

Success in Sight® helps reinvent culture at Richwood High School



The Challenge

In 2010, Richwood High School in Richwood, West Virginia, was a struggling school in an economically depressed coal and lumber town in the Appalachian Mountains. Plagued by high poverty, poor attendance and graduation rates, and low teacher morale, the school got a wake-up call when the state designated it as “low-performing” for not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)—the only high school in West Virginia to be designated as such. Superintendent Beverly Kingery of the Nicholas County School District knew the school needed to reinvent itself—and quick.

Strategic Solution

The school received federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds to help choose and implement a reform model focused on improving instruction. After learning about McREL at a SIG vendor fair, the district chose Success in Sight. Using Success in Sight’s continuous improvement process, the school focused on three areas of concern: shared leadership, instructional practices, and school culture. Guided by consultant Sammye Wheeler-Clouse, Richwood staff created “fractal experiences”—short-term, small-scale objectives that result in quick results—related to developing an “environment for learning,” specifically, using the strategies of setting objectives and providing feedback, and reinforcing effort. They created a leadership team and purposeful communities that were responsible for collecting data on the fractal experiences and sharing findings with staff and students.

Results

Several “quick wins” in that first year translated into dramatic results—in the second year, student proficiency went up from 25 to 40 percent in math and 29 to 50 percent in reading, with particularly strong gains for at-risk students. Attendance and graduation rates went up, and they met AYP for the first time in six years.

From the beginning, staff worked hard to involve students in the improvement process. The superintendent held an assembly with students, teachers talked about and set goals with students, and data results were posted in the hallways for everyone to see. Kingery motivated the sports-loving student body by posting achievement scores of a rival school’s athletes. At a basketball game, when fans from the other school started chanting, “Go home. Richwood!” Kingery was amazed to hear Richwood fans chanting back, “AYP!”

Next Steps

During its third year of Success in Sight, the school will continue monitoring and adjusting the changes they’ve made and will work on increasing student engagement. They’ve gotten a jump start by starting an academic booster club, hiring a part-time parent engagement coordinator, and using their website and social media to better get information out to the community.