

McManus Elementary School – Brisbane School District

This case study was developed for the Urban School Leaders Fellowship, a collaborative effort of the Connecticut Center for School Change, The Fairfield County Community Foundation, and the Department of Education Leadership, Neag School of Education, University of Connecticut. The USLF program was designed to develop a larger pool of diverse, highly qualified, effective and entrepreneurial leaders. The case study was revised in 2019.

Demographics

McManus School has 475 students. The student population is approximately 28% Black, 55% Hispanic, and 17% White. 81% of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. The school has grades K-5. Most grades have three sections of students.

Staff

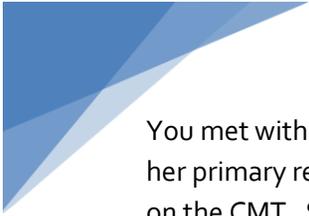
There are 18 classroom teachers, 3 special subject teachers, a media specialist, a literacy coach, three special education teachers, an ELL teacher, a social worker, a part time psychologist and a speech therapist. All but two professional staff are White. 3 classroom teachers are non-tenured, 4 classroom teachers have between 5 and 10 years' experience and the balance have more than twenty years' experience. The faculty works hard. There are 6 paraprofessionals assigned to the school primarily for special education support.

Background

The district has four full days for professional development spread throughout the year. Each grade level team meets one period (45 minutes) per week. In addition, there is one data team/PLC each week for two hours on a shortened school day.

Given your June 1st appointment, you were able to visit the school for two days in June for introductions and data gathering. Teachers are welcoming and friendly. Many express a need for leadership on literacy issues. It is clear the faculty cares about kids. Walls are filled with student work. However, your quick assessment is that the quality of the work is weak.

Reading instruction is traditional whole group. The school has a guided reading program, but few teachers use it. ELL students are integrated in each classroom. In the classrooms you observed during the literacy block (90 minutes), teachers were focused on stories not teaching reading strategies or skills. Teachers reported that they use both the Dibbles and DRA for assessing reading. Teachers reported that the school did not have a vocabulary program or plan, but many individual teachers did teach vocabulary based on their own lists. The few classroom libraries that you saw were teacher-purchased and eclectic.



You met with the literacy coach for two hours during your visit on the second day. She explained that her primary responsibility was providing remedial instruction to students who scored below proficient on the CMT. Since there were so many in this category, remedial instruction was provided in groups of 6-9 students three or four times a week. There were no specific materials used in remediation or additional, ongoing assessments.

On your visit to the school in June, you were able to observe two grade level PLCs. The climate was positive in both sessions. Teachers spent the first 15 minutes discussing field trips and an awards assembly. In both sessions, the groups placed their assessment data in tables and listed the group strengths and weaknesses on paper. There was no discussion of instructional practices.

Situation and Challenge

It is June 1st. The Board of Education has just approved the Superintendent's recommendation to appoint you the principal of McManus School. The Superintendent has charged you with the task to develop a plan to significantly improve literacy performance of students. Specifically, she has requested that you return with a two-year plan to turn around literacy performance of students. She further suggested that you implement a balanced literacy program in the school. However, the superintendent has said that if you don't think balanced literacy will do the job, you can propose other approaches.

Discussion Prompts:

1. What will be your school improvement plan for strengthening student achievement in literacy?
2. What will you try to accomplish in year 1? Year 2?

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