

**A Problem Solving Case Study:
Using Professional Development from a Smaller Learning Community Grant
to Improve Instruction in the Tidy Town School District**

Goals for the Case Study:

1. Initiate discussion about how a Project Director can encourage instructional changes following professional development
2. Surface issues and concerns for Practitioner Advisor Panel

Instructions for Table Groups:

The activity begins with 5 minutes of silent reading time, so each person can read the Background Information, and one scenario. (Note: All table groups read the same background information about the school district and the schools –but half of them respond to the questions following Scenario I and the other half to the questions following Scenario II.)

Background Information:

TidyTown School District serves a mid sized city that depends on manufacturing jobs for its financial base. Over the last ten years there has been an increased number of non-English speaking families moving into town.

Two years ago Tidy Town SD applied for and received a federal SLC grant to support high school transformation at three of its five high schools. All three of these Tidy Town high schools serve students from a broad range of income levels. The principals and the staff at these three schools had different levels of interest in redesign when the application was submitted.

The Schools:

School A has fifty-percent of its high school students living in poverty, including many immigrant students from 22 different countries (mostly Latin America and Asia.) The majority of these students are not fluent in English. School A houses one strong magnet program in Communications and Media. Larry Leader (the principal) has been a strong leader at the school for four years and has consistently been a vocal advocate for redesign. Larry clearly recognizes the need for the school to transform itself to address the needs of the student population. He has also repeatedly reminded the school staff that the purpose of the SLC grant is forming teacher teams that take responsibly for a group of students.

In School B, 65% of the students come from low SES families; however most of these students are from poor white or African American families. The school has had three different principals in the last 6 years but it also has a history of shared leadership with a strong departmental structure. The teachers in the school have expressed reticence to move toward the interdisciplinary SLC structures outlined in the grant application. The current principal has turned much of the leadership for the work on the SLC grant to Stella, a well respected assistant principal.

School C's population is 60 % middle class students with a strong tradition of college prep courses. It also has two magnet programs that attract the most academically proficient students in the district. However the data shows that 44% of the School C students are not achieving

academically. Dan the Man (the principal) at this school is strongly committed to data and has encouraged the staff to review the achievement data in their classrooms at least once a month and adjust their instruction accordingly.

At all three schools the reading test scores have not shown any improvement over the past three years—only forty percent of the tenth graders are meeting the state’s proficiency standard for reading. Superintendent Tim, who has been at the helm of the district for 3 years, has been publicly stating that this achievement rate is unacceptable. Central office staff has been told that their role is to support instructional improvement at all three high schools.

Professional Development on Differentiated Instruction (DI):

Using their SLC funding all three of the schools sent teams of 4 or 5 staff to intensive 5 day training on Differentiated Instruction in September 2006.

Directions for Scenario I: The table groups read and discuss this scenario and the questions at the end and prepare one person in their group to give a 3-4 minute summary of their answers or the issues they discussed following lunch.

Scenario I.

Following their 5 day Differentiated Instruction workshop, teams from schools A, B and C each had different experiences back in their schools.

The team from School A shared some of what they learned at each of the next three faculty meetings and with Larry's backing they motivated about 15 of the staff members to form a group that would work all year long to make changes in their instruction.

At School B, 2 of the 5 teachers that went to the training made some minor changes in their own classroom. Stella is very positive about what she sees in these two classrooms and wants to encourage other staff to participate in Differentiated Instruction training. About five of the staff seems interested, but Stella worries that having only a handful of the staff trained in DI strategies will not really make the difference. She is advocating for a half day training in DI at the school so that all staff can get some training and she wants you as Project Director to help make this happen.

In School C none of the 4 staff that participated in the training have been actively implementing the ideas they brought back from the training. You learn that two of the DI participants told the staff that the ideas presented at the training really don't apply at this school because the school already has such strong AP and magnet programs for the students that need more challenging opportunities. Dan the Man complained to you that the training really does not seem to have any impact on instructional change.

As Project Director, you know that it is important for the SLC grant funds to foster instructional improvement along with increased classroom rigor for all students. Also Tim the Tidy Town Superintendent gave you a clear directive that SLC funding is to be used to improve instructional strategies and increase the number of students reaching the proficiency rate in reading.

Questions for Discussion—please bring your knowledge of successful implementation in your district to the discussion:

- A. What message would you convey to the three schools? The same message or different messages?
- B. What would the next steps be related to training? Would you involve the principals or assistant principals at the three schools?
- C. How do you define the Project Director's leadership role when it comes to instructional improvement?
- D. What data might you or your evaluator collect to promote instructional improvement?
- E. Given the Superintendent's directive, what approach would you take to promote instructional change?

Directions for Scenario II: All table groups read and discuss this scenario and the questions which follow it and prepare one person in their group to give a 3-4 minute summary of their answers or the issues they discussed following lunch.

Scenario II.

One of the messages that was conveyed during the DI training was that SLC grants expect schools to **structure each and every SLCs** so all students receive **challenging and engaging instruction**. All workshop participants were urged to advocate increasing the number of college prep and advanced level courses in all SLCs when they returned from the workshop.

At School A the teachers who had attended the DI workshop met regularly to discuss the changes they were going to make instruction and to support one another. More teachers joined their group as well. Larry the principal was supportive of the group's work and asked them to report to the whole staff at faculty meetings. All was going well until the teachers that had attended the DI workshop advocated for changing student acceptance into the magnet program and AP courses. This caused pushback by several teachers at the faculty meeting.

At School B, the team that attended the DI workshop convinced Stella that the 5 day training was very powerful. Consequently she wants to schedule this training for all School B staff over the summer months. About half of the staff seems interested, but the remainder want summer professional development to be to for staff stipends to generate challenging and engaging curriculum. Stella wants you to help her promote the idea of a summer DI workshop.

At School C, two of the team members that went to the workshop described the need to increase the rigor of all the SLCs at the faculty meeting. Dan the Man agreed with them citing the results of a survey given to all the students last year. On the survey students said their classes were unengaging and unmotivating. The staff protested arguing that the curriculum offered at the school is already challenging and engaging and that a high percentage of the students do not have the prerequisite skills when they arrive. Dan suggests that additional data be collected to assess the level of the course offerings but a few months it becomes clear that the issue of increasing rigor has been dropped.

Questions for Discussion—please bring your knowledge of successful implementation in your district to the discussion:

- A. What message would you convey to the three schools? The same message or different messages?
- B. What would the next steps be related to training? Would you involve the principals or assistant principals at the three schools?
- C. How do you define the Project Director's leadership role when it comes to ensuring challenging curriculum and instruction for all students?
- D. What data might you or your evaluator collect to promote challenging curriculum and instruction for all students?