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From a Time-Based to a Performance-Based System: A Necessary Transformation

Leading Questions

1. What are the attitudes in your school or district about teaching and learning? Do you believe that *all* children can learn?
2. Do your school or district standards include 21st-century standards that span content areas such as critical thinking, creativity, innovation, teamwork, and leadership?
3. Do you think that the assessments required by your state result in an accurate picture of student learning?
4. What is the situation in your community in terms of graduation rates, dropouts, applications for postsecondary education, and graduates' readiness to compete in the global workforce?
5. As a teacher or administrator, are you willing to make substantive changes in your practices if you see the potential benefits?
6. What would it take to revolutionize the education system to create a virtual 24/7 system?

Many people cannot wait for the day when the use of auto fuel cells is as normal as talking on a cell phone to a friend or searching the Internet on a Blackberry. On that day, you will no longer need to stop at the local Fill-Er-Up Gas Station, stand in the cold, rain, sleet, or blazing heat while you fumble around for your credit card, figure out the instructions on the screen you can never read, eventually fill up your gas tank, and then drive away, invariably with the smell of gasoline on your hands.

Picture, instead, driving up to a Fuel Cell Renewal Station, where a smiling attendant zips out to greet you, pops open the hood of your car,

Standards- and Performance-Based Education

Like all human beings, children learn and develop at different rates and in different ways; they learn different content at different rates and in different ways. Despite that, traditional education moves students through grade levels in age-similar groups. This approach may be less tumultuous socially than students working together across age levels, but it impacts students negatively in many other ways and is inconsistent with natural developmental differences that make people unique.

First, this process creates artificial constraints for students, constraints that are apparent in instruction and assessment. For example, eighth-grade state-level assessments must be taken by all eighth-grade students whether some are academically ready to take those assessments or not. Second, this approach stigmatizes “slow” students who fail tests, who take longer to learn specific content compared to other students, or who struggle with specific concepts and skills. These students are affected in other ways as well. For example, lagging students frequently are promoted to the next grade level after squeaking by with barely acceptable test or course grades. The gap in students’ knowledge base that results from social promotion shows up in the next grade level, and the next and the next, and often is never remedied.

At the other end of the spectrum, gifted students may be just as out of sync with their age peers for other reasons. Even though gifted students generally are viewed as having an easy time of it in school, research and practice have repeatedly shown that many gifted students are exceptionally bright children with special needs, or *twice-exceptional* children (National Association for Gifted Children, 2005). A sixth-grade child, for example, may have college-level academic abilities *and* learning disabilities. Complicating the issue, being gifted can lead to anxiety, low self-esteem, and social difficulties for students as they struggle to fit in with their fellow students.

These brief examples illustrate the logic and importance of creating an education system that builds on and encourages, rather than impedes and stifles, the uniquely individual ways in which children learn and grow. The system that accomplishes these goals is one that allows students the freedom to move at their own pace—one that honors the natural developmental differences among students, yet holds them to high standards. Such

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The RISC Approach to Schooling

Leading Questions

1. Is there room for innovation in your school or district?
2. Does your school or district have organizational goals? Do you know what they are?
3. As an educator in your system, is there accountability for what you do?
4. What are your thoughts about the knowledge and skills students should master before they are granted a high school diploma? What should a confident, prepared high school graduate know and be able to do?
5. What does it look like in your system when a student masters these skills and this knowledge early?
6. Are teachers in the system using standards in their day-to-day instruction? If so, how are they using them?
7. Does instruction flow from standards, or is instruction based solely on textbooks?
8. Are students keeping track of their own progress on standards?
9. Does your assessment and grading system accurately reflect students' relative strengths and weaknesses?

The RISC Approach to Schooling is an integrated standards-based system of education that represents a synthesis of research and best practice about high-performing organizations, educational excellence, the characteristics of effective schools, and fundamentals of human learning, engagement, and motivation. It is fair to say that this model is the first organized, sustainable attempt to use a systems approach to empower students to have a say in what they learn and how they learn—both independently and with

Figure 3.4: Teacher Roles—Traditional Classroom Versus RISC Classroom

Traditional Classroom	RISC Classroom
<p>Teachers spend more of their time . . .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecturing • Managing classroom behavior • Scoring papers and tests • Preparing bulletin boards • Updating grade books • Preparing for state testing 	<p>Teachers spend more of their time . . .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging students • Empowering, mentoring, guiding, and inspiring students to take control of their learning • Coaching students about how to move forward • Assessing students' ability levels • Providing individualized small- and large-group instruction • Creating effective and engaging ways in which to increase individual student achievement • Communicating what <i>proficient</i> and <i>advanced</i> work look like

In one sense, teaching in a RISC setting requires more time in terms of tracking students' progress (see discussion in Grading and Reporting section, which follows on page 94). In another sense, RISC teachers find themselves more at ease as teachers, as Highland Tech High Assistant Principal Rebecca Midles explains:

It doesn't matter what age students are. Once they grasp the [RISC] model, people don't understand this, but my job is easier. As a teacher, I have more time to listen and learn from the students and be more at an observational level. Once students own the model, when they tell you what they need and they show you what they are learning, when you see the light bulb go off—when you get into that phase of students getting *inside* their learning—when that happens, they are the authors of their future.

Students have a tremendous opportunity to take the reins from teachers and to learn, progress at their own pace, and, if they wish, graduate early—with more knowledge and skill under their belts than the average student of the past. A pitfall for RISC teachers is passively sitting back and letting students educate themselves, which can result in students falling

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Student Stories: Individual Lives and Futures Transformed

Leading Questions

1. How many of your students are engaged in their education?
2. Can students articulate your education system and their place in it? For example, can they explain the vision of the system and how their learning goals relate to that vision, as well as what they are learning and why?
3. What are students doing after they leave your system? For example, are they pursuing trade school, secondary education, entrepreneurial activities, or jobs in the workplace?

The RISC Approach to Schooling has affected the lives of hundreds of students in Alaska and a growing number in the Lower 48 states. This chapter highlights the stories of two very different Alaskan students, from rural Tatitlek and urban Anchorage, respectively.

Rami's Story, Tatitlek Community School

It is 6:15 a.m. in Tatitlek, Alaska, a remote Native village situated southeast of Anchorage on a tip of land between the Tatitlek Narrows and Boulder Bay in Alaska's Prince William Sound. The sun is not yet up in this small Alutiiq community, but Rami Totemoff, age 16, is.

Since 5:30 this morning, Rami has been focused on completing a project for school. It is one of a number of projects she must complete in the next several months if she hopes to graduate with her classmates. By 6:50, she is out the front door of her parents' home for the short walk around the bend and up the hill to school. Rami has been following this