

# Ogden's Story

Georgia Department of Education  
Division of School and District Effectiveness  
2016 Instructional Leadership Conference  
5-6 October 2016, Stone Mountain Conference Center, GA

# A revelation is at hand.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;

William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming"

What I know—and all I can speak to meaningfully—is what I have done, and how my system responded.

I do not presume to know anything beyond that.

# **A Big Caveat**

*You can be the real situs of change.*

*You can stifle or strengthen real change,  
with a look, a word, a tone.*

Real change is about systems.

*Your system produces exactly what it was  
designed to produce.*

*If you don't like the product, change the  
system.*

System change begins with self change.

Learning Objectives



Fat,  
White,  
Middle-aged,  
Middle-class,  
Mormon,  
Republican,  
Father,  
Public-school educated,  
Married,  
Attorney.

I was a school  
superintendent.

And, I have a story to tell.

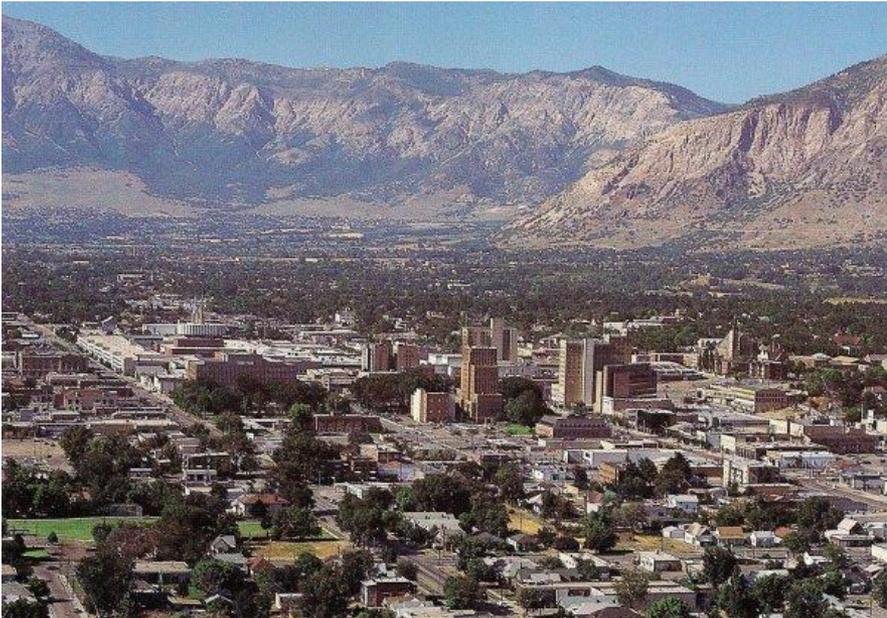
I am a:

# Our Context: September 2011



- In August 2011, I was a practicing trial attorney in Ogden, Utah.
- I practiced law in northern Utah as a civil trial attorney and a felony prosecutor from 1993 through 2011.
- I was elected to the Ogden City School District Board in November 2006.
- I was the chair of the Budget and Finance Committee of the Board from 2008 through 2011.

# Our Context: September 2011



- Ogden City
  - Aging rail town
  - High poverty
  - High diversity
  - Changing work force
  - Changing infrastructure
- Ogden School District:
  - Many programs
  - Many grants
  - Looming state takeover
  - Few gains
  - Nothing sustained
  - Much activity; no achievement



## Our Context: September 2011

- Labor Conflict: The Summer of Love, 2011
  - Ineffective contract (6.5 hours work day)
  - Negotiations unsuccessful
- End of Level Results, May 2011
  - Lowest performing elementary schools in Utah
  - Lowest performing comprehensive high schools in Utah
  - Low proficiency; low growth
  - More than four years of district improvement
  - Performance widely reported in Ogden Standard Examiner, Salt Lake Tribune, Deseret News, and TV Stations



Our Context:  
September 2011

# Our Context: September 2011



- Superintendent Zabriskie resigned, Thursday, 25 August 2011
- His wife had cancer, and died on 2 September 2011
- Board discussions

# An Outside Instructional Auditor's Observation.

“Observations show that most teachers were not teaching at grade level and few were asking questions beyond summarization and recall. Little is being intentionally implemented to help students acquire teamwork and leadership skills, to assist students in understanding global issues, and to ensure that students are being taught at the degree of rigor expected for college attainment.”

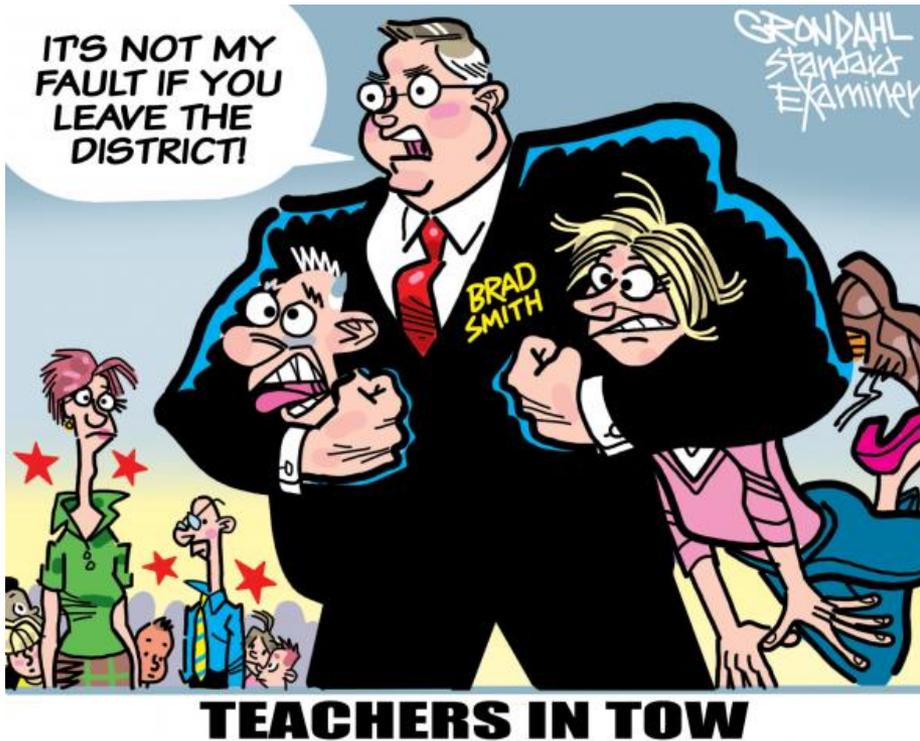
—RMC Report, February 8, 2012



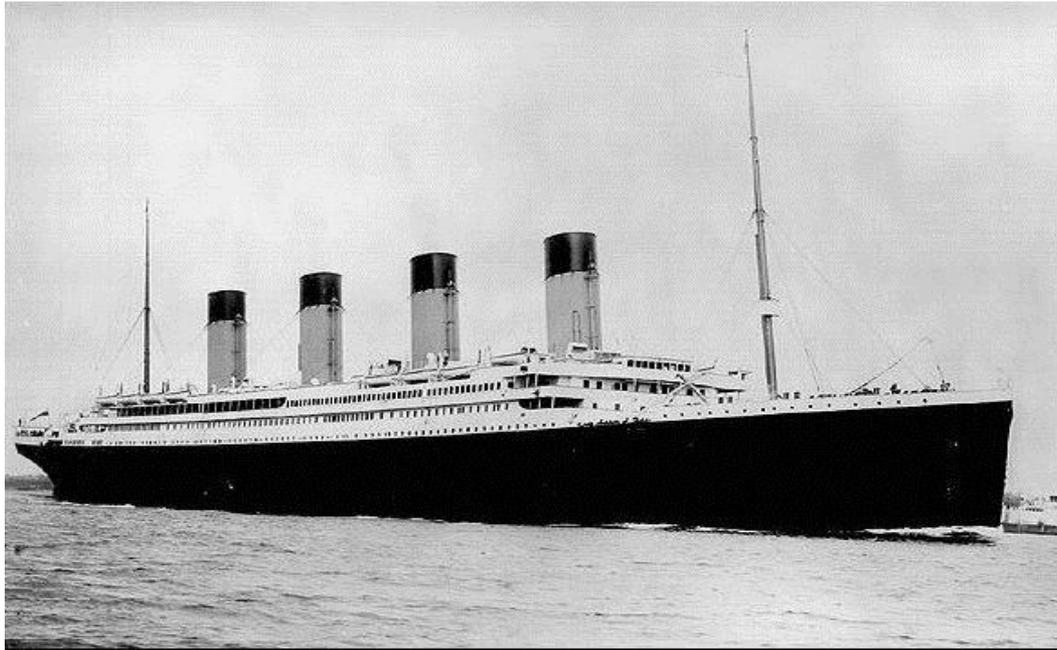
- School turnaround process with University of Virginia was just starting
- State intervention had already started
- Four SIG schools: Ogden High, George Washington High, Dee Elementary, Odyssey Elementary

Our Context:  
September 2011  
Rough Water

# Our Context: September 2011



- Appointment, Monday 29 August 2011, effective Tuesday, 7 September 2011
- School started Monday, 29 August 2011
- First Day, Tuesday, 7 September 2011:
  - 7:00 AM meeting with OEA
  - 8:00 AM meeting with executive directors to review needed administrative changes
- Day Three, Thursday, 9 September 2011:
  - Every Secondary administrators reassigned to new school or returned to classroom



If you were the captain of the *Titanic*,  
“Steady as she goes” might not be the  
best command.

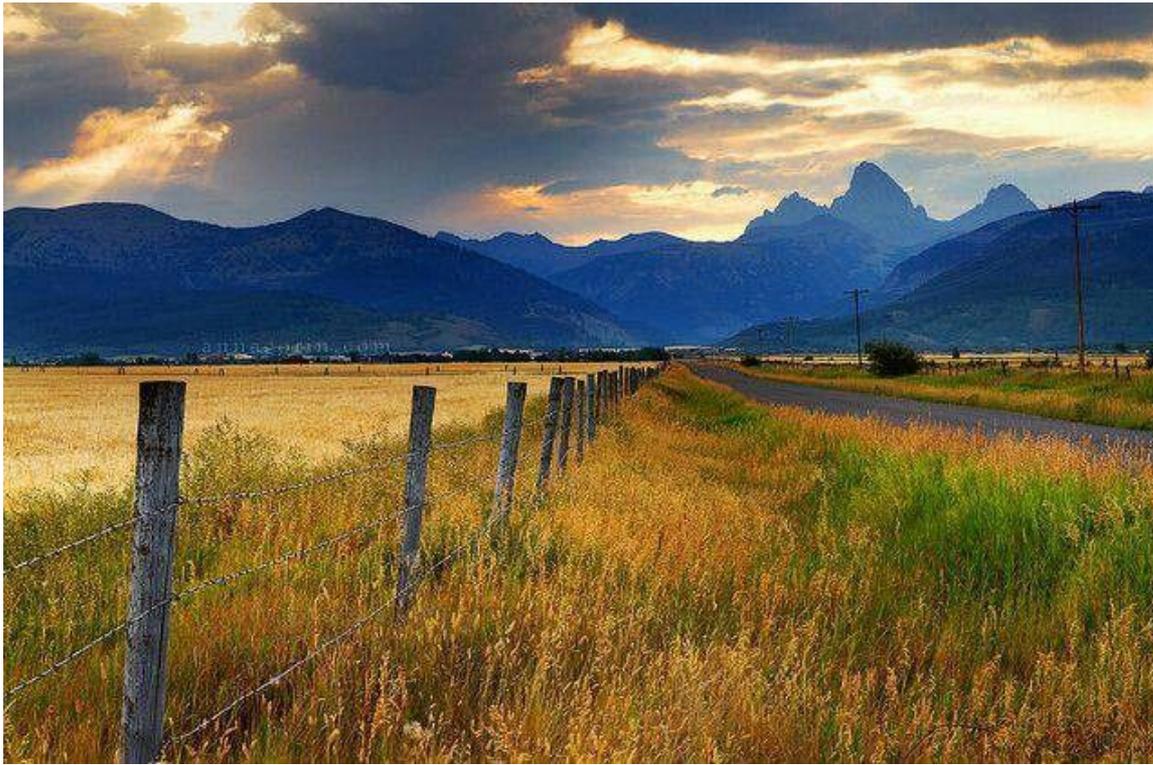
What is a “system?”



A System.



A System.



“These people built schools and churches in all parts of the [Teton] valley.... They built adequate schools, first the one-room school with eight grades, then the two room school and so on. They built the towns, Felt, Teton, Driggs and Victor. . . . How was this accomplished?

There was no industry, no money, no market, no doctor, no stores, nothing but the fact facing them of the coming each year, about August, September or October, of the hard winters, winters known only to those who have experienced them. I was born and grew up in the days of the threshing machine.”



“The threshing was done by **a neighborhood, a group of farmers, each one doing his part**, then going from one farm to another. The big farm, the little farm, the poor and the no-so-poor, the large family, the widow and the widower, it mattered not who, the grain on each farm was threshed. At each farm the women got together and cooked three meals a day, breakfast before daylight, dinner midday, and then supper after dark. Steaming pots of potatoes, gravy, meats, and vegetables, baked bread, puddings, more than enough for all.



The threshing crew consisted of first the cooks, then the man or men who owned the threshing machine, then the sack sowers, the sack buckers, then eight or ten wagons drawn by a team of horses and a man with a pitchfork on each wagon. In the early days there was a waterman who hauled water for the steam engine. These women, men, boys and girls worked together, each neighbor helping one another, each looking for the welfare of all. Oftentimes no money exchanged hands, no books were kept, no time wasted in figuring—just the satisfaction of getting the grain done before the snows came. **Was the threshing crew unique? No, it was just the way we did it.**



**Let us at times see the necessity to change our gaze of wonder** from the lofty crags and the towering spires of the majestic Tetons, . . . and see the tracks of the past, [made] by . . . those who came before. Let us take . . . the tremendous resources we have at hand and write the story of the future, eliminating much of the sorrow and hardship of the past.

Prentice E. Smith, "Has the Threshing Crew Gone Forever," Teton Valley News, January 22, 1981.

# *A System?*

**A system** is a set of interacting, interdependent *components and relationships* which form an integrated whole, to produce a desired result.

# *A System?*

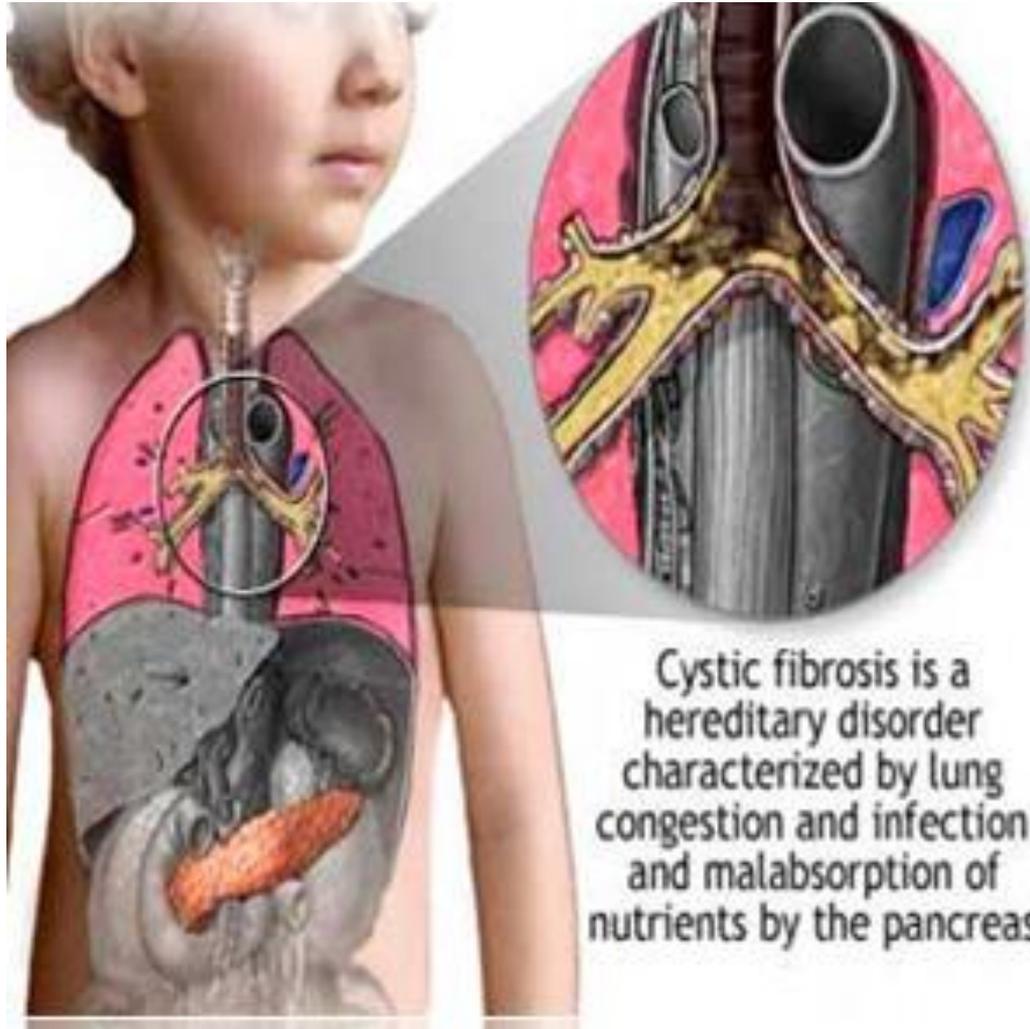
Every system  
is perfectly designed  
to obtain  
exactly the results it gets.

--W. Edwards Deming

**Big Idea: Systems achieve particular results *by design, whether intentional or accidental.***  
If those results are not what we want, achieve different results by choosing to alter the system that produced them.

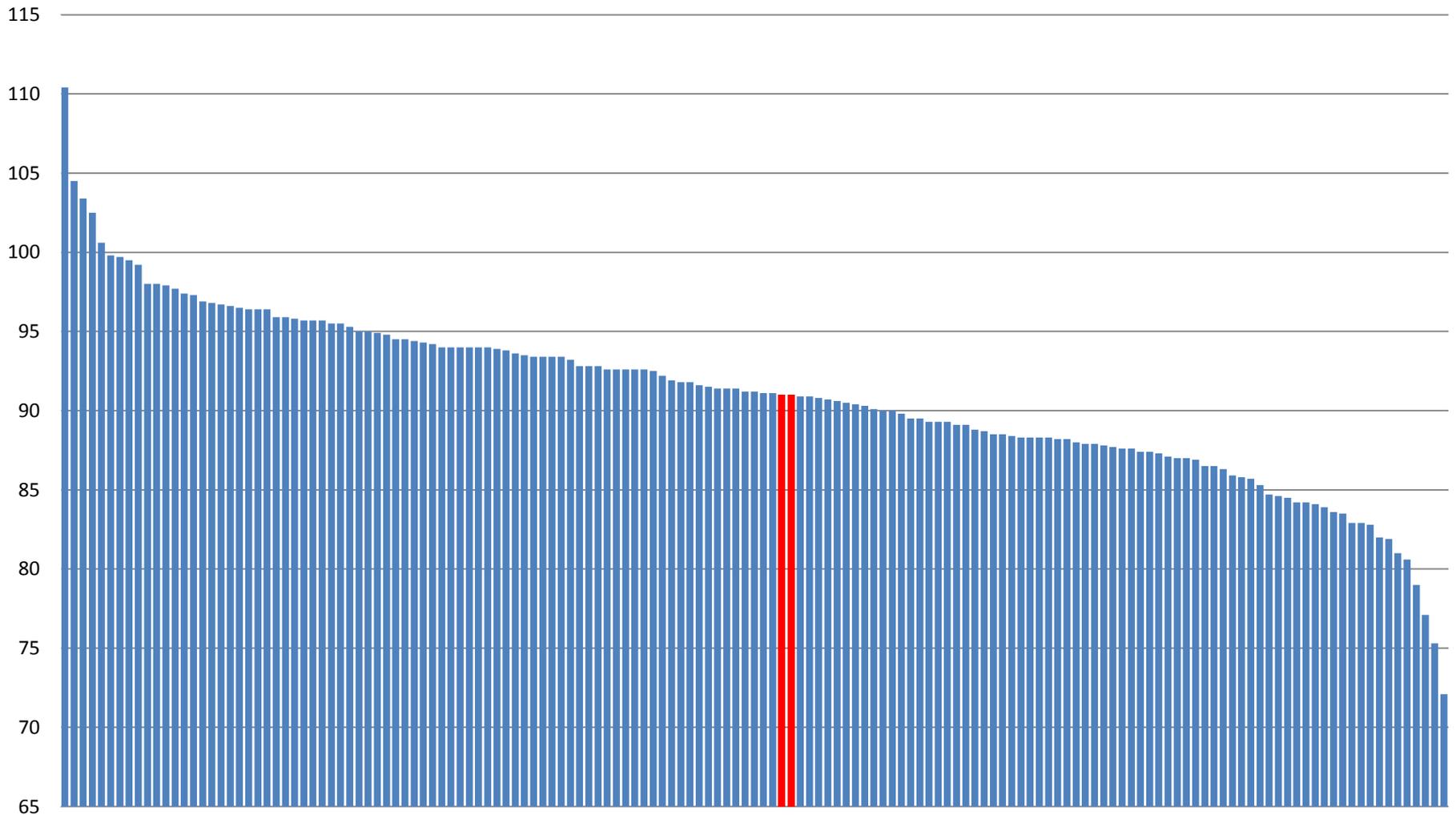
Big Question:  
What does that mean for me?

# Cystic Fibrosis



Cystic fibrosis is a hereditary disorder characterized by lung congestion and infection and malabsorption of nutrients by the pancreas

American Cystic Fibrosis Center  
Patient's Percent of Normal Lung Function, 2012 Data  
Cystic Fibrosis Foundation

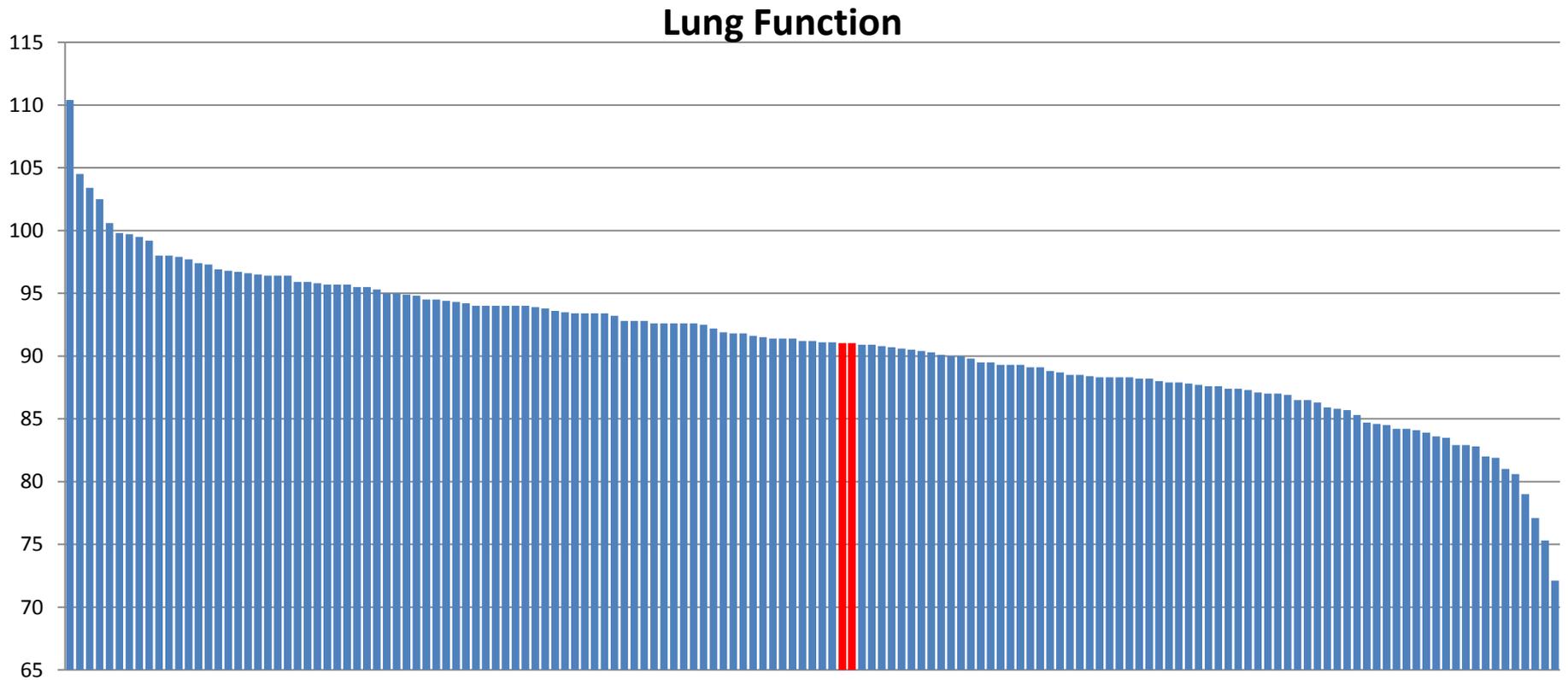


# A Puzzlement

What makes the wide variability especially puzzling is that **our system for CF care is so much more sophisticated than that for most other diseases. CF care works the way we want all of medicine to work.** Patients receive care in one of 117 ultra-specialized centers across the country. All centers undergo a rigorous certification process. Their doctors have a high volume of experience in caring for people with CF. They all follow the same guidelines for CF treatment, guidelines that are far more detailed than we have in most of medicine. They all participate in research trials to figure out the new and better treatments. You would think, therefore, that their results would be the same. **Yet the differences are enormous.**

Atul Gawande, *Better*, p. 211-12

Knowing it is a life or death decision for your child, which center would you choose?





What I saw in Cincinnati both impressed me and given its middling ranking surprised me. The members of the CF staff were skilled, energetic, and dedicated. [They carefully practiced medicine according to the best practices and protocols.] This was, it seemed to me, real medicine: untidy, human, but practiced carefully and conscientiously—as well as anyone could ask for. . .

A further puzzlement: Cincinnati



A person's daily risk of getting a bad lung illness with CF is 0.5 percent. . . . The daily risk of getting a bad lung illness with CF plus treatment is 0.05 percent.”

“On any given day, you have basically a 100 percent change of being well.”

Gawande, 221-22.

But, “sum it up over a year and it is the difference between an 83 percent chance of making it through without getting sick and only a 16 percent chance.”

*“Excellence came from seeing, on a daily basis, the difference between being 99.5 percent successful and being 99.95 percent successful.”*

With Janelle at 90% lung function  
(which is the *national average*):

“‘We’ve failed, Janelle,’ he said. ‘It’s  
important to acknowledge when  
we’ve failed.’

With that, she began to cry.”

“You do whatever it  
takes to keep your patients lungs  
as open as possible.”

Gawande, 219.

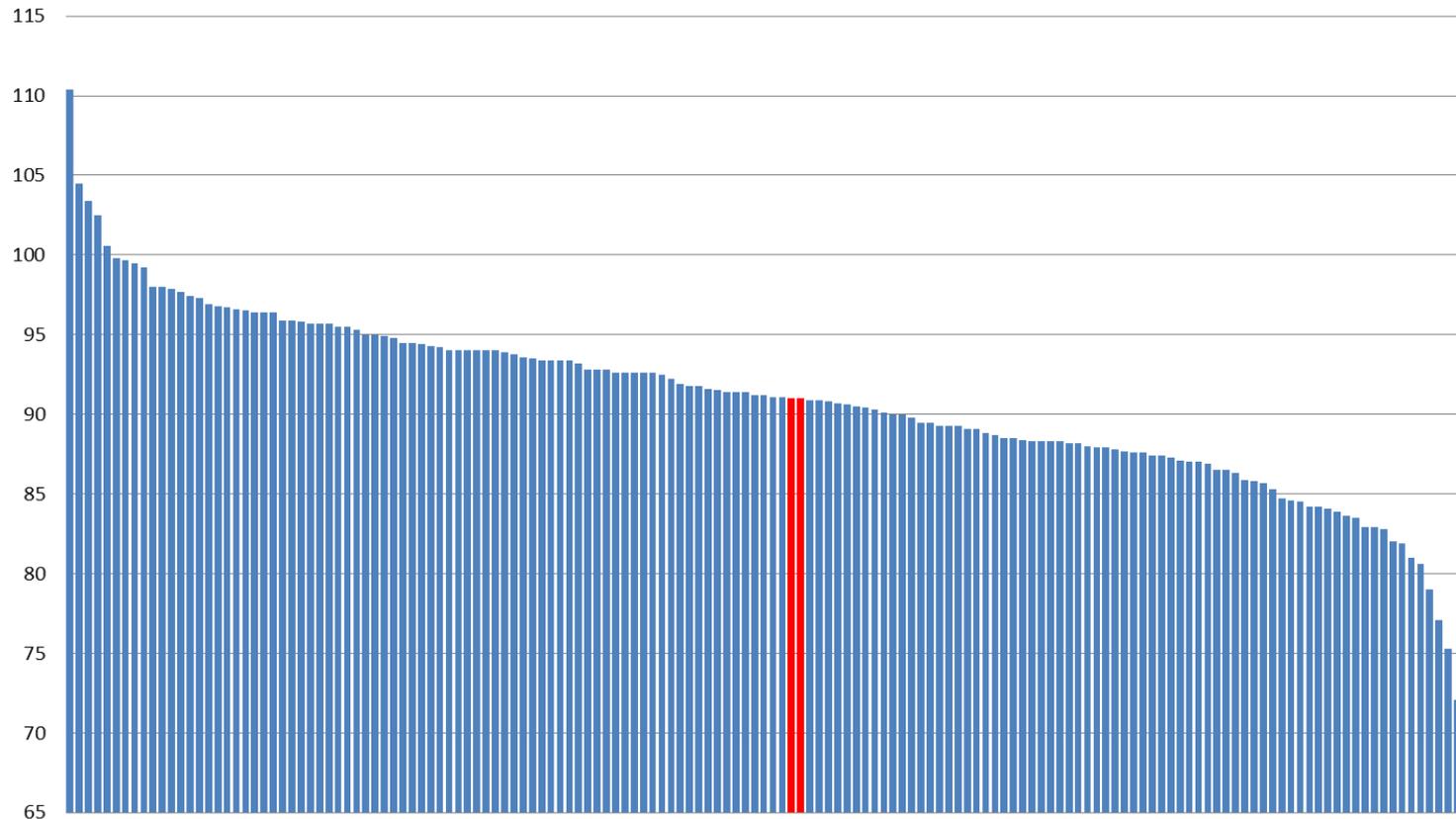
- **What does it mean to us to “do whatever it takes”?**

A break in the  
“Fourth Wall”



“You look at the rates of improvement in different quartiles, and it’s the centers in the top quartile that are improving fastest,” Marshall says. “They are at risk of breaking away.” What the best may have, above all, is a capacity to learn and change—and to do so faster than everyone else.”

Gawande, p. 227-28.



What they had was a system:

a set of interacting,  
interdependent components  
and relationships which form  
an integrated whole, to  
produce the result.

“[N]ot a single child or teenager at the center has died in almost a decade. The oldest patient is now sixty-seven.”

Gawande, 225.

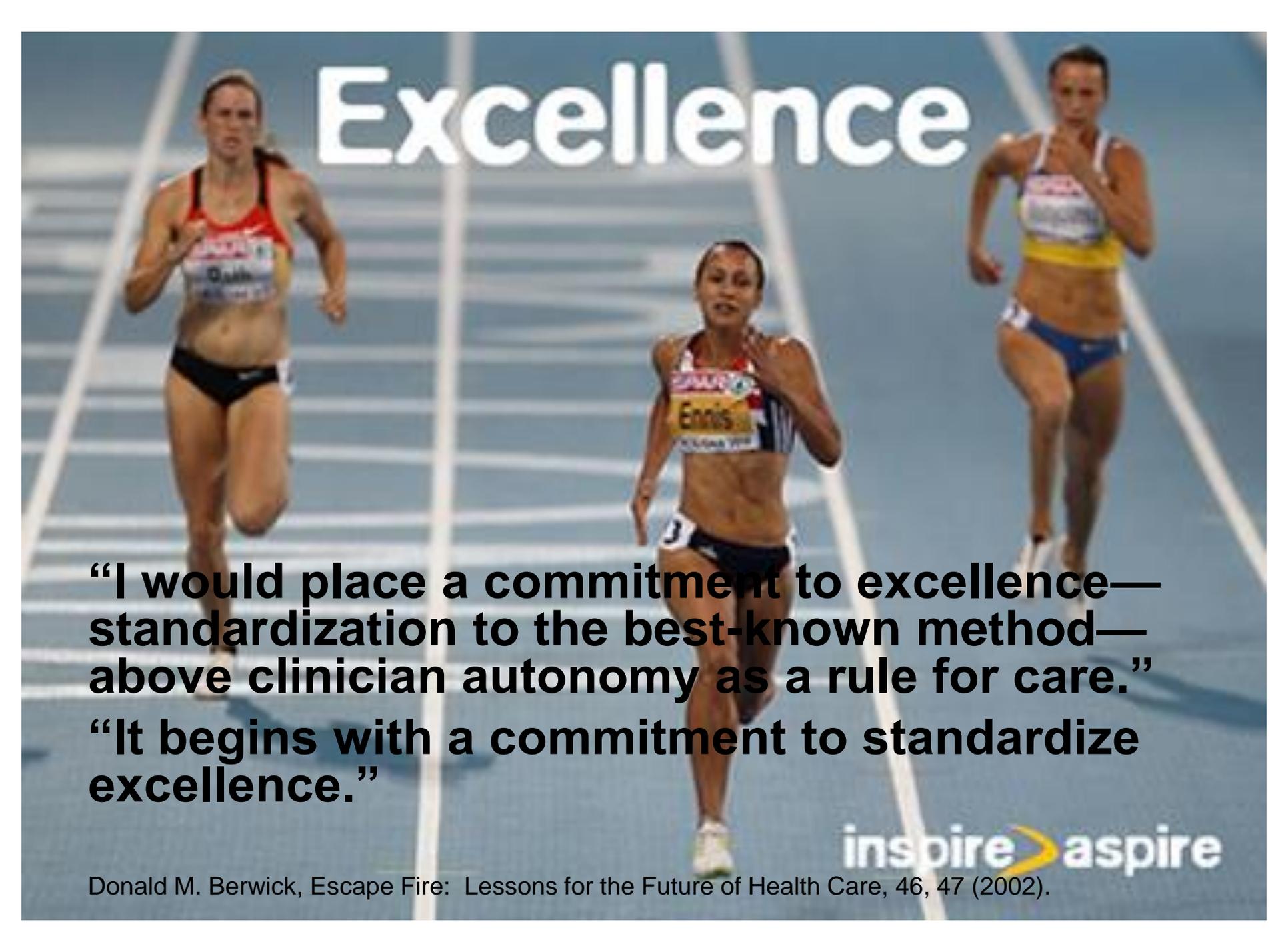
The hardest question for anyone who takes responsibility for what he or she does is, What if I turn out to be average? . . . Someone's got to be average. If the bell curve is a fact, then so is the reality that most doctors are going to be average. There is no shame in being one of them, right?

*Except, of course, there is.* What is troubling is not just being average but settling for it. Everyone knows that averageness is, for most of us, our fate. And in certain matters—looks, money, tennis—we would do well to accept this.

**BUT IN YOUR SURGEON, YOUR  
CHILD'S PEDIATRICIAN, YOUR  
POLICE DEPARTMENT, YOUR LOCAL  
HIGH SCHOOL? WHEN THE STAKES  
ARE OUR LIVES AND THE LIVES OF  
OUR CHILDREN, WE WANT NO ONE  
TO SETTLE FOR AVERAGE.**

Gawande, 229-30.

# Excellence



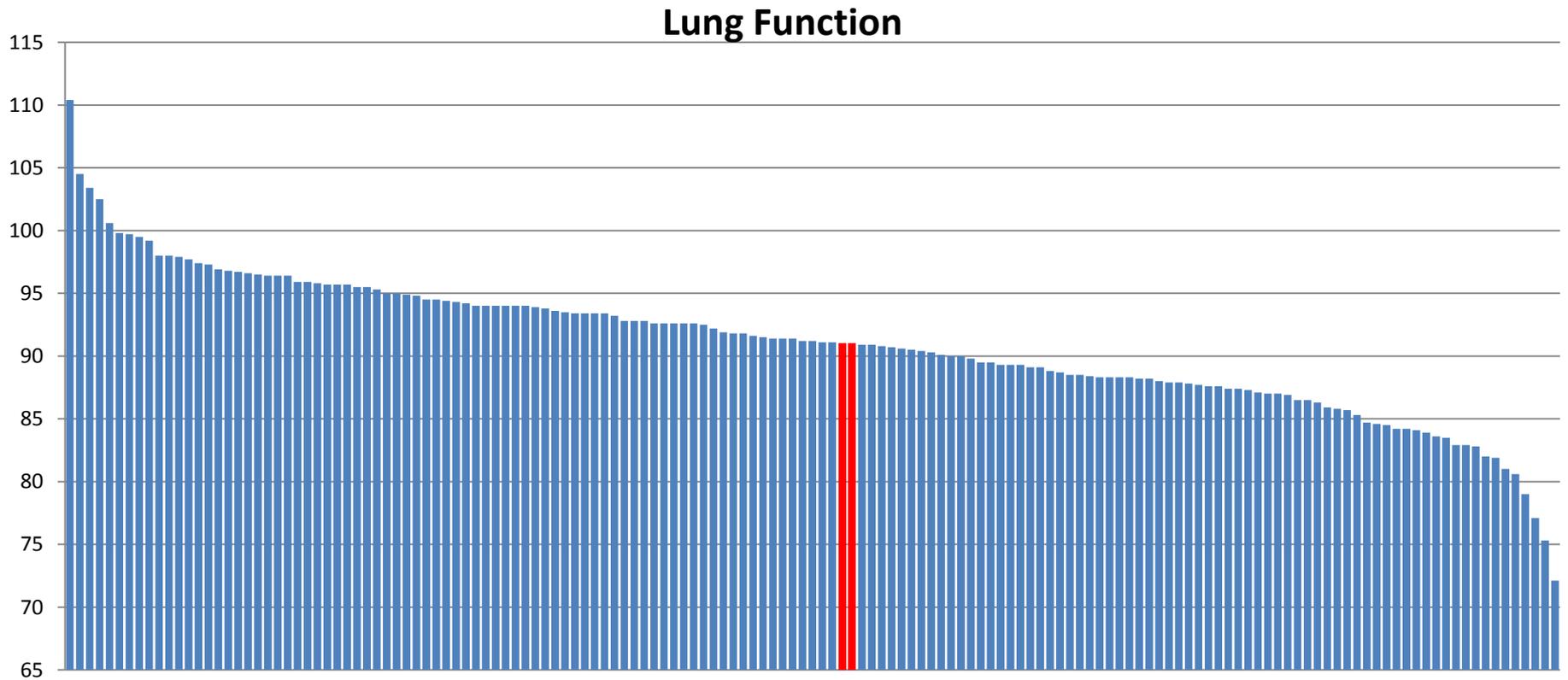
**“I would place a commitment to excellence—standardization to the best-known method—above clinician autonomy as a rule for care.”**

**“It begins with a commitment to standardize excellence.”**

inspire > aspire

Donald M. Berwick, *Escape Fire: Lessons for the Future of Health Care*, 46, 47 (2002).

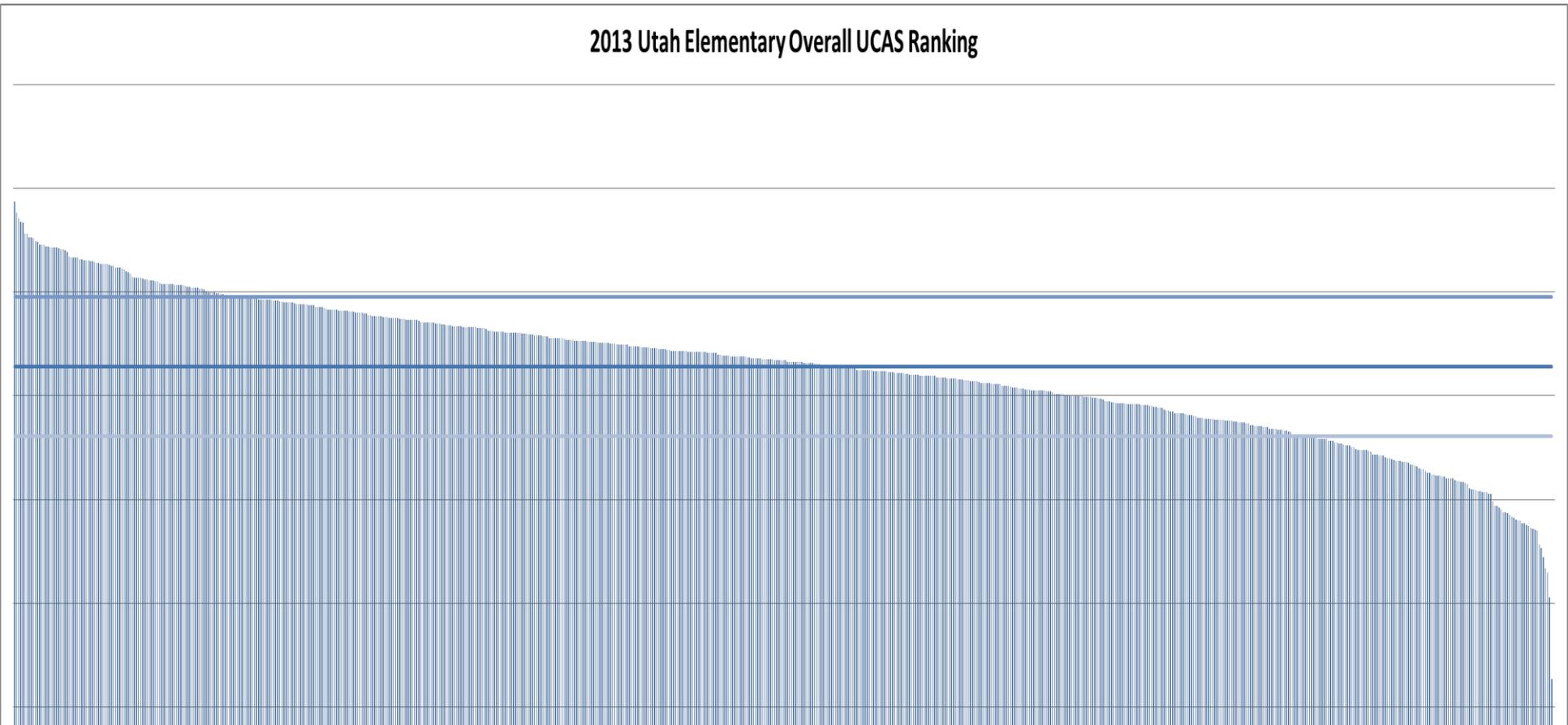
Knowing it is a life or death decision for your child, which center would you choose?



A Story.  
A True Story.  
A Story about us.  
A Story about change.  
A Story about hope.  
A Story from April 2012.  
In one of my schools. . .

# Knowing it is a life or death decision for your child, which school would you choose?

2013 Utah Elementary Overall UCAS Ranking





Professor C. Roland Christensen  
University Professor  
Harvard University

“Faith is the  
most essential  
ingredient in  
good  
teaching  
practice.”

C. Roland Christensen, Education for Judgment: The Artistry of Discussion Leadership (1991).



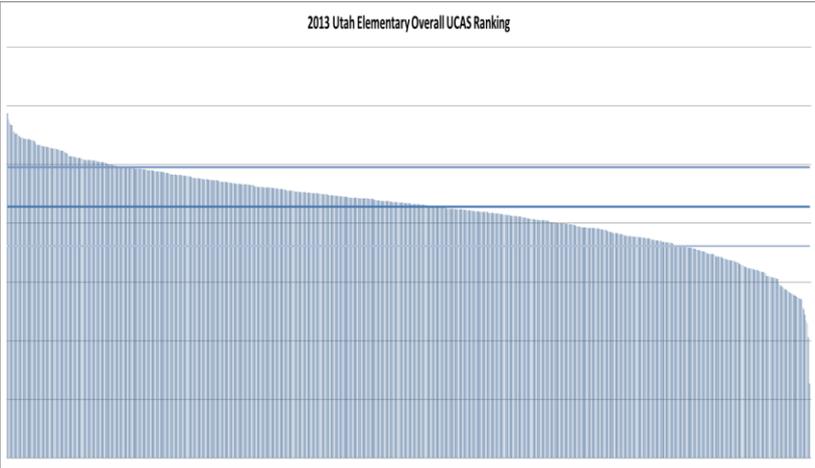
**“Everyone would like to be the best, but most organizations lack the discipline to figure out with egoless clarity what they *can* be the best at and the will to do whatever it takes to turn that potential into reality. They lack the discipline to rinse their cottage cheese.”**

Jim Collins, Good to Great, 128 (2001).

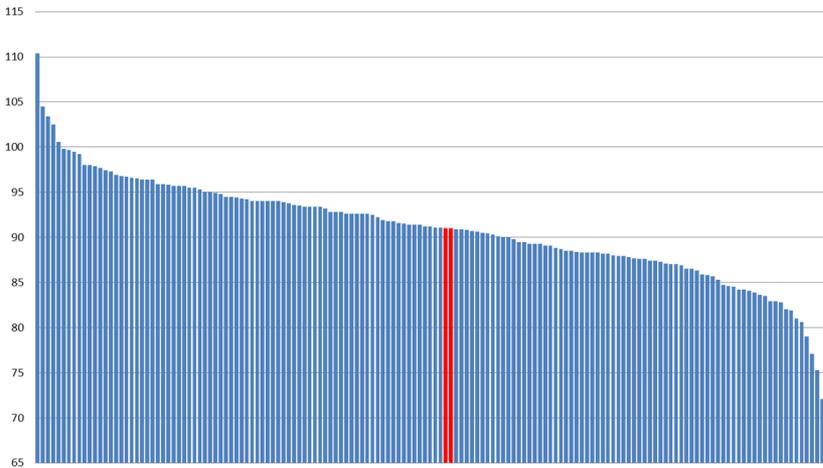
“Faith in the fundamental worth of our vocation, in the values that govern our **relations** with individual students and classes, and in the likelihood that at least some of the results we desire will be achieved.”

C. Roland Christensen, *Education for Judgment: The Artistry of Discussion Leadership* (1991), 116.

# Utah Statewide Results



# Cystic Fibrosis Centers



“We need ‘more people that specialize in the impossible’ and that is what teachers do.”

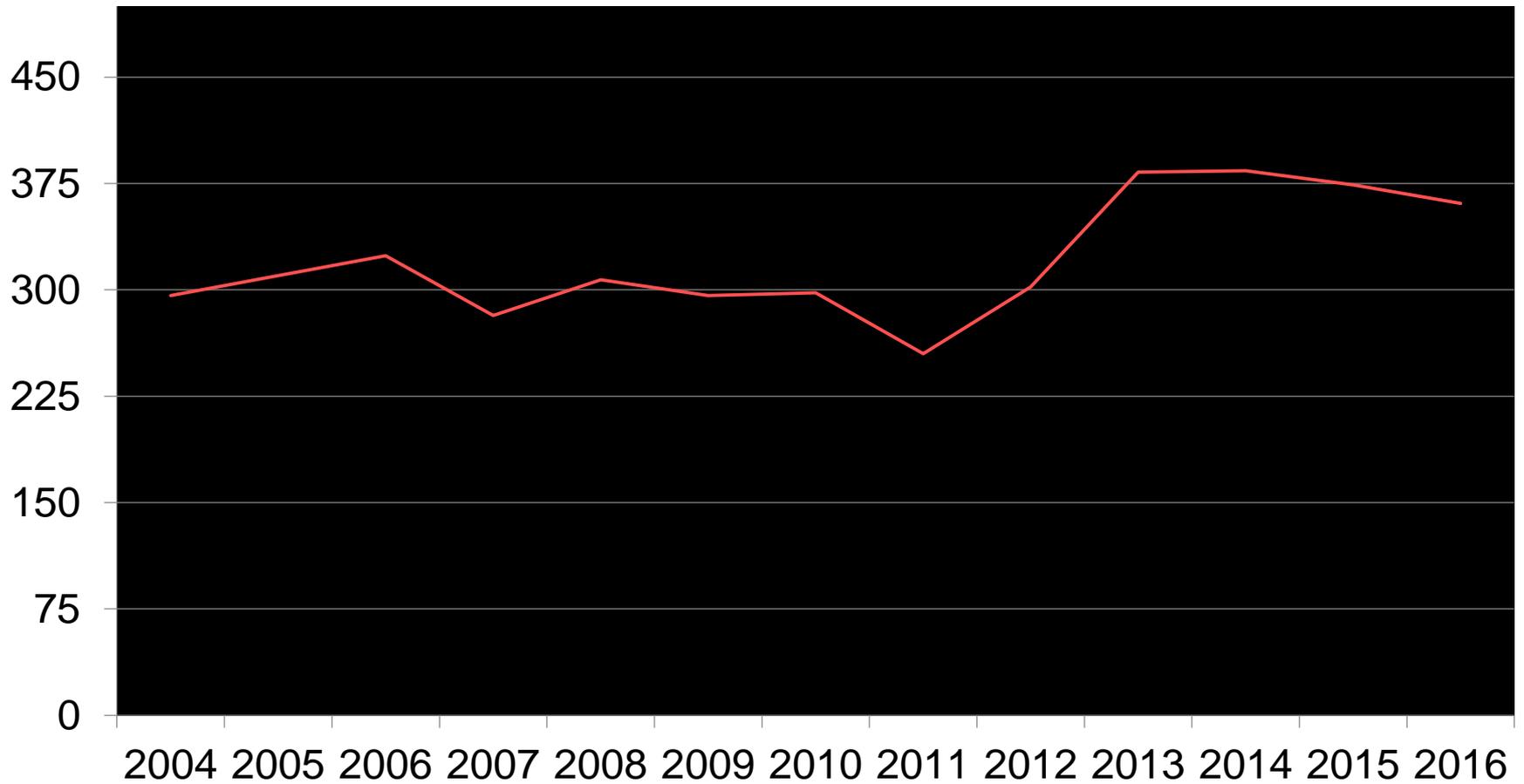
C. Roland Christensen, Education for Judgment: The Artistry of Discussion Leadership (1991), 117, quoting Theodore Roethke in Straw for the Fire: From the Notebooks of Theodore Roethke 1943-63, p. 185 (1972).

**Big Idea: A system must adopt excellence—and the discipline to standardize excellence—in order to achieve excellence. Systems commit to excellence when individuals do so.**

## **Big Questions:**

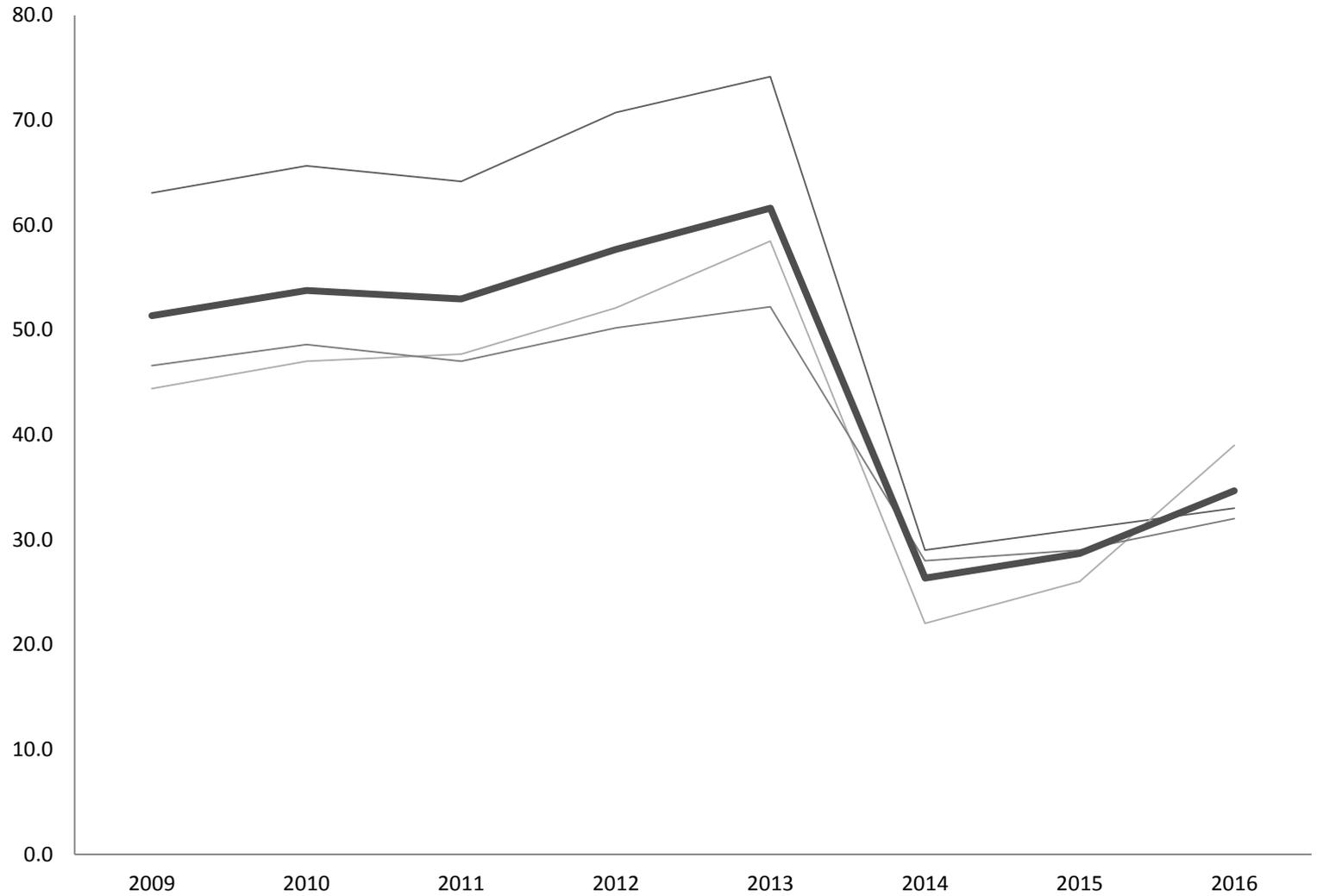
- 1. What three things will I change to adopt a standard of excellence?**
- 2. What would need to change in my system to develop standardized excellence?**

Since it is a life and death decision, here is what we have achieved:

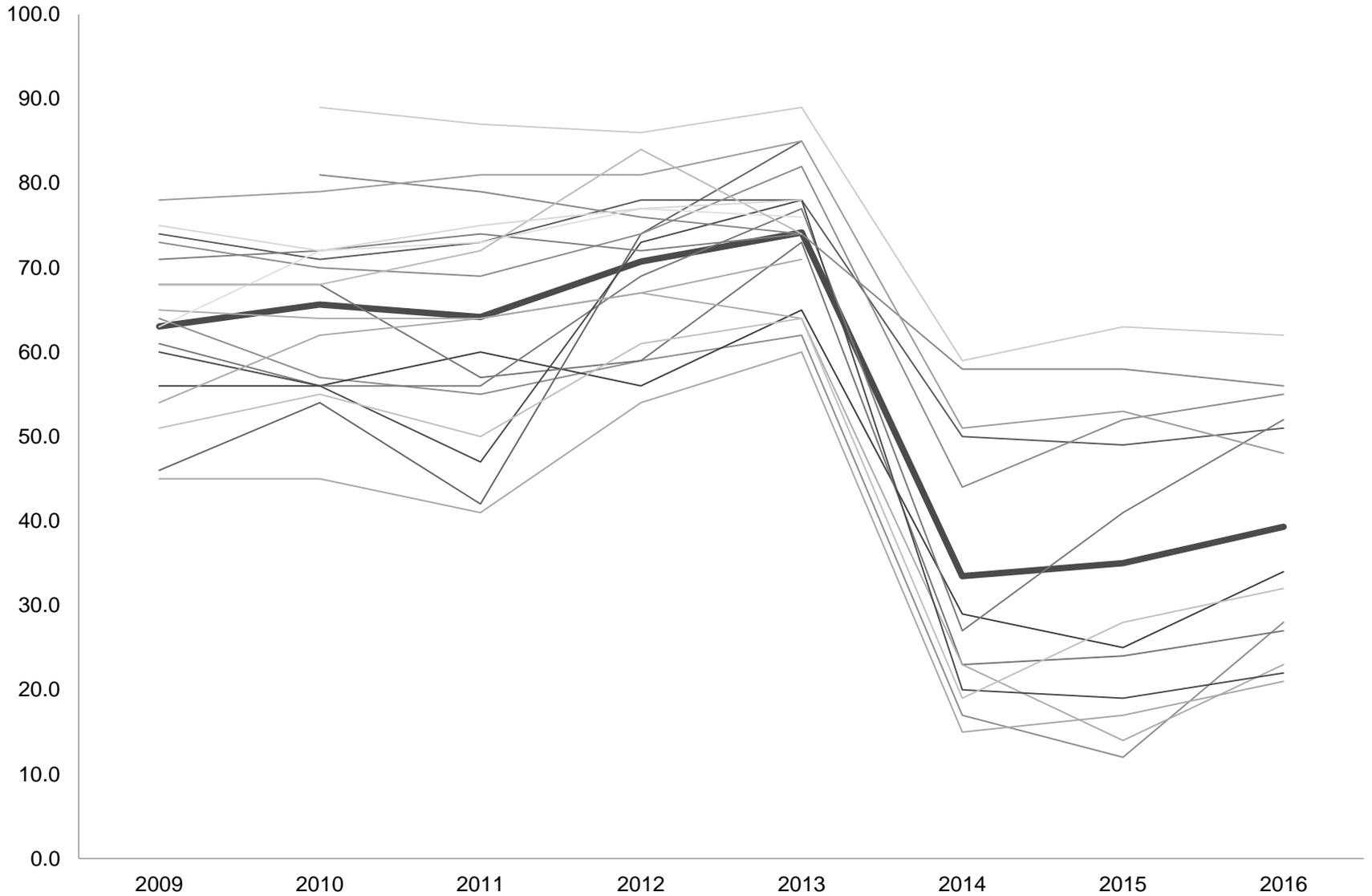


**OHS Graduating Class**  
**(2011 77%; 2014 89%)**

**Ogden City School District  
Number of Students Proficient, by Subject  
2009-2016**



Ogden City School District  
English/Language Arts Proficiency  
2009-2016



**Big Ideas:**

**Failure is inevitable.**

**Failure is the fundamental mechanism of all learning.**

**When we fail, we evaluate our failure, review our performance, make appropriate adjustments, and again take action.**

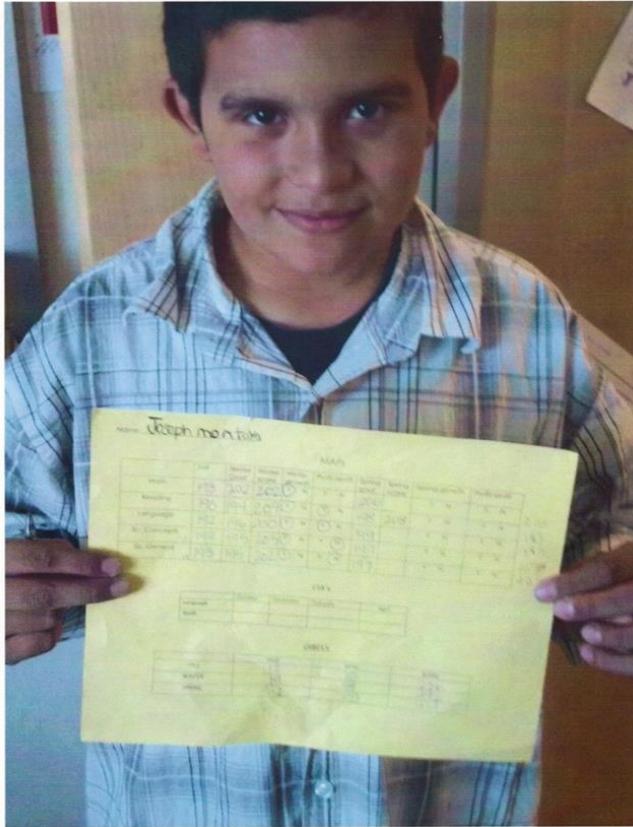
## **Big Questions:**

**What do I do when I fail?**

**What do I do when my team fails?**

**What do I do when my system fails?**

# A Tale of Two Students



So what will I do?

**Big Idea: As a district, as a school, as an individual, you can articulate the vision of excellence and discipline. It costs nothing but it requires everything. The District, the School, and You can go “all-in.”**

**Big Questions:**

**What does “all-in” look like for:**

**Me?**

**My Faculty?**

**My Students?**

# Lessons about Change

- “Highly successful organizations know how to overcome antibodies that reject anything new.”
- “*Successful large-scale change is a complex affair that happens*” as a *process.*”
- “THE CENTRAL CHALLENGE IN ALL [PHASES OF THE PROCESS] IS *CHANGING PEOPLE’S BEHAVIOR.*”
- “Changing behavior is less a matter of giving people analysis to influence their thoughts than helping them to see a truth *to influence their feelings.* . . .the heart of change is in the emotions.”

John Kotter, The Heart of Change, 1-2 (2002)

- Leading change is hard, complex and earnest. It can hurt.



**TEACHERS IN TOW**



"Welcome back to high school, had enough ditch-digging?"

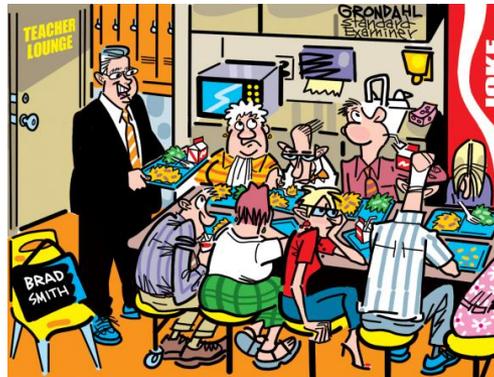


**ADULT EDUCATION ACROSS THE NET INTO THE WEBER SCHOOL DISTRICT**

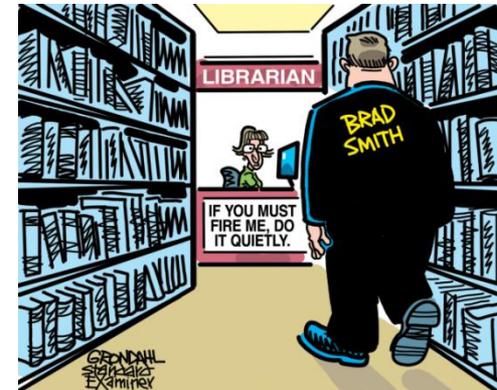


**SUPERINTENDENT BRAD SMITH RELAXES IN THE OGDEN HIGH SWIMMING POOL**

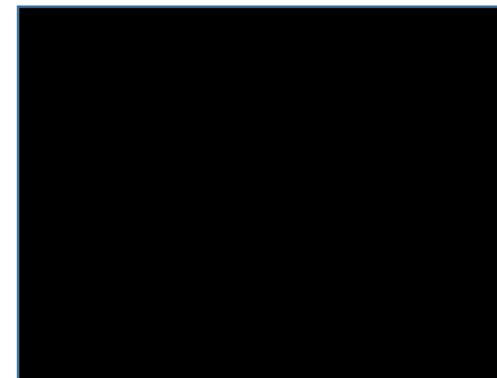
Pool party



"Does anybody know a good lawyer joke?"



"If you can't write your name, copy the name of the person next to you."



1. Articulate a vision and communicate it at least 100x more than you think necessary.
  - change the nature of the conversation: acknowledge the “brutal facts”
  - articulate a vision for change
  - demand and deliver more of ourselves and others in speaking out.
2. Identify, nurture and protect those doing the real work of change.
3. Articulate what success mean. Talk, persuade, direct, debate, engage, confront, challenge.
4. Prioritize change.
  - identify priorities
  - preferential HR processes
  - prioritized leadership
  - prioritized maintenance and material decisions
  - revisit how time is used; repurpose secondary prep periods or other prep times
5. Simplify mandates.
  - fewer meetings
  - fewer reports
  - preferential support
6. Articulate the need to think about things in novel ways.
  - “one per school”
  - not budgeting but resource allocation
  - can your priorities be determined by your expenditures
  - the solutions lie within
7. Principal is an instructional leader, not merely a manager.
  - visible in school as a leader
  - diffuse leadership in school: teams
  - observations and rapid feedback, face to face, small action steps
8. Require evidence for every decision and every assertion.
9. Model what it means to be a team, at whatever level you function.

What can I do? You can:

The District can be the real situs of change.  
*You* can stifle or strengthen real change,  
with a look, a word, a tone.

Real change is about systems.

*Your* system produces *exactly* what it was  
designed to produce.

If you don't like the product, *change the  
system.*

System change begins with self change.

Learning Objectives

I shall no longer ask myself if this or that is expedient, but only if it is right. I shall do this, not because I am noble or unselfish, but because life slips away, and **because I need for the rest of my journey a star that will not play false to me, a compass that will not lie.** . . . I am lost when I balance this against that, I am lost when I ask if this is safe, I am lost when I ask if men, white men or black men, Englishmen or Afrikaners, Gentiles or Jews, will approve. Therefore I shall try to do what is right, and to speak what is true. I do this not because I am courageous and honest, but because it is the only way to end the conflict of my deepest soul. **I do it because I am no longer able to aspire to the highest with one part of myself, and to deny it with another.**

Alan Paton, Cry the Beloved County

## **Biggest Ideas:**

***You can do something, now, today.***

***You can make your own area of  
responsibility an arena of excellence.***

***You don't need any more funding, or  
permission or anything other than  
your own will.***

# Some Suggested Reading

- Paul Bambrick-Santoyo, Get Better Faster (2016)
- Paul Bambrick-Santoyo, Leverage Leadership (2012)
- Donald M. Berwick, Escape Fire:  
[http://www.commonwealthfund.org/usr\\_doc/berwick\\_escapefire\\_563.pdf](http://www.commonwealthfund.org/usr_doc/berwick_escapefire_563.pdf)
- Jim Collins, Good to Great (2001)
- Jim Collins, Good to Great and the Social Sectors (2005)
- Atul Gawande, Better: A Surgeon's Notes on Performance (2007)
- John Kotter, The Heart of Change (2002)