

Guided Reading
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ABSTRACT

Pretty good is actually not so great – But where do we go from here?

Three different principals from three different schools with different backgrounds come together and discover one problem: progress is just not enough. Together we worked to improve strategies encouraging teachers and staff to recognize that pretty good is actually not so great. A common need to develop support tools and school structures, utilizing patience and purpose. Through our different journeys we worked to change instructional literacy practices, impact teacher mindset about strategic approaches to literacy instruction, provide feedback and build a culture of trust.

I approached PS/MS 123's formal implementation of Guided Reading as a strategy to address student need in reading. I set out both short-term and long-term goals with corresponding actions. The long-term goal was to empower all staff members to become experts in the teaching of reading using all the resources we have at hand to improve student achievement. To achieve this goal, it was necessary to take small steps, ensuring successes along our journey, so that we feel good about our results. Thus, short-term we developed and presented learning sessions during our prescribed professional learning sessions on Monday afternoons, along with tools for support. We introduced staff to our goal, provided resources, and set up classroom schedules when guided reading should become part of the regular literacy block. We assigned designated staff members to support teachers in this process, and during on-going meetings with my coaches reviewed our progress of students and teacher practice using observations and student data for documentation.

INTRODUCTION

PS/MS 123 is an inner city elementary/middle school of approximately 500 students, with close to a 50 percent mobility rate, meaning that in any given year perhaps 50 percent of our students who start the school year with us do not end with us. Additionally, many students enter our school during the year not having the advantage of a history with us, nor being part of our instructional program. Further, the demographics of our school include a student population of 21 percent English Language Learners, 28 percent Students with Disabilities and 96 percent Economically Disadvantaged. In addition, our population includes 52 percent African American, 40 percent Hispanic, 5 percent White, 2 percent American Indian/Alaskan Native and 1 percent Asian.

As a Renewal School, we are saturated with data telling us that our students across grades have a common need in vocabulary development, decoding skills, and text analysis. Although over the past few years we made steady gains, across grades kindergarten through grade eight many of our students still struggle to meet grade level standards in literacy. Therefore, we need to be better at empowering our teachers in understanding student needs in order to develop a

reading culture that supports our students through strategic approaches in their skill development, both as readers and thinkers beyond the literal level. It was important to us to begin our project in the early grades to build a strong foundation and address the literacy acquisition skills of early learners.

This project was developed with our mission of engaging students, families and community members in multi-faceted academic and social/emotional learning opportunities. It is the forefront of our work to bring our schools vision of “empowering lifelong learners and leaders” to fruition.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Across our third through eighth grade, the data trends show students are making gains in the area of word meaning, locating facts and citing evidence in writing. Where they continue to struggle is in analyzing events and text structure, especially in non-fiction text. The data also indicates that, comprehension, particularly in the synthesis of text, is indeed a need. In correlation with this data when we look at our Fountas and Pinnell data we find that 40 to 50 percent of our students still struggle to reach grade level benchmarks. Students working independently is still a challenge, thus identifying the need to focus on developing literacy skills and helping students gain independence.

After digging into the data of grades three to eight we decided to take a closer look at the early elementary student reading levels. We identified that approximately, at the end of the 2018 school year, only 38 percent of students in kindergarten were reading on or above grade level expectations, 29 percent of students in grade one were reading on or above grade level expectations, and 43 percent of students in second grade were reading on or above grade level expectations; which complicates grade-level reading instruction to support students meeting reading benchmarks as they progress through the grades.

METHODS

After reviewing all of our data for school year 2017-2018, the administrators and key stakeholders engaged in meaningful conversation about what approaches were needed to raise the literacy level of our students. We completed an item-skill analysis from key data sources, (State assessments, i-Ready, and Fountas and Pinnell Reading levels), and looked at teacher observation reports. We noted the complexity and demands of the curriculum and that the targeted skills were not being achieved; therefore, we had to revisit the focus of adjusting our culture of reading, needing to create an effective system for exposing students to the missing prerequisite skills for becoming successful readers. The leadership team surveyed teachers and noted that although students have been making growth and achieving gains in literacy, our teachers and students needed a more formal targeted protocol to follow during the daily reading lessons in order to meet students where they are and engage students in higher-order questioning, allowing students to share thinking and take ownership of their education.

We embarked on a mission of developing structures and supports to establish more cohesiveness around implementing guided reading as a formal component of our literacy block. During collaborative grade team meetings co-facilitated by our coaches, staff members brainstormed what would be most useful for them to begin guided reading in the classroom.

It was determined that although we had access to closets with an abundance of books, they were not organized for easy access, appropriate level and or skill. Therefore, over the summer of 2018 the leadership team and teachers took ownership to be part of establishing formalized Guided Reading Resource Rooms. This allowed teachers to have the needed resources to

implement the program. Additional books, fiction, non-fiction, chapter books, were purchased and added so that we could provide suitable materials that are of high interest and decodable vocabulary so all of our students could access a text.

Administration and coaches attended professional learning experiences and collaborated with consultants to establish supportive and routine structures for implementing guided reading within the classroom; adapted for the needs of our students. Although, guided reading is not a formal curriculum we supported teachers by creating a framework that supports and would allow teachers to create effective and targeted plans that speak to the needs of our students. Together, a school-generated comprehensive manual aligned to Fountas and Pinnell and the Uncommon Program was created. This document incorporated major characteristics of each level text, reading concepts and behaviors and suggested teacher/student prompts that would support the guided reading process. The document was created and shared digitally, and it continues to grow and change with teacher input.

Professional development was planned and implemented to establish a common lens and language around guided reading. Time during professional development allowed for a designated period to dive into data, allow teachers to ask questions about implementation and then for us adjust our practice as needed. A key concept of one of our professional development sessions was to model for teachers the element of productive struggle. Teachers learned to anticipate student challenges and how to monitor and adjust in the moment so that rather than rescuing student learning through questioning and discussion we were to allow them to self-regulate their learning. These professional developments were key as they aligned with our school mission and vision.

Subsequently, all teachers, kindergarten to grade four, were directed to begin guided reading in their classroom on a regularly scheduled basis, three times a week. Teachers committed to meet routinely with a targeted group of students who were reading below grade level as per Fountas and Pinnell data. Embedded in the project was a grade two initiative whereby groups of students on various levels were to receive guided reading instruction. To monitor student performance and progress, Fountas and Pinnell was administered in six-week increments. Also, i-Ready growth from the beginning of year to mid-year diagnostic would be examined in the areas of phonics and comprehension of literature.

As we progressed through the initiative, teachers used grade team meetings to share the strengths of the guided reading framework and the tools created, as well as to address areas of both student and teacher needs and make revisions. Along the way, teachers adjusted the lesson plan format, increased or decreased time met with students, incorporated additional visual tools for students and remained committed to meeting with students. An outside literacy consultant was brought in to support the process. The literacy consultant was provided with a formal schedule and conducted classroom visits and debriefed with both the teachers and the school-based coaches. Through this process, we were able to determine that almost all of the teachers on grades kindergarten to four struggled to select appropriate texts to address teaching a targeted skill. With this information, we engaged in book studies at the levels in

which teachers were engaging their students. We surveyed teachers and found that outside of implementing supportive structures and frameworks, the book study was most impactful. Teachers found that, “One book can teach many skills, but not all books teach all the skills”. Through this process, teachers are developing skills for teaching reading by selecting appropriate texts. Another discovery included the need for an enhanced “balanced literacy” approach across kindergarten through grade four.

We are now in the process of collecting data from the next round of Fountas and Pinnell to track student growth and progress. Additionally, we will begin working with teachers across grade bands to help them better understand the components of balanced literacy, create schoolwide structures and routines while continuing to strengthen best practices for literacy development to build student success.

As we continue, administration and coaches are involved in a book study of *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*, by Ron Heifetz, Alexander Grashow and Marty Linsky. Through this process we engaged in ongoing conversations and enriched our leadership skills.

RESULTS

As with any change one has to recognize that change takes a minimum of three to five years to take hold. However, given the urgency of helping our students become lifelong learners and readers and mastering the standards, the timeframe is far too long. Therefore, inherent in our project is the ongoing monitoring of implementation and professional learning time around guided reading so that all staff has a level of comfort with the strategic instructional practice. To date we have provided a minimum of eight sixty-minute professional learning sessions; along with data dives and grade team meetings referenced earlier.

My assistant principals and I do daily walkthroughs of our classrooms and have made it very clear to our staff that guided reading is a fundamental part of their literacy block; it is a daily look-for as we visit classes. We carefully note where and when it is occurring and where there is further evidence that a teacher is in need of one-on-one support. At this time, approximately 75 percent of teachers, (K-4), are consistently meeting with a targeted group of students. In addition, approximately 50 percent of the teachers, representative of at least one on each grade, kindergarten through grade 4 are now integrating more students into guided reading groups and expanding the time spent on this initiative.

Data conferences held on a regularly scheduled basis, allow for ongoing analysis of data from on-line and in-class assessments so that we can strategically monitor student performance and progress. Results thus far show that for during the first six weeks 50 percent of our kindergarten students who were part of the targeted group increased one or more reading levels, 100 percent of first grade students increased one or more levels, 86 percent of second grade students increased one or more levels, 75 percent of third grade students increased one or more levels and 82 percent of fourth grade students increased one or more levels.

Our grade-level teacher teams meet weekly and either an administrator or a coach participates and facilitates discussion around the implementation of guided reading. This collaborative venue allows our teachers to self-monitor their progress and to share noticings and wonderings. They use this time to review resources and share what works and what challenges they face. Minutes from these meetings concretize their work and serve as a guide to needed next steps. As result of this collaboration, Students are getting targeted instruction needed to attain mastery of the standards and become independent readers. Overall, a majority of teachers have improved in designing coherent reading instruction and engaging students in differentiated guided reading activities.

Weekly coach meetings provide the opportunity to gain a holistic view of how the program is moving forward across the grades and content areas. This is also a valuable time for us to plan our next steps to ensure fidelity of the process and implementation of the program and it is an opportunity for the coaches to share out the success of their classroom inter-visitations.

Guided reading is now an embedded practice towards achieving our mission and vision of creating and empowering lifelong learners and leaders.

REFLECTIONS

The Cahn Fellow program provided me with the opportunity to further develop my skills as a leader and set up an opportunity to take a clear look at my school and identify what was missing to support student success.

A true AHA! moment was when I saw guided reading "happening" across the classes and grades on a regular basis. Taking the time to self-reflect how we achieved this I understood the need for me to use many of the principles in the *Adaptive Leadership* book around distributive leadership; releasing control and trusting my ally to carry out the work without my direct oversight on a daily basis. In other words, knowing what was happening but "from the balcony." I recognized that embracing my administrative team and coaches put us in a powerful position of having multiple hands and talented staff to roll-out this project, including how to recognize, address, prioritize and address the challenges that come along with implementing a new initiative. The level of ownership, from organization of Guided Reading Resource Rooms, to developing a school-specific manual, we have all been in this together from the onset and the improvement of some students of three reading levels speaks to the fidelity with which the program was implemented and managed.

Currently, as we collect the data for those students receiving direct instruction under this initiative I am pleased with their performance and progress, and I am truly impressed with the ownership that my staff has taken to ensure the success of this program, overcoming many challenges and obstacles along with way. I am particularly proud of the work of my "ALLY." She

has been a true inspiration from the very beginning of this initiative, taking on tasks on her own as well as those assigned, and following through to inception. She accepted and met every challenge. She has developed a leadership style of collaboration, embracing her colleagues and developed a true understanding of how to meet people where they are, and then provide the support in a non-threatening manner so that they want to be part of the successes. She gave me the courage to build a more distributive leadership style, understanding that our teamwork was going to be a basis for effective implementation. Her talents in instruction, technology, and curriculum have been highlighted and honed during this process, as has her ability to see herself as a capable leader!

We are already planning how to maintain and expand the program for the up-coming school year.

ALLY Reflection

The Cahn Fellows program has had an unbelievable impact on my work this year. First and foremost, it gave me the confidence and the belief in myself that I am a leader; something I did not think of as me. Additionally, it exposed me to the idea that anyone can have the title of leader, but that does not make them a true leader. One of the most important qualities of a leader is the ability to have a vision, the knowledge and the management style to get it done; knowing when and how to build capacity with key stakeholders.

Specifically, a significant take-away for me has been watching my principal “lead” and believing in me. In my role as an IEP teacher I often need to collaborate with teachers, listening to them, identifying their needs and providing appropriate feedback, either via a verbal direct line of communication, or indirectly, through written feedback. Often, I find myself hesitant to say what is needed for “fear” of my colleagues’ reaction. Therefore, learning about and utilizing “The Ways of Knowing”, I developed an inner sense or “self-reflection” about with whom I was going to interact, and what could be his/her possible reactions to my feedback. I now find my feedback and conversation style is more strategic and impactful. While collaborating with another Cahn ally, she gave me a fantastic idea that I plan to incorporate during my next school year. I first want to share the ways of knowing with, at the very minimum, the teachers I work directly with. First, I need to recognize the needs of those I am working with, their strengths and challenges, and involve them in a conversation to support them. Then, I want to develop a template/checklist/rubric with suitable feedback protocols. This will enable me to have open lines of one-on-one communication with my colleagues with whom I am assigned to work with, creating a rapport for success. To be a successful leader one has to have a positive two-way dialogue.

My work this year was also impacted by understanding the importance of framing it around a Theory of Action: *If leaders are able to hear, understand and support teacher needs, the teachers are able to learn and plan intentionally for students, helping students become more successful as readers, and ultimately as lifelong learners and leaders.* The core of our work around Guided Reading has included continuous data analysis, both formal and informal,

summative and formative. The work has also been grounded by using an inquiry approach to understanding the impact of our work. A take-away from this process is that the beauty of true or adaptive change is that it is ever changing and ever growing as a result of our noticings. Consequently, from this work, we have been able uncover larger needs and a plan for the future to improve both teacher practice and student learning within our school. As we progress through our work as a school community, we remain grounded in this theory of action and our school's vision and mission.

The work with Cahn and within my school has sparked a new found passion within me. As my heart lives in the special education world, I now feel a desire to work in more of a leadership capacity, collaborating with teachers for the purpose of strengthening the instructional core to support the growth and successes of all staff members and students. I am anxiously anticipating continuing in my role as an "ally" to the principal and staff always looking for ways in which I can hone my leadership skills and advance my career into a formal leadership position.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Becoming an adaptive leader who values distributive leadership and building trust in those around me.

Particular kudos go out to my CAHN Ally, who has been a partner from the inception of the idea of bringing guided reading into the school as a regular practice and as a guiding force to keep us grounded in this work.

My assistant principal, who supported sharing the responsibilities of implementing and monitoring the work and willingly adapting her leadership alongside the process.

Thanks to all of the other staff members who were part of the process from creating book closets to developing and implementing professional learning sessions.

And.. To classroom teachers who took ownership of this initiative to bring it to life.

APPENDIX

Grade Team Data Dive Agenda
Guided Reading Focus Group Data
Guided Reading Lesson Plan Template
Guided Reading Manual Sample (Overarching Program Outline, Level A Specifics)
Guided Reading Professional Learning Power Point
Guided Reading Sample Lesson Plan
Guided Reading Survey Responses
Guided Reading Teacher Schedules (K-4)