



## Displaying objectives focuses instruction in Youngstown classrooms

### The Challenge

Volney Rogers Middle School in Youngstown, Ohio, is an inner-city public school with approximately 400 students, 92 percent of whom are economically disadvantaged. In the 2009–2010 school year, Volney Rogers was put on Academic Watch, having met only 30–50 percent of its indicators and after failing to reach its Average Yearly Progress (AYP) goal. Inconsistent instruction was largely to blame, according to Principal Diane Hunsbarger, so she set out to ensure that all students experience high-quality learning every day.

### Strategic Solution

Principal Hunsbarger and McREL Principal Consultant Mel Sussman began conducting several classroom visits to formally assess instruction and gather data. They were looking, in particular, for what McREL considers the “non-negotiable” instructional strategies—Setting Objectives, Reinforcing Effort, Providing Recognition, and Providing Feedback—from McREL’s *Classroom Instruction that Works*. The data they gathered confirmed there was instructional variation throughout the school.

The leadership team then developed a poster based on those four strategies and displayed it in every classroom. “Objective posters,” as they came to be known, included the unit objective and benchmark, lesson objective, grade-level indicator, activity description, related vocabulary, and assessment type. Teachers used the posters to focus their instruction by beginning the lesson discussing the objective and ending the lesson by asking students, “Did we

accomplish this objective today?” Students also knew what was expected of them and what to expect from teachers in class.

### Results

Hunsbarger conducts walkthroughs to ensure that teachers are referring to the posters and effectively implementing the four essential strategies. Now that they have a consistent instructional framework, staff members use monthly meetings to support each other and give feedback on using the strategies in their lessons. At the end of the 2010–2011 school year, Volney Rogers moved up from Academic Watch to Continuous Improvement as its students scored higher than or equal to the district’s average. Their assessment results showed a 7.7 percent increase in 7<sup>th</sup>-grade mathematics scores, a 12.9 percent increase in 8<sup>th</sup>-grade reading scores, and a 4 percent increase in 8<sup>th</sup>-grade science scores. Further attesting to their success, all of the middle schools in Youngstown City Schools have adopted the Volney Rogers objective poster.

### Next Steps

Like any school initiative, change takes time. While the success of the poster has kept everyone motivated, the staff realizes this is just a start. They plan to continue their momentum of student learning by exploring other researched-based instructional strategies. With validation that the change they’ve started is working, Volney Rogers Middle School is committed to reaching the highest state ranking and to becoming a school that teachers, administrators, and parents are proud of.

## Creating high expectations for a high-performance school

### Leadership development

McREL's Balanced Leadership® helps school leaders focus their schools on making the right changes, managing those changes effectively, and creating purposeful school communities committed to excellence. Our one- to three-year professional development program teaches principals how to balance and share the 21 research-based responsibilities of highly effective leaders and includes sessions on Developing a Purposeful Community, Managing Change, and Choosing the Right Focus. We also offer Balanced Leadership directly to school leaders or as a training-of-trainer program.

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### Instruction that works for all learners

McREL's best-selling manual, *Classroom Instruction that Works* (CITW), identifies nine categories of instructional strategies that research shows improve student learning. We offer workshops in the following four key areas to help teachers sharpen their instructional skills and develop a deep understanding of which strategies to use in particular situations:

- CITW workshops provide an overview of the strategies and the research behind them.
- Using Technology with CITW shows how to use technology with the strategies, embed technology into practice, and infuse your school's entire curriculum with technology.
- CITW with English Language Learners (ELLs) is an interactive workshop that shows how to modify the strategies for ELLs.
- CITW in Secondary Science shows how to apply the strategies, use science inquiry, and create learner-centered science classrooms.

McREL also delivers CITW through an online course and training-of-trainer sessions for professional developers.

For more information, visit [mcrel.org/balancedleadership](http://mcrel.org/balancedleadership) or [mcrel.org/citw](http://mcrel.org/citw) or e-mail [info@mcrel.org](mailto:info@mcrel.org).

