



Washington State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO PROVIDE THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN?

Prior to the Standards and Accountability movement the idea of students having the opportunity to learn was based upon equal access and seat time in our schools. Now that we have standards which students must meet in order to graduate, the opportunity to learn has come to mean something quite different. Here is one potential example.

Although the Reading WASL has been shown to be a valid and reliable assessment in and of itself, what is still in question is its “consequential validity”; that is, have the students *actually* had the opportunity to practice and learn what the assessment measures?

For example, to meet standard on the Reading WASL a student must have instruction, practice, and mastery in writing a summary, comparing and contrasting, identifying cause and effect, recognizing inference and prediction, evaluating the author’s purpose, and understanding and applying specialized vocabulary. Interestingly, even though these are the reading targets, these same skills are required in meeting standard on the Math WASL, the Writing WASL, and the Science WASL. In addition, Marzano’s research outlined in *Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement* (2001) has indicated that summarizing and identifying similarities and differences (comparing and contrasting) are two of the most effective instructional strategies for improving student achievement regardless of grade level or content area. Further, students must not only be able to answer multiple choice questions but must also be able to astutely respond to short answer and extended response questions in all subject areas. This has a huge implication for opportunities to learn effective writing processes.

As we continue our efforts in eliminating the achievement gap, perhaps we have identified two key questions to ask ourselves. Have all of our students had the opportunity to practice and learn at all grade levels and in all content areas how to write an effective summary, to compare and contrast, to identify cause and effect, to recognize inference, to evaluate an author’s purpose, and to understand and apply specialized vocabulary? In addition, have all students had the opportunity to learn across all grade levels and content areas how to respond to short answer and extended response questions? When the answer to these questions is yes, we may be at the point where standards, opportunity to learn, and accountability intersect and the achievement gap is finally eliminated.

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