RISC

Re-Inventing Schools Coalition

Superintendent's Conference

Bar Harbor, Maine

Sponsored by

Commissioner Gendron

Maine Department of Education

www.reinventingschools.org

Applying the Model

in

Bering Strait School District

John A. Davis, Ed.D.

former Superintendent

The Coalition is growing…

- Adams 50 School District, Colorado
- Early College of the Redwoods, California
- Ingenium Charter Schools, California
- Flagstaff School District, Arizona
- Lindsay School District, California
- Youth Connections Charter School, Illinois
- Maine Department of Education
  - *Maine Schools - Demonstrations Sites!*

The Bering Strait School District

- 400-700 air miles from Anchorage
- Russia and International Dateline
- Arctic Circle on the north
- Yukon River on the east
- It is not connected by road
- District is the size of Minnesota

The Bering Strait School District

- 15 school sites (k-12)
- 250 professional staff
- 200 support staff
- During the last eight years
  - Building one school a year
  - Building 30 teacher housing units

Russia
Looking across the
International Dateline

It’s People

- Siberian Yup’ik
- Central Yup’ik
- Inupiat

  - Native language/non-standards English
  - Subsistence hunting and gathering
  - Rural high schools created in 1976-1985

In 1999 the District…

- Community was not clamoring for change
- Staff was not clamoring for change
- Decade long decline in salaries
- Decade long stagnation in funding
- Vocational Ed, Arts and PE eliminated

The Board was asking why…

- Their children needed remedial classes in college
- Vocational educations seemed to have disappeared
- What could be done about drop-outs

Educational perceptions…

- Students were happy and attending school
- Students attending post secondary programs
- Teacher turnover was not a problem
- Some concern over drop-out rates
- Testing results were not an issue
- Parents were supportive, ambivalent and some were hostile toward school

The data by schools

- Reading scores ranged from 11% to 70%
- Attendance - as low as 85% in some schools
- Turnover was 35%-40 annually
- Postsecondary completion - low
- Cohort graduation - 50% +/-

Economically…

- Low socio-economic
- High unemployment
- Subsistence life-style
- Largest employers
  - Education, health care, governmental & transportation industry

Our Curriculum

Not well established in-spite of much effort

Not well supervised

Not consistently applied

Fragmented

Poor correlation between teacher assessment and test data

Wonderful Teachers

- All individuals (and taught that way)
- Teach for 2-3 years and move on
- How could we keep teachers?
- Best way was to stop trying

I was asking questions

- Research stated if a child was not reading at grade level by 3rd grade, he/she may never catch up
- Poor, rural and minority students were failing generation after generation?
- Students learned at differing rates
- We had organized our schools around an efficient industrial model
- Staff did not feel fulfilled professionally
- Research suggested retention did not work
- Who really benefited from social promotion

An “Adult-centric” School

Age based grade placement

Letter grades

Teach what “I” am interested in

Independent evaluations

Time
(*counter-culture)*

- Delayed gratification
- Live for today
- How to teach when students are not in school?

I concluded we could teach if…

- We agreed our students could learn
- We were willing to reorganize ourselves
- We could provide a comprehensive and measurable curriculum
- We expected more from our students
- We all taught using the same rule book
- We could all agree 80-85% was good…but not great

Explaining the Moral Imperative

- **Be the District's First Teacher**
- **Need for support**
- **Need for continuous improvement**

Believing and Dreaming

- The most audacious expectation
  - All children can learn
  - We will be responsible
  - If we expect our students to be great, we must strive to be great ourselves

Investigation

- Who, if anyone, was being successful with like students populations? RISC
- What were they doing? Standards-based
- Would they share their ideas? Yes
- Could we replicate their efforts? Absolutely, with work

Overview of the RISC Model

- Shared Vision

  Stakeholders drive systemic change
- Leadership

  All stakeholders develop leadership capacity
- Standards-Based Design

  Standards-Instruction-Assessment-Reporting

  Learning is the constant, time is the variable
- Continuous Improvement

  Refine processes that foster excellence

TEACHING EVERYONE

building a shared vision

- Teachers
- Principals
- Central Office
- Students
- Parents
- Business Mang
- Maintenance Staff
- Support Staff
- Community

Common belief

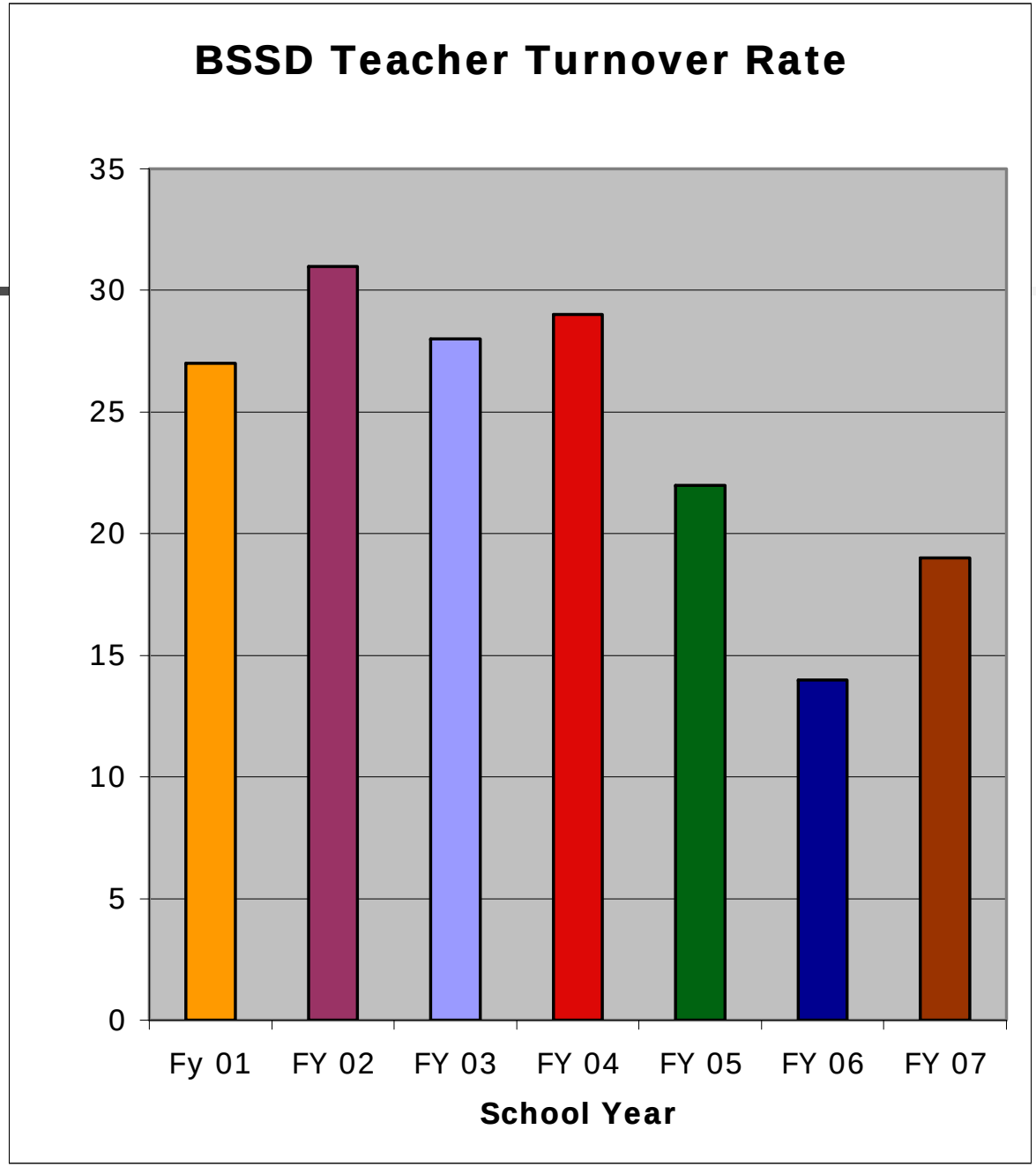
- Our students could learn
- It was our responsibility to teach all children

Building our own…

- Leadership Capacity
- Common Curriculum
- Common Assessment

Teachers

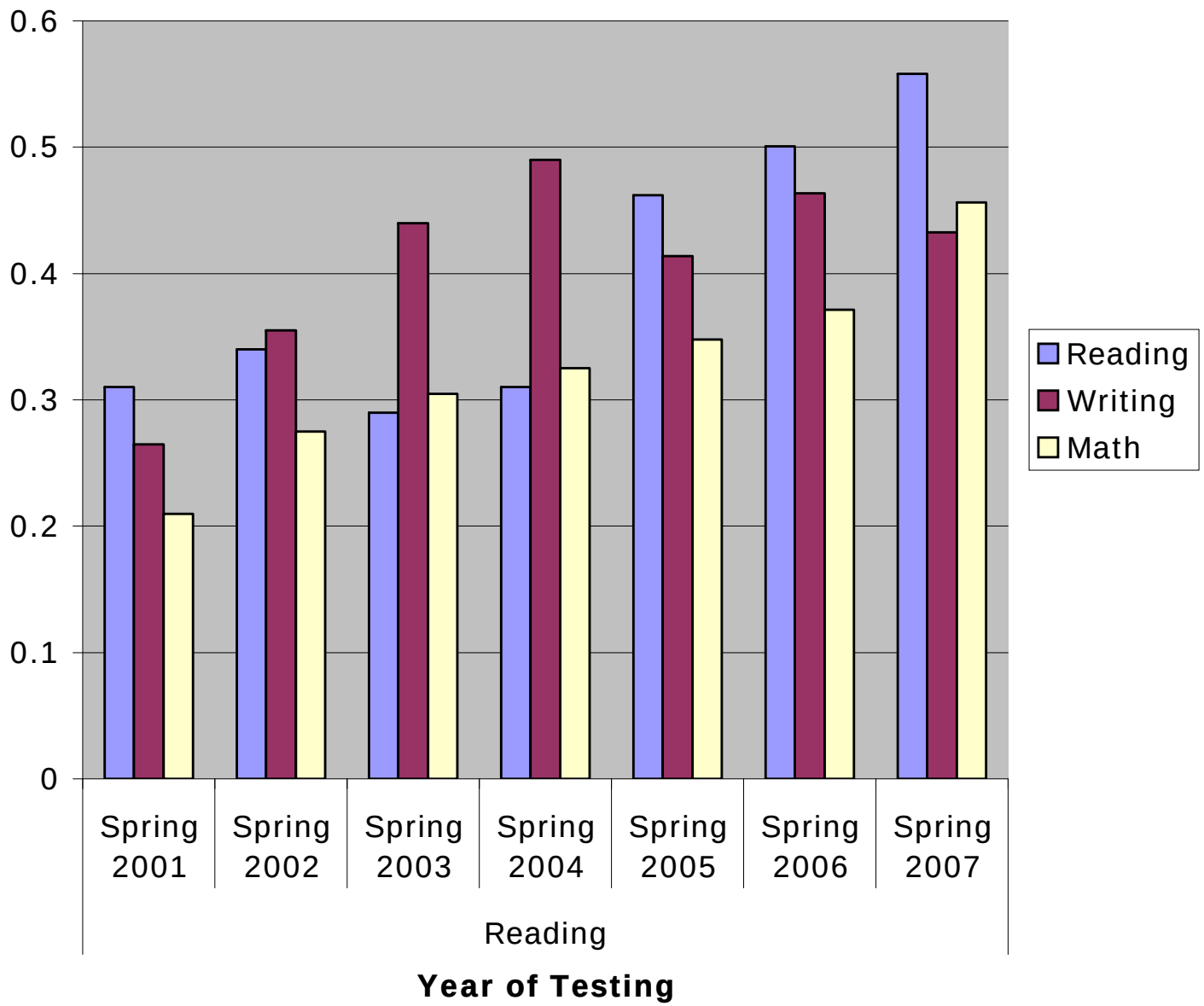
- Turnover
- Teaching what’s in the book
- Teaching what is interesting
- Hit or miss staff development
- Teacher focused

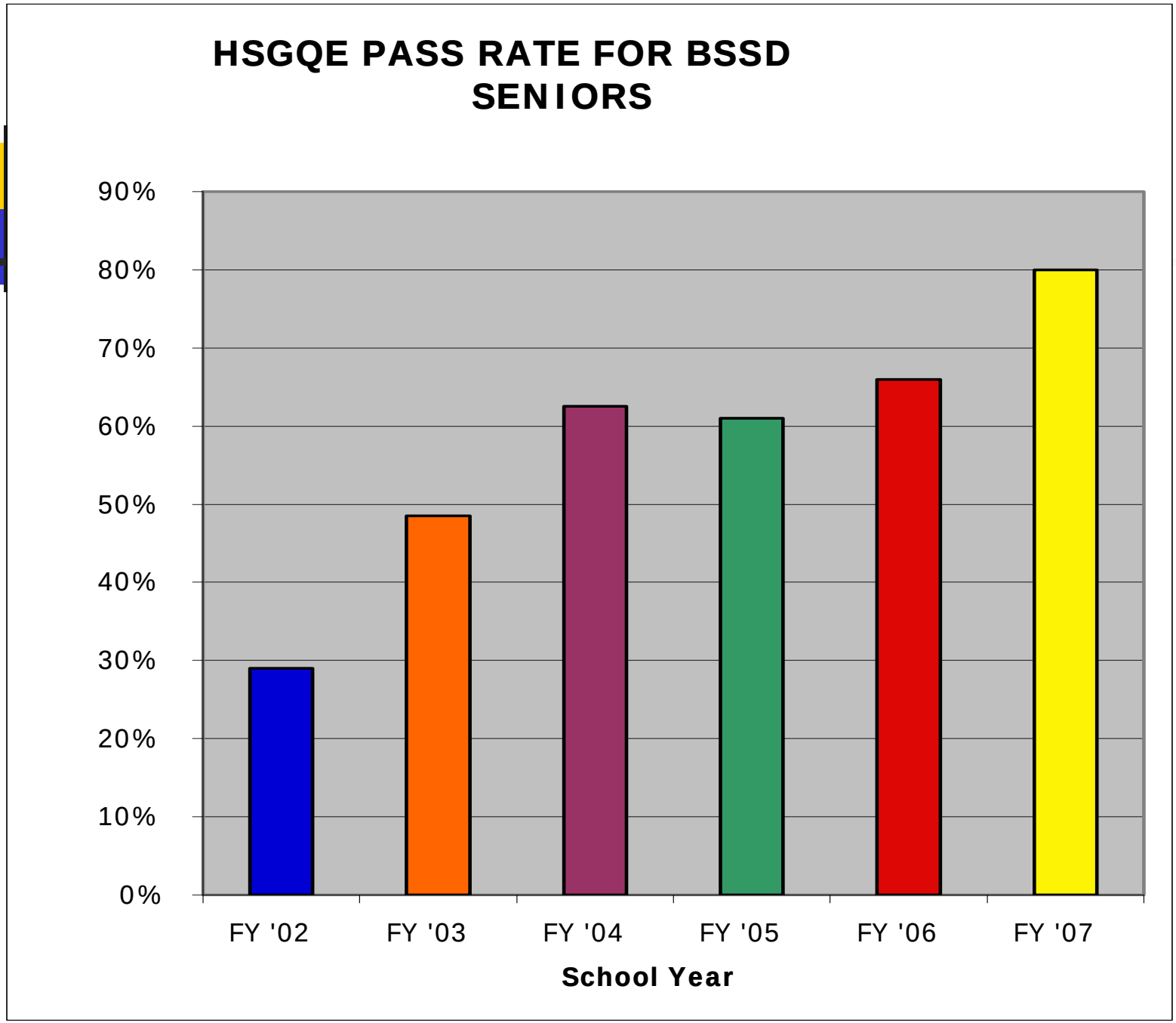

BSSD Teacher Turnover Rate
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
Fy 01
FY 02
FY 03
FY 04
FY 05
FY 06
FY 07
School Year

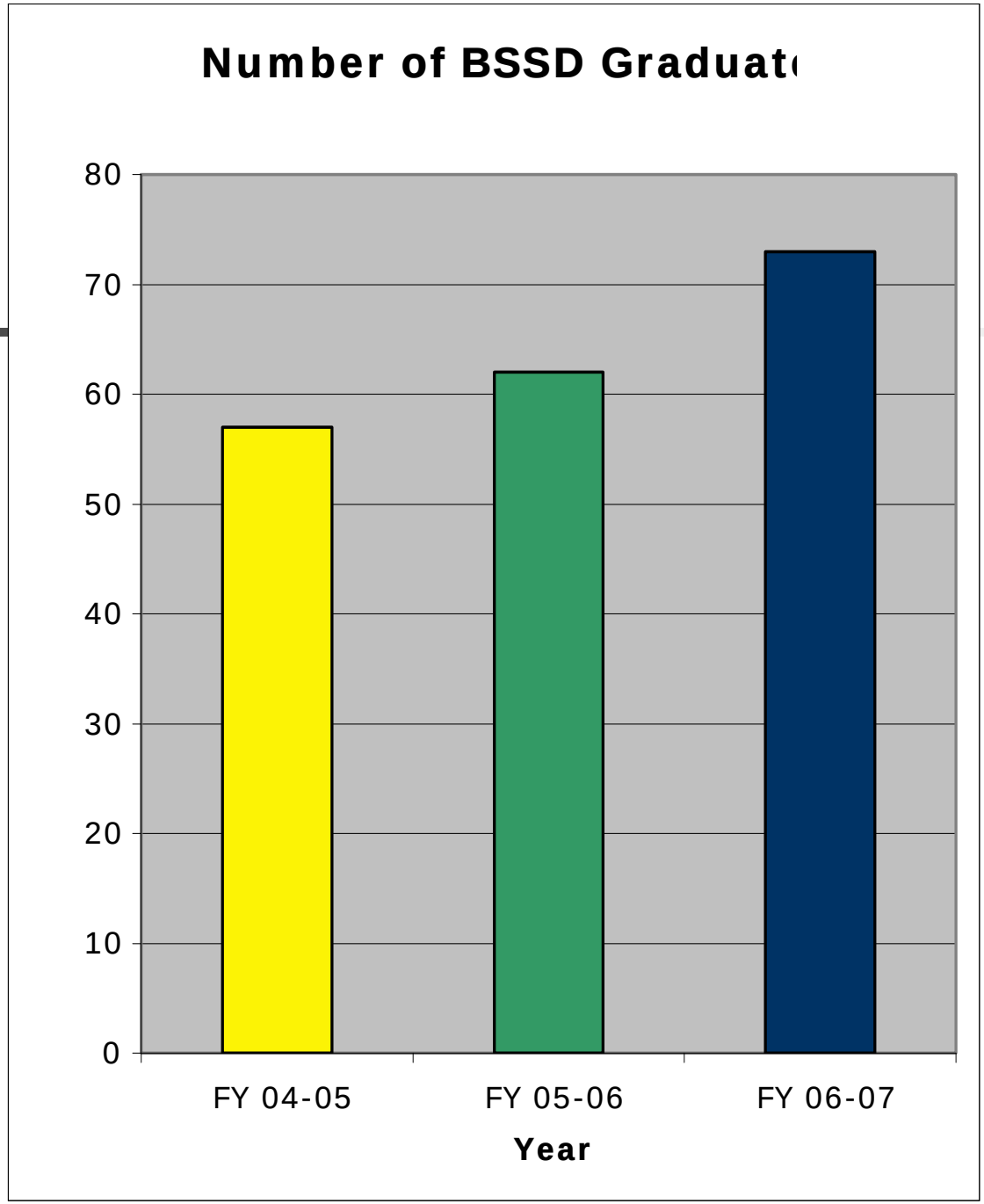
Instructional focus

- Time vs. learning - Learning takes time
- Learning Standards were a community decision - not textbook driven
- Assessments were common and freely available
- Students would be taught at achievement level - not age level

BSSD SBA Trend Data




HSGQE PASS RATE FOR BSSD SENIORS
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
FY '02
FY '03
FY '04
FY '05
FY '06
FY '07
School Year


Number of BSSD Graduat
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
FY 04-05
FY 05-06
FY 06-07
Year

Analysis and Alignment Standard-Instruction-Assessment

State of Alaska Standards-Based Assessment Results for Bering Strait School District students who demonstrated proficiency on an internally developed and administerd pre-assessment.

Grade Level	Percent of Students Scoring Proficient or Higher	Percent of Students Scoring in Sub-Sets			
		Advanced	Proficient	Below Proficient	Not Proficient
3	88.89%	38.89%	50.00%	11.11%	0.00%
4	89.47%	31.58%	57.89%	0.00%	10.53%
5	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
6	100.00%	57.14%	42.86%	0.00%	0.00%
7	100.00%	36.36%	63.64%	0.00%	0.00%
8	100.00%	66.67%	33.33%		
9	100.00%	50.00%	50.00%		

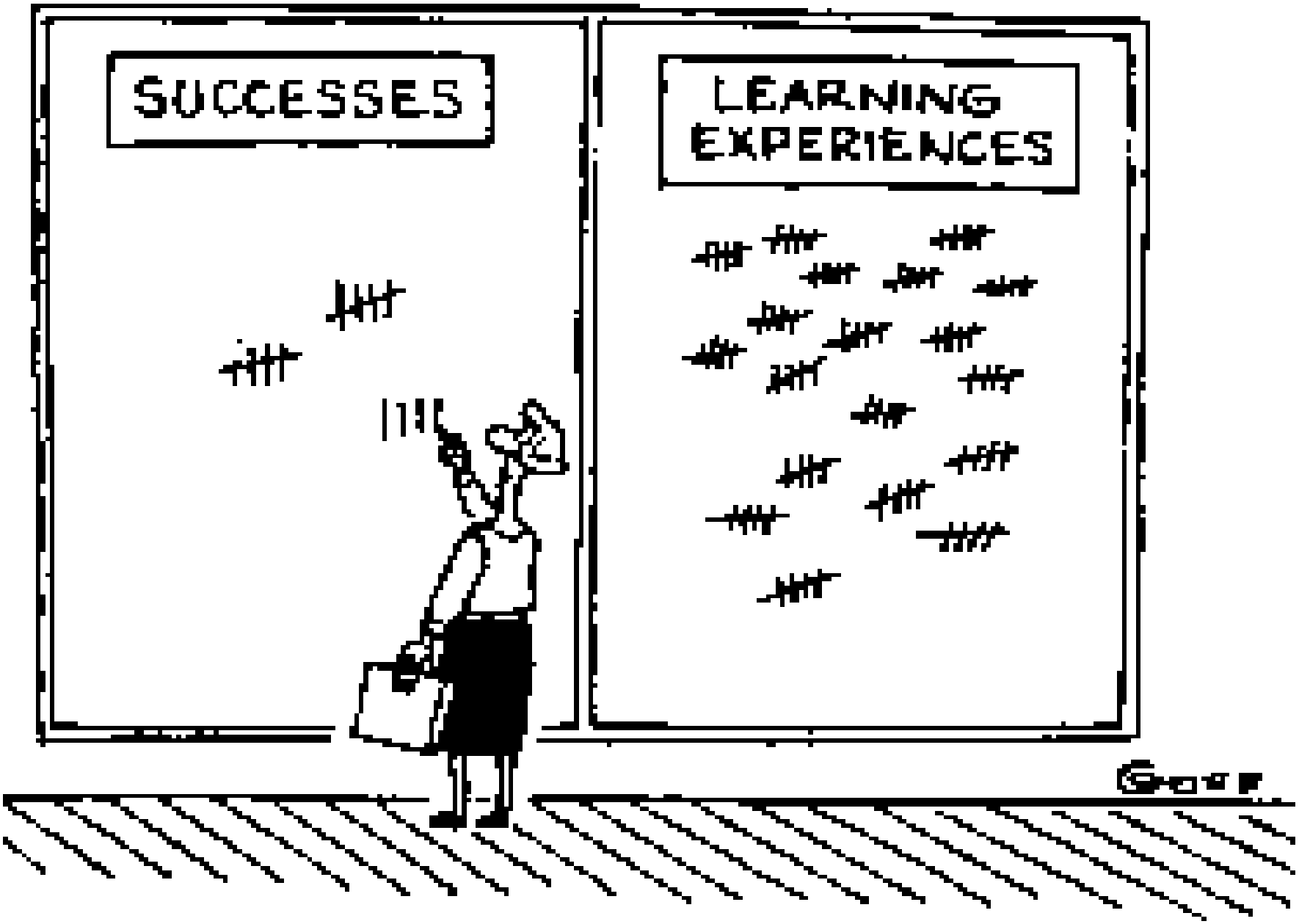
Alaska Standards-Based Assessment Data Spring 2005.

Process

- Understanding the data
- Question current convention
- Have a set of beliefs (shared vision)
- Believe students can learn and staff can teach (leadership)
- Apply the known (standards-based)
- Practice and practice again (continuous improvement)

Lessons Learned

- Expect to be leading a parade not in sight
- Letter Grades, graduation, class rank, valedictorian, etc
- People in “comfortable shoes”


SUCCESSES
LEARNING EXPERIENCES

“It is not about you, it is about students”

John Davis, 2005

Pay It Forward
Katherine Ryan Hyde
Warner Bros., 2000

"Doing the right things in the right ways."

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