



Coaching for School Improvement

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Practices Before Programs

Doug Reeves is an admired education researcher. His studies and reports on 90-90-90 schools (90% high poverty; 90% ethnic minority; and 90% of students meeting district or state achievement standards in reading) inspired the search for the factors contributing to the success of these schools serving typically disadvantaged student populations.

In a recent ASCD blog (*ASCD Express*, Vol. 6, No. 7. www.ascd.org/ascdexpress), Reeves presents strong advice to schools in his essay, "A Clearer Focus on Fewer Practices." He cites a fundamental conclusion from the decades of research he and his colleagues have conducted: "practices, not programs, matter most." He describes struggling schools overwhelmed by competing demands and fragmented initiatives/ goals/ programs. Reeves cites an amazing conclusion of his study: "schools with 6 or fewer priorities had the greatest gains in student achievement." (*emphasis added*)

Reeves extends his argument by describing what all Indistar coaches have seen and heard: schools are good at talking in 'labels' about their school improvement work -- "we're doing RTI/ PLCs/ professional development" -- but less skilled at implementing fully and effectively the instructional practices at the core of these programs. He reiterates the findings of his work, "One enduring conclusion remains: the common characteristics of these [the 90/90/90] schools were not the programs they purchased but the practices their teachers and administrators implemented."

Reeves' advice reinforces what those of us coaching school teams using Indistar are promoting: the changes that matter first and foremost are those that happen in the classroom. ANY school can map out a path to excellence by reinforcing core instruction practices described in Indistar:

"All teachers activate prior knowledge taking into account the variation in cultural contexts of students as well a differences in their prior interest and experiences."

"All teachers summarize key concepts.";

"All teachers use examples to help students see the steps toward mastery."

"All teachers reteach as often as necessary to help student meet the learning intentions."

These indicators describe practices -- not programs -- that have demonstrated effectiveness. Indistar teams and their coaches are heeding Reeve's advice by focusing attention where education matters -- in the classroom. Share your experience helping your school improvement team focus on a few fundamental practices in its change efforts. Thanks, Karen