



What Does FEA Mean By “Maximize the Learning”?

To Maximize the Learning is to refocus DoDEA’s priorities on student learning at the classroom and school building levels.

For this to occur requires three things:

1. DoDEA Headquarters must prioritize the work it wants educators to accomplish rather than constantly pile on more new programs, trainings and initiatives.
2. DoDEA must stop promoting a one-size-fits-all approach to professional development and go back to providing faculty and staff meaningful development opportunities, specific to their curricular areas and students’ needs.
3. DoDEA must stop trying to make all decisions at the Headquarters level and promote more and better local decision making at all levels.



Goal #1 – Prioritizing Education Goals and Reducing New Initiatives

In recent years, the size of the staff at DoDEA Headquarters has grown tremendously. Each of these new employees feels the need to justify their high-paying job and they do so by coming up with an endless series of new programs and initiatives that are then imposed upon the faculties and staffs at DoDEA schools.

Some of these new initiatives are worthwhile; many are not. Even those that are worthwhile will never be fully effective. This is because faculty and staff are constantly having new programs and trainings dumped onto them, gobbling up the amount of time they have to do their real jobs: educating children.

An example:

DoDEA is requiring K-3 teachers to administer reading tests to students individually, taking upwards of 20 hours – that’s half a week – of instruction time away from the class. What really makes no sense is DoDEA wants to require this test be given twice a year: once in the fall and once late in the spring. Since the second round of the test will be given just weeks before the end of the school year, its results will come too late to “guide and leverage” instruction, as DoDEA claims. Why take up another half week of instruction time on a test that serves no purpose? It’s inefficient and takes teachers away from the job of educating students.

In order to Maximize the Learning, DoDEA must do the following:

1. Stop the flow of new programs and initiatives.
2. Evaluate those initiatives developed in recent years and decide which ones are priorities and which are not. To call everything a priority is to exhibit a lack of decision-making ability.
3. Ensure that any program implemented in DoDEA schools does not take away valuable time that should be spent by faculty and staff working directly with students to further their education.
4. For any new initiative, clearly state the impact the program will have on teaching time in the classroom.



Goal #2 – Return to Meaningful Professional Development

Faculty and staff need quality professional development opportunities in order to maintain their skills and stay current on the latest information and techniques within their fields.

DoDEA used to understand this. Until recently, DoDEA did an excellent job providing professional development opportunities that were geared to a staff member's specific curricular area or profession (such as counseling).

An example:

DoDEA has adopted a one-size-fits-all approach to professional development. Lumping all such development opportunities under the banner of UDDI (Using Data to Differentiate Instruction), DoDEA now emphasizes generalized teaching philosophies instead of providing faculty and staff with useful training in the curricular areas in which they teach.

In order to Maximize the Learning, DoDEA must do the following:

1. Have professional experts that are fully familiar with new curricula train teachers directly
2. Bring teachers together in like-curricular areas to be trained and collaborate
3. Restore the sabbatical program and Educator Day programs worldwide
4. Provide funding for educators to attend professional conferences
5. Discontinued top-down professional development initiatives, such as UDDI



Goal #3 – More and Better Decision Making at the Local Level

The 2001 “March Toward Excellence” report by Vanderbilt University’s Peabody Center praised DoDEA as a model school system that should be emulated by others.

Among the traits cited as contributing to our excellence was the practice, at the time, of DoDEA management setting goals and providing resources from the Headquarters level, but allowing local faculty and staff to have significant input into how those goals could best be met.

That philosophy of local decision making has been abandoned in recent years. Now, decisions are made by education “experts” at DoDEA Headquarters – many of whom have never set foot in a DoDEA school – and those decisions are expected to be rigidly followed, regardless of how inefficient or unsound they prove to be.

An example:

Rather than host computer programs such as Excent and ASPEN at the Area or local levels, where those who use the programs could exercise some control over them, DoDEA insists on hosting such programs at the Headquarters level. As a result, any breakdown in hardware or software for these programs reverberates worldwide. Meanwhile, any problem or difficulty with how programs are perceived to perform by local users is ignored. DoDEA Headquarters decides what works and what doesn’t, with little or no input from those in the field doing the actual educating.

In order to Maximize the Learning, DoDEA must do the following:

1. Survey schools and complexes to assess needs at the local level
2. Provide release time for teachers to have meaningful collaboration time
3. Stop school improvement programs that are merely jumping through hoops and paperwork exercises
4. Rotate above school level positions back to the classroom
5. Provide adequate resources to local schools including adequate textbooks, supplies, paper, technology and training