Looking at the System

I spent this week with two groups of educators determined to increase student achievement in their communities.

I was part of Wood County, WV school district's Innovation and Dropout Prevention Grant. Wood County formed a Dropout Prevention Leadership Team to study graduation rates, trends, and data to assess the dropout status, and to develop a comprehensive Dropout Prevention Plan.
In their application for the grant the district stated:
Wood County is simply losing too many students at the ninth grade level. These students fall too far behind in ninth and tenth grades to be able to recover and complete high school. The vision of Wood County Schools is for all of our students to successfully complete high school and receive their diplomas. This vision is currently realized for only about an average of 80% of Wood County students. Current county data reveals a direct correlation between the number of students who do not pass ninth grade and the number of students who do not graduate from our three high schools.

The participants were mostly high school teachers and we examined planning backwards from the definition of student achievement to student and teacher behaviors. One problem we explored is that focusing on "graduating" is an insufficient goal. It's critical to graduate prepared to do **something.** It is the **something** that provides the motivation for student effort.
This valedictorian talks about being unprepared:

Later in the week, I facilitated training for New Jersey Education Association's Priority School Initiative. It's vision-*"Endeavor to ensure successful NJ public schools where all educators work in a collaborative environment that empowers shared leadership, enabling all students to exceed proficiency as defined by the New Jersey Department of Education."*

NJEA Priority Schools Facilitators

Earlier in the summer I trained 7 retired teachers who will be NJEA consultants serving 13 Priority Schools across the state. This week leadership teams from the 13 schools spent three days with their consultants and each other examining how to put the vision of the program into action. Seeing teachers, principals, and even a superintendent and parent, collaborating, learning, and creating was quite energizing.

Dennis Van Roekel

The president of the National Education Association, Dennis Van Roekel, spoke to the group highlighting that the program was a first of its kind for a state teacher's association to make such a strong commitment to support priority schools.

In his comments Van Roekel stated, "Systems produce what they were designed to produce". Without change, we can look at the

incoming kindergarten students and predict the graduation rate for 2025. We know what the current system is designed to achieve.

His comments resonated with me as I often hear educators stuck in the existing system design. School teams concerned with the parents' responses to a change in something like scheduling or grading. I remind them that we need to explain to parents 'why we are changing' and remember that the parents of the future are in our classrooms today.

I hope my work this week encouraged both groups to be system changers.