

B E S T P R A C T I C E S

A TICKET
FOR
SUCCESS

B E S T P R A C T I C E S

Tap into an
abundance of
research-based
practices.

The scene is a school office.

A man and woman are talking. The woman, a successful veteran elementary school principal, has been assigned to another school. The man, her replacement, is starting his first principalship. "You're so admired, the school is so respected, and everyone here is so positive and supportive of student achievement," he says. "I'm a little intimidated to be following you. Can you share a few of your 'can't-miss' strategies?" The veteran replies with advice that will sound familiar to principals:

- The best educators are also lifelong learners.
- Highly effective principals are especially adept at converting research into practice.
- Elementary school principals, in particular, are focused on what works for students and teachers rather than any specific ideology.

The challenge principals face is how to find the resources they need to realize these goals.

Enter Doing What Works, perhaps the largest, most comprehensive, and most insightful repository of effective, research-based instructional practices and other resources currently available to educators. It's a principal's free ticket to school improvement.

The U.S. Department of Education website—www.dww.ed.gov—relies primarily on the work of the Institute of Education Sciences and occasionally other entities that adhere to similarly rigorous standards. It features thousands of pages of content on 75 research-based best practices, supplemented with practical examples, tools, and sample materials all aimed at strengthening schools, improving student achievement, and providing support for instructional leadership. The website developers quickly realized that the challenge wasn't evaluating the research and recommending practices, it was helping educators navigate such a robust site. (See *DWW and NAESP* on page 39.)

Broad and Deep

Where and how to begin? DWW covers a wide range of topics, everything from data-driven improvement to early childhood education to organizing teaching and reducing behavior problems in elementary school classrooms, and it does so

in great depth. Plumb this content-rich site by taking three easy steps.

Select a Key Area. The entire DWW website is currently organized around six key areas: Data-Driven Improvement, Quality Teaching, Literacy, Math and Science, Comprehensive Support, and Early Childhood.

Drill Down to a Topic. Each area is divided into specific topics. The key area

of Data-Driven Improvement, for example, is divided into five topics: Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools; Response to Intervention in Primary Grade Reading; Response to Intervention in Elementary-Middle Math; Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making; and Using Data Under ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment

THREE CLICKS DEEP

The information is there ... the question is, can you find it? Although the DWW website features thousands of pages, hours of videos and multimedia presentations, and dozens of downloadable forms, templates, and tools, the practices—the site's "DNA"—are only three clicks away. Here's what you'll find at www.dww.ed.gov if you're looking for help in using data, for example:

CLICK ONE: Data-Driven Improvement

CLICK TWO: Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making

CLICK THREE: Five content-rich practices organized under four easy-to-use categories. Some of the insight available about the practice, the Cycle of Improvement, for example, includes the following:

- **Practice Summary:** A six-minute multimedia overview on Making Data Part of an Ongoing Cycle of Instructional Improvement.
- **Learn What Works:** A seven-minute interview with Elizabeth A. City, Harvard Graduate School of Education, who discusses how teachers can enact a three-step "Prepare, Inquire, Act" cycle of instructional improvement.
- **See How It Works:** An interview with a curriculum-skills specialist who discusses multiple assessments that are used to help staff collect information on various student skills and provide early intervention.
- **Do What Works:** Ideas for Action and Tools and Templates, each one a downloadable Word document that you can edit and adapt to serve your needs.



Act). Each topic features a host of related materials—video overviews (which provide general information) state- and district-specific examples and tools, and related links and reports.

Dive Into a Best Practice. Here's the core value of the DWW website. Each topic is sub-divided into the recommended research-based practices. For example, Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making (one of the topics under the Data-Driven Improvement area) features five practices:

- Cycle of Improvement (make data part of an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement);
- Student Use of Data (teach students to examine their own data and set learning goals);
- Vision for Data Use (establish a clear vision for schoolwide data use);
- Data-Driven Culture (provide supports that foster a data-driven culture within the school); and
- Districtwide Data System (develop and maintain a districtwide data system).

Each practice is further organized into four user-friendly categories, which are standard for all 75 practices on the site: 1.) Practice Summary, which provides background on the practice; 2.) Learn What Works, which consists of expert interviews, key concepts, research evidence, and related links—all in an effort to illuminate the research behind the recom-

mended practice; 3.) See How It Works, which offers interviews, presentations, and sample materials from schools and classrooms engaged in the practice; and 4.) Do What Works, which gives ideas for taking action and showcases examples, templates, and practical tools on how to use online resources. (See an example on page 37.)

**DWW
BY THE
NUMBERS**
6 Areas
20 Topics
75 Practices

With so much information available on the DWW website, finding a specific practice to explore can seem like trying to find a needle in a haystack. However, each area, topic, and practice is organized in the same way, so users only need to learn how to navigate the site once. It's the variety of formats—abstracts, videos, samples, downloadable templates, planning tools—that makes the website so robust.

In addition to the main framework, the DWW website includes a What's New section, FAQs, links to the Department of Education and the IES What Works Clearinghouse, and a way to subscribe to DWW updates. All of the information is free; educators are encouraged to print or email pages and share resources with colleagues.

Recommendations, Not Rules

Research-based best practices are those that keep working when fads, hunches, and instincts fall short. They bolster the kind of leadership that teachers look for in a principal, parents require on behalf of their children, and the nation needs of its schools. Research-based best practices are a leader's playbook. That said, DWW encourages principals to improvise and modify the tools and techniques to fit their needs.

Best practices are not perfect practices. No body of research, even one as extensive at the DWW site, can anticipate every unique situation. Principals' unique perspectives and experiences are essential to the school-improvement equation and to successfully implementing best-practice recommendations. Grover J. Whitehurst, an assistant secretary at the U.S. Department of Education, defined evidence-based education as "the integration of professional wisdom with the best available empirical evidence in making decisions about how to deliver instruction."

DWW supplies the empirical evidence. You supply the professional wisdom and make the decisions.

About this Article

This article was written and compiled by the *Principal* magazine editorial team and freelance education writer and editor David Martin. 

Principal ONLINE

Access the following web resources by visiting *Principal* magazine online: www.naesp.org/NovDec11

 *Best Practices for Better Schools* is an online publication series intended to strengthen the effectiveness of K-8 principals by **providing information and insight** about research-based practices and by offering guidance for implementing them in schools.

DWW AND NAESP

In 2010, NAESP conducted a survey of its members to gauge their interests and better understand their challenges. Virtually every respondent—99 percent—indicated that they are extremely interested or interested in best practices, particularly those that address the principal's role as an instructional leader.

With this nearly unanimous response as a touchstone, NAESP engaged with DWW as a partner to help distribute the web-based resources. (NAESP was the only national association selected to receive a grant from DWW to help disseminate this work.) Further, NAESP is developing and strengthening resources centered on best practices, all defined under a single umbrella, Best Practices for Better Schools.™

ANNUAL CONFERENCE. NAESP has re-designed its Annual Convention as the Best Practice for Better Schools Conference, March 22-24 in Seattle. Through a combination of keynote addresses, plenary sessions, and focused concurrent sessions, NAESP's conference features advice, insight, and guidance specifically for elementary and middle-level principals to transform schools into high-performing learning communities.

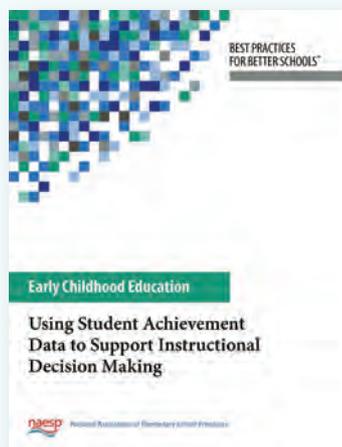
The line-up of speakers represents a virtual "who's who" in education and school improvement: The keynote addresses will be delivered by Diane Ravitch, education policy analyst and bestselling author of *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education*, and Rafe Esquith, a fifth-grade teacher and bestselling author of *Teach Like Your Hair's On Fire!*; and plenary sessions will be led by Douglas Reeves, Andrew Hargreaves, Richard and Rebecca DuFour, Eric Jensen, and Yong Zhao.

ONLINE WHITE PAPERS. NAESP has also published four online white papers based on DWW resources. The papers, part of a series titled *Best Practices for Better Schools*, cover preschool language and literacy, response to intervention in elementary and middle math, response to intervention in primary grade reading, and using student achievement data to support instructional decision-making.

The papers, seven to 10 pages each so they can be read in one sitting, walk principals through DWW's coverage of these topics, including the relevant research-based practices, actions that can be taken in schools and classrooms, links to what principals and other educators say about those actions, tools and templates, and extensive related links to websites and reports. Readers of *Best Practices for Better Schools* are encouraged to visit the DWW website to view all the resources. Upcoming topics to be covered by the series include instructional leadership, teacher and staff development, student assessment, school improvement, and school and home partnerships.

PRINCIPAL MAGAZINE. The March/April issue of *Principal* will focus on best practices. The magazine issue, which is currently in development, includes first-person accounts of best-practice implementation successes and challenges, case studies, and research-based articles.

Find details on all these initiatives at NAESP's website, www.naesp.org.



WATCH for much more on best practices from NAESP in the coming months. The 2012 National Conference and Expo, set for March 22 to 24 in Seattle, is being built around the theme Best Practices for Better Schools™ and the March/April issue of *Principal* will focus on best practices.