

# Collaborative Improvement

Three school districts work together to build processes and strategies to build strong school leaders

**SESSION:** *Developing Leaders in a Collaborative Model: Evidence-Based* | **Presenters:** Patricia Deklotz, superintendent, Kettle Moraine School District; Larry Dux, board clerk, Pewaukee School District; JoAnn Sternke, superintendent, Pewaukee School District; Kelly Thompson, superintendent, Muskego-Norway; Robin Lague, lead coach, Studer Group

In 2014, the Pewaukee, Kettle Moraine, Oconomowoc and Muskego-Norway School Districts entered into a collaborative partnership with Studer Education to develop their school leaders. The Studer Group has long had success improving health care organizations. In 2010, the Studer Group took its approach and applied it to education.

The process centers on the “Execution Flywheel” and tools with which to guide a district’s improvement. The Execution Flywheel has three elements at its core: passion and principles, which lead to results.

“The Studer Group provides us principles to get results,” said JoAnn Sternke, superintendent of the Pewaukee School District. “It gives us those principles but also tools and strategies.”

The first tool is employee and parent surveys. Kelly Thompson, superintendent of the Muskego-Norway School District said the Studer Group helped the district re-think the way it uses surveys.

“Our district had been doing surveys but we hadn’t really utilized that data in a way that helps make us better,” Thompson said.

For example, under the Studer Group framework, the district held three surveys: an employee and parent

engagement survey in the spring, an employee survey in the summer-fall, and a district services survey in the fall-winter. The district met with some of the people that filled out the survey and heard directly what their concerns were. Doing surveys several times also allowed the district to set benchmarks and track its progress. Working as a collaborative effort, the four districts shared their survey results to get a perspective of how they did in comparison with the partner districts.

Another tool used by the districts is scorecards, which are a simple, one-page statement of what the district is going to do. It helps narrow a district’s focus and communicates priorities for action in specific areas.

“It allows you to monitor your district’s process on a regular basis,” said Pat Deklotz, superintendent of the Kettle Moraine School District.

The districts also incorporated “Rounding” into their principal’s schedules. Rounding is an intentional conversation with a school employee. The goal is to improve processes and recognize people for good work.

Deklotz said it helped her principals build and strengthen their school team. “Every one of my principals feels like it’s the most important thing they do all week,” Deklotz said.

The final strategy or tool the



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districts use is new employee interviews. The interviews are conducted by a new teacher’s supervisors, an assistant principal or principal, and take place 30, 60, and 90 days into a new teacher’s employment. The interviews are set up to help create a connection with new staff members and learn more about what they can offer or may need support with.

The districts had positive feedback on the collaborative improvement process and work with the Studer Group. The districts are currently looking at their next steps, which include getting more data from their surveys, holding additional training sessions, monitoring and learning new tools.

“We’ve greatly grown as three districts,” Sternke said. “This is important, collaborative work that we should all be doing.” ■