



IT WORKED!

Courageous Conversations and Data Teams

Joe Hinson
Mathematics Specialist
*Frederick County Public Schools,
MD*

Courageous Conversations and Data Teams

The role of a math specialist is an ever-changing and evolving position that requires dedication and commitment to the students, staff, administration, and community. In my three years in this role, I have come to the realization that in order to be an effective instructional leader, it is necessary to be supportive, transparent, and honest with all stakeholders. After meeting with members of our leadership team and being reflective to identify methods that would provide better results utilizing the classroom-focused improvement process, it became apparent that our teachers needed to focus on three main goals: become more intentional with their instruction by describing in greater detail what it will look like, incorporate the use of manipulatives and teaching at a concrete level when introducing new skills, and finally demonstrate ownership of their students' data (whether good or bad). Out of our three main goals, the most difficult to overcome is encouraging teachers to take ownership of their students' data.

In previous years, when teachers did not have successful post-test data, it was too easy for them to blame poor results on student apathy or on the necessity for quicker pacing that did not allow for students to develop deeper understanding of the standards. How would I overcome this challenge? My hope was that it would not continue to be an issue; however, at the end of our first instructional cycle, one of our grade-level teams revealed a similar trend. The results were inconsistent and not approaching our predetermined goal. During the post-test meeting, I shared the importance for us as a team to work together to drastically improve the testing results for our students. I emphasized that we all needed to be reflective on our performance because as a team, we had underperformed and that without working together, our results would not improve. Finally, I revealed that we needed to eliminate our excuses and accept the fact that our intentional classroom instruction should be the deciding factor in helping students overcome their achievement barriers and enable students to better understand the standard by performing better on the post-test assessment.

Beginning with cycle two, after reviewing pretest data, our planning process required teachers to document in great detail what instruction would be and what manipulatives they would use. Teachers were also required to write the types of questions they would ask and develop formative checkpoints that would be used to determine student understanding throughout the instructional cycle. As we had ongoing meetings to discuss student progress, I continued to emphasize that we needed to believe in the ability of our students and own the results when students were ready to take the post-test.

As we sat down to review cycle two results, I was both nervous and excited to see if our hard work had paid dividends. The results proved that our team was moving in the right direction because student performance on the post-test assessment increased by almost 30% from cycle one results. Teachers had clearly been more purposeful with their instruction, were more consistent with their teacher behaviors, had effectively utilized the formative checkpoints, and were taking greater ownership of the performance of their students. This proves that my teachers are beginning to embrace the classroom-focused improvement process as it relates to their instruction. As a math specialist, I look forward to the future and the continued growth my department will experience as we all work together to increase our teaching practices through the use of the data team process, courageous conversations, and more intentional classroom instruction.

Brought to you by the NCSM Coaching Committee (December 2015)

Special thanks to the ems&tl: Elementary Mathematics Specialist & Teacher Leaders Project

