Marshall Memo 141

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
June 19, 2006

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Quotes of the Week

"We consider extensive test-preparation activity as simply a sign that school and district personnel have little notion of how to actually improve reading proficiencies."

Richard Allington and Anne McGill-Franzen (see item #2)

"It isn't the standardized tests that are at fault; it is the unsophisticated preparation for the tests. The right way to prep for a reading test is to make sure students get a good education."

E. D. Hirsch (see item #5)

"Why is it that research on school turnarounds rarely if ever mentions the role of power, threats, coercion, guilt, and in-your-face supervision? Narratives of school improvement often read like politically correct fairy tales in which hard work and commitment prevail. Is it possible that behind the scene lurks a different story, one characterized by conflict, confrontation, and authoritarian measures?"

Daniel Duke (see item #1)

"It is impossible to imagine school improvement without a substantial amount of collaboration involving teachers and other staff members. However, the fact remains that many low-performing schools are already characterized by teamwork and cooperation."

Daniel Duke (*ibid.*)

"During the 1970s, it was believed that gender is a social construct and that gender differences could be eliminated via consciousness-raising. But it turns out gender is not a social construct. Consciousness-raising doesn't turn boys into sensitively poetic pacifists. It just turns many of them into high school and college dropouts who hate reading."

David Brooks (see item #4)

"Men and women can excel in any subject. They just need to be taught in different ways."

David Brooks (ibid.)

1. Keys to Turning Around Underperforming Schools

In this thoughtful *Kappan* article, University of Virginia professor Daniel Duke, who has worked recently on training school "turnaround" specialists, tells what he and his colleagues have learned about fixing underperforming schools – and what we still don't know. Culling the insights of recent studies, Duke lists eleven familiar ingredients in successful turnarounds:

• *Leadership* – The actions of the principal and teacher leaders set the tone for the school improvement process.

• *Fine-tuning school organization* – Leaders tweaked staff roles, teams, and planning processes to support the drive for improved student achievement.

• *Scheduling* – Leaders adjusted the daily schedule to increase time for academic work, especially in reading and math.

• *Alignment* – Tests were meshed with curriculum content and curriculum content was meshed with instruction.

• *High expectations* – Teachers insisted that students were capable of doing high-quality academic work.

• *Teacher collaboration* – Teams were required to work together to plan instruction, monitor student progress, and help students who were having difficulty.

• *Staff development* – Teachers received frequent, targeted professional training to support the school improvement effort.

• *Frequent assessment* – Students were tested regularly to see how they were doing on the curriculum.

• *Use of interim assessment results* – Teams frequently used assessment data to allocate resources, rethink their teaching strategies, and help students.

• *Prompt help to struggling students* – Teachers gave additional instruction to students who were having difficulty learning.

• *Parent involvement* – Staff reached out to parents to keep them informed of their children's progress and enlisted them to support the school improvement effort.

Will these elements assure the turnaround of an underperforming school? "If we have all 11 arrows in our quiver," asks Duke, "are we assured of hitting the targets?" Not necessarily. It turns out that the improvement process is more complex and the knowledge base has some gaps. Here are some insights that deepen and extend the list above:

• *We need to understand why schools decline*. "Most schools are not born low performers," says Duke. "Understanding how a school's academic achievement begins to slip can thus provide important insights into the adjustments needed to reverse the process." For

example, the reason often given for a school's plummeting student achievement is "changing demographics." Yet some schools with high percentages of poor, minority, and ELL students have high achievement. So what other factors combine with changing demographics to precipitate an achievement decline? Teacher resistance to making classroom adjustments? Inappropriate allocation of resources? Parent reluctance to insist on help for their children? Rosabeth Moss Kanter, a Harvard Business School professor who has studied dysfunctional corporations and athletic teams, has identified nine "pathologies" that snowball to bring an organization down:

- Communication decreases.
- Criticism and blame increases.
- Respect decreases.
- Isolation increases.
- Focus turns inward.
- Rifts widen and inequities grow.
- Initiative decreases.
- Aspirations diminish.
- Negativity spreads.

Do similar dynamics operate in schools? asks Duke. "Are the processes of decline and improvement symmetrical or asymmetrical? In other words, when schools improve, do they improve in the reverse order from the one by which they declined? If the first step in decline was the departure of a school's most talented teachers, for example, would the final step in school improvement be marked by the hiring of talented teachers? Or would that be the first step toward school turnaround?"

• *Just having teams is not enough*. "It is impossible to imagine school improvement without a substantial amount of collaboration involving teachers and other staff members," says Duke. "However, the fact remains that many low-performing schools are already characterized by teamwork and cooperation." In some schools, teams reinforce inadequate performance and engage in groupthink around low standards. So what are the key ingredients in effective teams? There's very little research on this question, but Duke suspects the key is what teachers talk about in their meetings. Ineffective teams tend to dwell on struggling students' home life and other external factors that the school can't control. Teachers typically left these meetings frustrated and feeling as if they had wasted their time. Effective teams shared student background information before the meeting and spent every minute of meetings discussing how to make immediate instructional adjustments and how to provide more monitoring and support for individual students. "Before these meetings concluded," says Duke, "individuals were assigned responsibility for implementing the agreed-upon interventions and reporting back on how they were working… Participants attending these meetings felt strongly that the process was highly productive."

Many schools have a plethora of teams. Duke suspects that some teams are more important to student achievement than others. Which of these make the most difference?

- Grade-level or subject-area teams that teach the same material to different students;

- Teachers from different subject-matter areas who share the same group of students;
- Vertical teams in particular subject matter areas;
- Literacy teams that focus on interventions for students with reading problems;
- Crisis intervention teams;
- Diagnostic teams;
- Teacher assistance teams in special education;
- School improvement teams;
- Leadership teams.

"Can gains in achievement of individual students, groups of students, and entire programs be traced back to the work of particular teams?" Duke asks. "Does the coordination of numerous teams itself become an organizational obstacle to improvement?" To pinpoint the most effective teams, Duke suggests conducting action research within each school.

• *Schools need to figure out what works for struggling students*. Low-performing and high-performing schools often have similar lists of interventions to help failing students:

- Supplementary reading and math programs;
- Extended learning time;
- Student incentives;
- Tutoring sessions;
- After-school homework centers;
- Summer programs;
- In-class grouping strategies;
- Special counseling;
- Mentors;
- Diagnostic testing.

It's clear that just having a bunch of programs is not enough. What distinguishes effective from ineffective interventions? Duke says that research is not very helpful on this question. Studies tend to look at aggregate data, he says, whereas "Schools are turned around one student at a time." What we need is data on how individual students respond to locally developed programs – and what happens when students are in more than one intervention (the impact may be as complex as taking multiple medications). "A major step in the right direction," he writes, "would be for every school, as part of its commitment to data-driven decision making, to convene the faculty at the close of each school year and assess how low-performing students responded to the interventions provided for them." The findings could be combined with similar data from other schools (with student names removed) to see trends and get insights into what was really working.

• *We need to be realistic about the ups and downs of the improvement process*. Studies of school improvement usually involve after-the-fact interviews with triumphant school leaders. "Memories being selective," writes Duke, "what may be missed by such investigations are the subtle midcourse corrections that were made in order to respond to unanticipated problems and disappointments… At present, we simply do not know whether the journey resembles a roller coaster ride, the long slow ascent of a high peak, or a trek consisting of

slopes and plateaus." Research points to these common phenomena as schools work to improve:

- Early successes can lead to relief, overconfidence, and complacency, resulting in a loss of momentum and/or actual declines in achievement.
- Many improvement efforts suffer from an "implementation dip" in which things get worse before they get better. Such a dip can be so discouraging that momentum is lost for good.
- Some principals and teacher teams call "audibles at the line of scrimmage," altering the original game plan in ways that aren't recorded in the mythical presentation of the improvement effort.

This kind of fine-grained information is vital, says Duke. "Those who undertake school improvement efforts need to know how others have responded to discouraging results, unexpected early successes, and unforeseen impediments." He suggests more in-depth interviews of successful turnaround administrators – and appointing a staff member to act as an in-house historian to record the unvarnished details of the improvement effort as it unfolds.

• *We need to think about unintended consequences*. Studies of improving schools tend to focus on the intended goals, says Duke, and not pay attention to outcomes that were not part of the plan. For example, focusing on raising the achievement of struggling students may reduce teacher attention to high-achieving students, reducing the percentage who score at the highest levels. And a focus on test scores may risk (as Jonathan Kozol has suggested in his latest book, *Shame of the Nation*) turning low-income students into "examination soldiers" who are trained to recall facts rather than acquire and apply useful knowledge. "The only way to detect the unintended consequences of school improvement efforts," says Duke, "is to conduct investigations that are not tied exclusively to such intended goals as making AYP or achieving state accreditation. Researchers need to open their aperture to take in all possible results of school turnarounds – the good, the bad, and the ugly. If teachers are requiring students to do twice as much homework, does this reduce the time for parents and their children to enjoy one another's company? Are students becoming anxious and stressed because of the unrelenting pressure to do well on tests? Are teachers afraid to take time away from test preparation to build relationships with students? Unless we answer these and related questions, we will have only an incomplete picture of the school turnaround process."

• *We need to be candid about how to handle ineffective staff*. "If teachers are a key to student achievement, they must also be a key to student failure," says Duke bluntly. He thinks that researchers have tiptoed around this delicate issue: "[R]elatively little is known about personnel issues in low-performing schools or how turnaround principals deal with them… Case studies of school turnarounds often note in passing that principals had to reassign or remove some teachers. What is unclear, though, is how principals arrived at these decisions. How, for instance, does a principal determine that the reason for low student achievement is the instructor and not the instructional program or intervention strategy? At what point does a principal decide that efforts to rehabilitate an ineffective staff member can no longer be

justified? Are there cases in which marginal teachers have experienced their own turnaround and become productive faculty members? If so, what did their improvement entail?"

There are even schools where the same staff that was teaching when the school was ineffective are still there when achievement soars. How can this happen? asks Duke. "Do their beliefs about themselves and their students change first and eventually lead to improved teaching? Do they first become more skilled at teaching and then experience a shift in their beliefs? Were reassignments a key part of the process?"

And how do teachers who for years have operated in isolation from one another start to work collaboratively? The usual explanation is heroic leadership by the principal, but in truth, says Duke, we don't know. "Why is it that research on school turnarounds rarely if ever mentions the role of power, threats, coercion, guilt, and in-your-face supervision?" he asks. "Narratives of school improvement often read like politically correct fairy tales in which hard work and commitment prevail. Is it possible that behind the scene lurks a different story, one characterized by conflict, confrontation, and authoritarian measures?"

• *We need to learn from improvement efforts that failed*. Duke says we know very little about why a number of turnaround efforts did not succeed. Why is this literature so sparse? Perhaps it's because researchers would rather tell an upbeat story. Perhaps journals and their readers prefer good news to bad news. Perhaps the principals of failed efforts don't want to talk to outsiders. Duke says we need to know more about unsuccessful efforts; "until we know more about these endeavors, we can only guess at the reasons why some school turnaround efforts succeed while others fail."

"What We Know and Don't Know About Improving Low-Performing Schools" by Daniel Duke in *Phi Delta Kappan*, June 2006 (Vol. 87, #10, p. 728-734), no e-link available

2. Distortion from Summer Loss, Flunking, Test Prep, and Accommodations

In this strongly-worded *Kappan* article, University of Tennessee professors Richard Allington and Anne McGill-Franzen describe four ways that standardized reading scores might give a false picture of student achievement:

• *Summer reading loss* – Studies show that every summer, a three-month achievement gap opens up between middle- and low-income students. Poorer students lose ground in July and August because they aren't reading nearly as much as their more fortunate classmates. According to Allington and McGill-Franzen, "teachers in high-poverty schools must, on average, teach until October before their students are performing at the level at which they performed the previous June!" This also means that spring-to-spring test score comparisons underestimate the true impact of these schools' instructional programs: "High-poverty schools could be doing a relatively good job of teaching kids to read during the school year, but those same kids then lose a total of two or more years of reading growth across their elementary school career." Thus, the deck is stacked against these schools, and the fact that this is not factored into state accountability systems is a source of unnecessary discouragement for these teachers and principals.

There is no simple solution, say Allington and McGill-Franzen, but they are experimenting with a program to provide free books to low-income students over the summer. "If we are to level the playing field," they write, "schools need summer programs that provide children with, at the very least, easy access to interesting and appropriate books. Providing access to books will not be a sufficient response for all children, but it is the least that we should expect."

• *Keeping students back* – "The repopularization of flunking is odd in an era of evidence-based reform initiatives," write Allington and McGill-Franzen, "if only because a century's worth of scientific research has demonstrated that flunking doesn't work. Flunking does not improve academic achievement over the longer term." But their point in this article is that retention inflates a school's student achievement, thus giving teachers and principals a perverse incentive to keep students back, even when it's not really helping. "[Y]es, that extra year of schooling does lead to better scores," they say, "but not better than those of similar children who weren't flunked. Why shouldn't a 12-year-old fourth-grader perform better after six years of schooling than after five? But in such cases the higher passing rate on the fourth-grade test doesn't mean that the school is improving its instructional effectiveness." Allington and McGill-Franzen suggest amending state accountability systems to track the achievement of each kindergarten-entering cohort as it moves through school, regardless of retention; this, they say, would more accurately measure true achievement gains and eliminate the incentive to retain students.

• *Test prep* – Test preparation materials may result in slim, short-term gains in standardized test scores, say Allington and McGill-Franzen, but it doesn't improve students' actual reading skills, which makes it morally questionable: "It's unethical," they write, "because the test-preparation activities were designed to improve test performances artificially rather than to improve the underlying proficiency being assessed." Test prep is thus another source of contamination to state accountability systems because it inflates student achievement. "We consider extensive test-preparation activity as simply a sign that school and district personnel have little notion of how to actually improve reading proficiencies," write Allington and McGill-Franzen. What is to be done? They recommend banning all but the most limited test preparation (i.e., familiarizing students with the format of a test just before it is given) and diverting funds currently spent on test preparation "to fund professional development designed to enhance the expertise of teachers and administrators at schools making extensive use of test preparation."

• *Inappropriate special-needs accommodations* – Allington and McGill-Franzen believe that a fourth distortion in state testing data occurs when schools allow students with mild learning disabilities to have reading tests read to them. "When the passages on any reading assessment are read aloud to students, the test is no longer a test of reading proficiency – it is a listening comprehension test with no relation to student's ability to read independently and understand text… Thus reports of reading achievement are contaminated because students who actually cannot read very well are reported as proficient readers." Allington and McGill-

Franzen suggest that there should be a more standardized and stringent way of determining which students should have the reading-aloud accommodation.

Summing up, the authors say they have no quarrel with educators being held accountable for student achievement. But, they say, "An accountability system contaminated by flunking students, narrow test-prep curricula, manipulation of special education accommodations, and disregard for summer learning and forgetting is not an accountability system at all."

"Contamination of Current Accountability Systems" by Richard Allington and Anne McGill-Franzen in *Phi Delta Kappan*, June 2006 (Vol. 87, #10, p. 762-766), no e-link available

3. Direct Approaches to Preventing Teen Suicide

The statistics are alarming – 500,000 young Americans try to kill themselves every year and 5,000 succeed. Much has been written about the importance of teachers watching for warning signs and intervening when students show signs of or admit to being suicidal. In this *Kappan* article, San Diego State professor Douglas Fisher says that by the time they have reached adolescence, students often find that suicide is "off-limits" for discussion in their high school. It's the luck of the draw which of these responses a student will get from a teacher (quoted from a 1995 article by Marilyn Valentino):

• *The ostrich approach* – Ignore the comment altogether and say to yourself, "There is no problem. There is no problem."

• *The Rush Limbaugh approach* – Note the errors but ignore the content, as in, "You missed the *i* in suicide."

• *The Sally Jessy Rafael approach* – Encourage more information and further disclosure without addressing the issue and providing guidance.

• *The Dr. Quinn approach* – Overreact, use "antiquated medicine to heal the patient," and misinterpret a need.

• *The professional approach* – Recognize the pain while offering help and professional assistance and asking the person what he or she would like you to do.

Fisher believes that students who have suicidal thoughts need teachers to adopt the fifth approach, and teachers need to be trained and comfortable with this response. "In addition," says Fisher, "students who have lost someone to suicide can benefit from writing about their thoughts, emotions, reactions, and experiences. In other words, writing can both allow us to identify students at risk and be therapeutic for students."

Another way to make suicide "discussable," says Fisher, is to give students access to books and information on the topic. Here are some of his recommendations:

- *After the Death of Anna Gonzalez* by Terri Fields (Henry Holt, 2002)
- *America* by E. R. Frank (Simon Pulse, 2002)
- *Inside Out* by Terry Trueman (HarperTempest, 2003)
- *Jay's Journal* by Beatrice Sparks (Pocket Books, 1979)
- *Life Is Funny* by E. R. Frank (Dorling Kindersley, 2000)

- *Looking for Alaska* by John Green (Penguin, 2005)
- *Razzle* by Ellen Wittlinger (Simon Pulse, 2001)
- *Shooter* by Walter Dean Myers (HarperTempest, 2004)
- *The Burn Journals* by Brent Runyon (Alfred A. Knopf, 2004)
- *The Turning* Hour by Shelley Fraser Mickle (River City, 2001)
- *Whirligig* by Paul Fleischman (Henry Holt, 1998)

Fisher recounts two anecdotes on students who were exposed to some of these books. After reading *The Burn Journals*, a high-school student said to his teacher, "Man, I thought I had it bad. This guy hates life. I want to be alive and kickin' it." Another student who read *Jay's Journal* said to a teacher, "Everyone at this school has thought about it [suicide]. I get picked on 'cuz I'm so small and all… I've thought about it. But Jay didn't know that death is a permanent solution to a temporary problem."

The teachers at Hoover High School in San Diego took prevention a step further. The school suspended its daily 20-minute sustained silent reading period and had all teachers read *Whirligig* aloud. In the book, Brent goes to a party, is rejected, gets drunk, and attempts suicide by closing his eyes and taking his hands off the wheel of his car. All 2,300 students heard the book and discussed it in class, and of course teachers had to be prepared to discuss drinking, DWI, and suicide – all of which were forbidden topics before this. Several days into the reading of *Whirligig*, a student named Anna approached one of her teachers and pointed to the line in the book where Brent attempts suicide. "This is me," she said. "I've tried this. I've tried it a lot." Her teacher had been trained on how to respond and convinced Anna to enroll in a support group for battered girls and a counseling program.

A final approach for high schools, designed by the American Psychiatric Association Alliance, is titled "When Not to Keep a Secret." The idea, originally designed to prevent school violence, is to give students a formal opportunity to consider when keeping a secret is harmful. The structured writing exercise lets students reflect on their experiences in breaking a confidence and trusting an adult. For more information, see the "Projects" area of this website: http://www.apaalliance.org.

The American Psychiatric Association Alliance has also partnered with the Yellow Ribbon Campaign – see http://www.yellowribbon.org.

"Keeping Adolescents 'Alive and Kickin' It': Addressing Suicide In Schools" by Douglas Fisher in *Phi Delta Kappan*, June 2006 (Vol. 87, #10, p. 784-786), no e-link available

4. Should Boys and Girls Be Assigned Different Novels In School?

In this provocative *New York Times* Op Ed column, David Brooks bemoans the fact that educators haven't accepted the fact that there really are male/female brain differences and differentiated the books they assign students by gender. "Despite some innovations here and there," he writes, "in most classrooms boys and girls are taught the same books in the same ways." The mismatch between boys' cognitive style and what's taught in school, he argues, explains why the percentage of young men who read has plummeted over the past 14 years

(three times faster than it has among young women). "Nor should it be a surprise," he continues, "that men are drifting away from occupations that involve reading and school. Men now make up a smaller share of teachers than at any time in the past 40 years."

"During the 1970s," says Brooks, "it was believed that gender is a social construct and that gender differences could be eliminated via consciousness-raising. But it turns out gender is not a social construct. Consciousness-raising doesn't turn boys into sensitively poetic pacifists. It just turns many of them into high school and college dropouts who hate reading."

Brooks goes on to summarize recent findings from brain imaging studies. "Women use both sides of their brain more symmetrically than men. Men and women hear and smell differently (women are much more sensitive). Boys and girls process colors differently (young girls enjoy an array of red, green and orange crayons whereas young boys generally stick to black, gray, and blue). Men and women experience risk differently (men enjoy it more)… It could be that women are better at processing emotion through words."

Does different brain wiring doom men to being "insensitive dolts who don't appreciate subtle human connections and good literature"? Not necessarily, says Brooks. "This wouldn't be a problem if we all understood these biological factors and if teachers devised different curriculums to instill an equal love of reading in both boys and girls." Men and women can excel in any subject, he asserts. "They just need to be taught in different ways… [F]or most kids it would be a start if they were assigned books they might actually care about. For boys, that probably means more Hemingway, Tolstoy, Homer and Twain."

"The Gender Gap at School" by David Brooks in *New York Times*, June 11, 2006 (p. 12), no free e-link available

5. The Consequences of Shortchanging Science and Social Studies

This *Education Week* article reports on the distress voiced by many middle-school science and social studies teachers over the increasing gaps they are noticing in their students' basic knowledge. "In some elementary schools," said Wisconsin teacher Mike Koren, "they are completely cutting out social studies… If they do teach it, it's the last class of the day, if there's enough time left in the school day."

In this view, many elementary schools are overreacting to the NCLB pressures and expanding literacy and math time to the exclusion of other subjects. "All we hear is literacy, literacy, literacy, math, math, math," says former Arkansas science teacher Rene Carson. "In my classroom, I started to see that for things you would assume kids would know when they get to middle school – like cloud structure, how to read instruments, basic parts of the cell, animal classification – they just don't have that background anymore."

Carson's concern is that if elementary schools don't spark interest in science through solid curriculum and hands-on activities, students won't be prepared for more advanced curriculum in middle and high school. "[T]hey are going to lack that creative spirit we've seen for so many years in kids who want to be the engineers and the rocket scientists of the future. I don't think we have instilled that dream in the minds of a lot of kids today."

Core knowledge advocate E. D. Hirsch was interviewed for this article and said that reading comprehension and overall achievement will improve only if elementary schools build background knowledge in a variety of subjects. Focusing only on reading skills and strategies, he argues, will make students *worse* readers. "It isn't the standardized tests that are at fault," says Hirsch. "It is the unsophisticated preparation for the tests. The right way to prep for a reading test is to make sure students get a good education."

"Older Students Play Catch-Up On Uncovered, Vital Lessons" by Kathleen Kennedy Manzo in *Education Week*, June 14, 2006 (Vol. 25, #40, p. 13), no free e-link available

6. Computers in the High-School English Classroom: How Not To Do It

This *Teachers College Record* article by Ewa McGrail of Georgia State University describes a district's attempt to get all high-school English teachers using laptop computers. The program got a decidedly mixed response ("It's a double-edged sword, this technology business," said one teacher), and seems to have gone poorly: teachers saw it as top-down and autocratic, had no role in shaping the program, and weren't supported in integrating computers into their own teaching approaches. In addition, the alignment with standardized tests had not been thought through.

The author concludes: "This study suggests that individualized professional development, combined with discipline-specific training as suggested by teachers themselves and relevant to teachers' individual context, must accompany any technology integration throughout the entire implementation process. Teachers must feel empowered to use or not use technology in the way that best suits their temperament, goals, and skill sets. Thus, a one-size-fits-all approach to computer instruction for teachers will not succeed. Teachers will continue to require customized approaches to computer instruction in their professional development. For the near future, this means that significant variance will exist in the overall level of use of computers by teachers. I do not believe that this will result in inherent differences in instructional excellence."

"'It's a Double-Edged Sword, This Technology Business': Secondary English Teachers' Perspectives on a Schoolwide Laptop Technology Initiative" by Ewa McGrail in *Teachers College Record,* June 2006 (Vol. 108, #6, p. 1055-1079), no free e-link available

7. What Makes the Difference in Middle-School Math?

This *JESPAR* study of middle-school math achievement by two John Hopkins University professors found that students who enter high-poverty middle schools behind in mathematics follow two dramatically different paths. Most fall even further behind and are "unprepared to succeed in challenging high school courses without substantial and sustained doses of extra help." Their downward spiral is associated with poor student attendance, bad classroom behavior, and lack of effort – and with not encountering effective math teachers as they passed through middle school.

A second group of students, smaller than the first, had a very different experience. They were lucky enough to have a string of good math teachers and successful instructional experiences; they found a new self-confidence in math, increased their effort, and improved their attendance. They made large achievement gains, substantially closed the achievement gap, and, in some cases, left eighth grade performing above grade level.

What explained the difference? The authors point to several factors that substantially raised the odds for students:

- A strong schoolwide instructional program in math;
- Significantly increased teacher support and training;
- In-classroom non-evaluator peer coaching;
- Looping, small learning communities, and teacher teams to improve student-teacher interactions.

"Closing the Mathematics Achievement Gap in High-Poverty Middle Schools: Enablers and Constraints" by Robert Balfanz and Vaughan Byrnes in *JESPAR* (*Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk),* Spring 2006 (Vol. 11, #2, p. 143-159), no e-link available

8. Short Item:

Aspen Institute high-school report – In this new Aspen Institute report on high-school reform, Judy Wurtzel argues that we need a new description of what effective teaching looks like, a much more aggressive and sophisticated strategy for recruiting and selecting teachers, and a better infrastructure to support good teaching and get results. The full report can be downloaded at http://news.publiceducation.org/t/4602/174777/73/0/.

"Transforming High-School Teaching and Learning: A District-Wide Design" by Judy Wurtzel; spotted in *PEN Weekly NewsBlast*, June 15, 2006.

Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

If you have comments or suggestions, if you saw an article or web item in the last week that you think should have been summarized, or if you would like to suggest additional publications that should be covered by the Marshall Memo, please e-mail: kim.marshall8@verizon.net

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and others very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 36 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 44 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through scores of articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the memo to subscribers every Monday (with occasional breaks; there were 50 issues in 2004-05).

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Publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educator
American School Board Journal
ASCD SmartBrief
Atlantic Monthly
Boston Globe
CommonWealth Magazine
District Administration
Ed. Magazine
EDge
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Update
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
JESPAR
Jimmy Kilpatrick
Journal of Staff Development
Language Learner
Middle Ground
Middle School Journal
NASSP Bulletin
New York Times
New Yorker
Newsweek
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
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Principal Leadership
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Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
Teacher Magazine
Teachers College Record
Theory Into Practice
Times Educational Supplement