



# IT WORKED!

## *Building Teacher Capacity with a Classroom-Focused Improvement Process*

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### **Building Teacher Capacity with a Classroom-Focused Improvement Process**

I recently made a move to a building involved in the classroom-focused improvement process. One of the expectations shared with me as the math leader was to help my math teachers understand that the process we are using is to improve our instruction, and to replicate the best practices that are happening in our classrooms by collaborating within and across grade-levels about high-yield instructional strategies that produce student success as measured by classroom data.

Stages of this process include: choosing a priority standard and unpacking it to identify the skills that are necessary for student success with a standard; creating a common assessment based on the identified skills in order to collect data, and measure progress toward meeting the standard; collecting pre-assessment data to identify student performance related to the standard; examining root causes for student success or lack of success; and finally, identifying high-yield instructional strategies to improve classroom instruction, ultimately to impact student success.

This year, I have found that the conversations about instructional practice have been some of the most challenging and most valuable conversations I've helped facilitate. So many teachers, including those in my building, give 100% of themselves each day. Because of the effort and dedication of my teachers, when student success doesn't meet their expectation, it sometimes becomes difficult to focus our conversations on what we can do differently because we feel we've already given our best. The classroom-focused improvement process provides purposeful direction for thinking "outside the box" about the instructional strategies we use. However, my teachers have been stuck in a mindset that they've always done their best, so there isn't anything to change. My challenge has been to help them see otherwise without diminishing the great work they already do.

One of the most effective ways I've found to do this is by building trust through listening and questioning. I want my teachers to feel validated in the work they do, so I am careful to listen to them talk about the tremendous efforts they make to reach students, as well as any frustrations they might have. I have learned to work hard to listen more and "fix" less, as I am a "fixer" by nature. I frequently reflect on my own practice, constantly evaluate what I can do differently, and then put a new plan into action. However, if I want to build capacity in my teachers to do likewise, I can't be the one to jump in and fix. Listening helps me better understand and identify the needs my teachers have which, in turn, helps me ask questions that will help my teachers reflect on and grow in this classroom-focused improvement process.

One of my favorite questions: Why? Why did you use the strategy you did the first time? Why do you think students weren't as successful as you wanted them to be? Why was the strategy more successful in another room? Another favorite question: What? What does our data show us that students are struggling with? What part of this strategy is worth replicating? What part of this strategy is worth replacing? What other instructional strategies have you seen or heard other teachers try that might be helpful in this instance?

It has taken time, but I have found that persevering with these questions has empowered my teachers to talk openly and freely about successes, struggles, and risks they are willing to take with new instructional strategies. They dig deeper into root causes. They collaborate more across grades about how related standards were instructed in previous years or in following years. They think more purposefully about what an instructional strategy is, what the teacher behaviors related to that strategy will be, and what

the desired results look like. My teachers are beginning to truly take ownership of the classroom-focused improvement process as it relates to their instructional practice. It continues to be a journey, and I am excited to take the journey with them. However, the true joy comes in seeing the fruits of my coaching efforts to build my teachers' capacities with our classroom-focused improvement process.

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