

EDUCATION

NORTHWEST MAGAZINE

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northwest

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Connecting Adolescents to Literacy



ON THE COVER

At Heritage High in Vancouver, Ronald "Trey" Gunn takes part in a Collection of Evidence class in which students prepare work samples that help them meet Washington graduation requirements. For the full story, see page 10.

Photo by Yvette Sidaros

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EDUCATION

NORTHWEST MAGAZINE

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Margaret Edson compares literacy to a pastry bag. “It presses you into one clean line,” she recently told *The New York Times*. “Sitting by yourself, forcing the swirl of thoughts into a linear, systematic journey forward—it makes you smarter.”

Edson’s tour de force, “Wit,” focuses on a year in the life of an English professor and scholar who is diagnosed with advanced ovarian cancer. The powerful play has been staged across the country, was adapted by Mike Nichols into an Emmy-winning HBO movie, and won a passel of prizes. But, having said what she wanted to say, Edson set aside her own writing to focus on teaching. Pulitzer or not, the writing she’s concerned with now takes place in a middle school classroom in Atlanta.

It may not be glamorous, but working to improve adolescent literacy skills is arguably as important as taking the New York theatre scene by storm. A recent survey reported in *Reading Today* identified adolescent literacy as one of the eight most critical literacy topics in the current professional environment. The survey authors, Jack Cassidy and Douglas Loveless, note that the emphasis on younger readers that marked the beginning of the millennium has now shifted to a focus on students age nine and older. Measures such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress in reading and writing underscore how far adolescent students have to go in becoming proficient in those areas.

In this issue of *Education Northwest Magazine*, we highlight some school, district, and state initiatives that are helping older students improve their reading and writing skills. Some schools are doing that by capitalizing on young people’s enthusiasm for digital tools. Others are stressing literacy strategies in all classrooms, from social studies to science to math. Still more are incorporating instructional models such as Project GLAD and 6+1 Trait® Writing.

As always, we hope that bringing you these stories will encourage and inspire you in your own schools and classrooms. And, we’d love to hear what’s making a difference for your students.

—Rhonda Barton,

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CEO'S MESSAGE

Dear Readers,

As one of the three R's, reading is a cornerstone of elementary school instruction. Reading as a formal part of the curriculum, however, typically decreases as students move into the higher elementary grades and beyond to middle and high school.

Results from the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress show that 66 percent of grade 8 students score below the proficient level in their ability to understand the meaning of text at their grade level. Other data indicate that the average high school student is unprepared for the literacy demands of college and the workplace. These findings underscore the need for more adolescent literacy instruction, not only in English language arts classrooms but across the disciplines in secondary school.

At Education Northwest, a major priority is helping to improve literacy instruction at all levels of the education system. For six years, we evaluated Reading First programs in a half-dozen states to help inform classroom practice. We also conducted research on the role of reading coaches and how the coaches' duties varied greatly from one school and one state to another.

We've consulted with state lawmakers and district leaders on literacy policy, providing evidence about effective strategies that's helped both Washington and Alaska formulate their comprehensive literacy plans. Our literacy experts also evaluated implementation of specific reading models, including Striving Readers and Read Right, and completed a rigorous experimental study on the impact of the popular Project CRISS reading comprehension model.



Education Northwest's pioneering development of the 6+1 Trait® Writing Model of Instruction & Assessment continues to impact writing instruction, not only in the Northwest but around the world.

A special area of focus for us has been literacy and language development among English language learner (ELL) students. With the ELL student population at more than 7 percent—and growing—in the Northwest, we expect this work to contribute significantly to how districts and schools in our region are better able to equip these students for success.

We hope that this issue of *Education Northwest Magazine* highlights the importance of working to achieve higher levels of literacy among all students and especially adolescents. We invite you to check out our website at <http://educationnorthwest.org/category/topics/literacy> to see how we can partner with you in this critical work.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carol Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Carol Thomas
Chief Executive Officer

OVERVIEW

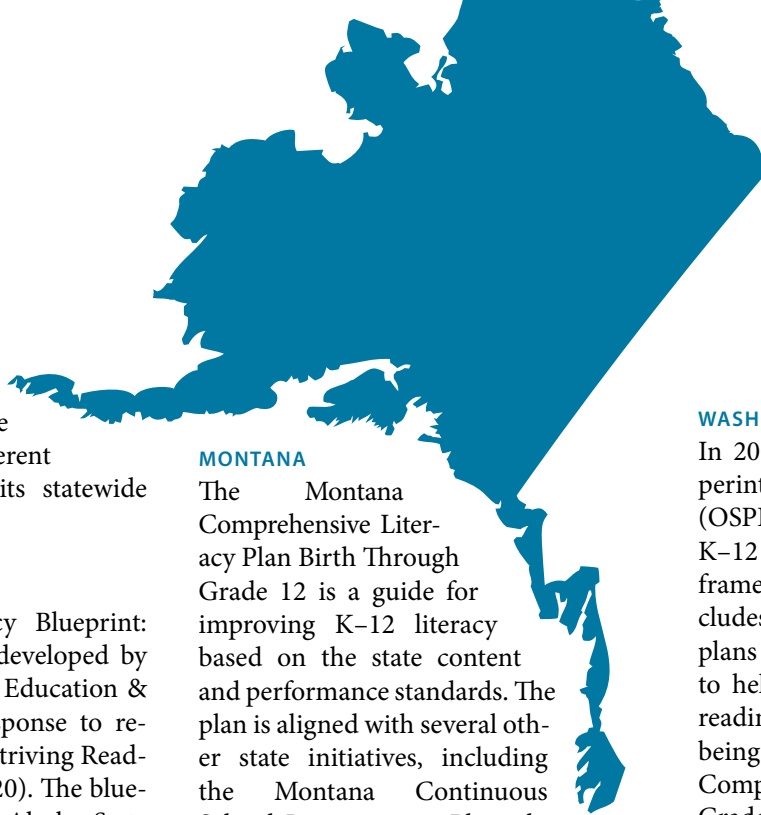
Adolescent Literacy Policy in the Northwest *By Richard Smiley and Ann Davis*

In recent years, most federal efforts to improve literacy have focused primarily on improving the foundational literacy skills of elementary students. The literacy difficulties faced by older students have been a lower priority. This is beginning to change, however, as many states are adopting a variety of adolescent literacy policies. In some cases state legislatures have enacted laws regarding adolescent literacy. In other cases state boards of education have adopted regulations or state education agencies have prepared state plans to address literacy issues. Whether originated by lawmakers or other stakeholders, these policies address such issues as literacy plans, accountability and assessments, reading diagnosis and intervention, professional development, content standards, teacher certification, and funding.

Education Northwest researchers developed a framework of 14 state-level policies that are important to actively promote adolescent literacy. The framework is based on 10 studies that were identified in a literature review on the topic. Using the framework to analyze the adolescent literacy policies adopted by Northwest states, the researchers found seven of the key policies identified were common across all five states. Of the other seven policies, one key policy was adopted by four states, two were adopted by three states, two were adopted by one state, and one was adopted by two states. One key policy—adolescent literacy is a stated executive or legislative priority—was not adopted by any state in the Northwest.

Presence of key policies in the five Northwest states

Key policies	AK	ID	MT	OR	WA
State has an adolescent literacy plan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
State recommends districts develop an adolescent literacy plan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
State provides or disseminates information to districts to support adolescent literacy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Adolescent literacy is a stated executive or legislative priority					
State provides or secures funding for adolescent literacy initiatives	✓			✓	✓
State appoints stakeholders to facilitate adolescent literacy priorities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
State requires schools to provide interventions for struggling adolescent readers	✓				
State requires adolescent students performing below proficiency on state reading assessments to receive diagnostic reading assessments	✓				
State has mechanisms for accountability in adolescent literacy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
State offers professional development in adolescent literacy to educators	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
State ensures that teacher preparation, certification, and endorsement requirements support adolescent literacy needs	✓	✓			
State has a designated, state-level, adolescent literacy office or staff member	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
State has content-area standards that embed literacy instruction within all subjects		✓		✓	✓
State strengthens literacy requirements for middle school promotion and high school graduation	✓	✓		✓	✓



Each Northwest state has taken a slightly different approach in developing its statewide literacy plan:

ALASKA

The Alaska State Literacy Blueprint: Birth to Graduation was developed by the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development in response to requirements of the federal Striving Readers Program (see story, p. 20). The blueprint was adopted by the Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development in March 2011. The team that developed the plan included school district educators, university faculty, and representatives of parent and professional groups.

IDAHO

At the time Education Northwest's study was conducted, the Idaho Adolescent Literacy Task Force had developed a draft Idaho Adolescent Literacy Plan Grades 4–12 for the Idaho State Department of Education (SDE). Currently, the state is planning to adopt a comprehensive literacy plan that covers birth to grade 12. The team that developed the adolescent literacy plan included representatives from local education agencies, institutions of higher education, and the SDE teacher certification unit.

MONTANA

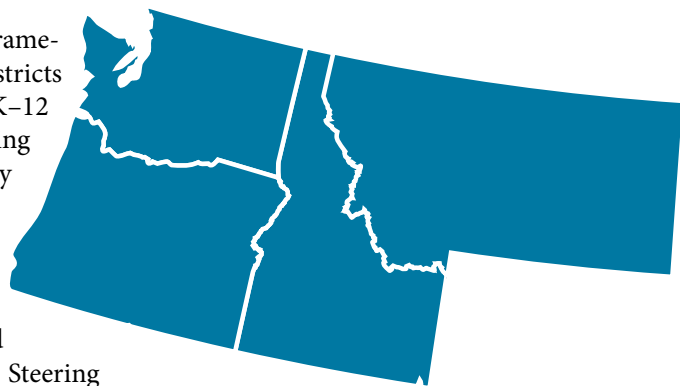
The Montana Comprehensive Literacy Plan Birth Through Grade 12 is a guide for improving K–12 literacy based on the state content and performance standards. The plan is aligned with several other state initiatives, including the Montana Continuous School Improvement Plan, the Indian Education for All mandate enacted by the Montana Legislature, and the Montana response to intervention initiative. A team of representatives from the university system and public schools helped to develop the plan.

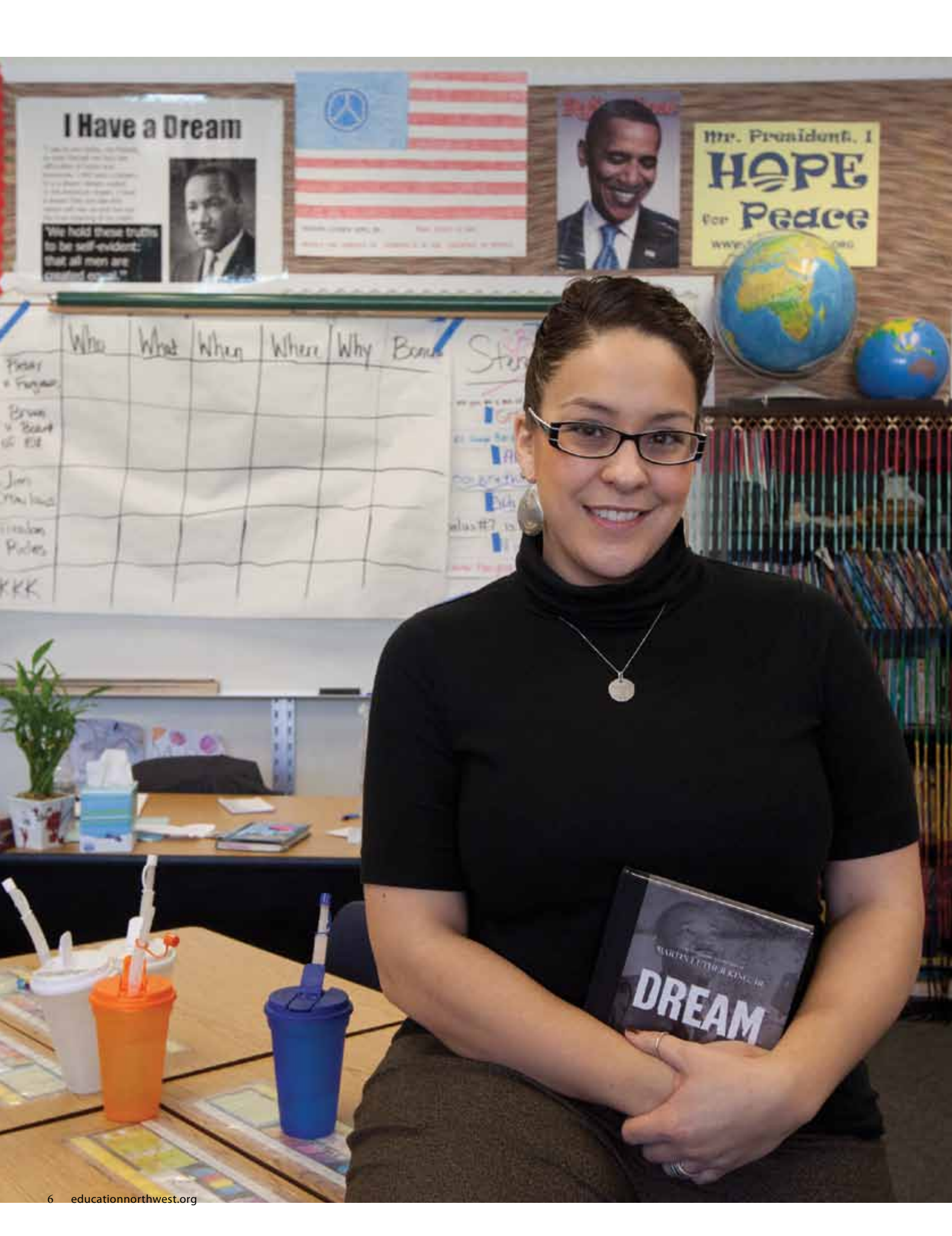
OREGON

The Oregon K–12 Literacy Framework provides schools and districts with guidance for improving K–12 reading. The framework is being revised as the Oregon Literacy Plan, which will cover birth to grade 12 and will incorporate the Common Core State Standards. The Oregon Department of Education established the Literacy Leadership State Steering Committee to oversee the development of the framework. This committee, supplemented with additional members and now called the Literacy Leadership State Team, developed the draft Oregon Literacy Plan that will replace the framework.

WASHINGTON

In 2005, the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) adopted the Washington State K–12 Reading Model. The model is a framework for systemic reform and includes both short and detailed action plans for use by schools and districts to help students achieve and maintain reading skills. The model is currently being updated into the Washington State Comprehensive Literacy Plan: Birth to Grade 12. The model was developed by the Curriculum and Instruction unit of OSPI, with assistance from educators throughout the state. OSPI convened a State Literacy Team composed of experts in literacy, university faculty members, and educators from school districts to draft the new comprehensive plan. ■





I Have a Dream



We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal."



Mr. President, I
HOPE
for **Peace**



Who What When Where Why Bonus

Fisher
v. Ferguson
Brown
v. Board
of Ed.
Jim
Crow laws
Crisian
Poles
KKK

Steps
1. ...
2. ...
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BARACK OBAMA
DREAM

The Language of Dreams

A fifth-grade teacher in rural Idaho learns new, language-acquisition strategies that can help her most vulnerable students reach their dreams.

Story by BRACKEN REED, photos by DARIN OSWALD

NAMPA, Idaho— Three large windows take up almost the entire west-facing wall of room 340 at Endeavor Elementary in Nampa, Idaho. Each window is divided into four smaller panes, and even on a gray afternoon in late January, natural light pours into the room.

Inside, fifth-grade teacher Sonia Galaviz has rejected the traditional classroom arrangement of parallel rows in favor of desks arrayed in teams. Her 32 students are grouped in fours, with the desks facing each other, two by two. Even the casual observer might notice that each of these 4-desk squares mirrors the 4-paned windows that let in the light of the outside world—a coincidence, but an appropriate one. In Galaviz's class, there is a constant interweaving of life outside the classroom and what takes place inside—between the personal and the political, the individual and the group; between students' dreams and the hard work needed to reach them.

Posters of Galaviz's personal heroes are hung around her classroom: Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez, President Obama, the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. Messages of civil rights and ethnic pride fight for space on the walls beside a giant U.S. map and student artwork. Look closer and you'll notice the many large papers taped to the walls, each covered with vocabulary words and key concepts from the lessons her students are learning. Everywhere you look you see this combination of language, content, and civil rights. In 2011 Galaviz received a national Teaching Tolerance Award in Culturally Responsive Teaching from the Southern Poverty Law Center, a civil rights organization.

For her, it's personal. Raised in a bicultural household—her father is from Mexico and her mother is white—her views and values were forged by the fire of growing up as an outsider in predominately white areas of Northern Idaho. By her teens Galaviz had embraced her complex ethnic heritage and developed an affinity for the underdog. As a college undergraduate she majored in political science and communications and dreamed of becoming an activist and a lobbyist for the rights of the marginalized.

Language was central to that dream. She immersed herself in the study of Spanish, which her parents had not spoken in the home. This experience of being a second language learner as an adult would prove to be invaluable in her later work, in addition to strengthening her identification with Latino culture.

Motherhood eventually altered Galaviz's career path, but not her passion. She turned her attention to teaching and eventually received a master's degree in bilingual education from Boise State University and a teacher's certificate with an English language learner (ELL) endorsement. While still an undergraduate she worked for a family literacy program in Canyon County, using a story-based literacy approach to teach English to Latino children and their parents. "That's where I learned how special the field of education can be," she says. "I was working with children and parents together, at the same time, which is very personal and intimate. I've tried to maintain that intimacy in education throughout my years of teaching in public schools."

If that passionate, intimate, and personal approach defines her teaching philosophy, there is another element that is equally important: professionalism. Galaviz refers to teaching as a calling, not just a job, and she is always looking to improve, especially in ways that will help her meet the needs of her most vulnerable students—those in poverty and those still struggling to learn English. It's this drive that led to her participation in a new research study.

A Critical Time for Students

In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences awarded researchers at Education Northwest \$2.8 million to conduct a four-year experimental study of Project GLAD (Guided Language Acquisition Design). Project GLAD is an instructional model that provides teachers with a specific set of strategies for integrating language instruction and grade-level content in the mainstream classroom. The model was originally designed in the 1980s by two teachers in California,

Marcia Brechtel and Linnea Haley, who were looking for ways to meet the needs of the many ELL students being placed in their classrooms.

By 1991 Project GLAD had become a fully developed model whose popularity spread throughout California and into nearby states, including Oregon and Washington. During the following two decades, as the ELL population soared in areas of the country that had previously served only small numbers of such students, the model found widespread acceptance, often as a complement to the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) or other forms of "sheltered" instruction.

Although Project GLAD draws on an extensive research base in the areas of second language acquisition, brain research, and effective literacy practices for second language learners, the model as a whole had never undergone a rigorous experimental study. Education Northwest identified a need for such a study, based on the increasing popularity of the model in some Pacific Northwest states.

Education Northwest researchers chose to limit the study to 30 schools in Idaho, a state that had never used the Project GLAD model, and to focus on fifth-grade classrooms. As Elizabeth Autio, one of the researchers involved in the study explains, "Fifth grade is a critical time for all students, but especially for English language learners. Grade 5 students are typically expected to access more complex content using a more specialized, academic language. That starts to happen in third grade, and by fifth grade it's kicking into high gear."

"We also chose to focus on grade 5 because Idaho assesses science at that grade level," says Education Northwest's Theresa Deussen, the primary investigator for the study. "One of the things we want to see is whether Project GLAD helps boost student achievement in science."

When the researchers went looking for school teams in Idaho who were willing to participate, Sonia Galaviz was one of the first teachers to volunteer. "Sonia actually called us when she heard about the study," says Autio. "In most cases we had to go out and actively recruit people

to participate, but she contacted us. Her enthusiasm for the project has been amazing."

Strategies That Work

Endeavor Elementary opened its doors in August 2007. The school was built to serve the rapidly growing population in the northeast part of town, which is largely Latino, low income, or both. Currently the school has a 75 percent poverty rate and is 46 percent Latino. Approximately 25 percent of the students qualify as ELLs.

Although Project GLAD was specifically designed for ELL students, research has shown that students in poverty also come to school with low-vocabulary development, typically far behind that of children from more privileged backgrounds. "We have the lowest income level and the highest language learner population in the district," says Galaviz, "so this seemed like a perfect fit for us. Project GLAD obviously applies to all students, and the methodology and pedagogy behind it are good teaching practices for all students, but it's especially suited to ELL and high-poverty kids. And I also knew my grade-level team could do it."

The Endeavor Elementary team, which includes Galaviz and her fellow fifth-grade teachers Terri Bennett and Patricia Duncan, was randomly assigned to be part of the "treatment" group—one of 15 schools to receive training and coaching in the first and second year of the study. The 15 "control group" schools will receive training and coaching in the third year of the study.

Teachers in the treatment group received two full days of intense training in August 2011 and a 5-day classroom demonstration in October. They will also receive three coaching sessions each year. After the training, teachers were encouraged to start using the Project GLAD strategies in their classrooms, with their colleagues and their Project GLAD coach as supports.

"Project GLAD is a form of sheltered instruction," says Jody Bader, the training coordinator for the study, "but what's unique about it is that it actually gives teachers specific and practical strategies.

The whole training is about strategies that teachers can take back to their classrooms and use the next day, and that's what we encourage them to do."

The GLAD model includes 35 specific strategies, which are grouped into broader skill categories: Focus and Motivation, Input, Oral Language, Reading, and Writing. Some of the strategies are already familiar to many teachers, such as collecting portfolios of student writing and having students keep interactive journals. Others, in particular the various charts, the array of "input" strategies, and the emphasis on cooperative learning, are less so. In nearly every case, the strategies are meant to immerse students in academic language while simultaneously increasing access to subject-area content.

Jennifer Koons, a Project GLAD trainer and the coach for the Endeavor Elementary team, says this focus is where Project GLAD most closely aligns with adolescent literacy efforts. "The lack of academic vocabulary is a major obstacle for students who are struggling to learn subject-area content at the middle and high school levels," says Koons. "By using these strategies we're frontloading those skills, so that when

In the Project GLAD model teachers are encouraged to have language literally "dripping from the walls."



they encounter high-level concepts and content-rich, academic language and are asked to construct meaning from it, they're going to have the skills to do it. In that sense, it's about scaffolding—you're building those skills lesson by lesson, strategy by strategy."

Getting the Flow

On this Friday in late January, Galaviz is using Project GLAD strategies in a social studies lesson on her favorite topic: civil rights. The previous week she chartered a bus and took her entire class to the capitol building in Boise—a short 20-minute drive to the east—in order to participate in a Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration.

Galaviz begins today's 45-minute social studies period with a "Civil Rights Boogaloo," an example of a Project GLAD strategy in which students chant a rhyming poem based on the content they've been studying. The poem is written on chart paper and Galaviz uses a yardstick to lead students through it word by word, beat by beat. When they've finished, she asks students to choose vocabulary words they want her to highlight, words that intrigue them or that they think are important. One student chooses the word "strife," another says "integration," and several mention the terms "de facto" and "de jure." Galaviz highlights each.

Galaviz then segues into two closely related Project GLAD strategies: expert groups and team tasks. To get there, she uses another strategy called "numbered heads," in which the students in each 4-desk cluster are numbered one to four. (The groups of four are also a Project GLAD strategy, although one that Galaviz was already doing on her own.) "I'm going to ask that all the 1s be my experts today. You're going to meet with me in the corner."

Next, Galaviz gives the three remaining students in each team a task to complete—in this case, a civil rights time line and a map of the South, in which students will identify where each event took place.

As the teams concentrate on this task,

Galaviz works with her eight "experts" on a piece dealing with the Ku Klux Klan. Each student reads along with her and uses a highlighter to mark important information of his or her choosing. As the task progresses, students will have the opportunity to draw pictures and will also get specific, guided instruction from Galaviz about the areas they have highlighted. In addition to improving students' note-taking skills and tapping multiple learning modalities, expert groups are specifically designed to help students dig deeper into one aspect of a topic. Once these "experts" have mastered the content knowledge, they return to their 4-student teams, where they teach their fellow team members.

"Expert groups are a good example of how Project GLAD not only builds academic literacy, but also deep content-area knowledge," says Deussen. "It's that combination of the two that makes it so unique."

Out In the World

After the class period, Galaviz talks about using Project GLAD strategies in the classroom. "When you're teaching lessons you've got to know where it's going," she says, "and that's been a challenge for us as teachers. These 35 strategies can flow beautifully—when we had our training we got to see how one would flow into the next. But when you don't own a specific strategy yet, it can feel fragmented. You're thinking: 'What was I supposed to do next? I know this flows nicely into something ...' It can be hard to find that flow, even though there isn't really a single strategy that you use in isolation."

As a coach, Koons acknowledges that finding that flow is a learning process. To get there, she encourages teachers to think in terms of specific outcomes they want to achieve—such as the kind of writing they want their students to be able to do—and then choose a "sequence" of strategies based on that desired outcome. "That's part of unlocking the code," she says. "As you become more proficient with which strategies to use at which

See DREAMS, page 44

Getting to

Supports for both students and teachers
propel a Washington high school toward
a top achievement rating.

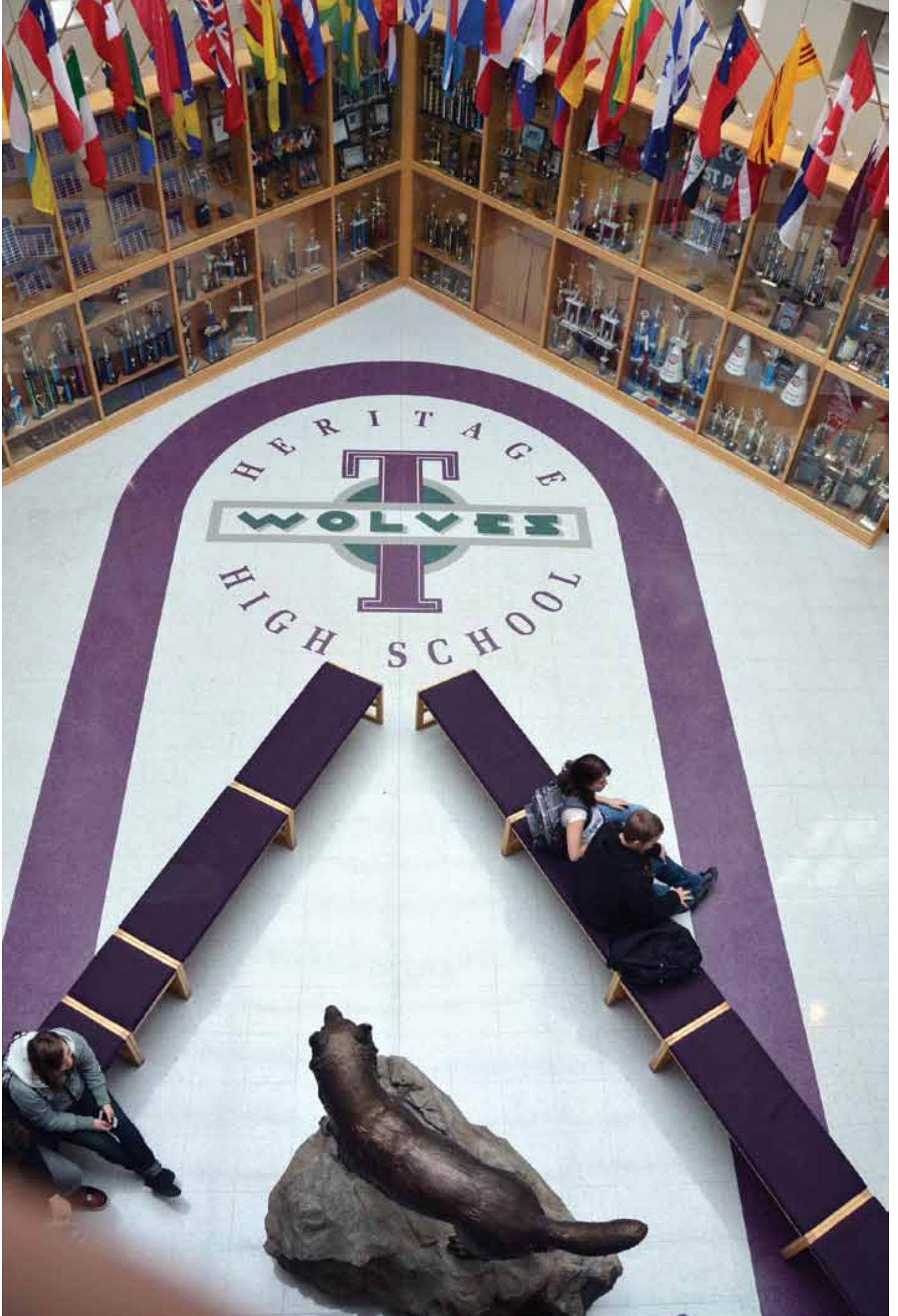
Exemplary

Story by RHONDA BARTON
Photos by YVETTE SIDAROS

VANCOUVER, Washington—Ferdinand bends over his paper, tightly gripping a ballpoint pen and pondering the assigned essay topic: what I like about myself. Even though the high school junior aspires to be a professional soccer player, he knows that earning a diploma is important. And, in order to do that, he needs to demonstrate mastery of Washington’s reading and writing standards.

After failing the state High School Proficiency Exam or “HSPE” in his sophomore year, Ferdin finds himself in the Collection of Evidence (COE) class at Heritage High. COE is an alternative route to graduation in which students compile work samples with the help of a teacher to meet the state reading and/or writing standards. Only 15 students share this COE classroom and teacher Jeanine Christiansen is able to give them the intensive, one-on-one help that’s rare in traditional classes with 30 or more students. Like Ferdin, who is a native of Turkey, many COE students are former or current English language learners and need extra support to sharpen their literacy skills. “At first I wasn’t sure about being here,” Ferdin admits, “but now I think it’s great. It gives you a chance to pass high school.” In fact, after taking the class, 98 percent of Heritage’s COE students are able to meet the standards.

The COE class is only one part of the formula that’s helped Heritage High make strong gains in student achievement. Tenth-grade reading scores shot up by double digits during each of the last two school years. Equally impressive is the school’s showing on the Washington State Achievement Index. In 2008–2009, Heritage ranked “fair” on the index that measures achievement of low-income and non-low-income students, achievement versus peers, and improvement from the previous year. In 2009–2010, the school’s rating jumped to “good” and it hit



“exemplary”—the top tier—in 2010–2011.

What moves a school from fair to exemplary—especially when more than half of its 2,100 students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch? If you ask teachers and administrators that question, they’re likely to give credit to student supports such as the COE class, the tutorial period, and the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program. As well, they’ll mention Heritage’s use of professional learning communities (PLCs) and its implementation of the Workshop model in which teachers work together to hone their lessons.

Here are some of the ways Heritage High is building those skills.



Ferdi concentrates on polishing his writing skills in a Collection of Evidence class. Writing folders (below) showcase the work of both freshmen and Advanced Placement students in Steve Massart’s classroom. Students can comment on their peers’ work by posting sticky notes on the folders.



Monitoring and Motivating Students

Second period is over, but more than a few of Steve Massart’s students remain in their seats. This is the start of the tutorial period, which is built into the schedule for 30 minutes, four days a week. It’s a time for students to get individualized help and to be held accountable for how they’re doing in all their classes. Massart keeps tabs on 15 freshmen and even though he’s an English teacher, he knows how his tutorial students are doing in their science, math, or social studies classes.

Any student who has an F in a subject or has earned less than a 2.5 grade point average is assigned to a tutorial. Every six weeks, the faculty reviews the F data and reevaluates the tutorial assignments. “That’s one of the most powerful aspects of tutorial: student motivation,” says Associate Principal Lori Rotherham. “Kids know they have to meet a certain standard to be out of tutorial. They can be free to get a snack, go to the library or computer lab, or just socialize with their friends.” Last year, the GPA cut-point for tutorial was 2.0, but enough students exited the program that the school was able to raise the stakes. In the future, administrators hope to increase the GPA again to 2.8, with a goal of having half of all students required to attend tutorials.

Massart spends the tutorial period checking in with students about their homework assignments and trouble spots. If a student needs to visit another teacher, he’ll provide a pass. “It’s a more relaxed atmosphere to talk to kids,” he says. “It’s a place to get things done, work with their friends, or work with me if they need to.”

Many students who exceed the requirements still show up for tutorial. Noah is one of them. “I’m here most days to talk to Steve [Massart],” says the senior. He’s working on an essay for AP Literature that challenges the concept of beauty and he’s seeking Massart’s opinion on which titles might help support his thesis. “Noah is wrestling with trying to do this project right, so he’s coming in every day and testing ideas,” notes Massart. “In tutorial he has an opportunity to get into a conversation with me and not be rushed. He appreciates that. For me, it’s a chance to push students a little bit further.”

Another way Massart pushes his students is through the dozens of manila folders lining his classroom walls. Each student has a folder that he or she has personalized with a collage of photos, drawings, and meaningful snippets of text. Inside are writing samples that anyone is free to read and comment on, via sticky notes. Freshmen get to check out what



AP seniors are thinking and writing about, while the seniors offer pithy feedback to their younger peers. “We’ll be pairing up with the freshmen, which facilitates mentoring,” says Noah. “Everyone is learning different things, so other people may notice things you won’t in your writing.” No one is exempt from making his or her work public: Even Massart, a published author, has his own folder that’s filled with assignments he’s completed along with his students.



Steve Massart (top) uses the tutorial period to check in with students on problem areas. Students like Noah (above) use the tutorial to test ideas and get more guidance on assignments. Rosemary Fryer (below) helps AVID students understand what it takes to get to college, both academically and financially.



Preparing for the Future

While tutorials support students who may be at risk of failing English or math and dropping out, Heritage’s AVID program targets another population: students with a GPA of 2.0 to 3.5 who strive to go to college. Joaquin is typical of the 10 percent of Heritage students who’ve applied for and been accepted into this elective program. “There are 12 of us in my family and I want to be the first to go to college,” he says. “The class has helped me figure out what courses I need, what learning is going to be like in college, what expenses will be, and if there are scholarships I can get.” Joaquin has set his sights on California State, where he hopes to major in business and culinary arts. Ultimately, he’d like to be a chef and operate his own restaurant.

Joaquin’s teacher, Rosemary Fryer, takes the sophomore AVID students through a fast-paced series of lessons from dissecting the quote of the day to discussing the meaning of the word “hallowed” to identifying incorrect grammar in text from a sample SAT test. Then it’s on to a persuasive writing exercise during which students have seven minutes to write 150 or more words. “Be sure to use specific examples to support your opinions,” Fryer reminds the class.

After completing their journal entries, the students attack the learning target of the day, which is clearly stated on a white board at the front of the room: “I can make accurate and effective Cornell notes. I can construct a formal summary from my notes.” Students know that mastering that technique will come in handy in a college lecture hall.

Matt Kesler, who also teaches AVID, says field trips to college campuses help students see the relevance of their classroom lessons and allow them to “contextualize” themselves there. “Taking students to college campuses didn’t seem that impactful to me until I started reading their reflections,” says Kesler. “I realized some of these students had never been on a college campus before. They’d go into a college classroom and say, ‘It’s different, but I can see myself here.’ And then they’d say, ‘What do I need to do to get here?’”

AVID incorporates a tutorial twice a week, and Heritage’s experience with AVID students was the genesis for introducing tutorials to a broader population. “We needed to look at a systems approach,” says Kesler, “and how to build that into our building. Our desire has been to help kids access not only the time, but the materials and instruction they need, and that’s what the tutorial model has helped us to do.” For Kesler, the tutorial has become a place to reteach lessons when assessments indicate that a student didn’t grasp the material the first time around.


 WORKSHOP

Fine-Tuning and Aligning Instruction

Heritage teachers can thank JoAnne Morrow, the school's part-time literacy coach, for integrating the state rubrics into everyday practice. Morrow was trained by the state to score COE writing samples. That led to what she terms "an epiphany" in how to help teachers align their assessments of student work. "What is an adequate summary for one teacher is an appallingly poor one for another teacher," says Morrow. "In a 6-period day, a student can have three to six different versions of what a summary or a main idea or a comparison can be." Now, there's a clearer idea and common agreement throughout the school of what it means to work at a basic level as opposed to a proficient or advanced level.

Another contribution Morrow has made is leading the school's professional development in Workshop, a model in which teachers collaborate in small groups to design, teach, observe, and refine lessons. Morrow is mentoring 11 cadres, each of which has three members. With Morrow's coaching, the teachers take turns developing a lesson with a focused learning target and essential question. At a prebriefing, the teacher discusses his or her philosophical beliefs and describes how and why a specific lesson was constructed. During the lesson, the rest of the cadre observes and makes notes about evidence of student learning. Afterwards, team members reflect on what they saw and its impact on student learning. Morrow publishes the reflections, which are widely shared.

"My role is to keep us true to the [Workshop developer] Sam Bennett's philosophy that teaching is a very complex endeavor," says Morrow. "The more we practice, the better we get, and no one has it nailed. The Workshop protocols focus on why kids are doing what they're doing, how they're doing it, and what the evidence of that looks like. And, we're always focused on increasing high-level discourse and building rigor in our classrooms."

All schools in the Evergreen School District are implementing the Workshop model, though each school is given leeway in how to do that. Morrow shares Heritage's experience with others in the district, just as the 33 teachers she's training will serve as "emissaries" to spread Workshop practices within their school.



Literacy coach JoAnne Morrow (left) meets with Linda Wegner to prepare for a Workshop lesson.

Learning From Heritage

One-on-one instruction for struggling students, transparent and intentional teaching, common agreement over assessment standards, and protected, collaborative professional development: These are the ingredients that have contributed to Heritage High's recipe for success. All schools may not be able to duplicate that formula, but Rosemary Fryer has a takeaway that everyone might consider: "If we can get everyone to do a learning target for a particular lesson, let the kids know what that is, and then structure the lesson so it's not so much 'teacher talk' but students working, that's something all schools can do, no matter what their resources. We want teachers to have autonomy and academic freedom; however, it can't be mystery learning. There has to be an understanding of what it is we're learning today and how to assess how close we got there." ■



Literacy 2.0

At a middle school near the state capital, English language learners “beg” to take quizzes via iPod, engaging in interactive language arts exercises that seem more game than test.

In a high school classroom near the Pacific coast, students write, videotape, and edit public service announcements, documentaries, and films.

And, students from all over the Seattle metropolitan area create stories via digital cameras and blogs, and publish them on social websites, where they also engage in debate on community issues.

These are just a few examples of technology-enhanced, instructional approaches that Northwest teachers are using to engage students and help them develop the literacy skills they need in the 21st century marketplace. While reading and writing continue to be the fundamental skills of literacy, technology—when integrated effectively—can be a powerful tool for instruction.

This is especially true for students who are digital natives. These “Net Gen” kids have grown up in a world of rapidly evolving technology, and they use digital tools on a daily (sometimes, continuous) basis. Scientists posit that these students’ brains are actually developing in new ways because their gray matter is constantly engaged with digital devices. When neurons fire together, they wire together, making connections based on their interaction with technology.

For those on the other side of the digital divide, technology integration is perhaps even more important, for these digital

immigrants must learn to compete with digital natives for employment and other opportunities. In short, schools must teach students the skills they need to succeed in the information economy. And to do so, they must integrate technology into literacy instruction.

This is Literacy 2.0.

✦ Claggett Creek Middle School + Keizer, OR

When Claggett Creek Middle School teacher Matt Hurst learned that his district had a classroom supply of iPod Touches that were up for grabs, he jumped at the chance to use them with his English language learner (ELL) students. They now use the iPod Touch on a daily basis for everything from participating in class discussions and taking quizzes to conducting online research and blogging.

“What’s another word for ‘funny?’” Hurst prompts, and students across the room simultaneously respond via iPod: “humorous,” “comical,” “hysterical.” The words appear on the SMART Board at the front of the room, and students vote on their favorites. “Sometimes,” Hurst says, “students want to respond, but they are shy or slower than other students. Sometimes, they want to ask a question, but don’t want to interrupt. This gives every student a chance to participate.”

Hurst uses a variety of fun apps that offer language arts exercises and assessments. In Space Race, students tackle multiple choice questions; when the correct answers are selected, spaceships (representing each student) race across the SMART Board. “Students love the competition,” says Hurst, who allows students

*Northwest educators integrate technology into instruction,
boosting student engagement and the acquisition of 21st century literacy skills.*

By JOYCE RIHA LINIK



to retake quizzes so they can chart progress and gain confidence. “It’s the first time in my years of teaching that students have begged to take quizzes. Additionally, assessment results are immediately available, so I can see needs and tailor instruction.”

Through another app, students compare details of state colleges and universities, and use computers to write compare-and-contrast essays incorporating the data. This is eye-opening for Hurst’s students, most of whom are first- or second-generation immigrants and do not have family members who attended college. In addition, very few have access to technology at home.

To help his students develop the digital literacy skills they will need in college, Hurst integrates technology into literacy instruction wherever he can. This includes asking students to write blogs and post them on educational networking sites such as Edmodo. “Everybody’s blogging these days,” he observes. “Individuals blog in personal narratives. Corporations hire professionals to write expository, nonfiction articles.”

Even Hurst blogs. Leading by example, he writes posts for different audiences: some for educators, some for students. The site for his students includes yet another genre of writing patterned along the lines of the popular *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* fiction series. Students follow suit, practicing varied styles of writing and engaging in rewrites to create posts they are proud to display to the world.



A student photographs produce to incorporate into her blog on Seattle arts and culture. Photo by Lucas Anderson.

📌 www.pugetsoundoff.org + Seattle, WA

At <http://www.pugetsoundoff.org>, youth across Seattle blog about subjects such as social justice, animal rights, and the environment. Students who see themselves as writers and artists post their creations: a poem on bullying, a photograph of graffiti, a video of a Seattle snowstorm. Many voice concerns about community issues and collaborate to solve problems in their communities.

This community youth center in the ether is a joint effort of the City of Seattle, the University of Washington Center for Communication and Civic Engagement, and Metrocenter YMCA. While youth often participate on the site as individuals, teachers have begun to use Puget SoundOff as an educational tool, offering students the opportunity to blog or post comments on issues and submit entries to competitions such as “Write a Bill” and “Human Rights Day Banner” contests.

“I’ve seen educators in the classroom—as well as those working with youth at our community centers, nonprofits, and libraries—using Puget SoundOff and other technology tools to enhance education,” says David Keyes, the City of Seattle’s community technology manager. “They are using blogging tools to teach applied critical thought, writing, English, and civic engagement skills.”

YMCA, the organization that manages the site, has branches in several Seattle schools and offers afterschool classes in blogging, photography, and videography, so students can acquire the skills they need to communicate and collaborate on the site, as well as in the real world. The “Y” has been particularly effective at making these Literacy 2.0 opportunities available to underserved

populations. In Garfield Community Center’s Teen Life “Rectech” group, teens participate in progressive blogging, writing together as a group until they develop the skills to go solo.

“This helps build articulation skills,” reports Keyes, “and for some of the East African immigrants involved, it improves their English. Commenting on blogs helps with the development of critiquing skills. The public posting gives them a greater purpose in sharing their voice and affirming that their voice matters.”

“There is power in telling your story,” says Colleen McDewitt, a technology instructor with the Y. “When kids do it online and people read it and comment on it, they feel that someone is listening.”

📌 Tillamook High School + Tillamook, OR

Just take a gander at Wil Duncan’s “venue,” a billboard-sized wall at Tillamook High School covered with student-rendered ads, posters, and business cards. Search “THS Productions” on YouTube to see how technology enhances literacy instruction at Tillamook, famously known as the home of the “Cheesemakers.”

Duncan teaches a variety of classes, including Intro to Business, Desktop Publishing/Graphic Design, Multimedia Design, and Photography/Photoshop. He integrates literacy activities and technology into all of his instruction. Just a sampling of the digital tools in his work belt include a Promethean board, Active Expression devices, digital still-shot and video cameras, a website, lots of cool software, and an iTeach.org-sponsored Moodle site and Google account (for use of Google docs).

“Technology offers us these incredible tools to engage students,” says Duncan, “and once we have them engaged, well, we’ve got ‘em. They’re going to be ready to learn whatever we hand them and run with it.”

Students love Duncan’s Multimedia Design class so much, some take both levels, and then reenroll in the advanced course again and again. There, they write stories and then script, storyboard, film, and edit them to create digital video dramas and situation comedies. One of Duncan’s favorite assignments is to have students use “the hero’s journey” as a template for their story line. The kids get very creative. While many students create superheroes who roam the school hallways, one group produced a traditional cop show with a twist. Instead of tracking down baddies who have broken civic laws, these detectives track down people guilty of fashion faux pas, such as wearing socks with sandals.

Further, students create multimedia public service

announcements on such topics as preventing drug and alcohol abuse and violence. Documentary projects include chronicling the restoration of nearby Holden Creek, a native salmon run clogged with debris.

Throughout the process, students hone key literacy skills: reading as they conduct background research, writing as they prepare story lines and scripts, storytelling as they edit graphic elements to create a film, and communicating as they work collaboratively with each other. Learning doesn't get much more authentic than this.

"My mission is to give students skills they can actually use when they walk out the door," says Duncan. "One student, in particular, has become so adept at video editing that he'll be able to find an internship at any video production house in Portland when he graduates. His skills are already those of a beginning professional."

▲ Seattle Digital Literacy Initiative + Seattle, WA

On Presidents' Day weekend, 20 students wander the streets of Seattle, snapping photos and scribbling notes on the myriad ways that arts and culture are expressed by this city's diverse population. Several students focus their attention on a museum exhibit featuring photos of families from around the world, each posing with a week's worth of groceries. Others are drawn to a handful of ethnic restaurants in the University District. Eventually, when their curiosity is sated or their notepads and memory cards are full, the students gather in a computer lab where they transform the raw material into photojournalistic essays (i.e., blogs) and post them online.

They work under the tutelage of professional journalists from the Seattle Digital Literacy Initiative (SDLI). This nonprofit effort of the Common Language Project and the Department of Communication at the University of Washington seeks to empower youth to be educated consumers, critics, producers, and participants in today's complex media landscape.

"There's much less separation between the media consumer and producer than ever before," says Sarah Stuteville, SDLI

Tillamook students collaborate on creating their modern depiction of "the hero's journey." Photo by Wil Duncan.



director. "All of us are making media now. We're posting photos online, we're making videos for YouTube, we're using social networking and blogs to talk about our lives. And, we're inundated with media as consumers. So, we offer programs that acknowledge both sides of that equation. We go into schools and after-school programs and talk about our work as journalists; we try to pull back the curtain a little bit and let young people see what it looks like to do it professionally."

In the process, students learn key literacy skills. "At the foundation of making any media are reading and writing skills," says Stuteville. "You're writing a script, you're interviewing people and taking notes, and then you're synthesizing that information and presenting it. Plus, we're reading and analyzing the story. We're looking at how it's put together, and what was done well and what wasn't, so we can learn to do it better."

Teachers report that the approach is effective. Travis Foltz, a teacher at Kent Meridian High School, has invited SDLI into his classroom multiple times to enrich instruction for his students. He says Stuteville and her staff have helped students hone academic skills and develop media literacy by considering stories and their sources, as well as biases and ethics.

"The fact that they utilize a lot of technology in their reporting and presentations has inspired my students to seek out new ways of telling their stories," says Foltz. "Last year one pupil collaborated with 30 other students, a few teachers, and the video production department to create a multimedia portrait of the plight of high school students today. The video documents the peer pressure, loneliness, and depression that some high school students experience."

Ann Magyar a teacher at an alternative high school called New Start, says her students—all of whom dropped out of traditional schools—are initially daunted when given the opportunity to tell their stories through digital media. After all, many come from impoverished homes, where technology isn't available. Plus, they're used to failing.

With support, however, the students begin to develop new skills and find their voices. "Because they are producing something that will go out into the world, instead of to one teacher, they care more about it," observes Magyar. "This, along with the fact that real-life journalists want to hear their stories, builds their confidence."

Already, Magyar sees her students thinking in new ways. One student, who created a multimedia presentation on how industrial pollution affects mercury levels in the ocean, now plans to go to film school when he graduates.

That's connection. That's Literacy 2.0. ■



A Seattle student's image is captured in this camera duel. Photo by Evan Swope.

Paula Smith uses a variety of literacy strategies to help her social studies students understand classroom readings.



A Blueprint for Success

An Anchorage middle school exemplifies some of the strategies that all Alaska schools are being asked to incorporate in their approach to literacy.

Story and photos by RHONDA BARTON

ANCHORAGE, Alaska—If you popped into Paula Smith's seventh-grade classroom, you might assume her students were deep into an English language arts lesson. Smith prompts her class to determine the meaning of the word "irrigation" by identifying the part of speech, looking at the suffix, and searching for contextual clues in the sentences surrounding the word. After the students come up with a definition, Smith cues them to begin reading the text aloud in unison—a technique called choral reading.

Smith is in her third year of teaching at Clark Middle School, but social studies—not English—is her content area. Every teacher at Clark, though, considers literacy part of his or her instructional charge. "With social studies, the kids really need to be able to understand the vocabulary so they can understand the content," says Smith. "If your students don't understand word structure, how to decode a word, or how to find context clues to decode what some of the meanings or inferences are, it doesn't matter what subject they're in. They're going to struggle."

A Statewide Literacy Blueprint

The fact that "reading and writing to learn" is as important as "learning to read and write" is made explicit in the Alaska Statewide Literacy Blueprint, a new initiative of the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development (see sidebar). The blueprint, which addresses literacy from birth through grade 12, states that "effective literacy instruction means moving beyond 'how to read' to helping students learn the different ways that reading and writing looks in their different subject areas—from lab reports in biology to expository essays in history."

In addition to focusing on the development of children's literacy from the very early years through graduation, the blueprint emphasizes effective, research-based approaches to instruction. "This plan is not a new curriculum [but] a connection to what kids need to know," says Alaska Education Commissioner Mike Hanley. "Rather than a big paradigm shift, it is a fine-tuning process that looks at how teachers focus their instruction and the assessments that will guide that instruction."

A 14-member team from around the state drew up the blueprint, which covers everything from instruction and intervention to assessments, leadership at multiple levels, family and community engagement, and professional development. The plan, adopted in March 2011, is now being rolled out across Alaska, but Clark Middle School is already ahead of the game with robust professional development, instructional strategies, supports for struggling students, assessments to guide instruction, and a collaborative approach.

Changing Populations, Changing Needs

Anchorage's first junior high school, Clark was named for the district's first superintendent, Orah Dee Clark. Built in 1959 at the height of the Cold War, the original concrete block structure resembled a bunker and featured a steel-and-girder roof designed to support helicopters and fighter jets, in case of war. Today a clean-lined, light-filled building serves sixth- through eighth-graders. Colorful murals, intricate mosaics, and

modern sculptures enliven the school, reflecting the Mountain View neighborhood's burgeoning reputation as an arts district. The building and surrounding area, however, aren't the only things that have changed. Clark's more than 1,000 students are diverse in ways that the founders never imagined, with almost two dozen languages heard in the hallways.

That diversity also plays out in the classrooms, to which students bring vastly different literacy skills. To address those individual needs, Clark has instituted a three-tiered RTI approach, which it calls "response to instruction" rather than the more widely used "response to intervention." Tier I—high-quality core instruction—applies to everyone, but the majority of students also receive Tier II support. That's because only 12 percent of sixth-graders, 23 percent of seventh-graders, and 38 percent of eighth-graders score proficient on the fall universal benchmark screeners. Tier II instruction includes a double dose of language arts, which translates into an extra 45 minutes a day of small-group focus on grammar, writing, and reading. An academic afterschool program serving 10 percent of Clark students offers additional Tier II support.

Tier III, primarily for special education and English language learner (ELL) students, features an alternative curriculum. Marie Smith, an English language arts teacher, has had particular success with Tier III students: Last year all of her students gained 100 points on the state benchmark assessment. Smith team teaches with two other instructors so there are multiple eyes on all students. The three teachers collaborate on objectives for each lesson and strategies for delivering the material. If there's a small group of students who are struggling with a lesson, one of the teachers is available to take charge and reteach the concepts to that group. In addition, the team of instructors jointly reviews student data and conducts formative assessments on a schedule dictated by student performance. The least proficient students are tested on a weekly basis,



That's why the word decoding strategies are so critical, she says. "Instead of just giving them the meaning of words or telling them to go get a dictionary, we provide tools and skills so they can figure out the words themselves." She adds that packing the class period with activities also helps keep the students interested and motivated.

A Strong Coaching Model

Motivation and engagement in literacy learning is also something that weighs heavily on the mind of Christine Dennis, one of two literacy coaches at Clark. Together with her colleague Dianne Orr, Dennis provides Clark faculty with targeted professional development that's driven by student data and by teachers' self-identified needs. Clark is the only secondary school in the Anchorage district with its own site-based coaches, funded through Title I and a school improvement grant. Dennis and Orr come to the job with impressive credentials: Both worked in a Reading First program at a local elementary school where they succeeded in more than tripling student proficiency rates, from 23 to 80 percent of students.

The coaching office, which occupies a prominent spot just off the main entry, bustles with activity. Posted in the window for all to see is a poster tracking the school's reading fluency rates.

while more proficient students are on a biweekly rotation and the most proficient undergo testing once a month.

Some of the same techniques used in Paula Smith's social studies classroom are also evident in Marie Smith's (no relation). On this October morning, Marie Smith leads her grade 8 special education and ELL students in reading aloud a story in unison. Her two coteachers circulate around the classroom to confer with individual students while Smith frequently pauses to check for comprehension with the whole class. Her lesson objectives are clearly spelled out on the white board: use decoding strategies to pronounce or say unfamiliar words; describe the mood of the setting and dialogue; predict outcomes; and introduce vocabulary strategies to figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word.

"Motivating students is a challenge," Smith admits, "because they don't know how to read, they don't know the words, and they can't comprehend the material."

Christine Dennis (above) is one of two full-time literacy coaches at Clark. In Marie Smith's classroom (below), struggling students benefit from a team teaching approach.



Materials to support literacy instruction are crowded into the tight space. But, Dennis and Orr are as likely to be in the classroom as at their desks. They drop into classes on a daily basis to see how all teachers are weaving literacy strategies into their lessons and to lend a hand with individual students. The two coaches help instill a strong sense that everyone is in this fight together.

“We are building a community of professionals who are so willing to go to the next level of professionalism,” says Dennis. “They’re willing to come in on Saturdays for professional development and then to take those strategies and instructional practices and layer them on to their core curriculum, whether it’s math, science, or social studies.”

Dennis and Orr try to instill literacy best practices across all grade levels and all content areas, including techniques

such as paying attention to pacing, monitoring student understanding, providing higher student response opportunities, and making sure students know the specific learning objectives. They also focus on word learning strategies, general reading strategies, comprehension, phonics, and decoding.

Perhaps one of the most important tools for improving achievement, however, is using multiple types of assessments to get a big picture of where students are in their literacy development. “As an educator, I want to know what are my students’ strengths and weaknesses because it helps guide my instructional practices,” says Dennis. “Universal screeners are imperative because they let everyone know where our population is, and help us look at a standardized way of addressing our students’ needs. As far as progress monitoring, it’s important to

know if the changes we make in instruction are making a difference. And, diagnostics help pinpoint a specific need so we immediately know what the student’s deficit is and we’re not just relying on what our gut tells us.”

Dennis is excited about the Alaska Statewide Literacy Blueprint—both as a teacher and as a parent. She believes it will help her and other parents home in on the strategies and skills their children should have at particular points in the developmental continuum. It will also help educators pinpoint where to strengthen their teaching.

As other Alaska schools begin to implement the blueprint, they only have to look at Clark’s example to see how all the elements of an integrated literacy program work together to build student success. ■

The Alaska Statewide Literacy Blueprint

By next fall Alaska Education Commissioner Mike Hanley hopes he can visit any school in the state and see the Statewide Literacy Blueprint in action. “I would like to see it fully implemented and recognized so that wherever I go I could have a conversation [about it] with any educator, including superintendents,” says Hanley.

The plan, which encompasses student needs from birth to graduation, is geared toward preparing all Alaska children “to live, work, participate in society, and pursue personal fulfillment” in the 21st century information age. To do that, it focuses on five areas:

- **Instruction and intervention** that includes effective pedagogy and emphasizes “oral language and vocabulary development, phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, reading comprehension, and writing.”
- **A comprehensive assessment system** that “screens children to efficiently find out who might be struggling; diagnoses the source of those struggles; monitors the progress of children as they develop reading and writing skills; and evaluates the effectiveness of literacy programs.”
- **Leadership** at the state, district, and school levels that serves to “define and focus on the priorities that shape the organizational culture; ensure that adequate resources are available; ensure that the different parts of the system are coherent and aligned with one another; and build the capacity of individuals in the organization to do their jobs effectively.”
- **Family and community engagement** that recognizes that “the best academic outcomes arise when children’s families and educators interact and communicate regularly about children’s literacy development.”
- **Professional development** that is research-based, promotes collaboration, and “helps create professional conversations about children’s literacy.”

Hanley says the plan fills any potential gaps that may exist from one grade to another. He notes, “It provides a nice continuity of expectations and visions for teachers to guide students in literacy from the beginning to the end.” Read more about the blueprint at http://www.eed.state.ak.us/ak_state_literacy_plan.pdf.



Making the Connections

A Montana middle school implements a strategic approach to lesson planning and instruction that reinforces literacy skills, key concepts, and the continuity of the learning process.

Story and photos by BRACKEN REED

GREAT FALLS, Montana—They're questions every secondary school teacher has heard from a frustrated student: Why do I need to know this? When am I ever going to use this? What does this have to do with anything in my life?

While it's easy to interpret these questions as a demand for relevance—a desire to see the big picture—the frustration is more likely the result of a gradual breakdown in understanding. Often, students have simply lost the thread between what they have previously studied and what they are studying now, and where they imagine their studies—and their lives—are headed. They have no context. They can't make the connection. They've lost the sense of relevance lesson by lesson, unit by unit, one “small picture” at a time.


For many students this begins to happen in middle school,

when subject-area content becomes more complex and specialized and academic language is ramped up. The result is what's sometimes referred to as the “middle school slump”—a downward trend in test scores and a time when too many students begin to disengage from school in a way that ultimately leads to dropping out.

For the past year and a half, East Middle School in Great Falls, Montana, has been implementing a research-based planning and instructional process that helps students make those critical connections, day by day, one unit at a time.

Mapping the Lesson

On a chilly, overcast morning in early February, Bonnie Jensen leads one of her seventh-grade social studies classes through a



unit on the regions of the United States. Using a special software program, Jensen has a large chart, called a Unit Organizer, projected on her SMART Board, and each student has a paper copy of the same chart. “OK, here’s the learner outcome for today,” says Jensen. “I want everyone to go back to their Unit Organizer. Turn to the back page, please. What’s the first question we’re going to answer? We’re going to read to find out why ...”

“Why the Northeast has developed into a major commercial center of the world,” says a female student, looking at the sentence on her Unit Organizer.

“Right,” says Jensen. “Now, what does ‘commercial’ mean? It’s another word we’ve gone over and over.”

A student provides the answer and Jensen moves into a whole-group reading of a passage from the textbook, followed

by a pair-share activity in which students discuss the passage, again referring to their Unit Organizers as they identify one thing they have learned from the reading.

As the lesson progresses, Jensen keeps her students moving back and forth between the text and the Unit Organizer, reinforcing important or challenging vocabulary words (“tourism,” “autumnal,” “deciduous”)—most of which the students have already been pretaught—and referring repeatedly to the key question they are attempting to answer. Throughout the period, the Unit Organizer serves as a visual guide—a map of what students are trying to find out and how it relates to what they’ve already studied.

The Unit Organizer Routine was created by Keith Lenz and his colleagues at the University of Kansas in the early 1990s, as

part of a broader set of instructional techniques called Content Enhancement. What Jensen is using is the hands-on “visual device,” the Unit Organizer, which is a two-sided piece of paper that the teacher and her students fill out together in an interactive process as they go through the unit.

The front page of the Unit Organizer lists the key information of the unit, including the “Bigger Picture” that maps out where it fits in the overarching scheme of the subject: The Study of Geography → Current Unit: Regions of the United States → Last Unit: Profile of the United States → Next Unit/Experience: Civics.

Down the left side of the page, Jensen and her students have identified key vocabulary words, and at the bottom they have collaborated on the development of seven key “self-test” questions. These questions will form the bulk of the end-of-unit assessment, and they also serve as almost daily formative assessments. The assessments allow students to check their own understanding and Jensen to track each student’s progress.

Putting the Pieces Together

Principal Shelly Fagenstrom refers to the Unit Organizer as a “mental file cabinet” that gives students a way to organize what they’re learning, as they’re learning it. Debbie Hunsaker, a Title I specialist at the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) and East Middle’s school improvement coach, introduced the Unit Organizer Routine to Fagenstrom in the summer of 2010. “Her excitement and enthusiasm were palpable,” says Fagenstrom. “She felt like this was something that could move us forward and really transform the way we do lesson planning and the way we teach.”

Fagenstrom and seven members of her teaching staff—representing the core areas of math, science, social studies, and English—attended a 2-day training in Helena that fall and the teachers began implementation almost immediately. By early spring, Jensen and her fellow social studies teachers were asking for more, followed soon after by the entire science staff. Hunsaker provided 1-day trainings for each subject-area team in the spring of 2011. “I think that’s a powerful testament,” says Fagenstrom. “It really spread throughout the school because people could see that it works. It works for the staff as they lesson plan, and it works for the kids.”

By the beginning of the current school year the staff in every core subject area had embraced Unit Organizers, and Fagenstrom began allowing teachers to submit them in lieu of lesson plans. Fagenstrom, who was named the 2010–2011 Montana Principal of the Year by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, says the strategy has been a perfect fit for the school. In part that’s because it meshes with other key initiatives, including:

- **Interdisciplinary Teams:** East Middle School has organized its core, subject-area staff into interdisciplinary 4-member teams for almost a decade. Each team shares both a daily 1-period “team time” and another 1-period prep time that they can also use to collaborate. “During that time they’re

looking at crossovers and tie-ins within the curriculum,” says Fagenstrom, “and now they’re doing that using the Unit Organizers. It’s another way of making that connection for kids. They’re not just learning an isolated concept in social studies, for example. They’re going to hear it in language arts, in math, in science—it’s being reinforced over and over again.”

- **Technology:** With the help of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding, East Middle has put SMART Boards in every core classroom, created a new technology lab, and implemented Moodle, a course-management system that allows students and teachers to post content—including their Unit Organizers—online. The schoolwide focus on technology and 21st century skills “interfaces beautifully with the Unit Organizer,” says Fagenstrom. For example, teachers such as Bonnie Jensen use specialized software and the SMART Boards to make the Unit Organizers interactive, embedding web links and videos that can take lessons beyond the classroom.
- **Writing Across the Curriculum:** The Great Falls School District has made writing a priority for all middle and high schools in the 2011–2012 school year. A key part of the Unit Organizers is the written “constructed responses” that students are asked to give at the end of each unit. This typically happens on a weekly basis. In addition, students keep “conversation journals” in which they’re constantly addressing, in writing, questions about their knowledge of the content. According to Fagenstrom, this is another way in which regular progress monitoring is built into instruction.

Ramping It Up

According to Fagenstrom, the school is only beginning to tap the full potential of the Unit Organizer, and a new Striving Readers grant will help them do just that. As part of the national \$7.6 million grant awarded to Montana for 2011–2012 (see sidebar), the school applied for and received \$257,000 directly from OPI. Fagenstrom is using some of this money to provide additional staff development in the use of Unit Organizers. In addition, two staff members, Jensen and special education teacher Elaine Vogler, are participating in the statewide Unit Organizer team directed by OPI’s Hunsaker.

Jensen and Vogler are among only a small handful of teachers on the statewide team, which primarily includes state-level literacy and instructional specialists. As part of the team they will attend three, 2-day trainings in Helena during the current school year.

At the school level, Jensen and Vogler are working as a collaborative team to explore the possibilities of



Principal Shelly Fagenstrom (above) believes in combining rigor and relevance. Social studies teacher Bonnie Jensen has been a statewide leader in implementing Unit Organizers.

using Unit Organizers to provide differentiated instruction in the mainstream classroom. “I think it has a profound potential for doing that,” says Vogler, a 33-year veteran whom many consider to be one of the best reading teachers in the state. “My focus is: How can I get a higher percentage of students to access the core curriculum?”

There are many opportunities to do that with Unit Organizers, which require students to take notes and fill in content as they go. For example, Vogler says that students with advanced reading and comprehension skills can be given a Unit Organizer template that is nearly empty, whereas students with more limited skills can have several points already listed to get them started. “Some of our special education students have very limited motor or processing speeds that make it impossible for them to do the same work as others,” says Vogler. “But if we scaffold it so they can fill in just the key portions that carry the meat of the discussion, then they’re still engaging in the concept effectively. I’ve seen that happening already.”

Seeing Is Believing

In only a year and a half, the entire core instructional staff at East Middle has embraced the use of Unit Organizers. And students, too, have become enthusiastic supporters. According to Jensen, students are typically a little confused during the first few units when they’re introduced to the process, but they catch on quickly and soon find it indispensable. “I think the visual aspect is key,” says Jensen. “When I review at the end of a unit now, we have the organizers out, the students answer the questions, they highlight key concepts and vocabulary words, and then we discuss it. It provides a visual map of everything we’ve done, in a way that goes far beyond typical note-taking.”

Karrie Pepos, a seventh-grader in Jensen’s class agrees. “The self-test questions are the best,” she says. “If you can answer those questions then you’re definitely prepared for the test.”

“I like it because it’s easier to study with,” says Rhyan Shultis, another seventh-grade student. We’ll write a term down and then just write the definition right underneath it, so you can study it really easily.”

As for making the connections, both students are unequivocal. “You keep the papers from each unit, so you can look back and say, ‘Oh, this one is just like that one,’” says Shultis. “Like in math, it brings it back up. You can actually see how you used that concept on an earlier one, but it also helps on this one.”

“It shows me how, each time we go through a unit, we’re learning more and more about the whole topic,” says Pepos. “It connects it all together, and that makes me feel smarter.” ■

Seventh-grade students Rhyan Shultis (left) and Karrie Pepos say Unit Organizers have helped them learn content in a way that goes deeper than rote memorization.



Montana’s Striving Readers Program

Montana was one of only six states to be awarded a 2011–2012 grant through the federal Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program. Created in 2005, Striving Readers was designed to help states implement comprehensive and fully integrated literacy programs for children from birth through grade 12.

Montana is using its \$7.6 million grant to improve school readiness and success in the area of language and literacy development, with an emphasis on closing the achievement gap among all student groups, including low-income students, students with disabilities, American Indian students, and limited English proficient students. The Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) has awarded subgrants to 10 districts, 6 preschools, and 29 individual schools across the state.

According to Debbie Hunsaker, the director of the program, OPI’s adolescent literacy priorities are based on research such as the *Reading Next* study, published by the Alliance for Excellent Education in 2006. That study makes 15 key recommendations for creating effective adolescent literacy programs. These include eight recommendations specifically focused on content-area classrooms, such as using diverse texts, involving students in text-based collaborative learning opportunities, providing extended time for literacy within content-area courses, and providing direct, explicit instruction in both vocabulary and reading comprehension across the curriculum. “Unit Organizers are research-based and align with every one of those content-area recommendations,” says Hunsaker.

In addition to specific instructional strategies, the state is promoting a data-driven, decision-making process that includes the collection, analysis, and use of high-quality data to assess the effectiveness of all funded projects. OPI has chosen Education Northwest as the external evaluator, based on its experience evaluating previous literacy initiatives in Montana, such as the Reading First and Reading Excellence programs.

For more information on the Montana Striving Readers program, visit the OPI website at <http://www.opi.mt.gov>. To learn more about Education Northwest’s expertise in evaluating language and literacy initiatives, contact Theresa Deussen at 800.547.6339, ext. 631.





A Schoolwide Approach To

IMPROVING STUDENT WRITING

Forest Grove High School takes a proactive approach to Oregon's new graduation requirement in writing.

Story by JACQUELINE RAPHAEL, photos by JESSYCA POLICH

FOREST GROVE, Oregon—A dozen English teachers from Forest Grove High School in Oregon gather at 8 a.m. for a refresher workshop on the 6+1[®] Trait Writing Model of Instruction & Assessment, delivered by Education Northwest's Jan Littlebear. They're brushing up on the popular model in which teachers guide students in analyzing their work, using a set of components or "traits" characteristic of high-quality writing.

"We've set our sights on two traits: conventions and sentence fluency," says Kari Bloomquist, department chair. The other teachers in the fluorescent-lit classroom nod in agreement: Errors in punctuation, spelling, grammar, and capitalization, and choppy sentences without any variety in length or structure plague their students' writing. "So what have you got? Minilessons? Instructional activities? Lay it on us," says Bloomquist.

"OK, then. Roll up your sleeves and let's get started," says Littlebear with a smile. The teachers are eager to start because the state of Oregon has significantly raised the stakes in writing. Last year, 32 percent of students statewide failed the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) writing test without penalty. But, starting with this year's junior class—which enrolled in grade 9 in 2009–2010—students will not receive diplomas unless they demonstrate their ability to write clearly and accurately. Prospective graduates will have three options to meet this new Essential Skill of Writing requirement: achieve a passing score on the state's OAKS writing test or the writing SAT, or demonstrate proficiency on three locally developed and scored writing samples produced on demand by students in response to a prompt or question. This year's seniors are also

required to meet the Essential Skill of Reading; by 2012–2013, the Mathematics Essential Skill will be required.

If the new diploma requirements weren't enough of a challenge, this year the Oregon Legislature as a cost-saving measure eliminated all but one opportunity—in grade 11—for students to take the OAKS writing test. Previously, Oregon students took the test in grades 4 and 7, providing valuable leading information about students' writing performance. Districts also had the option to administer the high school OAKS annually. Now, districts and schools have no way of knowing which students are at risk of not meeting the Essential Skills requirement. They must shoulder significant new responsibilities: Assess students earlier and on their own, then strengthen their writing instruction, or face denying students their diplomas.

Forest Grove High School is taking this responsibility seriously. Recognized with multiple awards from the state, the high school's success at eliminating achievement gaps in reading and math is long-standing. Some 50 high schools from across Oregon and from as far away as Kentucky have visited the school over the years to learn about the school's innovations. Writing, however, has remained a challenge, with last year's proficiency levels no better than the state average (68 percent) and lower for English language learners.

The traits professional development workshop is one example of how Forest Grove is preparing students for the writing requirement. The district chose to focus on trait writing because

it closely aligns with the state's official writing scoring guide. Also, the 6+1 Trait framework, developed by Education Northwest more than two decades ago, is in widespread use around the world and has been shown to be effective in research studies. (See "REL Northwest Studies Examine Popular Writing Model, English Language Proficiency" on page 40 of this issue.)

Piloting a Proactive Approach

Forest Grove's approach to the Essential Skill of Writing, which is still evolving, consists of two related changes: a greater focus on writing in regular grade 9 classes and a series of writing intervention courses in subsequent grade levels, including a "writing workshop." The workshop is modeled after the school's successful double-dosing approach to reading and mathematics, designed to catch up students whose diplomas are at risk.

This year, students in regular grade 9 English get a head start on writing samples—essays in each of the three required modes: narrative, expository (or informative), and persuasive writing. In addition to producing one or more longer, polished pieces over time, they are given several opportunities each semester to complete timed writing assignments. If successful, these will count toward meeting the requirement. For students to be successful, they must produce samples that earn at least a 4 (on a 6-point scale) in each of the required traits: ideas, organization, conventions, and sentence fluency. (Two additional traits, word choice and voice, are included in the state scoring guide and the traits model, but the state doesn't use them in scoring.) Teachers trained in the state's official writing scoring guide rate the samples.

Pretesting at Forest Grove revealed that few regular English freshmen could write a successful narrative. The school had no intention of waiting until junior or senior year. "We had our work cut out for us," says teacher Nikki Hartman.

She and fellow instructor Megan Murtaugh use the traits model to help their students do better on conventions and sentence fluency. A key feature of the traits approach is that students are explicitly taught how to assess their writing using the scoring guide, allowing them to pinpoint their strengths and weaknesses and improve their skills. Forest Grove exemplifies this approach, with posters on classroom walls illustrating the individual trait scoring via metaphor. For example, sentence fluency scores are depicted visually and with descriptors on a continuum from "air ball" to "rim" to "backboard" to "swoosh."

Sentence fluency is "a big deal" in Murtaugh's class according



Wendy Gassaway helps a sophomore decide how to begin revising her essay.

to freshmen Celinea and Kyle. "It means having strong sentences that actually make sense, so that when you read the piece out loud, it flows," explains Celinea. She says she's good at it if she puts her mind to it. Kyle reports his writing strength is organization and his weaknesses include sometimes failing to fully develop his topics with details, which he correctly identifies as the ideas trait. Although Celinea loves poetry so much she recites some of her own from memory, she has also learned to appreciate expository writing. So has Kyle, who wrote an expository essay on how to shut down computers remotely. "It had a lot of technical terms in it. It could have been boring, but Ms. Murtaugh told me to explain it in detail so that someone could actually

do this, follow it step by step," says Kyle. "Everything in my paper is in order and organized. I loved it."

Students say their favorite writing teachers incorporate fun activities, such as group work and games, into instruction. Hartman and Murtaugh agree and work hard to do so. Sometimes they worry that pressure to pass writing could discourage struggling students. However, they're proud that midway through the year approximately half of their freshmen have written at least one passing writing sample.

Honing the Focus in the Upper Grades

If students have not produced at least two passing writing samples by the end of grade 9, they are placed in a composition-focused grade 10 class instead of regular or honors English. More than half of this year's sophomores were initially placed in this intervention class, with 18 percent exiting by the end of the first semester.

Former English Language Development teacher Wendy Gassaway currently teaches all six of the school's sophomore composition-focused English classes. "Quite a few of my students hate writing," she says, noting that sentence fluency and conventions traits hold most of them back. This week, Gassaway is starting every class with a review of the sentence fluency trait, including the discrete skills students can practice to improve. "I keep explaining it, and I keep working with different sentence starts," she says. "Then I ask them why I'm talking to them again about sentence fluency, and every class says, 'This is the trait we don't pass.'"

Although the class is helping students overcome writing challenges, there is a student, a second language learner, who causes Gassaway to sigh. A "phenomenal" writer, "he pours lush, detailed lines onto the page, but his complex sentences can

lack clear subjects and verbs, negatively impacting his scores. He'll write, 'Rushing through the air and knocking down the branches,' but forget to mention the wind," she reports. To produce passing writing samples, he wrote papers that she considers among his weakest works. "He dumbed down the writing, using short, careful sentences over which he could maintain control of his grammar and punctuation: 'This happened, then that happened,' he wrote. It frustrates me a little that he's been encouraged to do mediocre writing that's good enough when I know he's capable of truly great writing."

Forest Grove expects fewer sophomores to require the intervention class next year due to the increase in successful writing samples produced in the new ninth-grade course.

Offering a Unique Writing Workshop

For students in grade 11 with two or more writing samples to complete, Forest Grove provides a "double dose" of writing instruction: placement into a writing workshop intervention class and a composition-focused English class. Students needing only one sample take only the latter. The emphasis in both courses is on personalized instruction.

The writing workshop classes, piloted last year by instructor Eric Larsen, are small with 10 to 15 students. Larsen frequently works individually with his students, taking time to get to know them. "Not just who they are, but how they think. How they put things in sequence," he explains.

After providing some whole-class instruction, he sits with each student. One rewrites her thesis statement until he approves it. Next, she works on an outline that breaks down the rest of the essay, spelling out what each paragraph needs to do and what the paragraph parts do. "We may go paragraph by paragraph—each student goes at his or her own rate."

The class reads family stories, many by younger writers

Writing is an integral part of Megan Murtaugh's freshman English class.



growing up in hard times, to validate their own experiences as topics for writing. Larsen says the key to working with struggling writers is to establish mutual respect and give these students reason for self-respect—for themselves, their ideas, and ultimately their words.

As with other Forest Grove teachers, Larsen focuses on conventions errors, but his take is a bit unconventional. "I spend a lot of time studying their run-ons with them. I think English teachers tend to take conventions personally, thinking if we mark the errors, students will get them right. But, really, there is a pattern to every error. Students make them because they believe they're correct. My job is to figure out the pattern and show the students exactly what they're doing," he says.

This year one of his students failed sophomore English and could barely write on day one of the writing workshop. Recently this student wrote a successful expository essay about why he feels disrespected in school. He discussed specific examples and provided a detailed description of his solution: He plans to open his own auto shop and thus gain respect by demonstrating his skill as a mechanic. When Larsen asked the student why he was able to write this essay after producing so few last semester, he said, "Because you cared about what I had to say."

Seeing Results

Teachers leave the traits workshop armed with strategies to help students write more effectively. None of this is new to Forest Grove, but the instructional approach is more explicit now—and the stakes, for students, are clearer. Yet, teachers note it's challenging, especially for younger students, to think ahead about a high-stakes graduation requirement. The focus on passing may also prevent students from recognizing small gains made along the way. Advanced Placement English teacher Whitney Karp observes that if a student's scores increase significantly in the ideas trait, for example, but do not in conventions, "You won't hear him cheering. He just says, 'Dang, I'm still not passing.'"

Principal Karen Robinson says the school's efforts not only help prepare students for postsecondary success but build a foundation for meeting the rigorous writing expectations set by the Common Core State Standards. Forest Grove teachers regularly monitor student progress and take steps to increase the reliability of their scoring: both practices supported by research on formative assessment in writing. In "leveling" activities, during which they score student writing together, sharing problematic papers and those they can't score objectively, they've achieved high marks in consistency and rigor. "Leveling is allowing us to teach each other," says Larsen.

It's too soon to know if the state's Essential Skill graduation requirement will contribute to improved student writing at Forest Grove, but the school's approach is already producing results. Due to the writing intervention classes that support work sample completion, 79 percent of the juniors have met the Essential Skill of Writing. That's up from only 66 percent who passed the writing test last year. ■

New (and Old) Challenges in Adolescent Literacy

Language and literacy instruction have been at the center of Michael Kamil's academic career for more than 40 years. The Stanford University professor emeritus served on the National Reading Panel and chaired the committee that created a new reading framework for the National Assessment of Educational Progress. He also served as lead author of the Institute of Education Sciences practice guide on adolescent literacy (see sidebar). More recently, Kamil drafted the *Washington State Comprehensive Literacy Plan: Birth to Grade 12*, which acknowledges "a growing recognition that we need to address the different literacy demands in middle and high school."

Kamil talked about the latest research findings on adolescent literacy with Theresa Deussen, who heads Education Northwest's work in language and literacy research and evaluation.

Q: What are you excited about in terms of recent research findings on adolescent literacy?

The findings that are really important are some pieces of research that seem to point out different aspects of the problem. For example, the amount of reading for students in high school has become easier and smaller over the years. In other words, they're asked to read easier texts and fewer of them, but in college it turns out that they have to read more and more complex text. We're actually sort of dumbing down the curriculum to get them to do well in high school, but we're not preparing them to meet the challenges after they graduate high school. That's one set of findings that's very interesting, and the gap seems to be growing wider.

The other set is that there are lots and lots of folks who are concerned these days about whether or not students are actually prepared for either college or work: Are we preparing them for the amount of reading and the type of reading they will have to do?

There is a whole series of studies going on at the moment—some of which aren't released yet—that look at whether or not students are prepared and if they are, for what kinds of occupations. It looks like there's a hint in some of the data that some professions require a great deal more literacy than we've been assuming they do.

Do you mean scientific professions and technical literacy?

No, I mean things like auto mechanics: having to read manuals and directions and testing procedures that require computers, electronic testing, and interpreting the results. To be certified for these things, students have to do a lot of reading and they have to get into programs where the reading load is pretty high.

The interesting thing is that several years ago we did the improving adolescent literacy report and came up with several things that the research suggested and those findings still hold. Most adolescents need more vocabulary and more vocabulary instruction. Also, comprehension strategy instruction is still important—being able to read and discuss text. But, we're still focusing largely on literary text and we need to be moving our emphasis to information or expository text.

Let me add one final thing and we don't have a lot of research on this one: We're not preparing kids for multimedia and electronic forms of literacy. We need to focus on how students process things that aren't strictly text but include graphics and animations and videos and so forth, rather than ignoring them.

Let me ask about two other aspects of literacy, the first of which is writing. What are we learning about that right now?

There is a relatively recent report out, *Writing To Read*, that's a follow-up to *Writing Next*. It shows that there are some very dramatic ways to improve reading by teaching writing. For example, teaching spelling turns out to actually be very beneficial. But, a lot of things don't improve achievement all that much even though they are statistically significant. We do know that we should be teaching reading and writing together, but we have to be careful that we don't focus simply on fiction writing. We need writing of all sorts—writing reports, writing summaries of information, and so on—that people use both in college and in the workplace.

What about research into interventions for really struggling adolescent readers—for example, eighth- or ninth-graders who are reading at a fourth-grade level?

We've had a lot of research recently, but the results aren't very promising. They seem to suggest, in my interpretation, that it's a problem of believing that one size fits all: Buying an intervention for a whole school may or may not address all the problems that the students in that school have.

We really have begun to realize that doing word recognition work with most adolescents is not likely to yield much improvement. There's a small number—probably 5 percent or less of all the problem readers at the adolescent level—who can be helped by that, so it's not the same as for elementary where there's a bigger proportion of kids who need that. What we really need to do is think about the issues involved in diagnosing the problems that kids have and why they're struggling at high school and middle school. A lot of it is vocabulary, but sometimes it's background knowledge and sometimes it's as simple as not knowing how to deal with comprehension strategies. We

need to have a battery of tests that allow us to match the interventions to the needs of individual students rather than looking at a single program that says it'll handle all those students.

There is another piece of research that really is kind of exciting. It's the data from the 12th grade National Assessment Administration. What we found was that we've had very little change in the proportion of kids who have reached the advanced reading level over almost the entire history of national assessment. It's about 5 or 6 percent and that figure just doesn't change. But, what's interesting is that what separates those kids from everybody else is a very simple set of abilities or skills: that is, being able to read one or more texts, figure out what the argument is either across or in conjunction with all of the texts, and then provide evidence from the text that the student's answer is correct. It's really the one thing that we need to be stressing that we don't do very much of in high school—what's the basic thesis, what's the evidence for it, and what's the quality of that evidence?



Theresa Deussen

That's a great transition into the other piece I wanted to ask about, which is the adoption of the Common Core State Standards. How do you expect that might address some of the problems that you've pointed out here?

It addresses a whole bunch of the things that we found out from research, which was the intent of the standards movement in the first place. Among other things it actually calls for getting kids to read more complex text and greater volumes of text, so that would address the problem we talked about earlier: the trend in schools versus the trend in college. That's an important part of the standards.



Michael Kamil

The second thing the CCSS address is the very last piece of research that I was talking about. The argument of evidence is at the very heart of Common Core and the standards call for doing that beyond literary text, in areas such as social studies and science. The Common Core doesn't tell people how to teach, it just says, "Here are the sort of things students have to be able to do at certain levels." ■

In some ways you would think it wouldn't be that hard to teach that.

It shouldn't, but you have to remember that in high school, reading is left up to the English language arts folks. They do literary text and that's not a skill that you can actually teach in that context. When we don't have content teachers teaching reading—although we're making some progress there—there's no place where students learn that skill.

Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices, a practice guide published by the Institute of Education Sciences, elaborates on five, evidence-based recommendations:

1. Provide explicit vocabulary instruction.
2. Provide direct and explicit comprehension strategy instruction.
3. Provide opportunities for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation.
4. Increase student motivation and engagement in literacy learning.
5. Make available intensive and individualized interventions for struggling readers that can be provided by trained specialists.

Each recommendation is connected to a "level of evidence"—strong, moderate, low—that is determined by the level of rigor of the available research studies upon which the recommendations are based. The full guide is available at http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/adlit_pg_082608.pdf. For more on recommendation 4, see "Research Brief" on page 34 of this issue.

RESEARCH BRIEF

Encouraging Motivation and Engagement in Reading *By Jennifer Stepanek*

Students face a number of literacy challenges as they move into middle school and high school. Reading assignments are longer and students are called on to learn a variety of skills and reasoning processes that vary across disciplines (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). Secondary students are expected to learn from the texts they read, in which they are likely to encounter new words, facts, and ideas (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2010). In spite of these demands, content-area teachers rarely receive training in how to support students in developing literacy skills (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002).

Data on reading achievement indicate that many students are not prepared to meet these requirements. Reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) have remained stable at the high school level. The average reading score for 17-year-olds was two points higher in 2008 than in 2004 but was not significantly different from the reading scores in 1971 (Rampey, Dion, & Donahue, 2009). The most recent data for grade 12 show that only 38 percent of students performed at or above the proficient level in reading on the 2009 assessment (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). At grade 8, 34 percent of students scored at or above the proficient level on the 2011 assessment, a gain of two percentage points from the 2009 assessment (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

One approach to improving literacy outcomes for adolescents is to focus on increasing students' motivation and engagement. It is one of five recommendations put forth in *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices* (Kamil et al., 2008), the practice guide developed by the Institute for Education Sciences (see Q&A, p. 32).

The guide suggests that “to

foster improvement in adolescent literacy, teachers should use strategies to enhance students' motivation to read and engagement in the learning process” (p. 26).

It is important to note that although “motivation” and “engagement” are sometimes used interchangeably, the practice guide authors provide a distinction between the two terms. Motivation for reading is a person's desire or predisposition to read. Engagement is the extent to which a person is deeply involved and using active strategies while he or she is reading (Kamil et al., 2008). An

consistent positive correlations with achievement. Engagement is associated with improved comprehension and stronger reading outcomes (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Results from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which includes assessment data from 32 countries, demonstrated that engagement was consistently correlated with higher reading achievement. In fact, it was among the student factors with the largest impacts on reading performance, falling just behind grade level and immigration status (Brozo, Shiel,



Photo by Yvette Sidoros

Allowing students to set their own reading goals is one research-based strategy for increasing student motivation and engagement.

additional distinction to keep in mind is the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is based on a personal interest in a subject or an activity, so that pursuing it is perceived as a reward in itself. Extrinsic motivation is based on a sense of obligation or the pursuit of praise or rewards.

The rationale for focusing on motivation and engagement is based on

& Topping, 2007/2008). Motivation has also been positively correlated with achievement across multiple studies. For example, in one study of students in grades 3–8, measures of intrinsic motivation are positively correlated with both academic grades and standardized test scores for both reading and mathematics (Lepper, Corpus, & Iyengar, 2005). However, extrinsic motivation

was negatively correlated with academic performance.

Furthermore, researchers have consistently identified a decline in motivation as students move into middle school and high school. For example Gottfried, Fleming, and Gottfried (2001) found that intrinsic motivation declined from grade 4 through the high school years, although motivation for reading did not decline as much as motivation for mathematics and science. A more recent study of intrinsic motivation in students in grades 3–8 also found a significant decline (Lepper, Corpus, & Iyengar, 2005). Finally, the results of a 3-year longitudinal study found a decline in both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as students progressed from middle school to high school (Otis, Grouzet, & Pelletier, 2005).

Contests and reading challenges that give students opportunities to win prizes are frequently the first things that come to mind as ways to encourage students to read. However, strategies that encourage extrinsic motivation have been shown to have the opposite effect. A meta-analysis of 128 experiments conducted by Deci, Koestner, and Ryan (2001) examined the impact of a variety of strategies to encourage motivation in students. Not only were many of the strategies unsuccessful, they actually had a negative impact on intrinsic motivation. Verbal rewards were the only condition that enhanced intrinsic motivation, but only in studies of college-level students and only when students perceived the praise as providing information about their performance rather than controlling their behavior. All other rewards significantly undermined intrinsic motivation, including completion-contingent rewards (those that require completing an activity) and performance-contingent rewards (those that require reaching a specified level of performance).

Nevertheless, there are many other options for teachers who want to enhance student motivation. Rather than focusing on rewards, the following strategies facilitate students' intrinsic motivation and support their engagement in reading:

- **Promote student autonomy.** Provide opportunities for students to set their own goals, which will encourage them to become more engaged in reading and other activities (Kamil et al., 2008). Allow students to make choices about the topics they will pursue, the format of the texts they will read, and the ways they will demonstrate their learning (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).
- **Use content and learning goals.** Content goals encourage students to focus on important ideas and specific processes (Kamil et al., 2008). They are more likely to pursue activities for the sake of understanding deeply rather than performing well or gaining rewards (Guthrie & Davis, 2003).
- **Develop relevant and meaningful activities.** Plan literacy experiences that incorporate topics and issues that are appealing to adolescents and that are grounded in interesting texts (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Kamil et al., 2008). Connect reading to hands-on activities that spark their interest and encourage them to generate questions to pursue (Guthrie & Davis, 2003).
- **Facilitate social interactions.** Provide opportunities for students to discuss what they read in small groups and pairs (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Develop protocols or guidelines with students to lay the groundwork for productive and respectful conversations.
- **Encourage self-efficacy.** Teachers can help students to develop self-efficacy by modeling persistence and effort, providing encouraging feedback,

and supporting self-evaluation (Schunk, 2003). This enables students to monitor their efforts and progress and work harder when they encounter difficulties.

Although they do not directly address reading skills, these practices are an important component of an effective literacy program. Students who avoid reading have fewer opportunities to develop improved vocabulary and comprehension skills. As Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) point out, engaged readers have self-generated learning opportunities that can be equivalent to several years of education. Addressing motivation and engagement increases the odds that students will benefit from reading instruction. ■

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- See RESEARCH BRIEF, page 44

Parenting for Literacy *By Joyce Riha Linik*

In a treasured family photo, my son is sitting in an overstuffed living room chair, his head bent forward, his nose tucked deep inside a monstrous tome perched precariously on his small lap. When the picture was snapped, he had just proclaimed that he was “reading” that college-level physics textbook. He was not yet two. Of course, I realized it was unlikely that Nicholas could identify any specific words at that tender age, let alone decipher the content, but it was clear he already understood something my husband and I had long known: There is something very cool about books.

As book people, Larry and I have modeled reading from the start, so it may come as no surprise that Nicholas, now nine, has turned out to be “a reader.” These days, at bedtime, we have to hound him to set his treasured book aside and turn off the light, because he has school the next morning. Sometimes, when we think he has been asleep for an hour or more, we find him huddled under the covers, flashlight in hand, trying to make it to the end of one more Harry Potter or Percy Jackson chapter. It is hard to get angry about something like that, especially when I remember doing the same thing with my Nancy Drew and Little House books so long ago.

I was not surprised this year when my son signed up to participate in Oregon’s Battle of the Books (OBOB), a statewide competition that offers students the opportunity to test their memories of the plots, characters, and details of 16 assigned books, against others. As coach of my son’s team, I can attest that the third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders vying for the school championship were having loads of fun—and honing key literacy skills in the process.

What did surprise me, though, was that while several teams from my son’s K–8

school participated in the grade 3–5 division, no students elected to participate in the grade 6–8 group. When I asked parents of older students about this, the answers were similar. In short, reading had lost out to other activities. As students hit adolescence, the demands on their time skyrocketed. Afterschool commitments like soccer, volleyball, swimming, music, dance, and homework had simply edged out books or at least those chosen for enjoyment. Plus, there were the distractions that friends and hormones threw into the mix. And these were kids who, for the most part, liked reading in the first place.

I had to wonder: What happens to the kids who don’t enjoy reading all that much? What happens to those who have been struggling all along? Is this the period of development where books make it or break it?

While many literacy articles focus on reading attainment by third grade, I’ve seen a slough of articles that say many students struggle with the transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn” in the years that follow.

Research shows that attainment of literacy skills can be a reliable indicator of future academic and career success. Frighteningly, some states even predict future prison populations based on third-grade reading scores.

Of course, teachers work hard to help students build key literacy skills. But it’s no secret that parental support can tip the scales in a student’s favor.

So, as parents, what can we do to help?

Debbie Ellis, who led the former Oregon Parental Information and Resource Center at Education Northwest, and I recently put our heads together to come up with some suggestions:

- First and foremost, model reading. Read where your child can see you. Read *to* your child. Have your child

read to you. Show that you value literacy by practicing it. My family and I read Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* out loud every holiday season, and it has become a cherished tradition.

- Fill your home environment with literature, whether books, magazines, and/or newspapers. Provide your child with options, and then watch what draws him so you can feed those interests. Does your kid love science? Consider a subscription to a magazine like *Discover*.
- Encourage all reading. Whether it’s Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* or Marvel Comics’ *Iron Man*, encourage your child to read what she enjoys. And vary the levels. Some choices can challenge and build skills while others can build reading confidence.
- Talk about literature. Ask your child what he is reading, and ask him to tell you about it. The act of retelling the story solidifies comprehension, and helps with retention. Likewise, share interesting tidbits from things you are reading. This is good for your brain, too.
- Browse libraries and bookstores with your children. Watch what genres and authors interest them, and then pick out similar titles to keep them reading. Or ask a librarian, clerk, or another parent or child what he or she recommends, and see if that pick piques your child’s interest.
- If your child has read a book that’s made it to the big screen, rent the movie (afterwards) and discuss the differences. This builds comprehension, plus provides preparation for all those compare-and-contrast essays.
- If your child is struggling with assigned reading, watch a movie that can help her better understand the time period, genre, etc. Lois Lowry’s *Number the*



Nicholas (left) and Ryan take part in a library-sponsored “flash mob”—an event aimed at making reading cool.

Dan Cahill, as well as the misadventures of Greg Heffley. It was literacy building at its finest. I’m pretty sure it never occurred to either boy that it was anything other than fun.

What’s more, a fifth-grade boy from their school wandered by with a copy of *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, one of my son’s favorites, and a few friendly comments and nods were exchanged.

Oh yeah. Flash-mobbing with books can be cool like that. ■

Stars or Anne Frank’s *Diary of a Young Girl* may be more meaningful when a child has a framework/scaffold for understanding, and there are numerous World War II movies and documentaries that can help set the stage. If your child finds a particular reading assignment completely impenetrable (e.g., he simply cannot grasp the language of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*), then watching the movie version *during* the reading process may help boost comprehension.

- Model writing. Write notes to your child. Send letters and/or e-mails to family and friends. Buy a journal for communicating with your child, or a special box in which you can tuck notes you write to each other.
- Encourage your child to write, and have writing supplies readily available (paper, pens, note cards, journals). Encourage your child to write to family, or to send thank-you notes

to friends after a birthday party. Suggest becoming pen pals with a friend who has moved away.

- Be creative. Anything that gets your child reading, writing, and/or communicating helps to build literacy skills.

I recently saw a Facebook post about a “Reading Flash Mob” at a library in a neighboring town. It sounded intriguing, so I called up a friend whose son is one of Nicholas’s best buddies, and we decided to attend the event together. Though the turn-out was a bit disappointing (by any definition, the smattering of bodies there could not be defined as a “mob”), the event was a total success in my eyes.

Nicholas and his friend, Ryan, sat side by side at an old oak library table and read their books, taking periodic breaks to marvel at the adventures of Amy and

Ninth Consecutive REL Contract Focuses on the Work of Research Alliances

Education Northwest has been awarded a \$28.5 million contract by the U.S. Department of Education to serve as the regional educational laboratory (REL) for the Northwest for the next five years. The award, funded by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), builds on Education Northwest's 46-year history of providing REL research and technical assistance services to clients in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington.

"We are excited about the scope of work in the new contract," says REL Northwest Director Steve Fleischman. "There is an emphasis on building regional stakeholders' capacity to identify, access, use, and apply data and research to meet their self-defined improvement goals. The REL program also seeks to build a national knowledge base of reliable, actionable evidence to help improve student outcomes."

REL Northwest will focus on three priority areas that were determined by examining regional data and surveying Northwest constituents:

- **Turning around low-performing schools**—Leading and sustaining improvement efforts in schools identified as needing corrective action or restructuring under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and in schools identified as "the persistently lowest performing" by the state education agencies
- **Increasing graduation rates and readiness for postsecondary education and careers**—Improving secondary education, including academic performance, dropout prevention, transitions to postsecondary education, and college or career readiness
- **Achieving greater equity by improving outcomes for all students**—Reducing disparities in educational participation and performance among

student groups based on race (particularly American Indian/Alaska Native), Hispanic origin, family income, and English language proficiency

At the core of REL Northwest's research and technical assistance is the facilitation of "research alliances"—established groups throughout the region that have agreed to work with Education Northwest. "IES' vision is for the RELs to work with groups focused on priority needs of the region—helping them to use research and data in ways that build capacity for improvement," says Christopher Mazzeo, deputy director of REL Northwest. "As we develop relationships with these groups and they are able to implement sustainable, practical solutions, we anticipate that this knowledge base of best practices will spread."

Currently, REL Northwest is working with the following eight alliances:

ALASKA

Alaska State Policy Research Alliance

Policymakers and researchers from Alaska's higher education system are focused on creating a shared research agenda to improve education and build awareness of research evidence about key education policy issues.

IDAHO

Idaho Statewide System of Support

State education agency staff, technical assistance providers, and stakeholders from local education agencies are using evidence related to school improvement to enhance the support provided to low-performing schools.

MONTANA

Montana AA District Network

Representatives from districts with high schools that have more than 1,000 students are helping districts and principals use data to improve high school graduation rates and evaluate dropout prevention initiatives.

OREGON

Oregon Leadership Network

Representatives from Oregon school districts are focused on collecting and analyzing data about policies, programs, and practices that promote equity in high school graduation and discipline practices.

Rural Schools Network

Administrators from 22 Oregon GEAR UP rural districts with more than 50 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch are using data and conducting research to better understand what helps their students reach and succeed at college.

WASHINGTON

Washington Educational Service Districts (ESD)

Representatives from Washington's nine ESDs are using state and local data to support more effective school improvement decision making by teachers and principals.

Road Map for Education Results

Part of a cradle-to-college initiative involving seven districts in South Seattle and South King County, this alliance is focused on helping districts identify indicators of ELL students' academic success and language development and using evidence to better support ELL students.

REGIONAL

Bureau of Indian Education Schools (BIE)

Representatives from BIE high schools



Chris Mazzeo

in Oregon and Washington are working to improve data quality and use, particularly to inform efforts to increase graduation rates and prepare students for success in college and careers.

While we are committed to working

with these alliances in 2012, we are exploring opportunities to pursue additional partnerships and welcome suggestions for other potential alliances. Please contact Christopher.Mazzeo@educationnorthwest.org for information

about new alliances.

Visit the REL Northwest section of our website at <http://educationnorthwest.org> regularly for updates as our work with alliances and other regional partners evolves. ■

TA Academy Hones Technical Assistance Skills

School improvement coaches and other technical assistance (TA) providers often come to the job with impressive credentials as excellent educators or administrators. They may not, however, be equally experienced at the actual work of providing TA. Education Northwest and its partner Precision3 are addressing that issue with a new program that will provide systematic training to enhance and deepen TA practice.

of the project organizers. Danette Parsley, a TA Academy facilitator, adds that the academy will focus on equipping TA providers with deep content knowledge—something that's often missing—as well as a firm grasp of effective change processes and data use.

“The TA Academy is designed to focus on the individual attendee as well as on all attendees,” says facilitator Lexie Domaradzki of Precision3. “This is important because our promise is to see ‘each participant’; watch and listen for what they need; and provide teaching, feedback, and guidance that will assist them in reaching their highest potential in supporting schools and districts.”

The TA Academy launched its first cohort in late January with a 4-day institute in Portland. Among the participants are a half-dozen coaches from the Oregon School District Improvement Network (OSDIN). Cathy Russell, an OSDIN coach from

Warm Springs, explained, “What drew me [to the academy] was its focus on a systematic approach. In our work, we need to look at the whole system and how to have conversations about school improvement in a nonpersonal, non-threatening way.” Nanci Sheeran of Toledo said she was prompted to join the group because “I want to become proficient at this and become a resource to principals and teachers in helping them use the data we collect.” The “intentionality” of the TA Academy attracted Mary Schroeder of Klamath Falls, while Kathy Larson of Philomath and Siletz said the focus on rapid inquiry cycles excited her. “I’ve been frustrated trying to figure out how to get started and moving,” says Larson, “and these sessions are making me think about things I haven’t thought about before.” After only a few hours, Larson said she had already picked up some tools she was going to use right away.

While the first TA Academy focuses specifically on building content knowledge in literacy, a future one will emphasize mathematics. For more information on TA Academy offerings, e-mail Theresa.Deussen@educationnorthwest.org or call Deussen at 503.275.9631. ■



The first TA Academy workshop focused on building content knowledge in literacy.

The intensive TA Academy, which is now being pilot tested, will feature face-to-face institutes, monthly webinars, and side-by-side coaching over a 2-year period. “Our goal is to create the best TA providers in the country,” says Education Northwest’s Theresa Deussen, one

of the project organizers. Danette Parsley, a TA Academy facilitator, adds that the academy will focus on equipping TA providers with deep content knowledge—something that's often missing—as well as a firm grasp of effective change processes and data use.

REL Northwest Studies Examine Popular Writing Model, English Language Proficiency

With education budgets continuing to constrict, state and local education agencies want to make sure that their investments in programs and services are paying off. Two recent research studies conducted by REL Northwest provide evidence that can help educators determine program effectiveness. One study examined a writing instruction model widely used in the Northwest while the other analyzed the progress of one state's students with limited English proficiency.

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE IMPACT OF THE 6+1 TRAIT® WRITING MODEL ON GRADE 5 STUDENT WRITING ACHIEVEMENT

According to a scientific study involving 74 Oregon elementary schools, the 6+1 Trait Writing model caused a statistically significant increase in student writing scores during the year in which it was studied.

REL Northwest's study, published in December 2011, examined first-year implementation of the model, in which teachers were provided with additional writing instruction and assessment strategies that were intended to complement whatever writing curricula and strategies were already in use at their schools. The study found that when implemented under similar conditions, the writing model can be expected to raise the average level of fifth-grade student writing achievement from the 50th to the 54th percentile. The 2-year experimental study involved 102 teachers and 2,230 students in the treatment condition and 94 teachers and 1,931 students in the control condition.

Previous research, including National Commission on Writing studies in 2004 and 2006, found that the

development of academic writing skills is essential to student success in secondary and postsecondary education and in an increasing number of high-wage jobs. In addition, the remediation of writing problems currently imposes significant costs on public and private organizations, including postsecondary institutions. Grade 5 was chosen as the target population for the study based on the importance of developing academic writing skills at that grade level. Fifth-grade writing instruction typically focuses on learning expository and persuasive writing—skills that are essential to students' success in all subsequent grade levels.

The trait writing model emphasizes instruction in which teachers and students analyze writing using a set of characteristics or "traits" of written work, including ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions. Use of the model is widespread throughout the United States and in several countries.

In addition to the analysis of students' holistic writing scores, the study included exploratory analyses of student performance on six specific outcome measures of particular writing traits. Use of the model increased student scores on three writing traits—organization, voice, and word choice. For the other traits the mean outcome score of students in the treatment condition was higher than that of students in the control condition, but these differences were too small to be considered statistically significant.

Although the research team for this

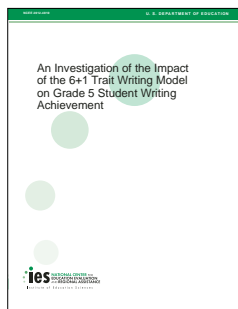
study was employed by Education Northwest, the organization that developed and markets the 6+1 Trait Writing model, numerous steps were taken to ensure the transparency of all research processes and to limit the possibility of bias.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY LEVELS OF LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS IN IDAHO

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires schools to ensure that highly qualified teachers provide effective instructional services that will result in measureable progress in both English language acquisition and academic progress for limited English proficient (LEP) students.

At the request of the Idaho State Department of Education, REL Northwest conducted a comprehensive analysis of the English proficiency of the state's LEP student population. The resulting report, published in January 2012, will help Idaho officials make decisions about resource allocation, professional development, and instructional practice.

REL Northwest researchers based their study on statewide results on the Idaho English Language Assessment (IELA), the federally mandated annual assessment Idaho administers to all LEP students. They examined the distribution of LEP students in Idaho across five proficiency levels (from beginning to fluent), on the IELA in 2010 and compared it with results for 2007. The study showed how the distribution varied by grade spans for five domains measured on the IELA: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension. The research team also compared results across subgroups of LEP students, including by gender, participation



in the free or reduced-price lunch program, Spanish as the primary language, enrollment in a U.S. public school for the first time in the previous 12 months, migrant status, and enrollment in special education.

Among the key findings were:

- Most LEP students had an intermediate, early fluent, or fluent level of proficiency. Students at these levels can participate in classroom activities, although they still require support, particularly with the development of

academic English.

- Some LEP student subgroups had achievement patterns that differed from the pattern of the overall LEP student population. In each grade span, more female LEP students than male LEP students scored at the early fluent or fluent level.
- Except in kindergarten, students new to U.S. schools within the previous 12 months and students in special education had lower levels of English language proficiency than did other LEP

student subgroups.

The studies were carried out under Education Northwest's 2006–2011 contract with the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, which operates the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) program. All of the reports published by REL Northwest and the nation's nine other RELs can be downloaded at <http://educationnorthwest.org/rel-compendium>. ■

Volunteer Leadership Center Offers Online College Courses

For nearly 50 years, people from all walks of life have been fighting poverty as Volunteers in Service to America (VISTAs). In addition to gaining skills, experiences, and networks during their year of service, VISTAs can now earn college credit at no charge. The Volunteer Leadership Center (VLC) at Education Northwest has developed three online college courses with academic credit recommendations from the American Council on Education. The courses are designed to help VISTA members manage volunteers, develop community resources, and understand the history, causes, and solutions of poverty in the United States.

VISTAs make a yearlong, full-time commitment to live at the federal poverty level and volunteer at nonprofit or public agencies engaged in antipoverty work such as combating illiteracy, improving health services, or helping families acquire food and stable housing. VLC's Jil Freeman, who just completed teaching one of the pilot courses, says that the VISTAs are all involved in projects that strengthen the infrastructure of their organizations. "The work VISTAs do builds the capacity of organizations so they can better serve communities and clients," she explains.

Historically, volunteers would rely on on-the-job training to acquire the skills needed for their work. Now, however, the VLC courses will help fill that gap. "Two of the courses VLC designed are applied curriculum courses that address VISTAs' highest identified skill needs—volunteer mobilization/management and resource development—so that students learn site-based applications in addition to earning college credit," says Freeman.

For the 12-week Resource Development course, a team from VLC simulated a community kitchen and facilitated hands-on assignments related to fund raising, event planning, and grant writing. A former professor at Portland State University, Freeman said that this was the most heterogeneous group she's ever taught. "The 38 students who completed the course came from 15 states and ranged from a 20-year-old who had never attended college to a 60-year-old pastor to people in graduate school," she notes.

Feedback from students about the course was very positive. One student



Jil Freeman

commented, "The course material and timing have been amazingly relevant to my assignment as a VISTA. I have used the material and resources each and every day in carrying out the responsibilities of my position." Another student said, "After reading about how individual donors

are the most reliable source of funding, I held a training for all the VISTAs and my supervisor about how to start communicating with volunteers, churches, and students, and viewing them as potential donors. The training became a great brainstorming session, and currently I am working on creating a development plan for the 2012–2013 fiscal year."

VLC is planning to offer its online courses in Volunteer Program Development and Resource Development again this summer. A third course, piloting this March, examines the history, causes, and solutions to the complex issues of poverty in the United States. It will be taught by Dr. Stephen Pimpare, author of *A People's History of Poverty in America*. ■

Conference Call

6+1 TRAIT[®] WRITING INSTITUTE FOR TRAIT PRESENTERS

June 26–28, 2012, Cannon Beach, OR

This advanced training of trainers is for literacy coaches, teacher leaders, administrators, and curriculum coordinators who have knowledge and experience in the model and wish to conduct their own in-district, trait-based workshops. These future presenters will delve into the research supporting the 6+1 Trait model, explore balanced literacy issues, score K–12 student papers, and learn lesson design and curriculum mapping strategies. Throughout the three days, participants will learn how to incorporate adult learning strategies as they build their own workshops.

With states nationwide preparing to implement the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS), now is the time to offer professional development to staff in trait-based writing instruction. “The CCSS in writing describe the knowledge and skills that all students will need to master for college and careers,” says Jan Littlebear, an institute facilitator. “The CCSS are based on the same components of high-quality writing described in detail in Education Northwest’s 6+1 Trait Writing model. Using the model’s scoring rubrics, teachers can provide concrete feedback to students about what they need to do to improve their work and ultimately achieve the high level of writing called for in the CCSS.”

Previous participation in a 6+1 Trait Writing workshop and classroom experience teaching the traits are prerequisites for participation. For questions contact Mark Workman, Mark.Workman@educationnorthwest.org, 800.547.6339, ext. 572.

FROM STRUCTURE TO INSTRUCTION INSTITUTE

June 29–July 1, 2012, Seattle, WA

By popular request, Education Northwest’s national institute on high school design and improvement will take place in the Pacific Northwest this year—in downtown Seattle. The fifth annual From Structure to Instruction Institute will build on the success of the previous institutes by offering best practices, tools and strategies, and personalized coaching by experts in the field to help school and district teams tackle the intensive work of instructional improvement and structural change.

According to Education Northwest’s Katie Whitney Luers, one of the institute’s organizers, “high schools are facing several issues this year that demand immediate attention. Adoption and implementation of Common Core State Standards, the need for better preparation for college and careers through career and technical education and core integration, and waivers for the No Child Left Behind Act are changing the landscape for high schools across the country,” says Luers. “We are recruiting presenters—people with experience transforming high schools—who can offer practical guidance on these new issues, as well

as on long-standing challenges.” Practitioners who have innovative, successful programs or practices they wish to share are encouraged to visit the call for presenters section on the website and submit a proposal.

This year’s program targets eight critical elements of high school design and improvement:

1. Career academies and career and technical education
2. Postsecondary readiness
3. Professional collaboration and effective team facilitation
4. Responses to persistently low achievement
5. Demonstrations of proficiency and authentic assessment
6. Implementing Common Core State Standards
7. Optimizing resources, including time, people, and money
8. District stewardship

Registration is now open. Those who register by April 30, 2012, can save \$115 on the standard registration fee. Visit the institute event page at <http://education-northwest.org/event/sti12> on a regular basis for up-to-date information on keynotes, session descriptions, and more. ■



Lessons Learned on Optimizing School Support Teams

States in the Northwest and nationwide are using school support teams (SSTs) to provide intensive and sustained support to schools identified as in need of improvement. The latest issue of Education Northwest's Lessons Learned focuses on how to use SSTs—cadres of highly qualified teachers, principals, or district staff who have been successful in boosting academic achievement—to maximum effect.

Since 2005, Education Northwest has worked closely with state education agencies (SEAs) in the region to design and implement their statewide systems of support to schools and districts in improvement status. From our experience in the field, as well as our federally funded research on statewide systems of support and SSTs, we have gleaned a number of lessons about optimizing SST member assistance. These lessons offer practical recommendations to SEA policymakers, technical assistance providers, and school and districts administrators.

LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT OPTIMIZING SUPPORT TO LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS THROUGH SCHOOL SUPPORT TEAMS

1. SST members must be able to provide capacity-building support to schools by drawing on a wide range of resources and information.
2. The experience and skills an SST member brings to the assignment must be carefully matched to the characteristics and needs of the school and its leaders.
3. SST members must first build trust and establish credibility, to help the school develop capacity for positive change.
4. A fundamental role of the SST member is to assist with implementation of strategies to address the school's goals.
5. What worked in one school does not guarantee similar results in a different school context.
6. SST members foster sustainable improvement by cultivating ownership

among all stakeholders and a vision of continuous improvement that is shared by the leadership and staff.

In addition to descriptions of the six lessons, the 4-page brief provides snapshots of the typical SST member's role, as well as characteristics of such teams in the Northwest.

Education Northwest's Lessons Learned series offers sound and succinct advice derived from our 46 years of research, evaluation, and technical assistance experiences. Other issues in the series cover topics such as planning a school-based mentoring program, choosing a school turnaround provider, and implementing high school small learning community and small school reform efforts. Go to <http://education-northwest.org/resource/1295> to download the series. ■

Hot Off the Press: Free K–1 Math Assessments, Aligned With the Common Core

Kindergarten and first-grade teachers have a new tool for enhancing teaching and learning in mathematics. Education Northwest introduces Assessing Mathematical Understanding—a comprehensive set of mathematics assessments that provides both cumulative data about students' progress over time and in-depth diagnostic information. Aligned with the *Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for Mathematics*, this field-tested approach helps teachers track student progress, identify particular difficulties, and inform their instructional planning.

Available free online, the set contains a guide, kindergarten and/or first-grade assessment items, a diagnostics book, and student record sheets.

Using Assessing Mathematical Understanding tools, teachers:

- Conduct individual assessment interviews two to three times during the school year. The one-on-one interview structure allows the teacher to collect rich data about student knowledge that is not limited to the answer the student gives, but also includes observations of the strategies and explanations the student uses.
- Document information in the student record (included in the set), which provides a cumulative report of mathematical progress during that period.



Download your free set today. Visit <http://educationnorthwest.org/products> for details, including product information and video demonstrations. Hard-copy versions—spiral-bound or three-hole punched—are available for purchase. ■

Dreams

Continued from page 9

time, you start to see how it scaffolds and how it leads students to success.”

Bader also stresses the importance of having a specific goal in mind. “Each strategy has a rationale for when we do it, why we do it, and what the language and content objectives are,” she says. “When I’m coaching teachers and they say, ‘I want to try such-and-such strategy,’ I always make sure to ask them: ‘How does it fit in your unit plan?’ You have to have a reason why you’re using it here. What are your language objectives? What are your content objectives?”

For these reasons, Bader also stresses

that to master the model requires coaching, time, and patience. “A good rule of thumb is that it takes two or three years to master all of the strategies to the point that you use them with fluidity,” she says. “And coaching is essential.”

For Galaviz, an 8-year veteran in the classroom, it’s been a process of accepting that she will sometimes be out of her comfort zone. “I try to think long term,” she says. “I know it feels overwhelming right now, but when we become confident in these strategies and we’re able to implement them fluidly and on a daily basis in our classrooms, I think the benefits are going to be exponential. These kids will take the strategies with them.

In that sense, they’re not just learning language skills and content knowledge; they’re learning how to learn. That’s something they will take with them as they leave my classroom and go out in the world.”

As she says this, she glances toward the windows, and the light pours in. ■

For more information about the Project GLAD study, please contact Theresa Deussen at Theresa.Deussen@education-northwest.org or visit the website: <http://projectgladstudy.educationnorthwest.org>.

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END NOTE



Students gathering in the main hallway of Clark Middle School have a constant reminder of how they're doing in meeting literacy goals. A poster in the window of the literacy coaching office keeps a tally of the school's fluency rates.

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