

Engagement for Success:

Clay County School Leaders Use Data to Drive Results

Overview

Innovation at a Glance

During the 2006-07 school year, Superintendent Dr. Grady Miles led the Clay County district Better-Seeking Team through The Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement's Base Camp and Leadership Summit (BCLS). The lessons learned through the professional development have been enthusiastically transferred to the district and cascaded to school, grade, and department teams. This applied knowledge has formed a foundation for the development of a data-focused, results-oriented culture committed to team-based leadership and high performance for all learners and leaders. To assure continuation of the team and a data-based approach to leadership and improvement, Mrs. Johnnie Grimsley, former Title 1 Director and current Clay County School Superintendent, successfully led a second team through the BCLS process and district transfer.

According to Clay County Middle School Principal Terri Marcus, who also serves as the district's GLISI Improvement Implementation Coordinator, the most significant lesson learned and transferred from the GLISI Base Camp and Leadership Summit experience was the development of data-focused teams throughout the school system. The system, school, grade, and department data-focused teams collaborate regularly to analyze summative and formative student achievement data, identify students by level of achievement risk, set long- and short-term achievement targets, develop and analyze the results of common classroom assessments, and plan acceleration procedures for students not meeting expectations.

Impact at a Glance

Clay County had been one of the lowest-performing school systems in the Chattahoochee-Flint Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) area. But, since the implementation of the data-focused strategies they learned at GLISI's Base Camp and Leadership Summit, student achievement has improved significantly. The elementary school was a 2008 winner of State Superintendent Cox's Distinguished Achievement Award for Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) Improvement in fourth-grade reading and social studies scores. The school also showed the greatest improvement statewide, with a 32.1 percent increase in students meeting or exceeding the standard. In 2009 the school was recognized again as a Distinguished School for improvement in fifth-grade reading and science and eighth-grade writing. The elementary school has also been named as a Title 1 Distinguished School for making AYP for 2007, 2008, and 2009. Additional impact indicators include improvements in

the consistency and relevancy of instructional delivery, an increase in parent and community involvement, increased mastery of the curriculum, and improvement in the percentage of students successfully progressing from one grade to the next.

The Impact Story

Background/Context

Clay County is a small, rural county in southwest Georgia, with a population of 3,357 and a per capita income of \$25,539. Even though 64.3 percent of county citizens are high school graduates, only 4.5 percent of the county population has earned a bachelor's degree. The elementary and middle school serves 320 students. More than 95 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, and are classified as Economically Disadvantaged. Clay County students in grades 9-12 attend the shared services at Randolph-Clay High School located in Randolph County, Georgia.

Dr. Miles was appointed as the Superintendent of Clay County Schools in 2005; previously the position had been a "revolving door." As a result, even though the school and district employed many excellent leaders and teachers, alignment across the faculty and staff was low. Dr. Miles' vision, paired with support from key administrative and teacher leaders along with the lessons transferred from GLISI's Base Camp and Leadership Summit, helped create a shared vision, common focus, and team-based improvements throughout the system. The significance of these improvements for this high poverty rural system was readily understood, supported and sustained through the leadership of current Superintendent Johnnie Grimsley and Curriculum Director and IIC Terri Marcus.

What Was Done?

The data-focused lessons learned through GLISI's Team-based Improvement in Base Camp and Leadership Summit were transferred to practice in a continuous cycle of steps. A first step was the creation of a sense of urgency. Terri Marcus credits the use of data for creating a sense of urgency that led stakeholders to a consensus around the need for and support of change.

To create this consensus, Better-Seeking Team members led grade level and department teams through the processes of data disaggregation and longitudinal analysis. This data-focused process led to a shared understanding of what was working, what needed improvement, and then the establishment of and commitment to student achievement targets. The results of the analysis of student performance and related data were charted and posted in hallways as a reminder of where the students and school had started, the current status, and progress needed.

A second step was the development of school, grade, and class targets. The school targets identified provided a clear direction for both the elementary and middle school efforts. The grade and department targets were set to heighten the need and urgency for effective teaming. Class targets identified students by level of academic risk, including those who needed additional time and support from the beginning of the school year, those who should meet the CRCT expectation but needed on-going monitoring, and those who should be expected or pushed to exceed the CRCT standard for performance. Grade and department teacher teams have monitored the progress of students within each of the risk categories.

After identifying students by level of risk, teacher teams turned their attention to developing common formative assessments to be administered every two weeks. The results of the common assessments were analyzed by the grade or department teams. At the collaborative team meetings, the percentages of students passing and failing in each class were calculated and placed on charts to be posted outside of each teacher's classroom. More importantly, teacher teams shared successes and collaboratively planned strategies to accelerate mastery for those that did not meet expected performance. This step of collaborative formative assessment analysis and planning has led to increased teaming and support and is a major factor contributing to the positive results in student achievement and a system-wide collaborative culture.

What were the Results?

The Clay County Schools staff achieved several outcomes that positively impacted student achievement. Clay County Schools had been one of the lowest-performing school systems in the Chattahoochee-Flint (C-F) RESA region. Student Criterion-referenced Competency Test (CRCT) achievement results in English/Language Arts, Reading, and Math in fourth, sixth, and eighth grades were within the lowest quartile of systems within the area. However, the system has now made AYP for three consecutive years and is an achievement leader within the C-F RESA area. While past results were rather dismal, system 2009 results on the CRCT by subgroup for this K-8 system and school reveal:

- Seventy-six percent of all black and economically disadvantaged students met or exceeded the CRCT math expectation.
- Eighty-seven percent of the students met or exceeded CRCT ELA standards.
- Based on the 2009 CRCT results, Clay County was one of three systems in the Chattahoochee-Flint RESA area making AYP and one of a significantly small pool of systems across Georgia that had made AYP.

Data illustrating the increase in students meeting GaDOE CRCT grade expectations substantiate improvement in student progression from one grade to the next. The charts below demonstrate the growth made in grades 1-8.

ELA

Grade	2006	2009	Percentage Point Change
1	83	91.9	8.9
2	62	89.7	27.7
3	75	93.3	18.3
4	32	85	53
5	65	84	19
6	67	84	17
7	74	88.5	14.5
8	83	86.2	3.2

Reading

Grade	2006	2009	Percentage Point Change
1	93	94.5	1.5
2	67	86.2	19.2
3	72	88.9	16.9
4	46	80	34
5	53	84	31
6	72	68	-4
7	64	80.8	16.8
8	90	79.3	-11.3

Math

Grade	2006	2009	Percentage Point Change
1	90	97.3	7.3
2	57	79.3	24.3
3	75	69.9	-4.1
4	33	72.5	39.5
5	75	88	13
6	31	56	25
7	50	76	26
8	55	69	14

What was the Impact?

The Better-Seeking Team members became data-focused leaders and models for grade and department teams. As a result of these teams meeting regularly throughout the school, the quantity and quality of teacher collaboration improved. Weekly meetings now focus on student achievement, school processes, or implementation data. Teacher teams analyze student work to guide instruction, to recognize and celebrate achievement, and to plan acceleration strategies for students not meeting expectations. Data, goals, recognitions, and collaborative conversations provide evidence of a system and school culture focused on data and improvements in student achievement.

Additional organizational goals reported by Curriculum Director and IIC Terri Marcus include improved consistency and relevancy of instructional delivery, improvement in mastery of grade-level curriculum, and an increase in parent and community member involvement in school conferences, PTO, and school activities.

Next Steps

While the team-based and data-focused process has led to significant improvements in academic achievement and an increased sense of collaborative culture, system and school leaders are still continuing the work in two important areas. The first goal is a deepening of the collective understanding of the Georgia Performance Standards through detailed analysis of the short-term common assessments to assure alignment and rigor. The second goal area is increasing the level of detail shared with administrative leaders regarding student achievement progress and instructional strategies utilized within classrooms. The increased detail shared about teaching and impact on learning is providing the additional information needed for administrative leaders to monitor classrooms and provide feedback in order to guide continuous improvements.