

## **Toppenish School District No. 202**

# **District Large Scale Improvement**

Due to ESD 105's leadership, OSPI's assistance, and the continuous learning attitude of our staff, large scale improvement in Toppenish School District began taking roots five years ago with a systems change emphasis. After district teams attended Harvard Institute for School Leadership and Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Washington, they returned with a sense of urgency and expanded the framework for building and sustaining instructional capacity. As a result, administrators and teachers are leading the district in six common areas of continuous improvement:

- establishing structured learning communities;
- improving teaching and learning through research-based practices in the content area, embedded professional development and collaborative mentoring;
- monitoring and supervising instruction;
- building capacity to support sustainability;
- establishing learning walks with debriefs; and
- using protocols for fiscal and instructional accountability

Our district's immediate goal is for all third graders to read at grade level. We expect to accomplish this goal by improving teaching and learning for every student and each classroom, beginning in our 17 preschool classrooms. Until we are able to close the teaching and learning gap, our middle and high school students will continue to struggle with comprehension and problem solving skills.

### **Establishing Structured Learning Communities**

Our continuous learning journey's foundation is based on professional learning communities, embedded professional development, developed processes for parent engagement, and user-friendly data driven systems, every student will receive a high school diploma. After four years of data-driven system training, our educators realized the importance of common language and vocabulary and formative assessments. In this context it is our premise that with a systemic approach for using data, student achievement will accelerate and sustainability will occur.

### **Monitoring and Supervising Instruction through Holistic Accountability**

The non-negotiable of all administrators is to model instructional leadership by action, not rhetoric. It is expected that every Administrator spend a minimum of two hours per day on learning walks and supervision of instruction. Being engaged daily observing and discussing student work with teachers and staff will improve classroom practice; furthermore, students will read, write, and solve problems at a challenging level. By doing work of high cognitive demand, students will be able to reach proficiency. Evaluations by the superintendents and the directors will be formed around the critical question, "How will this action/decision help students become better readers, writers, and problem-solvers and reach proficiency?" Preparing for sustainability, the District provides on-going embedded professional development for the Curriculum Director and instructional lead learners in cognitive coaching, data analysis, and system improvement. With an internal and external

school improvement leader, the wheels of system change turn with fewer bumps and holes as we focus on bringing our work to scale.

### **Capacity Building to Support Sustainability**

Building a vertical and horizontal capacity will be a continuous journey due to student and teacher mobility, language, and poverty issues. We have implemented some systemic changes for sustainability. Knowing that a quality education is a gift for life, we are beginning to exceed the state and federal standards for continuous growth through the following eight core essentials:

- developing preschool and early learning cooperatives and coalitions to ensure kindergarten readiness;
- sharing distributive leadership and developing informal leaders;
- planning and delivering embedded professional development for improved pedagogy and increased rigor in literacy, math, writing, and science;
- using and analyzing data and artifacts for evidence of learning;
- mentoring, monitoring and learning together;
- supervising instructional accountability through protocols;
- engaging parents in their child's learning through family friendly schools;
- personalizing instruction through relationships and relevance
- expanding professional networks and partnerships;
- using healthy school environments for increasing student achievement;
- developing preK-12 intervention systems to increase student success;
- designing a 24/7 virtual learning system to meet the academic needs of all children.

In summary, every employee must not only feel accountability in closing the achievement gap, but embrace a professional learning attitude to improve their practice. When this passion couples with application, all students will meet/exceed the grade level standards. Historically, some educators in our district believed "all" meant only certain groups of children. Since 89% of our students live in poverty, "all students" means everyone. More importantly, we will prepare every child for the challenges of a changing world.

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## Professional Learning Communities

Responding to faculty and staff request, we purchased 200 copies of Results in 2004, On Common Ground in 2005, and Results Now in 2006, and The Art and Science of Teaching in 2008.

1. \*DuFour, Richard; Eaker, Robert; DuFour, Rebecca. (2005). **On Common Ground-The Power of Professional Learning Communities.** National Education Service, Bloomington, Indiana
2. Elmore, Richard. (2000). **Building a New Structure for School Leadership.** The Albert Shawker Institute, Washington, D.C.
3. Elmore, Richard. (2004). **School Reform from the Inside Out.** Harvard Education Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts
4. \*Marzano, Robert. (2007). **The Art and Science of Teaching.** ASCD, Alexandria Virginia
5. Fullan, Michael. (2005). **Leadership and Sustainability.** Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, California
6. Pellicer, Leonard. (2003). **Caring Enough to Lead-How Reflective Thought Leads to Moral Leadership.** Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, California
7. \*\*Platt, Alexander. Tripp, Caroline. Ogden, Wayne. Fraser, Robert. (2000) **The Skillful Leader: Confronting Mediocre Teaching.** Ready About Press. Acton, Massachusetts
8. \*\*Platt, Alexander. Tripp, Caroline. Fraser, Wayne. Warnock, James. Curtis, Rachel. (2008). **The Skillful Leader II: Confronting Conditions That Undermine Learning.** Ready About Press. Acton, Massachusetts
9. Reeves, Douglas. (2004). **Accountability for Learning-How Teachers and School Leaders Take Charge.** ASCD, Alexandria, Virginia
- 10.\*Schmoker, Michael. (1999). **Results-The Key to Continuous Improvement.** ASCD, Alexandria, Virginia
- 11.\*Schmoker, Michael. (2006). **Results Now-How we can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning.** ASCD, Alexandria, Virginia
- 12.\*\*Scott, Susan. (2002). **Fierce Conversations.** Berkley Publishing Group, New York, New York

\*All certificated staff have participated in reflective study groups with these texts.

\*\* Administration only

6/09