

The annual calendar certainly measures the passing of time, yet so many of us measure time by the passing of annual events that surround our profession. Thoughts shared by members of our district family include: "I can't believe track season is here already" or "I can't believe Spring Break came and went." And of course, the one I heard this morning makes everything all too real: "Our kids take STAAR next week." Yes, so many of our kids will take their exams next week. While some of my colleagues across the state are worried about the eventual STAAR results, I am instead thankful for everyone's hard work.

Reflecting on my own learning as a student (high school and college), my campus experience, and most recently my district leadership experience, I have come to the conclusion that there are some very essential components to successful teaching and learning. First, we need an aligned curriculum. Second, we need to present our aligned curriculum in an engaging manner. Third, and most importantly, the student needs to be ready to learn. While there is so much we are doing to improve upon the first two components, there are only a few things we can do to address the third component. I want to dedicate this blog to addressing these components.

How do we convince students about the importance of their own engagement in learning? I am talking about engagement beyond just being in attendance. We are blessed for those students who get that motivation drilled in at home, but the data shows that a significant percentage does not. I am convinced that a positive and nurturing relationship between the student and the teacher goes a long way in making up for the absence of mom and dad calibrating the student's motivation at home. As I look around our District, we have so many examples. Today I want to highlight [Mrs. Susan Cadena](#), math teacher at our High School. I once heard a student tell my son, "Algebra II is hard, but your teacher is there early in the morning and later in the afternoon. If you don't want to fall behind, she will make sure you don't fall behind." By example, Mrs. Cadena has shown her [students](#) that what she is teaching is meaningful to her students' future. Our students and our District are blessed to have her. Awesome!!!

The second component almost seems like we have to sell a product that some may not want to buy. However, nothing could be further from the truth. We simply have to present the curriculum in a manner that is most understandable and makes sense to our students. This is where meaningful staff development plays a huge role. I want to commend all the [teachers](#) that have been attending the additional [staff development](#) that our [C&I team](#) prepared and presented over the last couple of months. It has been nice to hear of the afterschool staff development and even nicer to see those strategies implemented in the classroom.

The first component is clearly the anchor of our success and probably the hardest to address. Ensuring that each lesson addresses the right amount of vocabulary and stimulates the right amount of critical thinking is difficult. Admittedly, this is the Achilles of all reform. Yet I am convinced that continuously improving upon this component will soon yield the results our community deserves. Although we have asked all of you to complete our annual survey, I am going to ask core area teachers across all grade levels to provide some additional feedback that is specific to the Planning Protocol. Like all surveys, this one will also be anonymous. However,

rather than make it a multiple choice type of survey, we will ask for some written feedback. These are some of the questions we will ask:

1. What are the positive things you enjoy about the planning protocol?
2. What have you specifically learned, from the planning protocol sessions, that you have been able to consistently use in your daily work?
3. What improvements would you make to the planning protocol?

I am hopeful that each of you will participate and provide insight on how to improve our instructional planning process.

In closing this blog I want to commend all of our coaches and students for ensuring the success of our local track meet, [The Queen City Relays](#). It was exciting to see so many students [compete](#), and even more exciting to see them [win](#) in so many events.

*"It takes ten thousand hours of deliberate practice - practice that promotes continuous improvement - to master a complex skill." - Malcolm Gladwell*