

Instructional Partnership Initiative

Using Teacher Evaluation to Drive Instructional Improvement

Overview

The Instructional Partnership Initiative (IPI) is a research based, no-cost strategy that uses teacher evaluation data to drive instructional improvement in clearly identified areas of practice. Utilizing detailed, indicator-level evaluation data, TDOE identifies and recommends potential partnerships between teachers in a given school. These pairings provide flexible, data-driven, targeted professional learning opportunities for teachers at all levels of practice. In Tennessee pilot studies, principals found the support to be beneficial, teachers appreciated the collaboration, educators perceived the evaluation system more positively, and students' TCAP scores improved significantly schoolwide--6 points in reading and 7 points in math.

Instructional Partnerships

Over the past two years, TDOE has been developing this approach for creating instructional change. The resulting Instructional Partnership Initiative is designed to leverage the formal evaluation feedback teachers receive into lasting instructional improvements through collaborative teacher partnerships. Based on complementary, indicator level evaluation data, TDOE identifies teachers who might benefit from working together in a yearlong partnership. The partners are then encouraged to work together throughout the year to build instructional skills and are provided with suggestions for accomplishing this successfully. The partnerships are voluntary, require very little time to establish, and have demonstrated great success. They allows principals to use existing expertise within their schools, promote shared leadership, and build capacity for all educators. The focus becomes using performance evaluation data to improve teacher practice, rather than spotlighting evaluation as a means for accountability.

Setting up Instructional Partnerships is straightforward:

- (1) TDOE uses fine-grained evaluation data to generate potential matches, then sends these matches and other implementation support to school principals. Each principal gets a list of possible partners along with pertinent information about each pair.
- (2) School principals review the recommended list of matches and make changes if necessary. This latitude allows principals to create the most successful combinations possible.
- (3) Principals invite teachers (separately) to participate, introduce each willing pair, explain the pairing, and encourage the pair in their work together. Principals begin with initial meetings in the fall. Setting up the IPI partnerships is a minimal time commitment and does not require on-going management.
- (4) Once paired, teachers work together throughout the year. While there is great latitude in what teachers do with their partnerships, each teacher receives an IPI guidebook with suggestions to help them structure the partnership over the course of the year. The guidebook supports a core part of the program-- autonomy to determine how the partnership will operate.

There are no specific requirements for participating teachers, as they are explicitly encouraged to structure their work to best meet their goals. Recommendations for partner activities are

provided, including peer class observation and lesson planning. Teachers may choose to work together during planning times, during (possible) release time, and potentially after school.

Pilot Study Results

In the TDOE pilot of this initiative, interested schools were randomly chosen to implement Instructional Partnerships. Schools using these partnerships increased average student TCAP test scores school-wide by 7 points in mathematics and 6 points in reading/language arts. Students of participating teachers saw TCAP improvement of up to 12 points more than the students of similar teachers in control schools. In addition, teachers in the schools that implemented the IPI reported evaluation was more about feedback than accountability vs. their counterparts in control schools. The random assignment of schools to receive the initiative ensured that we could make strong causal claims about the effects of the partnerships.

In addition to fostering higher test scores, adopting the IPI approach promoted shared leadership, built capacity in schools, and gave principals a concrete way to provide feedback to teachers. Principals indicated that the partnerships took minimal time to set up, teachers benefitted, and partnerships offered more support than the principals alone could provide. Teachers felt the opportunity to reflect on their practice and collaborate with a colleague were clear benefits of the initiative. Each principal who implemented the IPI in the pilot study chose to continue it for an additional year.

For additional questions about the IPI, please contact us at team.questions@tn.gov.