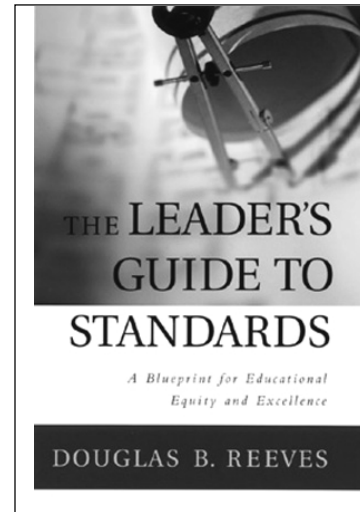


Study Guide for:

The Leaders's Guide to Standards

A Blueprint for Educational Equity
and Excellence

By Douglas B. Reeves, Ph.D.



Suggestions for effective book studies:

1. Set the dates with specified readings well in advance.
2. Ensure that participants have a personal copy of the book.
3. Provide the book study guide before starting to read the book.
4. Select a location that allows for the participants to be able to spread out books and writing materials.
5. Provide a comfortable meeting place with plenty of light.
6. Beverages and snacks are always welcome.
7. The role of the facilitator is to ask open-ended questions and stimulate discussion, not to lecture. Consider changing the role of facilitator and being very clear about norms for participants and facilitators.

Advanced Learning Press provides study guides to complement your comprehensive professional development plan. These guides represent the author's suggested questions and activities to lead to full comprehension and implementation of the ideas in the publication. Focused group discussion leads to individual reflection as well as having the group develop common understandings and language regarding the book's content. For additional insights or questions, please email the author at info@MakingStandardsWork.com. You will receive a response within two business days.

This guide and other study guides are available as a free download at <http://www.makingstandardswork.com/ResourceCtr/index.php>

Chapter 1: The Case for Standards

1. Why, in an age of increasing accountability and standardized testing, must leaders be prepared to make the case for standards? Take a quick, informal poll of your colleagues. How do the people that you work with view standards?
2. What two methods are described for evaluating student performance? Which method is best suited to education. Why?
3. How are standards fair? How can stakeholders, both in and out of schools, add value to standards in order to increase their fairness? Why is fairness so critical at this point in education?
4. You are holding your first PTA meeting as principal of your new school. A parent stands up during your presentation and states that standards have ruined education and made your school less effective. How would you respond?

Chapter 2: Standards and Norms: What's the Difference?

1. Standards are fixed; norms move. How does this distinction help make the case for standards over norms?
2. How does the healthy competition created by standards help prepare students for the competitive world of work. How does this help students understand the real source of success? What does this sense of cooperation imply for grouping and tracking?
3. Standards measure proficiency not speed. This issue only comes into play during the assessment of standards. How many opportunities do your students currently get to receive feedback and resubmit their work? How does this concept impact the typical grade book?
4. The author asserts that the use of the average is a recipe for mediocrity. How can the desire to be "above average" lead to a dangerous complacency. Why should we insist that students meet a standard rather than simply being better than 50 percent of their peers?

5. Standards are complex. Why is this actually a benefit of standards? Why is that very complexity critical for improving student achievement? How can that complexity be a double-edged sword?
 6. Examine a set of norm-referenced test results for a student in your building or district. Do you have a clear idea of the strengths and weaknesses of that individual student? If you were hired to provide a customized intervention for that student starting tomorrow, where would you begin? Now examine the achievement of that same student on the standards of your district. Where would you begin your intervention program in light of this information?
 7. Many parents are more comfortable with norm-based tests despite the information that is available about the benefits of standards. You are being challenged by one of those parents at a board meeting focused on implementation of standards in your district. How would you respond to this parent's love of ranking?
 8. How do standards affect the fundamental and comfortable pattern of grading? What is the implication of standards for averaging student results over a grading period? How would you make the case for changes to grading practices on the basis of fairness and rigor?
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Chapter 3: Standards-Based Performance Assessment

1. Why is it essential that classroom assessments be clearly linked to state standards? How is the use of performance assessment essential to standards implementation?
2. Why is it necessary to test the relationship of a performance assessment to the most important standards? How does this test serve as a filter when planning instructional activities? Take a quick walkthrough of some classrooms in your district. What percentage of the activities that you observe can be directly related to your standards? What percentage of those activities could be eliminated in order to provide more instructional time?
3. Effective performance assessments provide a scenario within which the performance tasks will take place. How many of the activities and tasks observed during your quick walkthrough were placed into a real-world context. What does that imply for student engagement during those tasks?

4. Why is a continuum of performance a critical aspect of effective performance assessment? How does this continuum affect differentiation of instruction?
5. How do scoring guides support the most important purpose of achievement? Reflect on the activities that you observed during your walkthrough. How were teacher expectations for that work communicated to students?
6. A teacher who claims that your insistence on implementing standards is destroying her autonomy in the classroom confronts you. How would you respond based upon the principle of fairness?
7. What is a more efficient way of measuring teacher expectations than direct observation? Ask for a set of three teacher-created assessments and three samples of work considered by the teacher to be proficient on those assessments from several teachers in a grade level or department. What can you surmise about the expectations of each teacher? Are those expectations consistent across the grade level or department?
8. You have noticed after several reviews of teacher-created and scored assessments that the results are inconsistent among team members. How can you provide time within the contract day to increase teacher consistency in scoring student work? Why is it worth the time to increase the consistency with which scoring guides are used?
9. Ten steps to creating standards-based performance assessment are provided. Each is critical but why must step one be completed before the others can proceed. Identify some weeds that can be pulled from your school or district's garden.
10. Create an action plan for providing the time and resources that teachers will need in order to complete each of the ten steps for creating standards-based performance assessments.

Chapter 4: Power Standards

1. Choose a grade level or subject. Examine your district's curriculum and standards for that subject and count the number of standards, objectives, and sub-objectives that are included for the year. Divide that number by

- the number of academic days in your school year. How much time do your teachers have to teach each standard. What does that imply for student proficiency on those standards?
2. You are the new principal of a building that is completely demoralized by the task of covering every standard and objective in the curriculum and every chapter in the text. Describe to your new staff each of the three criteria for Power Standards and explain how their application will benefit the teachers as well as the students.
 3. Apply the Power Standard criteria to the standards that you examined in question one. How many standards meet all three criteria. What does that imply for your current curriculum map?
 4. How would you respond to a teacher who objects that some standards that are not included on a list of Power Standards could be on the state assessment at the end of the year. Another teacher raises the objection that everything in the curriculum document must be covered. How would you respond to that concern?
 5. The practical implications of Power Standards for leaders are described in this chapter. Examine your upcoming calendar of faculty meetings and professional development. How can that calendar be modified in order to provide time for collaboration?
 6. How can leaders avoid micromanagement and improve student achievement at the same time?

Chapter 5: Instructional Leadership

1. Leadership research has demonstrated the connection between leadership and teaching. One of the most important tasks for leaders as teachers is to “focus the organization on the mission, values, and principles that will sustain the organization through any challenges.” (page 60) What are the values of your organization, of your teachers, and your self? How are those values currently communicated?
2. How does the underlying value of fairness translate into action? Several expectations for professional practice are included on pages 62 to 68. How does the value of fairness drive each of these expectations?

3. What are the special needs of new teachers in a standards-based system? What are the special needs of veteran teachers in a standards-based system? How would you as a leader respond to each?
4. What is the most important concept to keep in mind when dealing with a divisive faculty? How does this concept impact your actions as a leader? Examine your calendar of upcoming events. What changes should you make in light of this concept?
5. How does the fundamental principle that it is faster and easier to build on your strengths than to compensate for your weaknesses impact your decision-making? With whom on your faculty would you choose to spend the last ten minutes of your day? How can you celebrate small successes and catch colleagues doing things right?

***Chapter 6: Standards and Community Leadership:
Communication with Parents, Politicians, and Community
Members***

1. Conduct a quick and informal survey of your staff and community by asking the question, “What are your wants and needs for this school?” Tabulate the responses from both groups. How closely are the responses aligned? How can you reconcile the differences?
2. Are you prepared to answer the three questions to which parents demand answers? What actions would you need to take in order to be better able to answer those questions?
3. Describe the four guidelines for presentation and communication with policy makers and community leaders. What organizational values are evidenced by these guidelines? Review two or three recent presentations to your school board. Did those presentations follow these suggested guidelines? How could they have been improved?
4. Community opposition is a fact of life for educational leaders. How should such opposition be addressed?

Chapter 7: Data-Driven Decision Making

1. It is important for educational leaders to distinguish between popularity and effectiveness. Review some recent professional development practices, educational programs, or curricular decisions in your school or district. What evidence is there of the effectiveness of those programs or decisions. Should any of those programs or practices be discontinued or renewed?
2. Why is an analysis of student achievement results only the beginning of data-driven decision making. Why is it important to be able to link specific practices to specific results? Review your own available sources of data. Are you able to directly link certain leadership decisions to improvements in student achievement? If not, what other information do you need to gather?
3. Why is the average not your friend in analyzing student data in order to improve achievement? What kinds of information should you seek when analyzing test data?
4. What purpose does the first step of data-driven decision making serve? Why is it crucial to the success of the subsequent steps?
5. Why is it just as important to discover the strengths as well as the challenges of your school or district in step two? What implications does the discovery of areas of academic success have for the way in which you communicate to your stakeholders?
6. There are two levels of analysis that must be conducted during the needs analysis step of data-driven decision-making. Describe those levels of analysis and how each impacts the actions of teachers and leaders within the school or system.
7. Many business and education authors have described the power of setting goals. How does meeting the SMART criteria improve the effectiveness of a goal?
8. Educational effects have many causes. Why is it crucial for school improvement efforts to identify those causes that can be influenced by teaching practice, curriculum strategy, and effective leadership? Choose an area of recent improvement for your school or district. Brainstorm the possible causes of that improvement and then identify those most directly in your control. How can those causes be adapted to an area of need?

9. What is the danger of failing to measure the strategies that you have identified to meet an academic goal. Examine your current school improvement plan. Is there any provision for a periodic review of the strategies that are being implemented to achieve the goals set forth in the plan?
10. How does step seven help ensure that data-driven decision making is a continuous process. When was the last time that your current school or district improvement plan was reviewed? How often are your improvement plans revised?
11. Three myths of data-driven decision-making are described in this chapter. Do any of those beliefs affect the practice of your district? How can you as a leader change practice in order to change beliefs about data analysis?

Chapter 8: Creating Ownership and Support for Standards

1. Identify some areas of success in your district in the area of standards implementation as described in previous chapters. How have the teachers and leaders of that school created ownership of the standards. How have the teachers and leaders in that building created congruence between their actions and the values of the district? What replicable practices can you discover from their practice?
2. Name five leaders or teachers in your school or district who are willing to experiment with innovative teaching practices. How can you support their innovations within your current budgetary, evaluation, and incentive system?
3. Examine your calendar as suggested by Tom Peters. Create a pie chart that displays the allocation of your time over a typical week. Does that allocation of time reflect your espoused values? How can you reallocate your time to more directly reflect the mission and values of your organization?

Chapter 9: Redefining Educational Accountability

1. “What the leader needs to know is not merely an announcement of results but the causes of those results.” (page 128) The first step in successful leadership is identifying the information required to accomplish the mission. Evaluate the information gathering systems that you currently have in place. Do those systems provide you all of the necessary information? How can you modify those systems in order to get the information that you need?
2. How does a comprehensive accountability system relate to the Leadership and Learning Matrix? Compare the specific actions of a leader that is moving on the Resilience Continuum to the actions of leaders who function on the other three continua. How would you support a leader trying to move from one of the other three continua onto the Resilience Continuum?
3. Reflect on several recent leadership presentations in your district. How many of those presentations increased the capacity of their participants to answer the four essential questions proposed by Schmoker (2001). How could those presentations have been modified in order to improve the ability of the participants to answer the four questions?

Chapter 10: Assessing Leadership Performance

1. The fundamental purpose of assessment is to improve performance. Is this purpose evidenced by your current leadership evaluation system? What standards for leaders are currently in place in your district and how are they measured. Do those standards support the mission and vision of the organization?
2. Create an anonymous description of a leader using one or two persons with whom you are familiar. Provide that description to a group of your colleagues to assess using your current leadership evaluation instrument. Compare the results of the separate evaluations. How closely do those evaluations align? How could the descriptors in the evaluation instrument be improved in order to provide clearer descriptions of leadership performance?
3. Reflect on your strategic leadership decisions over the past year using the three central questions on page 149. What do your answers to those questions tell you about the effectiveness of your strategic leadership? How could your strategic leadership be improved?

Chapter 11: The Role of the Superintendent

1. Identify the most pernicious negativism that is presently facing your district. What is the source of that negativism? What are the underlying assumptions and beliefs that are fueling it? Construct a direct response to that negativism using the values and principles of your organization.
2. Examine the current policies and practices in your district. What obstacles impede the complete implementation of standards as described in this book? How could you modify those current policies and practices in order to provide more support for standards implementation? What stakeholder interests would be affected by those changes?
3. Review the organization of your central office. Is the organization of your central office determined by departmental function or by the needs of the mission? How could your central office be more efficiently organized to support the mission and values of your school district?

Chapter 12: The Role of the Board of Education

1. What are the demographics of your school district? What is the demographic composition (including age statistics) of the community that you serve? Compare the two data sets. What implications can you draw for stakeholder involvement?
2. What are the burning issues presently facing you as a school board member? Evaluate the knowledge and expertise of your fellow school board members. Do you and your colleagues have the capacity to deal with those issues in an informed manner? What implications does this have for the professional development of you and your fellow board members? How and when will you gain the knowledge and skills necessary?
3. What is the process by which items are placed on the school board docket? Does this process reflect the values expressed by your district? How can you modify the filtering system in order to reflect what is most important to the board?

Chapter 13: The Role of State Leadership

1. It is inherently inefficient to assume that a district will deliberately choose non-compliance. What incentives does your state have in place to reward compliance by design. How can you divert the time, energy, and

resources that are currently devoted to inspection to support a system of self-monitoring?

2. Personal computers have the potential to revolutionize classroom instruction by support the Data-Driven Decision Making process. Discuss with your state test vendor the steps that would be necessary to provide teachers and building level leaders with the level of detail described in the chapter. What would be the costs of making those changes? How could you align your actions with your values in this regard?
3. A governor can shape public dialogue on education by making explicit links between the mission and vision of the state and the decisions made on the local level. What systems do you have in place to gather the information necessary to make those links explicit? How could you restructure the state accountability system to gather the needed data?

Chapter 14: The National Leadership Imperative

1. What are the implications of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act for public schools in terms of school choice? How can national and state leaders support the innovative efforts of public school districts to offer flexibility to parents?
2. The grading system, as we know, fails to provide accurate feedback to students, parents, and teachers about the ability of the children being rated. How can you as an educational leader gather and present data to frame a dialog on revising grading practices. What are the perspectives and interests of all stakeholders in the current system?
3. Federal influence over education is limited. How then can national leaders shape educational policy and practice?

Conclusion: The Enduring Values of Leadership

1. What stories shaped your values and passions. How can you share those stories with others and support their discovery of the events that shaped their values?

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- *Daily Disciplines of Leadership: How to Improve Student Achievement, Staff Motivation, and Personal Organization*
- *Power Standards: Identifying the Standards that Matter the Most*
- *“Unwrapping” the Standards: A Simple Process to Make Standards Manageable*

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