

Remarks of Hayes Mizell on December 2, 2006 at the Annual Conference of the 12 Under 12 Network of the National Staff Development Council. The Network met on December 2-3 in Nashville, TN at the Opryland Hotel in Nashville, TN. Mizell is the Distinguished Senior Fellow of the National Staff Development Council.

Courage to Change

Several months ago, I invited some of you to take a survey and provide feedback regarding your experiences with the 12 Under 12 Network. I want to take this opportunity to briefly share the responses with you.

This was not a “scientific” survey, but rather a quick and dirty method of gauging how you are feeling about your involvement in the Network. By the way, if you are not using a free web-based instrument like SurveyMonkey.com for a variety of purposes ranging from identifying the date most people are available for a meeting, to getting anonymous faculty feedback, to soliciting the views of parents and students, you might want to consider it.

Thirty-five people responded to the survey, and I am grateful for them taking the time to do so. Keep in mind these are people from your schools who have had direct experience with 12 Under 12, either by serving on a school’s leadership team or participating in either the annual July or December meeting of 12 Under 12.

The first item on the survey asked respondents to provide an overall assessment of their schools’ involvement in the 12 Under 12 Network. A total of 74 percent of the respondents indicated they thought their schools’ participation in the Network was “very worth” or “worth” the schools’ investment, while 26 percent said they thought their schools’ participation was only “somewhat worth” the investment. This is somewhat less than a resounding vote of confidence, but three out of four is not bad.

We were also interested in what you regard as the “most valuable component” of the 12 Under 12 Network. Thirty-seven percent rated the annual two-day conferences like this one to

be the most valuable component, and 26 percent experience indicated the critical friend visits to your school are the most valuable. Twenty percent said that participation in your school's leadership team is your most valuable experience in 12 Under 12. These responses seem to indicate that on the whole the Network's programming is balanced and meeting diverse needs.

We then asked you to indicate what you consider to be the "most valuable activity" of the Network. A whopping 74 percent responded that the activity they value most is "sharing with and learning from other educators representing various 12 Under 12 schools." Three people, that is nine percent of the respondents, were honest enough to say they regard "socializing with representatives of other 12 Under 12 schools" to be the most valuable activity.

Still probing for your assessment of the Network's value, we asked you to identify "the greatest benefit" of your schools participation in 12 Under 12. There was a broad spread among the responses to this survey item. Twenty-nine percent responded that "the professional development at my school is more focused on increasing the capacity of our teachers to help students perform proficiently by 2014." Twenty-three percent responded that their "entire school is more focused on helping all its students perform proficiently before 2014." Twenty percent said their schools have "learned and applied professional development strategies to increase the instructional capacities of our teachers." Therefore, a total of 72 percent believe their schools' are better off because of their participation in 12 Under 12. It is worth noting that an additional 11 percent of the respondents indicated they are "personally more focused" on helping students become proficient and still another 11 percent reported that they are "involved in the leadership of my school to a greater extent than prior to the school's participation in 12 Under 12." I acknowledge that the way I phrased this survey item forced respondents to select from among a

list of statements of benefit, but it is worth noting that no respondents either skipped this item, which was an option, or responded under the “other” item.

We were also curious about your assessment of your schools’ current professional development. How does it compare to “what it was before the school’s participation in 12 Under 12”? Forty-nine percent of the respondents indicated their schools’ professional development “is beginning to improve instruction.” Twenty percent said it is “much more effective” than staff development in the past, and 14 percent said it is “better” but we still do not understand whether and how professional development improves student performance.” These responses indicate that while professional development in your schools is improving, on the whole you have not yet realized its full potential. I encourage you to keep using your association with the National Staff Development Council to deepen your knowledge and your practice for making professional learning a powerful tool for improving the performance levels of both teachers and students.

As those of you who have been active in 12 Under 12 know all too well, we continue to emphasize the student performance goals to which your schools committed themselves when they joined the Network. However, we wondered about the extent to which teachers in your schools are aware of and really understand your schools’ student performance goals. Thirty-one percent of the respondents estimated that about 70 percent of their schools teachers do understand the goal, 29 percent estimated that about 50 percent understand the goal, 17 percent said they believe about 30 percent understand the goal, and another 17 percent responded that 90 to 100 percent of their teachers understand the goal.

Of course, it is one thing to understand the goal; it is quite different to prepare students to meet the goal. Forty percent of the respondents estimate that about 70 percent of the teachers “are, in fact, preparing their students to meet the school’s 12 Under 12 student performance

goal.” Twenty-three percent estimated about 50 percent of teachers are engaged in such preparation and another twenty-three percent estimated about 90 percent of the teachers are preparing students to meet the goal. Your confidence is encouraging, but keep in mind that all students will not perform proficiently unless all teachers are preparing them to perform proficiently. If you believe that less than half or less than a third of your teachers are preparing all students to perform proficiently, it is a certainty that all your students will not perform proficiently. There are, in other words, some teachers who are on the sidelines of the race towards student proficiency, just as there are some students on the sidelines. In our recent professional development telephone conference calls with your schools’ leadership teams, we have focused on targeting and intervening with students who are not making adequate progress towards proficiency. There is just as much a need to target and intervene with the teachers who are not adequately preparing these students to perform proficiently.

Finally, we ended the survey by posing several open-ended questions. Though responding to these questions was optional, about 70 percent of the respondents did so. Your responses were very diverse, as expected, and helpful. Rather than taking the time now to describe these responses, I will share copies with you later. If you see response patterns that you would like to call to my attention, or if the responses prompt some new thinking on your part, please let me know.

When we met in July, I commended your faithfulness to the 12 Under 12 Network and I want to reiterate that today. George Perry and I know that each day you work under very difficult circumstances to move your schools, your faculties, and your students towards your respective student performance goals. This is an incredibly complex task, made all the more so because there are many, many variables simultaneously in play. Primary among these is the full

spectrum of the human condition's glories and foibles, from health to sickness, from generosity to selfishness, from effort to lassitude, from sensitivity to callousness, from clarity to confusion, from hope to despair. All of these, and more, are at work in your schools each day. If anyone thinks it is easy to steer the ship of school reform through these shifting shoals, they should spend a day in your pilothouse.

Yet, while your destination is certain and you are better prepared than most people to reach it, there is one essential trait you must have. I was reminded of this recently during one of our monthly professional development conference calls. One of you observed that while students at a particular grade level are especially in need of experienced, highly effective teachers, the practice has been to assign such teachers to upper grade levels. You then questioned whether you have the *courage* to go against this traditional practice and assign teachers where they are needed rather than where they expect to be.

Courage is not a word that often comes up when discussing school reform, but there is no question it is at the heart of preparing all students to perform at the proficient level. One definition of courage is "firmness of mind and will in the face of ... extreme difficulty." I can't think of a better word that applies to your efforts to achieve what no one, at any time in history, anywhere in the world, has achieved – to prepare all students for proficient academic performance. It is a goal worthy of your courage, especially because you know the risks. I doubt that any of you entered the education profession understanding that you would have to be courageous as well as knowledgeable, caring, and efficient, but here you are. If there is anything that is certain, it is that all students will not perform proficiently if your schools continue to operate much as they always have. Changing schools requires courage. It is not an option.

During your conversations with each other over these two days I hope you will do three things: First, think about an action you know you – not someone else, but you -- need to take to move your school more rapidly towards its student performance goal or that you need to take to move your students more rapidly towards the proficient level of performance. This should be an action you have avoided taking because even though you are convinced the action is necessary, you also know that it entails risks to you professionally or socially. Second, share with your colleagues here the action you believe you should take, but also identify what is keeping you from taking this action you know is necessary. Third, ask your colleagues here for their advice and support. You are here not only for yourselves but for each other. If you can't discuss your doubts and even your fears here, it is unlikely you will do so elsewhere.

You are an elite group. No other group of schools is trying to do what you are attempting. Keep at it. Remember that it is your persistence and courage that will see you through.

Thank you.

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