"... the only way that higher standards and new systems of support and evaluation, will work, is if teachers lead this change in partnership and collaboration with principals, parents and communities. That’s what I saw in Reading, Massachusetts -- teacher leadership in action..."

Secretary Duncan’s remarks at the National Board on Professional Teaching Standards Conference

Goals and Approach: Systems and Structures to Support Educator Collaboration

The goal has been to leverage the Common Assessments initiative as a vehicle to transformational change and to establish a means for substantive collaboration among all staff in order to:

- empower teachers as leaders in all educational initiatives
- build capacity and foster creativity through staff collaboration (instead of allowing accountability and standardization to remain the drivers of change in education)
- engage in regular discussions of student learning expectations (both horizontally and vertically)
- establish our own measures for student success (instead of relying heavily on state assessments)
- examine student work and deprivatize professional practice
- ensure measures are truly valued and embedded (not “extra” or seen only as “required”)
- explore strategies and instructional practices which yield the best outcomes for students
- embed professional development and meaningful collaboration as routine

Description

Common Assessments provide an opportunity to engage teams and departments in collaborative work:
- Implemented a district-wide professional learning community (PLC) structure as a systemic process, in partnership with the Reading Teacher Association
- Established teacher leaders for each level and content area as facilitators, and provided ongoing training and support to empower the teachers to do the work and to shift culture
- Provided professional development in leadership and facilitation to all teacher leaders
- Empowered PLCs to determine professional development needs and recommend action steps
- Districtwide PD Committee is looking at how the PLC structures are being used

Successes

- Empowering staff with new opportunities for leadership and collaboration is helping to transform how we look at student outcomes and our own instructional/assessment practices
- The confidence and enthusiasm of teachers as they see themselves as leaders and experts

“To get the greatest return on human capital investments, smart schools open up time so that teachers ... can work together on how best to put their training into practice.”

How much a student learns is a result of both the knowledge and training of the teacher but also how effectively that teacher works with and learns with other educators in the school.

“Similarly, scholar Michael Fullan identifies ‘collective capacity’ built through planned collaboration as the ‘hidden resource’ that US school systems have neglected to cultivate.”

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