

What Works In Schools: Translating Research into Action
By Robert Marzano
Synopsis by Debbie Ambrose, Center for Skillful Teaching

The July 9 Professional Development Seminar gave school-based administrators their first opportunity of the 2003-2004 school year to refocus their thinking and efforts on school-based improvement initiatives. A new resource provided for staff on that day is the latest book by Robert Marzano, What Works In Schools: Translating Research into Action. In his previous book, Classroom Instruction That Works, Marzano synthesized research data that identifies key instructional strategies that have been proven to increase student achievement. What Works in Schools is another synthesis of research that names **twelve key factors** that have been shown by research data to impact student achievement. The factors closely parallel the critical elements identified in the MCPS Call to Action and Framework for Improving Teaching and Learning. Marzano states, “My basic position is quite simple: Schools can have a tremendous impact on student achievement if they follow the direction provided by the research.” (p. 4).

Each of the twelve factors is addressed in a separate chapter. Marzano includes a review and synthesis of related research spanning the past 35 years, and recommends specific **Action Steps** for implementing the findings of that research. The twelve the factors have been organized into the following categories:

School-Level Factors:

- A Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum
- Challenging Goals and Effective Feedback
- Parent and Community Involvement
- Safe and Orderly Environment
- Collegiality and Professionalism

Teacher-Level Factors:

- Instructional strategies
- Classroom management
- Classroom curriculum design

Student-Level Factors:

- Home Environment
- Learned Intelligence and Background Knowledge
- Student Motivation

The final factor Marzano considers is the critical role of **Leadership**, which he says, “could be considered the single most important aspect of effective school reform...it influences every aspect of the model presented in this book.” (p. 172) A critical role for school leadership is to guide a school community to examine the unique, individual strengths and needs of it’s students, staff, and community.

The twelve factors can be thought of simply as different doors to enter to continue our work of improving student achievement. Each door will lead us to explore that improvement different ways. Our choice of doors needs to be carefully made, and well matched to the strengths and needs of the culture and practices already in place in each school. Marzano says, “...Just because the research indicates that a particular school-level factor is important to student achievement doesn’t mean that it is important

in a given school.... In the new era of school reform, schools will look carefully at the research, but then determine which factors apply to their particular context” (p.158).

Many schools have already begun to tap the wealth of information found in the book. Here are some suggestions for using this resource to enhance your schools’ efforts to improve student achievement.

1. Continue collecting data about the current conditions in your school.
The Appendix offers a “Snapshot Survey of School Effective Factors”. This is a tool with which schools can “take their current pulse” in terms of the twelve factors. Staff responses to questions in the survey can provide an important set of data that a school can use to identify and focus improvement efforts based upon staff perceptions of those factors that are most relevant to a given school and its students. The survey can be used in it’s entirety, or staff can be asked to respond to selected sections. Specific suggestions for using and interpreting data from the survey are found on pages 160-165.
2. Begin at the end.
Share Chapter 18, “The Critical Role of Leadership”, with your leadership team. Use the principles identified by Marzano as a way to self assess to strength of this factor in your school.
3. Choose a set of factors for a school-wide focus.
Select a group of factors (School, Teacher, or Student) as a whole school focus. Begin to implement specific Action Step(s). Then conduct your own action research to investigate the impact of your efforts on the achievement of your students.
4. Investigate different factors in small groups.
Encourage teams and individual teachers to select one factor (IE – Classroom Management) as an area for self-evaluation and growth. Use the Action Steps for specific suggestions about the incorporation of research into school and classroom improvements.
5. Build on past successes.
Select an individual factor that was an emphasis in your school last year (Example: Chapter 7 – “Collegiality and Professionalism). Examine your school’s progress in this area in light of the research and Action Steps presented in the chapter.

And finally,

6. Share your work with colleagues.
In the spirit of professional community, tell colleagues in other schools about the successes and challenges you encounter as you consider the research data and suggestions found in the book. This will serve to continuously expand our knowledge and allow us to add our own contributions to answering the question, “What Works In Schools?”