

# Book Study

Prepared by the  
Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) Project

## *Results Now*

Mike Schmoker

(ASCD, 2006)

### **Book Description:**

**In *Results Now*, Mike Schmoker explores “how we can achieve unprecedented improvements in teaching and learning.” Schmoker contends education can reform through effective leadership and professional learning communities.**

### **Target Audience:**

**This is a great book study for a staff who are beginning to look hard at the instruction portion of a MTSS system. Good instruction is at the heart of all three tiers and this book provides some practical research-based methodology.**

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**Introduction: The Brutal Facts about Instruction and Its Supervision**

1. Imagine a school better than anything you've ever seen. What does it look like?
2. Schmoker quotes Collins in *Good to Great* that the first step is to "confront the brutal facts." How will you recognize your school's brutal facts? What do you predict the brutal facts will be?
3. Does your school have any sacred cows or traditions which stand in the way of greatness?
4. If the key components of effective schools are not a mystery, why is there a knowing-doing gap in education?
5. Schools have in-house experts. Many times experts within the building are not readily accepted by the faculty. How can schools help teachers develop and accept in-house experts?

## Chapter 1: The Buffer

### Overview

The buffer prevents educators and communities alike from seeing instruction and supervision as it really is. The buffer keeps all of us from seeing how much better our schools could be.

### Discussion Questions

1. Schmoker refers to Richard Elmore's definition of a buffer as "a protective barrier that discourages and even punishes close, constructive scrutiny of instruction and the supervision of instruction." It protects schools "from outside inspection, interference or disruption." Is NCLB the factor which will break the buffer? Why or why not? If so, how? If not, what could be the buffer-breaker?
2. Schmoker says to look for schoolwide patterns in the general quality and substance of instruction and students' attentiveness. How are these observed and what should be done with that information?
3. As you read this chapter, describe when these three moments happened for you:
  1. Something you agreed with
  2. Something you would argue with
  3. An aha moment

## Chapter 2: Isolation - The Enemy of Improvement

### Overview

The buffer is both cause and effect of a hapless tradition of isolating educators from each other and from information that is essential to professional practice.

### Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree that isolation is the enemy of improvement? Show thumbs up or thumbs down to show agreement or disagreement. What other factors prevent improvement? Where does isolation rank in that list?
2. This chapter maintains that in traditional schools teachers are isolated. On a scale of one to five with five being the most severe, how isolated do you feel your teachers are? Hold up fingers to reveal estimations. Is there a consensus? Do some feel more isolated than others? What can be done to reduce isolation?
3. If isolation prevents improvement, how can our school change the attitude of “just leave me alone and let me teach?”
4. How do we support new teachers? How do we support teachers new to the system? How do we support teachers who are not obtaining high student results? What can be done to improve our system of support?
5. How is support provided to all teachers to ensure students meet expectations?

### **Chapter 3: Leadership Interrupted – How the Buffer Compromises Supervision**

#### **Overview**

Chapter 3 examines how the current system works to prevent leaders from having much influence on the quality of instruction.

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. According to Schmoker, the two things that matter most to instructional quality are what is being taught and how well. What does our school do to monitor instructional quality? How do we monitor what is being taught? How do we monitor how well it's being taught?
2. Many schools are plagued by “lots of change, but not much improvement.” What changes has our school made in recent past? Was there improvement? Should the changes be re-examined? How and when?
3. Collins proposes that “simple plans” work best. He suggests teachers analyze achievement data, set goals, and then meet at least twice a month for 45 minutes. Is our school doing this? Is it working? Are we examining the best data? How can the meetings be improved? If our school is not doing this, should we? How can we? What data should we examine and how? What might our goals be? How can we create opportunities to meet?

## Chapter 4: Curricular Chaos

### Overview

Chapter 4 quotes many experts who challenge that what we teach varies markedly from what we think. The experts herald that schools are missing their greatest opportunity by not providing a common, high-quality curriculum.

### Discussion Questions

1. Porter writes that “What gets taught is the strongest single predictor of gains in achievement.” However, Jacobs suggests that curriculum guides are fiction and Marzano points out that the intended curriculum is not the implemented curriculum. How is our school ensuring that the curriculum is “guaranteed and viable?”
2. How do teachers and schools balance flexibility within the curriculum and standards to allow for personal and creative variation without creating chaos and still providing a “guaranteed and viable curriculum?”
3. Schmoker refers to Wiggins in writing that “state assessments, however imperfect, are not the enemy.” What is the enemy of learning and how do we fight it?
4. Schmoker contributes lack of guaranteed and viable curriculum to four factors: incoherent curricula, ineffective instruction, ineffective assessment practices, and no quality control. Do these happen in our school? How do we recognize them? How do we break the mold to improve?

## Chapter 5: The Power of Authentic Literacy

### Overview

Chapter 5 takes a general look at the social, intellectual, and economic power of acquiring the most authentic forms of literacy – of purposeful, intellectually engaging reading, writing, and discussion.

### Discussion Questions

1. Vacca predicts that adults of the future will need advanced levels of literacy to function effectively. Brainstorm academic and social literacy that will be required in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
2. The author uses phrases such as authentic literacy, higher-order literacy, deep reading, and reading texts critically. What do these mean? How are they different from what our school currently offers?
3. In the Learning and Earning section, Schmoker refers to a study from England that claims the ability to read well is the single best indicator of future economic success. He also offers the statistic that 40 percent of those born into the bottom economic fifth stay there as adults. What is being done and what can be done in our school to combat poverty with reading?
4. What does it mean to be truly, authentically literate?

## Chapter 6: Authentic Literacy and Intellectual Development

### Overview

This chapter examines the three components of authentic literacy. Understanding literacy is essential to changes in literacy instruction. Changing literacy instruction will transform learning in every subject.

### Discussion Questions

1. There are many different terms to describe what Smoker labels deep reading. Those mentioned include purposeful reading, reading for meaning, strategic reading, and rereading for higher order purposes. The author insists this can begin before second grade. What would it look like in your grade level or subject area? How can you promote this kind of reading?
2. How does reading pen in hand improve thinking? How do you encourage that kind of thinking in your classroom?
3. The National Commission on Writing proclaims that writing “is not a frill for the few, but an essential skill for the many.” Do you agree? Marino’s research indicates that writing should occupy the very center of schooling. To what extent do you involve writing in your classroom? What are some examples of ways you integrate writing in your classroom? How could you increase writing in your classroom?
4. Argumentative literacy leads to high quality discussion. How do you create this type of academic dialogue in your classroom?
5. Teaching vocabulary increases knowledge of essential concepts. What can you do individually? What does our school do to promote vocabulary instruction? How can we improve vocabulary instruction to have greater impact on achievement levels?

## Chapter 7: A Startling State of Literacy Education

### Overview

Chapter 7 argues that literacy instruction is lacking. The author insists most classrooms are missing the powerful opportunity of literacy.

### Helpful Hint

Chapter 7 asks for sincere self-reflection. The teachers, administrators and schools who are brutally honest with themselves will be able to make small changes which will impact student learning. Educators who get their feelings hurt will not face the brutal facts or make changes to impact learning. As Colin Powell suggests, leave your ego at the door. This is about the learning, not the teacher himself. Do not take anything personally.

### Discussion Questions

1. Literacy instruction is the supreme opportunity for the general improvement of schooling. Yet, the two activities least apt to occur during a typical language arts class are reading and writing. What percent of time is spent reading and writing in our school?
2. The author speaks of uncomfortable acknowledgments. Dr. Phil says you can't change what you don't acknowledge. As a survey, answer the questions posed in Chapter 7.
  - a) Are most of our reading assignments and class discussions typically lower-order, focused on facts and recall; or higher-order, focused on interpretive, open-ended discussions?
  - b) Have you, since you attended college, done a lot of reading, for different purposes, with a pen or highlighter in hand?
  - c) Is such purposeful reading, pen in hand, an almost universal way that we engage in deep reading and critical reasoning?
  - d) Should our students, from the earliest grades, be given interpretive prompts or purposes before they read, to guide their reading, pen-in-hand, on a daily basis?
  - e) Should teachers regularly select short passages and carefully explain their thoughts as they analyze and make meaning of the words and sentences, so that students can see how adults tackle text?
  - f) Should students receive clear, detailed instruction-entire lessons-on each respective element of a writing rubric?
  - g) Isn't repeated teacher modeling accompanied by examples of good written work essential to understanding these criteria of good writing?
  - h) Shouldn't students be taught-very carefully and thoroughly-to evaluate their own written work with these rubrics?
  - i) How routinely do such practices-purposeful reading and interpretive modeling or "think-alouds," and frequent writing instruction focusing on only one criterion in a scoring guide actually occur in the average classroom?
  - j) What simple, immediate action could we make to create a difference in the quality of our school?
  - k) Why should we teach writing? Why are we not teaching writing?

3. Most students are engaged in activities that have nothing to do with literacy. Activities with little impact on learning have been called crayola curriculum, stuff, and literature-based arts and crafts. What activities do we see like this in our school?
4. By examining our school's practices, we are not looking for individual teachers' shortcomings. We are looking for patterns of good or poor instruction. Consider a recent lesson you taught.
  - a. Did the activity have anything to do with literacy; with learning to read or write?
  - b. How many students were clearly engaged-were on task?
5. We know the enormous importance of time-on-task. How do you as a teacher and a school protect your instructional time?
6. Most students, most of the time, are engaged in meaningless activities. Students can not articulate what they are learning or why. Can yours? How can this be improved?
7. What is the difference between I taught it and I just corrected it?
8. Allington found that the highest-achieving classrooms spend as much as 70 percent of class time reading or responding to what they read. How does your classroom and school compare to Allington's recommendation that students read 60 minutes and write 40 minutes per day ?
9. Schmoker asks, "How do we begin to make needed changes to instruction and its quality?" How do we?

## Chapter 8: Professional Learning Communities: The Surest, Fastest Path to Instructional Improvement

### Overview

Chapter 8 proposes that professional learning communities feature the most powerful set of structures and practices for improving instruction.

### Discussion Questions

1. Schmoker says, “We’ve seen how various forces have prevented instruction from being all it can be.” He then asks, “What are the most practical, effective actions and arrangements for ensuring that instruction improves, meaningfully and steadily, in every discipline?” What forces have prevented quality instruction? How can those forces be reduced? What actions should we take to improve instruction?
2. Compare professional learning communities to traditional schools. How does our school compare?
3. One of the fundamental concepts of PLCs is for teams to meet at least twice a month for a minimum of 45 minutes. Are we doing that? Can we do that? How can we ensure that the focus of the meetings is instruction?
4. In the team vs. workshop approach, teachers depend on colleagues instead of outside experts. Is this possible in our school? How do we develop the attitude that collective effort and intelligence are the most powerful force for improvement?
5. Team meetings that do lesson studies identify a low-scoring standard, do a rough draft of appropriate assessments and create lessons. How would this work in our school?
6. Schmoker writes, “We act as though viable improvement must be acquired from certified experts in a series of presentations, with PowerPoint slide shows and projectors.” He quotes Fullan and Hargreaves in calling this a “culture of dependency that disempowers teachers and is a barrier to smart, constructive effort.” What does staff development look like at our school? Do we have a ‘culture of dependency’ on outside experts? How could our professional development be improved?
7. Educational experts agree that “best practices don’t pay off until they have been implemented and fine-tuned.” How would you rate yourself on implementing best practices in your instruction? How could you improve?
8. Such terms as positive deviant and internal expertise describe the process of teachers teaching each other the practice of teaching. Discuss how this could apply to our school. What expertise could your teaching team develop?
9. Several times Schmoker remarks that “educators should obsessively celebrate, study, and showcase every team success.” How does our school celebrate success? How could we improve?

10. Schmoker references educational experts who urge us to generate quick wins by scraping the big plans and design goals to produce frequent small wins. How can our school build the kind of momentum created by a steady stream of success?

## Chapter 9: Leadership in the Professional Learning Community

### Overview

Chapter 9 advocates that the most powerful actions that leaders can take are those built around the fundamental concepts of learning communities. Leadership built on a learning community foundation will not only be simpler, but will allow ordinary leaders to have an extraordinary impact on instruction and its improvement.

### Discussion Questions

1. Chapter nine refers to average human beings as leaders within the professional learning community. What supports would the less than superhero need to effectively be a leader? Does our school have those things in place? Could we?
2. Four conditions that have to exist for teachers to learn from one another were outlined. What were they? Do these conditions exist in our school? How do we know? How could we make them occur?
3. Little is quoted as saying teachers need to pay closer attention to the evidence of student learning. What evidence do you use to determine student learning? How is the information used?
4. Collins writes that effective leaders “see what is essential and ignore the rest.” Focus on what is vital and eliminate all extraneous distraction. “Stop doing the senseless things that consume so much time and energy.” What is our school doing that is non-essential? Is it consuming our energy? How can it be eliminated? How can we have a clear focus?
5. DuFour asked his teams of teachers to explain and justify their assignments and exams to ensure the right mix of objective testing and assessments. Could you explain and justify your assignments and assessments? DuFour’s teams also reviewed grade-distribution data and failure rates. Does our school? Are you willing to conduct reviews to determine the impact of procedure on teaching quality and curriculum coherence? How would this function in our school?
6. Referencing Marzano’s work, it is emphasized that scheduling is essential to success. When we examine our schedule, does it meet the practical ways outlined by which both leaders and teachers can ensure standards are actually taught?  
Do we have...
  - a) a common schedule for teaching the standards such as curriculum map or pacing guide
  - b) teacher teams who meet by month or quarter to review and discuss evidence of what is actually being taught.
  - c) regular reviews with teacher leaders and teaching teams to focus on teaching and its

impact

- d) quarterly curriculum review with evidence such as formative assessments, grade books, team lesson logs, student work
7. Professional Learning Communities depend on a formal dialogue process to assist in the transition from traditional schooling. The dialogue allows the parties to thoroughly inquire and understand one another's thinking. What is in place in our school that follows DuFour's formal dialogue process? What should we improve or implement?
- a) Make a case for a change or initiative
  - b) Provide reasoning, evidence, and concrete examples that argue for adopting the change
  - c) Acknowledge areas of uncertainty to help achieve clarity or solutions
  - d) Invite others to question assumptions and conclusion
8. Marshall advocates that the teacher evaluation process should include these questions:
- a. What percentage of students scored at the advanced, basic, or below-basic levels?
  - b. In which areas did students do best, and where were they confused or unsuccessful?
  - c. What is our strategy for addressing the weakest areas and helping students who are struggling?
- Are you in favor of basing the teacher evaluation process on your work with colleagues, improved performance on formative assessments, and conforming to agreed-upon curriculum?
9. Fullan contends that linking compensation to evaluation would actually lead to higher pay for teachers. He calls it the "quid pro quo world of delivering results to secure more resources." Should raises be dependent upon performance?
10. Peters urges schools to celebrate what they want to see more of. Peters encourages leaders to obsessively and frequently praise employees by creating multiple public forum for recognition. How does our school reward, recognize and celebrate? How often? Is it authentic? Evans says we shower recognition on pupils but deny it to adults. Does our school recognize the achievements of adults? How do we improve?

## Chapter 10: Scaling Up Central Office and State-Level Leadership in the Learning Community

### Overview

Chapter 10 proclaims that schools must face the brutal facts about school leadership. It also dares to propose that clarity and simplicity are achieved through coordinating and reinforcing the few simple actions. Chapter 10 further emphasizes that improved school leadership has profound benefits will occur at all levels.

### Discussion Questions

1. A single team or a single school has the power to create a pocket of greatness. For unprecedented effectiveness, work must extend to the district, state and provincial levels. Leaders at these levels must also work in teams. How can this be achieved? What would these meetings look like?
2. Alvarado counsels that everything in an administrative meeting should be geared toward the issue of teaching and learning, not turf, administration, budgets, and power. How do our administrative meetings compare?
3. Schmoker says that most of the problems that prohibit learning communities from being effective are solvable. He likens the difficulties to speed-bumps, not brick walls. What speed bumps will we encounter in our district? Which ones will seem like brick walls?
4. Discuss Schmoker's question: "If such simple, focused action will have...immense benefits on whole districts, what will happen if these practices occur at the state level, and are reinforced and required by state-level officials?"
5. The Education School Project found in their study that the key problem in educational programs is lack of focus. Does our school have a focus? What is it? What should it be?

## Conclusion: Why Not Us? Why Not Now?

### Overview

The conclusion motivates us to start immediately to change the current system.

### Discussion Questions

1. Schmoker concludes with “we can change the world. Let’s start this school year.” Are we ready to change the world? Are we ready to start this school year? What will we change? What is our timeline?

### Appendix A

#### Suggestions for Teaching Critical and Argumentative Literacy

### Overview

Appendix A reiterates key themes in Section II. It provides practical suggestions, questions, and topics to guide productive activities in a variety of subject areas.

### Discussion Questions

1. How are the suggestions in Appendix A relevant to your setting?
2. What information can you take with you?
3. Which quote or activity caught your attention?

### Appendix B

#### Start Here for Improving Teaching and Learning

### Overview

Appendix B points out that the structures and practices to improve teaching and learning are at hand. There is not reason to delay their implementation.

### Discussion Questions

1. Define collegiality. What does it look like in our school? What should it look like? How can we get there?
2. School improvement takes more than collegiality. What other factors affect achievement? How are we dealing with those factors? How should we be dealing with those factors? How can we get there?
3. Schmoker closes with “The stakes are high, but success could redefine public education and the education professions. It could enable us to reach unprecedented levels of quality,

equity, and achievement.” What is at stake? What will happen if we don’t redefine public education? What will happen if we do redefine public education?