

Maywood–Melrose Park–Broadville School District 89

Challenge

Located approximately five miles west of Chicago, Illinois, the 10 schools in Maywood–Melrose Park–Broadview District 89 span several suburban communities that face urban issues. Since the Title I district has no busing system, the schools serve communities that are either predominantly African-American or Hispanic with very little ethnic overlap. Many schools were struggling to make adequate yearly progress (AYP). In fact, from 2004 to 2009, between 60-80 percent of schools were not making AYP; 60 percent didn't make AYP in 2009.

“Our capacity, or lack thereof, for best instructional practices was evident,” said Dr. David Ballard, the district’s assistant superintendent of curriculum. Data analysis for the 2007-08 school year revealed that one problem lay in the district’s scattered approach: too many initiatives were being conducted at one time. For example, in 2007 District 89’s annual staff development event, “Institute Day,” consisted of 13 to 15 sessions going on at the same time. Consequently, everyone was doing something different and there was no real cohesion. Even outside of Institute Day, school staff cycled through several different ideas so nothing had the chance to take root. Plus, none of the ideas were grounded in best practices or professional learning.



“One teacher told me that the training on high-yield strategies was the best thing we offered all year, and the majority of teachers reported that it has changed their teaching practice. Teachscape met our needs and took us in the direction we wanted to go: creating a culture where learning and reflection were valued.”

Dr. David Ballard, Ed.D.,
Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum,
Maywood-Melrose Park-Broadview School District 89

Solution

District 89’s turnaround strategy consisted of making sense of all of the competing initiatives, developing communities of learners, and moving forward in an all-inclusive manner to improve instruction. “We took a step back and the professional development committee looked at districts that were recognized for professional development,” said Barbara Dahly, the district’s director of teaching and learning.

“We crafted a document stating our mission and tied it to the standards of Learning Forward,” said Dr. Ballard. He led a year-long inquiry into what constituted best practice, focusing on the work of well-known education researcher, Dr. Robert J. Marzano. The professional development committee also reviewed research on 90/90/90 schools, which are institutions where at least 90 percent of the students are from ethnic minority groups, at least 90 percent are eligible for free or reduced lunch, and 90 percent or more are successfully passing standardized assessments.

District 89 used grant funds to purchase Teachscape’s High Yield Instructional Strategies, which are based on Marzano’s research, as well as the company’s classroom walkthroughs, data analysis and back-end resources.

In August 2009, the district began training principals and assistant principals in classroom walkthroughs. During the fall, principals, assistant principals and teachers received preliminary training on high-yield strategies and then began implementation with the objective of exploring three strategies each year. Teachscape coaches made monthly visits to each building to do one-on-one work with principals, assistant principals and leadership teams.

As a result of the district’s partnership with Teachscape, principals are transitioning from building managers to instructional leaders. Conducting classroom walkthroughs gave principals the opportunity to move around their building and observe practices, and it also kept everyone focused on data relevant to the strategies being implemented. Each administrator performed a minimum of 15 seven-minute walkthroughs per week.

Benefits

- Teachscape tools provided a non-threatening way for the district to engage principals and assistant principals in conversations about instructional practices.
- Coaches provided recurring reflective coaching to help leadership teams develop the skills required to guide the teachers in their buildings.
- Teachers were able to build an in-depth understanding of strategies so that they could help students take ownership of their learning, truly master subject matter and provide timely and specific feedback to each other through cooperative learning.
- Moving beyond the traditional presentation/lecture model resulted in a higher level of student engagement. Students began talking to each other about lesson content.



Demographics

Number of Schools: 10
Number of Students: 5,500
Number of Teachers: 375
90% Free and Reduced Lunch
Annual growth—declining by
100 students per year

Program Results

State test results show significant improvement. In 2005, 42 percent of third graders scored below the state standards for reading, with another 19 percent scoring so low that they received academic warnings. In 2010, that cohort, now in the eighth grade, had 74 percent of its members meeting and exceeding reading standards (and no member of the cohort received an academic warning). Also, 44 percent of that cohort had scored below the state science standards during 2006, with another 11 percent receiving academic warnings. In 2010, 64 percent were meeting and exceeding science standards.

Cohorts that had been doing relatively well in comparison to the group mentioned above have also shown significant improvement. In 2007, 48 percent of fourth graders met or exceeded reading standards and 51 percent did the same for science. In 2010, 62 percent and 66 percent of that cohort met or exceeded reading and science standards respectively. Also, teachers and administrators found that more students knew the lesson objectives and were giving feedback.

The success of the teachers who took the new changes to heart led to their colleagues' further acceptance of the new strategies and practices. In fact, on the April 1, 2010 Institute Day, teachers did presentations on the strategies. "That was extremely positive," said Dr. Ballard. "It makes a more powerful impact when teachers see peers up there instead of administrators."

In the 2010-11 school year, District 89 boosted the number of coaching visits by Teachscape as it prepared to create internal coaches at the schools. "It's been a cultural change," said Ms. Dahly. "A class is no longer just about a presentation or lecture; the kids are actually talking to each other."

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