

From Woo Hoo to Wow! One School's Journey into School Improvement

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Background That Led to Your Team's Inquiry:

We started our inquiry into school improvement by first looking at our Marzano school data. We noticed across the building that morale was slipping and the job demands of our staff were increasing. We were implementing a new core math curriculum that was taking a toll on our teachers' stamina. We determined that our first step would be to develop a shared understanding for all staff of what a strong instructional framework includes and how the components will support the improvement of instructional practices at our school. This could only be done if we could show teachers they would have the support they needed to be successful. Therefore, the purpose of our action research was to develop a way to involve teachers in creating a strong instructional framework.

Statement of Your Team's Wondering:

With this purpose, we wondered...would we be able to co-create an instructional framework that could be used by all teachers with an outcome of learning being impacted in a positive way?

Methods/Procedures:

We began our inquiry by closely examining our Marzano school data for Levels 1 & 2. We quickly learned that our staff did not have a shared understanding of what classroom instruction should look like or consensus of non-negotiable teacher behaviors. We began by setting norms for our professional learning community meetings to increase professionalism and provide clear expectations for adult behavior in our meetings. This was received in a positive way by a majority of staff.

Our Woo Hoo Wagon initiative was continued throughout the year. We wanted to make sure teachers knew how much they were appreciated by students and administrators. The wagon went around the school twice a month with small treats and inspirational notes for staff. The times when students manned the wagon were the most well received. The acknowledgement their efforts by students was very meaningful to the adults that work with them.

Finally, we began digging into our Marzano data to help our teachers develop a shared understanding of effective teaching in each classroom should look like. This took a series of three PLC meetings to establish a shared understanding of effective classroom strategies which allowed us to create an instructional framework. Additional data was collected through a survey to gauge teacher reactions and implementation to the new framework.

Stating Your Team's Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing our data, three important things we learned include: Learning Statement One: Before our action research project, administrators had not clearly communicated expectations for effective teaching classroom strategies and Learning Statement Two: Teachers did not have a shared understanding of effective classroom strategies and Learning Statement Three: Ongoing discussion will be necessary to clarify expectations and provide new teachers with the support needed to be successful.

Learning Statement One: Administrators had not clearly communicated expectations for effective teaching classroom strategies. Our Marzano data reflected this statement. In our Level 2 data, leading indicator 2.4 showed that teachers and administrators felt there was room for improvement in providing teachers with clear ongoing evaluations of their pedagogical strengths and weaknesses...and are consistent with student data. In response to this information, the administrators sought out training to provide teacher feedback through instructional walk-throughs. This is an ongoing strategy that the principal and assistant principal will be implementing for the 2018-19 school year.

Learning Statement Two: Teachers did not have a shared understanding of effective classroom strategies. Through our discussion in our PLC groups, it became highly evident that teachers did not have a shared understanding of what should occur in the classroom always, sometimes, and never. It took several sessions and conversation to provide clarity on what effective instruction is and when it should happen. At the end of our work, we created a list of strategies to guide our planning in the future.

Learning Statement Three: Ongoing discussion will be necessary to clarify expectations and provide new teachers with the support needed to be successful. During our PLC discussion, teachers indicated that they felt it would be important to review our instructional framework and to provide professional development to new teachers each fall. This will be the responsibility of the instructional coach and the administrators in the building. The review and possible revision of the framework will occur for the entire staff. New teachers will have additional PD and classroom support during their first two years of teaching.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

This action research cycle helped our leadership team to develop a focus and a deeper understanding of the instructional framework. Marzano's leading indicator data provided a much needed insight into the needs of teachers in the building. We will continue to work on this framework and the implementation of high reliability schools strategies. We are at the beginning of this school improvement journey.

Our leadership team will continue this important work over the next several years. Teachers will need to have continued PD in the areas of planning and engaging instruction. This will occur whole group and through job embedded opportunities with the instructional coach.

The instructional framework and our HRS data from Marzano has given us direction and focus. We are moving forward as a group to create high expectations for ourselves and our students. We have developed a Student Achievement Plan that includes the implementation of this framework across the curriculum. Our goal is to improve student performance each year and raise our school grade. To answer our own questions...Can we co-create an instructional framework that could be used by all teachers with an outcome of learning being impacted in a positive way? The answer is a resounding - YES!

References:

High Reliability Schools Webinar: <https://vimeo.com/163269962>

Marzano, R. J., Warrick, P., Simms, J. A., & Livingston, D. (2014). A handbook for high reliability schools: The next step in school reform. Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research Laboratory.

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