

## **Braintree: Promising Practices and Implementation Tools**

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- 3. Lever Addressed:** School Culture
- 4. Title of Promising Practice:** Building A Strong Professional School Culture
- 5. District(s) Where Implemented:** Braintree Public Schools
- 6. Applicable Grade Levels:** All PreK-12
- 7. How This Practice Reflects District's Mission & Core Values:**  
This practice and the district's mission and core values are really one in the same, in that the overall " mission of the district, in partnership with parents and the community, is to prepare all students to become responsible and contributing members of a diverse and global society." In addition, the district's articulated beliefs lay the foundation for a strong professional culture. (See BPS's Strategic Plan for detailed mission and beliefs.)
- 8. Goals of This Practice:**
  - 1.) Create a professional culture that is focused on excellence of instruction and student achievement.
  - 2.) Create an inclusive process in which all stakeholders are involved in creating and implementing the district's 5-year strategic plan.
- 9. Description of This Practice and How it Addresses Criteria for This Lever:**  
The current Superintendent of Schools, whose tenure spans 22 years as the head of Braintree Public Schools, has spearheaded four 5-year strategic plans for the district. (The 2010-2015 Strategic Plan entitled Braintree's Exceptional

Schools of Tomorrow / B.E.S.T. is included as an implementation tool.) The hallmark of creating each of these plans has been the inclusiveness of the process, highlighted as follows:

- A core group of 75 people were invited to participate, which included teacher reps, students reps, parent reps, administrators, School Advisory Council members, SEPAC members, curriculum leaders, School Committee and community reps. This initiative was purposefully led by the Superintendent vs. an outside consultant to model the culture of shared leadership and trust.
- The initial group began by developing the district's mission and core beliefs, which laid the foundation for professional culture, and from which all goals and decisions made within the district have, and continue to, evolve. The group committed to working evenings to create and complete each five-year plan, and this overall process has insured that all stakeholders in Braintree's learning community are viewed as valued resources who have an important voice to lend to this significant district initiative.
- As part of the strategic plan, the district creates its annual goals that guide curriculum leaders and creates a blueprint for individual schools to incorporate these goals into their School Improvement Plans. These system – wide goals and action plans are reviewed semi annually; mid- year to determine progress and at the end of the year to evaluate overall progress. During each of these check points, those responsible for action steps report out to assess what aspects of each goal have been met and which ones may need to be carried over to the following year, making this a living document that insures continuity in the development of the following year's goals. In between these reviews, principals are working with staff and curriculum leaders within each content area, which allows all involved to "live a professional culture."
- From the development of an overarching mission, beliefs and goals, the district has created and maintained the organizational structures necessary for effective implementation, collaboration, communication and accountability. Structures such as monthly meetings with K–12 Principals, Curriculum Directors, the Professional Development Council, grade level and department meetings, central office/teacher union leadership meetings, school advisory councils and student councils, who all work together toward common goals.

- The collaborative processes that result from these structures are recognized as vital to the sustainability of a strong school culture. To this end, the district has utilized three important vehicles that are continually evolving and improving over time:

Adoption of a Professional Learning Community model that began about six years ago with principals and teachers attending a two day training. The formalization of Braintree's PLC, helped to further the work that had begun on student achievement and structure it around the guiding questions and practices that identify a true professional learning community: 1.) What do we want students to learn? 2.) How do we know they've learned it? 3.) What do we do if they haven't? 4.) What do we do if they've already learned it? Much work has been done on aligning and developing curriculum and creating formative assessments, that allow teachers to regularly determine who is with them and who is not, and how best to respond to the needs of both struggling and advanced learners.

Creation of Data Teams at both the district and individual school levels. The district first needed a plan and a system to determine what data was needed, how it would be disseminated, who would take the lead, what data would be useful, how would it be used, and what the expectations would be at each school level. At the same time the district changed the student information system to Aspen 2, and a steering committee was formed to thoughtfully and strategically plan what would be stored in the new system, who would have access, and how the data would be shared. As a result a check list was created listing all available data, what principals needed, what the teachers needed by grade level and department, and who was responsible for getting the data to them.

Analysis of student data started with MCAS results, and through the work of the K-12 Curriculum Directors, principals, and teachers who collectively offered a broad range of thought, additional data was gradually added to the mix. To ensure consistency and clarity around MCAS analysis, the technology department also created a template to guide teachers in their analysis of both student and content related results.

The logical outgrowth of looking at MCAS results was the establishments of building based data teams where teachers, specialists and principals are

now looking at multiple measures of student progress. Data teams rely on the PLC guiding questions to frame their work, and identify how to best provide needed support and challenge by utilizing systems in place such as RTI and flexible groupings. Assessment that drives instruction is what moves the discussions forward with real data rather than being side tracked to other topics, related or not.

Lastly, the delivery of Professional Development opportunities that are designed to address aspects of the district's ongoing PLC work. To accomplish this, the Professional Development Council made up of peers representing each level, was formed to plan workshops guided by the results of a teacher survey, conducted each year. For example, the "how to's" or structure and use of protocols for effective and efficient data teams was first identified and addressed as a need for further professional development.

As detailed below, this promising practice exemplifies many of the criteria necessary **for professional culture** as they relate to levers for positive change:

The superintendent at the district level and the principal at the school level ensure there is an articulated set of core values that drive behavior and decisions as well as an organizational culture that supports open and honest communication, continuous professional improvement, data-based decision-making, and joint responsibility for student learning and achievement.

District and schools actively involve teachers, families, and other stakeholders (as appropriate) in decision-making.

Teachers regularly engage in instructional conversations, peer observations, collaborative planning, and ongoing collegial support.

District and schools are characterized by a climate of shared responsibility for continuous improvement.

Data are continuously examined and analyzed to guide instructional decision-making.

District and school culture is characterized by trust and willingness to discuss "undiscussable" issues.

Superintendents and principals receive professional development to enhance their capacity.

## **10. How This Practice Was Implemented So It Was More Successful Than**

**Others:**

A number of factors can be identified as contributing to the success of this practice:

The inclusiveness of the process of developing a district strategic plan, which involved all key members of the school community. Over time, this collaborative process and acknowledgement of the value of each person's contribution, has led to respect and embedded trust.

While there have been past task forces before naming them data teams and collaborative efforts before calling them PLC's, adopting a Professional Learning Community model around the district mission, beliefs and goals has made this a more focused, intense and student centered process.

There has also been a shift from talking about great lesson plans to how students are actually doing, i.e. a shift in teacher centered learning to student centered learning. The emphasis on student data at the state and national level has also contributed to this difference.

More opportunity for collegial conversations that bring out the best in all involved, which transfers to teacher growth, and to teachers helping students find their passions.

The history of pride in the Braintree schools, seen as the crown jewel of the community perpetuated by a PLC focus; the shared responsibility and "can do" attitude of staff and their willingness to roll up sleeves to get things done with student achievement as the focus.

**11. How This Practice Changed The District or School:**

Along with the shift to student centered learning, the culture around data has also shifted dramatically, changing the overall attitude from defensiveness to embracing the power of data, and in some instances, even asking for more. While there is still work to be done, there is more evidence of teachers working in high performing teams to identify what instruction needs improvement, as well as learning from each other and sharing instructional strategies that have been more successful in improving student achievement.

**Other changes that have resulted from building a professional culture in the district:**

Building a professional culture served to support the new evaluation system and enhanced time in substantive discussions around student achievement professional goal setting and professional development efforts.

Expanded opportunities for staff collaboration.

Evidence of student improvement based on data.

Professional Development that is primarily driven by a yearly teacher survey.

**12. Resources (time, money, materials etc.) Required For Successful Implementation:**

- RTTT funding to align curriculum to frameworks and materials.
- Released time for collaboration: and funding for substitute teachers.
- Four early release days per year with PD focus.
- Funding and support to attend PLC training and conferences.
- Purchased Aspen X2 to store and retrieve student data in a timely way.

**13. Tools You Used To Implement or Advance This Practice (surveys, needs assessments, technology tools, rubrics, feedback forms etc.)**

See separate attachments:

- 1.) Strategic Plan 2010–2015 (Braintree's Exceptional Schools of Tomorrow / B.E.S.T.)
- 2.) <http://www.braintreeschools.org/mission/index.htm>
- 3.) Data Team Template and Vision
- 4.) MCAS Check List
- 5.) Professional Development Survey