

**MERGENTHALER VOCATION-TECHNICAL SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL  
Baltimore City Public School System**

**"Our Strategy for Standards-Based Instruction and Assessment"**

**"Work in Progress: 1 January 2006"**

**Introduction and Focus**

**Background.** Our school's current performance on high stakes State assessments calls for immediate and long-range improvement in classroom teaching and student achievement. In response, we have forged a school improvement plan that requires standards-based instruction and assessment in each classroom as our approach to instructional improvement.

**Purpose.** This paper was developed to accomplish the following tasks:

1. To describe our strategy for moving from the school improvement plan to actual classroom implementation;
2. To describe the specific components that comprise our standards-based strategy to account for student achievement through classroom teaching;
3. To provide a way for staff to participate in shaping and constantly improving the standards-based strategy based on our vision, mission, and assessment data;
4. To establish the focus and strategy for the Instructional Management Team to carry out its role and responsibilities throughout our school.

**Instructional Management Team**

The Mergenthaler Instructional Management Team was constituted in October 2005. The following role, leadership and members, and schedule describe how the Team functions.

**Role:** The Instructional Management Team is responsible for planning, developing, coordinating, evaluating, and improving standards-based instruction and assessment and school-based professional development. This role includes supporting and communicating the efforts of classroom teachers to plan, teach, assess, and analyze the results of standards-based lessons and assessments related to our priorities of reading, writing, and mathematics and other subjects and career pathways that support our school vision and mission. The Team applies the school vision, interprets student assessment data, identifies the priority content standards teachers are expected to teach, and benchmarks best practices to improve teaching, student achievement, and professional development. The Team advises the School Improvement Team on initiatives and issues associated with instructional improvement. The Team will post its agenda and results on the school's web site for all Mergenthaler stakeholders to review and provide feedback.

**Leadership and Members.** The Instructional Management Team is chaired by the principal and includes assistant principals; department chairpersons; and teachers and consultants, as needed.

**Schedule.** The Instructional Management Team meets weekly on Wednesday from 8:30 am. to 10:00 am.

### **Components of Standards-Based Instruction and Assessment**

The Instructional Management Team developed the following preliminary components to define our strategy for standards-based instruction and assessment. They represent a "work in progress" and were shaped and refined during the first semester of the 2005-2006 school year. Then, the preliminary components were improved and are ready for full implementation in the second semester. The intent of this strategy is to describe as clearly as possible the standards-based instruction and assessment practices expected in our classrooms to improve student achievement -- *and to improve them constantly through analysis of assessment data and best practices, school-based professional development, and coordination through the Instructional Management Team.*

#### **Standards of Learning**

Standards of learning describe what a student should know and be able to do as a result of instruction. Our academic teachers use the Maryland State Voluntary Curriculum Standards known as Core Learning Goals. These Goals include more specific subdivisions known as Expectations, Indicators, and Assessments Limits. Because these standards form the basis for HSA and MSA assessment items, each teacher is expected to align daily lesson plans with one or more of these standards. Our career technology teachers will use the Core Learning Goals for English and Mathematics to support schoolwide priorities to include reading, writing, and mathematics standards in their career pathways.

#### **Teaching**

The school improvement plan demonstrates our commitment to using differentiated instruction, incorporating writing and mathematics across the curriculum, and applying best practices related to High Schools That Work, the Coalition of Essential Schools, and the BCPSS Principles of Learning. Additionally, we are committed to employ 20/60/20 time percentages to organize lessons for maximum time on task for students and teachers and to provide for more student dialogue and "Accountable Talk" in each classroom. Finally, we expect each teacher to use a computer connected to the Internet and online teacher productivity software to increase their efficiency, effectiveness, and communication in performing their roles and responsibilities. All of these commitments to quality teaching will be demonstrated in standards-based lessons and assessments during the pilot phase and thereafter.

#### **Multiple Assessments and Scoring Tools**

Beginning with our ninth grade class this year, students are required to pass annual State assessments for graduation and to reach AYP performance standards for meeting

MSA requirements. Also, our students complete two BCPSS quarterly benchmark assessments in each semester to gauge their progress before taking the State assessments. Furthermore, our students are required to complete a variety of classroom assessments developed, administered, and scored by our academic and career technology teachers. The State and BCPSS assessments are based on and align with appropriate Core Learning Goals. Our teachers will develop and administer "Classroom Benchmark" assessments on a weekly basis to generate more information for making adjustments in teaching strategies to support increased student achievement on all tests and assessments.

### **Analysis and Reporting Results**

State and BCPSS benchmark assessment data are reported by Core Learning Goals and aligned Expectations for the school and students. These data are reported in statistical tables, box and whisker charts, and bar graphs. Teachers analyze these data to discover insights for developing and delivering differentiated instruction to improve student performance on the next administration of the assessments. We will focus instruction on our assessment-driven needs by increasing the number of "Classroom Benchmark" assessments in all classrooms and reporting the data in a manner similar to the State and BCPSS assessment reports.

### **School-Based Professional Development**

Our teachers have and will continue to complete professional development sessions targeted on developing and scoring brief and extended constructed response assessment items. These sessions will be expanded to include how to develop standards-based lessons based on the school's vision of student learning; Core Learning Goals; available State, BCPSS, and classroom assessment data; and best practices. Twenty lead teachers received a 12-month subscription to TaskBuilderOnline™ and eLearningTeacher.com™ to develop standards-based lessons and assessments, complete online training activities, compile a portfolio of training experiences and results, and link to related online professional development resources. In December 2005 these lead teachers received start-up training during school-based coaching sessions organized by the Instructional Management Team and supported by LearningFront™ consultants. Additional training sessions were completed for approximately 20 additional teachers in December 2005. In addition, LearningFront consultants provided email comments to teachers for improving their start-up standard-based lesson using TaskBuilderOnline. This approach demonstrates our commitment to use technology resources provided to teachers to "Maximize Time on Task to Maximize Student Achievement."

### **Implementation Strategy**

#### **November - December 2005: "Pilot Phase"**

Department chairs and classroom teachers in each academic and career technology pathway completed the following actions to pilot test our standards-based instruction and assessment components during November and December 2005:

1. Participated in and applied the results of professional development experiences through whole school programs, BCPSS pull-out programs, and school-based coaching sessions targeted on standards-based instruction and assessment. The school professional development program was updated to align more closely to the components in this paper for standards-based instruction and assessment.
2. Planned at least one standards-based lesson before the holiday break. A cadre of teachers taught, scored, and analyzed their start-up standards-based lesson. These standards-based lessons included "Classroom Benchmark" selected and constructed response assessments that will act as models for the development of additional standards-based lessons and assessments in the second semester.
3. Conducted department discussions of the standards-based lessons and identified best practices for improvement. These discussions revealed the need to re-adjust our initial expectation of one standards-based lesson per week to one per month in the second semester. Additional training will focus on how to describe activities in more specific terms, how to integrate BCR/ECR assessments into daily lessons, and how to compare classroom assessment results to our school improvement goals and state data. School-based coaching will be available for lead teachers from a LearningFront consultant and supplemented with online feedback through the integrated email system contained in TaskBuilderOnline™ and eLearningTeacher.com™.
4. Reported weekly the results of the standards-based lessons to the Instructional Management Team through the department chairpersons to monitor and improve our instructional improvement process.
5. Posted sample lessons, scoring tools, and results of standards-based lessons on the school instructional web site. This process will act as another form of professional development and create the opportunity for teachers to share their work with other teachers in Baltimore and throughout the world.
6. Provided progress reports of the instructional improvement process to the School Improvement Team on a monthly basis.

The Instructional Management Team evaluated the results of the pilot phase and made the following adjustments and improvements for full implementation during the second semester.

### **January - June 2006: "Implementation Phase"**

Based on the "lessons learned" during the pilot phase, the Instructional Management Team will develop a professional and standard approach for implementing standards-based instruction and assessment throughout the second semester. This will include weekly meetings to monitor the process and make on-going adjustments. The standards-based lessons and results of this phase will be used to demonstrate teaching strategies and student learning in academic areas and career technology pathways and to plan for additional standards-based lessons. The results of standards-based lessons and assessments will be summarized, examples of student work collected, and the

lessons, scoring tools, samples of student work, and assessments will be filed for other teachers to access. Samples of these standards-based lessons and assessments will be posted on the school instructional web site for online access. Teachers will be encouraged and supported to complete digital video episodes of their teaching strategies for posting on the school web site. This approach is known as the TaskBuilder Figure 8 Strategy™ and has led to increased student achievement on State and local assessments in other BCPSS schools.

### **July 2006 And Thereafter: "Continuous Improvement Phase"**

Our instructional improvement strategy requires teachers and administrators and other stakeholders to improve continuously and to make adjustments along the way in order to stay focused on our vision, goals, and results. To do this we have divided the school year into four phases for our Instructional Management Team to provide on-going reports about its efforts to achieve our priority of improving teaching and student achievement on State, BCPSS, and classroom assessments.

- 1. In Phase One (June, July, August),** our Instructional Management Team communicates with stakeholders; plans and develops instructional improvement activities for the next year; plans and delivers start-up professional development sessions; develops and aligns new lessons and assessments; field-tests school start-up strategies for September; and completes the first phase progress report;
- 2. In Phase Two (September, October, November),** our Instructional Management Team collects instructional improvement baseline data; begins to implement standards-based instruction and assessment, stakeholder involvement, and support services; administers classroom and BCPSS benchmark assessments; monitors milestones; delivers professional development; improves the use of technology; completes all start-up phases for new initiatives; and prepares the second phase progress report;
- 3. In Phase Three (December, January, February),** our Instructional Management Team adjusts instruction and services based on assessment data and professional judgment, maintains formative assessments, administers classroom and BCPSS benchmark assessments and State HSA assessments, monitors milestones, provides technology resources, continues professional development, and prepares the third phase progress report;
- 4. In Phase Four (March, April, May),** our Instructional Management Team adjusts instruction and services based on assessment data and professional judgment, maintains formative assessments, administers classroom and BCPSS benchmark assessments and State HSA and MSA assessments, monitors milestones, continues professional development, and prepares the fourth phase progress report to support planning for the next school year.

### **Expected Outcomes**

The following outcomes are expected as a result of implementing this strategy to support standards-based instruction and assessment at Mergenthaler Vocational-Technical Senior High School by June 2006:

- A 10 percentage point increase in student achievement over our 2005 performance on HSA and MSA assessments, thereby meeting the safe harbor provision of MSA and NCLB and precluding a restructuring status for school improvement.
- A school-wide needs assessment process that focuses professional development on specific student academic and career pathway needs, performance, and requirements;
- An Instructional Management Team representing all academic and career pathways for developing standards-based lessons and assessments related to our vision of student learning and assessment results;
- Increased leadership and professional skills by 20 lead teachers to support the use of the web-based applications TaskBuilderOnline and eLearningTeacher by approximately 50 additional teachers to implement standards-based instruction and assessment in our school;
- Approximately 350 prototype standards-based instruction and assessment lessons to correlate with our progress to increase student achievement (70 teachers x one prototype lesson x 5 months) developed, taught, scored, and analyzed by participating teachers during the implementation phase of the 2005-2006 school year.
- Increased weekly use by teachers and administrators of computers connected to the Internet to demonstrate our commitment to maximize time on task while accessing data quickly, developing lessons and tests, teaching, assessing, and communicating within the school and worldwide.
- A web site dedicated to instructional improvement for posting and seeking feedback about our school improvement plan, Instructional Leadership Team activities, standards-based lessons and assessments, and links to related resources.