

Promising Practice

Dr. Daniel Sturdivant

Dooly County School System

Dooly County Middle School

Principal: 2003 - Present

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Our Better-seeking Team:

- **Who:**

- 10 school level leaders: one Principal, one Assistant Principal, one School Counselor, one Media Center Specialist, one Graduation Coach, one Technology Instructor, one Connection Resource Team Leader and three Team Grade Leaders (6th, 7th and 8th).

- **Selection Process:**

- All team leaders were automatically appointed to the Better-seeking Team. The remainder of the team members were appointed by the principal based on special skills/strengths in the 8 Roles of School Leaders™ and/or consistent demonstration of a high level of energy devoted to promoting individual student and overall school success.

- **Supportive Structures/Processes We Implemented to Support Better-seeking Team:**

- From the beginning, the principal set the tone of the group by communicating the important practice of valuing each team member's ideas and opinions. This fostered a culture where members were open to sharing information and ideals.



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We faced this challenge:

- **Performance Problem:**

- School community did not foster high student expectations

- **Data:**

- Did not make AYP (2003/2004)
- Inadequate communication between stakeholders
- Low morale (students, teachers, and community)
- Lack of shared vision
- Low student expectations

- **Additional Challenges (2003/2004):**

- 100% of our students qualify for free or reduced lunches
- Sub-standard facility



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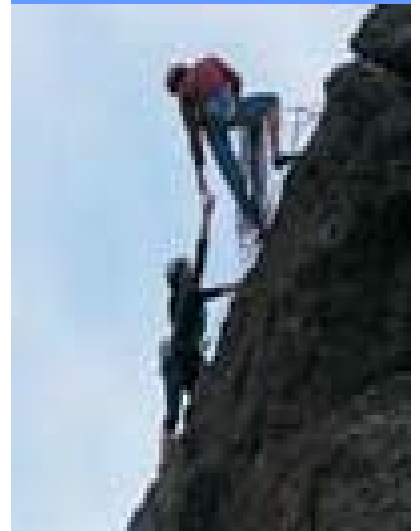
Our data analysis helped us define the causes of the problem:

- **Probable Root Causes Identified:**

- Planning time was not being utilized effectively
- Data were not being analyzed by teachers and were not being used to drive instruction
- High teacher turnover rate
- Professional learning activities were not data-driven

- **Processes Used to Identify Actionable Causes:**

- The Better-Seeking Team met and discussed the major challenges as reflected in the data. We knew the problem (low CRCT scores and did not meet AYP) and we knew the goal (improve CRCT scores, with an emphasis on reading and language arts).
- Collectively, we devised action plans for individual teams.
- Next, each team leader took the action plans to the individual teams. The individual teams implemented the action plans and noted challenges to implementation.



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Our analysis compared our practices to best practices. Here is how we determined what needed to change:

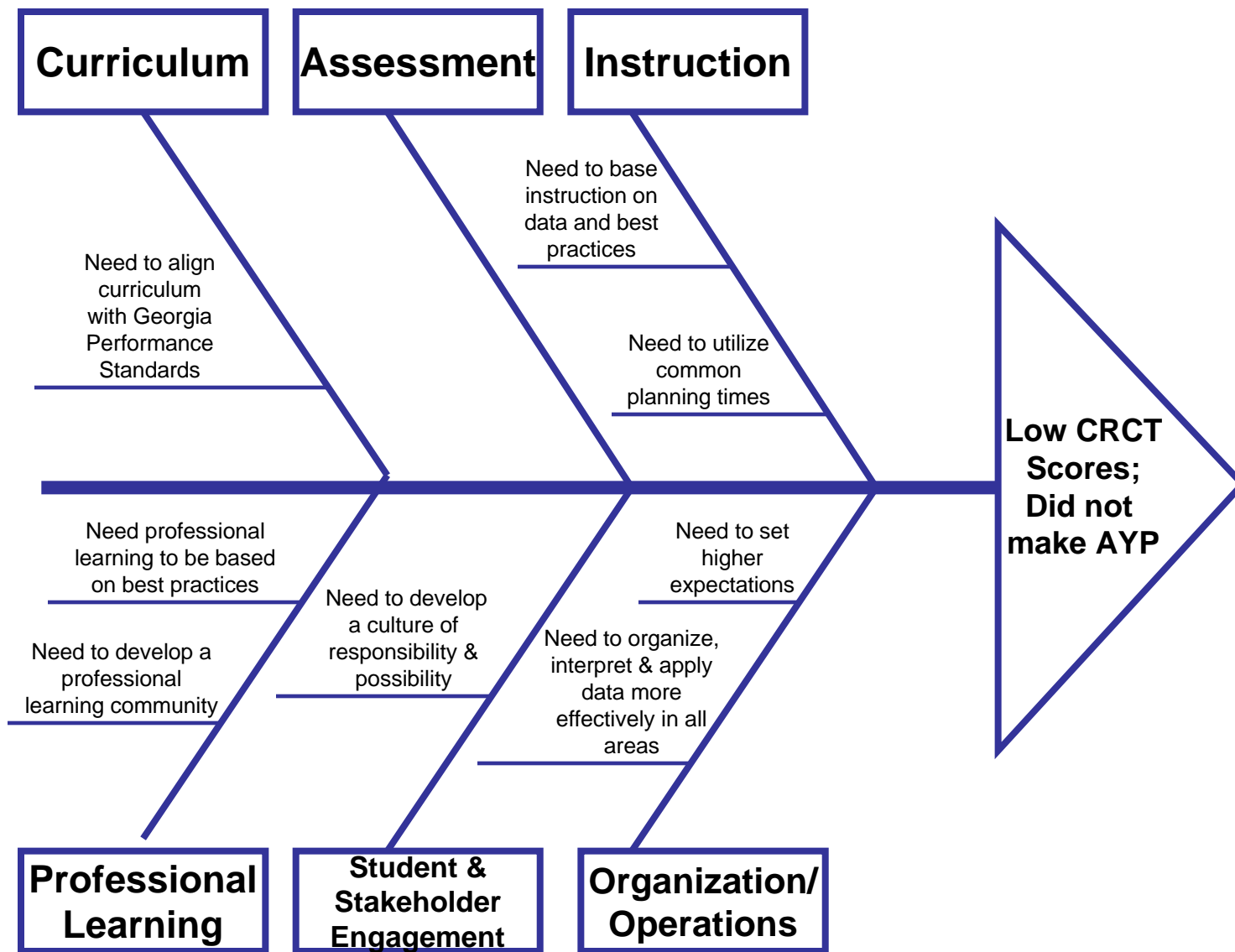
- **Current Practices vs. Best Practices:**
 - Instruction and curriculum systems needed to be based on best practices, data-driven, and aligned with Georgia Performance Standards (GPS).
 - We needed to develop a school-wide culture of professional learning and to base professional learning practices on research-based best practices.
- **Changes in Current Practice as a Result of our Findings:**
 - The result of our analysis told us these systems had to change:
 - People (development of a professional learning community, communication with stakeholders, and data-driven professional learning)
 - Instruction (using best practices, data-driven)
 - Curriculum (alignment with GPS)
 - Assessment (holding all stakeholders accountable)



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As part of our root cause analysis...our Fishbone Diagram:



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We selected this set of solutions to implement and solve the problem:

- **Description of Solutions:**

- Developed a culture of professional learning
- Embedded data-driven decision-making
- Engaged and empowered key stakeholders

- **Rationale for Solutions:**

- Aligned problems with strategies and goals
- Based decisions on best practices



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We took these actions to implement the set of solutions:

- **Developed a professional learning community:**
 - Convened weekly sessions around the instructional needs
 - Held curricula alignment/development sessions across grade levels
 - Involved the BST and all teachers
 - Focused training on analyzing data, differentiating instruction, and managing classrooms
- **Embedded data-driven decision-making:**
 - Shifted data analysis from administrators only to include teachers (this empowered teachers and allowed them to capture the data most meaningful to them)
 - Based instructional and curricula decisions on student data
- **Engaged and empowered key stakeholders:**
 - Increased community support and parent involvement through special events such as “Dad Days,” “Family Math Night,” and “Student Support Meetings”
 - Implemented a student incentive program (provided a student suggestion box, communicated suggestions to students, and then implemented appropriate suggestions)



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We tracked our impact and results...

- **Checked Impact:**
 - Benchmark assessment – The Assistant Superintendent organized teachers to meet monthly across all grade levels to align curriculum with Georgia Performance Standards and to design benchmark tests to gauge student progress
 - Teachers and administrators utilized report card grades to gauge student progress
 - The BST met on a regular basis to discuss successes and to identify and resolve barriers
- **Measured Impact:**
 - CRCT scores (2004/2005 – 2006/2007)
 - Student attendance reports
 - Parent participation levels in school activities
 - Teacher involvement in professional learning activities
 - Visitor perception of school culture
- **Recommendation for Adoption:**
 - The tools we learned through participation in GLISI's Base Camp and Summit helped us use our data to identify and address barriers in the following systems: professional learning, instruction, curriculum and stakeholder engagement.



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We experienced these changes as a result:

- **Changes:**

- System Changes: Curriculum, Instruction, Professional Learning, Stakeholder Engagement and Organization/Operations
- Teachers' aligned/re-aligned curriculum
- Data-driven instruction has become the norm

- **Supporting Evidence:**

- School climate (*Very positive and welcoming!*)
 - Improved faculty morale & community perceptions of our school
 - Engaged students in their learning and witnessed students setting higher individual academic goals
 - Fewer discipline referrals and higher attendance records
- Made AYP for three consecutive years (2004/2005 – 2006/2007)
- Achieved Title I Distinguished School Status (2006/2007)



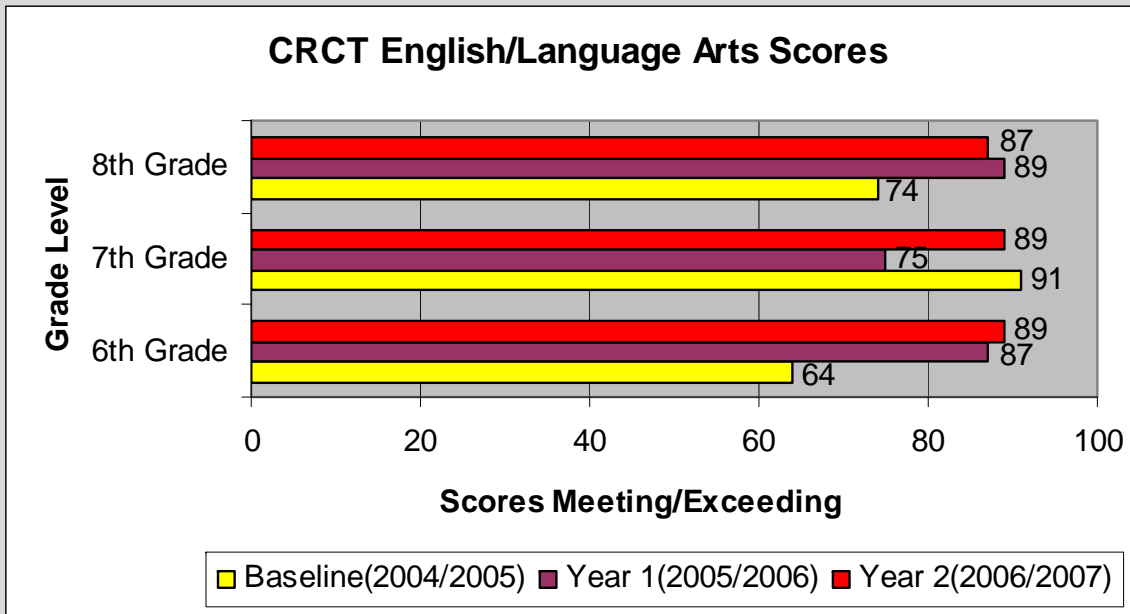
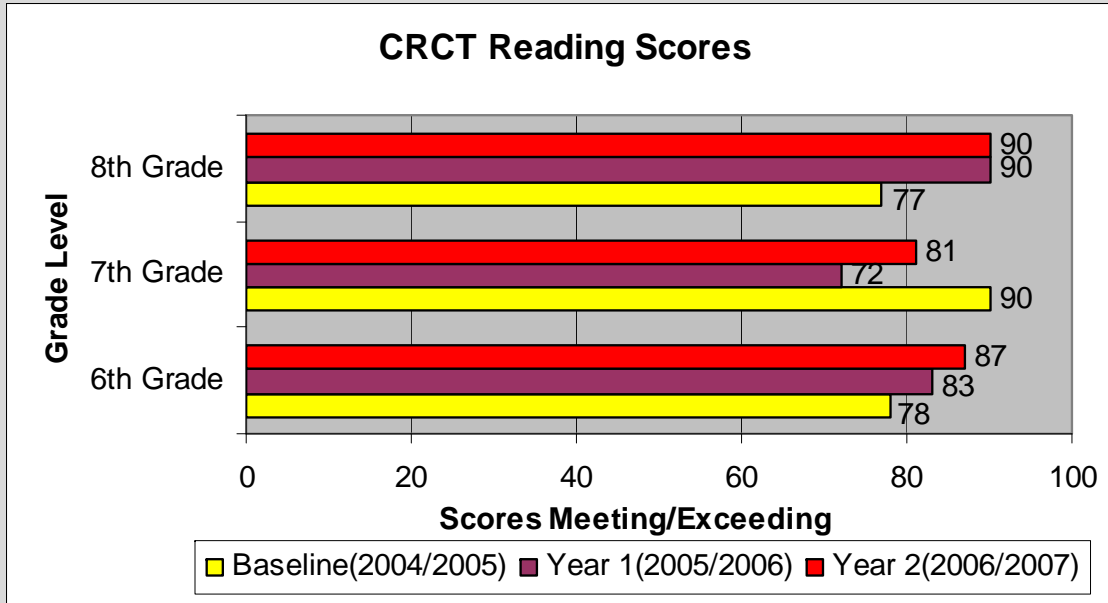
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We gained these targeted measurable results:



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We also gained these unanticipated measurable results...

- Increased **School Pride** ... at an all-time high
- Increased on-site visits by parents
- Increased awareness of parents and community members regarding the school's academics and extracurricular goals and activities
- Selected as one of only 15 schools to be recognized by Georgia's Partnership for Excellence In Education (2007) **GPEE Bus Tour!**
- Rank improved from 433 (2004) to 202 (2007) by Georgia Public Policy Foundation (GPPF)
- Among similar middle schools with a poverty rating of 100%...
WE ARE RANKED FIRST!



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These other factors influenced our results:

- Encouraged faculty and staff
 - Reminding them that commitment to students goes above and beyond CRCT scores
 - Providing opportunities to celebrate our accomplishments
- Focused on student attendance policy
- Planned, reviewed, monitored, and revised the school improvement plan on a regular basis
- Provided an environment conducive to learning (***A new school building ... Board of Education buy-in!***)
- Marketed our success through the local media, our school team, and the community
- Increased the use of instructional technology:
 - Increased the number of student computers in each classroom for instructional purposes
 - Provided laptops for teachers (for classroom and data management)
 - Provided additional student laptop computer stations
 - Made software for students available to students at school and at home



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We learned these lessons:

- **Meaning to us as professionals:**

- Importance of engaging all stakeholders during planning
- Importance of fostering a community where open communication and sharing can flourish
- Importance of embedding data-driven decision-making
- Importance of believing in the possibility of **change**
- Importance of believing in the possibility of **changing**

- **How we shared our practices:**

- Presentation at GLISI Display of Excellence
October 2007 and February 2008



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Our Solution Implementation Summary:

- **Problem identified:**

- Low student achievement in all academic areas (with a focus on reading and language arts)
- Low teacher morale, lack of student engagement, and lack of community support

- **Set of solutions implemented:**

- Formation of leadership teams: A District Change Team and School Better-Seeking Teams were formed
- A shared vision was developed and communicated with all stakeholders
- Data were used to drive the team's decision-making (i.e., teaching strategies, technology applications, professional learning activities)

- **Changes experienced:**

- The dramatic and positive changes relative to our school climate greatly impacted the engagement of all stakeholders (teachers, students, and the community) which translated into better teaching and learning and yielded phenomenal academic achievements.

- **Results realized:**

- Met AYP for three consecutive years (2004/2005 – 2006/2007)



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