

APPENDIX A: SUCCESSFUL INSTRUCTION

Successful Instruction:

Research confirms that excellent teachers impact student achievement. In fact, teachers account for 30% of the variance of achievement. The only other aspect of education that matters as much as the talented, expert teacher is the student (50% of variance). This includes the home, peers, and school, including the school leadership, each component having only 5% of variance (Hattie).

What teachers care about, know, and do powerfully affects learning. “We have poured more money into school buildings, school organization, reduced class sizes, new examinations and curricula, and parent involvement,” says Hattie, while “the answer lies in the person who gently closes the classroom door and performs the teaching act, alone with students during their 15,000 hours of schooling.”

New standards, new tests, and more training do not guarantee great teaching. What guarantees great teaching is engaged, enthusiastic teachers who have deep content knowledge, effective classroom management and genuine care and attention to each unique student (Amato).

Research says that great teachers:

- adapt instruction to students' abilities and interests
- habitually create opportunities for thinking and analysis
- use specific and timely feedback to guide students' thinking
- extend students' knowledge
- are passionate and curious
- know their content, hence, can make lessons uniquely their own
- balance their content with the diverse students before them
- use students' variety, energy and inquisitiveness to tailor their teaching
- afford students ownership of their learning through self-selected inquiry projects
- adjust to each individual classroom full of students as well as to each individual learner
- respond to their students automatically
- respect their students and demonstrate care and commitment to them
- show their passion for learning and their unwavering belief in the potential of each unique student
- seek from their students deep understanding and application of knowledge

Great teachers are the critical factor in building great schools, the single most powerful influence on student learning. Therefore, teachers need:

- meaningful, self-selected professional development that is timely and relevant, not faculty meetings that “force-feed new mandates, withering away teacher autonomy and morale” (letter)
- assessments that are reliable and instructionally supportive
- data that is meaningful
- collegial sharing--school, district, statewide and nationally
- strong pre-service with deep content instruction and extended student teaching
- autonomy to make instructional decisions in conjunction with colleagues, including selecting materials and pacing lessons
- freedom from bureaucratic distractions, including unrelenting changes and tests
- guidance and encouragement to sponsor student academic activities and classroom inquiry
- fewer learning goals
- guidance and support to encourage parent involvement
- guidance and support to create classroom esprit d' corps
- guidance and support to use positive, specific feedback in oral and written form

What is the Principal's' Role?

Since the school and principal account for only about 5% of student achievement, what is the role of an effective principal (Hattie)? Classroom observations can be beneficial, but principals cannot use observation alone to improve teaching, especially when they come armed with a template, rubric or checklist. There is no such thing as a universally effective set of teaching strategies (DuFour). Besides observation, then, effective principals affect student learning when they:

- reduce bureaucratic requirements
- create a climate of psychological safety for teachers and students
- focus on student learning
- assure teachers are not pulled out of classrooms to comply with top-down professional development or for any other reason
- avoid rigid scripted lessons or curriculum
- eliminate distractions
- express appreciation for teacher expertise
- increase their own knowledge of what constitutes effective teaching by observation
- share with other teachers what their colleagues do
- use the data to allow teachers to decide what works

Principals cannot improve learning by observation alone. They cannot improve teaching by micromanaging instruction. Therefore, principals should avoid scripted programs that convey negative messages. Scripts and rigid adherence to both materials and curricula imply that teachers are incapable of making instructional decisions. The unintended consequence of constantly buying teacher-proof materials and tests is high teacher turnover because teachers infer that they are not valued enough to plan their own lessons. Their professional development is often less about growing their capacity as professionals and more about training to use commercial programs and tests. The national standards and testing movement also conveys a negative message to teachers, implying that teachers do not know how to teach the right stuff (Hattie).

Since no one program can meet the needs of all students, teachers must not be hamstrung by adherence to one-size-fits-all approaches. There is no scientifically-researched evidence that one program applies successfully to all students, especially the learning divergent and the gifted students (Cooter). It is the teacher, not the program, that is the ultimate driving force in improving instruction.

Wyoming policy and lawmakers also must guard against pushing the brightest and best educators out of the door of the classroom by “hijacking teacher time” (Strauss). Expert teachers urge leaders at all levels to: avoid giving them menial administrative tasks that seek to comparatively measure teacher efficacy in the classroom; avoid administering tests that narrow curriculum and steal time away from authentic student tests; and avoid making deterministic assumptions that the most effective means to an end can be externally defined, controlled and measured in a standardized manner (Garan).

Since teaching is an art and a science, teachers must have the time and authority to plan, collaborate, reflect, research, confer with students and parents, and better themselves so they can meet the individual needs of students.

References:

Amato, Mary. “What Are We Doing to Support Great Teachers?” *Education Week*. 9-25-13.

Cooter, Robert B. “The Pillars of Literacy Instruction.” University of Texas at Arlington.

Dufour, Rick and Mattos, Mike. “How Do Principals Really Improve Schools.” *Educational Leadership*. April, 1-2013.

Garan, Elaine M. 2004, *In Defense of Our Children: When Politics, Profit and Education Collide*. Heinemann.

Hattie, John. 2012. *Visible Learning* New York: Routledge.

Strauss, Valerie. "I Won't Quit." *The Washington Post*.