

Monroe Township School District

A High Yield Strategies Case Study

Monroe Township School District's Challenge

In addition to providing differentiated instruction to its 5,500 students, Monroe Township School District (MTSD), located in Middlesex County, NJ, also believes in delivering differentiated professional development to more than 500 teachers. However, attending to the individual needs of so many educators proves time-consuming for professional development coordinators and results in limited offerings.

"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.

Monroe Township's Solution

In 2005, MTSD's former Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Christopher Tienken, saw a Teachscape presentation at a New Jersey school boards convention and was struck by the flexibility offered by its blend of online, face-to-face, and classroom-based professional learning. In addition, Teachscape's Programs of Study covered many of the same topics targeted by the district's staff development department such as High Yield Strategies based on Dr. Robert J. Marzano's *Classroom Instruction That Works*.

In 2005, MTSD partnered with Teachscape. Lewis Stonaker and Stephanie Goldberg, the district's other staff development coordinator, test-drove the online course materials before presenting them to the staff. MTSD has now fully implemented Teachscape's High Yield Strategies program via year-long courses, as well as a book study group that uses the materials in a chapter format for mini-courses.

The cohort of teachers participating in a year-long Program of Study may be district-wide or restricted to a specific school building. The professional learning community meets formally for three full days and two half days. They also meet on their own outside of that time. These year-long courses are based on district goals for professional development.

In addition to year-long courses, quarterly mini-courses are offered that are geared toward teachers' supplementary interests. During each course, participants review a different part of Teachscape's classroom instruction materials. The district set up these mini-courses, because the staff development coordinators realized that some teachers were interested in focusing on three or four chapters rather than all nine. "We are often adding more Teachscape subscriptions due to the popularity of the courses," said Mr. Stonaker.



"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

Two years after implementing the Programs of Study, MTSD acquired Teachscape's Classroom Walkthrough system which helps school leaders assess whether teachers are applying appropriate instructional strategies in the classroom. During administrative meetings, school leaders collectively analyze specific components of the walkthrough data and then develop action plans. The walkthrough information is used to share building-level data at faculty meetings and to provide guidance to year-one teachers at their monthly reviews.

Overall Program 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 Teachscape's Classroom Walkthrough system

Program Results

Monroe's professional development program gained national recognition in 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.

Formerly the district relied on observations and anecdotal information to tell them about classroom instruction. With Teachscape's High Yield Strategies and Classroom Walkthrough, the district now has hard frequency data on all strategies being implemented and what is working to raise student achievement.

The program's approach of blending courses with discussions has led to a new teacher exchange program in which participants visit colleagues' classrooms throughout the district in order to observe teaching practices. Participants can visit classrooms outside of their grade level or regularly taught topic, so professional learning opportunities are expanded. This district-wide knowledge sharing has resulted in a culture of continuous learning and improvement that benefits both teachers and the students they serve.

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



PROGRAM DEMOGRAPHICS:

Number of Schools: 7

Number of Teachers: 500+

Number of Students: 5,500

5% free and reduced lunch

Annual growth of 250–300 students

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