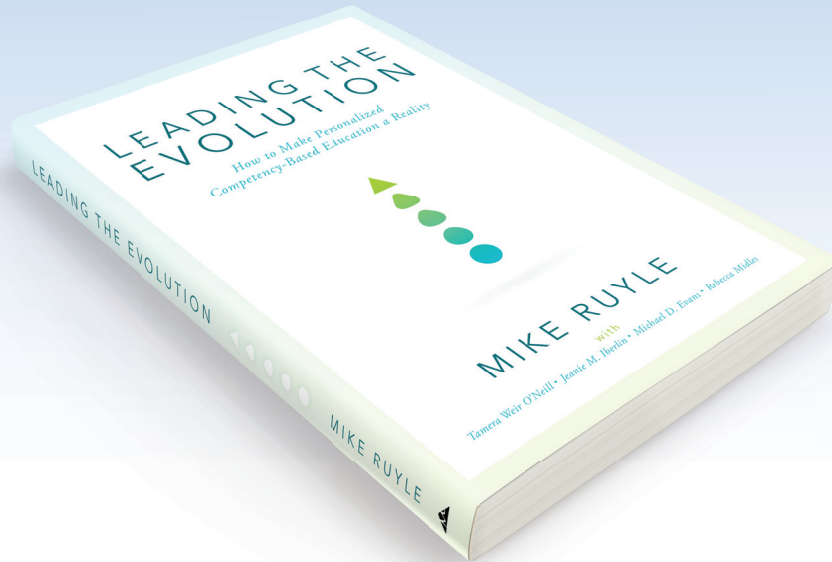


**Creating the Anywhere,
Anytime Classroom**

BOOK STUDY

with Solution Tree

by Mike Ruyle



The Voice of Students and Teachers

Additional comments from teachers and students from interviews regarding their perceptions of the personalized, competency-based model and the leadership qualities to bring it to fruition.

Leader Comments

Making change like this is really hard. I've had to stretch myself and my own learning much farther than I've ever had to do over my entire career. For much of my career, I thought I understood standards and teaching – and I could get by just 'doing the job' for another few years. But there is so much that I don't know – and the only way to get through it has been to have a colleague on the same page as me. We would go into each other's offices on Fridays and collapse from the physical and mental exhaustion – as well as from the emotional fatigue of trying to lead lots of people in a direction that I could see the destination. Those Friday afternoons were HUGE though. We could gather our thoughts, gain some clarity and perspective, and I'd always leave re-energized to begin work again next week. It was our own personal PLC and I never could have led this this change without it. It saved my career.

This school district has to decide if they want to be leaders. I know that there are some over there (district office building) that don't like what is going on. I also know that some of the teachers have been talking against

this to the school board. There's just a lot of gossip and I don't think that our district's leaders are on the same page – at least they don't communicate a united front that shows confidence and competence. Change is hard and the old system can seem easier because we all know how to do it. There are several teachers here that don't want to change their practices because change takes lots of hard work. It would help if the leaders all communicated and modeled that we are in this for the long haul together.

Teacher comments on critical leadership qualities

Vision

... the vision leads to everything. We teach to the heart. Here we are changing kids' lives and trying to make it better for them forever. It's all change based – we are always trying to do things better, so we try everything, and if it doesn't work, we all try to fix it together.

The principal has the vision thing down. He asks me questions about things that might work better, or maybe just help him understand a situation more clearly, but he's always making me think about things in a different way. Sometimes, it reinforces me in my thinking about what I'm doing, sometimes it confuses me, and sometimes he makes a light go on in my head. But I'm always thinking now.

When the administration here hires people here, they look for "fit," not just certification. I've been through lots of interviews before and was never asked questions like I was in the interview here. It's unique. Not a single question about my content knowledge, but they were probing to see how open-minded I would be and how adaptable to a new way of doing business. And if someone doesn't fit, they don't just hammer them, but they try to help them find a job elsewhere that could be a better match for them. The change is happening and most of us have fully bought in here.

Central Office was very supporting and flexible of us as we went through everything. This was especially true with teachers who did not want to follow the model. I know that a couple tried to go above our principal and were quickly shot down...This sent a clear message to all of us that we could not go around the principal if we didn't like these changes. The changes are happening – everyone needs to get on board and row together.

Our administration is totally focused on the staff and the kids. It's all about the learning, and not just the teaching – but the learning for both kids and adults. That was a new idea for us, but it's made all the difference. The principals are very supportive of anything that could work better for kids and encourage us to try different things. There's lots of freedom and lots of support here. Also, since the administration is so dedicated to community involvement and parental input, there is a culture here that encourages risk-taking.

Our principal was the driving force behind this in the beginning. He had to work with the teachers and the kids and downtown. Now, we are all on the same team and are the driving force ourselves. And now, we are leaping

higher every month. But he needed to lead us in the beginning and during the tough times. It takes courage and energy – and not many people have that!

When I have a boss with vision and I can see and trust him, then we work collaboratively. Just like in my classroom – if kids trust me and know where we are going, it's easier to work together to get things done. In this program, the vision was there in the beginning, although it has changed and evolved over the years. I've had my share of disagreements with the leadership because I don't think they understand my subject area all the time, but we have made huge strides here and this is great. We are on the same page because the vision and direction is clear, he's right beside me, and we can move together.

My previous school tended to focus on non-offensive things – the principal was afraid to bring up difficult issues and was always afraid to offend some teachers. Here, we can argue and debate, but the vision is clear, and the innovation follows. Our input and feedback matters – but we know that a few complaining teachers won't derail the process.

Risk-Taking and Celebrating Success

We celebrate success always. In staff meetings, in district meetings. All the time. And we do walk-throughs here that are very important. People are always walking in the room and I have feedback within the hour. I don't see that as a burden – it's positive and empowering

Teachers that take risks here are not threatened. In fact risk-taking is part of the strategic design. We hire risk-takers, and are encouraged to take risks in our evaluations.

It has taken a lot of trial and error so far, and I am sure that there will be more of that in the future...but it's good to know that we aren't going to get dinged if we are trying to do something creative. Our principal actually demands we be creative and learner-centered all the time, and is in the room to give good feedback and he speaks to us often as the voice of the kids. It makes me feel that I'm on the right track, even if I don't see the big picture sometimes.

This whole model was a risk, and now we are seeing positive results. We take calculated risks all the time. They don't always work, but we all see what happened are on the same page moving forward. In the larger, traditional school here in the district, we never take risks. We always pull back.

We were encouraged to try new ideas at every step. Our principal gave us the green light to go forward and explore some of these concepts. If things worked? Great. If they didn't – well, we learned something and moved on from there. And it's amazing how the kids love the new way even more than the teachers. It's totally changed the culture here.

...we are willing and encouraged to try anything – whatever could work – and we have no fear of failure or change. But leadership is not just flying by the seat of their pants – it's all research based and solid with data. Our principal isn't afraid of offending people – he'll call it like it is and work to keep us focused on the main thing. You can't have second-order change without risk and focus.

This is the first time I truly understand the art of teaching. I thought I was doing things with my classes that were good – and it all had some good stuff in it. But now I help kids, and don't just teach curriculum. Pacing guides and curriculum and test scores are huge here – so it was a risk to get away from that and focus on kids learning. It was scary. But the principal was resolute and the results speak for themselves.

We celebrate small victories almost every day. Other places I've been are not bad, but it's harder to do it and harder to see it – it can seem contrived. One leader in my past had this rotating award thing that the teachers thought was ridiculous – and we feared being singled out to get it! It was embarrassing! But when teachers are authentically rewarded and recognized, they will do the same thing more with kids in class. They know how it feels and want to spread it.

Rewarding short-term growth is important, because this whole shift will take time and energy to make it happen long term. Teachers and kids need to be celebrated regularly. It creates an infectious energy.

We celebrate all the time. We have changed things. Our principal celebrates us, and we celebrate each other. And we celebrate the kids a lot. It has a great trickle-down effect. We are good at innovation and celebrating 'wins.' And then the kudos lead to discussion with colleagues. People come up to me and say, 'so what's happening there?' On the main campus – not so much. The Monday Memo is fine, but pretty hokey. Just like some mini shout out. And too many kudos breed resentment. It's either the same people getting the recognition, or people that don't really deserve it. It's a fine line, but really important.

Visibility and Personal Involvement

The principal is always around – in the halls and in rooms. At first it was uncomfortable as it's so different – the principal in the larger school never connects with people like that. But the kids like it when he's here asking them about things. It makes them feel good when they can explain things and that he knows the direction they are going. It's a symbol that we are all in this together. He also inspires a confidence and calm here, we see it in action every day. He encourages, and actually demands, that I get out of the box. He gives me the confidence to try new things, and even tells me 'you can't get in trouble here for trying something.' I have no fear and I'm not always looking to make sure things are good so I'll have a job next year. He's supportive and really helps me get better.

We have been encouraged as a staff to examine traditional practices and realign to the model. The principal is always leading and always asking questions that we can't answer using traditional education. This has been

a great change in my classroom because I am able to focus on student learning, not just providing a grade. It's hard but exhilarating!

I love how my principal is so available for us. He challenges us all the time, which can be exhausting, but he seems to show up in my room just when I need it. It's not one of those situations where the principal tells us to do something, then disappears or is "busy." This guy is here, available, and takes the heat so we don't always have to.

Our leadership team is very visible in the school and in the community. Especially the building leaders, but the district people as well. I do think communication could be better lots of time, but they're trying. One thing happening is that site leaders will train a group of parents in the performance-based system, and those people will serve as trainers for other groups of parents. The principal teaches the parents and they teach each other. That's good, but I think that should be a district-level job. The principal's job should be to train the staff and focus on us – this is hard enough that more building help would be good.

Culture Shift

There is a lot of front-end loading with this - we need to identify the goals, communicate the scales, and change the purpose of grading. It's exhausting – but my life is so much easier now. I was going to leave teaching, but now I love my job. There is such a different energy and culture now. If my principal left and we went back to the old way, I'd retire instantly.

Daily collaboration with my colleagues has been huge in facilitating this process. We have been able to have meaningful conversations about the pros and cons of implementation. Having this opportunity has been a great way for me to see what others are doing and how it works. It's so great to open our classrooms and know we are in this together. It's not all about the principal anymore – we are all in this together. It feels good that we are learning together.

Some staff members had a focus on sabotaging the model and were not willing to change. There was a good deal of controversy around their actions, but they were moved out...this left the teachers in (this school) who want to work on being better teachers. The removal of these staff members was critical in establishing a new organizational culture. The traditional model of education is fairly engrained with some teachers and I think they will resist change as long as they can. But the new culture from both the teachers and the kids will win the day in the end.

Changing a culture is hard, but this change won't happen without it. Our principal was getting crushed by a group of people – some really ugly, unprofessional stuff. But the other teachers were watching closely and if he let that stuff go on, he would have lost the rest us. I felt bad for him sometimes, but that was his job and we got through it. The naysayers are always going to talk, but their voice isn't loud anymore.

Not all of our teachers really trust the system yet, and some still don't understand it - so their ability to innovate can be hampered. But then the administration spends more time in their room trying to help them. And staff members really help each other. We're a good team here.

Innovation is part of the culture here. The building administration talks about it all the time, and good principals model what they want to see. It leads to lots of positive energy.

Having everyone on the same page and speaking the same language is huge. And once the kids bought in, the entire culture changed. Everyone is focused on learning and results now - like laser focused. And it's not just some mission statement - it's real. It's changed everything!

Teacher Comments on Academic Optimism

Most of the teachers here are awesome!! And we all appreciate the efforts and improvement we have made here. It's amazing. I can't teach the old way anymore, and I used to hate going to department meetings where people - intelligent people - couldn't get outside their box. Here, the principal listens and we can wrestle with things. He values my opinion, and even if we disagree, we can always figure it out.

...I am focused on finding things, how to engage individual kids. It's like the coaching process, I need to evaluate where kids are in terms of skills and knowledge, and then figure out how I can get them excited to keep moving. ... I shift according to needs. It's all about connections. It's not about me, it's about them, and I need to always think about that so that I can be better and more effective.

I'm always trying to find ways to engage kids with the content. Our school is so much different than it used to be. The sleepers don't exist anymore. I can't say that all students are engaged, but it's getting better and better every year. And that's exciting. It makes me more optimistic about what I do and how successful our kids can be.

We took the SAOS as a staff. It was so empowering to see that the teachers who have bought into the system the most have the highest academic optimism scores, and their students are performing better and attending school at a higher rate! How about that? Gave us just the boost we needed.

The best thing is when the teachers and the principal can challenge the kids - especially the kids who've struggled in school - and they see it. The light goes on. It rarely happened when the teachers just gave kids work to do - but now they know the goal, it's something they can achieve, and they think and they figure out how to get things done. The principal modeled that for us and now we do it in the classroom.

What kids need to do just to "get by" is so much higher now than it used to be. And if kids have grit and are motivated, the sky's the limit. But the motivational piece is huge, and it's VERY difficult here.

I think that is our biggest challenge here in this community. We have done a great job getting the low kids to basic proficiency. Kids know how to be successful. But we need to be able to bring in higher-level classes, like AP, so that our highest kids can be pushed to their ability level. That is our next step here, I think.

The biggest change is that we were able to have a voice in the process. We were motivated to be a part of something that made things better for staff and students. The support provided by the principal during this time was amazing. The book talk, bringing an expert here, and the visit to other schools in the model provided some of the best PD.

Our principal is all about innovation. It's all he talks about. It's good, but sometimes he's talking above me. Not in a bad way - it's just I don't see what he means or how it fits in yet. But we celebrate innovation and share ideas all the time. There is great collaboration here and we push each other to innovate and think differently.

My principal talks to me about education every day. He actually challenges me to think differently, and I think the kids appreciate it. No one wants the class to look like some traditional teacher-centered room. Sometimes, I'll change a lesson on the fly, right here and now if I think it could work better. At other schools, I never really have seen principals in the room challenging teachers to be better and think differently - it's almost like they are afraid to challenge teachers. But it doesn't have to be in a bad way. Kids here see that it's ok to wrestle with things and collaboration can lead to better results.

The principal is deeply involved in my curriculum and instruction. At first I was offended - like he didn't think he knew what I was doing! But he always defers to my expertise as well. It's pretty cool. If you really want to implement change, and if schools really are going to evolve, we need people in rooms trying to lead it and help people do it better. Teachers need leaders who really speak the language and know what life is like for me.

For lots of years, we've talked about "vision" and direction at this school, but I was never sure exactly what that meant for me as a teacher. This year, I saw personalized learning as a goal - and now the vision is competency-based education, and everything flows from that. The principal is more involved in our subjects and our teaching than I've ever seen from anyone else. But at least he knows my subject area and my job now. And that's rare.

The principal and the teachers all speak the same language - even though we are not all at the same level of proficiency ourselves. Our principal really knows his stuff - he's is always in the rooms asking kids what they are doing, asking me what we are doing, and throwing out lots of ideas - and it makes sense what he's trying to do. Even though I don't have the system down well yet, I know I'm getting there. But if he didn't really know what it was all about and what it looks like, we'd easily revert to what we already know and what we always do. We trust in his knowledge and like that he doesn't always depend on us, as teachers, to figure it out.

We gathered lots of data during the implementation period. The district posted the data and hired a data specialist. Now is the time to be true to their word and follow through on this. We need to be able to challenge

the fast movers with real-life opportunities and advanced experiences. Just because a kid is done with level 3, how can we take that kid to the next level? Sometimes we are so worried about the low kids that we forget the higher ones. We are working on a system for all kids. That's really important, and I can see it happening now!

It's great when the rules and the goals actually align. This is the first time I ever had that. We brought students in to help us make the rules - usually rules are just imposed on kids. Now, they have a purpose that makes sense and things seem more orderly as everyone is on the same page.

The great thing is that our principal in charge of this innovation is also the administrator in charge of finance. We have been able to go to him directly with requests for things we need to make it work, and he makes it happen for us immediately. We have lots of discussion about resources so money is not spent frivolously, but there has never been a time when we could not get what we needed. He prioritizes the needs of our successful, innovative teachers over the status quo. And that's amazing!

We always spent money every year to attend some content area conference that teachers could travel to - it was fun and seemed interesting and made us feel "professional." But I can't really say that it made me a better teacher or it made a big difference in my classroom. I'll admit that we actually got much more out of having a couple of days each semester to meet - beyond PLC time - and really consider the data and our practice. The principal made this happen and the costs for substitutes and lunch was much better spent than on travel arrangements or new textbooks.

Learner Comments on Engagement

Personalization

I need more personal time to learn things - not lots, but enough to help me get into it. Then I can go on and do it quickly, and sometimes I help others. I'm not like a cow in a herd here. Here, it's not just "shut up and listen, shut up and do this." It's more of "how can I help you to really master this learning goal?"

In English, I read the prioritized standard until I understand what I need to do. Sometimes we go over the big prioritized standard as a whole class, and we always point back to it. All the time. My teachers help by talking with me or my group until I'm sure I know it means, then I get to work in my way to show that I 'get' it. I love that. And if I don't think that an assignment or assessment is right for me to show my knowledge, then I can change it and show them how I can do it in a better way.

I'll work harder for my teachers because they work harder for me. They help me get better at things that I already understand and they don't just make everyone do work. I hate the busy work that teachers used to give us just to keep us on task. Do teachers like busy work in their lives? Now the work makes sense because the teachers work together with me to come up with a plan. I'm much more willing to do the work now - in fact, I actually like it most of the time.

I love when the teachers give me one-to-one time. Some teachers are better at it than others. But if they know me, they can help me with the technology, and all the subjects get more interesting.

In competency-based, kids have more of a chance to get motivated because they can follow their own interests. It's liberating to be able to think differently and do what I want. I'm encouraged to do better because I can. I can tell on my own if the work I do is good enough or not. I really don't need for the teachers to tell me, because the standards and scales have it spelled out. And the teachers don't just throw work at us. I get what I need to do, and I do what I need to get it done. It's really all about student performance. People know where they are and they move from there. And that is how it works in jobs in the real world.

In the normal high school, I was just in the middle of a big herd of people, and we were moved along like cows. In performance-based, I get to choose my own path and move that way. It's so much more interesting and motivating, and I want to be done early so I can move on with life. And now I will be done early with a higher skill level!

I hate it when you go into a class and a teacher just tells you the rules, so here I get to understand what I have to do and then do it MY way. I need more hands-on, and the personal work with the standards allows me to excel. In a regular class, when a teacher is up blabbing, it just goes right through me.

I understand my classes better and then I can do better on the test. It feels GREAT knowing how I will do on a test. And if I mess up, I fix it and can still move on. I like this better, so I'm a lot more motivated. Most of all the kids like it better. They can get ahead, and they have a choice on what to read, and on what to do. It motivates me to move and get done more quickly. It can be harder sometimes to have independence, but I do learn things better. I just have to work harder at it, which is probably a good thing.

What's been great is how we each have our own computers and how we can use them to study subjects in a way that makes sense to us. Some of my classes still teach all kids from the same page in a book – but not all kids are listening or get what's going on. I need to be able to learn stuff in a way that makes sense to me. Teachers need to let me do that and I'll work harder.

If I get to learn about the things that interest me, I'll do better. If I have to do just what some teacher says, I don't do as well. That's why kids cheat or don't do anything, because just doing what a teacher says is important isn't always important to us.

You know, I'm not sure I really get more actual 1-1 time. But between the teachers and working together with other kids in the class, it sure seems like more 1-1 time.

Teachers help kids more here – it's not just about getting assignments and worksheets and stuff out to kids. Teaching is more personalized for each kid. I can tell if I understand things or not, and I know when I'm ready to demonstrate it. I love that and I do better.

Some teachers really ask me what I like to do and help me do those things better. Other teachers just tell me what to do, and then kids just do it, like a circus animal. If I get to pick assignments, I do sooooo much better and I like school so much more.

I know that many of the things I learn here will help me get into college, and I really want to go to college! Teachers respect me when I say that and they help me more 1-1.

In math, we are traditional and don't often get personalized help. We just take notes and do homework, which is boring and I don't focus. In my competency-based classes where we have more 1-1, I do so much better.

My teacher is always near to help if I need it, and she talks to me all the time – every single day to be sure I know why I'm doing things. I like that.

Math is fun – because I can do multiplication, and now I'm doing harder multiplication. I get multiplication, so it's fun, even when I'm not great at the harder stuff yet. I will be pretty soon because I'm one of the best in my class at math. Multiplication is a big learning goal for us this year and my teacher helps me do it really well. I'm at level 4 most of the time!

In my regular classes, my teachers teach stuff. In competency-based classes, my teachers teach me. It's weird. If you walk in, it doesn't look totally different – but it really is totally different.

I've been a straight A student my whole life. But it's just that I could do the stuff pretty easily. I didn't really learn or care about the material. I do now though, The teachers work with me to make myself better, and I don't just copy assignments to turn in any more. I really get it now.

How Teachers Work in This System

Teachers teach differently in this system. It's the scales and the goals. Kids are more independent, but teachers are still there to help and push us to be better. They are always there for us. In this program, you actually have to learn and understand concepts. There is no way to mess around. You have to work because you need to understand that there are no Cs or Ds. You have to prove that you really know the standards and do good work.

The teachers in my regular classes hold me back all the time. They are all so 'by the book' and they can't get out of their own comfort zone to focus on what I need or understand. They don't address us as different people unless someone has bad behavior. Here in this program though, they really know me and help me to be better in everything. I would have dropped out early, but these people can see me and help me get better.

Most of the work is sooooo boring in the regular school. I can't believe teachers think we really like sitting there and listening to them every single day!! And then the stupid homework!! Just tell me what I need to do in class – don't waste my time in class and I won't need to do your work at home.

I think lots of teachers like traditional school better because it's easier for them to have kids just follow directions and do what they say, but that doesn't push kids to be better. They don't have to connect with kids and work with them individually as much. They just have to teach something once and then give homework. But here, they teach in a way that fits me better. This is awesome!

There are too many teachers and subjects that don't help us. I know we are supposed to see lots of things to be well rounded, but regular school doesn't really do that. It just forces kids to do things that are of NO interest. Then with a teacher who doesn't care about us, and I can guarantee I'll never like it.

Lots of times, I go into a traditional class and am excited, and the teacher turns me off to it forever. Big classes with a boring teacher, makes it totally not relevant for me.

Nothing about this competency-based program should change. I just wish all the teachers were good at it. This system makes more sense. I've improved my speaking and writing. If there is a topic I'm interested in, I get to work on it more which will make it all better when I turn it in. I like how the teachers push me to think about lots of different things.

I hate how some teachers just talk to a whole class in some of my traditional classes. How boring is that? Like he thinks everyone understands or cares about what he is saying??? Really? In my good classes, where competency-based really works, the teachers work with all of us in a way we are interested in and they help us learn that way. I want them to help me in my way, not talk at me in their way all the time.

I hate it when you go into a regular class and a teacher just tells you the rules - so here I get to understand what I have to do and then do it MY way. I need more hands-on, and the personal work with the standards allows me to excel. In a regular class, or even here if the teacher isn't good - when a teacher is up there blabbing - it just goes right through me.

The teachers here call parents, which makes kids work harder. Others down the hall don't because they don't want to take the time. You need to be self-motivated. If you're lazy, you will fail either way. Those kids fail here or down the hall in the regular school.

In my last school, you had to adjust to the teacher. If you knew what they wanted, you would do well, you just had to figure that out. It's a game. In this school, the teachers adjust to the kids. It's not a game because you can't fake it. But you know what you need to do and the teachers help you get there. the teachers It's harder, but it's better. Lots better.

Teachers and tests are what always hold me back in traditional classes. I should test when I'm ready. I'm not a slacker, I'm just not as ready as some kids on test day. The scales make all the difference because kids are in different places and have different strengths. My teachers here know that, and teach me that way, and help me do better. They help me more here, and it is so much better.

I really don't need the teachers to tell me things in competency-based because standards and scales have it spelled out. They encourage me to do better though because I really can usually do better, and I can almost always tell on my own if my work is good enough. The teachers actually help me find my interests and point out different things I may find exciting.

There are not as many huge lectures I have to sit through. Teachers give me more and better explanations. The teachers are also more open to me being different and be able to show my knowledge in different ways. I actually try to get to level 4 in classes now!! I 'get' things more, because I see where I need to be. I respect myself more, and I respect the school more.

The teachers are also more open to me being different and being able to show my knowledge in different ways.

Ability to Move at Own Pace

Goals and scales are huge – I get school now. I like that I can follow my own progress, and that I can do lots of things like quizzes, posters, worksheets, essays, and PowerPoints. I like essays and PowerPoints the best because then I get to show what I know better.

I'm engaged in most of my classes, and I like how I can move ahead and progress faster if I want to.

When I can complete a task without teacher help, I know I'm proficient. I know what it needs to look like. It's better than sitting back and listening to a teacher blab. No one cares. I can work on my individual pace and do things better – not just turn stuff in to get the points.

I love seeing myself progress on my measurement topics. I couldn't go to school without goals and scales anymore.

Teachers help me where I am, and I don't feel I have to keep up with a class where I don't know what's going on. I can go at my own pace and not be rushed by deadlines. I'm working harder than I did in the regular school and want to stay in school. The work in my other classes made me want to leave – and I'm only a freshman!

I took two tests in math this week and got A's on both of them. I like being able to go at my own pace and not wait for everybody else. Everybody taking a test in the same day is so silly to me. If I'm ready earlier, why should I have to wait? I have the knowledge, let me go on!

I love this! It's saving me. I like coming to class and being able to focus on what I need to do, and not just follow what the teacher says. Time-based education really is pretty ridiculous. People learn things differently. Schools need to see that and not have people move through like cows. The whole school should do it like this. Things are a lot different. I'm proud of that. It's not about the grade.

The pressure is off for kids to meet deadlines when they can't do it. In regular classes, bad grades and punishment is always hanging over us. It shouldn't be all about assignments and homework and attendance. I had to go to treatment for an eating disorder twice and missed some time, but it doesn't matter as long as I know the stuff and can show my skills. You have to make sure you really know things before you can move on.

I love the advisories and all the technology. In some classes we have to listen to a teacher talk a lot, but in the other ones there is always lots of activity and the teachers just help us find things in different ways based on what the scale says I need to be able to do.

I want to go to college, so I'm motivated. And I like learning. I like how the teachers change things every year. If you're dedicated, you can really get ahead and have so much knowledge.

It's easy because I get to show things my way, I know what proficiency should look like, and I know if I have it or not - and so does the teacher. I was always scared to raise my hand in the regular classes. Now I do it all the time because I know I'll get the help I need, and I know that I'm not stupid. Other kids ask me for help sometimes, and that makes me feel good. I never felt that in any class before. Since I feel like I'm moving, I get more comfortable. The teacher knows where I am. It feels good to progress through and have them check in with me.

I 'get' things more, because I see where I need to be. I respect myself more, and I respect the school more."

The goals and scales - that's where it's at - when we take the time to really get them. I understand my classes better, and then I can do better on the test. It feels GREAT knowing how I will do on a test. And if I mess up, I fix it and can still move on. I like this so much better, so I'm a lot more motivated. Most all the kids like it better. They can get ahead, and they have a choice on what to read, and on what to do. It motivates me to move and get done more quickly. It can be harder sometimes to have independence, but I do learn things better. I just have to work harder at it, which is probably a good thing.

I want to be an accountant, so the math is important. But really the English is great because I need to be able to speak formally and write well so that my business will succeed. Everything I do is to help me get where I want to be.

Usually, if I really do the work, I think I know the material better and then it's more interesting. At least now it's my work, and not just stuff the teacher is making us do.

More Authentic Learning

I like this way more! It feels GREAT knowing how I will do on an assessment, and if I mess-up, I can still fix it and move on. I like this better so I'm more motivated. Most of the kids like it better because they have a choice on what to read and what to do. It can be harder, sometimes, to have the independence, but I do learn things better when I have choices, and I just have to work harder, which is probably a good thing.

Instead of busy work, worksheets, and assignments, in performance-based you get to show you are capable of doing skills, and after you show that you have it down, you can move on. Then all the other things get better because you know it more. I'm doing so much better, and that just makes me try harder. I LOVE being successful at school!

This is not as easy as people think. It's actually harder, but I'm doing better in school now than I ever have. It all makes more sense to me, and I feel good when I see myself moving and getting things done. We are getting a better education here. All the other kids are getting cheated. Too bad for them!

I was going to drop out before you let me come here. I hate the regular classes because they don't make sense and I didn't care. They just make you do work that doesn't matter. But now, I know what I'm learning is important, and I'm doing a good job in school. For the first time since 2nd grade!

This is easier to understand why I am learning things and what I need to do. Then I can do better. It makes sense. The standards are easy to understand and I get to say how I will put things together. I'm doing better than I ever have.

When I can complete a task without teacher help, I know I'm proficient. I know what it needs to look like. It's better than sitting back and listening to a teacher blab. No one cares. I can work on my individual pace and do things better – not just turn stuff in to get the points.

We need to have skills in the real world. Grades don't matter. Some kids have the grades but not the skills. That's not good for anybody. Schools need to change because kids don't care as much. Schools are not real-life lots of time.

I know I will need the skills we work on here. Kids get bored with school the regular way. It's not working really. Kids cheat all the time and just copy homework so they can turn it in for points. They just care about passing, not really learning. There is more opportunity for better learning here.

I was nervous to come here at the beginning, but this is definitely so much better. OMG! I had great grades earlier, but I would get overwhelmed sometimes, and would then shut down automatically. Here, I can go into a class and not worry about silly assignments. I know where to go and can do what I need to do to get there.

Here I get to show what I know, and not just get tested on what I don't know. Also, sometimes I might make a mistake, and in the regular class I lose points. A mistake doesn't mean I don't know it – I just made a mistake. I'm always on edge in regular classes.

I KNOW I will pass the test, because I KNOW that I can do the stuff. That feels GREAT! I failed Algebra I for 3 years – but it feels great that I can really do it and help other kids. I don't feel stupid anymore. I like that I can do school faster and better. I like how I can really understand proficiency, and that I understand the stuff they are teaching me much better.

It's not so grade-based, but real knowledge based. And I need more time usually, I hate to be rushed – it stresses me out, and then I get too focused on tests that I don't do well on.

Continued Challenges

I think they need to re-teach some of the teachers. They have been doing it the same way for so long that they can't speak to kids in a way that makes sense anymore. They need to be updated so they can teach us and update us in a better way.

Some of the teachers don't care, they just want to make us do work. The older teachers are mostly really good, but some of the newer ones are not very good. It's hard for them, and then it's hard for us.

In some of my classes, when the teacher is teaching something, I can still go forward. One problem though is that a lot of times I think they just make us all do the same stuff, like worksheets or questions, and then I don't care.

Lots of stuff I learned in the regular school is totally worthless. They teach some basics, which is good, and we all should be able to read and analyze, and think, but so much of the stuff is ridiculous. Lots of times, I go into a class and am excited, and the teacher turns me off to it forever. Big classes with a boring teacher, makes it totally not relevant for me. That's why it's so much better here. I see how it's important.

Lots of the newer teachers don't know how to do the system very well. I hate how some teachers are great and some don't seem to care very much. Then the kids don't care either.

Sometimes, if learners are behind pace, they can just copy some other kids work. And the teachers don't care. That bugs me sometimes.

I hate how some teachers don't understand the system, because then I end up doing extra work for nothing.

I don't like how they make kid's show we are proficient at lots of things, but the teachers don't have to show they are proficient at teaching us. It should be the same for everyone.

I hate being in classes with behind-pace learners. It feels like the teachers spend so much time with kids that don't want to be there that I get left alone. If kids aren't motivated, they should leave. Teachers should spend time with the kids who want to be here and want to succeed.

A big percentage of the kids don't care, and then it's harder on the teacher. It makes it harder on the rest of us who want to move quickly.

If people are not motivated to do school, then they will not do school. In traditional school, they will fail unless a teacher gives extra credit. Here though, at least they get to follow their own interests. If you can't succeed with that system, then you just don't care and those kids should go away and not make it harder on the rest of us.

Teacher Comments on Schooling in the New Model

The most important thing I do is work to make kids into independent learners. It's also the hardest thing I do – try to wean kids off me and have them take responsibility for their own learning. I try to train kids to be able to train other kids, especially in technology. Helping them engage in the material is the center of what I do. The absolute best thing about my principal is that he helps keep me focused on the main thing, which is helping kids learn better. In the past, it's always been focused on curriculum and pacing guides. But he believes in this model, and so do all of us, so he protects us from outside mandates and pressures. Our kids will do better than ever because they have solid skills, and not just had teachers who “went over things.”

Moving to this model was hard at first. Most of us didn't really want to invest too much time and energy to it – we've had way too much experience with responding to the new flavor of the month in terms of some theory the district adopted. This is the first time that the principal said 'this is what we are doing, and everything else is secondary' and he meant it. We didn't have to do some of the busy work our colleagues from other schools do – that led to breakthroughs for us and helped move things forward.

Once the district began to see real results, they backed our principal and gave full permission to move forward. Now we are seeing even better results!

I look at the common core as a risk we should be taking. We hear about it all the time, but it's just talk really. It's not a vision, it's not a passion, it's not exciting. It's really nothing that has made a change in classrooms on a large scale. Here's the deal, we always talk about curriculum and standards, but that is often just groupthink from teachers. How can I fit it into what I already do? It hasn't led to real change, and we are just continuing

in the same way, and that will eventually lead to average and mediocrity. We are so based on curriculum in most schools that it just leads to cookie cutter education. In my regular class, I often teach just like the guy next door – in fact, that the goal with pacing guides and all the other stuff. A monkey could read our curriculums and teach it. But here, it's all about process skills – I teach job skills and life skills like collaboration and leadership. It's what the community really wants, but lots of teachers don't want to hear that because it changes how they will have to operate. Here, we took a risk and then worked hard to make it work. Our principal was not afraid to take real risks because it will rock the boat. Protect the status quo or protect learning and teaching? Which is it? That's the question I'd have for any aspiring administrator.

I'm in an administrative certification program now. The best thing I learned from watching my principal is how he was able to deal with different people differently, but still keep everyone focused on the same end goal. If people were struggling and upset, he could calm them and reassure them that they were on the right track. He could also bring the energy when people needed an upper.

I've never been comfortable with conflict, and I think my principal actually likes it – it energizes him. I can't do that, but I do appreciate how he is willing to deal with everyone where they are and keep us all on the same path. It's all about keeping the eye on the vision, but being flexible enough to help everyone get better in ways that fit them. And isn't that what we should be doing in our classes with our learners?

I lesson plan differently now. I plan my formatives for the same class tomorrow – it's important to plan things while this class dynamic is still fresh in my mind. I'll also plan for which groupings should take place, and the vocabulary that the kids will need to progress. Those few minutes after a class are really necessary for success tomorrow. I need to be flexible for my kids based on where they are in their knowledge. I need the principal to be flexible in the same way – see where we are in our knowledge and move from there, knowing that people get there in different ways and at different times.

I have a whole new view of assessment now. The principal gave us the SAOS twice and interviews kids to get quick data all the time. Then we take the information from those things and analyze it to see where we need to put most of our efforts. I've heard about data collection and analysis all my career, but this is the first time we are actually using it in a way that makes sense. Now, I'm figuring out how to do the same thing in my classes.

We are constantly assessing our own growth in this model and garnering feedback from it. That has been huge for me because now I do that in my classes. The assessments here in this school are amazing, and are always available. I'm not sure that it helps take all kids to a higher level yet, but it sure helps most kids by setting the bar high.

We look at assessment differently here – it's about growth, not a grade. I struggled with that for awhile – but I get it now.

After a class period I typically reflect on what happened. I look for what the kids showed they learned. What could I have done better? It's great having a colleague here during the same period, so we can reflect together. I also look over and record my formatives – I usually give 1-4 daily. It may be something as simple as verbal feedback, or as sophisticated as a written piece, but I want to check on whether or not what I did was good and go from there. In my non-competency-based classes, I set up for what I'm doing – I think more about planning a lesson and keeping kids busy so that they are listening to my lesson and will get it for the test. In this class, I plan for how I can reach each kid differently – the focus is on them. I think more here about engagement. And I always am conscious of who did a good job as well as those who are struggling or had some behaviors that I need to address – that is assessment data in action. I'm grateful the principal was patient enough to keep us thinking about monitoring progress as a faculty, because now I can do the same thing in my classes.

We always hear about the LRSP (Long Range Strategic Plan) from Central Office, but I still don't know what the vision is really. How does it affect me and what I do? But what we are doing in this building with competency-based learning, I totally get it. Our principal speaks this model much better than our superintendent speaks LRSP. I'm excited to be part of something great here – and everyone will catch on soon by watching us. It's fun to be a pioneer with something I believe in and understand.

It's easier and more difficult at the same time in this model. Since kids are at different skill levels, I have to work to identify where they are and come up with strategies to motivate and help them. I'm more involved with them personally than I am in a traditional classroom. I still get the same level of frustration sometimes, but I definitely feel I can take kids higher here because I know them better and they know exactly what to do and how to get help. In traditional classes, it's easier in lots of ways to talk to 30 kids and then tell them what to do – and then they either do it or not, and I just grade on that. Here, I have to connect with each kid each day. It's harder, but it's much better because I know I can take them to a high level individually.

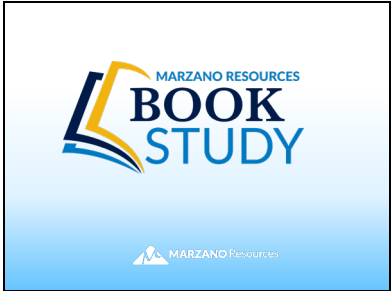
I have to assess where they are first – absolutely the most critical thing. Once I've figured out where they are in terms of skills and knowledge, I need to figure out what the stumbling blocks are – what are the missing skills? Are they missing some previous skills that we need to address, was it just a bad day, are they simply having trouble getting this particular concept, or are they ready to move on? Once that is clear, then I can work with them harder and more effectively. I also need to convince them that whatever we are working on is important and help them see the big picture. That is why the relationship and caring about them is critical – they will work harder for me if they trust that I know them and want them to be successful both in school and in life. In my traditional classes, just have to accept that I will fall 'off pace' when I work with kids this way. I take what I've learned in the performance-based system and bring it to my other classes, but that means I have to slow down and really look at the formatives. That is the key because it determines how I will help a kid and how I will be able to help him move to a higher level.

The principal and I disagree sometimes – lots of times actually. But it’s done positively and we know that we have each other’s back. For a long time, I thought he was just here to steamroll his agenda through, but now I’m seeing the big picture and I trust him like I’ve never trusted before (just don’t tell him I said that!)

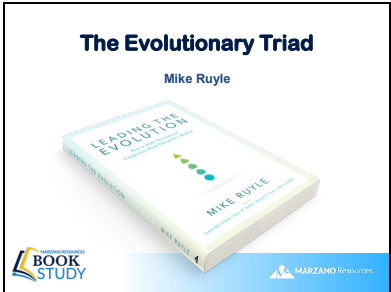
In the regular school setting, the classes are too big and there are too many teachers – I just don’t see the vision. It’s like there is a new flavor every month. Most of those things are good and we are a good district so we try to do lots of things, but there are too many initiatives, so the staff truly doesn’t “see” the vision in the general school. But I have a good relationship with my principal in our pilot program here – so I trust him and am able to see the big picture better. And I know he’ll back us if the going gets tough. I’ll do anything for him.

In this program, we definitely take risks. We all know the situation and know that this whole model was a risk - but now we are seeing positive results. We take calculated risks all the time. They don’t always work, but we all see what happened are on the same page moving forward. In the traditional school, we never take risks. We always pull back. Look at the grading practices initiative. I’ve heard about the need to change grading for years, then nothing. Then it’s rolled out, then we go back. Ridiculous. Let’s actually try it – so what if it doesn’t work – at least we tried. Maybe we just need to work through it. And we model to kids about taking risks and staying focused. But most principals are too afraid of the complainers. That’s why things never really change.

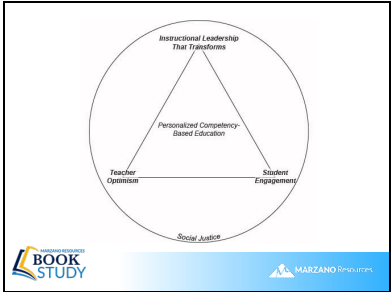
Slide 1



Slide 2



Slide 3





Slide 7

The Learners

- Panorama Student Survey
- Student Voice
- Student Engagement
- Grit
- Pedagogical Effectiveness



Qualitative Data

Slide 8

Student Engagement



- PSS
 - Measured in schools pre/post implementation
 - Measured against traditional systems
- Statistically Significant Differences in Both Protocols

Slide 9

Leadership

- Critical Behaviors Observed in Successful CBE Leaders:
 - Instructional Leadership that Transforms
 - Moral Leadership
 - Mindful Leadership
 - Extreme Ownership

Final Thoughts

- No going back from either teachers or kids
 - Once implementation is well underway, people don't want to return to traditional schooling
- Challenges to implement are significant
 - Takes committed leadership
 - Developing leaders is challenging
- Technology is close but not there yet – and that's a hindrance
- Working together – cohorts – huge impact
- Next steps...

