



Taffeta Young was named assistant principal at Oakcliff Traditional Theme School in Doraville, Ga., in 2009-10 after serving for nine years as a coach for DeKalb County Schools. You can contact her at Taffeta_y_young@fc.dkalb.k12.ga.us.

Navigating cultures is a key skill

Q How did you work effectively with multiple schools?

I worked with four schools at one time. Every school has a different culture. You have to have people skills working with so many personalities. You need to know how to present yourself, how to have respectful conversations. You have to be respectfully pushy.

It all comes back to the administrator. Sometimes if you have an administrator for whom instruction is not a strong point, you can take the lead if you go over the data and analyze it together, then figure out the professional learning that's needed. You have to get your foot in the door. I get materials together and do my research. We used varied assessments. We looked at district-level data and local assessments. We analyzed data and planned professional learning with individual grade levels.

We did focus walks where we gathered a team of individuals, not classroom teachers, but specialists, counselors, assistant principals. We would look

for what we wanted to see and hear, what evidence in student work we wanted to see to show students were moving in the right direction. I had conferences one-on-one with teachers, modeled for them, observed in their classrooms.

Through all of that, I kept a coaching log documenting who I saw, the days I saw that teacher, the professional learning focus or grade-level meeting notes if I assisted with individual professional learning. It was very important to document what we had done and the next step.

In some cultures I could take the lead with no problem. Other administrators felt they needed more control. I always said, 'At the end of the day, the test scores are going to come back to your school. You've got to be responsible.' Once you give them the information, they can take it or leave it. I tell them I'm not there to take over their job; I'm there to support them. I try not to grandstand.

Cultures differ. Teachers sometimes can get caught between. So I always tell the teacher, "At the end of the day, she's your principal, so take her lead." ♦

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