

Data can show if all of the efforts pay off in student learning

Last year, professional development at Mason Middle School* included an eclectic array of programs. This year, the school improvement team recommends that professional development focus exclusively on higher-order thinking skills. Some teachers wonder how that focus was identified.

“We looked at data about student performance on state, district, and schoolwide common assessments and analyzed teachers’ assignments,” explains Cherylynn Sanchez, the school’s staff developer, “and discovered that students are rarely using higher-order thinking skills. The questions they are missing on some of the assessments involve analytic and interpretive thinking.”

To address this problem, the school improvement team recommends that teachers adapt their assignments to include higher-order thinking, teach students how to think analytically and creatively, and assess students’ thinking skills. The professional development plan addresses these three areas.

For staff development to improve student learning, staff development leaders want the content and process of adult learning to align with the identified learning needs of students. Using a variety of data sources, both formal, such as state tests, and informal, such as classroom assessments, ensures that decisions related to data are more thorough and accurate than they would be if a single source of data were used.

After the focus for staff development is identified and a plan of action developed, data help the school improvement team, principal, and teaching teams know if their plan to incorporate

more direct teaching and assessment of thinking skills in the classroom is occurring. Analyzing a variety of data throughout the school year will help teachers know the results of their work and will help them make better decisions about the impact of their work on students’ performance on a variety of assessments.

Three times during the year — in October, January, and April — Sanchez asks teachers to bring one assignment and five student responses to the assignment to a faculty meeting. She organizes teachers into interdisciplinary, vertical teams. Each teacher presents his or her assign-

ment. Team members discuss the level of cognition the assignment requires. Next, each takes a sample of student work and determines if the work demonstrates the level of cognition expected and identifies their evidence. The discussion on each teacher’s assignment and student work takes about 10 minutes. Near the end of the hour-long faculty meeting, teams complete an anonymous summary sheet that identifies the levels of thinking their five assignments required and the number of students who demonstrated the appropriate level of thinking.

Sanchez collects the anonymous summary sheets and uses them to determine if the assignments require a range of higher-order thinking skills and if students are successful in applying them. She uses these ongoing data to help her plan for the ongoing year-long professional development on higher-order thinking skills and to provide the school improvement team with evidence of progress toward the schoolwide goal. ♦

** Fictitious person and school*

DATA-DRIVEN

Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement.



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For more information about the NSDC Standards for Staff Development, see www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm