

Clear Expectations to Enhance Rapport and Growth

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Background That Led to Your Team's Inquiry:

Our team was wrestling with ways to increase teacher sustainability without lowering high expectations for ongoing school improvement. After listening to the Tammy Heflebower with the Marzano Research Group at IPLI, we resonated with the focused and visible one-pager approach to instructional expectations because teachers often feel overwhelmed by the myriad of policies and procedures they are expected to retain in addition to instructional priorities and expectations. We looked at a variety of samples, took slides, and began to consider whether creating a one-pager of instructional expectations divided into "should see daily," "might see, but not daily," and "should never see" categories would be an effective next step in moving our faculty forward.

Statement of Your Team's Wondering:

How will posting clear expectations for daily instruction and using that criteria list to guide all professional goals, coaching, and parent communication impact student achievement and staff growth and rapport?

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into our wondering, we began drafting a one-page table to outline basic instructional expectations in partnership with our school leadership team. After creating a rough draft, our School Leader and School Designer reviewed the expectations for alignment with our EL Education Power Practices, adding and revising as needed. After getting our document to a usable level, we presented it to all teachers for review and discussion.

Our next step in the process was asking teachers to self-assess how they were doing at using all the elements of basic instructional expectations. We created a Google Form and asked teachers to assess their ongoing use of each item in the instructional expectations table. After analyzing the self-assessment data, we created a data tracker and asked teachers to set a professional goal surrounding one of the daily items that they gave themselves a poor score on. We then had teachers post their goal in a public place as a reminder and as a form of public accountability to parents, students, and colleagues. We have done self-assessment data check-ins and are charting our collective progress.

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

As a result of analyzing our data, two important things we learned include: a one-page table of clear instructional expectations is very helpful for teachers to know where to focus their energy and ongoing improvement, goals and initiatives must be revisited regularly for people to stay focused on them and keep them as a central piece of ongoing improvement.

A one-page table of clear instructional expectations is very helpful for teachers to know where to focus their energy. This is evident in teachers referencing it regularly in conversations impacting their practice. It is also evident in the growth data that shows teachers growing in instructional practices listed on the one-pager. Goals and initiatives must be revisited regularly for people to stay focused on them and keep them as a central piece of ongoing improvement. This became very evident when completing the second self-assessment check-in and analyzing the resulting data. Many teachers had remained stagnant in their goals or even regressed. When we first kicked off the initiative, we did not continuously remind staff of the goals and their work on improvement in these areas. After the second self-assessment, we did more reminders and check-ins, and the resulting data at the third self-assessment check-in showed significantly improved scores as a result of professional improvement.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

We found this action research process very helpful in moving our school forward and increasing teacher sustainability. We now have 100% of our teachers committed to returning to teach at Inspire Academy for the 2017-2018 school year, a first in teacher retention for us! Focusing on key instructional practices in an organized and visible way has helped our teachers and leaders manage improvement without feeling so overwhelmed and fragmented.

Our next steps in the process will include continued conversations with stakeholders about the process, using this document to guide lesson plan reviews and additional teacher goal-setting, and working to make the document a more visible and public text. As a professional learning community, we felt that we needed to become more comfortable with the document and more confident in our implementation of it before being able to help other stakeholders understand and embrace the document.

We have already begun conversations with some parents, but they felt the document would not facilitate the conversations with parents that we hoped, so we now need to grapple as a staff about ways to bring parents into the conversation well. We will begin expanding to various stakeholders by sharing our action research findings with the Inspire Academy board of directors. Then, over the summer, we will plan ways to continue to keep it central for teachers, train support staff in what the document means, and from there expand the conversation to include parents.

References: