

Wayne County Public Schools

Challenge

Located southeast of Raleigh, Wayne County Public Schools (WCPS) is the 20th largest school system in North Carolina. The district contains 31 schools serving more than 19,200 students. Sixty percent of the student population is eligible for free or reduced lunches, and in the 2006-07 school year, the district was placed in the No Child Left Behind Act's corrective action category. "We began working with Teachscape as part of our action plan to amend that," said Dr. Sandra McCullen, the district's associate superintendent.

WCPS began working with Teachscape Classroom Walkthrough in the 2007-08 school year and the High Yield Strategies Program of Study in 2009. However, Dr. McCullen wanted to further build education leaders' capacity for making data-based decisions and implementing research-and-standards-based plans and instruction.

Solution

Once again, WCPS turned to Teachscape to utilize the company's Instructional Decision Making and Planning (IDMP) Institute, a program that delivers focused professional training within a set period of time. In the summer of 2009, the school sites' professional learning community teams attended a two-day IDMP workshop.

During the workshop, principals and group leaders engaged in reflective conversations that centered on using multiple sources of data such as classroom walkthrough data, the district's benchmark assessments, end-of-course scores, and other state test data. Each school identified its individual needs and planned a specific course of action to meet its school improvement plan that combined high-yield strategies, classroom walkthroughs and IDMP.

After the workshop, instructional leaders decided that the number of classroom walkthroughs, which previously had been consistent across schools, should be based on each team's decision. Additionally, teachers regrouped students according to the benchmark data in order to create smaller groups and provide individual support. "They are utilizing high yield strategies that match the learning styles of the students," said Dr. McCullen. "Instructional leaders at the school sites are reviewing the classroom walkthrough data and having reflective conversations to improve teaching and student learning." Teachers also worked with instructional leaders to analyze student work to verify students' learning.

To ensure effective application of the professional development, Teachscape coaches visited school sites on WCPS' six designated half-days. During their visits, the coaches reviewed classroom walkthrough data and recommended next steps in the schools' action plans. After each visit, consultants sent school teams reports that served as a record of the progress being made. The reports evaluated the site's use of data and staffers' success in addressing issues that the data had revealed. These reports were shared at the monthly principals' meetings and in principals' one-on-one discussions with the central office administrator.

The district also applied its new professional learning principles to its leadership academy for assistant principals and curriculum facilitators who wished to become principals. The participants used high-yield strategies for high-, middle- and low-achieving students. Additionally, they created in-depth case studies called learning histories in which students set goals and instructors developed lesson plans accordingly. "This approach creates true instructional leaders," stated Dr. McCullen. "We choose principals from that pool."

Since 50 percent of the district's principals had held the position for five years or less, WCPS also had a Leadership Academy Plus for those novice leaders. Participants discussed how to improve implementation of instruction and how they could become instructional leaders.



“ One of the principals told me that the process has helped him to see the power of data when teachers utilize it for instructional decision making. Instructional practices are changing to meet the needs of each individual child. It's personalized education based on data.”

Dr. Sandra McCullen,
Associate Superintendent,
Wayne County Public Schools

Benefits

- The whole school system focuses on teaching and learning conversations that use data analysis to help individual students.
- As a result of the professional development, staffers district-wide use the same terminology and processes, facilitating collaboration and teamwork.
- School sites use the IDMP Institute and coaching to focus on the issues and needs of their particular student populations
- The IDMP process encourages ongoing open communication between instructional personnel and other staff members involved in the planning and decision-making process.
- Teachers are better able to embed Bloom's Taxonomy's higher-order thinking skills in student work, which leads students to receive a more in-depth learning experience.

Program Results

In the 2008-09 school year, performance composite scores rose for 81.2 percent of the schools, and 90.9 percent of the schools made Adequate Yearly Progress while the state averaged 70.8 percent. Additionally, 84.4 percent of the district's schools satisfied criteria for meeting and surpassing expected growth under North Carolina's accountability model; and 50 percent of those schools actually met the formula for high growth (compared with the 39.4 percent state average). Of all the schools making at least expected growth, 96.3 percent also made AYP, and 93.8 percent of those achieving high growth also made AYP. "We had 17 schools on NCLB's corrective action list," said Dr. McCullen. "Now we don't have any in the 2009-10 school year." She credits Teachscape as a major factor in the progress of WCPS.

In order to involve as many teachers as possible in the building of instructional capacity at school sites, the district conducted five IDMP workshops in the summer of 2010. "We delivered IDMP to all administrators this summer, and we're still implementing the six coaching visits for 28 schools in 2010-11," said Dr. McCullen.

Dr. McCullen expects that the district will eventually be able to continue the professional learning with its own resources and leaders. "We're helping teachers to become instructional leaders in the classroom and to know when to change their lessons," she said. "We believe instruction improves one teacher at a time."

Demographics

- Number of Schools: 31
- Number of Teachers: 1246
- Number of Students: 19,200+
- 60% Free and Reduced Lunch



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This case study was completed with the gracious cooperation of Wayne County Public Schools.