

# Minnesota Principals Academy-Action Learning Project

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## *Putting Culturally Relevant Pedagogy into Practice*

### Abstract

This Action Learning Project focused on developing background for teachers and professional development of culturally relevant strategies, thus increasing the effectiveness of their instructional practice. The process used research to ground the work, a blend of a variety of delivery methods, including small group and large group presentations, job embedded activities, and collecting specific feedback from stakeholders which will lead to measuring implementation and student perception data as we plan and implement in year two. Our teachers are currently engaged in understanding and recognizing beliefs about race through an adaptive change model, but continually seek technical solutions in the classroom on a daily basis. Our vision is "ALL students engaged and achieving at HIGH levels." Through professional development, teachers experienced authentic learning, which can be necessary for students of color to engage more fully.

The evaluation of our first year proved to be important for planning our second year of implementation. All of our data was collected in a qualitative form of surveys and interviews. Our teachers experienced high levels of engagement and learning and want to continue learning, so they are better equipped to meet the needs of their diverse learners. In year two, we will answer the question, "To what extent does job embedded professional development of culturally relevant strategies impact student engagement and achievement?"

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**Vision:** ALL students engaged and achieving at HIGH levels.

**Background/Context:** Our school student population has and will continue to have changing demographics. Currently, we have 1.2% American Indian, 12.0% Asian, 15.4% Hispanic, 25.1% black and 46.3% white students and 54% students on FRL. Within these percentages, we have approximately 15% of our students identifies as EL and 13% identified as needing special education services. While we are not identified as a Title 1 school, nearly half of our students come from a Title 1 school and the other half of our students come from middle to high socioeconomic backgrounds.

**Rationale for change:** Teachers have been engaged in developing a deeper understanding of their own beliefs regarding race, through work with an outside agency and internal equity teams, thus leading to adaptive change over time. Teachers want to learn the tools to engage all learners, but especially our students of color. Therefore, we are implementing both an adaptive and a technical approach which will ultimately lead to all students engaged and learning at high levels. Our students of color continue to underperform as compared to their peers.

**What we did:** in the spring of 2014, we assessed all current and incoming about professional development needs. Strategies for engagement and meeting the needs of diverse learners came out as a high area of need. Yvette Jackson's book, *Pedagogy of Confidence*, was implemented for a book study. A small team of staff attended the National Urban Alliance Summer Institute in the summer of 2014, to gain more expertise in culturally relevant strategies. Formal professional development was provided in August, October, and February (2015) and qualitative (and some quantifiable) data gathered after each.

**What we found out:**

Themes early in the school year included: (n=24)

- Book study was not a preferred style of learning for 25% (7) of our staff.
- Small group sharing was beneficial for understanding strategies.
- Chants were engaging for nearly all participants 92% (2).
- Taxonomy strategy can be used across all content areas.
- Kindergarten teachers wondered how to use the strategy 100% (4).
- More strategies and more Thinking Maps!

Themes later in the year (Feb/March): (n=30)

- The rotation model was highly effective and engaging to staff.
- Staff loved the modeling of culturally relevant strategies.
- All staff wanted more PD.
- Staff valued sharing implementation in collegial groups; learning from each other.
- Time spent was valuable, effective, efficient, and fun.
- The format of 20 minute rotations was engaging.

**Implications for Year two:**

Job embedded professional development prepares educators to understand and appreciate all students. Continued, focused, teaching of culturally relevant strategies will be implemented.

A large team of staff will attend week 2 of the National Urban Alliance Summer Institute and create a comprehensive plan for professional development for year 2 by July 31, 2015.

Perception data will be collected from students and families regarding engagement.

Student engagement will be measured using the survey given by each teacher as a part of TDE.

Student achievement data will be examined, students selected, and monitored as the strategies are taught. Post data will be collected in the spring of 2016. Perception data, through a survey will be given to staff to continue to begin collecting some longitudinal data.

**A few last thoughts that were shared by staff...**

"I have been in this district for twenty years. This is the BEST professional development I have ever received!"

"Real learning took place today for me! I have a renewed belief that these strategies can make a difference."

*Interventions for Overcoming Barriers in Pursuit of Students' Highest Level of Academic and Personal Achievement*

A priority of the Minnetonka School Board was identifying barriers to student learning. As such, developing interventions that support students in overcoming barriers to achieve their maximum potential was essential. The Action Learning Project (ALP) included three focused intervention models, each of which utilized clear benchmark measures for determining its effectiveness for individual students. The vision is: All students ready for middle school. The models addressed math, reading, and social emotional interventions.

**Math Intervention Model**—In order to meet the needs of struggling learners in mathematics, leadership refined the model for math instructional delivery. Leadership comprises the principal, members of the student support team (SST), and a teacher on special assignment (TOSA). The TOSA for Minnewashta Elementary School facilitates the SST and English assessments building-wide. Other SST members include the English reading specialist, the Spanish reading specialist, and the school psychologist, the building facilitator for special education, the school guidance counselor, the school nurse, the school social worker, and a regular education teacher. After reviewing data for intermediate grades, rather than pulling out students for math intervention, both Response to Intervention (RtI) teachers and Special Education (SPED) teachers push-in for math classes to deliver small-group, instruction-targeting interventions. The intent of this shift is to increase student engagement and provide additional instruction targeting student need(s). The focus of this intervention was 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY	SPECIAL ED EFFECT SIZE	STRUGGLING EFFECT SIZE
VISUAL & GRAPHIC DESCRIPTIONS OF PROBLEMS	.5	N/A
SYSTEMATIC & EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION	1.19*	.58*
STUDENT THINK-ALOUND	.98*	N/A
USE OF STRUCTURED PEER-ASSISTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES INVOLVING HETEROGENEOUS ABILITY GROUPING	.42	.62*
FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT DATA PROVIDED TO TEACHERS	.32	.51
FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT DATA PROVIDED DIRECTLY TO STUDENTS	.33	.57*

\*Moderate to Large Effect

Number Proficient	Total Number	Percent	After Intervention Proficient	Total Number in Intervention	Percent
136 (N)	145 (N)	94	15 (N)	23(N)	65

SPE D	SPED Proficient	SPE D Total	Percent	ELL	ELL Proficient	Percentage
9 (N)	7 (N)	9	78	2 (N)	1	50

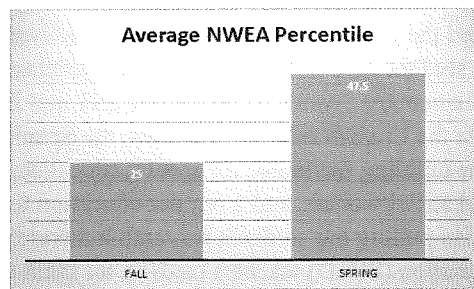
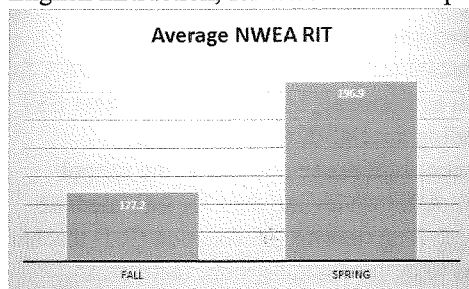
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Pre-Intervention Proficiency	Post-Intervention Proficiency
20%	80%

Math Implications:

- Continue to Implement Research-based Strategies
- Study the Standards
- Invest Time in Number Sense
- Scrutinize What is Taught
- Students: Majority of Time Analyze Errors & Receive Feedback

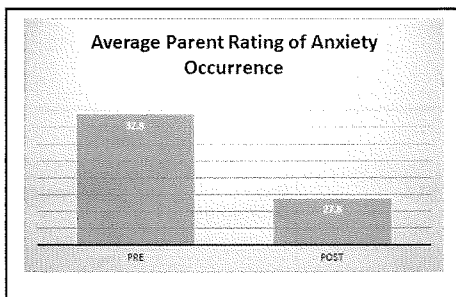
Literacy Intervention Model—Reading specialists considered a literacy model identifying interventions for each individual child in collaboration with the SST. As part of this analysis, leadership worked with teachers to develop a strong understanding about what is known as the Orton-Gillingham methodology and focused on identifying more staff members to deliver instruction in the future within this model for students with either dyslexia or specific learning disabilities in reading, and new learners to English instruction, for which intensive phonics instruction is crucial.



Literacy Implications:

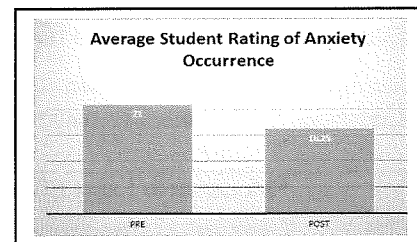
- Linguistic Skill Development Focus
- Teachers Know & Understand Language
- Bring Others Up-to-Speed
- Measure Ongoing Implementation
- Record-Work-Experts

Guidance Model In the summer of 2013, the principal for Minnewashta Elementary School wrote an in-depth proposal for creating an elementary guidance position (non-sped) at Minnewashta to meet the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students. This project investigated specific interventions for students experiencing anxiety or weak executive functions and implemented one anxiety intervention during the 2014-2015 school year. The research was clear about the need to treat both the parent and child at the school setting. The effect size if both are treated is between .75 and 1.51. The curriculum used was Coping Cat.



Anxiety Implications:

- Assess at +3 +6
- Collect Student Perception Data
- Gain Permission to Repeat
- Research Next Steps
- Formal Observations of All



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