

Curriculum Leadership Institute E-Hint

More About Successful Schools

In a previous E-Hint, we learned about schools that “break the mold,” meaning they did very well when they were not really expected to do so. We also learned some things that all of those schools had in common. This E-Hint discusses those same schools and some additional qualities they share.

First of all, let’s look at why educators and the general public were so surprised by these schools. Why were they not expected to do well, and just how well did they do? Both of those questions are answered by another “title” the schools have been given: they are all “90/90/90 schools.” This means that at least 90% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch; at least 90% were ethnic minority students; and at least 90% of the students met high standards according to independently administered tests of academic achievement. In most instances, when people see those first two “90” statistics, they certainly don’t expect to see the third one!

So what do these schools do to be successful? In addition to the characteristics described in the E-Hint “Schools That Break The Mold”, the 90/90/90 schools also had the following in common.

1. *A focus on academic achievement.* Achievement information is presented on charts, tables, and graphs that are displayed in every hallway, and updated frequently (usually weekly). Trophy cases are filled with examples of outstanding student work. This focus is echoed in each individual classroom.
2. *Frequent assessment and multiple opportunities for improvement.* Most of these schools conduct weekly assessments, constructed and administered by the classroom teachers. If students perform poorly, they are not just given a low grade. Teachers understand that most of these students (at the beginning) would be satisfied with a “D” and unmotivated by an “F.” Instead, students are given more work (and encouragement), and thus multiple opportunities to succeed. The teacher-student relationship is more like one of coach and promising athlete.
3. *Written responses in performance assessments.* The most common characteristic of these schools is their focus on requiring written responses in performance assessments. While many schools have students participating in frequent creative writing assignments, these schools focus more on informative writing, which not only helps the teachers with diagnostic information, but helps students process information in a much clearer way.

Watch for additional E-Hints outlining characteristics of these schools. Research on the 90/90/90 schools can also be found in the book, *Accountability in Action*, by Dr. Douglas Reeves.