Simplify state standards for teachers, students

State standards are purposely broad and sometimes even vague. After all, the goal of such standards is to tell educators what to teach not how to teach. This creates a challenge because teachers need to know exactly what the standard means and how to translate it into practical classroom-level results. A simple activity known as “unpacking standards” can help your teachers make sense of state standards and even explain them in student- and parent-friendly terms.

Here is an unpacking exercise developed by Rebecca Burns, senior research and development specialist for Edvantia, which houses a regional education laboratory:

1. Rewrite the standards in words that can be understood by your students.
2. Ask what students must know or understand to complete the task.
3. Ask what students must be able to do to complete the task. In other words, what skills do they need?
4. Describe an assignment or assessment that could be used to decide if students have the ability to perform this task.


For more information, e-mail Rebecca Burns at Rebecca.burns@edvantia.org.
St. Elmo Elementary School

St. Elmo Elementary School was selected as an Alabama Reading Initiative Demonstration Site for the 2005-2006 school year. Selection was based on outstanding instructional practices that are consistently demonstrated. St. Elmo Elementary is one of only 15 demonstration sites selected from across the state. St. Elmo Elementary was also recognized by the State Department of Education as an Alabama Torchbearer School. St. Elmo was one of only 13 schools in the state recognized for this honor. Selection was based on schools that showed significant gains in student achievements.

ACCESS Granted

Access, Alabama Connecting Classrooms Educators, and Students Statewide (ACCESS) has been granted (pun intended) to Bryant High School as one of 24 pilot high schools across the state that will provide interactive instruction via videoconferencing. ACCESS Distance Learning approach will help solve problems by expanding course offerings, curriculum and teachers to meet course requirements. The ACCESS Distance Learning Initiative is an exciting new method of delivering high-quality courses statewide which may support Advance Placement (AP) courses to schools that otherwise cannot offer college-readiness coursework, foreign language, honors classes and electives due to low enrollment at the local school.

Alaska Quality Award

The Mobile County Public School System’s Division of Federal and Special Programs was awarded the Alabama Quality Award in Tuscaloosa. This award is given to businesses that exemplify performance excellence in late November. This conference provides a forum for Alabama Quality Award recipients to share their exceptional performance practices with Alabama leaders in business, education, health care and non-profit organizations. This was a great opportunity to network and learn from others sharing our journey to performance excellence.
New Teacher Orientation Make Up Session

Wednesday, January 18, 2006 marked the date of the New Teacher Orientation Make Up Session conducted for district teachers hired since August 4, 2005. Baker High School bustled with activities designed to meet the needs of the one hundred twelve (112) new hires in attendance. The day’s agenda focused on an overarching goal of introducing teachers new to the district to multiple support services provided for them through the district’s central office. Acting on behalf of the superintendent, Mr. Paul E. Tate, Jr., Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, welcomed participants and was followed by Dr. Samantha J. Ingram, newly appointed Deputy Superintendent of Academic Affairs. Other division/department updates were provided by Dr. Rhonda Waltman, Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services; Dr. Carolyn Lee Taylor, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction; Ms. Gloria Bush, Coordinator of Instructional Technology; Brenda Haskew, Coordinator of Staff Development. Rounding out the morning, Ms. Peggy Windham, Special Education Resource Teacher, presented an overview of inclusion, a major district emphasis at this time. Participation in New Teacher Orientation is required for all teachers new to the district. The next New Teacher Orientation will be scheduled for two days in early August, prior to the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year.

For more information about district news and services, browse the Mobile County Public School System’s homepage at www.mcpss.com

Brenda Haskew, Staff Development Coordinator 221-5201 ext. 216 or bhaskew@mcpss.com

Sharing Learning Structures

Dr. Rita Pierson shared her stories and insights with MCPSS administrators on January 11-12, 2006 at Baker High School. Her presentation, based on Ruby Payne’s work, included an analogy comparing the teaching and learning processes to a master chef in a restaurant instructing apprentices in cooking. This analogy illustrated the need to consider the What, the Why, and the How of teaching and learning in addition to the Proof of that learning in lesson design. Dr. Pierson provided numerous strategies to help students learn information while building their cognitive capacity for learning. We look forward to hosting Dr. Pierson again this summer at the 2006 Raise the Bar; Close the Gap Summer Conference.

Understanding Learning the How, the Why the What

| 1. | Directly teach the mental models of the content you are teaching. |
| 2. | Use a choice/consequence approach to discipline. |
| 3. | Tightly structure tasks by time and procedure. |

Patricia Hughes, Director of Staff Development 221-5200 or pmhughes@mcpss.com

Anna Booth Elementary School

The National Association of State Title I Directors (NASTID) announced on November 16, 2005 their 52 selected Title I Distinguished Schools. These academically outstanding schools have risen above obstacles of poverty with the help of the Title I program. Booth Elementary in Bayou La Batre, Alabama was selected as a Title I Distinguished School. They were selected because of their results from Closing the Achievement Gap category between all subgroups. Booth Elementary was honored at the annual distinguished schools award ceremony at the NASTID annual conference in Dallas, Texas on January 28, 2006. We salute the faculty and staff of Anna Booth Elementary School.

Stephanie Danzy, School Improvement Specialist 221-5233 ext. 242 or sdanzy@mcpss.com
Federal and Special Programs

Overview

The Division of Federal and Special Programs comprises a variety of programs, some financed through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and others through district and state funds. The staff of this division is dedicated to providing services to help schools more effectively develop, implement, and evaluate their plans for the academic success of all children.

Vision

Within three years, Federal and Special Programs will enhance the provision of high quality services, programs, and performance standards that meet or exceed federal and state regulations for students, staff, and schools.

Mission Statement

In pursuit of excellence, the mission of the Division of Federal and Special Programs is to provide the highest quality services, programs, and resources to empower all stakeholders to develop professional learning communities to ensure that all students will meet or exceed challenging standards.

New Teacher Induction Year 2

Mobile County Public School System initiated the New Teacher Induction Year 2 (NTI2) program in the first semester of 2005-2006 with approximately 550 second year and experienced teachers participating. This district-wide innovation aims to improve teacher effectiveness and efficient use of time and resources through three strands: classroom management, standards-based instruction and community (school). Participants engaged in activities presented through Classroom Organization and Management Program (COMP), a scientifically research-based training conducted by district educators who are certified as national trainers in the model. Refinements will make next year’s implementation of NTI2 even more effective when second year teachers only will participate in this program. With an eye to continuous improvement, district leadership has created another New Teacher Induction program, New Teacher Induction for Experienced Teachers, specifically designed to meet the needs of experienced teachers new to the district.

A Google search yields 617,000 entries for Classroom Organization and Management Program (COMP)! Check out the program’s website at www.comp.org.

Kim Hillman, School Improvement Specialist Staff Development 221-3225 ext. 252 (khillman@mcpss.com) or Brenda Haskew, Staff Development Coordinator 221-5201 ext. 216 (bjhaskeev@mcpss.com)