

Creating a Shared Vision of Success to Increase Student Achievement

DISTRICT PROFILE

Metro Status: Urban

Total Schools: 274

Grades: PreK–12

Total Enrollment: 166,233

**Eligible for Free or Reduced
Lunch:** 75.6%

“We now have more students applying to college, going to college, and getting scholarships to college. We definitely see the success in our partnership with ICLE.”

GOALS

- Increase leadership and instructional capacity to achieve a shared vision of success.
- Strengthen instructional practices and professional development opportunities.
- Improve students’ standardized scores, reading proficiency, and confidence.

CHALLENGES

The School District of Philadelphia is the eighth largest school district in the nation. The district lacked the capacity to effectively implement of district-wide professional development and, as a result, student achievement was lagging, particularly in the large comprehensive high schools. When they received a large Small Learning Community (SLC) grant, leadership in the School District of Philadelphia thought that the grant would make the process of improving instruction and building leadership capacity easier. Instead they were met with an extra set of unexpected challenges. With major turnovers in school and district-based leadership, new stakeholders brought with them new perspectives about funding use and teacher professional development strategies. Such instability contributed to the decline in student performance and inconsistency in achievement measures. Realizing that both leadership and instructional quality were suffering, the School District of Philadelphia engaged with the International Center for Leadership in Education for help achieving their goals: a shared vision of school improvement, a team of exceptional school teachers and leaders, and high student performance.

SOLUTION

■ Building the Instructional Leadership

Principals were trained by the ICLE team to access, analyze, and track key performance and behavioral data using district data management systems. This provided the ability to oversee incidents of student misbehavior, the average daily attendance rates, and the students’ scoring proficiency on state exams. Building level leaders worked shoulder to shoulder with consultants to develop strategic action plans to address gaps in these and other related areas. Plans were monitored with monthly and end-of-year reports updating progress toward goals.

■ Improving Instructional Capacity of Teachers

Teachers attended district-sponsored professional development sessions, completed online ICLE professional development courses, and received supplemental in-classroom coaching support. All educators were also provided with print resources which were then used as a source of reference in the classroom, either individually or with ICLE coaches. Online surveys were completed so that the impact of professional development on teaching practices could be monitored and measured.

■ Organizing Small Learning Community Models

ICLE created a personalized learning environment for students with small learning communities reflecting each school's individual strengths and needs. These communities individualized the student experience in a large urban school. ICLE then coached the teachers on constructing lesson plans and adjusting instruction to meet the needs of students in the learning communities while school leaders were given guidance on structuring re-organization.

■ Developing a Rigorous and Relevant School and Classroom Learning Environment

ICLE placed a heavy emphasis on helping teachers create a pedagogical approach that individualized student instruction. They gave teachers an overview of the new Common Core State Standards and how these changes related to the Pennsylvania state standards. ICLE then coached teachers in the creation of CCSS appropriate lesson plans by providing instructional strategies that focused on rigor, relevance, and building relationships. Teachers collaborated with instructional coaches who helped them facilitate student goals such as transitioning to college and career readiness standards and assessments.

“ICLE worked side by side with leadership teams and instructional teams to lay the groundwork for each of the schools, every new school year.”

“Bringing the ICLE instructional coaches in allowed the teachers to feel more comfortable and less threatened than having someone from the Central Office coming down and making them feel like they were being rated.”

SUCCESS

Nearly all goals of the district's various grants have been met. Teachers and principals alike have found the combination of both instructional and leadership coaches to be an invaluable asset to their own professional development. This has translated into better-armed school leaders who are ready to tackle the challenges faced in their district. ICLE's efforts have created a unity amongst the instructors, leading to the creation of professional learning communities amongst the teachers themselves. Students have become open to the process, gladly providing feedback to the coaches and teachers knowing that their input will result in a classroom that is more engaging and where they are more likely to succeed. The district has seen an improvement in students' standardized test scores and a dramatic increase in the number of students applying, attending, and receiving scholarships to college.

