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## **Relevance Key To Raising Rigor In The Classroom**

If you pay attention to the newspaper's coverage of educational issues, you know about the federal mandate of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which was instituted during George W. Bush's first year or so in office. Unlike previous mandates, NCLB is something that has affected the way we do business – not only in Springboro, Warren County and Ohio, but throughout the United States.

Today, more than five years after it was instituted, we find ourselves embracing some of the core concepts of NCLB. Like some of you, when it first came out, many educators saw the legislation as just something that would put more work on us. We were right; it did put us in the position of spending thousands of hours in changing our standard operating procedures.

Now that we have five years under our belt, and a better understanding of what NCLB is really trying to accomplish, many educators – including myself – are embracing its ideals. As I have mentioned in my columns on several occasions, I have been studying the work of Bill Daggett and the International Center for Leadership in Education. This group is funded by Bill Gates, so I am trying to read their materials with a critical eye. Are they truly attempting to make America's educational system better, or are they trying to push a personal agenda?

In a recent Daggett article, he talks at length about making certain the rigor and relevance is raised for ALL students – not just the typical ones or the high achievers. As an educator, I can tell you we spend a great deal of our time figuring out ways to help those who need it the most – the ones not achieving at their grade level and even special needs students. Why would we want to raise the rigor for students who already have shown they cannot succeed at our current level?

What we have found is that these students can achieve at higher than anticipated levels, but it is imperative that their teachers explain the relevance of the lesson to these students. That is where NCLB is lost on some people – including educators. To show a student “relevance,” you need to figure out what kind of learner that student is.

For example, is this student a low achiever except in band or art? If so, their curriculum should be taught in such a manner that it makes sense to them, based on their

foundational knowledge in band or art. Think of an area you excelled in as a student. Can you imagine how well you would have done in middle school or high school if someone could have explained to you how algebra or physics pertained to music or sports? This is the core belief of No Child Left Behind. In order for all students to reach their optimum learning ability, a curriculum must be structured to meet that student at his/her level.

The obvious disadvantage to this way of thinking is a teacher can no longer stand in front of a classroom and lecture. They must analyze each of the students' data, and then figure out ways to reach individuals. This doesn't mean a teacher has to design 25 different lesson plans or 130, if they teach at the high school. As the teacher analyzes the data, the students will fall into natural groups. However, time is a factor. We have only 180 days per year to teach a huge amount of material.

Bill Daggett's group is quick to point out that the only way success can be achieved is through data analysis. The school systems that are excelling through the concepts in NCLB are the ones who are using data to help them successfully conquer the workload that all teachers and administrators feel on a daily basis. Just like your personal or work computer helps you manage several chores, organizing each individual student's data into a useful, definable manner will free up teachers and administrators to creatively solve individual issues.

At Springboro Community Schools, we are looking at many ways to organize individual student data. The reason is simple. If we can find out what skills a student is lacking, we can work with them individually to make certain they understand. It is important to remember that at each grade, students build on a foundation of knowledge. A student is not successful if they memorize facts and then quickly spit them out on a test. For a student – and school – to be successful, they must LEARN how, why, where, when and what. All of this takes time, patience, parent support, and resources.

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