

Chalkboard

By

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This *Chalkboard* continues the series that has examined how the Gentry School District, in its efforts to focus on student learning, has answered three questions posed by Richard DuFour in his book Getting Started: Reculturing Schools to Become Professional Learning Communities. If you have been reading this series of articles then you know the three questions are ““What is it we want the students to learn?” “How will we know when they have learned it?” and “What do we do when they don’t learn it?” If you are a regular reader you know I have cited the Arkansas Department of Education’s web site at <http://arkedu.state.ar.us/curriculum/frameworks.html> and <http://arkedu.state.ar.us/actaap/definitions/#ACTAAP> as excellent resources for answering the first two questions.

The final question, “What do we do when they don’t learn it?”, is the hardest to answer. I will devote two *Chalkboards* to the answer. Let me first suggest some wrong answers.

“Don’t worry about it, they will catch on after a while!” “There are twenty children in my class; I just don’t have the time to deal with one student when nineteen got it the first time.” “I think that child needs to be referred for special education or at least Title 1!” “Oh, she’s just lazy!” “He has poor study habits.” “She just doesn’t pay attention in class”. “You know what? I taught that child’s daddy. He was a slow learner also.”

One right answer is “Intervene”. Merriam-Webster’s On-line dictionary defines intervene as “to come in or between by way of hindrance or modification”. So who is it that is to be an intervenor? In the case of a student not learning, that role has to be shared by the parent and the school. In this instance of intervention we are talking either about modification of instructional techniques or modification of a child’s program of learning. Let me offer an example for both parent intervention and school intervention.

A friend of mine was discussing with me a few days ago about hiring a tutor for her high school aged son. This mother said she had paid for her son to be tutored last year because he had problems with understanding Algebra. Since that tutor has since moved to Texas, my friend said she had secured the services of a retired math teacher from another town in advance

“just in case”. This parent, recognizing the long-term value of math proficiency, was willing to spend personal dollars to guarantee that her son would have a chance to be successful in math.

While I appreciated this parent’s commitment, a silent question that I asked myself was “Hmm...I wonder what the teacher did to intervene for that child?” I asked myself several other questions? “Did the teacher make a personal contact with that parent to explain the child’s difficulties? Does that teacher use different instructional techniques to match the various learning styles found in any classroom? Did that teacher check students’ homework deeper than just determining if an answer is right or wrong to see where any error in process was located? Did the teacher arrange for a student who ‘knew’ the material to help the one who didn’t? Did the teacher offer to come before school or after school to help the student? Did the teacher talk to the student’s previous year’s math teacher? Did the teacher look at existing test data to see if the weakness existed previously? Did the teacher talk to that child?” Your having access to my thoughts gives you an understanding that I thought the teacher should have routinely done all those things and more before any parent had to ante up for private assistance. This is one instance when I would have to agree in part with mad parents who have told me angrily “My taxes pay your salary....”Public schools in Arkansas are to be offering a “free and appropriate education” to all students.

I might have asked these questions to the parent that day if I had not already known the answers. “Do you take a serious attitude about school with your children? Do you stress the value of education? Do you monitor that your child has enough time in his or her schedule to devote to homework and studying? Did you talk to the teacher? The principal? Counselor?”

The above questions to both teachers and parents address intervention in the simplest form. (To be continued.....)