



QUALITY EDUCATION COMMISSION

BEST PRACTICES BRIEF # 1:

“MOVING THE NEEDLE” IN OREGON THROUGH TEACHER COLLABORATION & FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

OCTOBER 2012

¹In an eighteen month study of teacher practices in Oregon’s K-12 system of public schools, the Quality Education Commission (QEC) has found evidence that regular teacher collaboration used in concert with six specific practices including formative assessment is more prevalent among teachers in Oregon’s public schools performing better than expected than among teachers in schools with similar demographics performing lower than expected.¹

Further, the QEC found that higher performing schools have teachers who are invested in the ongoing and systematic implementation of these six practices as part of a school-wide continuous improvement strategy. Through this process, teachers are making significant progress toward ensuring every student has an equitable opportunity to thrive in school and fully realize the promise of Oregon’s 40/40/20 Goal.²

BACKGROUND:

Among the statutory responsibilities of the QEC are to determine the prevalence of teacher practices in Oregon’s K-12 system of schools that are effective in raising student achievement; and to analyze the gap between the desired and actual levels of implementation of these practices.

¹ Quality Education Model Final Report, August 2012
<http://www.ode.state.or.us/superintendent/priorities/2012-qem-final-report-8-1-2012-.pdf>

² Oregon Learns: The Strategy to Get to 40/40/20, August 2011
<http://www.oregon.gov/gov/oeit/docs/oeit40-40-20strategy7-25-11.pdf>

For the 2010-12 QEM Report Cycle, the QEC focused its best practices research in two areas of effective practice known to exist in varying states of implementation in Oregon: Collaboration dedicated to improving student achievement and the systematic use of formative assessments to improve instruction. The QEC’s overarching questions regarding these two practices were:

- ✓ How prevalent are they throughout the State?
- ✓ Are they “moving the needle” in the direction of improved and equitable student achievement?
- ✓ What are the indicators of a school’s capacity to implement both practices effectively?
- ✓ How could the proliferation of these practices throughout the K-12 system be supported?
- ✓ What are the implications of the research findings for the Quality Education Model?

THE STUDY:

Understanding that teacher collaboration and formative assessment are not consistently defined or implemented throughout the K-12 system, the QEC used the following definitions with teachers during the study to support more reliable research results:

Teacher Collaboration: Teachers working cooperatively together to continuously improve their professional practice and the learning outcomes of their students through an analysis of student data and the effectiveness of targeted interventions.

Formative Assessment: Classroom-based assessments providing timely information about student learning that is used to adjust instruction to improve students’ achievement of intended learning objectives/outcomes.

The findings of the study were based on data collected from all three phases of the investigation:

- Phase I: An initial QEC survey administered online to all public school teachers in Oregon about teacher collaboration and the use of formative assessments to determine the prevalence of these practices
- Phase II: A second administration of the survey to a subset of Oregon teachers who were identified as teaching in schools (matched pairs) that were performing either higher or lower than expected based on an index of risk factors

- Phase III: Onsite follow-up interviews of teachers and administrators who were part of the matched pair schools

The responses of 2,679 teachers representing 10.6% of all Oregon teachers and 1300 different schools were included in the analysis of Survey results from Phase I and II. The distribution of respondents across school levels was in proportion to the number of students served at each level.

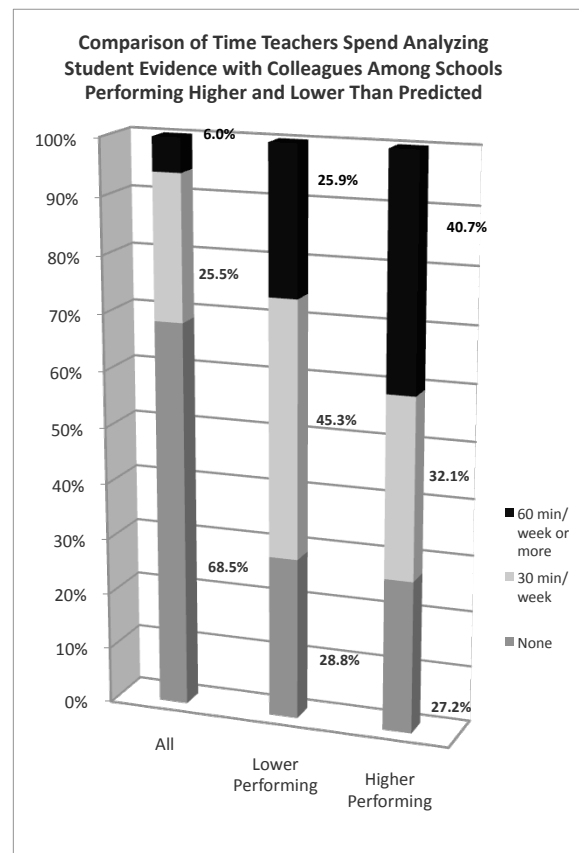
SURVEY FINDINGS: THE 6 PRACTICES

Findings of the matched pair survey administered during phase II revealed six specific teacher practices that teachers from schools performing higher than expected implemented more often than did teachers from schools performing lower than expected. The six practices are:

1. Always set goals for improving student achievement when collaborating with colleagues;
2. Collaborate with colleagues for at least 60 minutes per week in analyzing student evidence from ongoing classroom assessments to gauge student progress in meeting State Standards;
3. Use targeted instructional interventions at least weekly to address each student's specific learning needs and goals;
4. Implement formative assessment techniques at least weekly to determine if the targeted instructional practices are helping students make progress;
5. Provide feedback on a daily basis to students on their progress toward meeting their individual learning goals;
6. Provide feedback at least weekly to parents on the degree to which their child has mastered their specific learning goals;

These results provide concrete evidence of a persistent process for intervening when students are not meeting standards in schools performing higher than expected. For example, the following chart highlights the difference in the amount of time teachers surveyed from schools performing higher than expected indicated they spend per week "analyzing student evidence with colleagues" than

those from schools performing lower. The "All" bar represents the results of the Phase I survey and suggests a significant statewide implementation gap:



INTERVIEW FINDINGS: TRAITS OF SCHOOLS PERFORMING HIGHER

Interviews enabled the QEC to confirm and better understand how schools implement the six identified practices to ensure equitable academic growth for all students. Those schools realizing higher than expected student achievement have functional collaborative work structures (e.g., data teams, professional learning communities, Critical Friends groups, Instructional Rounds Teams), and share similar characteristics or traits:

- A majority of teachers collaborate at least weekly in teams as part of a school-wide continuous improvement process. They are skilled in small group facilitation and routinely use analysis of student work and peer observation protocols that help them focus on strengthening instruction to meet the specific learning needs of each of their students. They

also engage in informal consultation with colleagues if they can find time during the day.

- *Teachers have experienced success in ensuring equitable student growth for all student populations including those identified as English Language Learners (ELL). Also, teachers are unanimous in their belief that the continuous improvement process is more effective than “pull-out of school” staff development if teachers are integrally involved all phases of implementation:*

“I wish we could get people to understand that collaboration time for teachers is the very best professional development of all... This time is used to assess student progress and make decisions about how to adapt our teaching to help students meet their academic goals... We all work as a group to figure out how to help students, and we won't let a single kid fail. We are data driven and see clearly where to go...”

Dovina Greco, Classroom/ELL Teacher
Indian Hills Elementary School, HSD
May 1, 2012

- *A majority of teachers in the school are knowledgeable about Assessment for Learning and proficient in data-informed decision making. They use a balance of formative, interim and summative assessments aligned with the Common Core State Standards and Essential Skills, and they are likely to use collections of evidence. They have a deep understanding of the power of formative assessments or “assessment for learning”. They calibrate their scoring and analyze or “moderate” assessments to ensure their level of rigor, reliability and validity.*
- *They have been the recipients of significant grant funding over the past decade most of which was used for instructional coaching, extended pay for teachers to collaborate outside of the school day and substitute pay for releasing teachers to collaborate during the school day. Using funds this way allowed teachers to work together in the implementation of a school-wide continuous improvement process that integrated THE 6 PRACTICES into the daily instruction of all teachers in the school. This included integration of targeted instructional interventions into the regular classroom. Schools that performed lower than expected also received similar grant funding, but used it differently. It was often used to pay for a small number of teachers to*
- *implement new intervention programs scheduled during and/or outside of the school day and/or to pay a small group of teachers to work on standards-based learning. They did not extend the resources to the majority of staff nor did they use it to implement the entire complement of THE 6 PRACTICES as a coherent school-wide strategy. Their lower performance may be a reflection of an incomplete implementation rather than a failed implementation.*
- *School and district administrators and school boards have aligned budgets and policies to further develop and spread the implementation of a continuous improvement process. This funding often includes ensuring dedicated time for collaboration and for the staffing of master teachers and/or specialists in each school who provide expert help with interventions, technology and onsite staff development as needed. Teachers in these schools say they feel supported, empowered and effective in their work because they are able to utilize their colleagues’ expertise, be creative, speak freely, and help make decisions related to staffing, professional development, master scheduling, academic progress reporting and overall school improvement planning.*
- *Teachers communicate more often with students, parents and colleagues about the progress students are making toward mastery of the Common Core State Standards, Essential Skills and classroom learning targets. They say advances in technology that enable the reporting of a student’s level of proficiency in meeting standards are crucial to their ability to continue making progress in improving student achievement for all. In addition, technology that enables better access to professional networks and educational resources are also fueling the further development of innovation.*
- *Teachers speak with confidence about their ability to help all their students stay the course on a trajectory of learning that will result in graduation and access to post secondary education. They understand that economic and family circumstances complicate the lives of many students, but they speak emphatically about education as “the great leveler” and about teachers as the most important influence in whether or not a student succeeds in school.*

These school characteristics paint a hopeful picture of the transformation of teaching from the isolating

private practice and “one size fits all” approach to highly interactive and innovative school cultures that meet the needs of every student. Oregon clearly has, however, an implementation gap that must be closed if we are to fulfill the promise of 40/40/20.

IMPLICATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS:

STUDENTS WILL:

- Have daily access to a personalized academic report that logs the progress they are making toward attaining proficiency or beyond in meeting State Standards and Essential Skills and daily learning targets;
- Be instructed by teachers who customize their teaching to enable them to achieve career and college readiness standards and their own personal educational goals;
- Experience a more rigorous ongoing assessment process that includes multiple opportunities to meet or exceed college readiness and success standards at each step of their learning; and
- Have an equitable opportunity to enter, attend and succeed in the post-secondary learning option(s) of their choice.

PARENTS/GUARDIANS WILL:

- Have regular online access to their child’s academic progress in attaining mastery of State Standards, Essential Skills and classroom learning targets and to the steps they can take to assist their child in attaining his/her academic goals.
- Know that their child’s educational plan and profile provides evidence of his/her capacity to succeed throughout his/her P-20 learning experiences from pre-Kindergarten to the post-secondary educational option of their choice; and
- Have ongoing access to support that enables them to help their child successfully navigate the post-secondary education transition process through all its phases.

TEACHERS WILL:

- Be accountable for ensuring that their students make progress in meeting State Standards and Essential Skills on a trajectory of learning that

ensures the State’s 40/40/20 goal is met;

- Receive support that will expand their capacity to implement a continuous improvement process utilizing THE 6 PRACTICES including regular collaboration time to analyze student work and create personalized instructional interventions;
- Have an overall student load that does not compromise their ability to implement all of THE 6 PRACTICES. (note: Student results reported in this Brief and the QEM 2012 Final Report were realized by schools operating within the context of the 2009-10 budget which was often augmented by grants.);
- Have the technology to record and report academic progress to students daily and to parents at least weekly; and
- Have access to personalized on-site professional learning including peer review and observation to continually improve teaching and learning.

STATE AND DISTRICT POLICY MAKERS WILL:

- Receive an historical analysis of school spending patterns in relation to the costs of implementing THE 6 PRACTICES at their current level within Oregon schools performing higher or lower than expected;
- Utilize a revised QEM that incorporates the costs of expanding implementation of an effective standards-based continuous improvement process within a seamless P-20 system of education for making policy decisions related to spending on education.
- Need to develop policy that ensures dedicated funding for a statewide technology upgrade based on projected costs for deployment at a level that provides all schools with the electronic capacity to support standards-based learning within a P-20 System of education.

In summary, It is clear there are schools throughout Oregon that are highly effective with all students regardless of their academic needs, socio-economic status, race and/or ethnicity. The challenge is to scale up their practices to include those schools that are struggling to meet the needs of all their students. This will not happen without authentic alignment among the QEM, State and district policies, and actual spending practices.