



BECOMING

— A GREAT —

HIGH SCHOOL

*6 Strategies
and 1 Attitude*

That Make a Difference

TIM R. WESTERBERG

Foreword by Robert J. Marzano



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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO MY PARENTS
WHO INSTILLED IN ME THE WORK ETHIC,
PERSEVERANCE, AND GIFT OF EDUCATION THAT
HAVE MADE POSSIBLE WHATEVER SUCCESS
I HAVE ENJOYED THUS FAR IN LIFE.

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I would also like to acknowledge the contributions that the members of the faculty and staff at Littleton High School made to what this book has to offer. A great deal of what I know and believe about creating great high schools I learned from watching and listening to them.

FOREWORD

BY ROBERT J. MARZANO

High schools are in the spotlight, and virtually all high schools, even high schools that have longstanding reputations in their communities as “good schools,” are under pressure to get better. Among the major sources of this pressure to improve—a force that few in leadership positions in a high school community can afford to ignore—are the No Child Left Behind Act, state accountability report cards, competition for students created through ever-expanding choice initiatives, and fears of losing our competitive advantage in the 21st century global economy.

While the forces of change are many, the “remedies” proposed to improve high schools are legion. What high school leaders and leadership teams wishing to significantly improve their schools need is a comprehensive and practical research-based model to guide them to those strategies and initiatives that have a proven track record of increasing student achievement. This book definitely fills that need—specifically by focusing on the 6+1 model.

Dr. Tim Westerberg, a 26-year veteran of the high school principalship and a nationally known high school reform activist, presents such a model in this book, *Becoming a Great High School*. Taken together, the research-based conclusions, recommendations, and examples in this work, briefly summarized here, provide a framework for helping any high school become a great high school.

High schools that get uncommon results from common student populations have several things in common, not the least of which is an effort-based, we-expect-success school culture. Examples from high-performing

high schools—public and private; rural, suburban, and urban—of what such a culture “looks like” in practice are explored in this book. The evidence across schools is clear: Great high schools in this country engage all students in college and career-prep curricula and provide the support that students need to be successful. General and remedial tracks have no place in these schools.

In America’s best high schools, curriculum, instruction, and assessment are guided by clear learning goals. However, many (if not most) high schools are activity driven. Teachers design learning activities for students based on what is usually a vague and implicit understanding on the teacher’s part of what knowledge or skills are to be learned. Students are often unaware of the intended learning outcomes of these activities and adopt a check-it-off mentality toward schooling. Learning becomes secondary, at best, to checking off assignments as completed and collecting points toward a grade. By contrast, substantial increases in student achievement are being recorded by high schools that have identified a limited number of common, “big-picture” learning goals at the course, department, or building level.

With clear learning goals in place, high schools that go from good to great set out to accomplish those goals by strategically employing the instructional strategies embodied in a commonly held, research-based instructional model. There is a lot we know about how students learn, and using the science of teaching increases the chances of success in the classroom. Approaching lesson design with a common instructional model in mind not only increases student achievement directly but also has an indirect impact by providing teachers with a common language of instruction. In high schools that use professional learning communities and collaboration time productively, teacher talk focuses squarely on teaching and learning. Meaningful communication about teaching and learning—or about any other topic, for that matter—cannot happen absent the background knowledge provided by a common instructional model.

Any viable instructional model will include as components formative assessment, tracking student progress, and timely intervention. The research on providing effective feedback to students on their progress toward clearly stated learning goals suggests it may be the most powerful instructional strategy available to high school teachers. Tracking student progress at the student, classroom, and school levels has been shown to be motivating to students and provides teachers with data to inform adjustments to instruction. Teachers in

high-performing high schools work in teams to design a rubric or scoring guide for each identified learning goal, develop common assessments or a bank of assessment items based on those scoring guides, administer frequent formative assessments, and track student progress based on the results of those assessments. In the best high schools in America, intervention for students who are not successful is a planned event, and arriving at course grades is part and parcel of the formative assessment process.

The final strategy in the 6+1 model invites students and teachers to celebrate success in making progress toward and accomplishing important academic and life skills learning goals. Celebrating success, done in certain ways, is rewarding, motivational, and just plain fun. It is the logical conclusion to a sequence of strategies designed to improve student learning and create the high schools of our choice.

On a personal note, I have known Tim for over two decades. This book represents a powerful combination of his considerable practical knowledge based on a highly successful 26-year career as a principal and decades of research and theory that people like me have tried to synthesize. Given that combination, this could be one of the most useful books on high school reform to date. I recommend it most highly.