

Promising Practices and Implementation Tools

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Lever Addressed and Title of Promising Practice: Organization Structure and Culture

Title of Promising Practice: Organizational Structure and Culture

District(s) Where Implemented: Barnstable Public Schools

Applicable Grade Levels: K-12

How This Practice Reflects District's Mission & Core Values:

Barnstable Public Schools has a set of three core values that, in the words of Superintendent Mary Czajkowski, drive the work in the district.

These values are: (1) All children have the right to every opportunity to achieve their own potential (2) Each person deserves to be treated with dignity and respect (3) Integrity and personal responsibility are the hallmarks of daily interactions. These core values are read out loud at every School Committee meeting and are pervasive throughout the district- on the district website, posted in all the schools, and embedded in each building's School Improvement Plan.

The Superintendent is in her third year in the district and over this time has worked to put in place new organizational structures against the backdrop of the district's core values where the focus is creating learning environments that maximize opportunities for all students to learn. Synchronous with the district's core values is a belief in open and collaborative communication. Hence the vision for the organization's work around culture-building through leadership, using a model of distributive leadership.

Goals of This Practice:

Early in the Superintendent's tenure, a decision was made to enroll district leaders and teachers in a formal leadership training program. NISL, the National Institute for School Leadership, was engaged to do the work. Training teams of administrators and teachers together is a first for the district. The curriculum included 14-18 modules. Examples of modules are: Ethical Leadership, Literacy,

Science and Math. ((See full description of the program)).

The vision and the goal of this endeavor is to promote and implement a model of distributive leadership and shared decision-making among teachers and leaders wherever possible and pertinent.

Description of This Practice:

The first time the Superintendent extended the offer to administrators and teachers to participate in NISL, approximately 80% of the leadership team at the time volunteered to sign up. Relatively few teachers showed interest in this first round. However, the Superintendent subsequently heard there was interest among teachers, based on word-of-mouth, about the experience of the first cohort, and put out an invitation to all teachers to join a second cohort. Twenty-five teachers signed up. Several were aspiring leaders and others were teachers with an interest in looking more closely at their own classrooms, and also beyond - but not in an administration role.

The School Committee paid \$4,000 per enrollee (total of \$250, 000) to support the training program - a symbolic and tangible investment in this work.

Ultimately, two cohorts, composed of administrators, curriculum coordinators and teachers participated in consecutive 18-month long Professional Development Leadership Institutes through NISL. A total of 48 people have been trained over a three-year period and while the leadership team debated enrolling a third cohort, a decision was made to focus on the two groups that had already been trained, and go deeper with the work, rather than continue to train more leaders. It is important to note that a large percentage of the participants were aspiring teacher leaders and the Superintendent saw in this an opportunity to develop internal capacity in the district. This recognition has been important in terms of leadership demonstrating confidence in its own faculty, and for the sustainability of leaders.

The two cohorts were brought together to share and discuss their learning with each other, and also did a presentation to the School Committee with the following goals:

- Share the benefits of the leadership training experience and the action projects participants had done
- Examine the work started in individual buildings in order to determine next steps

Nine new administrators are coming into the district, drawn from both internal and external sources. Some who were NISL-trained will function as teacher leaders while others have been placed in administrative leadership positions. One of the many benefits of the NISL Program was that it inspired and built knowledge and confidence in teachers who are now opting to rise through the ranks to higher positions.

Secondly, having teachers and their principals training together at the same

time through the same program proved to be inspiring and instructive for both in terms of their future work together. Learning together over a sustained period increased their understanding and appreciation of each other's roles. Teachers and administrators had the opportunity to discuss what was common and what was different about their respective areas of responsibility and perspectives on their shared work which they reported will greatly enhance their collaborative efforts going forward.

The Superintendent is in the process of developing Leadership Councils at each school site comprised of administrators and teachers who have participated in the NISL training leadership program. There are no assistant principals at the elementary levels.

The CIA team members are administrative leaders and teachers. These Curriculum Instruction and Assessment teams are comprised of literacy and math coaches, data analysis specialist, principals and teachers. Roles and responsibilities of these teams include looking at student data, focusing on professional growth and professional development priorities and needs, and collaborating in decision-making for both their own schools and more broadly, across the district, when indicated.

The CIA teams look at instruction in their buildings, and at rigor and coherence in units and unit lessons developed in all curriculum areas. The overriding focus is student achievement in general, and specifically the high needs student population groups. The teams meet by grade level and collaborate across their roles to cross-pollinate ideas and help each other in terms of the different challenges and issues in the different schools. Grade level teams meet for professional development on a regular basis and the focus of their work is both school and district.

Criteria for This Particular Lever Most Exemplified In This Practice:

District and schools actively involve teachers, families, and other stakeholders (as appropriate) in decision-making.
Teachers regularly engage in instructional conversations, 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 are evaluated on their ability to build a workplace culture of non-defensive examination of teaching practice and leadership practice in relation to student results.
Superintendents and principals receive professional development to enhance this capacity.

How This Practice Was Implemented So It Was More Successful Than Others

Used:

The work being done is in its nascent phases. The impact and effectiveness of the work is yet to be determined and will be closely monitored, evaluated and reported.

How This Practice Changed The District or School:

The philosophical underpinnings/vision of this new endeavor speak to the promise of how the district will be impacted by the work of the new leadership teams. Vision and related goals include: (1) more sharing of responsibility (2) higher levels of accountability within and across buildings (3) more collaborative decision-making among administrators and teachers.

Because this work is in its early phases, there are obviously no reports as yet on outcomes and benefits. However, the focus and content of meetings held so far, including the leadership teams and the workshop with the Barnstable School Committee, indicate there are already outcomes in terms of new organizational structures, culture-building and planning.

Our work in education today is increasingly complex. It cannot be accomplished by one-person-in-charge, nor should the multiple stakeholders involved work in isolation. Promoting open communication and shared responsibility and decision-making wherever possible and pertinent is now a priority. Creating teams and support structures, and allocating time and money to do this work affirms the commitment of the district's administration to a model of distributive leadership.

Stakeholders who now share a common vision, language and understanding are being convened. Furthermore, building and strengthening leadership among those already in the district will increase the district's capacity to address and achieve its goals. Focusing internally also has the benefit of increasing stability and sustainability in the ranks of leadership.

Student achievement is the shared responsibility of all. In the more traditional model that preceded the current work, all personnel involved had this focus but worked more in isolation from each other. The vision now is of a professional culture that fosters communication and collaboration because student achievement is a shared responsibility not only in name, but in every structure and practice possible.

The work is currently being planned and will be closely monitored to track impact and effectiveness.

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

Training two cohorts: \$250,000

Budget for substitute teachers during NISL training

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

NISL Training Curriculum – Overview

BPS School Committee Workshop/NISL Workshop

Planning – Agenda

Planning – Report

Planning – Implementation Suggestions