case study

Collaboration Helps Community Find Effective Solutions to Budget Crunch

SEWANHAKA CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

RESTORING FACILITIES • IMPROVING INSTRUCTION • SUPPORTING SECURITY • ENHANCING EFFICIENCIES

Providing
a Quality 21st
Century Education
FOR *All* STUDENTS

Recap/Key Points

- Multiple TregoED tools are used to find cost savings and pass bond referendum

- Innovative thinking encourages new solutions

- Stakeholder involvement builds trust and transparency and leads to community support

District Information

Located on Long Island, NY, the Sewanhaka Central High School District serves 8,600 students (grades 7-12) in its five schools. The District receives students from four varied communities—each with its own elementary systems. Each community sends two trustees to the Sewanhaka Central High School's Board.

Problem/Challenge

Upon arrival in Sewanhaka, Superintendent Ralph Ferrie inherited many competing challenges, including five aging buildings that could no longer be maintained through the regular operating budget. These needs combined with a legislatively-imposed property tax cap required the District to cut spending by at least 3 million dollars. Clearly, some painful decisions (including those involving personnel cuts) were necessary.

Solution

TregoED trained the District's leadership team in Decision Analysis (DA), Potential Problem Analysis (PPA), and Situation Appraisal (SA). Team members then initiated an extensive DA related to budget cuts. They formulated a dozen criteria to use for evaluating potential cuts. Over the course of multiple meetings, the team identified potential cuts that would best meet the criteria. Ultimately, the team evaluated over 40 potential cuts and completed a PPA on each one which helped determine core cuts. The cuts were shared with the Board and the public and then further refined as a result of feedback.

tregoED

Every budget presentation was framed around the work with DA and PPA. This enabled the team to make the logic visible and the motivations transparent. These presentations and ensuing discussions helped further refine the work and determine where cuts could and could not occur. Thinking creatively, the team explored new ways to reduce costs and utilize resources. Ultimately, a final budget plan was developed and approved.

After the initial round of budget cuts, it was clear to leaders that the buildings' condition and the scale of needed repairs necessitated a bond referendum. SA was used with building principals, the Board, and others to further clarify needs. After multiple meetings with many stakeholders, a bond proposal was solidified using DA and presented to the community. It failed the first time. Additional input was sought and the proposal was recrafted. A communications plan was developed and the proposal was put to a vote once again. It was successfully passed the 2nd time—a historic first for the District.

Results

- At least three million dollars cut from district spending. Significant cost savings achieved through innovative solutions to problems, e.g. technology to augment security, restructured ESL program, phase-out of obsolete programs, and reduced software costs through analysis of usage.

- First-ever voter-approved bond referendum successfully passed to bring necessary repairs and improvements to aging buildings.

- Enhanced capacity of central office and site leaders to resolve difficult issues, involve others in the process, and communicate sound rationale for actions. Subsequently, district leaders have used TregoED tools on many varied issues— e.g., software purchases, vendor selection, program restructuring, technology implementation, policy changes, disparities in discipline and academic data, etc.

- Greater transparency and trust within and between the district and the communities it serves.

- TregoED tools and common language enable more effective and productive teamwork—even when there are significant disagreements.

"

"Over time, we've gained the increased trust of our community (internal and external) that critical decisions are based on clear and purposeful thinking, consider the input of appropriate stakeholders, and align with agreed-upon district priorities."

Dr. Cheryl Champ, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction

tregoED