

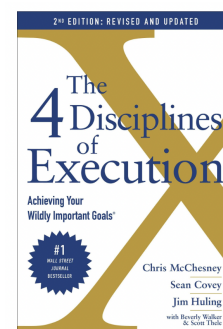
I Changed My Mind

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I changed my mind. When Suzie first approached me about writing an article for *The Leader*, I immediately thought of writing about our all-day Kindergarten success we had last year. It really was phenomenal for our Title One School of close to 75% low income, to score as high as we did on the end-of-year Acadience reading assessment. The goals we were setting last April in Kindergarten were similar to the mid-year goals typically set by our 1st-grade teachers. We were so excited to see our Kindergarten students learning at such high levels! However, this year, with nearly all of our elementary schools in Washington County switching to all-day Kindergarten, our November 1st ESGI (Letters and Sounds) Kindergarten scores are towards the lowest in our district. I mean we did score high for us at 86% proficient, but now the district average is above 92% proficient so we ended up one of the lowest. So, I'm not going in that direction after all.

Nope, instead I want to share a book I listened to this summer and was so impressed with that I ordered a copy for each member of my leadership team to study with me this year. We meet weekly and discuss the assigned chapter and how it relates to student achievement goals, school teams, and teachers.



The book is *The 4 Disciplines of Execution* and is written by Chris McChesney, Sean Covey, and Jim Huling. This book mainly addresses business practices and not much about schools, but I got very interested in trying the strategies at our school. Then I discovered that “Leader In Me” schools read it or implement some if not all of its practices, so there are a few of you who already know what I’m writing about. But you must have been keeping it a secret, because I had never heard of the book before this summer. Now I’d like to share some quick highlights of how we’re using it at our non-”Leader in Me” school.

The Whirlwind Each of the 4 members of our leadership team started by identifying what our personal “whirlwind” looks like and then we each selected something we will commit to each other to do outside of our unique whirlwinds that will hopefully lead to student learning. For me, my whirlwind is more than likely similar to yours, with things contributing such as:

- making those custodial-initiated decisions that begin the day, and then
- discovering which teachers are sick and if I’m going to be teaching 1st grade because the sub didn’t “pick up”, and
- checking emails before the teachers arrive with their help/clarification questions like “now what” or “what shall we do when...”
- then getting out in front of the school as the kids and parents arrive in the morning.
- Once school gets started it’s approving purchase orders,
- investigating student complaints of bullying and calling parents,
- making more decisions about lunch supervision during a shortened day, or
- meeting with a concerned (another word for angry) parent, or
- more calls to parents about their, lets call them behaviorally challenged, kids and
- suddenly lunchtime is here and you spend the next 1-2 hours supervising energetic 5-11-year-olds during lunch recess.
- The emails that need a response are still lingering along with
- writing that parent message announcing the next school holiday/program/activity, and then
- more naughty kids,

and BAM, it’s the end of the day. After sitting through another IEP I’m on my way home thinking, “I didn’t get one thing done today that will help student learning.” That, my friends, is the whirlwind. It’s urgent and important. What we are committing to each other in our weekly meetings is the one “important” thing we choose within our realm and outside of our whirlwind that oftentimes doesn’t get the attention it deserves but will lead us to reach our single most important goal that will eventually lead to our vision of student learning.

Keeping Score So, the leadership team makes a commitment to one another each week to do one thing, “just this one thing” as Curly of the movie *City Slickers* would say, each day that each of us will do outside of the whirlwind that will lead us to the most important goal we set for our school to improve. One thing I usually commit to my team is to get into a certain number of classrooms that week to observe and give feedback to teachers. That is outside my whirlwind and hopefully will lead to student learning. The next week when we meet we go around the room to see how we did with our commitments. We keep score and naturally, I want to win. So now more than ever, I am motivated to get into classrooms and give the teachers feedback before the end of the day. Each member of the leadership team is setting similar commitments outside of their whirlwinds and we’re keeping score.

We meet every week to report on and score our commitments, and to talk about what we learned from our assigned reading, usually a chapter. This “cadence” of weekly meetings is most valuable and I think we all look forward to them. It has certainly focused us as we narrowed down the choices for our most important goal that we believe will ultimately make the biggest impact on student learning at our school.

Our vision is to move from a “C” to a sustainable “B” grade by May 2024. Sure, we’d love to reach an “A”, but first things first. For right now reaching a “B” will mean improving our overall performance and growth on the RISE tests, especially for our English Language Learners and our students with disabilities. Now that may not sound like much to some, but to us, that represents in some cases an over 10% proficiency increase in language arts, closer to a 20% increase in math, and around an 8% increase in science. Increases in those three areas in the same year haven't been done here at Washington Elementary in its history, that I’m aware of. This year we’re trying to RISE ourselves out of our designation as a TSI (Targeted Support and Improvement) school. If you’ve never heard of that, congratulations! Your RISE and WIDA scores are above the “cut” score! Way to go!

Our Wildly Important Goal or “WIG”: *Improve our attendance percentage from 57% attending 90% of the year to 87% of students attending 90% of the year by 2024.* You could select any goal that would lead to your vision from active student engagement during math and science to shorter transition time between subjects. The goal formula is x to y by _____. We believe that if we can get our kids to school every day it will increase their chances of learning more and then hopefully prove it on the RISE tests. The design, as we understand it from the book, is that now teacher teams will set their own “WIGs” and Lead Measures (or plans of action) that will support our school’s “WIG”. The teachers will choose one thing outside of their whirlwind they

can do each week, keep score with their colleagues/teammates, and post those scores where the staff can see. They will then collaborate with their students so they can set their student-team's "WIG" that supports the class WIG that supports the school attendance goal (WIG). The students will pick one thing they can do, report their progress scores to their class team, and post their scores for the class to see. Our classified staff can also meet as teams and set WIGs, meet weekly and report, then keep score. It all stems back to our Wildly Important Goal of attendance. My leadership team hasn't finished the book yet, so we've still not shared this idea with our students and staff, but we've got a plan to do so in January.

If this condensed version I've explained doesn't make sense, check out *The Four Disciplines of Execution* on Libby or Audible. It may make your drive to work go faster.

The "B" Grade (will be sustainable due to our soon-to-be newly formed culture of attendance at school) is a vision to reach in 1½ short years, among my last years of my 40+ in education. My last hoorah. It may be a lofty vision, but I think with the focus this book is teaching us and the buy-in we're hoping for from our staff and students, we'll achieve it and more. In a couple of years, I'll let you know how we did; unless I change my mind. 😊