

Monroe Township School District

Challenge

As Monroe Township School District (MTSD), located in Middlesex County, NJ, burst at the seams due to urban sprawl, the district needed to come up with unique ways to train an abundance of new teachers in addition to keeping its senior teachers engaged in their own professional learning. The district wanted to provide differentiated instruction to its more than 600 teachers and it wanted to make training both relevant and interesting.

“You can only do so much training yourself,” said Lewis Stonaker, one of the suburban district’s staff development coordinators. In order to expand his training model, Mr. Stonaker needed a program that was flexible enough to accommodate the distinctive needs and characteristics of their professional learning communities.



“We’ve always believed in differentiated professional development for our teachers, and Teachscape fit right in with our model. It fills a big need.”

Lewis Stonaker,
Staff Development Coordinator,
Monroe Township School District

Solution

In 2005, the district implemented Teachscape’s Programs of Study because it covered many of the same topics targeted by the district’s staff development department such as High Yield Strategies based on Robert J. Marzano’s *Classroom Instruction That Works*, and fit nicely into the district’s approach of book studies for professional learning communities.

MTSD implemented Teachscape’s High Yield Strategies material via two formats. The first was year-long courses based on the district’s goals for professional development, and the second was a book study group that used the material in chapter form for mini-courses. The district now combines the in-depth nature of the year-long courses with the collaborative environment of the book study format.

Each book study group consists of three to six people to ensure no one dominates discussions or fades into the background. Participants receive *Classroom Instruction That Works* as well as site subscriptions to Teachscape’s High Yield Strategies course materials, which correlate with the book’s chapters. Participating teachers are allotted 20 hours of professional development time and also do training on their own time.

In 2007, MTSD acquired the Teachscape Classroom Walkthrough system which helps school leaders assess whether teachers are applying professional training in the classroom. In 2010, the district’s new superintendent, Dr. Kenneth Hamilton, introduced an “instructional round” version of classroom walkthroughs, similar to clinical rounds. The assistant superintendent of curriculum instruction spearheads the initiative, overseeing the principals, vice principals, teachers, district wide supervisors, and staff development coordinators that comprise the instructional round teams.

The process involves three to five teams consisting of five or six administrators visiting a school site. “We look for implementation of the district’s goal, as well as the individual school’s goal,” said Mr. Stonaker. Afterward, team members discuss each other’s observations. Instructional rounds occur four times a year districtwide. Teachers know when the rounds will take place but not what will be under observation.

Regular classroom walkthroughs are carried out at the schools’ discretion. The data collection technology is now available on iPads, and the ease of use has resulted in school leaders conducting walks much more frequently. The walkthrough information is used to share building-level data at faculty meetings, develop action plans at administrative meetings, and provide guidance to year-one teachers at their monthly reviews.

Benefits

- The blend of online and classroom-based professional learning is flexible enough to fit with Monroe’s differentiated professional development model
- The easy customization of the online resources means that teachers can watch practice models that are best suited to them and the grade level they teach
- The blended approach of online and classroom instruction accommodates one of the major tenets put forth by adult learning theorist Malcolm Knowles, that “adults learn better when they can share and discuss perspectives”
- Motivated teachers can take the initiative in moving their instruction to the next level by using the online resources as independent learning
- Instead of relying on principals’ observations and anecdotal evidence to analyze instructional strengths and weaknesses, schools can collect “hard data” on the application of teaching strategies with the Teachscape Classroom Walkthrough system
- Students are engaging in higher-level thinking and questioning more frequently than they had in the past

Program Results

Monroe’s professional development program gained national recognition via an article published in the spring 2007 issue of the National Staff Development Council’s *Journal of Staff Development*. The article was later reprinted in the council’s book *Finding Time for Professional Learning* (2008), a compilation of time-related best practices.

The strategies being implemented have generated concrete results. In 2010, the vast majority of grade levels beat the state averages for the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge. The exception was the math results for eighth graders, who were just one percentage point below the percentage of their peers scoring proficient and above on the test.

The scores are more impressive because since the 2000-01 school year, the district’s student population has been increasing rapidly due to growth in the surrounding community. “Usually when a district is growing like this, there is a drop off because of the new students coming in from other districts,” said Mr. Stonaker. “Our student performance has shown steady growth over the years.”

Although Mr. Stonaker retired in summer 2011, he is confident that the district’s teachers are equipped to continue supporting the incoming students. “We’re always looking for different ways to use Teachscape tools,” he said. “You never grow as a district if you don’t try new things.”

Demographics

- Number of High Schools: 7
- Number of Teachers: 600
- Number of Students: 5,800
- 5% Free and Reduced Lunch
- Annual Growth of 150 Students



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This case study was completed with the gracious cooperation of Monroe Township School District.