



The FreshPond Education Program for Guaranteed Learning Opportunity (GLO)

Program Rationale

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Why implement GLO Design Teams?

The Need for a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum:

In his book, *What Works in Schools* (Marzano, 2003), Robert Marzano estimates that schools only have about 9,042 available instructional hours to teach 15,465 hours worth of the standards required in most K-12 state standards documents. Overwhelmed, teachers are forced to make “idiosyncratic decisions regarding what should be covered and to what extent” (p.23). Thus a student’s opportunities to learn are, at best, subject to the whims of individual teachers; schools cannot ensure that each student will have equitable access to the curriculum. The curriculum is not “guaranteed.”

The answer, Marzano argues, is either to drastically increase the number of instructional hours, or, more realistically, “implement a curriculum that is both guaranteed and viable.” “Schools,” he states, “should drastically reduce the amount of content teachers are required to address in class,” monitor that the curriculum gets covered, and guarantee the time it takes to cover that content (p. 24, 27).

In other words, schools ought to comb through the standards documents in order to identify, communicate, and enforce what Douglas Reeves calls “power standards”—those essential elements of the curriculum that all students should experience regardless of teacher to which they were assigned (Reeves, 2000). Power standards:

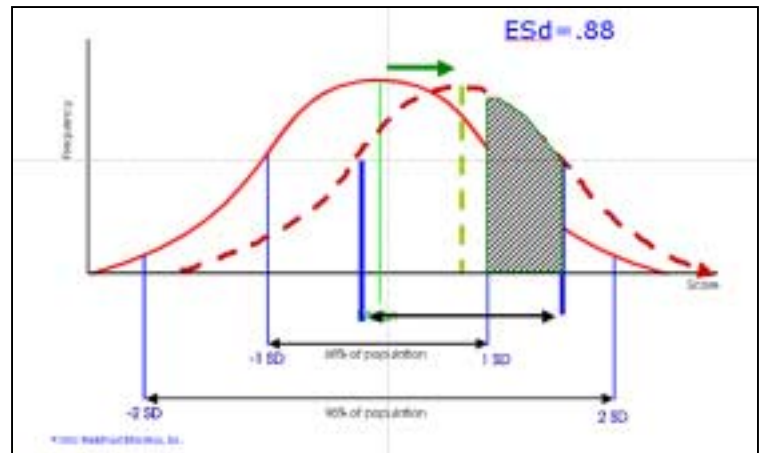
1. **Endure** beyond a specific course (e.g. “scientific method” endures; “the Creb Cycle” does not).
2. Have **leverage** to help the student succeed beyond the details of the course (e.g. the ability to read tables and graphs is useful in all courses besides science).
3. Are **required** for the next level of instruction (e.g. paragraphing is a necessary skill before learning about the five-paragraph essay).

Teachers have a professional obligation to identify “power standards” and the accompanying “guaranteed and viable curriculum.” In his 2000 meta-analysis of the schooling effect (the impact schools have on student performance), Marzano (Marzano 2000) concluded that the mean of student performance in schools providing guaranteed “opportunities to learn” is .88 standard deviations higher than the mean of a control group of schools (see figures 1 and 2). Put another way, schools that fail to guarantee opportunities to learn are denying their students the opportunity to score 31% higher on standardized tests.

Figure 1: Marzano’s top five School-level factors with statistically significant correlative impact on student performance (adapted from Marzano 2000 and 2003)

Category (ranked)		ESd	P gain
Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum	Opportunities to Learn	.88	31
	Time	.39	15
Challenging Goals and Effective Feedback	Monitoring	.30	12
	Pressure to Achieve	.27	11
Parental and Community Involvement	Parental Involvement	.26	10
Safe and Orderly Environment	School Climate	.22	8
Collegiality and Professionalism	Leadership	.10	4
	Cooperation	.06	2

Figure 2: expected increase in student performance with Opportunities to Learn (based on Marzano 2000 and 2003)



FreshPond’s GLO approach captures the spirit of *power standards* and *guaranteed and viable curriculum* by encouraging schools to develop **Guaranteed Learning Opportunities (GLO)** that address a limited set of power standards. Each GLO includes:

- **Performance Task:** An assignment and learning experience that all students will experience regardless of the teacher to which they get assigned.
- **Shared Rubric:** The rubric developed and used by all teachers to evaluate the performance task.

- **Student Exemplars:** Samples of student work from each performance level on the rubric.
- **Lesson Plan:** teacher notes and learning activities that prepare students for the performance task.

Schools that follow FreshPond’s GLO approach are encouraged to create a limited set of GLOs. Again, the idea is to guarantee a certain set of learning opportunities for each child. The larger the set of GLOs, the more likely that teachers will make “idiosyncratic decisions” about which GLOs to implement, and the less likely that all students will experience them.

Graduation by Proficiency, not Seat Time: the power of external scoring, rubrics, and exemplars of student work

In his “90/90/90” study, Douglas Reeves’ and his colleagues at the Center for Performance Assessment identified 228 schools with 90% of their students in poverty, 90% minorities, and 90% high test performance and discovered they shared five characteristics:

- **A focus on academic achievement:** (i.e. public displays of performance data, exemplar student work—an overt focus of FreshPond’s GLO program)
- **Clear curriculum choices** (i.e. committing more time to core areas of reading, writing, and math in lieu of “covering” all the standards—an idea related to power standards)
- **Frequent assessment of student progress and multiple opportunities for improvement** (i.e. insist on proficiency rather than assigning low grades and letting students fall behind by moving onto the next unit)
- **An emphasis on writing**
- **External scoring** (e.g. common assessment practices and the regular exchange and scoring of student work between teachers—another overt focus of GLO)

(Adapted from Reeves 2000a.)

FreshPond’s GLO Design Program borrowed from Reeve’s 90/90/90 conclusions. Design Teams create and use a common rubric to evaluate student work, therefore guaranteeing that expectations for students are not a function of the “idiosyncratic judgment” of individual teachers. The act of creating and norming common rubrics does more than guarantee consistent high standards within the Design Team.

“External scoring” is a powerful professional development opportunity. Not only does it help participating teachers understand how to integrate standards into the curriculum, “external scoring” generates collegial discussion about how best to teach to the standards evaluated on the rubric.

In addition to providing teachers with valuable curriculum and professional development experiences, the GLO program can also provide schools with useful assessment tools. Like many others, FreshPond Education believes that standardized test scores are a necessary but far from sufficient assessment mechanism for measuring student mastery of the curriculum. FreshPond’s GLO Program reflects the philosophies of the Coalition of Essential Schools, and others, who have long rejected “seat time” graduation requirements and, instead, championed the idea of “Exhibitions of Mastery” as authentic assessments of student proficiency. Schools can use their list of GLOs as graduation requirements or, at least, elements to be included in student learning portfolios.

GLO Design Teams are not Curriculum Committees

While GLOs would appear to be the obvious domain of the curriculum committee, champions of the traditional “curriculum committee” must be prepared to abandon bureaucratic models of curriculum development. FreshPond’s experience with its Curriculum Mapping and Design Team programs serve as constant reminders that discussion about curriculum **MUST** be grounded

in the classroom experience. If teachers are not involved in the creation, refinement, and enforcement of GLOs (especially the activity of norming student exemplars to the rubric), it is highly unlikely the GLO will be implemented, and even less likely that the student work will be evaluated with same standards.

In her book, *Mapping the Big Picture* (Jacobs, 1996), Heidi Hayes Jacobs corroborates this experience when she declares that curriculum committee should coordinate, but not dictate curriculum. In her argument for teacher-created curriculum maps, Hayes Jacobs notes that curriculum committees tend to create lists that are meaningless mandates unless there is a commitment from teachers as to “when a skill will be taught” (p. 4). In other words, the decision about which parts of the curriculum ought to be viable needs to come from both the standards (as interpreted by the curriculum committee) AND from the teacher’s experience in the classroom.

Saying we should honor the teacher’s experience, however, does not mean that teachers should continue to make curriculum decisions in isolation or not be held accountable.

Tony Wagner’s excellent book, *Making the Grade: Reinventing America’s School*, reiterates a point being made by most leading educational thinkers: we must reject the isolated, rule-driven, compliance-based norms of “bureaucratic school culture” and move towards a “knowledge-generating school culture” that values collegiality, relationship, and shared responsibility (Wagner, 2002). In short, teachers can no longer work alone; they must be organized into teams focused on guaranteeing learning opportunities for all students.

THE CULTURAL DRIVERS	A KNOWLEDGE-GENERATING SCHOOL CULTURE	A BUREAUCRATIC SCHOOL CULTURE
Relationship	Highly collaborative and collegial	Isolated and competitive
Responsibility	Shared	Blame others
Motivation	Relationship-driven	Rule-driven
Agreements	Covenants	Contracts
Accountability	Face-to-face, commitment-driven	Anonymous, compliance-driven
Learning	Sustained support for individual and organizational learning	Limited and sporadic attention to skill development
Expertise	Collaboratively developed and widely shared	Private and hierarchical
Outcomes	Generation of new knowledge and solutions	Passive or partial replication of old/others’ ideas

Table 1: The ingredients of a Knowledge Based Culture (Wagner, 2002)

FreshPond’s GLO Program honors Wagner’s concept of “knowledge-generating school culture” by creating collegial teams of teachers that share the responsibility of collaboratively creating, implementing, and enforcing guaranteed learning opportunities for all students. That is, instead of playing cat and mouse enforcement games with a curriculum committee, GLO Design Team participants use their time together to analyze current practices and generate new knowledge and solutions.

A word of caution is necessary: **GLO Design Teams are not substitutes for a curriculum committee.** Curriculum committees must provide enough oversight to guarantee that GLOs are aligned across different grade levels and courses.

While GLO teams do have an important curriculum development function, **GLO Design Teams are ultimately professional development—not curriculum development—teams.** That is, the

main function of a GLO Design Team is to use the collegial examination of teacher practice in order to unify standards of excellence, improve instruction, and ultimately enhance student-learning opportunities. In fact, there is a growing consensus among professional development experts that American educators focus entirely too much on producing and rewriting curriculum standards and lesson plans when they ought to be observing, analyzing and improving instructional practice. In *The Teaching Gap* (Stigler and Hiebert, 1999) the authors propose that we emulate the Japanese practice of “lesson study,” a job-embedded form of professional development in which teams of teachers meet daily to discuss, observe, and analyze one another’s teaching.

Unfortunately, most American schools do not provide the time, compensation, professional development structure, or the reflective “continuous improvement” culture necessary to support the Japanese model of lesson study. In the absence of comprehensive systemic changes, teams of American educators have had to find creative ways to observe, analyze, and improve one another’s teaching.

One solution is the “Critical Friends Group” (CFG) model initially championed by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University and now hosted by the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) at the Harmony School Education Center in Bloomington, Indiana.


CFG members gather for at least one two-to-three-hour meeting each month, at which they establish and publicly state learning goals for students, help each other think about more productive teaching practices, examine curriculum and student work, and identify school-culture and equity issues that affect student achievement. As “critical friends,” they observe one another at work regularly to provide feedback in challenging but non-threatening ways (NSRF, 2003).

At the heart of the NSRF’s work with CFGs is a series of useful “protocols” for guiding collegial meeting and examinations of one another’s work.

Like FreshPond’s Design Team program, the GLO program is an adaptation of both the CFG protocols for guiding peer review and the lesson study concept—particularly the notion that teams of teachers need structures and collegial time to analyze and improve instructional practice.

The GLO Program’s practical structure recognizes that teachers do not have the time to be on separate curriculum committees and instructional-improvement teams.

The Peer Review Protocol



Before Meeting: circulate lesson and Peer Review Questions

1. Review agenda, select note-taker, etc. (2 min)
2. Present lesson and curriculum challenge (<5 min)
3. Ask clarifying questions (<5 min)
4. Silent writing time (<3 min)
5. Discuss lesson using probing questions (<20 min)
6. Silent writing time (<3min)
7. Reflect/summarize important observations (5 min)

Creating, analyzing, norming, and implementing GLOs provides a practical structure for professional development and the development of a viable and guaranteed curriculum for all students.

Notes

Jacobs, Heidi Hayes (1996). *Mapping the Big Picture: Integration Curriculum and Assessment K-12*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Marzano, Robert (2003). *What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Action*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Marzano, Robert (2000). "A New Era of School Reform: Going Where the Research Takes Us." Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning

National School Reform Faculty Web Page: <http://harmony.pvt.k12.in.us/nsrf/program.html>
(24 march 2003)

Reeves, Douglas (2000). Standards are Not Enough: Essential Transformation for School Success. *NASSP Bulletin*, Vol. 84, No. 620, 5-19.

Reeves, Douglas (2000a). *Accountability in Action: a Blueprint for Learning Organizations*. Denver, CO: Advanced Learning Centers. 185-196.

Stigler, James W. & Hiebert, James.(1999). *The Teaching Gap: Best ideas form the world's teachers for improving education in the classroom*. New York: The Free Press.

Wagner, Tony (2002). *Making the Grade: Reinventing America's Schools*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer. 121-151.