

## School-Wide Strategies and Peer-Led Staff Development

At this school, a staff decision to implement School-Wide Learning Strategies (SWLS) to improve student literacy was supported with changes to professional development.

### School Wide Strategies

This school used a staff consensus process to agree on learning strategies that would be used in every classroom to reinforce literacy skills. Their School-Wide Learning Strategies (SWLS or “Swells”) included activating prior knowledge, questioning, developing vocabulary, using graphic organizers, and using Cornell Note taking.

### Peer-led Staff Development

#### “Teachers Teaching Teachers”

SWLS were supported by regular peer-led staff development session in which teachers shared how they were using the strategies in their content area with a small group of teachers of different subjects. At every professional development meeting, selected teachers had the opportunity to share how they were implementing the strategies with a small group of their peers. Over the course of a year, more than 30 teachers led sessions with teachers from diverse subject areas. Teachers were approached by the literacy specialist and encouraged to lead; a preparatory session was held to ensure their success.

The literacy specialist summed up the successes and challenges this way:

#### Successes with this Model

- Creates tremendous staff buy-in
- Opportunities for staff to learn from one another
- Staff learns about what is happening in the building
- Small group sessions hold more staff accountable for participating
- Small group sessions allow more staff to participate
- Trickle-down effect: Staff share lesson ideas with one another and more SWLS are used school wide

#### Pitfalls to Avoid

Teacher presenters need to be set up for success. This includes individual preparation and group training. There must be time and money for this process. If the teachers are not well prepared, the sessions will not run well and not only will staff not buy in, but they will not want to present the next time.

Teachers need to be accountable for the lesson planning time during the staff days. The goals for this time must be clear: teachers are collaborating to create SWLS lessons that they will use in their classrooms.

## Timeline for Implementing School-Wide Learning Strategies

<p><b>2003-2004</b></p> <p>December March</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Began in-house staff development model with literacy specialist training all teachers in cross-content literacy strategies.</li> <li>• Training included two full day sessions between December and March. At the second training, some teachers led small group sessions in which staff practiced a specific strategy and applied it to their content instruction.</li> <li>• Major texts used to train teachers were <u>Reading for Understanding</u> by Ruth Shoenbach, <u>Teaching Reading in the Content Areas</u> by Rachel Billmeyer, and <u>I Read It But I Don't Get It</u> by Cris Tovani.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2004-2005</b></p> <p>September</p> <p>January</p> <p>April</p> <p>May</p> <p>June</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Received a federal Smaller Learning Community (SLC) Grant.</li> <li>• All middle and high schools in the district created Literacy Teams that included teachers of math, language arts, social studies, science, special education, ELL, a vice principal, and a literacy specialist. The school team began meeting once a month to share successful strategy instruction in the content areas.</li> <li>• The Literacy Team went to a Smaller Learning Community Leadership Institute. The team worked a coach who shared his school's success with school-wide strategy implementation.</li> <li>• A group of teachers visited the coach's school. In addition to content teachers, the group included a PE teacher and football coach, a school guidance counselor, and the activities director.</li> <li>• A Leadership Team of teachers and administrators is formed to oversee the SLC grant. This team created a proposal for School-Wide Learning Strategies (SWLS) and presented it to staff.</li> <li>• All staff voted on their top strategy choices and five SWLS were selected. Implementation of the SWLS would begin in the fall.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2005-2006</b></p> <p>September</p> <p>December March</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In house staff development model continues at the beginning of the year with the Leadership Team presenting background information on the following staff selected SWLS: activating prior knowledge, questioning, developing vocabulary, using graphic organizers, and using Cornell Note taking.</li> <li>• In house staff development model expands to include teacher presenters. Both the December and March staff development days require teachers to meet in small groups led by teachers in the building. All staff have opportunities to share lessons and lesson plan during this time. Over the</li> </ul>

February	<p>course of the year, over 30 teachers facilitate in-house staff development. A training session for the teacher presenters before the development days supports them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Leadership Team continues to meet monthly to share strategies. They begin to monitor staff development by asking their departments to fill out surveys about their use of SWLS in their daily instruction.</li> <li>• Based on staff feedback, all school Cornell-Note taking is changed to Summarizing.</li> </ul>
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Leadership Team makes plans to meet in August in order to map out staff development for the 2006-2007 school year.</li> </ul>

## Teacher Perceptions

The literacy specialist interviewed her colleagues after a year of implementation to gather perceptual data. Some teacher quotes are gathered here:

### **Teacher perceptions of School-Wide Strategies**

As far as school wide agreements, I feel that most people are using [the strategies] because these are good strategies. They work. They're smart. We've done the training. A lot of teachers already use these strategies. I have always used graphic organizers but I am using them a lot more now because it is in the forefront. You're always thinking SWLS.

- *Social Studies teacher*

School wide agreements are just a reminder to teachers about pedagogy. As a science teacher, I always get bogged down with curriculum. With these strategies and the way it has turned around staff development, it's a continual fun reminder about neat ways to present this material to students and teaching and pedagogy rather than always science, science, science.

- *Science teacher*

After one year of going through school wide strategies, I think it benefited the staff members. If we do a school-wide strategy in our classroom, we are unified. As a staff, we know what we are all working on and we are all on the same level. It makes us more aware when we teach that what we are doing in our classroom is part of the larger school. This really unified the staff members.

- *Math teacher*

I see instant feedback with some of the strategies. Adding pictures to the vocabulary helps the students memorize the words faster. With graphic organizers, more kids are turning in completed work and the answers are better. This helps with accountability more than somebody saying you have to do this.

- *Social Studies teacher*

The focus on vocabulary has changed me fundamentally as a teacher. I had never concentrated on vocabulary as a learning strategy. Seeing students this year grapple with vocabulary and then seeing them get better and better as I applied the strategies made a difference to me. Seeing that there was a need, and that students didn't have the vocabulary knowledge, removed any skepticism I had about the focus on vocabulary.

- *Language Arts teacher*

Even though I don't do Cornell Notes specifically, I have done more note taking in my classes this year. I had a hard time making Cornell Notes my own. But, I think because it was happening in other classes, students see the validity of [note-taking] and are taking better notes. Students have done better in my class this year than they did last year and I think that is due in part to making them take notes and I that am more aware of my instruction around note-taking.

- *Spanish teacher*

To make each teacher accountable for the SWLS is hard. I must admit, I don't do it all the time and there are days where I say forget it! I'm going back to my old ways. The old ways are very comfortable. By having the SWLS, you are asking us to really change. It seems to me that asking us to change very quickly and in a lot of areas would be very hard. Starting small works better.

- *Math teacher*

### **Teacher Perceptions of Peer-Led Staff Development**

When you have all school collaboration, it lends itself to accountability. One thing that was done well to promote the collaboration and accountability was having staff lead the in-services. I was a lot more inclined to ask questions and listen to examples and actually take some of the ideas from what teachers were doing in other content areas and adapt them because they were my peers and I respect them and I was more motivated. If it had been some "expert" on questioning that came in, I probably would have taken the packet, not looked at it, and recycled it like I have done for many years at in-services.

- *Spanish teacher*

This year it's been noticeable the comfort and acceptance and excitement about how we are using our time for staff training. For the most part, people think it's pretty darn effective. Teachers like to share. I've found even the old school teachers are going to find the day to be more positive if they have a chance to talk about their classroom experience.

- *Science teacher*

Keep things super practical in terms of implementing the strategies. Teachers will have problems with vague, broad, sweeping ideas. The more specific and concrete we can be about

showing other teachers practical SWLS lessons that we are using in our classrooms, the more likely they will be able to find ways to apply these strategies to their own classrooms.

*- Language Arts teacher*

We are not letting people forget [about SWLS]. At every staff meeting and in-service we talk about it. For our first year, we have quite a lot of people on board. I don't think everybody is [using the SWLS] but there is not this big anti-SWLS backlash either.

*- Social Studies teacher*

The SWLS have been kind of fun. The fact that there is a commonality you can have with teachers from every walk of life has been good. And for 20-year teachers to be able to talk with second year teachers on the same level has been really nice.

*- Language Arts teacher*