

case study

Tackling Student Achievement: Aligning Cause, Solutions, & Support



Recap/Key Points

- Used Problem Analysis and data to identify four root causes of student achievement problems
- Increased ownership of student achievement at district, school, and individual levels
- Aligned school and district initiatives, PD, and spending to address four key causes

Solution

TregoED provided an interdepartmental team with in-depth training in Problem Analysis (PA), a root cause-finding tool. The team facilitated one-day PA sessions with each school improvement team, focusing on using and analyzing student achievement data to identify root cause. School teams accessed, disaggregated, and analyzed existing student achievement data. Digging into and organizing data into the IS/IS NOT format helped teams make sense of information and identify interesting contrasts and anomalies.

School teams identified possible root causes as well as things to look for in their buildings to validate or disprove the causes. District team members completed Validation Walks and confirmed the most viable cause. School improvement plans and “problems of practice” were developed around validated causes and included observable indicators of success.

District Information

Colorado’s D11 (Colorado Springs) school district serves over 27,000 students in its 53 schools.

Problem/Challenge

District 11 had worked hard at addressing student achievement concerns, but wanted to see even more progress district-wide. Each school had implemented its own school improvement efforts with varying levels of success. While schools could choose from a wide variety of improvement actions, district leaders suspected that some efforts were more effective and relevant than others. The district wanted to see a more direct correlation between school improvement efforts and student achievement. For several years, leaders had sporadically used some familiar root cause analysis tools (Five Whys and Fishbone) but were not satisfied with the rigor or results of these analyses. Superintendent, Nick Gledich, and other district leaders, wanted to dig deeper in a standardized and systematic way to identify the true roots of the student achievement problem.



A district-level team also independently used PA on district-level data and identified four primary causes or drivers of student achievement. The four areas were: data-driven decision making (including data collection, analysis and usage), standards implementation (including knowing what they mean and how to achieve mastery), curriculum (including alignment to state standards and pacing guides), and quality of instructional practices (including rigor, expectations, and formative assessments). Interestingly, no school identified a root cause that did not align with one of the four identified at the district level. By working together and providing feedback to each other, each department specified what it needed to do in order to better support schools in these four areas.

Results

Focusing on their 4 key drivers of student achievement helped D11 align efforts and resources at all levels in order to better support teachers and schools. Some of the changes and outcomes include:

- Improved understanding and alignment to state academic standards—analysis showed a lack of clarity on what the standards meant and how to recognize and achieve mastery of them in the classroom. The district updated its curriculum and aligned pacing guides. Early efforts in working with schools quickly convinced the district of the value of working with each individual school to help teachers unwrap and prioritize standards, as well as determine ways to help students master them.
- More intentionality in lesson planning—lessons address high-impact standards and target mastery by requiring rigor.
- More systematic approach to writing common assessments—in response to school requests, the district adopted a test bank of questions to enable staff to create aligned, formative assessments through a drag and click methodology.
- Professional Learning Communities were re-established as a vehicle for furthering these results and doing focused work.
- Instructional Rounds and Success Walks allow targeted and timely feedback aimed at high-value practices.
- 80% growth in desired, observable indicators of success identified to address root cause.
- Greater focus of district and school resources—all initiatives, professional development, spending and planning have been aligned to address identified root causes related to student achievement.
- Central office departments have moved from being directive to being more collaborative and responsive to school requests based on data and root cause analysis, not opinions or faulty assumptions.
- More ownership and enthusiasm for tackling student achievement at all levels. Student achievement problems are proactively identified and addressed. Rather than dismissing problems for reasons perceived to be outside a teacher's or school's control, people are working together on things that **can** be done to address root cause.



"The work has created an infusion of excitement because the path is clear, the work is more defined and work is being supported."

Patti Pierce, System Improvement Specialist

