“We know from research by John Hattie and Helen Timperley that feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement, but this impact can be either positive or negative.”
HOW did we build this strategy?

We know from research by John Hattie and Helen Timperley that feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement, but this impact can be either positive or negative. We needed to determine how to provide effective feedback so our students could improve.

START WITH OUR FOUNDATION IN TEACHING LITERACY

We began by working with what we had already built, an idea that everyone in our school can teach writing. English, math, science, social science, electives—they all involve tasks and processes which involve clear and effective written communication for activities such as:

- Taking notes
- Explaining one’s thinking
- Arguing a thesis and supporting one’s thinking
- Comparing and contrasting
- Writing an open response
- Describing an experiment and reporting one’s findings and conclusion
- Generating a response to what one has read, viewed, or heard
- Thinking in complete sentences
- Developing an expository essay with a formal structure

STAFF TRAINING ON ACTIVE READING STRATEGIES

We needed consistency among staff so our strategy was aligned; we did not want to send mixed messages to our students. Our active reading strategy is as follows:

1. Read the question.
2. Make notations in the text.
   A. Circle key direction verbs, such as write, draw, explain, compare, show, copy.
   B. Underline important information. Often there is information in a question that is irrelevant to finding the answer.
3. In your own words, write what the question is asking you to do.
4. Develop your plan/answer the question.

With this strategy, we focused on creating a method for providing and using feedback that would align with our existing goals and targets. We put student learning at the center of a new initiative that included rubrics, literacy charts/skills, the district writing goal, and feedback. We held workshops to teach the definition of feedback, its effect, and its connections to literacy charts and rubrics, providing examples.

We focused on the power of feedback and the ways teachers could structure it to make it clear and actionable to help a student improve his or her writing. Feedback, when frequent, constructive and instructive, is a powerful tool in learning and improvement in writing. Sensitivity is crucially important, as is the relationship between the teacher and the student.
Our defined goals for corrective, written feedback were that it be:

1. **Timely** information that acknowledges student progress toward a clearly defined goal
2. **Affirming** of student strengths
3. **Guiding** to improve performance
4. **Leading** to reflective learning and independence

We noted that feedback on written work should focus on the content goals of the lesson and can be written or oral, as well as teacher to student, student to teacher, or student to student.

**DISTRICT WRITING GOAL**

During the school year, students will demonstrate growth toward proficiency in writing through teacher corrective feedback. Each term, students will produce samples in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

With a focus on this writing goal, we mapped and demonstrated connections between Brockton High’s literacy charts, writing rubrics, and feedback. Feedback can be provided on any assignment, including math.

**How do students respond to feedback?** After so closely defining and targeting our feedback, two important questions about student responses to feedback arose:

1. Do our students understand what is meant by feedback, its nature and its purpose?
2. How can we get students to make better use of the feedback they are provided? What requirements do students have to use feedback? What strategies motivate students to apply feedback they receive?

In response, we determined that our goal is to motivate students to use the information provided to improve their performance, whether they are using feedback in writing, orally or self-reflectively.

We developed a Student Feedback Log that prompts students to record feedback, strengths and instructions for improvement. Students paraphrase the information the teacher provided to understand it in their own words. They are then to reflect on learning and set goals for future assignments.

“Our students have grown accustomed to writing out their thinking, no matter what subject they are focused on. We no longer have to tell them to write out what they are thinking; they have just developed new habits.”
Students use the feedback logs as the centerpieces of their plans to revise assignments or complete similar assignments. The feedback logs provide the targeted information that translates into distinct goals or intentions for another writing effort, whether it is a new draft or a new assignment. Our teachers have rated the feedback initiative one of the most effective strategies we have used schoolwide.

What drives our belief in the importance of feedback? Feedback has been shown to have the greatest effect on student learning (Hattie, 2003, 2007) and guidance in how to process feedback for improvement is a key part of its effectiveness. This does not need to take a significant amount of time in class, but focusing on it for a few minutes to help students develop the habit of reading and/or using feedback is valuable.

How has our strategy impacted our students?

Our literacy initiative has been transformative to our school culture as well as our individual students. Our students have grown accustomed to writing out their thinking, no matter what subject they are focused on. We no longer have to tell them to write out what they are thinking; they have just developed new habits.

Our students are proud to be at school and they work hard. They don’t make excuses for not trying and they are confident in their acquired skills that have improved their learning in all subject areas.

FOLLOWING UP on this strategy

RELEVANT RESOURCES

“5 Research-Based Tips for Providing Students with Meaningful Feedback” by Marianne Stenger
Five tips for providing students with the kind of feedback that will increase motivation, build on existing knowledge and help them reflect on what they've learned

Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning
by John Hattie
Shows both teacher and student perspectives and contains step-by-step guidance including lesson preparation, interpreting learning and feedback during the lesson and post-lesson follow up

Transforming Brockton High School: High Standards, High Expectations, No Excuses
by Susan Szachowicz
Provides an in-depth account of the process of turning a challenged high school into a success model of what is possible when literacy is addressed systematically