

Minnesota Principals Academy - Action Learning Project

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From Isolation to Collaboration: A Transformative Journey to Standards-Based Collaboration at the Elementary Level

Abstract

This Action Learning Project involved developing a shared vision for a K-5 school. The project involved gathering input from stakeholders, creating a vision and ensuring staff understanding and willingness to follow the new vision. I worked with our Site Leadership Team (SLT) to develop the new plan, which centered on increasing student achievement in the area of literacy. The team also identified the need for purposeful collaboration in order to reach the student achievement goal. The SLT met twice a month and worked on implementation of the plan. Each team member was a liaison to their respective team and followed through with two-way communication throughout the implementation.

The team developed a multi-year vision and plan, outlined the action steps to increase staff efficacy and understanding with the MN English Language Arts Standards. The plan also included opportunities for collaboration in order to create a school wide common culture for learning. The plan included first order change strategies such as guaranteed literacy blocks, PLC time, and ongoing professional development as well as second order change philosophies such as vertical articulation of ELA Common Core standards, the need for collaborative planning, and common curriculum and resources for students. The plan was approved by the superintendent and cabinet as the staff created a different path than what was devised by the Teaching and Learning department for the district. The autonomy has empowered the staff to take leadership of professional development and have ownership on how the building's reform will transpire.

Vision: All students will meet or exceed benchmarks in reading.

Improvement Theory: (Created by Site Leadership Team) If teachers collaborate and implement resources that support personalized learning with high fidelity then all students will achieve at a high level.

Background/ Context: John F. Kennedy Elementary (JFK), located in Lakeville, MN, is a traditional K-5 elementary school serving 590 students. The population consists of 13% FRP, 16% students of color, 14% SPED, and 3% ELL. The 2016 MCA Reading proficiency was 64.5%. At the commencement of this project I was a first year principal in the building and the third principal in three years.

Why a Change: The staff stakeholder data indicated PLCs were not high capacity.

There was uneven implementation of district literacy practices. The site had purchased new resources and there was a need to learn how to effectively implement in the classroom and desired autonomy to decide next steps for professional learning. There was general consensus to work more collaboratively as a team. The site leadership expressed desire to create a vision plan unique to the culture and needs for the school.

What We Did: The principal worked with the Site Leadership Team (SLT) to create a vision for the school and define base level staff expectations. The vision became our multi year Improvement Theory; within the theory are action plans. This project focused on creating the plan and providing purposeful opportunities to achieve the goal of increasing proficiency in literacy.

SY 2015-2017 Implementation Plan

Professional Growth

- Full day Site Leadership Team retreat and ongoing conversations
- School wide implementation of Thinking Maps
- Standards Work focused around ELA- understanding Common Core shifts, Depth of Knowledge, vertical articulation. Teachers rewrote targets and began identifying common resources to meet standards.
- Expectation and guided facilitation to work collaboratively on implementation of Phonics and Vocabulary

Climate

- Develop teacher leaders
- Strengthsfinder assessment and conversations school wide
- Groundwork for PBIS

What We Found:

- Sustainable change is an ongoing process that requires commitment over a number of years
- Second order change needs to happen in order to experience systemic transformational change
- Planning around a comprehensive professional development plan is integral for teacher leadership. The school team must have buy in to occur in order to have sustained change.
- Teachers need to be part of the creation of the vision as well as the implementation so distractions can be lessened.

Implications for Practice:

The site's vision is a multi-year goal. The SLT is dedicated to continue focusing on the identified goal. The team is further solidifying themselves as instructional leaders. The team is taking ownership on helping change the climate and expects slow incremental change.

Practices that will be focused on for SY 2017-2018 include:

- Implementation of effective PLCs
- Continue practices that promote collaboration
- Continue to implement practices