



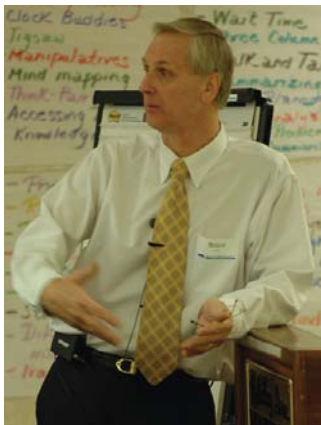
# Just for the ASKing!

by Bruce Oliver

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*Just for the ASKing!* is a monthly column that addresses the needs of instructional leaders, particularly building level administrators. Each month, this column provides information, insights, and suggestions that help administrators as they strive to be instructional leaders in schools. The monthly columns cover a wide array of topics, including: improving achievement for all students, the importance of active learning, establishing and maintaining a collaborative culture, and looking at data beyond the numbers.

## Top Ten Tips for Achieving and Maintaining Your AYP



Bruce facilitating the Leading the Learning workshop.

Many of my recent interactions with administrators and teachers turn to the same subject, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The stress level is high as educators try to determine how to maintain the AYP they have already achieved or how to reach an AYP goal that has not been met. School personnel tend to spend a great deal of time analyzing test scores from the previous year's statewide testing program; there is, however, much data beyond the state test scores that we need to consider. An analysis of formative assessment results, our interactions as professionals, the learning experiences we provide for our students, and our use of educational research to add new practices to our teaching repertoires provides rich data about adjustments we might make.

In an effort to capture the essence of how we might achieve our goals I've put together **The Top Ten Tips for Achieving and Maintaining Your AYP**.

1. **Align Your Practices** - The first and most basic question educators must ask themselves is: Are we teaching what we are supposed to be teaching? All states publish documents that set out with specificity the standards that must be taught in each subject at each grade level. There are, however, instances in which individual schools and whole school divisions have not yet aligned their teaching practices with the standards, benchmarks and indicators published by their state departments of education. Students can not be expected to perform well on state assessments if instruction is not aligned with the state standards.
2. **Analyze Your Priorities** - If we expect students to be successful, we must adjust our priorities to make sure that we are spending most of our time focusing on the essential to know information that our students must learn. Many state and district documents provide schools with the essential understandings or essential knowledge that must be taught to students. In those districts where such documents are not available, it is important for grade level teachers or departments to meet and determine the essential to know components of their curricula.

3. **Amend Your Planning** - Teachers should ask themselves: Do I know and understand the standards I am supposed to teach? As a teacher, do I keep standards documents close at hand so that my daily plans reflect the standards I am to address? With these questions in mind, teachers should analyze their planning practices to determine if they are using the standards-based education (SBE) planning process. Teachers who adopt this method of planning are finding greater satisfaction with their teaching and improved achievement results with their students. The SBE planning process (see at the end of this newsletter) asks teachers to "begin with the end in mind," plan assessments up front, and do a task analysis before they design the learning experiences.
4. **Assess Your Program** - The second step in the SBE planning process is to create an assessment that precisely and exactly measures the learning objectives. At the outset of the unit, the students should know exactly how and when their learning will be assessed. There should be no mystery, no confusion, and no guessing what is on the teacher's mind. We should not be using assessment practices that have been used for decades just because we inherited these practices. After teaching the students the content of the unit and administering the perfectly-aligned assessment, it is important for teachers to analyze the assessment results. Simply recording grades in the grade book and moving on to the next unit does not make sense if our goal is student learning. A teacher who wants to emphasize mastery learning will give students multiple opportunities to reassess until an acceptable level of achievement has been reached.
5. **Accommodate Your Pupils** - As mentioned above, two of the essential components of the SBE planning process are determining at the outset of the process the learning outcomes you wish students to achieve and then creating an assessment that is a clear match to those outcomes. An equally important component is planning the learning experiences in which students will be engaged in order to reach the learning goals. It is all well and good to devise clear plans and match assessments to those learning outcomes, but if teachers do not plan learning experiences that help students achieve the best results on the assessments, they may be simply creating unnecessary levels of frustration for themselves and their students. Essential, but often neglected, parts of the planning process are task analysis, pre-assessment, and practices and rehearsals which are scaffolded to ensure student success.
6. **Adjust Your Pacing** - The greatest asset that teachers have is time, the time to teach their students. It can also be a teacher's greatest enemy, especially if it is misused. Many teachers struggle to find the necessary time to teach all that is required. For this reason, it is important for teachers to adjust the pacing of their teaching so that they teach all the necessary standards. Some districts have created pacing guides so that the teachers know precisely what standards and benchmarks must be addressed in a given marking period. When that is not the case, teachers who teach the same grade level or the same subject need to collaborate in the creation of pacing guides.
7. **Advance Your Pedagogy** - The most successful teachers are those that consider themselves lifelong learners. They actively seek out new ideas, are open-minded and willing to try those ideas, and willingly share what they learn with their peers. These teachers do not expect one approach or program to provide all the support their students need. Instead, they integrate the best from many approaches in their efforts to meet the needs of their learners. They see themselves as true professionals, and like professionals in all fields, they are not satisfied with the status quo.
8. **Approach Your Parents** – The parents of the students we teach are our most influential partners and can be our greatest allies. Parents are the people who know their children best and who can provide teachers with greater insights into what makes their children “tick.” Teachers can benefit from truly listening to parents as they work together to try to create successes for the children they have in common. By communicating with parents regularly about the learning goals of the class, teachers can present themselves in a positive and professional mode that parents will respond to in an equally positive way.

9. **Assemble Your Peers** – Researcher Judith Warren Little found that the schools with the highest levels of achievement were the ones in which teachers engaged in conversations with their fellow teachers about the art of teaching. Research in recent years has pointed to the fact that schools that become communities of learners are the most successful. Teachers often work in isolation as they deal with their problems and frustrations. It is the teachers who collaborate with one another, who share both successes and failures, who willingly give and accept new ideas, and who analyze data together that see the greatest results in student achievement.
  
10. **Acknowledge Your Progress** – There are very few teachers and administrators who are not physically and mentally tired at the end of the day. As teachers learn new practices, as they add new ideas to their repertoires, as they change behaviors that will enhance student learning by taking risks, and as they work with their peers for the overall good of their school, we should make sure to set aside time to celebrate the successes and acknowledge the progress we are making. Celebrations of the progress that is being made can be a great stress reducer.

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# **SBE Planning Process**

**1st**  
What should  
students know  
and be able to do?

**2nd**  
How will the  
students and I  
know when  
they are  
successful?

**Task  
Analysis**

**3rd**  
What learning  
experiences will  
facilitate student  
success?

**4th**  
Based on data,  
how do I refine  
the learning  
experiences?