

## **Turning Around Schools; Collaboration at Work**

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### **Putnam City West High School, Oklahoma City, OK Raising Achievement among English Language Learners**

*Compadres in Education* is an ongoing program that demonstrates the power of collaborative action – by teachers, school administrators, parents, and community organizations – to raise the educational aspirations and achievement of low-income Hispanic students from families with limited knowledge of English. The program is teaching entire families of immigrants and their children to navigate the American educational system. This self-sustaining program has yielded hard evidence of gains in student achievement: higher test scores and dramatically better attendance records. The program was initiated by the Oklahoma Education Association with the National Education Association providing support and technical assistance. School and community leaders have been an integral part of the program from the start. Parents, teachers, and students are deeply involved.

NEA and OEA trainers facilitated, structured, and recorded initial community conversations. Participants identified the most important factors contributing to achievement gaps locally and formulated action plans to address them. They also learned to facilitate and record such conversations themselves, building local capacity to sustain the program. In response to concerns expressed during community conversations Putnam County West:

- Hired more bilingual staff members.
- Provided school- and district-wide professional development to enrich teaching and enhance achievement among English language learners.
- Furnishes written descriptions of course offerings in Spanish and in English, with emphasis on college entrance requirements.
- Expanded opportunities for learning through community service, especially for students at risk of dropping out.
- Implemented service-learning/community opportunities for high risk youth, thereby increasing relevance of their academic experience.
- Worked with Francis Tuttle Technology Center and Integris Health Center to create the new and innovative “Club Med” – exposing students to careers in health through real life experiences.

Although evidence of the three-year old program’s effectiveness is just beginning to manifest, it is clear that Hispanic students are making impressive gains. The pass rate among Hispanic students on the End-of-Instruction Test in English II, a graduation requirement, rose from 55 percent in 2007 to 77 percent in 2008. Over the same period, Hispanic students’ Academic Performance Index, a broader measure that reflects test scores as well as attendance and other factors, rose from 839 in 2006 to 1,065 in 2007 to 1,152 in 2008 on a scale of 1,500. Between 2008 and 2009, the number of Hispanic students who graduated from Putnam City West rose by nearly 70 percent. In addition, over the past two years, the school’s Hispanic students have met the Oklahoma Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives requirement, progressing in English language learning development to become proficient in English.

## **Denver Collaborative Model, Denver Public School System Collaborating to Improve Teaching and Learning Outcomes for All**

In Denver, some of the challenges in the turnaround schools were related to the lack of systematic organization, which did not create an efficient academic environment. Leadership capacity, instructional programs that were not well monitored, and the lack of consistent collaborative communication were all issues.

To effect change, Denver Public Schools (DPS) and Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) worked together to determine the level of support needed at identified schools. Conversations were held with the stakeholders – including community members -- to identify the best approach to improve schools. DPS and DCTA collaborated with a purpose statement that turnaround should mean dramatic school improvement and swift action. To accomplish this goal they jointly developed strategic goals, including that results should show better student outcomes and focus on student intervention and achievement, there should be transparency with all stakeholders and include all stakeholders in design and implementation, and focus on resource sustainability.

The Denver partners emphasized the importance of the process and focused on the intent to enact change with a school and community not **to** a school. Of paramount importance was making sure that teachers were included in developing the mission of the project and their role within it. This included “staff selection” training for principals and interview teams regarding finding “right fit” and understanding individual effectiveness vs. conditions of past school, as well as working to determine how to create the teaching/learning conditions necessary to attract teachers to low performing schools.

Moving forward, DPS and DCTA will monitor the improvement of the total process – starting with the first year of School Improvement – jointly facilitate discussion and “build the container” for Transformation Schools between all stakeholders, and monitor the equitable placement of displaced teachers.

So far, the results have been strong. DCTA and DPS have worked closely to ensure that the staffing process was fair to all employees. They will continue to work to improve the process and make sure that all students and staff experience improved working and learning conditions in priority schools.

## **Hamilton County, Tennessee**

### **Closing the Achievement Gap through Community-Wide Efforts**

In Hamilton County, Tennessee, principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, lead math teachers, and lead literacy teachers across the district are working and learning together through networks focused on attaining high levels of student achievement. In network meetings, schools are able to share best practices, strategies, and intervention that worked for them, and they have data to prove it. Middle schools have begun to open their doors and their classrooms to teachers who want to see, firsthand, stellar lessons. Goals of the initiative have focused on creating a more rigorous learning environment where more students score “advanced” on state exams while, at the same time, the achievement gap between low-income and middle-income students is narrowed.

Professional development for teachers and school leaders has been a major focus of *Middle Schools for a New Society*, including semi-annual planning retreats that allow leadership teams of students, parents, teachers and administrators at each school to study effective methods for school improvement and develop plans focused on the unique needs of their own schools. Further, the most effective professional development is available when it is needed and where it is needed. Middle schools have been provided with expert teachers to serve as coaches offering support to other teachers. These coaches receive training in best practices and working with adults, participate in network meetings, and bring information and effective teaching strategies back to their schools. They encourage collaboration and sharing of great ideas, provide model lessons, and offer help and support to teachers who are working to improve their craft.

The project also uses data to set goals, measure progress, and perhaps most importantly, improve instruction. Participants have examined data down to the level of individual questions on exams so teachers know what students “get” and what they don’t, allowing them to re-visit and re-teach the missing elements.

The results are impressive. In reading/language arts, the percentage of middle school students scoring advanced increased from 30 percent in 2005 to 40 percent in 2009. The achievement gap has narrowed from 24 percentage points in 2004 to 14 in 2009 and all students are achieving at higher levels than the 2004 baseline.

In math, the percentage of middle school students scoring advanced increased from 30 percent in 2005 to 45 percent in 2009. The achievement gap has narrowed from 23 percentage points in 2004 to 15 in 2009 and all students are achieving at higher levels than the 2004 baseline.

There have been profound changes in Hamilton County middle schools. Work toward redesigning these schools is substantive, data-driven and on-going. Networks have been formed to work collaboratively and share best practices. Teachers have gained an arsenal of new instructional strategies and use them in classrooms every day and in all content areas. Students are better readers and writers and are entering high school ready to learn.