

**Standards-Based Change in a Chicago School – My Journey**  
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Good Morning.

As Dr. Raphael shared with you, I am the principal of an inner city school located on the south side of Chicago. Drake School has a student population of approximately 370 students in grades Pre-K to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. 96% of our families are African Americans who are eligible for free or reduced lunch. We have a mobility rate of about 10% and an annual attendance rate of about 95%. Most of the students who attend our school live in the community; however, we do have students who attend our school through various programs. I have been asked to share with you today, my story of standards-based change.

When I reflect on how my journey with the Standards-Based Change Process began a number of images come to my mind. But after thoughtful consideration I came to the conclusion that there was one driving factor that led me to the Standards-Based Change Process. That factor was student achievement. I was faced with a need to continue the positive student achievement gains that Drake School was experiencing when I accepted the position as the principal. Under the very capable leadership of my predecessor, our school moved from doing well to showing strong improvements in reading and mathematics. For those of you in the audience who are principals, perhaps you can relate to my situation. As the new instructional leader at Drake I was faced with a number of challenges: meeting the mandates of a demanding district, supporting a staff that did not want a new instructional leader, and making sure that our data continued to demonstrate that we are trending up.

As I maneuvered my way through my first year at Drake I could not help but wonder if there was a better way to continue our success. I had to insure that our instructional program was of the highest quality for the students we served. Let me share a little bit about what happens in the Chicago Public Schools. Our school district sets high standards for its schools and in doing so, they make every effort to provide us with the tools and assistance that they think is necessary to support us. The instructional leaders in our schools (principals, assistant principals, and Area support personnel) have full-day monthly professional development sessions where we gather with our colleagues from other schools. During these sessions, much of our time is focused on topics mandated by the district (in addition to the sidebars we have about what is going on in our schools). When I started attending the meetings I was content with the mandated topics because I thought they were relevant, but I really wanted to hear about what was happening in other schools. Our monthly meetings became a venue where I could engage in conversations about student achievement with my colleagues. It was at these meetings that one of my colleagues, Patrick Baccelleri, and I began having conversations about examining how my staff and I were using the standards to improve student achievement. Patrick's explanation of the Standards-Based Change Process and its impact on student achievement at his school truly intrigued me. At the conclusion of my first year at Drake, and after several conversations with Patrick and my Area Instruction Officer, I was invited to learn more about the

Standard-based Change Process and how it could us accomplish our goals. With the recommendations from my Area Instruction Officer and Patrick, I applied to be part of the Standards-Based Change Process through Partnership READ located at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

CPS is great about giving administrators books to support instruction. That year, they gave us the second edition of Mike Schmoker's book entitled, "Results, The Key to Continuous School Improvement." I did not read it right away, however, during the summer before we began implementing the SBCP I read it. As I read his book his message was so obviously clear that it just made sense. Everything that I thought we should do was written right there on the pages. The question was, "How do we do that?"

When I went to the Partnership READ Principal's orientation I listened to the principals their staff members talk about the "To Do List," team collaboration, developing end-of-year-goals by using the standards, etc. and I could envisioned what I had been reading about in Mr. Schmoker's book, and what I had been thinking about for our school, unfolding before me. (At the time I was still carrying his book with me in my bag.) During the small groups sessions with our mentor school teams I could not stop talking about how according to book I had read, the Standards-Based Change Process captures everything that we need to improve our schools. Michael Fullan calls it "outcome based education and assessment accountability." I would flash it so that they could see what I was talking about. I was so excited about pulling our team together so that we could get started with the tasks at hand.

I began to share my enthusiasm with all of our school family, teachers, parents, students, and everyone who would listen. I could not contain my excitement about the positive impact that the Standards-Based Change Process would have for us and I felt that others were starting to feel the excitement as well.

Our first year was challenging, yet we remained optimistic. We worked as a whole group and in teams to complete the tasks on our "To Do List," by recreating our vision, developing end-of-year-goals, and designing assessments at each grade level, as we made a great effort to understand the Standards-Based Change Process. I admire the staff for forging ahead and trusting that the process would work for us. We made errors, and we faced setbacks, yet we readjusted and moved forward.

It was at the end of our second year that we saw our achievement scores drop. We were clearly disappointed. I guess the good news was that the drop did not place us on "probation" (a term that may only be used in Chicago which indicates that you did not make Annual Yearly Progress (AYP)) still it was quite disappointing none-the-less. After conferring with my mentor principal and the Partnership READ team working with our school, we decided that based on the data, some key changes had to take place in several areas. Two things happened, first we made some staffing changes, including hiring a literacy coordinator who was familiar with the SBC Process. Then the Literacy Coordinator and I examined the outcomes to look for alignment with the standards and rigor.

We shared our findings with the staff and amid a menial amount of grumbling, we revised our end of year outcomes for comprehension. When the grade level teams finished their revisions they were very pleased with the work they had done. This was probably when we realized that the SBC Process would be continuous because as the data shows improvement our goals will have to become more rigorous in order to improve student achievement. That realization took away that notion that, “we will get finished,” at some point in time.

This second year was such a pivotal point for us. During this year we started to observe changes in interactions among the staff. Their collaboration began to have more meaning. There was an increase in the number of individual conversations teachers initiated with me regarding their instruction. These were conversations that usually started during post observations conferences. Teachers were starting to reflect on and evaluate professional practice; their own and their colleagues. Some of these were advise seeking conversations on how to support a colleague make a suggestion about teaching lessons.

By the end of the second year, many of our teachers began to see the value in the Standards-Based Change Process. We could tell which teachers had invested in the process by listening to their grade level reports at our Gallery Walks. We heard teachers talk openly about their own practice and our staff began to pose questions to their colleagues about their instruction. Initially, their inquiries were more on the level of seeking information, however, we recognized it as a sign that the conversations were beginning to shift.

You can imagine how excited we were to see the changes developing. We increased opportunities for teachers to talk about what they do in their classrooms. Making minor changes in our routines had a big effect. Instead of having staff meetings discussing housekeeping issues, we used the time to focus on professional development. We moved out of the library for our meetings and into the classrooms. Each week we met in a different classroom so that the staff could see evidence of the great things that were taking place in the classrooms. Teachers began to share their practice with each other and ask for specific strategies to support their own instruction. In our breakout session today, we discuss this topic in more detail.

Our third year of the SBC Process had an amazing opening. When staff changes had to be made, we only hired persons after we described the SBC Process to them and made certain that they would commit to learning to implement the process and the practices that go with the process. Using the SBC Process in selecting new staff members insured participation and built stronger connections between new and returning staff.

This year, we were energized by the fact that the professional conversations that began at the end of last year were topics of discussion at the beginning of the year. We could see that the staff felt empowered to make critical decisions that affect teaching and learning. At our first Gallery Walk for the year I reminded them about the positive changes we had implemented using the SBC Process and the powerful effects their key decisions would have on student achievement.

Implementing the Standards-Based Change Process at Drake School has been tremendous. We have seen our staff empowered; they are setting higher standards for themselves, our Literacy Leadership Team has begun to tackle tough curriculum decisions, like implementing a new grading policy and selecting a more appropriate mathematics curriculum; goal setting has become common place; data driven decision making has increased; and selecting assessments and examining measuring tools is on-going.

Throughout the implementation process our district has been very supportive. I need to share with you that we have not been exempt from presenting district mandated topics on selected professional development days; however because our Area administrators work closely with us they allow us to adjust the presentations to fit our specific needs at Drake. They understand our goal and they provide support on so many levels. Improving student achievement is the goal of everyone in our District and the Standards-Based Change Process has proven to be the most effective means to make that happen for us.