

Getting Serious About Reform

What's a District to do?

The statewide network of ESDs is sharing in the work of Marzano Research Laboratories through a three-year project designed to help schools and districts in their improvement efforts. Titled, “Getting Serious About Reform” these team-based events are scheduled on the east and west side of the state over the next three years. Teams will hear from Dr. Marzano as he shares a research-based perspective on how to systemically transform student learning.

The intent of our project is to assist school and district leaders as they seek to respond to the diverse learning needs of their students. Drawing upon decades of research, and numerous educational studies, Dr. Marzano has identified **Three Critical Commitments**, likely to result in increased student success. Although the three commitments are not ‘earth shattering’ in terms of the novelty of their approach, they are foundational to answering the question, “What should we do to ensure increased academic success for all students?”

The three commitments are:

Commitment #1: Develop a System of Individual Student Feedback at the District, School, and Classroom Levels

Phase I: Track Student Progress on Selected Learning Goals Using a Formatively Based System of Assessment

Phase II: Design Learning Goals in All Subject Areas and Redesign Report Cards

Phase III: Implement the New Report Cards in a Staged Fashion

Commitment #2: Ensure Effective Teaching in Every Classroom

Phase I: Systematically Explore and Examine Effective Pedagogy and Develop a Model or Language of Instruction

Phase II: Have Teachers Systematically Interact Using the Model or Language of Instruction

Phase III: Have Teachers Observe Master Teachers Applying Instructional Strategies

Phase IV: Monitor the Effectiveness of Individual Teaching Styles

Commitment #3: Build Background Knowledge for All Students (Particularly Those With Educationally Challenging Backgrounds)

Phase I: Identify Academic Terms, and their associated concepts/big ideas, in Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies to Be Taught at Each Grade Level

Phase II: Implement the Academic Vocabulary Program District wide, Using a Common Approach to Instruction

As a network of ESDs, we believe capacity is developed within the school system as teams wrestle with the development and implementation of strategies like those contained within Dr. Marzano’s three commitments. We also believe that transformation of any

system takes time, adequate resources and dedicated leadership. Events like these planned around the state are not going to result in any meaningful change without well-considered and focused follow-up with on-going professional development. Events may inspire individuals to explore new ideas, but deep and significant engagement with shared problems of practice, *over time*, is needed to transform any system as complex as a classroom, school or district. Our assumption is that all school leaders know that capacity building is not an event -- it is a process.

We would suggest that there are at least three purposes for sending a team to participate in one (or all) of the ***Critical Commitments*** events scheduled. They are:

1. The team is seeking to *gather information* regarding where to go next in their improvement efforts. Essentially, team members are acting as advance scouts on behalf of the school or district, and they will share what is learned to inform future direction of improvement plans.
2. There are currently plans in place that align with some or all of the ***Three Commitments***, and the team wishes to ensure the strategies they have identified are *consistent with current research* and best practice. In this case the school system has a roadmap in place, but they want to validate the steps they have identified.
3. Strategies aligned to the ***Three Commitments*** are in place, and the team wishes to evaluate their implementation and *explore possible steps* to take them to the next level. In this instance a school system has moved from theory to action, and leaders are exploring how to refine what is working and expand on their current success.

We would encourage district and school leaders to review their improvement plans and explore with their leadership teams whether attendance at any of the planned events would be appropriate for their learning needs. If they believe sending a team furthers their improvement plans, we would suggest that a team attend to help engage a broad group in the learning process. We would also encourage leaders to support the team through background reading prior to attending and the development of some guiding questions to help frame their time at each session. Finally, after the session, we believe teams should debrief what they heard and develop plans for communication, follow-up and ongoing exploration of the topics raised.

We, at your Educational Service District, are willing and able to assist districts in their planning processes, and should you wish, help inform or guide your next steps in the important journey of “Getting Serious About Reform”.

For further reading regarding the three commitments, please see:

http://files.solution-tree.com/MRL/documents/visiondocument_vupdate.pdf