

Staff Buy-in is Critical

Teacher mentor program, communication efforts crucial
to adoption of educator effectiveness program

SESSION: *Effective Educator Initiative – Transitions Supporting Staff* | **Presenters:** Susan Borden, district administrator; Ann Higgins, director of administrative services, Machell Schwarz, principal; Colleen Kollasch, teacher; DeForest Area School District

In 2011, work began behind the scenes in the DeForest Area School District to begin the transition to support staff in the new effective educator requirements. Administrators understood there would be process changes, new software, different expectations and demands and implementation challenges. In the end, it would be affected staff who were the critical ambassadors for success.

“There is a ton of trust with these folks (from other teachers),” said high school principal Machell Schwarz, acknowledging the two teachers who were part of the session presentation and who served on the one-year pilot program before implementation district-wide. Veteran social studies teacher, Colleen Kollasch, half-joking offered, “We were the guinea pigs. Getting buy-in from staff was a really important part of the pilot year (2013-14).”

Kollasch acknowledged trepidations when she was evaluated by three different people, but in the end, “As a pilot teacher I was able to see no matter who did the evaluation, the result was the same and that was reassuring.” It also enabled her to convey that to other staff members who had different misgivings about the impending changes.

Superintendent Susan Borden said the district created a 25-member pilot team, “to give us regular and effective feedback from teachers in the classroom.” Three district-wide committees were also created (elementary, middle, high school). Over the course of three years, staff worked together on collaboration, support, team building and other activities to create conditions for successful staff implementation.

“At the center of everything we do is how to improve student achievement,” said Ann Higgins, director of administrative services. Kollasch added, “Working with my colleagues to help improve student learning is one of the best things that has happened.”

To assist staff, pilot teachers developed a website with contacts, resources, an evaluation timeline checklist and more — such as, what will evaluators be looking for in classroom lesson delivery? Early release time allows effective educator mentors to work closely with staff who have questions or need help. At the mid-point of this year’s district-wide implementation, 93 percent of staff responding to a survey indicated they want the mentors continued next school year. Mentors receive compensation.



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While the mentors were key, Principal Schwarz also stressed the importance of communication.

“Communicate, communicate, communicate — in 100,000 different ways,” he said. “It’s important to let teachers know this is a work in progress.”

DeForest used a variety of communication tools from a weekly “Employee Evaluation Tip of the Week” to in-service meetings for updates, discussion and concerns. Principals expressed a natural concern of getting new tasks performed given current duties and responsibilities. Administration responded by providing more time and curtailing other duties, such as special education evaluations.

In the final analysis, Borden said, “In God I trust, all others bring data!” ■