

The 21-Day Instructional Leadership Challenge

By: David Retherford, Elwood Junior-Senior High School

Contact: dretherford@elwood.k12.in.us

Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

As I began to think about what I wanted to do for my action research project, I looked at the survey results from the teacher survey that was administered prior to my officially beginning IPLI. Two areas of that survey stood out to me that correspond with Standard #2 of the ISLLC Standards, "An educational leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth." I had received just a 3.44 rating from my teachers on question #9 on supervising instruction, and just a 3.46 rating on question #11 on developing the instructional and leadership capacity of staff. These survey results along with my own perception of myself that I spend more time on building management activities than instructional leadership activities led to my inquiry of how I could become a better instructional leader. Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to participate in and implement strategies learned by Justin Baeder's 21-Day Leadership Challenge.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered if I purposely spent time focusing on my own instructional leadership, how much more effective of a leader could I be and what impact would that have on my school, staff, and most importantly, students? I also wondered how I could spend more time focusing on instructional leadership and less time on building management.

Methods/Procedures:

I began by signing up to participate in Justin Baeder's 21-Day Leadership Challenge at principalcenter.com. Each day for 21 days, I was sent a link to the day's challenge video. Although I did not complete the challenge in 21 straight days, I did eventually make it through all of the videos. I took notes for each of the 21 videos and compiled them into one big Google document. Within that document of notes, I used red font on action items that I either began implementing into my daily schedule or wished to implement into my daily schedule. I then created an implementation plan.

The first step in my implementation plan was to visit every classroom in my building once and provide a positive, encouraging, handwritten note to the teacher. It was recommended that I visit 10% of my teachers' classrooms each day for 5-10 minutes. I successfully completed this first step of the implementation plan. The second step of the implementation plan was to identify an EJSHS instructional framework. This step is still in process with the EJSHS Leadership Team. However, our instructional framework will include components of our teacher evaluation plan, district-wide instructional model, district-wide lesson plan model, best practices instructional strategies, and components of our school's 3-tiered data approach. Full implementation is anticipated to be in place by the start of the 2017-18 school year.

The third step in the implementation plan is to create a walkthrough form via Google Forms that I can use to make evidence-rich comments during classroom walkthroughs that support the school's instructional framework. Comments can be copied and pasted into an email sent to the teacher that can begin ongoing communications to help improve instruction in the classroom. A summary spreadsheet of school-wide comments can be reviewed periodically for analysis of school improvement. The fourth step in the plan was

to create an index card for each teacher in the building that I can write the date on the cards when I do walkthrough visits. My secretary will help me stay on task with walkthroughs by giving me a new 10% of my staff each day. The index cards have been created, but official walkthroughs have not. That is step five of my implementation plan.

Full implementation is planned to begin at the start of the 2017-18 school year.

At the end of the 21-Day Instructional Challenge, I surveyed my staff again. Question #1 was "On a scale of 1 to 10, how visible is Mr. Retherford in classrooms?" The average score was a 5.36. Question #2 was "On a scale of 1 to 10, how visible is Mr. Retherford in hallways, the cafeteria, etc.?" The average score was a 7.73. Question #3 was "Based on your perception, how "in the know" is Mr. Retherford about what's going on in classrooms?" The average score was 6.77. Question #4 was "Based on your perception, how "in the know" is Mr. Retherford when it comes to things going on in the school?" The average score was 8.09. Question #5 was, "Based on your opinion, what percentage of time does Mr. Retherford spend during a school day on instructional leadership activities versus building management activities?" The results of this question show that 54.5% of my staff say I spend about 50% of my time on instructional leadership and 50% of my time on building management while the other 45.5% of my staff indicate I spend closer to 75% of my time on building management while only about 25% on instructional leadership.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of my data, I learned that my perception of myself that I spend too much time on building management versus instructional leadership is fairly accurate. I've also learned through the 21-Day Leadership Challenge, that if I fully implement the strategies of my implementation plan, that I can be a more effective instructional leader.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

The next steps that I intend to take into the new school year start with full implementation of the plan created. Following full implementation of the plan, I will re-survey my staff with the same five questions I concluded the AR process with this year. My goals are as follows: 1) My classroom visibility will be greater than or equal to my cafeteria & hallway visibility, 2) My classroom "in the know" will be greater than or equal to my school "in the know," 3) An increase percentage of time spent on instructional leadership. If these three goals can be met, I will be working towards maximizing my leadership potential, the real goal!

As I reflect on the overall action research process, I am encouraged. I found the process to be quite engaging and a great learning opportunity from both the action-research process itself to the results of the 21-Day Instructional Leadership Challenge. I will continue to use action research as a way of studying the effects of both my leadership style and changes made within the school. I will also continue to fully implement the implementation plan created during this action research project. I would highly recommend that others engage in the action research process. I would also encourage my colleagues who wish to improve upon their instructional leadership to participate in the 21-Day Instructional Leadership Challenge.

References:

www.principalcenter.com