Leadership Initiative:  
Addressing Barriers to Learning & Teaching  
and Re-engaging Disconnected Students

School District of Indian River County (FL)

The district enrolls 17,000 students in 2 high schools, 4 middle schools, and 14 elementary schools. 54% of the students are on free/reduced lunch. The district has been working with the UCLA learning supports frameworks, including a learning support team in some schools.

The district leadership team working with the AASA/Scholastic/UCLA collaboration includes the Superintendent, Director of Student Services, and Executive Director of School Improvement.

Initial Action Plan

At the 12/09 initial meeting, the team determined that their next steps were sharing information about a comprehensive system of learning support with the cabinet, board, Principals, students services personnel, union, parent advisory council.

The Superintendent indicated he would identify an administrative leader and a steering team for the component. The district applied for a U. S. Department of Education Elementary and Secondary Counseling grant that would help support a focus on developing a comprehensive learning support system.

There was interest in working with the district professional development staff to focus on intrinsic motivation using UCLA Center resources. They plan to incorporate it into the inservice for teachers.

The district is hoping to strengthening learning supports through vertical integration (high school feeder patterns). They will form workgroups to use the matrix to map resources. In the light of district budget cuts, this work “will enhance our ability to work smarter.”

Following the 2/10 meeting, the team planned to develop a learning supports design document for the district and a strategic plan for implementation (integrated into the district strategic plan).

Progress and Barriers

In April, the district responded briefly to the following two questions:

1) What progress has been made by your team in moving toward a comprehensive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students?  
(2) What barriers have been encountered in moving forward?
(1) Progress:

- “Our staff development team (of 2!) has begun working on the teacher training module on intrinsic motivation. We hope to incorporate it in our preschool inservice for teachers.
- We have our presentation to the school board scheduled for May 11th. (This has been delayed due to the painful task of budget reductions of $12.6 million for next year’s budget) After we present to the school board, we will begin plans to incorporate the barriers to learning in the strategic plan update.
- Our student services staff has been discussing the need to develop vertical teams for resource planning. We will also be discussing assigning staff to the 2 teams, north county and south county, for the next school year to enhance our ability to work smarter.
- We have a tentative meeting with a core team of staff to emphasize the content/curriculum and the scope of intervention matrix and to begin to identify how to introduce it to schools. This core team will expand our district team composition.”

Update on June 8th. Team members report that on May 11 the comprehensive system of learning support was presented to the school board. Board members asked how this initiative will be integrated into what the district is already doing and were told that it will be integrated into the district's strategic plan. The board was interested in the holistic approach. Budget constraints have meant cutting support services. The hope is that this work can offset the closing of alternative programs and will keep students from falling through the cracks. The initiative provides a foundation and will bolster motivation school-wide. The district has two feeder patterns of schools. Each has met to brainstorm how to proceed at the school level. They will focus on one content area at a time, beginning with classroom enabling and especially on intrinsic motivation. The goal is to strengthen teachers relationships with students.

- The next step is a June 24 meeting to present the comprehensive learning support plan to the principals and engage them in the work.
- The initiative will also be included in the August 1-2 Superintendent's Summit and presented to all administrators in the district. The goals is to build commitment at all levels. There is concern about the overload on principals. The Superintendent will also introduce the initiative to the parent advisory group.
- The team working on the initiative will be expanded with new members to increase the leadership and ensure sustainability. Looking forward to a practitioner perspective. In working with the Race to the Top framework, the district is looking forward to more resources for intensive help for struggling students.

(2) Barriers to Moving Forward

- Unfortunately the 2 major barriers are time and funding.
- We applied for the Elementary School Counseling Grant but found out that we are 1 of 600 applicants for 44 awards!

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