

Transforming Instruction for the Common Core State Standards

DISTRICT PROFILE

Metro Status: Rural

Total Schools: 24

Grades: K–12

Total Enrollment: 14,853

Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch: 82.5%

“ICLE came in and sat side-by-side with us. One of their greatest traits, besides their breadth of knowledge and experience, is their responsiveness to our needs.”

GOALS

- Building district-wide understanding of the instructional shifts of the Common Core State Standards.
- Deepening instructional capacity of teachers, and instructional leadership of school and central office administrators.
- Supporting district leadership in aligning the current K–12 math curriculum with the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics.

CHALLENGES

For Yakima School District, implementing the Common Core State Standards presented a challenge that they were not prepared to handle alone. The district knew they were going to need help preparing students for the rigorous demands of the new standards because classroom strategies were modeled after outdated forms of pedagogy. Leadership in all 24 schools needed coherence and structure on a scale that the district felt was almost unmanageable. With 15,500 students, many of whom were English Language Learners or from low-income households, they felt the challenge of improving instructional practice once they recognized the level of rigor and the relevance that the Common Core was going to require of all their teachers and principals.

The Yakima School District decided to partner with the International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE) to gain a blend of support that would both build understanding of the key changes of the Common Core and give teachers and other school staff across the district the training and coaching they needed to help their students graduate college and career ready.

SOLUTION

■ Building Common Core Understanding Among Instructional Staff

ICLE focused on fostering a deep understanding of the Common Core and the coming assessments across the district. They provided instructional coaching to improve teacher effectiveness and modeled the strategies for higher levels of rigor, relevance, and student engagement. This involved a combination of one- and two-day workshops for teachers and instructional leaders, and side-by-side coaching throughout the year to help teachers put the big ideas and instructional shifts of the Common Core

into practice. Workshop facilitators walked participants through technology implications and planning and promoted active discussions regarding classroom implications for evolutionary reinvention of standards by 2014.

■ **Increasing Rigor and Relevance Through Differentiated Instruction**

Every teacher participated in two days of professional development on Rigor/Relevance to create a common language across the district and to build a bridge to the Common Core State Standards and SMARTER Balanced Assessments. This training helped teachers effectively use the Rigor/Relevance Framework to increase the level of academic rigor and make classroom instruction more relevant and engaging for students. Teachers gained an understanding of how to analyze state tests, plan curriculum, differentiate instruction, and select the most effective instructional strategies while applying the Framework's methodology. They discovered practical resources for introducing the Rigor/Relevance Framework in their schools.

■ **Creating Organizational Leadership and Capacity for Transitioning to the Common Core State Standards**

ICLE provided leadership training and facilitated a Leadership Academy for school and building-level leaders on how to help the district through the change management process. It also teamed up with instructional leaders to align school curriculum to the new standard. Recognizing the need for continued support, they also provided job-embedded coaching for leaders and teachers. They worked with the principal to establish a culture of high expectations by regularly meeting with school staff and community to create a shared vision—a common definition of student success—of students not only as scholars but also as future workers, citizens, consumers, and parents.

“The School Board is recognizing this as the first time they have seen an initiative actually reach kids in the classroom.”

SUCCESS

The Yakima School District recognized that the Common Core is not just about students learning, but the teachers and leadership as well. Principals from schools in the district have experienced that ICLE has helped create a collaborative environment where teachers work together in meeting quarterly professional development goals. Instructional leaders have been armed by ICLE with the tools to meet the challenges of the Common Core and have already begun helping other teachers and leaders at their schools to prepare for the changes to come. Yakima's commitment to improvement, along with ICLE's support over a multi-year initiative, is helping prepare their students for college and 21st century careers.

