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Balanced Leadership® helps Sioux City schools take charge of student success

The Challenge

Sioux City Community School District (SCCSD) is one of the largest, most diverse districts in Iowa. In recent years, the district has been grappling with a persistent achievement gap between its highest and lowest performing students. When the state identified SCCSD as needing assistance, administrators began looking for the root causes. They discovered a lack of ownership for student success from both teachers and administrators, as well as a tendency to avoid conflict, said Janet Rohmiller, director of professional development and special services.

Strategic Solution

To address these issues, administrators set two major goals: build collective efficacy and help leaders manage change more effectively. Given their goals, McREL's **Balanced Leadership** was a "natural fit," said Rohmiller. From 2009 to 2011, McREL delivered Balanced Leadership to school and central office administrators. In 2011, McREL also co-facilitated a Power of Data retreat, attended by 200 leaders and leadership team members. SCCSD leaders have learned about leadership behaviors linked to student achievement and the importance of using data to make informed decisions about policies, practices, and procedures.

Results

Learning how to better manage change, said Rohmiller, has given leaders "tools to address conflict and resistance effectively without feeling that they are pushing too hard or that it's not the right time." Specifically, principals are creating demand for change by collecting the right data and involving staff in analyzing it, as well as including leadership teams in developing improvement plans.

Administrators have established a districtwide monitoring and evaluating protocol (including an observation tool) based on McREL's research to ensure school-level changes are made with fidelity across all 18 elementary schools and six secondary schools. They are getting input from all leadership teams and communicating with various stakeholders before implementation.

Several buildings are using the Power of Data process in weekly staff development meetings, and principals are holding quarterly data meetings with individual teachers to help them better analyze data, draw conclusions, and monitor what is occurring in their classrooms. Teachers have come together as a purposeful community, Rohmiller said, to "have conversations about individual students and how they (the school community) can use data to help them achieve."

Next Steps

While implementation varies among buildings, SCCSD is using a common vocabulary, and staff members have a deep understanding of effective leadership practices. SCCSD and McREL now are collaborating on providing leadership support and expanding the district's capacity to provide its own professional development in the future. Rohmiller said, "We are exploring how to use our best assets—our people—in identifying what truly makes a difference for all of our students."

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4601 DTC Blvd., Ste. 500, Denver, CO 80237-2596 • 800.858.6830 • info@mcrel.org • Website: mcrel.org

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