

The Teacher-to-Teacher initiative was created by the U.S. Department of Education to provide the latest strategies and research on educational practices that work in the classroom. This series features teachers from across the country presenting techniques that can be used with students of all ages. This series is just one way the Department of Education is helping teachers get the support they need so “No Child is Left Behind.” (MUSIC) Hi, my name is Cheryl Krehbiel. I’ve been a teacher for twenty years. I’m a national board certified teacher. The session I’m presenting is “Examining Student Work: A Protocol for Improving Reading Instruction.” The session is actually a personal story about my experience returning to the classroom and turning around a low performing school. (MUSIC) So our county decided, in a very proactive measure, to restructure the school before the state said they were going to do it. And, very uniquely, they partnered with our teacher’s association. And Montgomery County Education Association is very forward-thinking, and it’s very focused on student achievement. Two thirds of the original staff at my school was asked to leave, or left on their own. I was part of the new two thirds people to come in and to change things. I was asked to teach 4th grade, and also to be part of the leadership team, and to coordinate literacy activities in the 3, 4, 5 – what we call vertical team. Three years into this effort, we have made significant gains, and I wanted to share those with you. In 2000, when I started, we had eleven percent of our students proficient. Now, 2004, seventy-five percent of our students are proficient in reading. We’ve gone from 5% in math to 67%, and in grade 5 from the 21st percentile to the 60th percentile – a little bit misleading – in 2000 we were working under a different state assessment – fair enough? Don’t believe we’ve made gains? The top slide indicates our gains for just this year – same assessment. We were at 46% proficient – now we’re at 75% - this year we made a gain of 28 points. My school – 98% free and reduced lunch, 76% of my students speak a language other than English in their home. There are 36 languages represented in my building. 26% of our students qualify for ESOL services. We have a 34% mobility rate. My school is the school where everybody says it can’t be done. Well, we’re doing it – we are really doing it! So, my story with you today is sharing with you what we did, how we did it, even some of the pitfalls along the way. I’m also going to share with you what I think are some ways that it could be improved, if this is something you want to think about in your own building. The other thing that’s really important for you to know is that this effort was teacher-led. It was not a decision by our administration, “Oh, you’re going to do it this way.” One of the first things we did when we got together as a staff our first year together, is we put together structures – put some structures in place – and deliberate opportunities for teachers to come together and work together. Now we did this on planning time, lunch time, and – as you’ll hear later – we agreed as a team to work one night a month after school until 6 o’clock. Pretty powerful! And this is where we are. So, okay. Our outcome for our time together, is I’m hoping that you’ll understand the intent of the indicators a little bit in our standards document. We’re going to talk about how you go about identifying the rigor to meet mastery. We going to unpack the standard and unpack a task. We’re going to look student work

supportively and critically and then we'll discuss instructional implications. First thing we're going to do, because I am a standards-based person, is I'm going to share with you the Maryland standards. I'm going to talk about the tasks that we used to assess mastery, and we'll unpack that. And you're going to have an opportunity to take the task, and I'll talk about why I think that's so important. And then, as a group, we'll collectively unpack it. And we're going to take a look at some student work samples at different levels of proficiency. And, again, discuss implications for instruction. What I'm going to do with you today is exactly what we would do as a vertical team on that one Wednesday after school 'til 6 o'clock. We worked as a vertical content team, which means in the room, on that Wednesday after school, there were 3rd grade teachers, 4th grade teachers, 5th grade teachers, special education teachers and ESOL teachers. And every single person agreed to do it, and every single person agrees today that it's the best thing we did and it's why we got the gains we got. Now, the state of Maryland has state standards that are grade-band. What students should know and be able to do by the end of grade 3, by the end of grade 5, by the end of grade 8. And, many states are exactly like that – they have grade-band standards. Montgomery County didn't like that. So, Montgomery County actually paid an organization to back-map the standards, so they could put indicators at every grade level. I mean, for example, if you're going to talk about what is comprehension, interpretation and analysis, what does that look like at grade 3, what does it look like at grade 4, what does it look like at grade 5? And those are the questions that teachers want to know, teachers are asking themselves. "How do I know this is really good enough?" So, for the document in front of you is the Montgomery County document. If you look at the end of the column of the grade 3, it says Maryland state standards or outcomes – those are the ones we used to have, just all by themselves. Somewhat meaningless, I think. So the back map indicators are pretty helpful. I provided the copies of our indicators, just as an example to you. One of the things that we have found to be of paramount importance is for you to actually understand your own state standards, and because I brought some experience to this school, as a standards specialist, that was my job first and foremost, was to help articulate to teachers what the standards were all about, why they were there. Now you would think that a school that was restructured would bring in all these great teachers who had had some experience, you know – we didn't. They brought in just a couple of us, and then a lot of brand new teachers, so they've had an opportunity to really mold, and get some pretty significant, I don't know, start to what we hope down the road will be DNA transfer into some of the other low-performing schools. Okay, so, the task we're going to look at today is actually one that we put together for grade 3. And if you look at the grade 3 column, you'll notice that under that comprehension, interpretation and analysis, there are several little indicators. One of the things that you want to do when you try to create an assessment that will enable kids to demonstrate mastery, is you want to try to fold in as many of those little indicators as possible, okay? You really don't want to focus on them in isolation – because your state assessment won't. Okay? For this particular task, we went with summarizing. And we went with summarizing for a particular

reason. The very first year that we started as a new group of teachers, we were involved in something called the tuning protocol – that was one of the structures we put in place, and the tuning protocol is a process for looking at student work – it comes out of Annenberg. And we were in a room one night, and one of the 5th grade teachers was presenting some student work samples. These are my kids summaries – I don't know what I did wrong – these aren't summaries. Here's the rubric I used. And this group of 5th grade teachers just couldn't understand what was going on. And then some of us with, you know, the leadership role, and a heavy heart, had to say to them – and we really swallowed hard – oh, my gosh. They had no idea what a summary was. No wonder our kids couldn't do it. The teachers weren't teaching it. Now, that's a huge "aha". And that's when we changed everything we did, when we realized we had these teachers together for three years, because they had agreed to stay, our choice was – do we let them continue, or do we stop, provide a significant intervention, and help them build their content knowledge – and that's exactly what we did. Now, all of you in this room are probably saying to yourself, "Well, I can write a summary – I can do a summary." That's great! But the point is, you have to agree to collectively come up with the definition of a summary, and you have to agree to leave your own standards at the door, and focus on what is it that the state is asking of our kids. And that's really hard to do, and it takes a lot of courageous conversations. And we have those a lot at my school now, and they're not easy to have. If you look carefully at that grade 3 column, one of the things it talks about is identifying theme, you look at the outcomes, theme, author's message – lot of words in there. So, we had to come up with, what do we think a summary at grade 3 is going to look like, what do we think a summary at grade 4 is going to look like, and what does it mean for grade 5, Okay? And to put you into an actual, authentic environment for a second, I'm going to ask you to turn to your handouts for this session. You'll see a story. The story is called "Saved by a Fly", Okay. I'm going to ask that you individually read this story, and then on the next page, answer the prompt that's asked of you – actually do the task. (MUSIC)

This is actually what we did with every assessment that we created together – whether it was writing a summary, talking about cause and effect, the implications of setting on a story – any formative assessment that we created for students that would provide an opportunity for them to demonstrate mastery, we wrote the task and then we did the task. How did it feel to take the task? How'd it feel? How many of you are very confident that "I did it – I wrote a summary." Okay. How many of you, based on what I said a minute ago are like "Oh, my – I'm not so sure." Yeah, it's kind of, it's really putting yourself out there. So, obviously, one of the first things that we really had to build in our little vertical team was some safety. Our principal wasn't with us – this was non-evaluative. So, nobody went and said "I'm sorry, Mr. Principal, I just have to tell you – Cindy knew nothing!" We didn't do that – we didn't do that at all. In fact, our principal was absolutely amazed at how we were able to build some safety for people. Because, it's only within some safety net, of course, that you can actually let your guard down, and know that it's okay – that we all have a little bit of learning to do along the way. For our newest teachers, they found this to be really powerful.

And, one of the reasons they thought it was really powerful was because, what they really wanted to do was to be more efficient with time, and this process helped them do it, because in their head now they had a really clear idea of what it is they had to get kids to do. We're going to debrief this in just a second. I'm going to share with you the definition of the summary that comes from my county. Montgomery County requires a statement about the author's message, or theme, in a summary – not every state does. Maryland's standards are more rigorous than other states. At grade 4, not only do you have to be able to identify the author's message or theme, you have to include a personal connection. That was a whole other aha! What we found is that people didn't know what connections were. How many of you know or remember the story "Little Red Riding Hood"? Just because you also have a red coat with a hat, that's not a connection. That's an irrelevant thought. A connection means you make a connection with the statement on theme. It helps you understand the story better. That was huge. Our kindergarten teachers were not happy – they were not happy. Okay, so our definition of summary – name the main character, or characters. Tell the key ideas, including the problem and the solution. Include a statement about theme, lesson or author's message. Be brief, and to the point. Those of you have written a page and a half, might have some editing to do. It should be written in your own words. And it's written in a logical order. That does not mean from the beginning to the end. It could mean from the end to the beginning, and many folks have done it that way. That's our definition of summary. Now, summarizing is actually a very complex task. It is one of those in-the-head kind of strategies, that kids have to generalize, they have to extract information, and to get students from retelling to summarizing is a huge leap. One of the analogies we use in my district is a retelling is the letter that you write home from camp, "We did this, we did this, we did this, and then, and then, and then, and then," which kids do all the time. But, a summary would be the postcard that you would send home from camp. Based on my definition that I'm giving you now, I'm going to ask that you – if you're ready to take a leap of faith – share at your table how you did, and if you're comfortable enough, go ahead and share your summary briefly with the people at your table... It's high level so it's not something that their going to do right away. It takes some time. To me, it's one of the hardest things to teach the kids, to write a summary. I think on many grade levels, depending on, you obviously (Inaudible) that's when they really start to learn. And adding that connection would be hard. 'Cause when she said that I tried to think of how I would add a connection. Oh, yeah. And I would like to see how she would – what do they mean by that. I think it means like an experience, maybe, that you had had – like when you read a story or something, if you had a similar experience, it kind of makes that connection and then it helps you comprehend the story better. Yeah, now that wasn't listed I noticed in her definition of a summary, so, was she referring to another state? She's using 3rd grade and fourth grade is when she said they make the connection. Like in "Little Red Riding Hood," going to Grandma's house is not what you're wearing. Right, like you might have an experience of remembering that you went to Grandma's house or maybe things like that. How would you include that in the summary? It

almost seems to me like it would be off topic, do you know what I mean? I don't know if it would be part of the summary. I always thought it was just part of comprehending what the author is trying – 'cause you're making a connection to what the author is saying. I always looked at that as comprehension – not necessarily part of the summary. But, she said it would be part of their summary – the written summary – that they would add a connection – In fourth grade? I just wonder how they would make it relevant. How would they fit it in? (Inaudible) Unless you added a question that said, "How does this relate to something that you...? Write a summary and connect it to your own life." Right, but if they didn't how would you do that? I guess the way most of us ended with, "The fly proved that he'd done something, and if you try hard enough, maybe if you go into a personal experience where you had tried really hard and maybe felt accomplishment," so that would be like a second paragraph to your summary. And that would be a connection. Right. Now, to me that's a different thing than a summary. At elementary age, they don't deal with abstracts, do they? 'Cause I think what we're thinking of is an abstract, when it just involves what the actual article is about. And here, they define summary as something more like an abstract, plus personal interpretation. I would say, I teach my kids the abstract, like you're saying, just what's the main idea, the main characters, the problem, the solution – that kind of stuff. I would never have them go and do a connection in the summary. Like they've had to do charts and make connections to your own life and that kind of stuff, but in the summary, I've never had them do that, that just seems hard... (MUSIC)

(MUSIC) I'm trying to get around to every table, but I get caught up in what I think is some really great conversation happening. It's really important. One of the things that I really want to be clear in my message is that I don't want anybody to go back and say "We have to do it the way Montgomery County does it." That is not what I want to say. What I'm really trying to say to you is that one of the most powerful things that we did at my school is that we got together and we talked about it and we worked it through. And we came with some common understandings about what we were going to do with our kids. And that's what we owe our kids. Because if we don't do that, and we have teachers going in different directions about what they think, or about what they did when they were kids, we don't do kids any service at all – we really don't. We've got to have those conversations. And sometimes it might mean that you have to have somebody from outside come in and provide a definitive answer. Teachers are notorious for "Oh, I've been doing that for hundreds of years, and I..." We've all said it, you know, but the thing that, the most important – this is not about you, this is not about me – this is about the kids and what's best for them. So, what I'd like to do with you now, is we're going to kind of unpack this task a little bit, okay? Based on all of the things that I have listed up here on what my summary is, you have a chart paper and a marker at your table. And what I'm going to ask you to do is I'm going to ask you to work together as a group to come up with the list of things, the list of skills that kids should know and be able to do in order to write this summary. What do you have to know and be able to do to write this summary? I'll help you with the first one here. Kids have to know what a character is, okay? So that's the list I want you to begin generating at your table together, and create that list for me. How to differentiate between main characters and listing every single character. Right, identify main characters. Number three would be the theme. What is a theme? We have to know what a theme is and identify the theme of the story. They also need to know how to sequence. That's what I was thinking. And that's for storyboarding. (Inaudible) Now, again, in our Wednesday afternoon session until 6 o'clock, this is exactly what we would engage in. We would create this list. And, we didn't write sentences like you all did, though, we would just write the skills for the concept and those literally became our mastery objectives for lessons. And then we would back-map, you know, in the little squares in the plan book, if I'm going to give the assessment about summarizing on Friday, the 10th, and I have to teach all of these things, how many days is it going to take me to do that? We would have someone, or a couple of people in the group, volunteer to create a pre-assessment, so that we were being very faithful to our kids about where they were, what is it that they know and can do, and we'd start them there. Because we had spent time looking at the standards above grade level and below grade level, we knew ways in which we could extend for kids. Our 5th grade teachers would create what they needed to create, and they would give every teacher a copy of what they did. So that when I had kids who were ready for more rigor, I didn't have to create it – I was doing what the 5th grade was doing. At the same time, our 3rd grade teachers would take all of their work and pass it up the line, so that 5th grade students, who were not proficient at reading, or weren't doing what

– couldn't do yet – they were getting the support they needed, but still completely aligned with that indicator. We also had conversations with our 2nd grade teachers, and they did not plan with us all the time, but at a simple faculty meeting, saying to the 2nd grade teachers, the 1st grade teachers, the kindergarten teachers, “You know, the next time you do that read-aloud, start talking to them about the lesson, or the message.” Well, they obviously didn't naturally do that, but it was a very simple way for them to extend their read-aloud lesson that would help us in the upper grades. It seemed like a no-brainer. The other thing that we did, after we posted our results – and we actually did post it just like this – is that we would begin to look at the natural connections through different content areas. Where can we get a bigger bang for our buck? Sequencing – do we do that in math? Yeah, we do. So, help kids make that natural connection. For our ESOL population – that's significant, it's really significant. Teaching them that sequencing means putting something in an order – well that's important in math, and that's important in reading. But if you don't tell our ESOL guys and some of our special needs kids, they're not going to get it on their own right away. So, why not help them with that. So, we would look for those natural connections, and since we're all together, by the time we left at 6 o'clock one night a month, I knew that my lesson plans were done – I had them. Now, did I have the actual hand-out I might use on day 7? No, but everyone in the group knew that they were accountable to everybody else in the group, and it was done. And people then actually Xeroxed it for you, and it just got shoved in your mailbox, so that when it was time, I had what I needed to do – we actually saved time. It was a much more efficient way to work. I hear a lot of comments out there that “The curriculum is so focused, or we've got to do all this state testing – I can't do anything fun anymore.” That was not our experience. In fact, the experience did direct opposite. Because we were very, so focused – completely aligned with what we knew our kids needed to know and be able to do – we found we actually had extra time, and we could do other things that our ESOL kids needed – whether it was building in, you know, double sessions in vocabulary instruction. For the first time we allowed kids to go out for instrumental music, I mean, we built in time for ourselves, and we still made our gains. Okay, I want to take a couple of minutes now, get to the student work. Now, of course when you're looking at student work collaboratively with your own schools, you're not going to type it up, and I actually miss the authenticity of kids' handwriting that's horribly messy, doesn't fit on the page, spelling is atrocious. I tried to leave as much in this as possible, but was authentic with the spelling or grammar. But, it's important that you remember this was a reading task. I was looking at their comprehension, so, biases here – you've got to forget about spelling, you've got to forget about the grammar, and what is it in the work that we see. Now, when we look at student work, we can look at it two different ways. We can look at student work supportively, and that means what is in the work that the student can do? What do they already do? What evidence do I have here that shows they understand main idea, or they understand plot/problems/solutions, or that they understand theme. Then, looking at work critically – what don't they know? What didn't they get? Those are the key

pieces for instructional implications – the critical. As teachers, we tend to instantly go to the critical. I'm going to force you today to think of the supportive role first, because those are the most important when you engage in conversations with kids about their work, and with parents. What is it that your child can do – let me share those with you. Or with the student, "Kevin, you did a fabulous job here, getting this particular piece," whether it's problem or solution. In my experience, I've found that if you start with what they can do, they can hear what it is they still need to do. The other critical piece that we would try to examine in our informal lunch conversations in the hall is the piece about us. And those of you who are candidates for national board or have been there already, one of the things you have to ask yourself is "What did I do well here, and what evidence do I have of that? And what area do I still need work?" Those are harder questions to have, or harder conversations to have, but they're very important conversations. Take just a second and read it to yourself. (MUSIC) I haven't shared with you the state rubric yet, 'cause I'm trying to give you an opportunity to see those things up there that are there first. Our state rubric is holistic, okay? So, it's not a checklist. It asks you to read the entire piece, and either say "This is good enough," "This meets proficiency," or it doesn't. On just your gut here, is this good understanding for a 3rd grade student? If this were your child, would you be please with this work sample? Whenever I do student work with a group of people, I never provide more than 5 or 6 samples, because that can take you hours to get through, if you're really focusing on it. I will tell you that this particular assessment did score at the proficient level in our state, and I'll talk through that. Let me put up our rubric. A two for the state of Maryland, meets proficiency. So, a general understanding is what a child needs to have to be proficient. Now, that's just our state. Now talking through the rubric, that's a whole other skill that you have to do. But if, as a group, you can collectively come up with what we call attributes at the bottom of papers, and give it a score, you have an anchor set. And that anchor set is really helpful as you continue to work individually in your classrooms, you can provide exemplars for kids about what it looks like. And, remember, not all two's are the same. One of the questions I like to ask myself when I'm looking at the student work and trying to give it a score is "Do I believe that this child read the story, understood it, and has come out with some understanding of theme," and for me that's enough. But it's those attributes that you specifically write, and when I say attributes I mean supportively. I do think, and again this is my personal statement, I do believe that Salmon saying – Salmon said he could die without water, tells me that the child understood the problem in the story. Now, for you personally, it might be different. And that's perfectly fine. But, the most important thing is that when you and I are in a room together, we collectively agree. Now, when you go back to your classroom, you may say to your students for me, "You've got to tell me all the animals," or whatever it is. But collectively you have to come up with a general agreement – you do. And that takes work. It takes a lot of give and take. And reading into papers is really difficult, because what we want to say is "I know Jose', he's only been in the country, you know, four months." Doesn't matter. Standards are completely meaningless, unless

they're tied to student work. And that's why the looking at student work is really a critical piece in the standards-based movement. What does it look like – that's what I want to know. And it differs from state to state and district to district. But the collaborative conversations that teachers, I think, are now only beginning to really understand how powerful they can be. And creative principals are coming up with ways to schedule, so that they can provide us with time. We deserve the collaborative conversations. And you know, I have two children and I like to get out of that building – some days I have to get out of the building so I can get home and do the car-pool thing. But committing to do one night a month, so that I have all my work done – that's a huge stress release for me. I mean it was really very helpful and powerful. Okay, let's go back to sample 5, which is one page back. (MUSIC) Again, let's start supportively – what are the attributes that are in the paper? Notice the characters. What else? It's clearly written in his own words, um-hum. Rather than giving you a score on this, let me ask you this. If you had an opportunity to meet this particular student, is there one question you might ask him or her that might make you feel better about what they know and understood from the story? Is this a student that you think needs another lesson on something? They need to say specifically that they have a problem with something. They might. That was what I would ask him, "What was the problem, why didn't he want the moose to drink? Perhaps more modeling, maybe going back to that lesson, important versus unimportant details, um-hum. Clearly this student has some understanding. This paper did score at the one level, but there were people who scored it at the two level. Now, here's what I – everybody loves this. In a holistic paper there is no perfect one, there is no perfect two, because we are all individuals there is going to be some subjectivity here. You're going to see something that I don't see. The reality is that if you gave it a one and I gave it a two, that's okay. Because when you add a one and a two together, it still does not actually meet proficiency. There is some oneness in it, there is some twoness in it, but giving kids the benefit of the doubt, do we want them walking away from the table saying "This work really was good enough, or does it really need just a little bit more work?" Some tweaking, yeah. And that's okay. We would have a harder time if you saw it as a one and I saw it as a three, or vice versa. When it's that far apart, there is something wrong and you really need more eyes, or voices, in on it. If I were to do an assessment for instructional purposes, I probably would not have my teammate look at it, but I was doing an assessment for assessing or grading purposes, it's absolutely double-scored, yes. And again, that helps us calibrate to come to that common understanding. It also builds content knowledge, and the discourse that happens between colleagues about instruction is the most important thing that can happen. I mean, listening to somebody say "Well, I could ask that question, and I might get a better understanding of what the student knows." Well, I'm going to go try that. But also listening to somebody say, "You know, he really needs some help with sequencing." I might not have seen that, and her input is really valuable to me. So, the discourse, that conversation is the most powerful thing that can happen. The meeting 'til 6 o'clock was only planning. (Inaudible) Looking at their work happened during our planning time. I'll be a little bit honest

here – our principal is a very capable woman – came up with a way to cash in one position for another and gave us 45 additional minutes a week planning time. But we were not allowed to spend that planning time alone – it had to be in a collaboration, and that’s what we did with it. So, happy for me, my work was done by the time I went home, I mean, that’s a good thing. So being a little bit creative with the schedule was extremely helpful. And because this restructured school was getting a significant amount of attention, she really wanted to provide that time. But, I also want to be clear. This effort did not happen with more money, it did not happen with additional staff, our superintendent was very clear. He wanted to be able to replicate our efforts, if we were successful. And you can’t do this in 20 different schools if you need to increase budget by millions. It’s not helpful. Would any feedback go to the teacher who has this student so that they can go back and perhaps reteach or cover theme and make sure that student thoroughly understands theme before it’s actually time to do the writing, and you know on the standardized testing? When we were done scoring a grade level, those papers went immediately back to the teacher, and one of the things that we’ve got pretty savvy about was literally putting student work samples on an overhead and debriefing them with the entire class, so that we would model, exactly what I’m doing with you, “Boys and girls, what evidence do we have here that Karen understood the story?” And let the kids articulate it – they can do it. And, in our building we never use words “not good enough”, we always use “the work is good enough” or, the thumb sideways, it still needs work. And so we would do an all-pupil response, exactly like that with the work with kids. And those samples are then posted in classrooms as exemplars for kids to use the next time we did a different story. Say I wrote a piece that was bad and you put it up there, did it not embarrass the child? There are some teachers who feel very strongly that student names should be removed – I’m not one of them. I really feel like I develop a pretty strong learning community in my classroom, and they still need work – that’s okay. I didn’t say it was awful, I didn’t put an “F” on it... Wouldn’t it be just as effective, if I was going to re-teach theme, to just extract this statement about theme out and go through the process of asking the class “would this really constitute a theme in relation to the story?” and go from there? I think that would be a very powerful way to do it. Sure, I do. (MUSIC) For more information or a free online follow-up to this program, log on to www.ed.gov/teacherinitiative. This broadcast and the follow-up are brought to you through a partnership of the U.S. Department of Education and the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium.