

## Monday Focus

October 22, 2007

**Grades Are in and We Look No Different** Though there was much gnashing of teeth over the horrible effects that might follow an elimination of the zero from our grade books, the actual effects in the grade book are the exact opposite. Our failure rate is worse than this point last year with the lone exception of the senior class. Though an insignificant number of those failures may be due to “over-identification” some students into Pre-AP classes at the ninth-grade level (a modest 3% increase), that does not explain a 5-point jump at 10<sup>th</sup> (40% to 45%) or a two-point jump at 11<sup>th</sup>.

**What’s the Fix?** Some have misinterpreted my frustration about grades to be about the grades and think that the “fix” is to fix the failure rate. That is actually more frustrating than the failure rate. The issue is simple: grades are (or should be) a reflection of the learning rate at Westside. If more students are failing across the board, then the learning rate must be worse. As the only persons who are certified to figure ways to improve that learning rate, it is our responsibility to do something about it. Looking deeper into the numbers reveals other issues.

**What Are We Measuring?** This Thursday in your curriculum teams, ask yourselves these questions:

1. What will all students know and be able to do as a result of taking this class (curriculum)?
2. How are we going to teach toward that knowledge and those skills?
  - a. How will we teach it (instructional practices)?
  - b. What will students practice to build that skill (student work)?
3. What does mastery of that K&S look like (assessment)?
4. What will feedback look like for a student so that he or she will know exactly what to do in order to improve in the area that you are measuring (objective-based feedback)?
5. How will we scaffold lessons and learning to reinforce those essential K&S (curriculum)?

**Do We Agree on the Above Questions?** The only data measure we have is the grade-distribution report. In many cases the spread within one curriculum team is a factor of 50 between Teacher A’s grade range and Teacher B’s. What practices has your curriculum team built into its practice to guarantee that our students are being held to the same standards? Are you trading papers, sharing ideas about assessment, practicing your pedagogical skill with your peers? If not, what are you spending your time on? If it is simply planning out the next 5 days of lessons, then your time is not being best spent. That should be a part of your CT meetings, but we must start getting our hands dirty with data.

**This is our Year** Quite simply, this is Westside High School’s year. Everything is in place. There are no excuses for average performance. I am looking at this year as the chance for us to make significant gains in student performance and radical jumps in our practice. I will come back from this AP training this week (lucky for everyone, I’m in New York Tuesday through Friday) with a commitment to drop most of my boring work (e-mails, budget and such) and hit 5-10 classrooms a day. What will I be looking for? Read this *MF* and the others that preceded it. Start practicing this week and be ready for a question-based dialogue after my walk-throughs.

**Science Brings it’s A-Game** West Region principals and administrators were in the building this past Thursday to look at our instructional practices. Overall the feedback was very positive. They saw evidence of good questioning strategies and engagement in most classrooms. I was on the science observation team. In most every classroom, a lab experiment was in session and students were highly engaged in the work. I was especially impressed by the way in which almost every single student in 7 different classrooms was highly engaged in the lab activity. It was inspiring to overhear the conversation in some classrooms (mostly prep were observed) in which students were discussing high-level comprehension concepts. Congrats team!

## Calendar of Event

**Mon Oct 22**

**Tue Oct 23**

**JV/Fr Volleyball vs. Bellaire, WHS Gym, 5 PM**

**Orchestra Concert, Auditorium, 7 PM**

**Cross Country Girls District Meet**

**Wed Oct 24**

**Benefits Meeting, All Day, First 15 minutes of your conference period**  
Any staff member who will sign up for benefits must attend.

**JROTC District Inspection, All Day**

This is the equivalent of "The Big Show" for our cadets. Wish them luck.

**Cross Country Boys District Meet**

**Volleyball vs. Bellaire, Butler, 6:30 PM**

**Thu Oct 25**

**Late Start Thursday**

Curriculum Team Mtgs. 8:30 – 9:15 AM

**Benefits Meetings, All Day, First 15 minutes of your conference period**  
Any staff member who will sign up for benefits must attend.

**Fri Oct 26**

**Pep Rally, Gym, 2:45 PM**

Please continue to assist during the pep rally as you have the previous weeks.

**Freshman Football vs. Lamar, WHS, 4:30 PM**

**Varsity VB vs. Lee, Butler, 5:15 PM**

**Sat Oct 27**

**Chipotle Pep Rally, Westheimer (near HEB @ Kirkwood), 2 PM – 5 PM**

Any staff member with an ID can show up at Chipotle from 2 PM – 5 PM and get a free burrito

**Football vs. Lamar, Butler, 6 PM**