

Creating a Culture of Achievement

The Janesville Story – how they changed their culture

SESSION: *Creating a Culture of Achievement — Improving Student Learning in a Large School District* | **Presenters:** Karen Schulte, district administrator; Kim Ehrhardt, director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment; School District of Janesville

Six years ago, the School District of Janesville embarked on a district-wide effort focused on raising student achievement titled, “Journey to Excellence.” This past September when the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction released the School Report Card Scores, the School District of Janesville ranked first out of the 15 largest school districts in the state. With an accountability score of 74.8, the district was in the “exceeds expectations” category. District Administrator Dr. Karen Schulte continues to aim high by setting a four-year goal of reaching a new accountability score of 84 by 2017.

Dr. Schulte and Dr. Kim Ehrhardt, director of curriculum, instruction and assessment, presented this success story at the 93rd State Education Convention and shared the district’s change formula and the role educational leadership plays in terms of reaching this accomplishment. Specifically, they discussed how the use of district-defined, nonnegotiable goals for teaching and learning resulted in the positive student achievement gains.

Dr. Schulte credits the district’s adoption of Evidence-Based Leadership (EBL) as a key foundational change that is pivotal to the improved results. EBL caused school leaders to begin analyzing key student learning indicators revealing a lack-luster profile of student achievement results.

The response was to set new improvement goals for each of the district’s 21 schools. This in turn set in motion the use of strategic instructional interventions designed to improve student performance in reading and math. The 2013 result is the cumulative effort of applying this formula to all schools during the past four years.

Dr. Ehrhardt explained how the staff at each building put their student achievement data under the microscope and then developed a set of specific intervention strategies to positively impact the student achievement tide. Specifically, the What Works In Education Framework by Robert Marzano was used to provide the research-based instructional model to structure and inform the changes.

Dr. Ehrhardt went on to explain that the incorporation of the Professional Learning Communities model, the use of curriculum-based assessments and other foundational practices that were responsible for the achievement gains. He also shared that high-powered, staff development from Tom Guskey, Anthony Muhommad, Eric Jensen, Sharroky Hollie, Marcia Tate and Michael Clay Thompson were critical to raising teachers level of expertise and knowledge necessary to support the change.

Both leaders explained that the



Karen Schulte,
School District of Janesville

evidence-based leadership model helped to bring to scale the following practices: clear and nonnegotiable targets, dynamic leadership, active response to what the data informed each school, quality professional development, and reward and recognition.

In conclusion, Dr. Schulte reported the district’s latest list of achievements, which include: six Janesville schools being named Wisconsin Schools of Recognition (2013); two high schools recognized as US News and World Report silver medalists; a National Blue Ribbon School (2011); and a school being recognized as having one of the top 100 Chinese classrooms in the nation by the Asia Society’s Confucius Classrooms Network. ■