



CASE STUDY

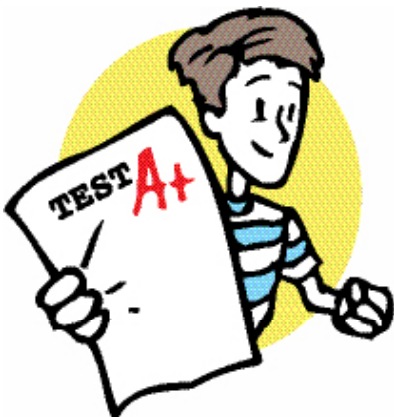
Harrison School District
Colorado Springs, CO

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Missing Link Found to Student Achievement - SUCCEED *Whole Person* Feedback

Creating a Culture of Feedback

In 2006, a new leadership team at Harrison School District Two, in Colorado Springs, Colorado, became serious about improving the quality of instruction in classrooms. At that time, **the new superintendent noted that, “what gets feedback, gets done better.”** A series of key actions were outlined in the District Action Plan that called for creating a culture of feedback to improve instruction. **Noting that teacher quality was the critical factor in improving student performance, a new personnel performance evaluation system was created that described valued instructional expectations.** New rubrics for performance evaluations were designed and supervising administrators were trained in how to use the “spot observation” tools, formal observation tools and how to write summative evaluations. Increased attention was now being given to monitoring what the district said it valued. **Efforts to improve the quality of instruction in the classroom through formal supervision saw slow and steady progress.**



By the end of the second year, most teachers taught from the aligned curriculum, lesson objectives were posted, and teachers began to implement student engagement strategies. Principals were assigned instructional coaches and even central office administrators monitored the quality of instruction in classrooms. **All principals adhered to full implementation of the district performance evaluation system.**

Something was Missing

For all the attention paid to recording and monitoring instruction, some administrators commented that **instructional performance seemed to plateau in the third year.** The district began to examine not just how principals completed the proper supervision forms, but also examine how administrators executed and delivered the feedback on instruction. **It became evident that a critical piece of training on how to deliver feedback was missing for instructional leaders.** Additionally, supervisors in the classified areas, such as Food Services and Transportation, had never been trained on how to give feedback, even though that is exactly what they do all day long.

In January 2009 bold steps were taken to correct the oversight. Harrison trained over 90 of its supervising administrators in

the **McGrath SUCCEED model for effective communication and feedback**. According to Maryann Wiggs, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, the power of that training was immediately obvious in the school district. Now Harrison not only has exceptional evaluation instruments, but also has a superior tool for delivering feedback in the SUCCEED FICA. **The missing element for Harrison was the “person tool” that guides administrators on how to deliver feedback to people in a way that ensures they become valued partners in the development of their staff.**

The People of Education

The “Whole Person” approach of trust, respect, understanding and mutual growth of the SUCCEED System, empowered the supervisors in the human aspect that had been missing in the feedback process. A number of people had been trained in another model for documenting unsatisfactory performance. **They found that without the “Whole Person” concept integral to SUCCEED, feedback had the potential to create an inadvertent culture of fear:** collateral damage of the attempts to create a culture of accountability.

Harrison wanted its supervisors to be valued partners in the growth and development of employees. The district invests tremendous time and energy in professional development to improve teacher quality. **Retention of the highly qualified teachers they have trained is important to sustaining academic progress in Harrison. The district wanted to be sure that feedback was not used as a weapon, but as a tool for collaboratively building excellence in education.** Combining the clear format of SUCCEED with the Whole Person gave the supervisors **not only what to say but how to deliver it, with attention paid to the tone, quality and balance of the feedback.**

The Missing Impact

The performance evaluation system did an excellent job of recording the status of instructional behaviors. The facts of what had occurred were described fairly well, and the actions that needed to be taken were set out. However, **prior training completely missed a description of the impact on student achievement that the recorded behaviors were having. With the absence of impact, feedback tended to become a perfunctory drill.**



Ms. Wiggs relays that, “immediately after training, our administrators were eager to begin implementing the SUCCEED System – they didn’t have to have an implementation curve. I saw them using the SUCCEED tools the next day. It is very user friendly.”

A major benefit of the SUCCEED System is that **supervisors now talk about the significance of the facts and what those facts mean to student learning.** Together with their evaluation system and the SUCCEED system, Harrison now has the tools to create a **culture of feedback to improve student achievement and learning.** SUCCEED has grounded

supervising administrators in the “so what” of the described behaviors – what it means that this is occurring. SUCCEED provides a common vocabulary for talking about the facts and associated impact, the context in which it is all occurring, and the appropriate action to craft as a result of it all.

As they continue to “skill up” in SUCCEED, they are finding that the SUCCEED approach is permeating their thinking as well as their speaking and writing. Now it is easy to talk about the facts, how those facts have impacted student learning, what influence other factors have, like grade level or entry skills, and what should be the next step. “It is an efficient way to support each other with clear thinking,” reports Ms. Wiggs.

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