

Shifting Mindsets and Instruction Over Time



WALNUT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Urban | Northeast U.S. | 6,000+ Students | Two Trainers

Background

The Walnut District serves students with significant cognitive disabilities (SCD) primarily in self-contained classrooms. The trainers were administrators new to the district, and the pair had a long history of collaboration. They had experience teaching students with SCD and providing teacher professional development.

Dynamic Learning Map® (DLM®) alternate assessment results reflected low achievement across the district. Teachers used self-made curricula to teach academic skills of their choosing. Most teachers prioritized functional skills over academics and expressed the need to protect their students from what they viewed as unrealistically high expectations. Following a statewide requirement to adopt high-quality academic curricula, the district purchased a commercially available curriculum, but teachers weren't using it.

Opportunities and Challenges

The trainers faced two challenges in getting teachers to shift to a more rigorous, standards-aligned curriculum. The small, tight-knit group of teachers resisted giving up their self-made curricula, and senior leadership did not provide strong messaging that teachers were expected to change. The trainers realized they wouldn't get teachers to adopt a new curriculum through workshops alone. Trainers were also not given priority on the district's limited PD schedule. In what time was available, teachers had to attend training on other topics. The trainers realized they needed a long-term plan that included a series of teacher PD and steps to bring key leaders on board with changing expectations.

Support for Trainers

- provided content for presumed competence workshop and leadership meetings about DLM results
- assisted in use of Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills, Aspirations, Behaviors framework to work toward a long view of teacher change
- recommended resources to meet teacher goals
- educated trainers about DLM assessment results and score reports so trainers were equipped for building-level leadership conversations
- introduced online tools for building teacher engagement during workshops
- provided feedback on alignment of PD activities with teacher learning goals

Trainer Accomplishments

- conducted a workshop about teacher beliefs and expectations about their students' competence and potential
- held meetings with building principals to share DLM results, educate them about appropriate expectations for students with SCD, and explain what they should expect to see in classrooms
- held monthly meetings with each building-level team of teachers and building instructional leaders during common planning time to gradually introduce the district's adopted curriculum and tailor the information to where each group of teachers was in the adoption process
- created a new Google classroom with resources specifically for teachers of students with SCD
- implemented a multi-part PD series focused on DLM Essential Elements and assessment blueprints, how the adopted curriculum is related to the Essential Elements, and activities to apply the concept of presuming competence in the context of writing instruction for a student with SCD

Trainers' Goals for the Future

- sustained use of the district's adopted curriculum during instruction
- use of curriculum-based assessment data to inform IEPs, three-year evaluations, and instruction
- observation tool that they and principals can use on learning walks
- teacher leaders to deliver PD to colleagues on academics for students with SCD