

A photograph of a classroom. A female teacher with blonde hair, wearing a brown sweater, stands and holds a white marker, looking down at a student. The student, a young woman with long, wavy blonde hair, is seated at a desk with a laptop, looking up at the teacher. In the background, another student is seated at a desk, and a green chalkboard is visible. The title 'SECONDARY CONNECTION' is overlaid on the top left, and the date 'January 2020 | Issue 14' is on the top right. A brown banner at the bottom contains the text 'Kati Winningham | RCSD District Teacher of the Year'.

SECONDARY

# CONNECTION

Middle School / High School Curriculum

January 2020 | Issue 14

*Kati Winningham | RCSD District Teacher of the Year*



# C O N N E C T

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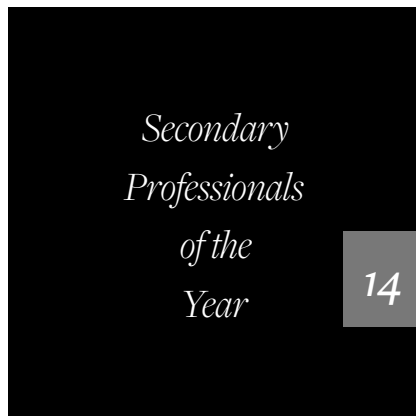
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ACT recently announced its first major revision in many years on the ACT. While some might say that the mathematics section has gotten hard in the past few years, it is still math that one can prepare for.

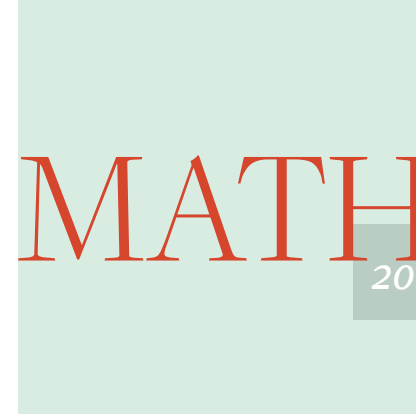
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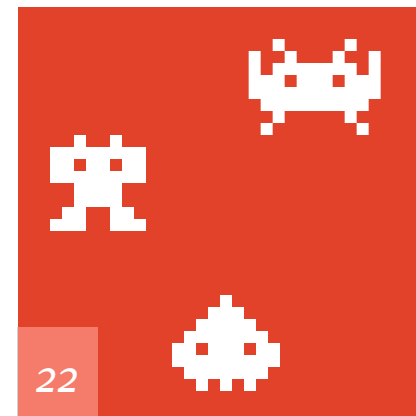
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Did you know that Canvas is more than a place to store links to assignments and grade papers? Canvas is constantly adding apps and features that can help you level up your Canvas game. Canvas is partnering with various education sites to make tech integration easier. Checkout a few of these new features in addition to a few that you may have overlooked in the past.

by Stephanie Cotnam





“Feedback with a grade on it is wasted feedback. Once students see a grade - they’re done.”  
~Alice Keeler

# A Focus on Feedback

by **Catherine Beasley**

What is feedback? Is feedback just a “good job” or “try harder next time?” A grade? A conversation? A note home to parents? In our world, feedback is a little bit of all of these things and so much more!

In the article, “Feedback: How Learning Occurs,” Grant Wiggins discusses feedback and what it should be in the classroom setting - “it is useful information about performance. It is not praise, it is not evaluation, is is not a number on a standardized test.” For teachers, it is important to receive feedback on instructional practice to continue growing in the craft. That feedback can come from a variety of different places - students, administration, peers, or our own self-reflection. The feedback helps to put our practice into perspective and provides an opportunity for reflection and the possibility to adjust based on needs. Think about how this same practice can help our students and how we can intentionally provide an opportunity for our students to see growth in their own learning.

teachers to hear and see what the student understands and what he or she may not yet understand in regards to a concept in our content.

Many times we think feedback is just what teachers say to students to make them “do better” or “try harder.” In the classroom, feedback starts long before any words have been spoken or grades have been given, it starts with the intentional planning of instruction for a specific instructional sequence. In that planning, the teacher must decide what students are going to experience throughout the instruction and how the experience moves toward the overall skill goals in the class. During the planning, it is also important to consider what the formative assessments throughout the instruction will tell the teacher about the student understanding and how that will affect the overall plan for instruction. When these decisions are made, teachers can then start to think about how the feedback will be given. John Hattie discusses how teacher planning should include the following questions:

“It’s the attempts and adjustments by the learner to perform that cause accomplishment. And without feedback, all of the teaching, no matter how extensive, remains theoretical to the learner.”

~Grant Wiggins

You can take a look at more information by John Hattie and visible learning at the [Visible Learning website](#) and specifically on his feedback theories

## Where am I going? How am I going there? Where to next?

Along with the instruction, students will need to know the answers these questions. When they know where they are going and how they are going to get there the feedback becomes adjustments along the way. It must happen during the learning - not when the learning is complete and the grade is given. In most cases, the grade will always trump the comment and then the intended feedback. When feedback is done correctly, the learning is a process for the student.

In another article, Grant Wiggins suggests that providing better learning feedback to students can help grow in their understanding of how to receive feedback because feedback in the classroom can be “a tangible effect of actions” such as listening to how other students answered a question or having the opportunity for a turn and talk, shoulder partner before a final answer is given. Feedback can also be “deliberate, explicit” by an individual. The [Seven Keys to Effective Feedback](#) helps to breakdown how we can provide helpful, quality feedback to our students. By providing feedback that is - goal-referenced, tangible & transparent, actionable, user-friendly, timely, ongoing and consistent.

All of these can help students grow in being able to provide feedback to you, as a teacher, and their peers in a variety of situations. Our students are not naturally going to be proficient in receiving or using feedback. In this case, this would become a skill that we develop within our classrooms and school over time.

When students learn to give and receive quality feedback, teachers can help to guide the process and can be assured the steps in meeting the intended goal is met.



\*Image taken from Matt Miller’s Ditch that Textbook [Twitter Chat](#) on “Giving Great Feedback”

Good feedback contains information that is useful for the In utilizing the research, we must strive to provide meaningful feedback that will help to grow students learning. The feedback strategies and content chart below can help you determine in what ways feedback will be most helpful for your students.

Feedback Strategies Can Vary in ...	In These Ways ...	Recommendations for Good Feedback
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When given</li><li>• How often</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide immediate feedback for knowledge of facts (right/wrong).</li><li>• Delay feedback slightly for more comprehensive reviews of student thinking and processing.</li><li>• Never delay feedback beyond when it would make a difference to students.</li><li>• Provide feedback as often as is practical, for all major assignments.</li></ul>
Amount	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How many points made</li><li>• How much about each point</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prioritize - pick the most important points.</li><li>• Choose points that relate to major learning goals.</li><li>• Consider the student’s development level.</li></ul>
Mode	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Oral</li><li>• Written</li><li>• Visual/ Demonstration</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Select the best mode for the message. Would a comment in passing the student’s desk suffice? Is a conference needed?</li><li>• Interactive feedback (talking with student) is best when possible.</li><li>• Give written feedback on written work or on assignment cover sheets.</li><li>• Use demonstration if “how to do something” is an issue or if the student needs an example.</li></ul>
Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Individual</li><li>• Group/Class</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Individual feedback says, “The teacher values my learning.”</li><li>• Group/class feedback works if most of the class missed the same concept on an assignment, which presents an opportunity for reteaching.</li></ul>

\*Taken from *How to Give Effective Feedback to Your Students* by Susan M. Brookhart

Matt Miller, author of *Ditch that Textbook*, held a twitter chat #DitchBook where questions were posed and educators responded with some great strategies and resources that could be useful in amping up your feedback game! If you get a chance, take a look at the link



# Directions for using QuickTime Player

1. On your computer, choose the Magnifying Glass on the top right of your screen
2. Search for QuickTime Player; hit Return
3. Once open on your computer, choose File
4. Now you will have the option of recording a screen with/without voice or just voice to provide information for your students

Figure 1

here but I’ve included a few strategies below that were discussed throughout the chat -  
Meaningful feedback can come in a variety of ways.

- Below are some examples of ways you can provide verbal feedback through technology.
- Screencastify is an easy add on to your Chrome toolbar that can help you provide video feedback.
  - Quicktime Player - all computers already have Quicktime installed and you could use this to do some audio recording but it also has the capacity to record your screen - this way you could show students how to research something specific, complete a task, work through a problem - a variety of different things! (See Figure 1)
  - Flipgrid - a simple way for teachers and students to record and share short videos. Think video discussion board!
  - Find more flipgrid resources here - <https://blog.flipgrid.com/amplify/#flipgridresources/>
  - Peardeck - this resource can do so many things but it can collect “anonymous” feedback through the use of polls, quizzes and interactive questioning.

Some examples of how teachers use a screen recording or voice recording for their feedback -

“I load students work on screen, start a screencastify recording and talk through the feedback.”  
“I have used an audio recording to explain my thinking in feedback that I have given on student writing.”  
“I usually do this during the writing process - this is not something that is done after an entire paper has been turned in. I have used a screencast to work through Google Docs with students. I am able to highlight section and give verbal feedback on an issue.”

If you don’t want to utilize the technology for verbal feedback, a quick conversation with the student to help them understand and make sense of the information they are receiving. Utilizing the feedback with quality questioning, can help the teacher understand what needs are present, moving forward. Many teachers use a conferring time during the instructional block.

Some examples of how teachers use conferences for their feedback -

“Who would of thought ... conversations?! One of the most powerful things we can do as educators is sit next to a kid and listen/talk.”  
“I use TAG method to teach my Ss how to give feedback. They learn to Tell something they like, Ask a question, and Give advice. Students apply this when giving feedback on Google Docs to their peers. Ss learn how powerful it is to use feedback to revise.”  
“I like student conferences where we go over the rubric together.”

In Google Docs, after a student has shared with you and given edit rights, you can make suggestions in Edit Mode - this will help the student to see how you might change something or why their thinking may need to change in some way. You can always highlight and make a comment on Google Docs. If you use a “@” symbol when

### Suggest changes to a file

1. On your computer, open a document at [docs.google.com](https://docs.google.com). In the top right, if you don't see "Suggesting," click **Editing Suggesting. ...**
2. Edit the document. You'll see your change in a new color. ...
3. The owner of the file will get an email about your suggestions and can decide whether to keep them.



commenting in the document, the student can receive the information via email and see that there is a comment. Some examples of how teachers use editing/suggesting mode for their feedback -

“When I’m typing comments, I like to type about specific things from their work I liked, or point out things that need more work.I try to avoid ”nice job!” ”  
“I give specific feedback and make sure I provide time for them to use that feedback. Forgot to capitalize - rewrite. Struggled to identify natural resources? Try again.”  
“With all of the Google tools and the feedback options, having feedback be digital means I can be more focused, while not emptying all the ink in the pen. While handwriting may be more personal, the typing can allow the student to benefit more.”

- Learn more about Edit Mode here - <https://support.google.com/docs/answer/6033474?co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&hl=en>
- Explore button - brings quick access to your Drive files, web search, images, recommendations and more. There is also a citation machine here for footnotes in your document!
- Learn more about Google Explore button here -
- Exploring “Explore” - Matt Miller
- 5 Ways to Use Google Docs Explore Tool - Shake Up Learning
- Cool Resource for ideas on how to improve feedback and make it less time consuming!
- Ditch the Textbook - Feedback Strategies



# The Struggle is Real

The Correlation Between Self-Care, Positive Relationships, and Living Your Best Life

by Jana Comer

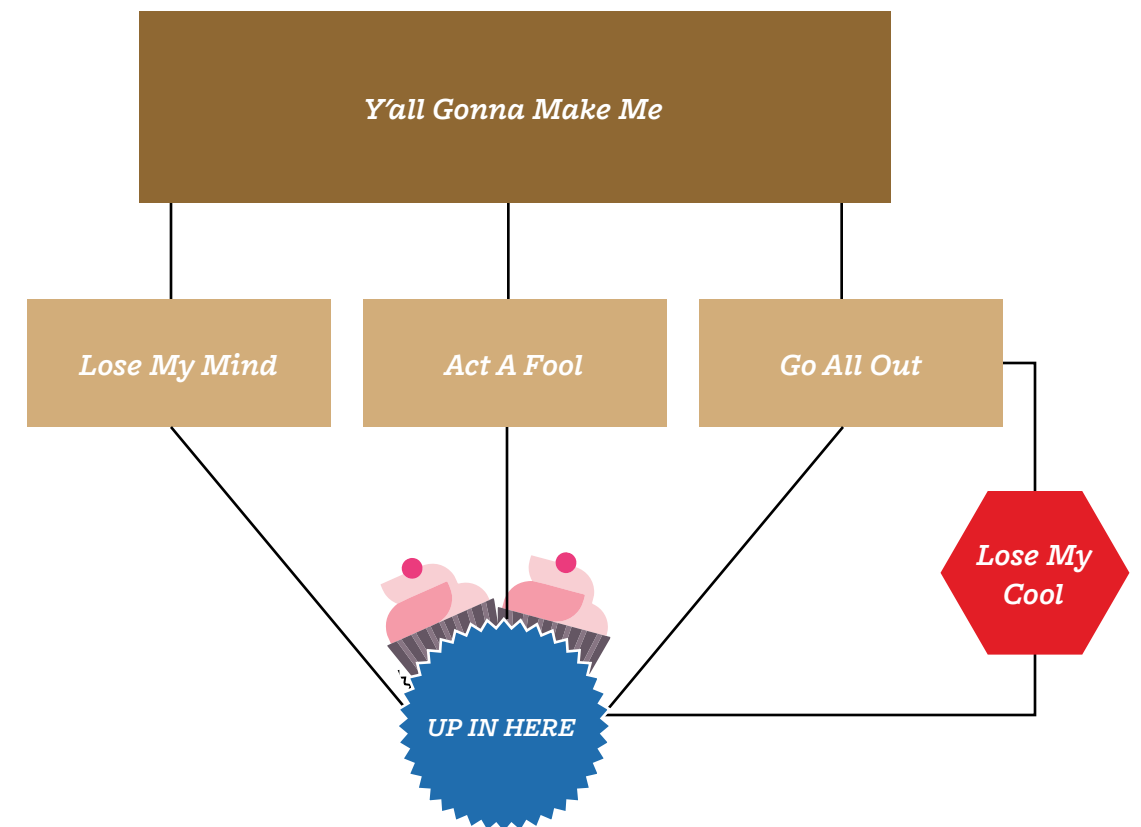


It's December 16th, y'all, and I am exhausted--mentally, physically, emotionally. The never-ending trek between September and November has been a tedious and challenging stretch. With the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, a few days off are always nice but it just doesn't feel like enough time to catch my breath.

Life can oftentimes be a lot. We all have personal and professional factors we deal with on the daily--for the most part all different but all respectively important and equally as taxing when folded into the mix. If I've not sent you into a depressive state and you're still reading, thanks for pushing through. I certainly do not want what I am about to discuss to be perceived as "she thinks she has it all together."... because I. 🍪 DO. 🍪 NOT. 🍪 My life is chaotic and overwhelming more often than not, more especially in certain seasons. Thank goodness for Jesus, Drake, and Starbucks... the few things helping me push through the composition of this article--and currently, life in general, if we're completely honest. What I do know is that I often struggle to embrace the calm amidst the storm, and I do recognize that I need to be more deliberate with regularly practicing self-care in order to be the best I can be for my colleagues, the students in our district, and equally important, my family and friends. To paraphrase a well known adage, you cannot control your circumstances, but you can control how you react by how well you take care of yourself.

It's not breaking news that emotions have a profound impact on the outcome of most any situation we encounter throughout life's journey. Whether it is receiving news on a health diagnosis, processing a stressful situation, preparing for a major life event, or making the simplest of daily decisions, your mental and physical well-being dictate your disposition and how you react to what lies before you. This is no different in our classrooms and schools. While the research surrounding teacher well-being is still emerging, there is a direct correlation between teacher well-being and student achievement. According to Marc Brackett and Dena Simmons, there are four reasons emotions are crucial in an academic setting: attention and learning performance, decision making, fostering good relationships, and health and well-being. Without positive interactions and models of the aforementioned, students tend to be less successful academically and socially. Furthermore, In *Kids Deserve It: Pushing Boundaries and Challenging Conventional Thinking*, author's Todd Nesloney and Adam Welcome explain the dire significance of making kids feel important and excited each time they enter the doors of our schools and classrooms:

*"Kids deserve an excited adult. They need someone who's ready to explore and laugh with them all day-- someone who's looking for those magic moments, full of high fives coming down the line with energy radiating all around. Our kids have far more issues to deal with at home than many of us realize. School is their safety net,*



*Educational Leadership*

*Emotionally Healthy Kids* October 2015  
Vol.73 No.2 [www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org)

*"Emotions Matter"*  
by Marc A. Brackett and Dena Simmons

*their safe place, their one true home. They want and need us to come to school every day ready to surround them with love, encouragement, and hope. Leave your problems in your car. Take a deep breath and focus on the positive. Find hope. Kids need the best you. Step out and be your best every single day. Be awesome! The kids deserve it!"*

Kids require, more importantly, deserve, a lot. They deserve our time, our energy, our effort, and our best selves. This philosophy could also be applied to colleagues, friends, and family. We can't be the best for anyone else if we aren't the best, most exceptional

version of ourselves. Exceptionality requires intentionality, so it is crucial that we are intentional in our efforts to be the best we can for the people we are surrounded by. Showing up every single day can be just as strenuous as it is powerful, so to avoid going all DMX on our colleagues, students, family, and friends, it's imperative that we proceed with the correct measures when taking care of number one. You have to choose to be the very first of your priorities. Guilt and stress do more damage to your body than chocolate cake ever will-- eat the cake. And on the days that seem the hardest, forward momentum is sometimes the only requirement.

## Self-Care Resources

- [Happy Teacher Revolution](#)
- [Developing a Self-Care Plan](#)
- [10 Self-Care Techniques for Teachers](#)
- [How to Teach and Still Have a Life This School Year](#)
- [Top Tips for Stress Management and Self-Care](#)
- [How Teacher Compassion Can Help Prevent Teacher Burnout](#)
- [Teacher Self-Care: What Will You Do For You Today?](#)
- [Recharging Our Professional Batteries: 3 Ways to Keep the Love Alive!](#)
- [Self-Care for Teachers & Four Easy Ways to Stay Well](#)



7 Self Care Strategies for Teachers	
Quick Pick-Me-Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tea</li> <li>• Chocolate</li> <li>• Protein boost (nuts, granola)</li> <li>• Floss</li> <li>• Healthy snacks</li> <li>• Thank you notes</li> <li>• Stress ball</li> </ul>
Two Minute Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do a few yoga poses or stretches to get your blood moving</li> <li>• Get out of the building for some fresh air and a change of scenery</li> <li>• Take a mindful moment and pay attention to your breathing to center yourself</li> </ul>
Channeling Creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knit</li> <li>• Quilt</li> <li>• Draw</li> <li>• Bake</li> </ul>
Connect with Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share projects with fellow teachers</li> <li>• Make positive phone calls to parents</li> <li>• Spend time with loved ones</li> <li>• Spend time with animals</li> <li>• Give back to your community by volunteering</li> </ul>
Find the Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep a folder of kind notes or feedback from students and families</li> <li>• Keep a notebook of inspirational quotes</li> <li>• Record something positive each day in a journal</li> </ul>
Unwind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watch a mindless TV show</li> <li>• Take a hot bath</li> <li>• Read</li> <li>• Listen to music</li> <li>• Meditate</li> <li>• Take the scenic route home</li> </ul>
Exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Run</li> <li>• Dance</li> <li>• Yoga</li> <li>• Crossfit/Gym</li> <li>• Go for a walk</li> </ul>

<https://www.edutopia.org/discussion/7-self-care-strategies-teachers>



# Set Your New Year’s Resolution for Teaching

*What’s YOUR Focus for 2020?*

by Lorie Yates

As we enter the second half of the school year and begin a new calendar year, it’s the perfect time to reflect on our professional goals for 2020.

I reached out to science teachers across the district about reflecting on strategies and resources that have worked, and what, if anything, they would like to do differently. There were several common themes throughout the responses. Read through the topics below. Maybe some of these will inspire your own new year teaching resolutions.

### Daily Learning Targets and Agenda

”My resolution is to focus on using specific learning goals each class and focus on formative assessments that help determine if students met our goal for the day. I want to make sure the activities and the way I assess students is relevant and timely.” *Anonymous*

A change for second semester: ”Use a ‘real-time’ agenda on the board to check off tasks as we complete them in class.” *April Sullivan, Northwest Rankin Middle School*

A strategy that has worked well for me: ”Involving the students in their learning. I continually ask students what worked for them and what didn’t. I try not to be stuck doing what I have always done because each group of kids is different so their learning will be different. We, as teachers, should strive to involve students in their learning to find out what is working and adapt our teaching accordingly.” *Anna Bigby, McLaurin High School*

A learning target is not an instructional objective. Instructional objectives guide instruction, and we write them from the teacher’s point of view. Learning targets, however, guide learning in today’s specific lesson. Learning targets are student-friendly descriptions of what you intend students to learn or accomplish in a given lesson. The agenda

is the list of activities that are intentionally planned to help students meet the learning target(s) for a specific lesson. Learning targets are meant to be shared with the students, and referenced throughout the lesson. Students can only aim for a target if they know what it is. When shared meaningfully, they become actual targets that students can see and direct their efforts toward.

Click [HERE](#) to watch students discuss the power of learning targets.

### Using Formative Assessments to Foster Equity and Inclusion Of All Students

This new semester: ”I want to create a 3-part remediation plan—One for all of my classes as a whole, one for each block, and one for each student.” *Shalonda Hawkins, Brandon High School*

A strategy that has worked well: ”Personal dry erase boards for quick feedback.” *Lee Robinson, Pisgah High School*

”Our ‘thumbs up, thumbs down, middle ground’ works well for me in evaluating student understanding throughout our lessons.” *Susan Christman, Florence Middle School*

”This year, I have worked extremely hard on giving students wait time” after questions are asked. *Lindsey Pitts, Brandon Middle School*

”I’d like for students to create videos of their understanding of the lesson in order for them to use at home to study.” *Susan Christman, Florence Middle School*

Page Keeley, an internationally known leader in science education and primary author of the *Uncovering Student Ideas Series in Science* and the *Formative Assessment- Practical Strategies Linking Assessment, Instruction, and Learning* series describes formative assessments as follows:

- Assessment is not formative unless you use the information to plan or modify your instruction with the intent to support learning.
- Formative assessments are assessments for learning- they differ from summative assessments in that they not only inform instruction, they also promote learning.
- Misconceptions are strongly held. It takes time and carefully designed instruction to help students give them up. Effective and appropriate use of formative assessment can help teachers identify misconceptions and guide students through a cycle of learning where they discover for themselves the facts rather than just have them told to them.
- To use formative assessment effectively, it is important to establish a safe classroom environment where all students' ideas, regardless of whether they are right or wrong, are encouraged, respected, and valued.
- Formative assessment is purposeful - they should always be linked to a teaching and learning target.
- Collect formative assessment data with intention and act on it purposefully.
- Formative assessment is used continuously throughout an instructional cycle: before teaching- to elicit students' ideas, throughout an instructional unit- to monitor learning and provide feedback, and at the end- for reflection.
- Formative assessments support development of communication skills. Use formative assessment to provide opportunities for students to share their thinking and engage in rich discourse and argumentation using evidence-based reasoning.

Take some time to do your own research on formative assessments. Start small- pick one strategy or technique, try it out, and evaluate its success before trying multiple strategies. Over time, you can build a repertoire of strategies and techniques and see your classrooms transform into spaces where active learning and assessing become connected in an endless cycle.

For more information on Page Keely's books and formative assessment techniques, go to [Uncovering Student Ideas](#)

### Lesson Planning

"I have been printing out a hard copy of my unit lesson plan at the start of each lesson for the past 3 years. This allows me to make quick notes throughout the unit about the teaching strategies I am using and student engagement. I am also able to reflect at the end of the unit taking into account the summative scores to measure the overall success of the techniques I utilized. Genuine reflection on my craft is the only way I found to improve daily practices." *Chad Smith, Richland High School*

"I want to start using a timer! I want to be better at timing my activities so that I ensure students are able to experience all the activities I have planned in order to meet our goal for the day. Timing my activities will also help students take more responsibility in the time they have." *Anonymous*

"I want to start using exit tickets, but I often run out of time at the end of class and I'm not able to do them."

*Anonymous*

A strategy that has worked well for me is "adding some short group activities during some of my lectures that help when we're diving into new material. I have made an effort to spice up my review days. I've used six station review games and modified them for each unit. The students rotate in groups of four and can earn Cougar bucks for winning rounds at each station. They have really enjoyed it." *Sarah Buffington, Northwest Rankin High School*

Lesson planning is more than just filling in specific information in a required template. Designing a quality lesson is like designing a tapestry - various pieces are woven together to form a larger, more intricate image. The tapestry of a quality lesson includes the content, the delivery of the content, the learning activities, questioning techniques, a variety of assessments - all woven together in a sequence of activities that help students meet a learning target.

Here are some questions to consider when designing your lessons:

- What are the specific learning targets for today's lesson?
- What questions can I ask to gauge prior knowledge, to elicit responses from all students, to help students formulate more complex answers/discussion?
- How can I help students see the links between this activity and other lessons?
- How will I start my lesson?
- What specific activities will students participate in? Why?
- How much time will each part of the lesson take? How will I keep track of time?
- What strategies will I use to ensure ALL students participate?
- How will I assess students throughout the lesson?
- How will I use the data I get from the informal or formal assessments I use during this lesson? Is there something I need to change now before moving on to the next lesson?
- How will I end the lesson?
- How can I make notes immediately after the lesson in order to reflect on what went well and what didn't go well?

### Student Engagement

A change I want to make second semester is to provide more opportunities for "student connections with content, communications, and activities." *Bill Hood, Florence High School*

"My students have really liked, and learned from, the small group discussion/argumentation activities with gallery walks that I have started using more. Having them discuss in small groups with justifications to rationalize their argument before they have whole class discourse has really made my students think more deeply about the content/topic." *Jamie Gibson - Northwest Rankin High School*

"Getting students thinking and curious before we ever write notes has worked well. I've been creating flow charts

and trying to shape their [thinking] before taking notes. I tell them that they are already smarter and more than ready. Then, when they do take notes...the notes are more meaningful." *Shalonda Hawkins - Brandon High School*

"I want to enjoy teaching while engaging my students more. I want to try new learning activities to keep kids engaged. I am going to be brave!" *Anonymous*

In John Hattie's groundbreaking book, *Visible Learning*, he explains that expert teachers are proficient at creating an optimal classroom climate for learning. The optimal classroom climate for learning is one where the activities are worth engaging in, the activities mean something, and the activities are sequenced in a way that helps students successfully meet the learning target. In a student-centered classroom, it is okay to make mistakes. Students understand that learning is not always a perfect linear experience. There will be times we know things, and times when we don't - - YET! It is a climate where student questioning is the norm. As you plan your lessons, ask yourself how much of your block will be devoted to students actively engaged in their learning versus how much is teacher-centered, teacher-directed activities. Think about how to sequence your activities in a way that keeps students curious, keeps them motivated, and keeps them on task.

### Self Care

Teaching is often a very rewarding profession. But, it is also very stressful and exhausting. Research shows that taking time on a regular basis to plan and attend to self-care can greatly decrease stress and increase self-efficacy.

Here are some of your own suggestions for taking care of yourself through the school year:

"I workout each morning at 5am and it is quite obvious when I skip a day. I do not take my work home with me ever. I would rather stay at the school an hour later than take my work home with me and drag it out over 3 hours. Home is for relaxation." *Chad Smith, Richland*

"Get a team around you. Whether you have a team you can work with at your school or if you have to connect to others through social media, email, phone, etc. Reach out to others. Ask advice from others. Share resources. It takes a village to TEACH...you cannot do it alone." *Anonymous*

"Spending more time with people that help me stay positive." *Anonymous*

"Exercise, chocolate, and coffee." *Anonymous*

"Always find the positive in every situation. No matter what, smile and laugh! As teachers/coaches, we are role models for these kids, and for me, that is enough of an incentive to wake up and be the best me I can be every day!" *Todd Montgomery, Richland High*

"Exercise." *Jenny Curlee, Puckett High*

"Getting enough sleep. Drinking enough water. Not focusing on energy-draining or mental-draining problems. Let it go." *Bill Hood, Florence High*

"When I'm not having the best of days, I remember a quote that somebody shared with me that said, 'was it truly a bad day, or was it a bad five minutes that you milked all day?'"

Most of the time, I realize it's something small that I'm letting get me down." *Sarah Buffington, Northwest High*

"Devotional, drinking lots of water, and committing to not working on school work at home so I can be there 100% for my family." *April Sullivan, Northwest Rankin Middle School*

"Prayer and physical work." *Lee Robinson, Pisgah High*

### New Year, New Semester - What are Your Teaching Resolutions?

"To give short integrated homework assignments that focus on the current material being taught but that also have a few questions from past material to keep my students fresh on all the material." *Chad Smith, Richland High School*

"To stay more organized." *Anonymous*

"To greet each and every student with a smile every day... to help students have a better day regardless of what is going on in life or the classroom." *Jamie Gibson, Northwest Rankin High School*

"Stay ahead with grading!" *Sarah Buffington, Northwest Rankin High School*

"It's important to me that I see the lightbulb moments in my students, so my resolution is to make sure I help them in some way so I see those on a daily basis." *Susan Christman, Florence Middle School*

"Be renewed and finish strong." *Tony O'Hair, Florence High School*

"Engage and conquer." *Bill Hood, Florence High School*

"Survive?? Just kidding. Next semester, my goal is to increase efficient scaffolding in my lower performing classes." *Justin Cummins, Richland High School*

"To engage my students more during new lessons." *Nikki Valle Northwest High*

"Keep an enthusiastic attitude - even when it is hard."

*Kayla Byrd, Brandon Middle School*

The start of the new year is the perfect time for us in the teaching profession to reflect on our WHY. January is a great time to take a moment and think about what we want to accomplish second semester. Take this month to refresh and start anew. Muster up some of that excitement that you had at the start of the school year. Use some of these great ideas, or come up with your own ways to help make second semester successful and productive for you and your students.

HAPPY  
New  
Year!



# Secondary Professionals of the Year



Kati Winningham

*2020 District Teacher of the Year*

PUCKETT HIGH SCHOOL



Shea Taylor

*2020 Secondary Administrator of the Year*

NORTHWEST RANKIN MIDDLE SCHOOL





## Marcus Stewart

*2020 Assistant Administrator  
of the Year*

BRANDON HIGH SCHOOL

## Becky Farnham

*2020 Secondary Teacher of the Year*

BRANDON HIGH SCHOOL



## Faith Fewell

*2020 New Teacher of the Year*

MCLAURIN HIGH SCHOOL



# ACT REVISIONS

by Montgomery Hinton

ACT recently announced its first major revision in many years on the ACT. While some might say that the mathematics section has gotten hard in the past few years, it is still math that one can prepare for.

So, how are the upcoming changes going to impact our RCSD community?

The ACT is going to allow students to retest a single section of the ACT after they have taken a full test. All sophomores and juniors will take the full test in the spring, which will qualify them for single section retests starting in September 2020. The costs of the retest have not yet been determined. Each single section will be taken on a computer that the facility will provide. A student can take up to three retests in each sitting.

Another positive change coming is that the number of fee waivers that are available for students who qualify has increased from two to four. Fee waivers, for those who qualify, have increased from two total to four. These can be used for any single test environment, whether it be a full test or a subtest(s).

Again, while the retests are only available as an online test, students will continue to have the option of taking the ACT paper and pencil as a full test only. Additionally, students who test online will potentially have the test results in two business days.

As the world continues to move towards digital, the ACT test appears to be providing a similar option to keep up with the ever-changing world. So, what is the draw back to the online version of the test?

First, it is online, so annotating is going to be much more difficult. Also, reading a passage or a question that asks about the passage as a whole will require one to scroll back and forth to compare the text to the question. These questions appear in the English and reading sections frequently. As one thinks about the math section and the pictures that often help the students understand the question, in digital format these pictures become a visual only. Is that a game-changer? Potentially, however, the testers will establish that baseline. As for the science test, this is a test that leans heavily on the use of visuals. Can one touch the screen and use the pictures as they stand? They can; it will just require some tweaking to the approach.

However, the big kicker is the studies that continue to support actual text reading in print. Studies show that students do much better with actual print. Check out this story which shows that increased screen time has correlated with a decline in reading comprehension; this [article](#) provides continued evidence which provides support of printed text. This [article](#) highlights the challenges of digital text. This [article](#) highlights some of the challenges of reading comprehension with digital text.

So, let's approach the new changes with hopeful optimism. The students will be the judge of the changes. The good news is that they will let us know. So, time will tell. But to prepare, read and read everything you can get your hands on.



# Making Projects Count

by Paula McClain

Every teacher knows that some students are just hands on and do much better with showing what they have learned rather than testing. Teachers know that some students are visual and can communicate what they know through a poster or project not only easier than a written test, but without the added stress and pressure.

Teachers also know that project-based grading can be difficult. How do we get students to understand what we want, what we require, what our minimum acceptance level is, and what to do in order to earn specific grades?

The answer may lie right around the corner at your feeding Elementary School...or right down the hall in your Art teacher's room.

Elementary teachers, especially Kindergarten teachers, have more than likely used a visual rubric to communicate what exactly it is that they want from students. Their reasoning: students have different reading levels. Some Kinders come in being able to read and others have no reading skills at all. Approaching writing and projects through a visual rubric is much more successful.

Your Art teacher on campus probably uses visual rubrics as well. His or her reasoning: it is a visual class and a visual rubric helps to communicate what is expected.

Those visual rubrics used by both Elementary and Art teachers can easily be applied to any project out there for: Social Studies, Foreign Language, Government, and more!

Visual rubrics can be vital for student success. They communicate a variety of things in one concise document.



Visual rubrics let students, teachers, administrators, and parents know what is expected and required on the project, what different levels (grades) require, and show examples of each level (leaving nothing up to question). Visual rubrics are also GREAT for ELL students, SPED students, and students who have difficulty or who are slower processing information. Since it is a visual image to look at, they can make those connections much easier and quicker than reading.

There are a few things you should know before jumping into using a visual rubric. First of all, visual rubrics like written rubrics do allow for some flexibility for the teacher in grading; they do have a bit of subjectivity involved. Subjectivity in grading can always be argued one way or the other, so the teacher must be consistent in grading when using a visual rubric. Secondly, visual rubrics take time to create. Visual rubrics require the teacher (you) to sit down and make an example of each of the different levels (there are usually 4). That means you are creating four different visual examples which contain and embody the four different levels of each required part of your project/poster assignment. Yes, this takes a bit of time, however the outcome for your students would be well worth the time (and they can be used again).

Being able to communicate visually as well as verbally what you expect on a project or poster is going to help all of your students succeed.

Total Score: ____/30	3 points 	2 points 	1 point 
Handwriting 	the Handwriting is excellent with no reversals	The Handwriting is fair with few reversals	Wg Handwriting is poor with many reversals.
Capitals/lowercase D or d	It is hot.	it is hot.	iT Is hOt.
Spacing 	It is cold. Spacing is appropriate and consistent.	It is cold. Spacing is inconsistent or incorrect.	Itiscold. Student did not have any spacing.
Details in illustration 			
Use of color & coloring appropriately 	Used lots of Color and Colored items Appropriately	Used 3-4 colors and Items were/were not Colored appropriately	Used only one or two Colors and items were Not colored Appropriately
Coloring inside the lines 			
Punctuation . ? !	Is that it? Punctuation is included and is appropriate	Is that it. Punctuation is included, but is not appropriate	Is that it Punctuation is not included
Use of sight words is and the it	I like it. Used the appropriate sight words and used conventional spellings for sight words.	I lik it. or I little it. May/may not have used the appropriate sight words May/may not have spelled sight words correctly.	I k t Did not use the appropriate sight words to convey a complete thought.

Sixth Grade Visual Rubric

	Advanced - E	Proficient - S	Progressing - S	Beginning - S
Value Sphere	 Smooth transition between ranges of value. Forms are distinct due to a wider range of value used	 Some range of values. Shading and blending do not show a smooth transition.	 Not a wide range of values. Does not show gradual transition of value.	 No range of values. Outlining is used in substitution of shading.
Candy Still Life	 Quality composition and use of space. Accurate highlights & shadows. Colors are accurately blended. Objects are realistic	 Quality composition. Highlights & shadows are somewhat accurate. Colors are somewhat blended to create realism.	 Effective composition and use of space. Highlights & shadows are somewhat unclear. Colors are not effectively blended to create realism.	 Ineffective composition and use of space is unclear. Highlights & shadows are not defined. Colors are not blended to create realism.
"Pop" Op Art	 Effective use of line, shape, space, value, form, and color to create illusion. Forms are distinct due to wide range of value.	 Effective use of line, shape, space, & color to create illusion. Forms are somewhat distinct due to some range of value.	 Ineffective use of line, shape, space, & color to create illusion. Forms are not distinct due to low range of value.	 Lines, shapes, space, form & color are not clear and defined. Forms are not clear due to no range of value.



# It's All Fun and Games Until You Say

# MATH

by Rhonda Kilgo

Playing games in class is not a new concept; teachers have been using games to try to entice students to learn content for years. In fact, in an article in *The Atlantic*, Zara Stone (2016) states that, “Games have a history of promoting engagement in a learning environment, and the collaborative elements help students develop social skills.” With the influx of interactive games and activities where students are involved in both real and virtual games, teachers are beginning to use some of the same ideas students see on these to boost student participation in math class. To implement these new strategies, the 6th grade math teachers at Florence Middle School are bringing escape rooms and gaming to their students.

Escape rooms are relatively new to the classroom. In 2018, *The Washingtonian* published an article featuring, Ginger Flesher-Sonnier, a former high-school math teacher who has built what they called a “lucrative career” by creating escape rooms. According to the article, her rooms “grossed \$4 million in 2017.” Given that these rooms require logic, teamwork, and often, calculations in order to solve the puzzles and escape, it’s not so far-fetched that these performance tasks would catch on in the math classroom. According to an article in *The Ed Advocate* (June 28, 2019), escape rooms teach students “critical thinking and problem-solving” which “will always apply to life and learning.”

Imagine the excitement of being invited to Rankin County’s own mathematics escape rooms when Brooks Matthews and Donna Rice, two FMS 6th grade teachers, teamed up to provide their students with this experience. Ms. Matthews and Ms. Rice worked tirelessly to create this for their students from designing the puzzles and distractors (which required standards-aligned mathematics students

were currently learning and introduced upcoming content) to creating a playlist of songs and testing QR codes. There were materials which were needed (some which the teachers were able to get donated but most were provided by the teachers) and puzzles created which challenged students and required them to wrestle with the mathematics involved.

Students were very receptive to the escape room activity and are excited about the idea of doing this again. Indy Moore, a student in Ms. Rice’s class, said that to be successful, you “had to have your mind set on it, know what you were doing, get all the pieces together, and understand all parts of it.” She also said that you “learn more because you have to do more math to complete it.” Ms. Matthews’ student, Belle Clark, enjoyed the activity because, “It was different - not something we normally do.” She included, “We were able to review what we’d been talking about for the clues. We had to work as a team and couldn’t have done it by ourselves.” Both Ms. Matthews and Ms. Rice are excited about doing this again, and Ms. Rice said she was “very impressed with which students showed leadership skills,” and she stated that she thought giving students opportunities to develop these skills was important. Ms. Matthews also noticed the emergence of leaders within the groups. She expressed that students who normally struggle seemed to be more receptive and successful while those who are often the first to answer had to depend on others for help and not overthink the tasks.

While Ms. Matthews and Ms. Rice had students participating in escape rooms, Jerry Barlow’s students were excitedly playing Classcraft. This program is marketed as one which brings gaming into the classroom and not only makes learning fun but also helps with classroom management. Owen

Cooper, a student in Mr. Barlow’s class, talked about what a difference using Classcraft had made in discipline. He said that Mr. Barlow simply puts a mark on the clipboard by the name of the student who is misbehaving and takes away his or her Classcraft time. According to Madelyn Rogers, this keeps the students from “leveling up,” and since they play as teams, this affects more than just that particular student. Both Madelyn and Owen said this makes practice easier and helps students prepare for the summative tests.

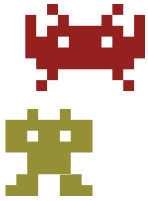
Having seen the excitement of his students when using Classcraft and knowing the popularity of Minecraft, Mr. Barlow began working on a way to implement Minecraft in his classroom. He is currently working on worlds where students will answer math problems in order to continue with their adventure through the worlds. Jim Pike pointed out in his 2015 article on ISTE.org that using this “wildly popular game that kids just can’t stop playing” can change the culture of a classroom. He said, “Students [want] to learn because they [are] excited about what they could make.” In Mr. Barlow’s version of this highly popular game, students are asked to explain their work and type in their steps before

identifying the correct answer. Finding the correct answer is what allows students to continue. When asked, his students said that they were excited about this new way of playing Minecraft and included that Mr. Barlow is always looking for new ways to incorporate gaming and technology in his class.

As a part of their research resources, NCTM published a study which supported using video games to help teach mathematics. This study showed that true games (not the traditional games which did not involve new gaming ideas) helped to increase mathematics achievement when students who participated were compared to non-gaming peers (<https://www.nctm.org/Research-and-Advocacy/Research-Brief-and-Clips/Video-Games-in-the-Math-Classroom/>). Armed with the knowledge that students who were born during late 2007 and 2008 were the first children born in the time of the iPhone, using games such as escape rooms and popular online games may very well increase the effectiveness of teachers as well as the motivation of students in the math classroom as we enter the next decade.











Brandon  
Florence  
McLaurin  
Northwest  
Pelahatchie  
Pisgah  
Puckett  
Richland

**Rankin  
County  
School  
District**

**TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE**