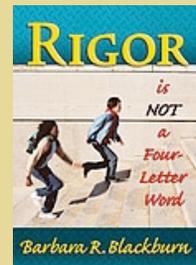# THE MAIN IDEA
current education book summaries

Rigor is NOT a Four-Letter Word
By Barbara R. Blackburn (Eye On Education, Inc., 2008)

S.O.S.   (A Summary of the Summary)

The main ideas of the book are:

> ~ To increase the level of rigor in our classrooms, we need to have higher expectations, support each student to learn at these higher levels, and ensure that students demonstrate that they are learning at higher levels.
> ~ This book provides more than 25 strategies to accomplish the above.

Why I chose this book:

With the Common Core State Standards coming down the pike and schools being held accountable for educating every student, educators are increasingly focusing on the topic of RIGOR. However, schools can't incorporate more rigor into their classrooms without a common definition of rigor. I like that Blackburn defines rigor in a way that includes curriculum, instruction, and assessment—this provides a real foundation schools can work from to begin the work of increasing rigor in all classrooms.

Note that this book is aimed at teachers and provides strategies they can use *in the classroom* rather than focusing on changes they can make in the curriculum.

The Scoop   (In this summary you will learn…)

√ *A clear definition of "rigor" that the whole school can use so everyone will be on the same page*

√ *Ways teachers can increase expectations and student learning* without *having to throw away what they already have*

√ *An overview of 25 strategies to increase rigor in the classroom that teachers can add to their toolbox*

√ *A rubric to gauge how teachers are progressing in their implementation of the concepts of rigor*

√ *Workshop ideas from The Main Idea to help teachers enhance the rigor in their instruction*

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, there have been numerous concerns about the low standards for students in American schools. A number of reports continue to show that our students are not prepared for the challenge of college and life beyond high school. In addition, since No Child Left Behind in 2001, the era of accountability has placed an even greater emphasis on the need to heighten rigor in our schools. In response to these concerns, this book focuses on ways teachers can increase the rigor in their classrooms.

There are a number of reasons why we do not have consistently high levels of rigor across the United States, but three major stumbling blocks are:

1) We do not have a consistent definition of rigor
There are many ways people define rigor. It may include the idea of quality over quantity, setting high expectations, deep immersion in a subject, working with complex content, and more. It is difficult to "increase rigor" without being given a clear definition.

2) We don't have a clear process/pathway to get there
How you increase rigor is connected to how you define it. Some people believe rigor should be addressed through making changes in the *content* taught. Another path to improving rigor is through changes in *assessment.* Some of the literature suggests that enhancing rigor in your classroom is directly tied to *teacher-student relationships*.

3) Other obstacles to increasing rigor
There are also a wide variety of other topics such as poor professional development and lack of highly qualified teachers that serve as barriers to effectively incorporating rigor into the classroom.

As these issues are discussed in the book, keep in mind Blackburn believes that rigor, at its core, is about ensuring that every student is provided the opportunity to grow in incredible ways. Three core beliefs shape her ideas about rigor:
> *Rigor is about quality, not quantity* – Rigor is not increased by assigning more homework; it results from depth over breadth
> *Rigor is for everyone* – Rigor is not something reserved just for advanced students
> *Rigor is about learning, not punishment* – Rigor is about growth and success, not failure

From these beliefs, Blackburn has created her own definition of rigor that frames the rest of the book:

Definition of Rigor
Rigor is creating an environment in which each student is expected to learn at high levels, each student is supported so he or she can learn at high levels, and each student demonstrates learning at high levels.

It is important to note that this definition is about *more* than just creating a challenging curriculum or a rigorous instructional strategy. It shows how rigor is about implementing an integrated approach that involves curriculum, instruction, and assessment in order to maximize learning for every student. Each part of the definition is fleshed out in more detail below.

1st part of the definition of **RIGOR**: Expecting students to learn at high levels

1st *part of the definition of* **RIGOR**: *Expecting students to learn at high levels*
In order to ensure that we expect students to learn at high levels, we need to look at *what* we teach and *how* we teach. *What* we teach -- providing a challenging curriculum -- is discussed later. In terms of *how* we teach, one way to expect more from students is to raise the level of questioning in the classroom. Higher level questioning is an important part of helping students interact with the content in a more rigorous way. Some teachers want to introduce more rigorous standards and activities, but then still ask their students basic recall questions. Instead, there are a number of models to help teachers better plan for questions at higher levels. To make sure objectives, activities, and assessments address knowledge on higher levels, consider using one of the following models below. The first is a revised version of Bloom's Taxonomy and the second comes from Ciardiello's book, *Did You Ask a Good Question Today?*

Revised Version of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives						
The Knowledge Dimension	**The Cognitive Process Dimension**					
	Remember	*Understand*	*Apply*	*Analyze*	*Evaluate*	*Create*
Factual	Recognize	Interpret	Execute	Organize	Critique	Construct
Conceptual	Recall	Classify	Employ	Disseminate	Assess	Produce
Procedural	Define	Summarize	Implement	Investigate	Review	Conceptualize
Metacognitive	Distinguish	Infer	Perform	Differentiate	Judge	Generate

Ciardiello's Four Types of Questions		
Question Type	*Question Stems*	*Cognitive Operations*
Memory	Who, what, when, where?	Naming, defining, identifying
Convergent Thinking	Why, how, in what ways?	Explaining, comparing, contrasting
Divergent Thinking	Imagine, suppose, predict, if/then, how might?	Predicting, hypothesizing, inferring
Evaluative Thinking	Defend, justify, judge	Valuing, judging, justifying choices

*2nd part of the definition of **RIGOR***: Supporting each student to learn at high levels*
It is not enough to simply increase expectations without helping students reach those higher levels. This is where the second part of the definition of rigor comes in. In the most effective classrooms, teachers incorporate two important elements in order to move their students to higher levels: motivation and engagement. Students are generally motivated when they *value* what they are doing and when they think they have a chance for *success*. As teachers we need to help our students see the value in what they learn – whether this is by connecting a study of chemistry to beauty shop chemicals or integers to the game of football. Then to help students believe they can succeed, we need to provide them with the necessary scaffolding so they have opportunities for success. This will lead to a cycle of even more success. Rather than dreading challenging work, students will come to associate it with success if it is accompanied by the appropriate type of support. Furthermore, to get students truly *engaged* in the lesson, they need to be actively involved and participating. Although students may be reading, listening, or working in small groups, this does not necessarily mean that they are engaged. For example, to be actively engaged in a discussion means more than simply nodding so the teacher thinks I'm paying attention. It means having students write down the key points to actually engage with the material. When the teacher is the only one doing the work, the students are not actively engaged. When you increase expectations without helping students find value in the lesson and without structuring the lesson to ensure that all students are engaged, the lesson will not be any more rigorous.

*3rd part of the definition of **RIGOR***: Demonstrating learning at high levels*
The third part of the definition of rigor involves students demonstrating that they have learned at high levels. It is not enough to simply design rigorous lessons and provide support; students need to show that they now understand at a higher level. We need to design the type of assessments that will allow them to do so. In the upcoming sections, many of the instructional strategies also serve as an assessment of student understanding. However, to fully assess student learning at a higher level, teachers need to use more challenging assessments, a variety of assessments, and embed formative assessments into their lessons.

The next five chapters introduce more specific ways to increase the rigor in your classroom and follow the acronym below:

Ways to Increase RIGOR
R   Raise the level of content
I   Increase complexity
G   Give appropriate support and guidance
O   Open your focus
R   Raise expectations

Specific Strategies to Increase Rigor in the Classroom

In the next five chapters, specific strategies are introduced to demonstrate examples of concrete ways to increase rigor in the classroom. This summary will highlight a few from each chapter to serve as examples.

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Ways to Increase Rigor				
Raise the level of content	**I**ncrease complexity	**G**ive appropriate support	**O**pen your focus	**R**aise expectations

Raise the Level of Content
Research has shown that many of our students believe what they are learning is too easy. One girl described her low-level classes as "teaching nothing over and over again." One way to increase the rigor for all students is to raise the level of content. You can do this by:
>   *1. Valuing Depth* -- We often focus on shallow coverage of many topics. For true rigor, we need students to develop a depth of understanding.
>   *2. Increasing Text Difficulty* -- An effective way to raise the level of content is to increase the difficulty of the texts the students read.
>   *3. Creating Connections* -- By creating interdisciplinary units or lessons, you can increase the rigor by providing an opportunity for students to apply the content they have learned in another discipline.
>   *4. Reviewing, not Repeating* -- We spend too much time going over basic content. It doesn't work to repeat the same information over again. Instead, we need to find a new and authentic way for students to use basic knowledge as a different way to review.
>   *5. Evaluating Content* -- We need to raise our expectations for the type of work students produce so that when we require students perform at the "proficient" level, it is actually proficient according to national or other more rigorous standards.

Increasing Text Difficulty – Some students only read books that are too easy for them. While it is important for students to build self-confidence by reading books they can easily tackle, they also need to read more difficult texts so they can learn to read more challenging materials. A simple first step is to look at what your students are reading and to determine if they are being challenged. A text should be difficult enough that a student learns something new but not so hard that they give up. A good rule of thumb is that they should be able to understand about 75% of what they read. In order to provide text materials that match your students' levels for growth you can use a variety of tools to determine the difficulty of texts. One tool is the Lexile Framework (you can find this on the web) which tells you the levels of many existing books and magazine articles. Then, if you are teaching a lesson on tsunamis, for instance, you can use the textbook for the entire class but then break students into groups to read different articles about tsunamis at their levels. Another way to increase text difficulty is to *pair texts*. After reading a piece of fiction, to add rigor you can have students compare the fictional text to nonfiction information. For example, after reading *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963* students can read articles about the Civil Rights period and compare the content.

Evaluating Content
We often accept work from students that is lower quality. While rubrics are a good way to outline your expectations for student work, there are too many rubrics in which the highest level asks for fairly mediocre work. It helps to look at an outside standard before deciding what "proficient" means. Below is an excerpt outlining standards (for Math/Algebra I) from the Southern Regional Education Board in which proficiency standards are tied to the NAEP. Research shows that teachers often expect their advanced students to perform only at the proficient level and their proficient students to perform at the basic level of competency. There are a variety of sources for standards to use to gauge whether your expectations are high enough from the NCEE (National Center on Education and the Economy) to the standards compiled by the Mid-Continent Regional Education Laboratory.

Basic	Proficient	Advanced
• Make and read single bar graphs, single line graphs, and pictographs. • Read and interpret circle graphs. • Find the mean, median, mode, and range of sets of data. • Plot points on a coordinate grid.	• Read and make line plots and stem-and-leaf plots. • Collect and display data for given situations. • Make, read, and interpret double bar, double line, and circle graphs. • Determine when to use mean, median, mode, or range. • Determine and explain situations of misleading statistics.	• Formulate survey questions and collect data. • Evaluate statistical claims in articles and advertising. • Analyze different displays of the same data.

While it is helpful to view published standards, it is particularly important to discuss expectations with other teachers and gauge whether they are as rigorous as they can be. One way to do this is to choose an assignment, share copies of the students' work, and have a group of teachers assess the work. Some teachers will be more rigorous than others in their grading, however, as the discussion progresses aim to come to consensus. It is particularly helpful if, in addition to having discussions with other teachers who teach your same grade level, you also do this exercise with teachers one grade above and below your grade.

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Ways to Increase Rigor				
Raise the level of content	**I**ncrease complexity	**G**ive appropriate support	**O**pen your focus	**R**aise expectations

Increase Complexity
Another way to enhance rigor is by increasing the complexity of your assignments. We spend entirely too much time on rote memorization and recitation of facts. Instead, we need to get our students to practice *using* that information at higher levels and applying that information in new ways. Below are a few suggested ways to do this:

> *1. Complexity Through Projects* – For example, rather than simply working on a set of equations to solve for slope, students might also design the ideal roller coaster -- a much more complex and ambiguous problem. Having groups of students solve this problem addresses another facet of complexity – the ownership is shifted to the students. Another key element is to design a rubric that lays out the expectations for higher-order analysis in the project.
>
> *2. Complexity In Writing* – We often ask our students to perform lower-order thinking when writing. For example, we might ask students to write a paragraph about a topic such as the solar system. Instead, we need to vary the types of writing assignments we give students so they can understand the topic at a higher level.
>
> *3. Complexity As You Assess Prior Knowledge* – Many teachers assess students' current level of knowledge about a new topic using a K-W-L chart (What do you KNOW, WANT to know, and what have you LEARNED?) Instead, teachers can use a more rigorous way to assess for prior knowledge.
>
> *4. Complexity With Vocabulary* – Giving your students a routine list of vocabulary words rarely leads to deeper comprehension of meaning. In a rigorous classroom you want students to *demonstrate* their understanding with more thorough explanations, details, examples, and elaboration.
>
> *5. Complexity in Review Games* -- Teachers often use simple games to review material. To maximize the involvement of students, have *the students* create the questions from their notes, labs, etc. and enhance the rigor by requiring *everyone* to respond to each question.

Sample Strategies and Approaches

Complexity As You Assess Prior Knowledge
To engage students in deeper thinking when they start a new unit, consider giving them a short set of questions, then having them read the textbook and rewrite the false statements to make them true based on the new textbook information. For example, one teacher gave questions like those below before introducing the Pythagorean Theorem. Note that this is more than a simple pretest because students must *apply* what they already know about the topic and then *analyze* their own answers and *compare* them to the textbook.

Note which is true and which is false:
___ 1. The longest side of a triangle is called the hypotenuse.
___ 2. Any side in a right triangle is called a "leg."
___ 3. If you know the lengths of all three sides of a right triangle you can use the Pythagorean Theorem to determine if it is a right triangle.

Complexity With Vocabulary
What makes for *rigorous* vocabulary instruction is requiring students to demonstrate they understand what words mean through explanations, details, examples, and elaboration. One way to help students deeply understand the meaning of words is to have them *synthesize* what they know about words. To do this, below is a sample graphic organizer students can fill out and below that is an activity in which students create riddles like the samples in the chart:

Excerpt of a Vocabulary Chart		
Book Definition:	Other Definition: Source:	Own Definition:
Word or Concept:		Diagram:
Examples:	Nonexamples:	

Sample What Am I? Riddles	
• Prices go up. • Your wallet is thinner. • You pay twice as much to provide family dinner. *What am I? INFLATION*	• My end is not like my beginning. • I get bound up for change. • I start low and end up high. *What am I? A BUTTERFLY*

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Ways to Increase Rigor				
Raise the level of content	**I**ncrease complexity	**G**ive appropriate support	**O**pen your focus	**R**aise expectations

<u>*Give Appropriate Support and Guidance*</u>

A third way to enhance rigor is to provide the necessary support and scaffolding needed in order for your students to do more challenging work. If you want to raise expectations you must also provide the accompanying support to help your students meet those expectations or you are setting them up to fail. Below are a few suggested ways to do this:

1. *Scaffolding During Reading Activities* -- Reading is used in almost every classroom and often provides an obstacle for students who struggle with reading skills. This section is *not* about teaching students how to read, but rather provides three strategies to guide students through their reading.
2. *Modeling* -- There are several ways to provide a model to help your students. You can make your thinking explicit by doing a 'think-aloud' when, for example, you talk through what you think when reading a textbook (about the headings, the glossary, etc.) You can also post a written set of procedures on the wall as a model – such as **'What to Do When You Don't Know a Vocabulary Word'** – that shows what strong readers do when they don't know a new word.
3. *Providing Clear Expectations* -- Students often don't know what quality work looks like. This is especially the case when we go beyond asking them to recite facts and require that they use higher-order thinking skills—such as describing the causes of an event, persuading a reader, or explaining the results of a science experiment. It is important to provide students with a clear checklist of your guidelines, sample pieces of student work that meet and don't meet those guidelines, and opportunities for students to determine whether those samples meet the guidelines.
4. *Chunking Big Tasks* -- To help students tackle larger tasks, break the work into more manageable chunks *and* provide additional instruction at each step of the way.
5. *Presenting Multiple Opportunities to Learn* -- Not all students learn the material the first time around. As teachers it is our responsibility to provide them with additional opportunities to ensure that they learn. This may mean meeting with a struggling student to expose him/her to the questions or content *before* class so they can be better prepared. Or it may mean *requiring* students (rather than *offering*), to meet with you for additional assistance.

Sample Strategies and Approaches

Scaffolding During Reading Activities
Teachers often use a spoken think-aloud to model how they think when they are reading. However, you can also use a *written* think-aloud like a *Guide-O-Rama*. You can write this type of guide to go along with a reading assignment to help students know what to focus on when reading. It can be used in class or at home, and it can be used with struggling students or the entire class. See the excerpt of one below:

Excerpt of a Guide-O-Rama	
Europe: War and Change – Chapter 12 (Sections 12.1-12.2)	
Page #	***Reading Tip***
329-332	Read section 12.1. Pay close attention to the terms nationalism, colonialism, and dual monarchy. They are related, and can be confusing!!! I've found that when I am learning new words that are similar, it's important to write an example along with the definition to help me understand.
335	I found it interesting that dogs were used in the war to detect mines and guard ammunition! Do you think this is humane? Why do you think they chose to use dogs this way? Do you have another alternative?

Chunking Big Tasks
Even graduate students often don't have the skills to break down larger, more challenging tasks into reasonable pieces. To help students tackle larger, more challenging tasks, break the assignment into steps, give a deadline for each, and this is crucial: *provide the necessary instruction for the students to complete each step*. For example, in the research project below, the author requires students to bring in 15 research articles for step 3. She takes one student's articles and divides them into piles: appropriate sources, inappropriate sources, and those that are appropriate with some limitations. After talking aloud through her criteria, for example, "Are there references?" "Is there bias?" she has her students sort their own articles into the three piles as well. Below is an excerpted list of the steps (see p.90 for the full list) to complete with one sample box filled in for the instruction the teacher needs to perform to teach that step:

Take a look at the sample list below:

Individual Steps to Complete a Research Synthesis	***Deadline***	***Instruction Needed***
1. Look at sample papers.		
2. Choose a topic		
3. Find appropriate sources.		Have students bring in their 15 articles and model how to determine if each article is an appropriate source or not (see description above)
4. Read all articles and draft a list of common themes for subheadings.		
5. Etc.		

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Include More Open-Ended Tasks and Questions

The fourth way to make your classroom more rigorous is to find more opportunities to give students open-ended tasks and questions. More rigorous tasks and questions tend to be open-ended rather than having one single, simple answer. Many students can calculate a simple equation, but when the task is embedded in a paragraph that requires them to *apply* their mathematical knowledge, they have more trouble. This doesn't mean you should ignore the instruction of basic facts, you should just make sure to also focus on the *use* and *application* of those facts rather than just asking students to memorize them. Below are a few suggested ways to incorporate more open-ended tasks and questions:

1. *Open-Ended Questioning* -- As you write questions for your lessons it is important to incorporate questions that have more than one answer because these are usually the higher-order questions. Another way to develop your questioning technique is to push students beyond their initial answers and ask them to follow-up, "How did you know?" "What made you decide on that answer?"

2. *Open-Ended Vocabulary Instruction* -- The traditional method of having students memorize vocabulary words does not result in long-term acquisition of new words. Instead, you need to give students the opportunity to experience the new words in different ways, incorporate old knowledge of words with new, and play with words to develop a deeper understanding of them. One way is to have students write poems about words – like a haiku – to fully capture and express their meaning.

3. *Open-Ended Projects* -- Open-ended projects allow students to delve more deeply into the material. One way to do this is to have students complete an assignment from different points of view. For example, in science, have students write about a drug to cure a deadly illness from the perspectives of the drug company as well as the patient who needs the cure.
4. *Open-Ended Choices for Students* -- If you provide students with more choices in an assignment then students will invest more time and effort into the task. Of course this does not mean allowing students to do whatever they want, but rather to choose from a few well-structured choices provided by the teacher.
5. *Open-Ended from the Beginning* -- In the US we tend to teach students something and *then* have them apply it to a real-world situation. In Japan teachers often start a mathematics class with a problem students do not yet know how to solve, but they let the students struggle with it. Students work alone or in groups and as they do so, they uncover the important mathematical concepts and reasoning. For example, students might be given materials (toothpicks, glue) and a budget and have to build the strongest bridge possible *before* being taught the mathematical principles necessary to do so.

Sample Strategies and Approaches

Open-Ended Questioning
In addition to using the questioning models from earlier in the book, you can use a matrix grid to insure that students are answering questions at a variety of levels. One way to use the grid is to put each question starter on a card and give pairs of students a full set. Then to review for a test, have one student choose a card, finish the question based on the material studied– for example, if he drew "How would" he might ask "How would you react if you lived in a country that faced a famine?" – and have the other student answer.

QUESTION MATRIX						
What is	When is	Where is	Which is	Who is	Why is	How is
What did	When did	Where did	Which did	Who did	Why did	How did
What can	When can	Where can	Which can	Who can	Why can	How can
What would	When would	Where would	Which would	Who would	Why would	How would
What will	When will	Where will	Which will	Who will	Why will	How will
What might	When might	Where might	Which might	Who might	Why might	How might

Open-Ended Choices for Students
There are several ways to provide choices for students in how they demonstrate their understanding of the content. Many teachers use individual learning contracts in which students choose from among a list of possible activities to complete for a grade. To ensure that students demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways you could have a Tic-Tac-Toe grid with different categories of assignments in each column and require that students choose one assignment from each column. Another way to do this is to offer different options that allow students to demonstrate knowledge based on the multiple intelligences (linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, intrapersonal, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and naturalist) and have students choose from among several different intelligences.

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Ways to Increase Rigor				
Raise the level of content	**I**ncrease complexity	**G**ive appropriate support	**O**pen your focus	**R**aise expectations

Raise Expectations

The final way to increase the rigor in the classroom is to raise expectations—a necessary part of many of the strategies that have already been discussed. Below are five ways to raise expectations:
1. *Expect the Best* -- It is difficult to expect the best from students when their actions tend to make us think less of them. Instead, we need to emphasize the types of teacher behaviors that show *all* students we expect the best. This means exemplifying the belief that all students can succeed, encouraging students, supporting students, and giving students the time and resources to succeed.
2. *Expand the Vision* -- Many students do not believe they can be successful and we need to help them expand their visions. Students who have dreams and goals of their own are more likely to put in the effort to succeed.
3. *Learning is Not Optional* -- When we give students a zero for not doing homework or a D on an assignment rather than asking them to do a more satisfactory job, we are sending the message, "You don't have to learn this." Rigor is not just raising the bar; it is ensuring that students do the work.
4. *Track Progress* -- As you increase your expectations students need to see that they are making progress in order to maintain their motivation. You can have students keep track of their progress weekly with a journal, chart, or some other way to have them reflect on their progress.
5. *Create a Culture of High Expectations* -- It takes time, but by consistently telling students they are not allowed to say, "I can't," building students' confidence, having students track their progress, posting motivating quotations, bringing in role models, and talking about dreams and successes, you will slowly build a culture of high expectations.

Sample Strategies and Approaches

Expand the Vision
There are several ways you can help students begin to believe in themselves. One way is to have students sketch out their dreams in writing or through a creative project. One teacher has her students create t-shirts with an illustration of their dream on the front and the steps to achieve it on the back. Another idea is to have students, on Day 2 of the year, write a letter to the teacher as if they had just finished the year outlining why this was the most successful year in their lives. It also helps to share success stories of people who achieved their dreams despite setbacks. There are four books on p.119 that can serve as resources for these types of stories.

Learning is Not Optional
We need to show students that learning is *not* optional by refusing to accept mediocre work and simply assigning a poor grade to it. The goal of giving assignments is for students to learn, not to assign a grade. Instead of giving a student a zero for an incomplete homework, have that student sit during lunch to complete it. This doesn't mean you necessarily need to give up your lunch period, but we need to provide students with the structure and support to complete their work. Another way to do this is to require that students rework any incorrect problems from a test. Overall, if we want to truly raise the bar and add more rigor, we need to have something in place for those students not yet ready to meet these new standards.

Conclusions

Overall, it takes time and patience to slowly and consistently increase the rigor in your classroom. At first there may be some resistance from students, but if you put more effort into supporting students so that they are successful with the new levels of rigor, they will be more accepting. Whatever you do, don't apologize for your high standards! Because enhancing the rigor is a slow process, it can be difficult to tell if you are making progress. In the book (on pages 154 – 157) there is a rubric you can use to assess your own progress. The rubric measures seven criteria: the three aspects of the definition of rigor – high expectations, support and scaffolding, and demonstration of rigor – as well as student engagement, two aspects of motivation, and classroom culture. Below is an excerpt of the rubric with just the three parts of the definition of rigor:

Rubric for Gauging Progress Toward Rigor			
Three Aspects of Rigor	*Starting at the Base*	*Making Progress Up the Mountain*	*Reaching New Heights*
1. High Expectations for Learning	I am working to understand what it means to say that each student can learn, will learn, and I will help them do so.	I believe that each student can learn, will learn, and I will help them do so. I sometimes act on those beliefs or I act on those beliefs with some students.	I consistently act on my unwavering belief that each student can learn, will learn, and I will help them do so.
2. Support and Scaffolding	I sometimes provide support and scaffolding. This support is usually general and built into the regular lesson. At times, I provide optional extra help.	I sometimes provide the appropriate support and scaffolding students need to ensure their success. This support is customized for each student at times. At times, I provide optional extra help.	I regularly provide the support and scaffolding each student needs to ensure his or her success. This support is customized for each student and supports my belief that students are not allowed to not learn. It is appropriate and encourages independence. If extra help is needed, is it required, and is offered when the student can attend.
3. Demonstration of Learning	Occasionally, some students demonstrate understanding of content in a way that is appropriately challenging. More often than not, students prefer basic assignments or questions. Students are generally given one opportunity to show they have mastered content.	Sometimes, students are given the opportunity to show they understand content in a way that is appropriately challenging. Students are beginning to see the value of more challenging assessments. At times, I provide alternative assessments and will allow students to redo work.	Each student regularly demonstrates his or her understanding of content in ways that are appropriately challenging. In other words, students do not take the easy way out in terms of showing me they learned. I provide alternative ways for students to do this and allow those students who need it extra time or a second opportunity.

The Main Idea's Workshop Suggestions: Enhancing Rigor in the Classroom

I. Define Rigor – Developing a Shared Vision of What Rigor Is

To improve rigor at your school you need a shared definition of what it is. Help your teachers think about rigor:

1. Have your teachers think of a time a teacher, coach, parent, or some other adult challenged them. Have them write about or talk in pairs to answer: How did you feel? What characterized the experience? What did you take away from it? What did it make you think about challenges and rigor?

2. Let your teachers look at some different definitions of rigor from the literature and discuss what resonates with them and what definition of rigor they think will most lead to enhanced rigor at the school. You can use the definitions on p.8 of the book or find your own:

Definitions of Rigor	
Quality of thinking, not quantity, and that can occur in any grade and in any subject.	Bogess (2007)
High expectations are important, and must include effort on the part of the learner.	Wasley, Hampel, and Clark (1997)
Deep immersion in a subject and should include real-world settings and working with an expert.	Washor and Mojkowki (2006)
Goal of helping students develop the capacity to understand content that is complex, ambiguous, provocative, and personally or emotionally challenging.	Strong, Silver, and Perrini (2001)
Rigor is creating an environment in which each student is expected to learn at high levels, each student is supported so he or she can learn at high levels, and each student demonstrates learning at high levels.	Blackburn (2008)

3. It is difficult to discuss a definition of rigor speaking only in the abstract. To begin to understand what a definition might look like, you could use a chart like this with teachers to flesh out a possible definition. The goal is to come to a school-wide definition.

To tease out a definition of rigor…		
What are our ideas about rigor?	*How this might look in the classroom?*	*What obstacles might we face?*
Ideas about content:		
Ideas about assessment:		
Ideas about teacher-student relationships:		

II. Assess Where Teachers Are in Implementing Rigor

To help your teachers think about how effective they are in implementing rigor, have them spend some time assessing themselves. Below are three suggested ways you can do this:

1. Have teachers rate themselves using the rubric in the book on pp. 154-157 (***Rubric for Gauging Progress Toward Rigor***) and excerpted in the summary on p.7.

2. Use the definition your group just developed and have teachers discuss in pairs how their own practice compares to this definition. What aspects of rigor do they implement well and what could they improve?

3. To help teachers become aware of the current reality of the need to increase rigor, share the results of the previous year's state/standardized/teacher-created assessments and break down the results by lower-level questions (about comprehension, for example) vs. their results on higher-order questions (analysis, for example). Or break down the results on multiple-choice questions vs. more open-ended questions (be careful with this as multiple-choice questions can also assess higher-order thinking). Discuss the school's strong points and areas to improve upon in terms of enhancing rigor.

III. Introduce a Few Strategies to Enhance Rigor

Show teachers that they need not throw out everything they already do in order to enhance rigor. They may just need to learn a few new strategies to try in the classroom. One way to do this would be to have a few teachers present one new strategy from the book at each staff meeting. However, as the instructional leader, you may want to present the first strategy –below are two you can start with.

1. As the instructional leader, introduce a few strategies to enhance rigor:

    Increasing complexity through vocabulary – Since teachers in ALL disciplines have content-specific vocabulary to teach, this is a great place to start. Use the graphic organizer in the book (p.4 of the summary) or find one of the many graphic organizers for vocabulary instruction on the Internet. Then introduce a few sample vocabulary words and have the teachers actually work through the graphic organizer to define and explain the word as if they were the students. Then give teachers time to adapt the graphic organizer to their own subjects so they can bring this back to their own classrooms.

    Open-ended questions – Again, every teacher should be including open-ended questions in their lessons. Furthermore, these should not be off the cuff, rather teachers should write these *into* their lesson plans. Ask teachers to come to the staff meeting with the next day's lesson plan in hand. Have them evaluate how well they have incorporated higher-order questions into the plan. Then, using either the revised version of Bloom's Taxonomy, Ciardiello's Four Types of Questions (both on p. 1 of the summary) or the Question Matrix (p.6 of the summary) have them revise their lesson plans to include more opportunities for asking higher-order questions.

2. Have one teacher present a new strategy from the book each week at a staff meeting. If the teacher already uses a version of that strategy in his/her own particular classroom, s/he could showcase what s/he does in the classroom as well.

3. Follow up – Don't just have teachers present the strategies; follow up! One way is to have teachers observe each other to give feedback on the implementation of the new strategies. Another way is to have teachers present their plans for new ways to incorporate rigor and get feedback from peers both before and after implementation. Perhaps have a committee to collect "exemplars" of rigor – both teacher and student work – a binder of tasks and student work that exemplify rigor.

After teachers or leaders have presented a range of strategies to enhance rigor, if the teachers can commit to several strategies that all teachers will implement ***school-wide, this will greatly improve the infusion of rigor into your school!

The Main Idea's Suggestions: Other Ways to Enhance Rigor

<u>Take the opportunity to use the Common Core State Standards to incorporate rigor</u>
This is a perfect time for schools adopting the Common Core State Standards to focus on the topic of rigor. If you adopt a version of Blackburn's definition of rigor, you will need a way to: (1) create high expectations, (2) support students so they can learn at high levels, and (3) have students demonstrate their learning at high levels.

One concrete way to enhance rigor and begin to incorporate the Common Core Standards is through the creation of new <u>*rubrics*</u> that align with these standards. Rubrics have the potential to help your school address Blackburn's three aspects of rigor:
    1. *Create high expectations* – If you create a challenging and thorough rubric, it should lay out high expectations for the work you expect from students.
    2. *Support students so they can learn at high levels* – Because a rubric clearly outlines the skills and knowledge students are expected to master, the rubric can serve as a guidepost for the areas where teachers need to scaffold their teaching .
    3. *Have students demonstrate learning at high levels* – Finally, the rubric serves as a tool that ensures that students also demonstrate their learning because it assesses that learning and provides feedback.

Put together a committee of teachers and/or school leaders to create some school-wide rubrics, that align to the Common Core Standards, for topics that cut across grades and subjects such as writing, reading informational texts, or speaking skills.

<u>The school leader's role in enhancing rigor</u>
In addition to providing PD to teachers on the topic of rigor, it is up to the school leader to emphasize the importance of rigor throughout the year. A few ideas to help you with this task:
    1. When you pop into classes, observe for *rigor*. Use a simple checklist based on the definition of rigor your school has adopted. For example (if you use Blackburn's definition):
        * Does the teacher show that s/he holds high expectations for all students? Is the teacher persistent in making sure learning is NOT optional?
        * Does the teacher provide the type of support and scaffolding to ensure each student learns? Does the teacher use a variety of approaches to ensure that students are supported to learn at high levels despite their current level?
        * How do students demonstrate higher-order thinking? Does the teacher use higher-order questions?
    2. When reviewing lesson or unit plans, give feedback about other ways rigor can be enhanced.
    3. Make sure teachers have the time they need to discuss rigor during faculty or team meetings, to observe each other for rigor, and to get feedback from the instructional leaders about their success with incorporating rigor.
    4. Use observations to determine which aspects of rigor teachers continue to struggle with and plan PD accordingly.
    5. Celebrate and share stories of teachers successfully enhancing rigor and students demonstrating learning at higher levels.