

Great Ideas for Great Public Schools

INDIANA

Professional development for teachers, extended learning time for kids

Union leaders and district administrators jointly created the Equity Academy in 2009 to provide professional development and greater autonomy for teachers in three struggling schools: Delaware Elementary, Howard Roosa Elementary, and McGary Middle School. Part of the 37-school Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation, the three Equity Schools have a total student population of 1,200 that is 60 percent white, 26 percent African American, and 3 percent Hispanic. Nearly 90 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Investing in teachers

- Equity Academy topics include communication styles, decision making, and using data to raise student achievement (schools can add up to five professional development “data days” per year).
- The academy is rigorous: 40 hours on Saturdays and after school on Wednesdays (missed sessions must be made up) culminating in a comprehensive oral exam (138 of the first class of 150 passed).
- One hundred of the 108 teachers in Equity Schools applied to the academy, as well as 90 from other schools. “We thought maybe half the current teachers would participate,” said Debbie Hartz, one of the academy’s two instructors.
- Participation is voluntary, but teachers who opt out—or fail—can no longer teach in Equity Schools.
- Teachers are paid \$20 per hour to attend the academy, plus \$1,000 upon satisfactory completion.

Lengthening the school year

- Each Equity School determined the best approach to extend learning time. All three schools decided to lengthen the school year—by up to 20 days per year—but not the school day.

- While the school day has stayed at 7 hours, 15 minutes, how time is used is changing—for example, to increase learning time, one Equity School serves breakfast in classrooms.
- “We didn’t lengthen the day because that would disrupt extracurricular schedules throughout the city,” explained Hartz. “Many middle school kids take care of younger siblings.”
- “When schools are chronically underperforming,” said superintendent Vince Bertram, “some point to ineffective teachers or leaders. What we’ve discovered is that these schools have a high percentage of students who start three or four years behind and just can’t catch up.”

Engaging families and communities

- Brett Clark, a math teacher who participated in the academy, visits parents at home “because a phone call, letter or email is making contact the way a bill collector would—and that’s not good.”
- Kristal Dellay, a teacher at McGary Middle School and member of the Learning Leadership Cadre, a districtwide program with Brown University, says, “There’s an old adage: Students don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

For more information: Debbie Hartz, Equity Academy instructor, deborah.hartz@evsc.k12.in.us

NEA web site: *Union Champions Equity Schools for Neediest Students*, <http://bit.ly/gDUOiz>



Great Public Schools for Every Student