

Instructional Rounds: The PD Hiding Right Under Your Nose

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Background That Led to Your Team's Inquiry:

At the start of the 2016-17 school year we found that our staff was divided both literally and figuratively. Fifty percent of the staff had worked at the school for five years or more and fifty percent were newly hired within the past two school years. This interesting mix of teachers led to feelings of mistrust between the "old" and "new" teaching staff. This created a division in the school and a negative school culture. Something had to be done.

The first step we took to restore trust and to improve our school culture was taking a closer look at the way we conducted our Professional Learning Communities. We went through a PLC reset (establishing new norms, agendas, roles, and etc.). This initial step led to increased collaboration as teams worked on created learning targets and scales for critical standards. But, it did not improve school culture the way that we hoped. Therefore, the purpose of our action research was to find other ways that teacher collaboration could improve school culture.

Statement of Your Team's Wondering:

With this purpose, we wondered how might engaging in instructional rounds increase collaboration among staff members and as a result improve school culture?

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into our wondering we decided to implement instructional rounds. First, we read articles about instructional rounds to learn more about how they work. Then, we sent out a survey to see who was interested in participating in the rounds. Next, we began weekly instructional rounds which we called "Rigor Walk Wednesday." Teachers could select particular instructional areas they would like to see in another teacher's classroom or could volunteer to open up their classrooms for others to visit. The visits lasted from twenty to thirty minutes depending on the subject being observed. We embedded time in for debriefing and reflection after each visit. Debriefing sessions typically occurred after buses and lasted about twenty-five minutes.

We conducted instructional rounds every Wednesday for six weeks. Visiting teachers used reflection sheets to guide their thinking during the visit. After each round the group participating debriefed in the conference room. We collected and analyzed the reflection sheets from teachers as well as the notes that captured the conversation during the debriefing sessions.

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

As a result of analyzing our data, two important things we learned include: 1) engaging in instructional rounds promoted a culture of collaboration; 2) Participating in reflective conversations after instructional rounds resulted in a change in instructional practices- in some cases immediately!

Engaging in instructional rounds promoted a culture of collaboration. As a school that struggled to bridge the gap between newly hired teachers and staff that had been at the school for several years, instructional rounds was just what Marzano states we needed to "stimulate excitement and energy among staff members almost immediately." Once we kicked off instructional rounds I would receive emails at least weekly with a teacher requesting to see something in another teacher's classroom. During PLC and planning time teachers were having positive conversations about instructional practices they had observed. They were sharing and exchanging ideas more frequently. By the end of the six weeks that we conducted instructional rounds, we had 100% participation. Every teacher either visited another classroom or opened up their classroom to their colleagues.

Participating in reflective conversations after instructional rounds resulted in a change in instructional practices- in some cases immediately! Some of the changes teachers made were more subtle than others. They were small tweaks, if you will, to practices they already had deployed in the classroom. For example, after participating in an instructional round where we looked at student's morning routines/jobs, one teacher shared that she would be making changes the next day to her morning routine. Specifically, she was going to add a little more structure to the morning routine so that students could engage in more meaningful and productive work.

Some changes teachers made were not just simple tweaks to existing practices. They were either completely new practices that a teacher wanted to try or a complete overhaul of a practice that was not effective. For example, many teachers discovered through the instructional round process that it was more beneficial to monitor student learning while they were working at small group centers. In the past a teacher may have called a small group during this time. We discovered that there was no one out guiding and correcting and giving feedback in real time.

The debriefing conversations had the greatest impact because ultimately, this resulted in increased student achievement as teachers began to move their conversations to instructional practices that yield higher student outcomes.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

Implementing instructional rounds positively impacted our school culture as it created a safe place for teachers to ask questions, reflect, and make changes in a non-evaluative manner. Teachers were able to collaborate with one another in a way that reestablished trust. Conducting instructional rounds reminded us of the importance of self-reflection. By providing the time and a protocol to self-reflect, we helped teachers affirm, tweak, and try out best teaching practices. Overall, teachers LOVED visiting each other's classrooms and sharing ideas and they are excited to continue this practice next school year. Instructional rounds will continue next school year as we continue to improve our school culture.

References:

Welch, L., Adams, G., Brown, J. L., Welch, A., Marzano, R. J., & Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. (2008). *The Art and Science of Teaching*. Alexandria, Va: ASCD.