

Navigation 101:

How a Focus on Planning Skills
Leads to Higher Student Performance



Friends:

I take great pleasure in providing you this description of Navigation 101, the innovative student planning initiative of the Franklin Pierce School District. There are many folks who deserve credit for the initiative's success, including the educators, parents and students who have worked so hard to implement it. No change as substantial as this succeeds in a district without the commitment of the school board and superintendent. Franklin Pierce is fortunate to have the leadership of Dr. Steve Rasmussen and its strong, united Board of Directors. Equally crucial for such an innovation is the vision and dedication of the curriculum director, Patti Anderson.

Still, the heart of this project was the creativity and determination of the dynamic team of Tim Stensager and Dan Barrett. Tim brought a thorough understanding of institutional change and remarkable powers of persuasion. Dan added experience with guidance innovations and the kind of remarkable good cheer that sustains a multi-year change process. I hope you will be as impressed as I am with the wonderful changes they have made for students. For that is the proof of this work: that students, parents and teachers have responded so strongly. Navigation 101 changes lives. What greater praise can I give?

Tim, Dan, and their colleagues have been sharing their success with other districts. I hope this brochure helps make Navigation 101 a statewide initiative. Our children need and deserve a program like this.

Sincerely,

Dr. Terry Bergeson
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Introduction

Since 1993, Washington Schools have been working hard to improve student academic achievement, and to help all students master the skills and knowledge set out in the state's rigorous new academic standards. During the past decade, there have been significant improvements in teaching and learning across the state.

Nonetheless, teachers, counselors and principals have struggled to find ways to motivate students - especially middle and high school students - to take advantage of these new and more challenging learning opportunities. How can they keep teens genuinely engaged in learning rather than just going through the motions? How can they help students understand the connection between working hard in school and having a satisfying adult life? How can schools keep parents informed and involved at the middle and high school level? In systems where each teacher - and each school counselor - deals with hundreds of students, how can they provide each student with meaningful personal relationships with adults?

In the Franklin Pierce School District, educators have found new answers to these questions. They have created a new model for teaching students the skills they need to chart their own course through middle school, high school, post-secondary education, and adult life. The new system also provides students with an ongoing, personal relationship with an adult that lasts throughout middle school, and another that lasts throughout the four years of high school. It also keeps parents involved in the decisions their teens are making. These changes have had profound impact on the student motivation, and on students' willingness to take on more challenging coursework.

Today, a growing number of school districts throughout Washington are adopting (and adapting) the Franklin Pierce model of student guidance. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction is supporting their efforts. In February 2004, a conference of early adopters of this model was held in Olympia to compare experiences, share best practices, and to identify products and services needed for further progress. OSPI plans to help develop curriculum and a web site to support this effort.

The Way It Was in Franklin Pierce

In the past, most students were given minimal guidance on how to choose what classes they took, and how to plan and prepare for their lives after high school. Each middle and high school counselor was expected to help hundreds of students choose and sign up for classes, while spending just a few minutes with each of them.

Students who planned to attend four-year colleges generally got the most help from counselors; those who planned to go to community or technical colleges or vocational training - and those who had no plan at all - generally got the least. Students who were more assertive about their need for assistance in identifying scholarship opportunities and navigating their way through the college admissions process were also more likely to get extra help from counselors than those who did not specifically request this assistance. Ironically, it was usually the students who *didn't* ask who were most adrift and in need of help.

In addition to their duties advising students about career choices, college entrance requirements, scholarships, and class schedules, school counselors were also expected to provide mental health and social services to students grappling with problems such as family disintegration, homelessness, abuse

or neglect, mental illness, or substance abuse. This mental health/social services function was most concentrated in elementary schools, but counselors were expected to fulfill this role in middle and high schools, too - even when doing so reduced the amount of time available for assisting students with education and career planning.

In their "spare time," counselors might occasionally make classroom presentations to students regarding post-secondary education and career options, but this was relatively rare. If a counselor found time for classroom presentations, the topic was more likely to be drug abuse prevention than career and post-secondary planning.

Very few recognized that there was a growing body of knowledge and a specific set of skills that students need to learn in order to navigate their way through public schools, post-secondary technical/vocational training or education, and an ever-changing job market. Nor did many recognize that failure to teach these skills put students at enormous risk.

Under these circumstances, it's no wonder that a lot of students regarded high school as an elaborate ritual without much real meaning. Some students, to be sure, were genuinely excited about learning and focused on academic achievement. But these students were not likely to be in the majority.

Parents were largely absent from the picture in both middle and high school. Some students might consult their parents about what classes to take, or show them the work they were doing, but this was not a part of the school system. The general expectation was that parents gradually faded from the picture once students left elementary school.

A closely related problem was the absence, for many students, of a meaningful personal relationship with an adult at school. Each student had many teachers; conversely, each teacher had hundreds of students. Although there was compelling research on the importance of such one-on-one relationships, middle and high schools were simply not structured to provide them. School counselors often dealt with students in crisis because of the absence of such sustaining relationships.

For many young high school graduates - and dropouts - the result was a phenomenon known as "post high school drift." Lacking specific job skills or any chosen career path, far too many young people drifted from one dead-end, low-wage job to another for several years before they finally realized that they needed further education or training to get ahead. By the time this realization sank in, some had married and become parents - making it much harder to balance the competing demands of family, low-wage work, and job training or education. Thus, the old system tended to perpetuate poverty on the one hand, and privilege on the other.

What students need to know and be able to do

The Franklin Pierce model was inspired by the data that school leaders confronted - data about the dropout rate, about the higher levels of skill and knowledge required by today's job market, and about the persistent gap in both school achievement and life outcomes for low-income students and students of color. These leaders were looking for ways to motivate students to learn as if their lives depended on it - because, of course, they do.

The cornerstone of the model is the recognition that there are specific skills and a specific body of knowledge that every student needs to master in order to take charge of his or her own education, career, and life.

Students need to be knowledgeable about their own interests, abilities, and learning styles. They need to know how to analyze their own WASL scores and other test results in order to build on their strengths and overcome their weaknesses. They need access to information and real-life experiences that help them sort out what career choices might be appropriate for them. And they need to develop the capacity to accept their own limitations, while at the same time challenging themselves to keep expanding their spheres of competence.

Students also need to understand how the K-20 systems of learning works, and how it fits with today's economy and job market. For example, they should know what jobs and what wages they can get with a high school diploma alone. They should know about the full array of post-secondary options available, and all of the possible ways of financing them.

Students should know how to find out about possible careers; how to find and recruit their own mentors; how to ask for and use job-shadowing opportunities and informational interviews; and how to research and assess prospective schools, vocational training institutions, or employers.

To be very specific, students - and their parents - need to know how to fill out big, scary forms such as the FAFSA - the basic document necessary to get federal financial aid for post-secondary education.

To be more general, students need to know *how to make the system work for them* - that is, how to *navigate*; how to chart their own course through public school, post-secondary job training and education, and a changing economy.

In today's world, these are *survival skills*. Those who understand how the system works can make the system work for them; those who don't will be the helpless victims of technological and economic change.

These are also *motivational skills*. Students who have learned to focus on their own futures, and to navigate their way towards fulfilling their dreams, have much more compelling reasons to work hard in school.

Marshaling the resources to give students the skills and knowledge they need

The central feature of the Franklin Pierce model is a guidance curriculum for teaching the navigational and planning skills students need to get the most out of middle school and high school, and to plan and prepare for their post-graduate lives.

Delivering this curriculum requires far more teaching-power than the counseling staff encompasses, and so, at both the middle and high school level, all teachers have been training to teach this subject.

Navigation 101 classes meet twice a month throughout the school year, and each high school teacher leads a class of about 20 students. (To accommodate the *Navigation 101* schedule, the high school day is restructured twice a month as if there were a school assembly.)

Teachers and students in *Navigation* classes stay together throughout the students' four-year high school career. Students regard this teacher as their personal advisor for the purposes of course selection, advice about post-secondary planning and goals, and connections to internships, job

shadows, and other career-related experiences. This personal, long-term relationship is critical to the success of this program.

The Navigation 101 coursework includes:

- discussion and analysis of students' test results,
- various assessments of personal interests and aptitudes,
- goal-setting skill development,
- planning for each year's high school course selection and personal goals,
- independent living skills lessons, such as how to budget and how to balance a checkbook,
- information about how the post-secondary education and training system works and how to access it, and
- development of a student portfolio and planning for annual, student-led planning conferences with their parents or guardians and their *Navigation* teacher.

In addition, students learn how to write a resume, how to use the full array of resources available to job seekers, and how to enroll in programs that allow them to earn both high school and post-secondary credits for free, before high school graduation.

A new role for parents and portfolios

As part of the *Navigation* coursework, each student begins a portfolio in his or her first year of middle school, and/or in his or her freshman year of high school. (As this program has evolved, the portfolios are now started in middle school.) This portfolio is the repository for WASL and other test results, documentation of career exploration activities, exemplary coursework, documentation of the 30 hours of community service required for graduation in the Franklin Pierce School District, student planning for both high school and post-graduation life, and student transcripts.

The student portfolio is begun in 6th grade, and is kept through each year until high school graduation. It is used as the basis for the student's presentation to a community panel prior to graduation.

Each spring, students, their *Navigation* teachers, and their parents or guardians meet for a conference to discuss the students' progress and plans. Students plan and lead these conferences. They begin by showing their work and discussing what they have done in the past school year, including information about what worked for them and what didn't, what skills they gained, and what classes were difficult for them. Following this discussion of the past year, they lead a discussion of what they plan to do in the coming

"In our first Individual Student Planning (ISP) conferences for our eighth graders, it became apparent that our conversation with students and parents needed to begin earlier than eighth grade...to ensure that all of our students and parents know what the requirements are to make their student's dream a reality."
Joyce Knowles -
Principal, Keithley
Middle School

year - what courses they want to take, what activities they intend to engage in, and how this will help them prepare for their post-graduation future.

At the close of the conference, student, parents, and teacher all sign the plan that spells out what classes the student will take in the coming academic year.

These conferences are highly rated by parents, who appreciate this structured opportunity to be involved in their students' choice of classes, and to discuss how their kids are doing in school. Parents report that the conferences are a valuable springboard for further discussion between kids and parents about post-high school plans and dreams.

Focusing on the future changes the culture of middle and high school

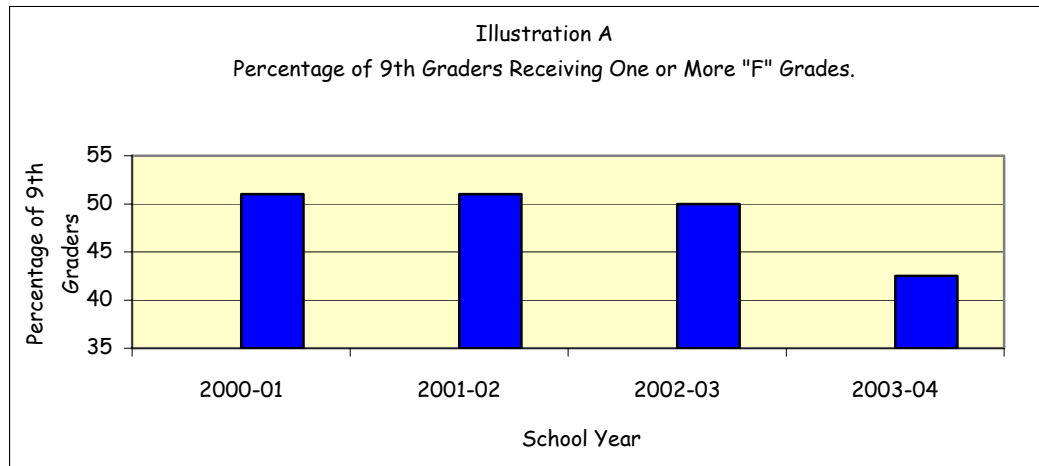
Educators in the Franklin Pierce School District did not set out to make a revolution in the way their middle and high schools operate; they simply wanted to improve the school guidance system and level the playing field for students who were under-served by the traditional system. But making guidance a core subject - and thereby making students and their parents much more savvy consumers of education -- changed far more than they anticipated.

When students become more knowledgeable about what they need to know and be able to do to achieve their dreams, they take much fuller advantage of the opportunities school affords. Their level of motivation rises. Their sense of purpose is clear.

They choose tougher academic courses - especially in math and science. They also learn that if they intend to go to college - including community or technical colleges - they will have to pay tuition to take some of the same math classes they can take in high school for free.

The changes in the schools are not confined to student behavior. Adults in the system have changed, too. For instance, in the past, the high school schedule was organized around the preferences of the faculty. When certain classes were full, students had to take something else. To make the new system work, it became apparent that it made more sense for the students to choose the classes they wanted *first* - and then to create a class schedule to accommodate their needs. Ninety-five percent of students now get the classes they request, when they request them. Teachers adjust by teaching the classes for which there is student demand. They have had to drop classes that don't help students achieve their goals. This system works because students are very knowledgeable about what courses they need - but it has been a big adjustment for faculty.

Educators also discovered that when more students sign up for tough courses, there is an increase in the need for tutoring and other support to help those students. Meeting this need is an ongoing challenge. Yet students are improving their performance. See illustration A.



Another unintended consequence is that parents who participate in student conferences see the vocational guidance their students are getting, and wish they could have some, too. There are lots of parents stuck in low-wage jobs who could benefit from parts of the *Navigation* curriculum. This is a need the school has not addressed, but when time and resources permit, it may be helpful to develop a brochure that helps parents connect with the agencies and educational institutions that can help them develop their own career and educational plans.

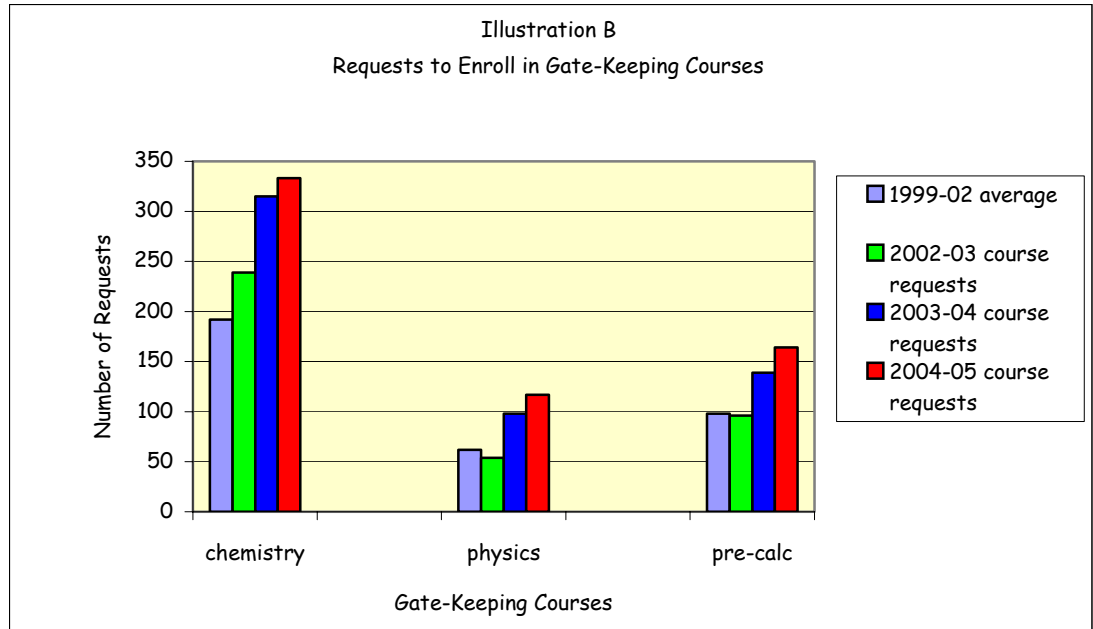
Changing roles for teachers, counselors, students, parents, and community members

In the new system, everyone involved is adjusting to new roles and responsibilities:

- **Students** are given more power and responsibility for shaping their own future, both during their middle and high school years and beyond. This is a major change in students' perspectives - and a major change in their level of motivation. Rather than being passive recipients of public education, students are becoming smart consumers who actively go after the skills and knowledge they want and will need when they graduate. They are enrolling in more rigorous and demanding courses, and making more and stronger connections with local employers and mentors. See illustration B.

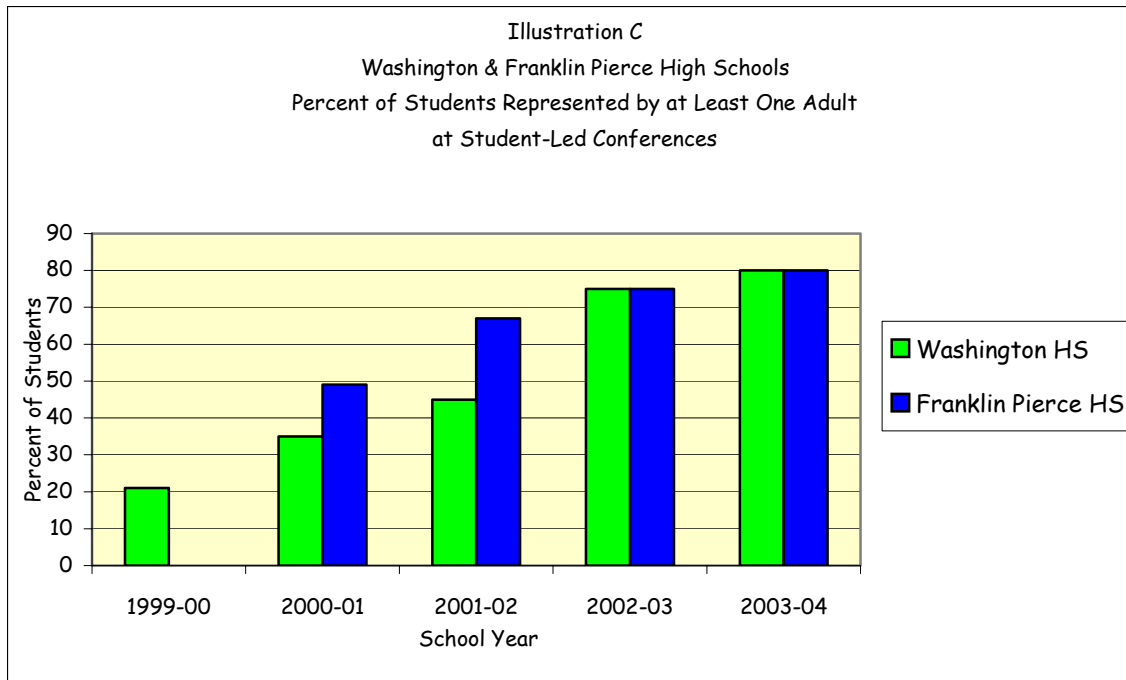
"This makes our future much more real to us." - student, Franklin Pierce High School

"My oldest daughter didn't get to participate in her high school graduation because there was confusion about her credits. She did graduate, but it was a very traumatic time, and I had not idea until the last minute that there was a problem. With the twins, we know every step of the way what they are taking, how they are doing, and that they are on track." - parent, Franklin Pierce High School



- **Parents**, who in the past were sidelined from school involvement once students reached middle school and/or high school, are now back in the picture. They attend student-led annual conferences, participate in students' decisions about which courses to take, and engage in student-led discussions about career interests, connections between school and future success, and planning for post-secondary education or training.

In fact, parents encouraged the district to extend *Navigation* curriculum, along with the student portfolios and parent conferences, into the middle school. See illustration C.



"The Navigation curriculum addresses the needs of ALL students. It is a win-win for students and advisors." -
Cynthia Diederich,
high school counselor

- **School counselors** have experienced a significant change in their job descriptions. They retain responsibility for the mental health and social services functions they performed in the past, but these services have become more structured and more clearly defined. School counselors act more as brokers of mental health and counseling services than as direct providers.

High school counselors continue to be the resident experts on post-secondary education and training options, and sources of financial aid for students. This is a big and important body of knowledge that must be kept current - and incorporated into curriculum for *Navigation* classes.

In the Franklin Pierce School District, counselors have taken on challenging new management roles as well. They monitor system performance, collect and analyze data, identify emerging problems, and bring together the teams needed to find solutions. They have helped design the *Navigation* curriculum, and helped train teachers to deliver it. They use the data they gather and analyze to stimulate efforts to close the achievement gap for students of color and students from low-income families, and to craft the School Improvement Plan required by the state.

Counselors also continue to act as consultants to students and *Navigation* teachers for specialized functions such as helping students enroll in Running Start, identifying and applying for scholarships, and designing the school class schedule.

The specific role of a counselor may vary significantly from one school to another, depending on the counselor's specialized skills, the needs of the students, and the availability of other support and management staff.

- **Teachers** are taking on a new role, not only because they teach *Navigation* classes, but also because they develop close and lasting relationships with their *Navigation* students - relationships that continue throughout the four years of high school. These relationships may be very important to students who lack other strong connections to supportive adults.

The relationship between teachers and counselors has also become much closer and more collaborative, because they work together to develop and refine *Navigation* curriculum, and to ensure that each student gets the help he or she needs to customize education and career plans.

"Now we all understand why public education must involve comprehensive guidance - and why all staff need to be involved in providing it." - Thomas Edwards, social studies teacher

"Five years ago...it was emergency management all the time. Today, I meet with counselors every week, and it's all about aspirations. I'm there to see that all students and families are treated as customers." - Jim Ridgeway, Principal, Washington High School

Teachers have also had to adjust to the new system of scheduling. More of them are teaching the higher-level math, science and Advanced Placement classes that students now choose.

- **Principals** provide philosophical, instructional, and administrative leadership for the change to the new school-wide guidance system. Principals help all school staff understand the importance of providing customized education for each student. They ensure that faculty see how all the pieces of the new guidance system connect to this goal: parent involvement, portfolios, *Navigation* classes, and students' personal, long-term relationship with the faculty member who leads their *Navigation* class.

Principals also help school staff work through the role changes inherent in the transition to this new system, and ensure that teachers and counselors get the training and the planning time they need for effective implementation and continuous quality improvement.

- **Superintendents and school board members** are responsible for creating enabling policies, and communicating with citizens, parents, and community leaders. The more parents and community members know about the purpose and design of the new school-wide guidance system, the more supportive they are likely to be. Building this community support is important because the help of many local businesses, craftspeople, and professionals will be needed to provide career information, job shadowing opportunities, internships, or other informal assistance to students who are exploring their interests and options.
- **Community and business leaders** support this change by offering students opportunities to explore career interests in a variety of ways, including community service, one-day job shadowing opportunities and longer-term internships.

"Our new guidance system has been a catalyst - it caused us to study and implement other system changes that improve learning and teaching in our district." - Steve Rasmussen, Superintendent, Franklin Pierce School District

"Navigation is teaching students to make plans and then giving them the opportunity to work hard to achieve those plans. Plans alone are not enough, especially when their choices are negated by arbitrary school schedules." - Tim Stensager, Executive Director, Technical and Career Education, Franklin Pierce School District

Replicating Success

Education leaders in the Franklin Pierce School District designed the Navigation curriculum and program to respond to specific data they found alarming. Their graduation rate was somewhere between 60% and 70%. The students who went on to post-secondary education or job training programs were predominantly those from the top socio-economic quartile. And among those who did go on to college, an alarming number required remedial courses, especially in math.

The data that drove this program also came from outside the school system. Today's economy clearly demands higher levels of skill and knowledge than ever before. Allowing students to drift through high school without gaining the skills they need to navigate this new economy doomed far too many to lives of poverty and frustration.

These issues are, of course, not unique to the Franklin Pierce School District. When educators began to hear about the success of Franklin Pierce's new guidance model, there was an almost immediate demand for technical assistance and materials to help them replicate it. Today, school districts throughout Washington are adopting and adapting this model, achieving similar results.

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction has encouraged replication by featuring speakers from the Franklin Pierce School District at conferences, by sponsoring an early adopters conference, and by supporting the publication of basic materials.

Those interested in learning more about this effort are invited to visit the OPSI web site at www.k12.wa.us or contact Tim Stensager or Dan Barrett at Franklin Pierce School District, 253-537-0211.

"This kind of systemic change is essential. Our children must learn to understand and plan their life with a view beyond graduation. Keys to the success of this effort are the empowerment of young people to take control of their future; the strong relationship built between student, teacher/counselor and involved parents; and the accountability and responsibility that the students take on to meet their goals. No student is overlooked or lost; each has the opportunity to plan for and work towards a future that he or she believes in. These skills are essential preparation for the workplace that they will be entering."

Paul E. Miller, Executive Director
Executive Council for a Greater Tacoma

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