



GPS: Goals + Process = Success

by Valerie Ford, Weatherford Independent School District

When I began my continuous improvement journey with the Weatherford Independent School District (ISD), I often thought that in time, the idea would pass, as it was one more thing to do. But the idea didn't pass, and the district gave it a try. Fast forward to today: We are firm believers in the continuous improvement process and its implementation. You not only better understand your students as learners, but you can also show the students processes they can use for a lifetime of learning.

Continuous improvement at the secondary level

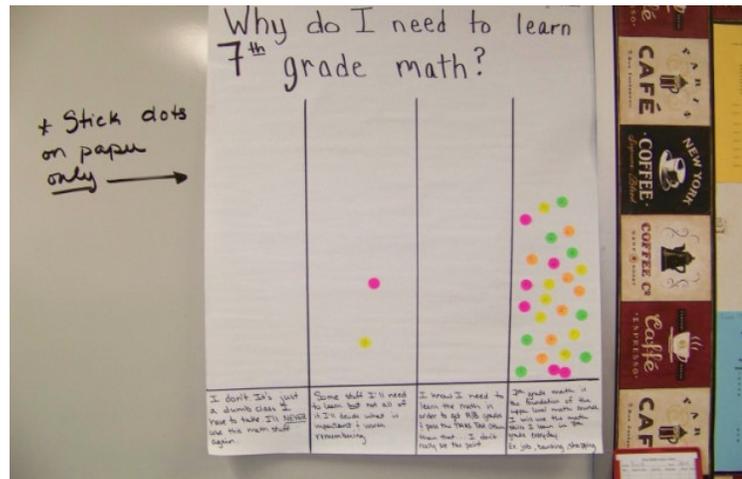
To use this quality method at the secondary level, we wanted to start with tools that gave us immediate feedback from the students. So we began using a consensogram and a plus/delta. By using these tools, we realized that students valued providing input. This was an example of a teacher's small choice that majorly impacted students. We began to notice our classroom environment changing. In the classroom, it wasn't the teacher telling the student what to learn, but, rather the teacher guiding the student toward the end results.

I think of continuous improvement as a GPS: The journey and eventual destination can be wide ranging, from inputting the final destination address to searching for a specific food choice and restaurant. This situation is similar to the way daily activities affect how students complete what is required for state standards. The students start their journeys from various stages in the learning process. This is much similar to the "current location choice" on the GPS—you would not track from point A to point E if you were already at point C. The voice is the teacher—just like with the GPS: If you get off route, stopped by a roadblock or slowed by traffic, we will make sure you reach your destination. We can even use the same acronym in education: GPS means goals + process = success.

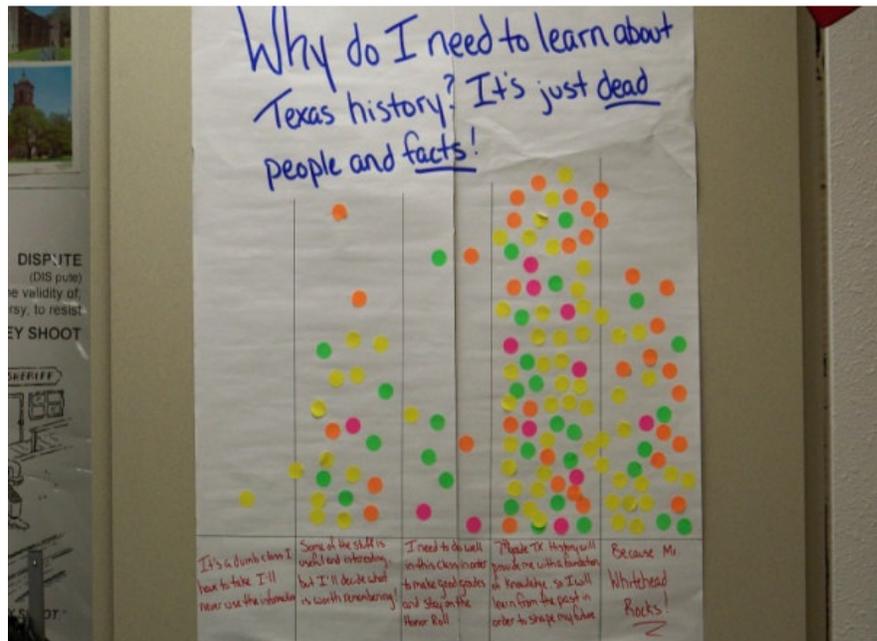
Starting tools

We first implemented continuous improvement using two quality tools: a consensogram and a plus/delta. A consensogram is a tool used to gather input from a group using a category approach with a tally system. We've used consensograms in a number of classrooms for many topics.

For a warm-up activity in my classroom, I posed this question, "Why do I need to learn seventh-grade math?" The students provided a wide range of responses. For one category, which I thought was interesting, the students said they thought they would use math, but they would decide what was important and worth remembering.



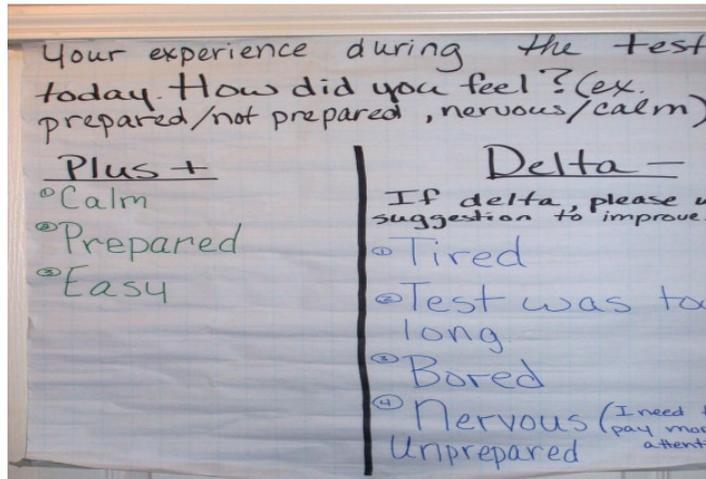
In another classroom, the teacher posed the question, “Why do I need to learn Texas history. It’s just dead people and facts.” One category the students selected was that “Seventh-grade history provides a foundation of knowledge and I will learn from my past and help shape my future.”



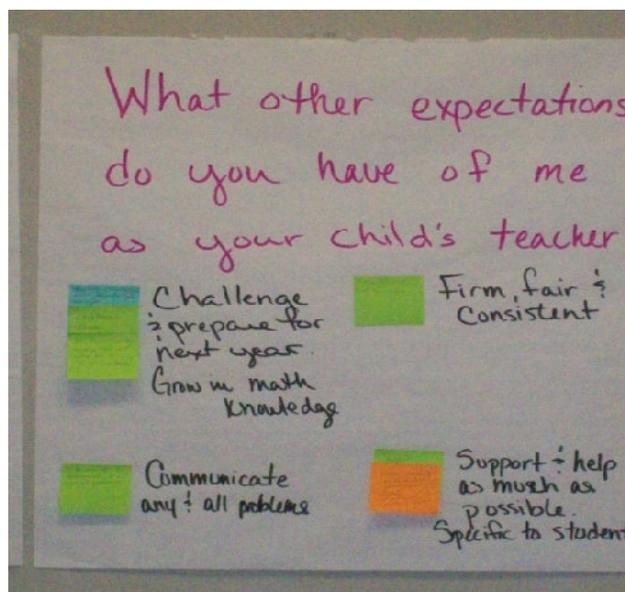
The second tool we used was plus/delta. This tool identifies areas of strength and improvement. We teach students the following: The plus is what works, meaning let’s keep doing it. The delta is what doesn’t work, and we need to identify how we can fix it together. It’s important to note that even if it’s not “broke” to the teacher, it could be “broke” for the students. Regardless the outcome, the reality is that the students will be the focus.

Many times in the classroom, we think the lesson is going well, but when the students are given an independent task, we realized it's not going well.

The following question was used after a unit test: "How did you feel about the test?"



We have found we can blend the plus/delta with the affinity process, which is a tool used to gather feedback in a group setting. Here, the students write their comments on Post-It notes and place the responses on the board with the groups' responses. Then, the questions are sorted into categories. This process was used to gather student, parent and teacher expectations during an open house.





Another data tool

We are currently tracking data in areas such as attendance, behavior, testing results by total and sub-populations. With the focus on the continuous improvement process, we began to think about what students can track that will increase their learning. We brainstormed and tried several approaches. Items the students and teacher tracked included homework, behavior, assessment and zeros.

We quickly learned the value of using the keep it simple for students (KISS) data tool. The destination must be clear and user friendly. If you track something just to track it, the students will quickly realize it's educational wallpaper. You must take a look at your subject and have conversations with your team or department about the value areas for data tracking.

During the first year, we determined we would track one area in our classroom that we felt had the most impact. For example, in a math classroom, six questions were given per objective. The six questions were then graded, and the students charted their own results on a bar graph.

The teacher asked the students to compile class results, and the teacher also did the same.



From this exercise, the teacher observed the students focusing on their individual strength and improvement areas. This prompted students to ask the teacher for extra work in



their improvement areas. The students' sense of accomplishment increased daily and weekly with the growth of their charting.

The students became increasingly aware of the reasoning behind homework with the improvement in their daily and weekly objective data charting. Another teacher found it effective to track zeros. With students not turning in completed assignments—even though the majority of the assignments were in class—the teacher posted this question: “What are reasons for the high zero count in your classroom?”

To answer the question, students used an affinity diagram. They eventually concluded that absent students were not completing assignments in a timely manner and students were just not turning in their work. Additionally, the students determined solutions, which the teacher implemented. For one solution, each row of students determined a weekly leader responsible for collecting and turning in assignments. For another solution, absent students would not be included in the posted zero count, or they would have their own count.

Through this process, the teacher and students created a solution that everyone agreed on, the zero count decreased and learning increased. We currently track zeros and tardies as grade-level teams with the students tracking the classroom data. We compile the data and have a recognition system for the teams.

With the KISS approach on data, the students are taking charge of their learning and are self-reflecting on their strengths and areas to improve. The teacher has transitioned from a position of “This is what you need to improve upon” to a position of “How can I help you improve?”

Reflection

Since the beginning, what we created with our use of the quality tools has changed. What we experienced with using continuous improvement at the teacher level began to grow and adapt to the student level. We began to see our classrooms through the students' eyes, and in return, the students saw the classroom through our eyes.

The journey was filled with trial and improvement, mission statements, data folders, and data tracking. In addition, the internet gave us resources to answer any questions we had.

Each year brings a new set of students with new GPS locations. With continuous improvement, we know how to reach the destination with each of our students.

Valerie Ford is a seventh-grade math teacher in the Weatherford Independent School District (ISD). She has nine years of experience, teaching both physical education and math. Ford's continuous improvement journey began in 2005 with Weatherford ISD. She has presented professional development pieces at the local and national level for ASQ.