

STATELINE

Getting Better at Implementation

BY KATHY CHRISTIE

If you count something you find interesting, you will learn something interesting.” This quote is from Atul Gawande, surgeon and author of *Better: A Surgeon’s Notes on Performance* (Picador, 2008), in which he engagingly describes the difficulties and successes confronted when new knowledge requires changes in practice. He describes how — under the very best of conditions and good intentions — implementation can fail, yet under the worst of conditions, the opposite can occur. The keys to improved performance in medicine, Dr. Gawande says, are “doing right,” ingenuity, and diligence. The parallels for education are striking.

Gawande tells how, when data clearly showed that the rate of hospital infections could be lowered if staff always thoroughly washed their hands before touching patients, it seemed like an easy fix: Require hand washing before touching a patient. Hospital staff bought into the logic and tried to follow the rules, yet only complied one-third to one-half as often as they needed to comply. Sometimes, they skipped this critical step because of the unbearable dryness caused from many, many hand washings a day. Other gaps in implementation happened for simple reasons, such as not wanting to offend the family member who warmly greeted the doctor with outstretched hand, thwarting the doctor’s intention to follow germ-free guidelines.

Ingenuity

Yet Dr. Gawande also describes how medical personnel in challenging Third World environments often get results. His stories range from the doctor who had to send a family member to the local hardware store for the plastic tubing he needed to do emergency surgery to the field staff trying to improve local health practices. When health workers tried to disseminate proven means of improving children’s nutrition, they were faced with a consistent lack of community support.

■ KATHY CHRISTIE is vice president for Knowledge Management and the ECS Clearinghouse, Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colorado.

Community leaders would nod their heads in agreement, but when the medical staff left, they went back to their old practices. So ingenious health workers asked local leaders to determine whether any children in the community were healthier than the rest, and to find out why. Those leaders did identify a local mother whose children were far healthier, and they were able to see how she had successfully adapted local food sources and prepared food in a noncustomary manner. Dr. Gawande identifies such an innovator (the mother) as a “positive deviant” — an individual who identifies and takes a nontraditional route that gets positive results. With a little encouragement, the community be-

“If you count something you find interesting, you will learn something interesting.”

gan to model its practices after hers — improving children’s nutrition in a manner more valued because it emerged locally and within cultural norms.

Diligence

Gawande defines “diligence” as the necessity of giving sufficient attention to detail to avoid error and prevail against obstacles. One means of giving sufficient attention to detail is counting something. (“If you count something you find interesting, you will learn something interesting.”) Although he contends that it really doesn’t matter what you count — as long as you count — it only makes sense to pay attention to the details of information that appear to matter. In education, we’re beginning to get better at that.

Campaign for Quality Education Data

The latest state survey from the Data Quality Campaign finds that the number of states with data systems that can successfully “count” important facets of schooling has appeared to reach a tipping point. For example, state technology directors report that they can answer the following questions:

- Which schools produce the strongest academic growth for their students? (39 states collect the data needed to answer this question, up from 21 in 2005.)
- What achievement levels in middle school indicate that a student is on track to succeed in rigorous courses in high school? (12 states, up from 3 in 2005.)
- What is the state’s graduation rate, according to

STATELINE

the calculation agreed to in the 2005 National Governors Association compact? (42 states, up from 14 in 2005.)

- What high school performance indicators (e.g., enrollment in rigorous courses or performance on state tests) are the best predictors of students' success in college or the workplace? (10 states, up from 2 in 2005.)
- What percentage of high school graduates take remedial courses in college? (27 states, up from 8 in 2005.)
- Which teacher preparation programs produce graduates whose students have the strongest academic growth? (16 states, up from 5 in 2005.)

However, only six states collect all the necessary elements of data: **Utah, Arkansas, Louisiana, Alabama, Florida, and Delaware.** For full survey results, go to www.dataqualitycampaign.org.

Link State Goals to Data

While some “master plans” wind up on the shelf, some set tangible goals that can help them avoid such a fate.

The **Tennessee** state board of education's master plan for FY 2008 to 2012 sets an overall vision of preparing all Tennessee children for successful post-secondary work, education, and citizenship. The plan includes goals of successful transitions; rigorous, relevant high school; relevant middle grade experience; dynamic elementary grade education; and high-quality preK availability. Most important, measures used to determine success “count something.” One of these is the remedial and developmental studies rate at post-secondary institutions for recent high school graduates. The current rate is 60%. The goal for 2012 is

20%, and for 2014, it is 10% — ambitious goals, to say the least, but measurable and important.

Also measured are the college-going rate, high school graduation rate, and reaching the ACT subject-area benchmarks for college and workforce readiness. The ACT benchmarks help predict postsecondary success based on subject area scores. For example, students meeting the benchmark subject-area scores have a 50% chance of obtaining an A or B or a 75% chance of obtaining an A, B, or C in the corresponding credit-bearing college course. Students' preparation for meeting these benchmarks is measured by ACT's PLAN and EXPLORE assessments, given in 8th and 10th grade. The ACT PLAN (10th grade), ACT EXPLORE (8th grade), and 8th-grade and 4th-grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) performance are additional measures.

In 2006, **Delaware** leaders put together Vision 2015, the state's plan to “achieve the best schools in the world for every student in the state. . . no exceptions. . . no excuses.” Led by a 28-person steering committee of Delaware's education, business, government, and community leaders — with advice from several hundred teachers, principals, parents, students, and lay citizens — this has been a collaborative effort.

The 2008 progress report notes that — as measured by performance on the state math test, achievement gaps are still leaving too many students behind.

The commitment in 2009 is to “put our limited resources where they are needed most.” Investments will be aimed at intensive leadership training in targeted schools, training early education providers, increased access to quality programs, and recruiting and supporting high-quality teachers, particularly in math and science.

Other State Leadership

To assist schools and districts across the state, the **Maryland** state department maintains a separate web



PHI DELTA KAPPA INTERNATIONAL OFFICE STAFF

WILLIAM J. BUSHAW, Executive Director; JEANNE STORM, Associate Executive Director; AMANDA GRAHAM, Coordinator, Future Educators Association (FEA); ERIN YOUNG, Director of Electronic Media and External Relations; AMY KEMP, Director for Leadership Development and Chapter Services; DeSHAWN EASLEY, Assistant Director for Leadership Development; HOLLY THRASHER, Assistant Director for Chapter Resource Development; LYNN LEWIS, Director of Development;

CATHY RUF, Director of Office Operations; DEBBIE WEBB, Executive Administrative Assistant.

Phi Delta Kappa International is headquarters for: **International Curriculum Management Audit Center** and **Future Educators Association.**

INTERNATIONAL BOARD

JOHN KENNETH AMATO, Pres.; Principal, Maple Place Middle School, 2 Maple Place, Oceanport, NJ 07757.
SANDEE CROWTHER, Pres.-Elect; Admin., Ret.; 1230 W. 29th Court, Lawrence, KS 66046.
JO ANN FUJIOKA, Past Pres.; Area Admin., Ret., 540 S. Forest St., #K, Denver, CO 80246.

KATHLEEN M. ANDRESON, Representative, Reg. A; Owner, The Synergy Group, Ltd., 7604 Summer N.E., Albuquerque, NM 87110.

ROBERT L. MEYERS, Representative, Reg. B; Admin., Ret.; 6417 S. 92nd St., Omaha, NE 68127.

PATRICIA WILLIAMS, Representative, Reg. C; Professor, Sam Houston State Univ.; 1908 Bobby K. Marks Blvd., Huntsville, TX 77341-2119.

RONALD N. STRAHANOSKI, Representative, Reg. D; Admin., Ret.; 1019 Runyan Dr., Lockport, IL 60441.
GERARD LONSWAY, Representative, Reg. E; Admin., Ret.; 5447 Bayshore Rd., Oregon, OH 43618.

OTELIA FRAZIER, Representative, Reg. F; Elementary Principal, Ret., and Adjunct Professor, George Mason Univ.; 9912 Par Dr., Nokesville, VA 20181.

CHRISTIAN H. CHÉRAU, Representative, Reg. G; Evaluation Consultant, P.O. Box 2907, Tybee Island, GA 31328.

FRANK H. NAPPI, JR., Representative, Reg. H; NYC High School Principal, Ret., and Adjunct Professor of Mathematics, Nassau Community College; 29 Holiday Park Dr., Williston Park, NY 11596.

BERNADINE E. MOLDOCH, Representative, Reg. I; Principal, Thomas Jefferson Elem. School; 250 Athens Blvd., Buffalo, NY 14223-1604.

YONG ZHAO, At-Large Representative; University Distinguished Professor and Director, U.S.-China Center for Research on Educational Excellence, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI.

site dedicated to school improvement (www.msde.state.md.us). The site includes sections on assessments, data analysis, instruction, and school improvement that could be just as helpful to parents or educators in other states.

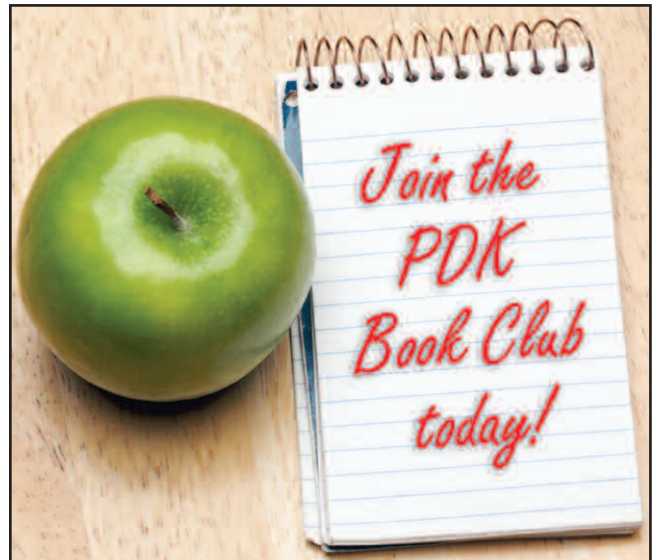
South Dakota's 2010 Initiative targets specific goals and actions. State leaders are "counting" whether there is annual growth of 2% in reading and 5% in math in the primary grades (K-2), progress toward the goal of a 95% graduation rate, whether 75% of high school students are enrolled in the "advanced" or "distinguished" graduation path, and whether the number of citizens with postsecondary education and training has increased by 20%. They want to increase the number of certified teachers teaching in high-need areas by 25% and increase the teacher retention rate by 20%. (Access progress reports here: www.2010education.com/ProgressReports.htm.)

Doing Right

A recent **Oregon** Quality Education Commission subcommittee report, the Diploma Panel Report (September 2008), appears to take a crack at "doing right":

- "We must increase achievement at elementary and middle schools and intervene early for those students who struggle academically.
- We must act like we believe that it is not an option to fail and must change those practices in each and every school that attests to the contrary.
- We must stop blaming external forces or organizations for the reality we are all trying to address: Too many students graduate from high school without the requisite skills.
- We must recognize those teachers who are having success with struggling students and share their data and their expertise with others.
- We must all accept responsibility for higher math and reading skills, not just some of us, and we need increased professional development to support this shift."

It is likely that Dr. Gawande would recognize the difficulties associated with the implementation of such goals, though he would certainly advocate for measuring and celebrating associated instances of success. In addition, he probably would advocate for a system that allowed Oregon's results to be compared to the best of the best. Taking his advice for diligence and attention to detail, we can begin to discover what constitutes the very best and measure improvement against it. Implementation built on ingenuity and doing right can get us all closer to "best." **IK**



Each year you will receive three powerful, education-related books selected specifically for PDK members.

Add this option (a \$90 value) to any membership package for only:

- \$39** U.S. members and APO/AFP addresses
- \$49** Canada and Mexico
- \$69** All other countries

DON'T DELAY! By signing up now, you will also receive a free copy of *Change Wars* by Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan (Solution Tree Press, 2008). Call 800-766-1156 to take advantage of this opportunity today.

PDK  **QUESTIONS?**
PHI DELTA KAPPA *International* **CALL**
800-766-1156

File Name and Bibliographic Information

k0902chr.pdf

Kathy Christie, STATELINE: Getting Better at Implementation, Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 90, No. 06, February 2008, pp. 397-399.

Copyright Notice

Phi Delta Kappa International, Inc., holds copyright to this article, which may be reproduced or otherwise used only in accordance with U.S. law governing fair use. MULTIPLE copies, in print and electronic formats, may not be made or distributed without express permission from Phi Delta Kappa International, Inc. All rights reserved.

Note that photographs, artwork, advertising, and other elements to which Phi Delta Kappa does not hold copyright may have been removed from these pages.

All images included with this document are used with permission and may not be separated from this editorial content or used for any other purpose without the express written permission of the copyright holder.

Please fax permission requests to the attention of KAPPAN Permissions Editor at 812/339-0018 or e-mail permission requests to kappan@pdkintl.org.

For further information, contact:

Phi Delta Kappa International, Inc.
408 N. Union St.
P.O. Box 789
Bloomington, Indiana 47402-0789
812/339-1156 Phone
800/766-1156 Tollfree
812/339-0018 Fax

<http://www.pdkintl.org>

Find more articles using PDK's Publication Archives Search at <http://www.pdkintl.org/search.htm>.