

Prioritizing Instructional Expectations to Create More Purposeful Professional Learning and Collaboration

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Background That Led to Your Team's Inquiry:

Warsaw Community Schools has a powerful mission statement. Our mission is to inspire and equip all students to continuously acquire and apply knowledge and skills while pursuing their dreams and enriching the lives of others. While the statement is powerful, the "how" is not entirely clear. The action research team identifies that success schools possess a common focus or vision. With a powerful mission statement in place, we now want to focus on building the framework to accomplish this mission.

The action research team also utilized the Marzano High Reliability School survey data in determining a direction for the project. The level one survey focused on creating a safe and collaborative culture. Two indicators scored lower. First, a need for a clearer definition of the instruction expectations of the school. The other indicator identified a desire for staff to have feedback into what these instructional expectations are as well as other building level policies and procedures. Therefore, the purpose of our action research was enlist the feedback of the building's certified staff to identify and prioritize the instructional expectations in the school.

Statement of Your Team's Wondering:

How would providing teachers with clearer instructional expectations on what is expected in their classroom each day have an impact on student learning, staff collaboration, and professional development?

Methods/Procedures:

The process began at a faculty meeting in September. Certified staff brainstormed a list of what they felt should be priorities as they instruct students in the classroom. The team combined duplicates and created a master list on various pieces of chart paper throughout the room. Staff members were given three blue sticky dots, three green sticky dots, and three red sticky dots. Blue dots represented what they felt were the most important and carried a point value of three, green dots were important and carried a point value of two, and the red dots were the least important and carried a point value of one. Staff members then placed their dots on their choices.

Through this process, nine items were identified as a priority. Members of the Professional Learning Community Leadership team then worked to determine what each of these priorities would look like within the classroom. The action research team then created a survey asking four questions: Which of the following practices do you consider your greatest strength? Which of the following practices do you feel would be your greatest need for growth? Which of these practices do you believe you could teach others through peer-to-peer learning, and which of these practices do you believe you could learn more about through peer-to-peer learning?

Through the survey, the action research team identified strengths and weaknesses among the staff. This allowed the team to prioritize professional learning for the remainder of the school year. It also allowed for a renewed purpose for peer-to-peer learning within the building. Peer-to-peer learning is a similar process to Marzano's instructional rounds allowing an individual teacher to spend time in another teacher's classroom. These individuals meet ahead of time to determine what they will watch and what they will look for and meet again after to discuss areas where learning was best, ask questions, and determine next steps. The action research team used survey data as well as the number of peer-to-peer learning visits to determine success of the project.

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

The team accomplished and learned through out action research project. First, we can work together as a team to identify and work toward goals. Thirty-four staff members took a list of 50 expectations and prioritized them to the top ten priorities. Everyone had a voice in the process creating a strong sense of buy-in to what we determined.

Second, we all have areas of strength and areas of growth. Survey data clearly identified these strengths and weaknesses. While the strengths varied throughout the staff, helping students set goals and track data is an area where the staff can grow as a whole. We will have further professional learning in this area.

Third, we can learn from one another. Survey data identified areas where the staff felt they could help others. It also identified areas where staff felt they could learn from others. This reinforced the need to for peer-to-peer learning in the building. As a result, Jefferson Elementary now has eighty-five percent of certified staff trained to visit other classrooms. Peer-to-peer visits also increased by fifty percent by the conclusion of the school year.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

The action research cycle was a success. We learned not to be fearful of data. Asking questions and seeking feedback is part of the journey of getting better. The HRS survey data identified a weakness of the building. Rather than run from it, the team devised a plan to improve it. Through this plan, we have prioritized professional learning and reflected on our strengths and weaknesses as a building and individuals.

As we move forward, we will continue to focus faculty meetings and professional learning around the school's prioritized instructional expectations. This will involve book studies, article reviews, and faculty presentations rooted around specific practices. We will continue to grow the practice of peer-to-peer learning throughout the school year. We will work to correlate our instructional practices to the Warsaw Community School's modified RISE Rubric. Finally, we will establish a professional goal based on the instructional priorities for the 2017-2018 school year encouraging teachers to begin the action research journey.

References:

N/A