

Clark County School District

Increasing Academic Achievement through Professional Development: “Differentiated by Design”

The Clark County School District (CCSD), Las Vegas, Nevada, has embarked on a comprehensive school-improvement, professional development plan to assist schools in the fifth largest district in the nation with increasing achievement and closing gap. As CCSD hires almost 1,400 new teachers each year, it is critical that professional development be differentiated according to the needs of the district as a whole and each school as a separate entity. Seventy workshops were “Differentiated by Design” to meet the diverse needs of our schools as they developed their 2007-2008 school improvement plans. Administrators and school improvement teams were able to choose from a menu of services offering a wide range of opportunities. A description of each session, essential questions, and the targeted audience were listed in a document sent to all school principals and central office administrators. A “Facilitator’s Guide to School Improvement” outlined the critical steps necessary for data review, root cause analysis, student-centered action steps, and evidence based evaluation.

“Differentiated by Design” is a collaborative effort. The Department of Research and School Improvement designed the sessions. Seven data coordinators, two school improvement coordinators, and two research coordinators were the primary instructors. Additional support came from our English Language Learner and Special Education Divisions. Funding for this endeavor was a joint venture between the Department of School Improvement and the CCSD Title I office.

Almost 1800 staff and administrators participated over the course of five days. School-based teams increased their capacity to lead their schools through an in-depth look at their school-specific data. A strong emphasis was placed on the importance of the inquiry process, including the identification of root causes based on both quantitative and qualitative information. Several sessions concentrated on the importance of identifying student performance differences in cognitive level questioning with a focus on increasing achievement in the areas of higher level thinking questions. Participants also learned about team building, best practices, and accurate reading of reports. Individuals were encouraged to use action research as a means of evaluating current practices in their classrooms. A session focusing on the creation of data walls as a means of showcasing student work and increasing achievement was a complement to the action research session.

Differentiated by Design served to give the schools a common language for school improvement, a district-wide focus on reaching higher targets, and a deeper understanding of the changes necessary to move the district forward.

Contact: Arlene Lewis, Director of Research and School Improvement, Clark County School District, alewis2@interact.ccsd.net or Denise Wiedemann, Coordinator III, Clark County School District, dvwiedemann@interact.ccsd.net

