relate to the research that you are completing for the project, and you will be required to make the connection between your research and your oral history.

For one of the oral histories you will write from that person's perspective, and for another oral history you will use documentation and research to support the person's perspectives.

You must clear your Essential Questions with me prior to beginning research and then we will work on finding a person that you can work with for the oral history component.

All of these oral histories will be published in our book along with our museum exhibits. The final products will be given to the Cascades City History Museum and appear in a short running exhibit at the State History Museum.

Some of the previously used Essential Questions have included:

1. How has politics contributed to changes within society?
2. Why do people decide to become politicians?
3. How has immigration affected communities?
4. How do perspectives of the American Dream differ between citizens and immigrants?

**EXHIBIT B - CLASSROOM SUPPORT MATERIALS**

**Oral History Project  
Assessment Rubric<sup>1</sup>**

Student Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_

	A	B	C	D	F	Comments Strengths Areas for Improvement
<b>Biography (5%)</b>						
Is historically accurate						
Uses dates, details and anecdotes						
Places interviewee in historical context						
Visual (Photograph)						
Maintains length requirements (1-page)						
Revised final draft						
<b>Historical Contextualization (25%)</b>						
Broad historical background established						
Creates context for understanding the interview						
Uses a wide range of primary sources						
Uses a wide range of secondary sources						
"Newspapers of the day"						
Paper length						
Research is balanced						
Dates used to establish context						
Research is historically accurate						
Maintains length requirement (7-10 pages)						
Revised final draft						
<b>Interview Transcription (25%)</b>						
Minimum, 15, open-minded questions						
Question organization						
Follow-up questions						
Transcription reflects tone of responses and includes parenthetical notes (smiles, cries, etc).						
Informational footnotes, or [bracketed] information, clarify references						
"Thinking on Feet" (Ability to create questions based on interviewee's responses)						
Formatting according to standards of the OHA						
Revised final draft						
<b>Analysis (25%)</b>						
Thesis that establishes historical value of interview						
In-depth analysis and interpretation						
Draws conclusions						
Application of historical contextualization and interview transcription through quotations						
Revised final draft						

**EXHIBIT B - CLASSROOM SUPPORT MATERIALS**

	A	B	C	D	F	Comments Strengths Areas for Improvement
<b>Mechanics (10%)</b>						
Text is clear, grammatical, and spelled correctly. Grade reduction for every 3 errors						
Text is carefully proofread						
<b>Technical Requirements (5%)</b>						
Relevant title with interviewee present						
Bibliography/Works Consulted (MLA Formatting)						
Pagination						
Appendix (relevant materials)						
<b>Museum Exhibition (100%)</b>						
POSTER BOARD POWERPOINT WEB SITE VIDEO DOCUMENTARY 1-ACT PLAY (10 MINUTE LIMIT)						
Exhibit is historically accurate						
Shows analysis and interpretation						
Places interview in historical context						
Shows wide research						
Uses primary sources including interview						
Uses secondary sources (Where appropriate)						
Exhibit is clear, organized and had visual impact						
Text is clear, grammatical, and spelled correctly						
Exhibit is neatly prepared						
Includes bibliography or works consulted						

<p><b>Overall Grade:</b></p>   
--

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Teaching Rubrics Created for National History Day. Available at [www.nationalhistoryday.org](http://www.nationalhistoryday.org)

**EXHIBIT B - CLASSROOM SUPPORT MATERIALS****FINAL PRODUCT GUIDELINES****Research Paper Guidelines and Expectations:**

A research paper presents the results of your investigations on a selected topic. Based on your own thoughts and the facts and ideas you have gathered from a variety of sources, a research paper is your own synthesis of these facts and ideas, with complete documentation of where those facts and ideas came from. In this sense a research paper is a new work that you create by consulting several sources to answer a research question.

A research paper is not a summary of an article or book or a collection of summaries of articles or books. You should demonstrate that you understand the problems by interpreting and evaluating the information you present.

The purpose of writing a research paper is two-fold: (i) to broaden your knowledge of a specific topic, and, most important, (ii) to help you gain experience in writing such papers. The experience in gathering, interpreting, and documenting information, developing and organizing ideas and conclusions, and communicating them clearly by itself constitutes an important part of your education.

- The paper should be well structured and should demonstrate your ability to analyze the problems you are writing about.
- The paper should contain no typos and no basic grammar mistakes.
- The essay should be typed on one side of the paper, double spaced, font size 12, and all pages should be numbered.
- Your References should be cited according to the MLA citation style.
- Your essay should be at least 5 pages long.

**Exhibit Guidelines and Expectations:**

Since we are creating a museum exhibit, the visual representations need to be of a high quality. You will need to redo any items that do not meet the museum standards as outlined below\*:

Museum exhibits play an important role in the transmission of historical knowledge. They are viewed by citizens of diverse ages, interests, and backgrounds, often in family groups. They sometimes celebrate common events, occasionally memorialize tragedies or injustices, and contain an interpretive element, even if it is not readily apparent. The process of selecting themes, photographs, objects, documents, and other components to be included in an exhibit implies interpretive judgments about cause and effect, perspective, significance, and meaning.

Historical exhibits may encourage the informed discussion of their content and the broader issues of historical significance they raise. Attempts to suppress exhibits or to impose an uncritical point of view, however widely shared, are inimical to open and rational discussion.

In aiming to achieve exhibit goals, historians, museum curators, administrators, and members of museum boards should approach their task mindful of their public trust. To discharge their duties appropriately, they should observe the following standards:

1. Exhibits should be founded on scholarship (meaning with an academic basis), marked by intellectual integrity, and subjected to rigorous peer review. Evidence considered in preparing the exhibit may include objects, written documentation, oral histories, images, and works of art, music, and folklore, videos, collages, recreation of historical documentation.
2. At the outset of the exhibit process (this would be at the end of the year), museums should identify community members in any exhibit and may wish to involve community members and representatives in the planning process.
3. Museums and other institutions funded with public monies should be keenly aware of the diversity within the communities and constituencies that they serve.
4. When an exhibit addresses a controversial subject, it should acknowledge the existence of competing points of view. The public should be able to see that history is a changing process of interpretation and reinterpretation formed through gathering and reviewing evidence, drawing conclusions, and presenting the conclusions in text or exhibit format.
5. Museum administrators should defend exhibits produced according to these standards.

6. Items that are recreated for the purpose of a museum exhibit need to represent integrity and historical accuracy. For example, if recreating a document that supports your exhibit then the document needs to be a replication of the original documentation.

In addition to following the above guidelines each student will need to write a commentary paragraph that explains the connection of their exhibit to their research. Why did you create what you did? What is it supposed to interpret? These paragraphs will be included in the exhibit at the end of the school year.

**Any item that does not meet the expectations will not be graded, it will be given back to the author to complete. The returned item must be resubmitted no later than five days from its return. This includes essays, exhibit visuals, and commentary paragraphs.**

\* Museum standards were created by Nick Johnson and the education director at the State History Museum.

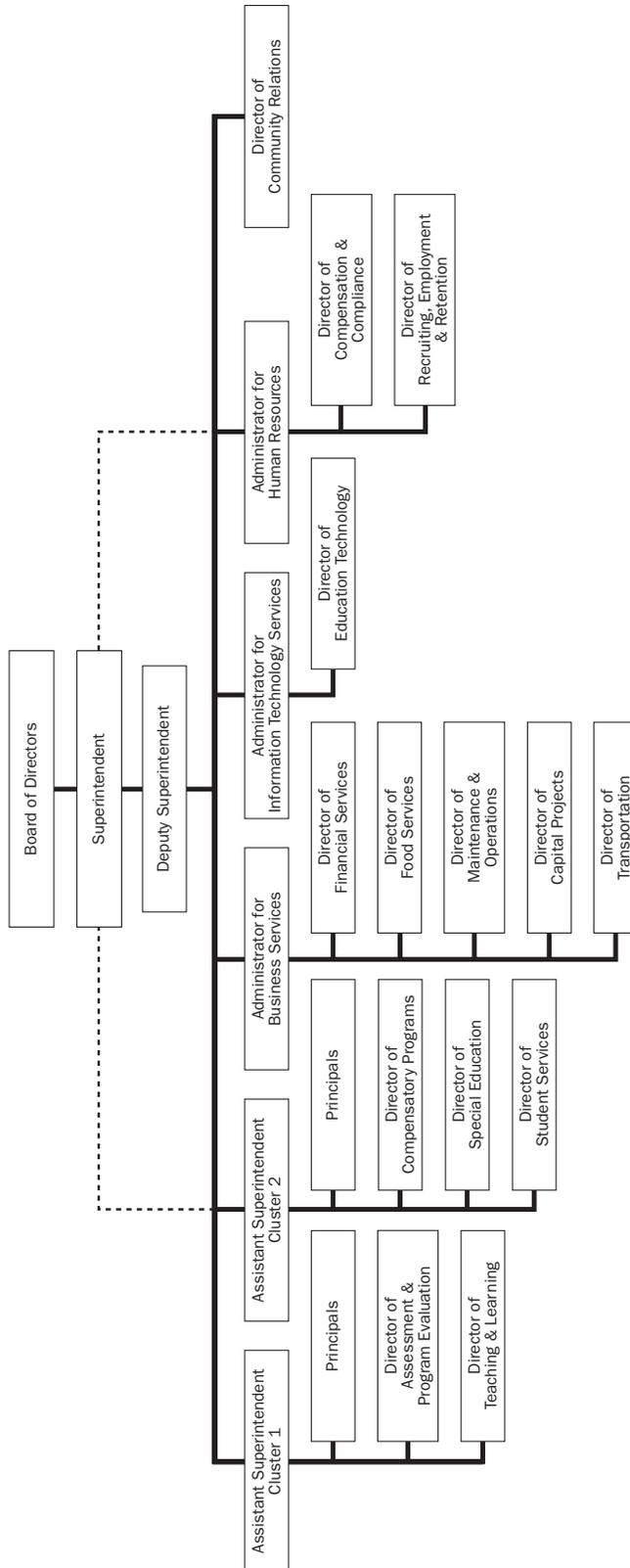
**EXHIBIT C - CASCADES SCHOOL DISTRICT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

<b>2006-2007 State Standardized Test Results (percent of students meeting standard):</b>				
<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Math</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>Science</b>
3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	60%	57%		
4 <sup>th</sup> grade	65%	43%	47%	
5 <sup>th</sup> grade	61%	47%		19%
6 <sup>th</sup> grade	57%	30%		
7 <sup>th</sup> grade	59%	37%	56%	
8 <sup>th</sup> grade	58%	33%		24%
10 <sup>th</sup> grade	72%	30%	77%	18%

<b>Student Demographics</b>	
Total enrollment	11,700
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2%
Asian	8%
Black	20%
Hispanic	16%
White	49%
<b>Special Programs (May 2007)</b>	
Free or reduced-price meals	57%
Transitional bilingual	9%
Migrant	0%
Special education students	13%
Languages spoken	60
Title 1 school-wide projects (total school-wide population)	9290
LAP (targeted assistance for students at 9 schools)	1074
Students enrolled in Advance Placement courses	547*
<b>Other Information</b>	
Unexcused absence rate (2006-2007)	0%
Annual dropout rate (2005-2006)	8%
On-time graduation rate (2005-2006)	67%
Extended graduation rate (2005-2006)	72%
*indicates total enrollment. Some students may take more than one AP class.	

<b>Teacher Information (2005-2006)</b>	
Classroom teachers	688
Students per teacher	19
Average years of teacher experience	12
% of teachers with at least a master's degree	55
Total number of teachers who teach core academic classes	588
% of teachers teaching with an emergency certificate	0.2
% of teachers teaching with a conditional certificate	0
Total number of core academic classes	1,551
<b>NCLB Highly Qualified Teacher Information</b>	
% of classes taught by teachers meeting NCLB Highly Qualified (HQ) definition	95
% of classes taught by teachers who do not meet NCLB HQ definition	5
% of classes in high poverty schools taught by teachers who meet HQ definition	96
% of classes in high poverty schools taught by teachers who do not meet HQ definition	4
% of classes in low poverty schools taught by teachers who meet HQ definition	100
% of classes in low poverty schools taught by teachers who do not meet HQ definition	0

EXHIBIT D - CASCADES SCHOOL DISTRICT ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



**EXHIBIT E - GLACIER HIGH SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

<b>2006-2007 State Standardized Test Results (percent of students meeting standard):</b>				
Grade Level	Reading	Math	Writing	Science
10 <sup>th</sup> grade	64%	21%	73%	12%

<b>Student Demographics</b>	
Total enrollment	1300
Juniper House enrollment	320
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2%
Asian	14%
Black	24%
Hispanic	17%
White	43%
<b>Special Programs</b>	
Free or reduced-price meals	53%
Transitional bilingual (May 2006)	9%
Migrant (May 2006)	0%
Special education students	12%
<b>Other Information</b>	
Annual dropout rate (2005 - 2006)	4%
On-time graduation rate (2005 - 2006)	78%
Extended graduation rate (2005 - 2006)	86%

<b>Teacher Information</b>	
Students per teacher	20
Teacher experience (years)	8
Teacher education (at least a master's degree)	59%

**EXHIBIT F - CLASSROOM OBSERVATION MATERIALS**

**Glacier High School Observation Schedule**

I will be working with you this year in the evaluation process. Listed below is the semester week for our pre-observation, observation and post-observation. Please contact me the week before to schedule a specific period and times. I know there are unexpected circumstances that may arise for both of us, and I will stay flexible to accommodate changes.

When we meet in our pre-observation conference, please bring the lesson plan for the lesson I will be observing. I would also like to discuss:

1. What should all students know, understand, and/or be able to do as a result of this lesson? Why do they need to know, understand, or do this?
2. What prior knowledge relating to the objective have the students acquired?
3. How will you know the students understand the lesson? What are students doing if/when they are successful? What does success look and sound like in your classroom?
4. How will students be assessed? How will assessment results guide future instruction?
5. How do you address and promote literacy in your subject area?
6. How do you structure your lessons to support the expected skills that are tested in the state standardized test? Your small school competencies?
7. What are your specific goals around instructional growth for the year?
8. How can I best assist you this year?

Let me know if you have a conflict with this week. Thank you. I look forward to working with you this year.

The materials in Exhibit F were adapted by Jane Richards for her own use from materials provided by the district, principals, coaches, and others with whom she has worked.

Pre-Observation/Observation/Post-Observation will be the week of: \_\_\_\_\_

The seven evaluative criteria in the district's evaluation form are:

1. Instructional Skills
2. Classroom Management
3. Professional Preparation and Scholarship
4. Effort Toward Improvement When Needed
5. Handling of Student Discipline and Attendant Problems
6. Interest in Teaching Students
7. Knowledge of Subject Matter

**Instructional Expectations**

What I will be looking for in every class:

1. Clear instruction and clear expectations
2. Meaningful and challenging curriculum (rigor)
3. Questioning strategies that push students to think critically
4. Authentic relationships, respect and decency
5. Enduring understandings and learning objectives
6. Correlation to competencies and standards
7. Strong assessment and checking for understanding
8. Strategies to insure every student is learning

Possible Questions/Observations:

1. Classroom Management

- How do you shape behavior as opposed to just imposing consequences?
- Is there a climate of respect and decency in the classroom?
- Are there clear behavior expectations?

2. Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions

- Are students engaged in enduring understandings?
- Are Essential Questions evident and used to help facilitate understanding?

3. Student Awareness of their Learning

- Do students know what they are expected to know and be able to do as a result of this lesson?
- Are students aware of why they need to learn this content?
- Are students aware of how this lesson will help with future lessons/assessments?

4. Student Knowledge about the quality of their work (questions asked to students)

- How do you know if your work is “good” enough?
- If you want to make your work better how do you know what needs to be improved? What needs to be included?
- When you earn a grade, can you explain why you earned it?

5. Visible Signs of Clear Expectations

- Are standards/rubrics posted in the classroom and discussed with students?
- Are models (exemplars) of good quality student work on display and are the criteria that make the work “good” labeled?
- Can students show examples of their work and describe the criteria they are trying to meet?

**EXHIBIT F - CLASSROOM OBSERVATION MATERIALS**

**Classroom Observation Check Sheet**

To:  
From:  
Date:

When I walked through your class today, I observed:

Students were:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> On task and engaged                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Making appropriate behavior choices | <input type="checkbox"/> Working on assignments |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Actively participating              | <input type="checkbox"/> Listening to peers     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Working in cooperative groups       | <input type="checkbox"/> Using research skills  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Working in pairs                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Problem solving        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Engaged in "real world" tasks       | <input type="checkbox"/> Creating a product     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Performing scientific investigation | <input type="checkbox"/> Taking notes           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrating knowledge and skills  |   |

You were:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Directly teaching  | <input type="checkbox"/> Leading a class discussion  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Facilitating cooperative learning                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Tutoring a small group      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reading to students                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Helping individual students |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Praising/supporting students                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring student work     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assessing student learning                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Checking for understanding  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Setting clear expectations                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Redirecting students        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Maximizing student responses (wait time, etc.)           |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dignifying answers and pressing for more                 |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Using standards/rubrics/criteria to discuss student work |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____   |  |

Positive classroom climate was evident:

- Bulletin boards supporting instruction
- Obviously well-organized lesson
- Well-organized and clean classroom
- Strong focus on learning and respect for the content
- Respectful student/teacher interaction
- Authentic relationships and cohesiveness
- Respectful student interactions
- Members of the class helping one another
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Clear expectations:

- Samples of student work with rubrics on display
- Clear expectations were visible for all
- Classroom behavior expectations/norms displayed
- HW assignments/schedules/due dates are clearly posted
- Day's objective visibly displayed

**Student Feedback**

Student 1:

What are you learning?

Why are you learning this?

Is your work good?

How do you know your work is good?

Student 2:

What are you learning?

Why are you learning this?

Is your work good?

How do you know your work is good?

Student 3:

What are you learning?

Why are you learning this?

Is your work good?

How do you know your work is good?

Notes/Questions/Coaching Ideas:

**EXHIBIT F - CLASSROOM OBSERVATION MATERIALS**  
**Cascades School District Observation Report Form**

Employee's Name:

Position:

Observer's Name:

Date:

Class Observed:

Time of Observations: From \_\_\_\_\_ To \_\_\_\_\_

1. Instructional Skills:

2. Classroom Management:

3. Professional Preparation and Scholarship:

4. Effort Toward Improvement When Needed:

5. Handling of Student Discipline and Attendant Problems:

6. Interest in Teaching Students:

7. Knowledge of Subject Matter:

Date of post-observation conference:

Evaluator's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Employee's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

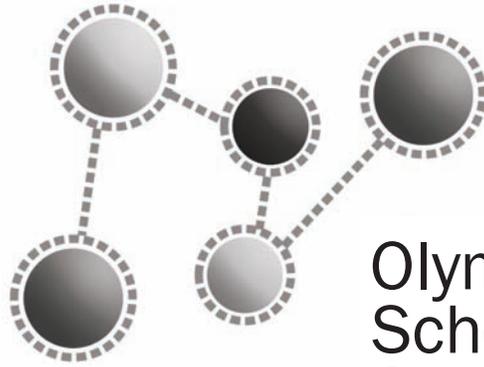
**EXHIBIT F - CLASSROOM OBSERVATION MATERIALS**

**Post-Lesson Self-Evaluation/Reflection**

(Please bring this with you to the post-evaluation conference.)

Date of lesson: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What did you want all students to know, understand, and/or be able to do as a result of this lesson?
  
2. How well did students accomplish that objective? What specific evidence tells you that this is so?
  
3. What did you do, as a teacher, to assist students in learning the objective?
  
4. Knowing what you know now, what would you be sure to do again if you were re-teaching this lesson?
  
5. Knowing what you know now, what changes would you make if you were re-teaching this lesson again? Why would you make these changes?
  
6. What do you want to be sure to discuss in the post-conference?



# Olympic School District Case Study

By  
Catherine A. Wallach

Student work covers the deep blue walls of Sophie Miller's classroom. Two corner bookcases anchor a small carpet with a beanbag chair, while a collection of different-sized tables with chairs defines the students' workspace. Sophie lets out a big sigh as she joins her colleague Robyn for lunch at one of the tables.

My class fell apart today with reading nonfiction. I don't think students understand the idea of audience and persuasion.

As the two ninth grade language arts teachers at Achieve Academy, Sophie and Robyn do a lot of planning and reflecting together. For the past couple years, there has been a growing concern at Achieve, based on MAP scores, that ninth graders don't do enough nonfiction reading.<sup>1</sup> So, the two classes are engaged in a nonfiction unit, including persuasive writing. Students began by reading editorials that Sophie and Robyn had photocopied out of the newspaper.

Sophie is concerned that her students can't articulate what they find difficult about nonfiction and what kind of support they need to better understand it. She gathers information every day, looking for clues in students' behavior and work products, to inform her instructional practice. She tells Robyn,

When things break down in class, it means something, and I have to figure out what.

At the end of class, Sophie had asked students to write brief post-it note reflections sharing one thing they learned about nonfiction writing. Most wrote, "I learned that nonfiction is true and fiction is not true." So basic! Sophie thought the conversation was much deeper but that was their take-away. Her literacy coach was right – she wasn't teaching the reading process as well as she thought she was.

For the past three years, Olympic School District has contracted with an outside organization to provide coaching for some of their language arts teachers and to develop principals' understanding of what good literacy practice looks like. Sophie was part of the first cadre that was coached. She then received coaching during the subsequent two school years and became a lead teacher for summer school. Now she coaches other teachers in her small school, called Achieve Academy, which opened in 2005 when Ravenswood High School converted into three small schools.

Sophie's own practice is still growing, particularly around making data-driven decisions – using concrete examples of student behavior and work to drive decisions about her instruction. Achieve's principal encourages the use of data, and Sophie chose to focus on getting better at it in her classroom this year. Students' reflections about their learning, comments they make in class, and lack of follow-through with assignments are all examples of data. Sophie reflects with Robyn on some of the challenges in using data:

I feel I'm really good in my classroom at using informal data. But, other types of data are available to me, like MAP and test scores... how can I use them to inform my instruction? Or even to help have honest conversations with the kids about the work, where they are, and where they need to be.

Shuffling through the students' reflections, Sophie gets an idea. She had noticed from students' comments during class that they were not clear about how or why people read newspapers and that the photocopied editorials they read came from newspapers. She and Robyn decide that in addition to writing editorials, they will focus the rest of the nonfiction unit on reading newspapers, so students can get a sense of audience and the

<sup>1</sup> Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) is a state-aligned computerized adaptive assessment program, meaning that test questions are given according to the level of difficulty of students' previous responses. For the past three years, Olympic students in grades three to ten have been tested three times per year in math and language arts.

purpose of an editorial in context. If it went well, every student could submit an editorial to the school paper (see Exhibit A Final Grading Rubric).

During the next day's class, students re-examine the editorials and identify what makes a strong argument. Midway through the class, Sophie asks students to write another reflection in their notebooks: "What did you learn about editorial writing today?" She is eager to keep students focused on the writing process and the idea of "voice" rather than the specific arguments made in the mentor text.<sup>2</sup> Next she asks them to create a list of issues they feel passionate about. Students spend the final twenty minutes of class writing about one topic from their list.

<sup>2</sup> The mentor text is a piece of writing, in this case an editorial, which Sophie and the students use to examine the writing process.

Moving around the room, Sophie realizes that only two students have done the previous night's homework, which was to collect examples of opinions from sources such as newspapers and magazines. To Sophie, this signals that students don't have a clear idea of what she was asking for.

In reviewing their notebooks that night, Sophie focuses on how they are doing in the writing process and looks for information that indicates where they should go next. An overarching theme is a lack of logic in students' arguments, with no clear line of thought. Sophie's instinct is to return to the mentor text the following day in class. She addresses the students:

All right, ladies and gentlemen, this is a mini lesson. What that means is I have some very specific teaching points for you. I read the drafts of your editorials and, based on what I saw there, I determined that we need to discuss the ways authors build arguments in editorials.

Students move their chairs from the tables into two concentric semicircles facing a whiteboard, which is illuminated by an overhead projector. Sophie walks students through the mentor text, dissecting the structure of the author's argument and looking for indicators of the intended audience. The lesson starts well, but quickly falls apart with students talking and not paying attention. Feeling frustrated, Sophie puts down her pen and solicits feedback from the students.

Apparently this isn't what you feel like you need right now. So, you guys tell me, what do I need to do differently as a teacher?

Put the people who talk too much in back, offered one student.

My question isn't about behavior, it's about learning. What do you guys need as learners to help you understand editorials better?

The students want more time to talk with their partners. They say they're bored with the mentor text and don't understand why they have to read it so many times.

Sophie begins to think that this unit is more difficult to teach than usual, and she's not sure why. She had missed some classes over the course of the month, for a variety of reasons, and she really doesn't have a sense of where the students are in the writing process. She feels stuck in a "reactive mode," doing a lot of assessing in the moment, which Sophie thinks "is the worst place to be when you are using student work to inform teaching decisions."

The students later break off to talk with their partners. Sophie works her way around the

room to meet with each pair. She asks them questions about their writing, their thinking, and their argument, taking notes on each student. She isn't sure what is contributing to the problems she sees. Are they having trouble thinking through their ideas, or are they just too focused on finishing the assignment? Sophie thinks that days like this, when things don't go well, actually provide a lot of information. Listening in on these writing conferences gives her a lot of data to consider.

Sophie drops by Robyn's classroom after school.

The next time I teach this unit I think I'll have the kids do more conferring and talking about their writing. They are so product-driven – they just want to be done. I wish they would focus more on the process.

Sophie wants the students to concentrate more on the process and less on the result. She thinks maybe next time there won't be a final draft at all.

## **A Closer Look at Data**

The district's goal is to improve student achievement as it relates to preparing all students for college, career, and citizenship. Improving teaching is the major strategy to get there, but they don't see that as a goal in and of itself. Superintendent Robert Kessler explains, "The investment in changing instruction is all in the name of improved student achievement in preparation for college." Alicia Pearson, Achieve's principal, perceives her work through this same lens:

If we don't fundamentally change instruction, we are not going to fundamentally improve student achievement. So my goal is to build the capacity of the adults in the building to be steeped not only in the content of what they teach, but in the pedagogical practices needed for students to become independent and responsible learners.

To that end, teachers need to have a discerning eye for what the needs of their students are and be able to build upon their strengths. What are their learning behaviors? Not only does a teacher need to be able to gather and analyze data to make a teaching decision, but [he or she must] be able to plan for each student's needs as well as the whole group.

In her classroom at Achieve, Sophie gathers data through the "assessment-teaching cycle," evaluating what students are able to do using anecdotal information and examples of student behavior. In the day-to-day work with the literacy coach, much of the data collection focused on how students' attitudes about learning and classroom behaviors may have changed. As a staff, Achieve is shifting toward using samples of student work or concrete examples of student thinking, rather than relying on a gut feeling about what is going on. The district provides MAP test data, but in a way that Sophie describes as "not very user-friendly."

Sophie teaches two ninth grade language arts classes, each in a two-block period, and has one release period to coach other teachers. She characterizes her student load as unusually low – 42 students plus 26 more in advisory. She does not have common planning time with Robyn, though most other subject area teachers have time together. That decision, along with the one to block language arts (and no other subject), was made by Achieve's staff. Sophie's language arts classes are taught as literacy workshops, with opportunities for student conferences incorporated into the teaching cycle.

In her teaching process, Sophie tracks the amount of work students turn in and tries to

uncover students' sense of ownership of the work. She has regular one-on-one meetings with students to assess how they are doing and to help them articulate goals for improvement. For example, she asks students to tell her about what they are reading and asks some students to read portions of their book out loud to her. She asks them questions about what they read and looks to see if they are keeping track of their ideas about the reading with post-it notes.

- Talk to me a little bit about what you mean.
- Can you show me a post-it note that points this out?
- Is the reading partner process helping you?
- What are you thinking of reading next?

She wants to understand how much agency students feel and how much accountability they take for their own learning. She wants them to get a sense of empowerment from the conferences and know how they can move forward. She asks students how they can keep challenging themselves. An "A" student might select more challenging books to read and work with his reading partner to identify areas where they want to improve beyond "just getting the work done." She tells a struggling student that he needs to turn work in so she can understand how best to help him.

According to her principal, Sophie's greatest growth in using data stems from her anecdotal notes from these conferences and listening in on students having conversations about their reading. She uses that information to inform her practice. In this way, data is very much at the center of what Sophie has been working on this year. Sophie is beginning to think assigning grades is not the priority; assessing students day-to-day, responding, and building units around students' needs is driving her toward implementing a more competency-based or narrative assessment for students.

Sophie credits the professional development she receives from the district and her principal, Alicia Pearson, as the reason she still teaches at Achieve. But, as she supports Sophie to better tune into her students' learning behaviors, Alicia feels the district is sending the message that "Students have to pass the state standardized test. The test is our indicator of student success," implying that results are more highly valued than improvement.

**Olympic School District at a Glance**

The Olympic Public Schools serve almost 17,400 students in grades K-12. The district is located south of an urban West Coast city and encompasses ethnically and economically diverse communities. The district is committed to redesigning its four comprehensive high schools, two of which have converted to small schools, and has opened two freestanding small schools. In 2007, 54 percent of the students qualified for free or reduced-price meals, and 63 percent of the student body consisted of ethnicities other than Caucasian. Students represented 80 nationalities and spoke 70 different languages (see Exhibit B Olympic School District Demographic Data).

**School Perspective on Data**

Principal Alicia Pearson leads Achieve's staff in using both qualitative and quantitative data to inform their work. For example, teachers had the impression that tardiness was a huge problem, with students habitually arriving late to class. When Alicia brought attendance data to a staff meeting, the teachers realized that the problem was primarily with first period. They gathered more data, including records from one day where they did "tardy sweeps" and wrote down the name of every single student who was late. Sophie recalls, "We had about 61 kids late for first period, out of 350. Then for the next class, we had three. So we said, this is more manageable. It's not like kids are late to

every class indiscriminately.” The staff realized that something else was going on. They learned that some of the buses were coming late and kids didn’t have enough time to eat breakfast in the cafeteria.

Achieve teachers have the opportunity to discuss students at monthly department meetings, monthly grade-level meetings, advisory team meetings, monthly staff meetings, and during daily informal conversations that Sophie feels are inevitable in a school as small

as Achieve. One of the staff’s goals is to create structures for sharing the information. The four language arts teachers are spearheading the work by meeting to discuss, for example, what one noticed about a student as a writer, what that means to his other subject area teachers, and whether his teachers have similar goals for him as a writer.

Achieve teachers collect and use data to identify trends in classes, in grade levels, and in various student populations. Teachers provide progress reports to students every three weeks, even though district policy calls for every six or nine weeks. Alicia has been helping teachers identify what proficiency looks like in each subject area and how to measure it. There is a growing sense at Achieve that

grades are not the right measure. Currently students receive the letter grades A, B, C, and F. But, teachers collectively wonder if meeting standard is an “A” or a “C.” Alicia has been gathering data to make some assertions about the lack of correlation between the current academic grade reporting and students’ proficiency toward standards-based outcomes.

Alicia leads teachers in using a compendium of assessments to see how students demonstrate their thinking in authentic ways. For example, they conducted a school-wide writing assessment and also looked at MAP data to measure growth over time. But while the district encourages this kind of data use, there aren’t structures in place to support it.

As a principal, I don’t have timely or even flexible access to data. I have to gather it from multiple sources and then synthesize it myself, rather than being able to go to one place and pull up the student and see their math, see their [state standardized test] data. I’m not able to enter in any other monitoring information.

Alicia says this lack of access inhibits her ability to look at patterns across her school with regard to truancy, for example, or track data representing individual student’s proficiency in certain skills or concepts. It is also difficult to compile data in the current systems that teachers and school administrators have access to. Similarly, the MAP data goes into a central repository at the district, but it is difficult for school personnel to access the system and get reports back out without assistance from the district office.

### **Making Data a Priority**

Achieve’s emphasis on collecting and using data to inform instruction is attributable to Alicia Pearson’s leadership. On any given day, she can be found walking the halls, checking in with a student about a recent math test, praising another for better communicating her needs to teachers, and congratulating another regarding praise from teachers on his

#### **Achieve Academy at a Glance**

Achieve Academy is a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools<sup>3</sup> and strives to provide an equitable education for all students through a rigorous, relevant, and collaborative educational experience. As with the district, Achieve’s mission is to prepare students for work, citizenship, and postsecondary education—for example, all students must apply to five institutions of higher education and for ten scholarships before they graduate (see Exhibit C Achieve Academy Demographic Data).

<sup>3</sup> The Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) is a national network of schools and centers engaged in redesigning schools to raise student achievement. CES schools share a common commitment to a set of beliefs about whole school change called the Common Principles. Ravenswood High School became involved with CES in 2003 (see Exhibit D CES Ten Common Principles).

oral report. Alicia reports spending about 90 percent of her time during the school day on instructional practice and learning – be it modeling instruction, observing instructional practice, looking at student work, or just maintaining a presence in the halls.

I spend my time on what is most important in the building – helping change instructional practice to meet the needs of kids. And making sure that I'm putting into practice the teaching, the modeling, and the scaffold for adult learning so that this work gains traction.

Alicia developed her leadership style before coming to the Olympic School District, during her tenure in a large, urban district. She started there as a language arts and second-language-learner teacher, but after three years she was released from classroom practice for an entire year to receive extensive training in instructional leadership. Alicia then became principal of the junior high school where she interned. She also did some consulting for the same organization that provides the literacy coaching to Olympic; in fact, Alicia worked with Olympic's district administrators to improve their instructional leadership practice. When Ravenswood High School converted to three small schools, Alicia accepted the principal position at Achieve.

In [my old district] everything was done to teach us how to lead for instructional improvement and how to analyze and use our analysis of instructional practice to make decisions about the adult learning that needed to occur that would enable students to learn and become independent thinkers. I was very steeped in the leadership needed to engage in that work, and I was able to bring that with me. In Olympic there is great energy on the intention of being able to focus on instructional leadership. I believe that at this point in the district, the focus is still on content work around literacy and writing. It is not yet connected to any instructional leadership; as a system, we don't have a common understanding and application of how to lead for improved student achievement.

Alicia leads from the theory, “research-based, practice-proven, value-driven,” meaning that every decision made at the school supports their core values about what is best for students. She encourages teachers to gather data and use that information to make decisions about their teaching practice. They reflect upon their practice, gather more classroom data to see what is or is not working, and build upon that. The goal is for all teachers to continually monitor and adjust.

I encourage the use of data. Not only is it my expectation, but it's a collective expectation among the staff. How that plays out looks different. My literacy staff, with Sophie leading that work, is farthest along in knowing what questions to ask, what data to collect, and how to use it.

Alicia says that teachers have told her, “It used to be when my principal came in he was looking at what I did. And you come in and you're always looking and listening to what the students are doing.” Alicia uses that information as an opportunity to have a conversation with teachers about their practice, asking, “What do you know about your students? Talk to me about them as learners.” A common theme in these conversations is moving teachers away from talking about students' behaviors – for example, the student is off-task a lot – to the evidence of their learning.

While Alicia has the experience and the wherewithal to support her teachers in their work, she would like more support from the district office. She thinks the district has yet to create the policies and systems that show they are serious about the district goal “all students graduating ready for college, career, and citizenship.”

## Pushing for Change

Alicia argues that if district administrators truly intend to make decisions based on what is best for all students, they need to consider a variety of data and cannot take the approach that one size fits all.

Everyone agrees that embedded coaching, not a pullout workshop, is the best utilization of professional development resources. But, when every single school, regardless of whether you're under-performing or high-performing, has the exact same number of embedded coaching days, that's not an equitable distribution of resources. As a district, we need to look at the instructional capability of the principal in the school or the leadership capability of the teachers who are engaged in the practice – that way we can gain traction in the work, as well as replicate and sustain it.

I would think that you reduce or eliminate the coaching at high-performing schools. You put it at a school where there's underachievement, with the understanding that, as that coaching [improves] teacher practice and student learning, you reduce that support, and it goes to someone else. We are still coming back to "if we don't do it all the same, someone is going to be mad."

A lot of the work for me is helping the district to be able to unpack what we mean by "equity." What we mean by "building capacity." [Everyone needs] to share their thinking, then determine a course of action and rationalize it, so that I understand it. That's been my greatest struggle as a leader this year: going back to my staff and owning it in front of them. That can be difficult. I'm very fortunate that I work in a district where I can wrestle with those conversations with my immediate supervisor, with the director of teaching and learning, with the superintendent. That we can get in a room and say, "That's not my definition. That's not my evidence."

Superintendent Kessler understands Alicia's frustration but has not yet figured out how to create a better system for distributing resources equitably. He says,

I think there are some school leaders who, if they were provided a little more autonomy, if we had a little more autonomous culture, they would be able to run with it effectively. For them, by not creating that condition, we are probably impeding them a little bit, or a lot, depending on who they are. But as a system, we haven't figured that out yet. There is still an inequity in the way resources are allocated.

However, the distribution of resources sometimes works in Alicia's favor. She wanted Achieve to have its own summer school, separate from the district. Alicia went to Assistant Superintendent Ruth Gentry with her proposal.<sup>4</sup> "If I have a plan in place to support my kids that has to do with instruction, and I need someone to finally make a 'yes' decision, I approach Ruth Gentry." The district agreed to fund the school. One district administrator explains why:

Alicia made a good case, and we trust her. Plus, the district designated Achieve as a "focus" school. The superintendent wants to support our neediest schools but realizes that we can't support them all. At some point the resources are too diluted. That leads to – not arbitrary – but different treatment.

Designating "focus" schools was one of Superintendent Kessler's strategies to support the district's neediest schools. Decisions were based on both quantitative and qualitative data, such as demographics (free or reduced-price meals and English Language Learners), achievement, leadership, and school circumstances. This last criterion distinguished the three new schools on the old Ravenswood campus, since the superintendent knew that

<sup>4</sup> At the time, Ruth Gentry was not in the chain of command to oversee high schools. Ruth Gentry's title has since changed to deputy superintendent and her responsibilities have expanded to include oversight of the director of secondary schools (see Exhibit E Olympic School District Organizational Chart).

they would need maximum support to get off the ground. So, while other high schools in the district are just as needy as Achieve, they don't get as much funding because they are not "focus" schools.

## **District Perspective on Data**

The district began looking closely at the data from its four comprehensive high schools shortly after the current superintendent, Robert Kessler, came on board as deputy superintendent in 2002. Robert came from a finance and economics background before entering the field of public education in 1994. According to Robert, the data – especially for low-income families and students of color – were "frightening." In particular, Ravenswood High School was in crisis, with large numbers of students dropping out, the largest number of students not passing the state standardized test, and a growing number of poor students (70 percent qualified for free or reduced-price meals). Two of the other high schools were also struggling, and even the best of the group was in the bottom half of the state rankings. Robert seized the data as a wake-up call for the district.

Robert spearheaded the ensuing reform effort in his position as deputy superintendent.<sup>5</sup> Converting Olympic's large, comprehensive high schools into small schools seemed like a promising strategy for improving student achievement. The district developed a set of guiding principles for the conversion efforts that supported teachers, the people closest to the students, in creating the new schools. In May of 2004, Olympic's school board passed the Policy for High School Redesign, which outlined the vision and goals for creating small schools (see Exhibit F Board Policy for High School Redesign). In September 2005, after a year of planning, three small schools opened on the campus of the old Ravenswood High School; Achieve Academy was one of them.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Kessler took over as superintendent in July 2005.

Concurrent with the data wake-up call in 2002, the district launched a literacy initiative. This included professional development in conferring with individual students on their work, site-based literacy coaches to assist with modeling quality practice, and external coaches to work with teachers on improving instruction. The principals went to monthly trainings on teaching literacy to develop their capacity as instructional leaders. Each school worked with a literacy coach who was "embedded" in select classrooms, modeling instruction and coaching volunteer teachers in real time. They asked questions in the moment that, according to Sophie Miller, "really helped me see things differently and demystified all the things that go into teaching." District leaders hoped that by "going with the goers," enthusiastic participants like Sophie would serve as models and inspiration for others in the district to join the work.

## **Looking at Student Data**

In the spring of 2007, Superintendent Robert Kessler began doing classroom walk-throughs by himself and with the senior leadership team as a means to build a knowledge set about what is going on in classrooms. He plans to make them a regular part of his staff's agenda next year. Likewise, the incoming Executive Director of High Schools, Isidore Franklyn, hopes to build the professional community between and among the district's high school principals by facilitating walk-throughs in each of the buildings

throughout the coming school year. These activities are designed to provide a snapshot view of what's happening in classes across the school by having visitors walk from class to class, spending about ten minutes in each of them. After the walk-through, Isidore will lead participants through a formal process to share observations, which might be filtered through the lens of a particular problem of practice selected by the host principal.

The superintendent's previous experiences with walk-throughs had been focused on identifying best practices and areas for improvement. He believed that if he was going to build system-wide supports, he needed a mental shift in how he thought about classroom activity. Now, his interest in doing walk-throughs is about learning what's going on and getting his senior staff "connected with what classroom practices look like," rather than providing feedback to schools about what they saw.

What we know to be true is that the support areas [such as transportation, nutrition services, and facilities] can drive how things happen in the schools in good ways or in bad. The more senior staff members are out in the schools and a part of the conversation, the better off we all are.

### Principles of Powerful Instruction

1. Standards-based lesson design based on the state grade-level expectations
2. High standards of student engagement
3. Teaching transferable skills
4. Teaching for independence
5. Designing lessons to meet the needs of students
6. Data-driven decision making
7. Looking for evidence of student learning
8. Reflective practice in improving our own learning

District personnel concede that the primary measure for student achievement is currently the state standardized test. But, when visiting classrooms, they are focused on other evidence of student learning. Isidore explains, "I listen in when teachers confer with kids to hear what they're talking about. I listen to what kids are talking about. I'll look through journals to see what the kids are writing about."

Isidore says that the district lacks formative assessments and a systematic way to look at student work. The district is, however, beginning to get smarter about the use of school- and student-level data. One area of growth is in disaggregating data to examine individual student progress, which district administrators did to look at who is taking Algebra II. They learned that hundreds of students who had passed the seventh grade state standardized test, and were therefore prepared for algebra in the eighth grade, were not actually taking the course. This data revealed one way that the district was not supporting students in reaching the "college-ready" goal.

## Data Initiatives

Olympic School District has several initiatives in place to get people focused on collecting and using data.

1. Data-driven decision making is one of the district's eight principles of powerful instruction disseminated by the Office of Teaching, Learning, and School Improvement. According to Ruth Gentry, the district has done a "good job of talking about them with principals and instructional coaches." But, she adds, it's up to the principals and coaches to bring the message to teachers.

Isidore Franklyn says that the district hasn't provided enough professional development for principals and teachers, or held them accountable, for using data.

The expectation is that principals will use data, but we know we haven't trained them. We don't have a culture of accountability. As long as they keep coming to all the meetings

saying, “This data is really helpful, I’m going to go back and use it,” [no one will check to see if they actually do it].

In the literacy workshops, because teachers do so much conferring, I think they’re doing a lot of formative assessment. Some schools do a nice job using MAP reports. So, if you’re a science teacher, we can plot out for you the reading levels of all your kids in science. ...We haven’t set the expectation that teachers will use data, and it is anecdotal at best as to who’s really using it. We haven’t done any sort of professional development on what that would look like.

Ruth Gentry agrees that the district is much better at gathering data than using it and that there’s a missing link around how to use the data to change practice. “We haven’t done a lot at a systems level to help with that.”

2. Creating a new Office of Accountability is another indication of the district’s focus on assessment and accountability. The superintendent’s vision for Charles Denton, as the new chief accountability officer, is to provide leadership in helping people understand how to use data. He explains, “When we can get Charles the tools, and he can then deploy them across the system, that’s when we’ll start to see some amazing things happen.” Charles Denton defines accountability as “being in touch with results.”<sup>6</sup> He says,

Accountability gets this bad rap for being heavy-handed. It’s not about that. It’s about being in touch with reality. Not setting up structures and disciplines so that you can just wander through life, through the work, without looking at whether you are meeting your goals. ... It is hard in education to substantiate things and attribute effects because you have so many things going on. There is a discipline to it.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Denton compiled a list of potential high school metrics (see Exhibit G High School Metrics) in an initial effort to determine how the district will track and measure progress toward the goal of graduating all students ready for college, career, and citizenship.

3. To grow a culture of accountability, the district is working with another outside organization to pilot an initiative with four schools this year, expected to expand to seven in 2007-2008. The effort shifts the goal of collecting data from being entirely about external pressure, like the state standardized test, to internal accountability, where schools identify their own measures. The initiative also attempts to vertically align K-12 use of data to assess and address students’ needs. Charles hopes it will streamline accountability systems by combining various year-end reports into one manageable school improvement plan, where improvement is more tightly coupled with data.

Ruth Gentry initiated the accountability work group, but will transfer leadership of the project to Charles. The group consists of a representative from the teachers union, ten district administrators, and school-level personnel from the four schools, including Alicia. This group developed guiding principles for the work, adapted from another district, which the superintendent would like to apply to all areas of Olympic’s work (see Exhibit H Accountability Plan Guiding Principles). Ruth understands that Alicia volunteered Achieve for the pilot in order to help shape the initiative as a way to “protect herself” from the system. Ruth says,

We have very few tools or structures in place to help teachers, such as assessments and rubrics. And because of that, our high school teachers are going ahead and doing good things on their own. I’m sure that those who have taken the time to put [tools or structures] in place are worried about the system coming in and not valuing them or replacing them with something not as good.

4. In an effort to give teachers more access to data on a deeper level, the district has an additional initiative on the horizon. A bond passed last year will purchase a new

student information system and a data warehouse. District and school administrators will be able to analyze student demographic information, student achievement data, and financial data, and make informed decisions at the district and school levels. September 2008 is when the superintendent hopes to have all the schools included in the new system. He expects it will take another year to get more sophisticated about using the data warehouse for analysis.

### **Follow-Through**

The challenge to define, collect, and access data is exacerbated by a pressing request from the school board for information on how small schools are working. Board members worry that the district starts initiatives without first creating indicators for success. The Policy for High School Redesign calls for assessments of student achievement and various stakeholders' satisfaction as a way to determine if the small schools strategy is the best investment of resources. The board is particularly concerned about student outcomes, and they consider lack of rigor to be an issue in the schools. The superintendent feels pressure to get some data back and show results in the 2007-2008 school year.

We've got to determine a set of student achievement metrics that we're going to monitor. Then, how are individual teachers making the progress toward those metrics? The [state standardized test] is not going away, so that will be one of them. But there are the interim assessments like MAP. Are kids gaining over the course of time?

Some of that test data has gone down during this initiative. Not in alarming ways, but when you are trying to build some momentum and support, and you don't have some of those little arrows pointing in the right direction... You only get so many opportunities to do that, then we are going to have to choose a different course.

Board members are frustrated that our results are as sketchy as they are. They're a board that believes in results – they have lots to be frustrated about with this initiative.

While the Olympic School District is committed to the rigorous goal of graduating all students ready for college, career, and citizenship, the district has yet to identify a common definition or understanding of what rigor looks like in the classroom. Nor has anyone determined which data can measure rigor. Charles Denton suggested reporting quarterly grades. At the same time, he knows that he cannot assume Achieve is operating on quarters or that they are giving letter grades. Likewise, counting Advanced Placement (AP) class offerings and test results conflicts with Achieve's decision not to offer AP classes. It is difficult to find comparable data across the district's high schools. Even so, Charles thinks it is an abundance of data, not a lack thereof, which can pose a problem.

You can have so many reams of data that none of it is really helpful. It's just so overwhelming that it becomes pointless. How do we disaggregate in a way that we are paying attention to diversity without putting so much data out there that it just overwhelms people? How do we best personalize and take it to scale?

We have good measures of summative or point-in-time snapshots. We have the ability to track individual kids. But we don't have a real good method for aggregating up the gains.

How the district will measure student achievement is still undecided. Clearly, the state standardized test will remain as one important metric. But, what interim assessments will measure students' progress? How will data be gathered, both informally and formally, and by whom? How will data be disseminated and will it be used?

The superintendent reports that the district uses data now more than ever before, though the culture of accountability is still developing. He acknowledges that a lot more work must be done to train teachers in how to use data to think about instruction. In turn, the district must make all of this data easily available to teachers during the course of their workday. District-level data is not disaggregated for every student group, and the technology is not yet available to make the data accessible to principals and teachers.

The solutions to these challenges may lie in the new initiatives. However, Ruth Gentry says a district evaluation showed “Olympic starts well on things, but it doesn’t necessarily implement well or finish. And it doesn’t evaluate what it does along the line, because it doesn’t implement.” Ruth adds, “We’ve come to the conclusion that we gather a lot of data, but what are we doing with it? What’s going to be different tomorrow? How much deeper do we need to go in the conversation?”

## **The Broad View**

People at all levels of the Olympic School District are talking about data. The district is launching new initiatives and a new structure to take their data and accountability plans to the next step. Sophie Miller uses data to inform her work daily and, in this regard, personifies the direction in which the district would like to move. However, the examples here of how data is collected and used in different parts of the system highlight issues that continue to impact teaching and learning in spite of the increased attention to data-based decision making. What light does this case study shed on system supports for improved teacher practice?

## Self-Study Questions

Questions to consider about the use of data in instructional change:

1. In what ways do *data definitions* match up or vary between and among individuals at different levels of the system?
2. In what ways does the teacher's *use of data* compare to that of her principal, the central office, and the school board?
3. How can the teacher and the central office support one another's different needs for data?
4. What supports or hinders individuals at each level when making data-driven decisions?
5. How would you characterize the central office's method for allocating resources? How does that impact the use of data for instructional change?
6. Given what you now understand about the system, what recommendations would you make to the teacher, principal, central office administrators, or other system personnel about system supports for data use to improve instructional practice and student achievement?
7. What specific lessons and insights did you gain from this case study and how might they apply to your own work to support instructional change in service of increased student achievement?

**EXHIBIT A - FINAL GRADING RUBRIC**

**LITERACY 9 – EDITORIAL**

Publishable Draft Due: Friday, January 12th

**The Assignment:**

Select an issue about which you feel strongly, write an editorial in which you carefully construct an argument to convince your audience of your point.

**Process:**

- Select a topic about which you feel strongly
- Collect ideas in your writing notes about this topic (opinions, examples, personal experience, information from outside sources)
- Draft and revise your editorial at least two times
- Share your writing in the celebration on the 12th

**Editorial Rubric:**

Assess yourself on the following rubric (use the back of this page to explain if need be)

Category	Exceeds Standard	Meets Standard	Not yet to Standard
Focus/ Organization	My editorial has a clear and focused argument about a single issue/topic. I have clearly developed paragraphs which are carefully organized to have the greatest impact on the reader. My editorial demonstrates clear evidence of a mentor text used.	My editorial has a single argument which is clearly presented to the reader. I have developed paragraphs. I used a mentor text.	My editorial does not have a clear argument/I don't have paragraphs/I didn't use a mentor text.
Content	All of the information presented in my editorial is accurate. My editorial has specific evidence/examples from more than one outside source.	All of the information presented in my editorial is accurate. My editorial has specific evidence/examples from at least one outside source.	My editorial contains only general information on my topic and/or some of the information is inaccurate.
Voice	My editorial demonstrates the use of original and specific language that adds to my argument.	My editorial shows evidence of original language use in an attempt to add to my argument.	My editorial shows no attempt at use of specific or original language or language use distracts from the argument.
Conventions	My editorial is virtually error free.	My editorial contains some errors, but they don't detract from the meaning.	My editorial contains many errors that detract from meaning.
Writing Cycle	My editorial is handed in with at least 2 drafts and with evidence of at least 3 revision strategies used.	My editorial is handed in with at least 1 draft and with evidence of at least 2 revision strategies used.	My editorial is handed in with no or insufficient evidence of the writing process.
Celebration	I share my editorial with my peers at the celebration!	N/A	I do not share my editorial with my peers at the celebration.
Overall	<b>My editorial exceeds standard in at least 4 out of 5 categories.</b>	<b>My editorial at least meets standard in all categories.</b>	<b>My editorial does not meet standard in all categories.</b>

**EXHIBIT B - OLYMPIC SCHOOL DISTRICT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

<b>2006-2007 State Standardized Test Results (percent of students meeting standard):</b>				
<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Math</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>Science</b>
3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	59%	57%		
4 <sup>th</sup> grade	65%	41%	50%	
5 <sup>th</sup> grade	58%	45%		19%
6 <sup>th</sup> grade	60%	33%		
7 <sup>th</sup> grade	62%	42%	58%	
8 <sup>th</sup> grade	57%	38%		26%
10 <sup>th</sup> grade	73%	38%	71%	28%

<b>Student Demographics</b>	
Total enrollment (October 2006)	17,360
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2%
Asian	21%
Black	14%
Hispanic	25%
White	37%
<b>Special Programs (May 2007)</b>	
Free or reduced-price meals	54%
Transitional bilingual	17%
Migrant	0%
Special education students	12%
Languages spoken	70
<b>Other Information</b>	
Unexcused absence rate (2006-2007)	0%
Annual dropout rate (2005-2006)	6%
On-time graduation rate (2005-2006)	65%
Extended graduation rate (2005-2006)	70%

<b>Teacher Information (2005-2006)</b>	
Classroom teachers	972
Students per teacher	18
Average years of teacher experience	11
% of teachers with at least a master's degree	54
Total number of teachers who teach core academic classes	760
% of teachers teaching with an emergency certificate	0
% of teachers teaching with a conditional certificate	1
Total number of core academic classes	1,737
<b>NCLB Highly Qualified Teacher Information</b>	
% of classes taught by teachers meeting NCLB Highly Qualified (HQ) definition	82
% of classes taught by teachers who do not meet HQ definition	18
% of classes in high poverty schools taught by teachers who meet HQ definition	76
% of classes in high poverty schools taught by teachers who do not meet HQ definition	24
% of classes in low poverty schools taught by teachers who meet HQ definition	96
% of classes in low poverty schools taught by teachers who do not meet HQ definition	4

**EXHIBIT C - ACHIEVEMENT ACADEMY DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

<b>2006-2007 State Standardized Test Results (percent of students meeting standard):</b>				
Grade Level	Reading	Math	Writing	Science
10 <sup>th</sup> grade	57%	18%	61%	12%

<b>Student Demographics</b>	
Achieve enrollment	350
Ravenswood campus enrollment	1,150
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1%
Asian	20%
Black	21%
Hispanic	23%
White	36%
<b>Special Programs (May 2007)</b>	
Free or reduced-price meals	59%
Transitional bilingual	19%
Special education	19%
<b>Other Information</b>	
Graduation rate (2006)	94%*
<small>*This number represents students that Achieve Academy inherited as juniors from Ravenswood High School after the conversion and does not account for the students who dropped out as freshman or sophomores, before the conversion.</small>	

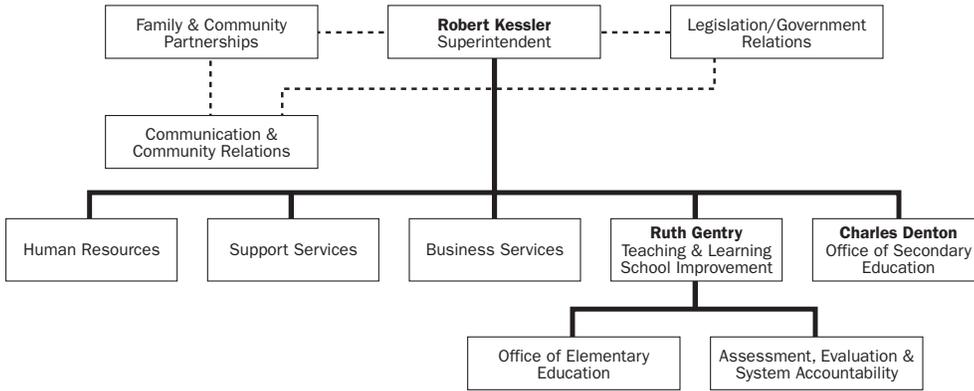
**EXHIBIT D - COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS (CES) TEN COMMON PRINCIPLES**

1. The school should focus on helping young people learn to use their minds well. Schools should not be comprehensive if such a claim is made at the expense of the school's central intellectual purpose.
2. The school's goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. While these skills and areas will, to varying degrees, reflect the traditional academic disciplines, the program's design should be shaped by the intellectual and imaginative powers and competencies that the students need, rather than by "subjects" as conventionally defined. The aphorism "less is more" should dominate: curricular decisions should be guided by the aim of thorough student mastery and achievement rather than by an effort to merely cover content.
3. The school's goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary. School practice should be tailor-made to meet the needs of every group or class of students.
4. Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent. Efforts should be directed toward a goal that no teacher have direct responsibility for more than 80 students in the high school and middle school and no more than 20 in the elementary school. To capitalize on this personalization, decisions about the details of the course of study, the use of students' and teachers' time and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff.
5. The governing practical metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker, rather than the more familiar metaphor of teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services. Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be coaching, to provoke students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves.
6. Teaching and learning should be documented and assessed with tools based on student performance of real tasks. Students not yet at appropriate levels of competence should be provided intensive support and resources to assist them quickly to meet those standards. Multiple forms of evidence, ranging from ongoing observation of the learner to completion of specific projects, should be used to better understand the learner's strengths and needs, and to plan for further assistance. Students should have opportunities to exhibit their expertise before family and community. The diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation – an "Exhibition." As the diploma is awarded when earned, the school's program proceeds with no strict age grading and with no system of credits earned by "time spent" in class. The emphasis is on the students' demonstration that they can do important things.
7. The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress values of unanxious expectation ("I won't threaten you but I expect much of you"), of trust (until abused) and of decency (the values of fairness, generosity, and tolerance). Incentives appropriate to the school's particular students and teachers should be emphasized. Parents should be key collaborators and vital members of the school community.
8. The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first (teachers and scholars in general education) and specialists second (experts in but one particular discipline). Staff should expect multiple obligations (teacher-counselor-manager) and a sense of commitment to the entire school.
9. Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include, in addition to total student loads per teacher of 80 or fewer pupils on the high school and middle school levels and 20 or fewer on the elementary level, substantial time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries for staff, and an ultimate per pupil cost not to exceed that at traditional schools by more than 10 percent. To accomplish this, administrative plans may have to show the phased reduction or elimination of some services now provided students in many traditional schools.
10. The school should demonstrate non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, practices, and pedagogies. It should model democratic practices that involve all who are directly affected by the school. The school should honor diversity and build on the strength of its communities, deliberately and explicitly challenging all forms of inequity.

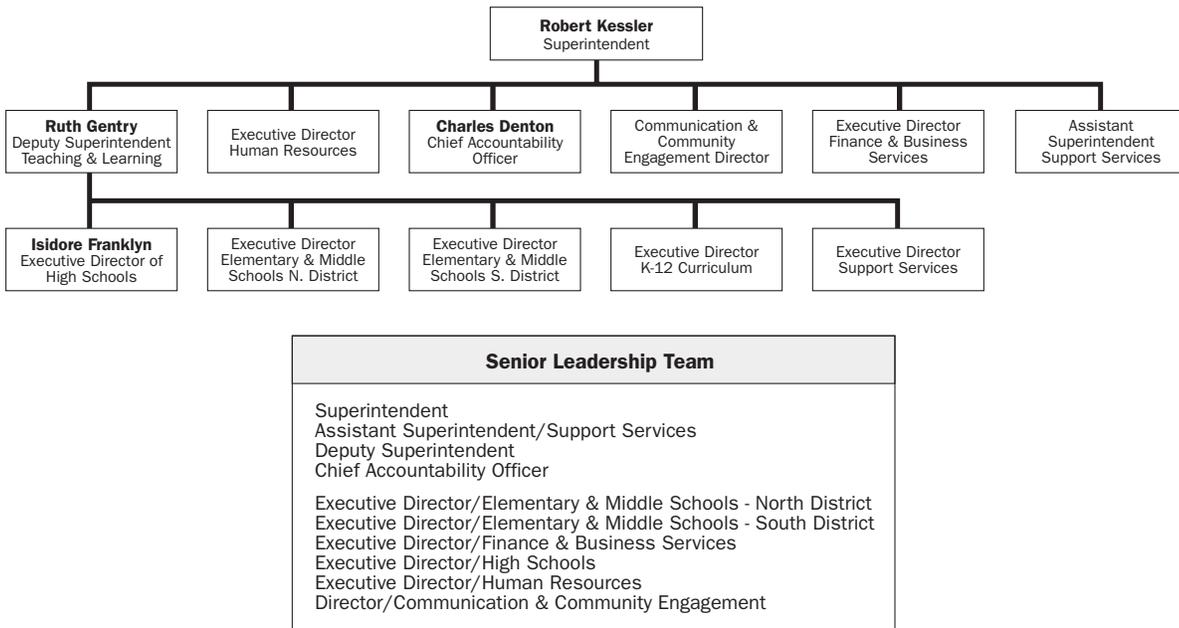
See <http://www.essentialschools.org> for more information

**EXHIBIT E - OLYMPIC SCHOOL DISTRICT ORGANIZATIONAL CHART**

**Organizational Chart: 2006 - 2007**



**Organizational Chart: 2007 - 2008**



## **EXHIBIT F - BOARD POLICY FOR HIGH SCHOOL REDESIGN: RIGOR, RELEVANCE, AND RELATIONSHIPS**

It is the goal of the Board to ensure that our high schools prepare all students to graduate with a high school diploma and for entry into postsecondary education, career, and the responsibilities of active citizenship. To further this goal, the district's high schools will redesign themselves into smaller learning communities or small schools on high school campuses that emphasize academic rigor, relevance, and relationships.

### **Purpose and Accountability for Results**

- a) The primary purpose of high school redesign is to raise student achievement for all students and close the achievement gap for under-served students by decreasing the size of schools adhering to high academic standards and increasing the quality of choices available to parents and students in Olympic Public Schools.
- b) The Board and Superintendent or designee will be responsible for ensuring community involvement and public understanding of the goals and priorities for developing high-performing high schools.
- c) The Board and Superintendent or designee will be responsible for promoting and encouraging new, smaller learning environments that promote effective relationships, academic relevance, and rigor at each high school campus.
- d) Smaller learning environments must identify measurable student outcomes and outline the method by which student progress in meeting the identified student outcomes will be measured. The measurable student outcomes must address overall student achievement as well as equity.
- e) The District will use an evaluation instrument and/or process to measure and report parent, teacher, and student satisfaction for all schools.
- f) Each high school throughout their redesign process and timeline is entitled to an equitable share of resources, technical assistance, leadership, and support in meeting its goals.

### **Core Guiding Principles of High School Redesign**

The high school redesign plan and the creation of new small learning communities depends on several key conditions. These conditions, as outlined in the policy and sustained by the district, are the important contributing factors leading to the desired results.

**Personalization:** Every student is known well, respected, and appreciated. Emotional and intellectual needs are met. Every student has an adult advocate and a personal plan for progress.

**Equitable, Inclusive, and Multicultural Schools:** Each student's cultural background and experiences are respected and connected to the curriculum. Resources are equitably distributed to ensure success for every student, regardless of background.

**Clear and High Expectations:** High expectations are clearly communicated to all students. Students are engaged in an ambitious, rigorous course of study and leave school prepared for postsecondary education and/or career.

**Authentic Curriculum and Assessment:** Students are challenged to increase and apply knowledge, analyze information, produce quality work, make presentations, and think critically. Teachers and students set learning goals, and students must demonstrate their competency in order to advance.

**Democratic Learning and Choice:** Teachers, parents, and students work together to create a common vision for where the school is going, and make decisions that result in student success. A system of "choice" allows parents and students to choose from the best educational opportunities available to them.

**Distributed Leadership Focused on Instruction:** The school board, staff, and community share responsibility to ensure the success of every student. Schools are given autonomy but are held accountable for enabling all students to achieve at high levels.

**Time and Space for Collaboration:** Staff and students are given the time and space to collaborate and develop skills and plans to meet the needs of all students. Teamwork is expected and encouraged.

**Community and Citizenship:** Parents are recognized as partners in education. Partnerships are developed with businesses and higher education to create authentic projects and opportunities for students. Students become responsible citizens through critical thinking, civic engagement, and an understanding of democracy.

Adopted by the Board: May 12, 2004

EXHIBIT G - HIGH SCHOOL METRICS

Category	Metric	Ongoing	2-4 X/year	Annual	Occasional	District Goals
Student Achievement	Reading			X		According to state law, beginning with the class of 2008, students (state standardized must pass the reading and writing portions of the state standardized test to graduate from high school. Passing the math and science sections won't be required until 2013.
	Math			X		
	Writing			X		
	Science			X		
	Percent passing 3 sections on first try			X		
Course Taking	Percent passing all sections eventually		X			Students' AP and IB test participation will triple between 2006 and 2010 and 90 percent of students will pass the exam.
	Predicted score (using MAP)		X			
	Grades		X			
HS Graduation	Percent of grads taking at least one college level course			X		90 percent of students will graduate on time.
	AP/IB participation			X		
	AP/IB test taking			X		
	AP/IB scores			X		
	Algebra 2 taking			X		
College Readiness	Pre-calculus taking			X		More students will meet Higher Education Coordinating Board standards and 90 percent of graduates will be prepared for college coursework without remediation.
	Percent success in Algebra by grade 9			X		
	OSPI Graduation Rate			X		
	Alternative measures of graduation rate (# of grads, grads/cohort)		X			
SAT/PSAT	OSPI Dropout Rate			X		90 percent of graduates will take the SAT and the percentage scoring 1300 and above will double.
	Percent students up a grade			X		
	Freshman fails		X			
	SAT participation			X		
College Going	SAT scores			X		90 percent of graduates enroll in post secondary education and the percentage of students attending 4-year colleges will double.
	SAT above high bar			X		
	PSAT participation			X		
Discipline	PSAT scores			X		No goal stated.
	2-year remediation rate			X		
	4-year remediation rate			X		
	Percent grads meeting HEC board standards			X		
Attendance	Percent going to college (total)			X		Complete annual online survey with each major constituent group.
	Percent going to 2-year college			X		
	Percent going to 4-year college			X		
	College graduation			X		
Perception	Total suspension/expulsion	X				
	No goal stated	X				
	Disaggregated sus/exp	X				
Student Survey	Number of fights	X				
	Total serious incidents	X				
Staff Survey	Daily rate	X				
	Number qualifying for legal intervention	X				

## **EXHIBIT H - ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

### **Joint Ownership:**

All adults in the system, from the board to the district office to the schools to the classroom, have mutual responsibility for student success. All levels of the system demonstrate a deep commitment to our district mission and hold one another accountable for results.

### **Multiple Measures:**

No one measure can capture a school or system's improvement efforts. Use multiple measures to identify and inform a fair and accurate means of demonstrating success.

### **Equity:**

In order to ensure high levels of achievement for all students, an accountability system addresses differentiation of resources and supports.

### **Continuous Improvement:**

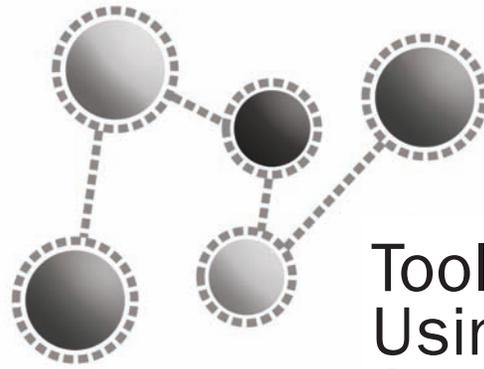
Isolation is the enemy of improvement. Collaboration, feedback, reflection, and professional growth are the norm.

### **Focus on Student Achievement:**

To prepare students for college, career, and citizenship, we will monitor academic targets (e.g., MAPs, SAT, eight components of power instruction) and other targets that are in service of student achievement (e.g., attendance, school culture, discipline).

### **Congruence:**

District and school initiatives, policies, and practices are aligned with the district vision.



## Tools for Using Case Studies

## Questions for Reflection and Comparison of Cases

Use these questions to compare findings across both studies:

1. How would you characterize the teaching experience of the two teachers with regard to individual and collective learning and practice?
2. What can we learn from these two case studies about the kinds of leadership that support instructional change in service of increased student achievement?
3. What data matters to whom, and how can we collect, analyze, and distribute data effectively to people at all levels of the system?
4. What do these case studies suggest about how a system can build coherence while at the same time granting authority and responsibility to individual schools to make significant decisions that affect student achievement?
5. What does “district support” mean and what does it look like when schools take diverse approaches to ensuring that their students learn? What is an equitable distribution of resources when both students and schools have different needs, and how should this be calculated?
6. What structural changes need to be made as instructionally diverse “best practices” take hold across the system? How will the system meet non-traditional logistical and learning demands arising when, for example, a school adopts inquiry- or project-based learning initiatives as a primary mode of instruction?
7. What cultural or structural (or both) changes need to be made as teaching, learning, and leading become increasingly collaborative? How can a system incorporate time for collaboration and the development of adult learning communities at all levels during the normal workday?
8. How can a system build a culture of mutual accountability that is not primarily hierarchical and that recognizes accountability as multidirectional rather than vertical?

## District Case Study Group Discussion Protocol

The two case studies presented here outline issues of instructional practice and school system alignment. We do not draw conclusions in the text but rather describe in detail one teacher's practice and the systemic elements that support and inhibit his or her efforts to improve his or her teaching. We leave it to readers to examine the cases and draw conclusions. To assist in this process, we provide here a protocol that can be used to help you and your colleagues sharpen your analytical skills, hone your problem-solving abilities, and challenge yourselves to think and reason rigorously.

### How to learn from a case<sup>6</sup>

The use of the case method calls for individual preparation as well as group discussion. Although no single method works for everyone, here are some general guidelines to help you prepare to use a case study:

1. Read through the case study quickly, noting the introductory paragraphs and concluding paragraphs, the internal sections and subheadings, the exhibits at the end of the case, and the self-study questions. Ask yourself, "what is this case about and what kinds of information am I being asked to analyze?"
2. Read through the case (including the exhibits) again, slowly and carefully, noting key facts, questions, disconnects, etc. Ask yourself, "what do I see happening in this district?" Be sure to note evidence from the text.
3. Read through the case again and put yourself in the role of the teacher, assistant principal, and district administrator. Ask yourself, "would I make the same decisions? What would I do differently?" Note your observations.
4. Develop recommendations for the district based on your analysis of the issue and supported by evidence from the case. Ask yourself, "If I worked in this district, what would I change? What would I keep? What would my next steps be?"
5. Discuss your findings with others using the protocol on the next page. Listen for other perspectives.

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from Hammond, J.S. (1976). *Learning by the case method*. Boston, MA: President and Fellows of Harvard College.

## Protocol

**Facilitation:** This protocol can be used with groups of different sizes. Adjust accordingly. The protocol takes about two hours (20 minute break included). Participants are seated in groups of 5 to 8 at small tables.

**Roles:** Whole group facilitator, table group facilitators

### Process:

#### 1. *Introductions/Set norms* (5 minutes)

Participants introduce themselves and their role in the school system.

Facilitator discusses norms for the table:

- Listen for understanding
- Ensure your perspective is shared (all perspectives are important)
- Allow for disagreement (the goal is to understand different perspectives, NOT to reach consensus)
- Stay in the case (cite evidence from the case rather than from personal experience)

#### 2. *Naming Observations* (10 minutes)

Participants take a minute to look back at their notes in preparation for sharing what they observed in the case study.

Facilitator asks:

*What did you observe in the case study? Use direct evidence from the case (try not to draw conclusions yet, just state evidence for your observation, e.g., "I observed that the district has a literacy initiative.")*

Facilitator notes observations on a flip chart using a bull's-eye graphic organizer with three concentric circles: the innermost circle for classroom, the middle circle for school/house, and the outer circle for district. Observations should be noted in the appropriate circle.

#### 3. *Sharing Perspectives* (20 minutes)

Facilitator asks:

*In looking at this graphic organizer and at everyone's observations, what most stood out for you in the case?*

*What appear to be the connections/disconnections between and among the strategies at each level?*

Participants first reflect individually in writing on the observations in the graphic organizer. (5 minutes)

Participants share their perspective (without responses/conversation from other group members).

After all perspectives have been shared, participants discuss their perspectives.

**BREAK** (20 minutes)

**4. Looking at the Bigger Picture** (40 minutes)

In two groups at the table, participants draw a diagram or picture of how the district's strategic work is playing out in the system. (15 minutes)

At the table – share the diagrams/pictures between the two groups. (25 minutes)

Facilitator asks the group to discuss:

*What is the impact of the connections/disconnections on the teacher?*

*What are the implications of the connections/disconnections at each level of the system?*

*What do these diagrams (and your discussion about them) suggest about the potential leverage points/places to build on the red flags/areas of concern?*

**5. Individual Reflection** (10 minutes)

Participants reflect individually in writing on these questions:

*Where did we see ourselves in this case study?*

*What did we see/learn from this case study that can assist us in our work?*

*What are our next steps?*

**6. Whole Group Reflection** (15 minutes)

Participants discuss their individual reflections and debrief the process.