

ALL STUDENTS ON TRACK
Willamette ESD

WESD did a high school inventory in 19 districts that they work with. They asked 7 questions and compiled answers from all the schools:

1. Career and college going vision

The programs are clearer than the vision, but they are often not clear to families.

Career support is not as visible, college support is a given, and many kids feel like they are failing or not working to their potential if they choose a career program instead of a college program.

2. Rigorous teaching and learning

Students, teachers and parents all want increased rigor and engagement.

There is a need for math professional development, alignment and a teacher pipeline.

3. Compelling high school graduation rates

Most districts want help and support developing and implementing a 9th grade on track program and early warning system.

4. Robust college going/dual credit programs

Dual credit programs have increased throughout the state, mainly through promise programs. The completion rates are still low, but we don't have enough years' data to tell whether taking dual credit classes increases the likelihood that a student will graduate from college.

There is a huge need for dual credit in the area of CTE. Most dual credit right now is in college bound classes rather than CTE classes. This needs to change.

5. High quality CTE and STEM programs

Educators want to bring programs into this century and create coherent pipelines and pathways.

Teacher certification and equipment are barriers here.

6. Intentional attendance policies and practice

Low rates of regular attenders are an issue across the region. While the daily attendance might be high, there are very high numbers of students who are chronically absent. There is a tremendous need for a root cause analysis and proactive outreach to reduce this number.

7. Equity

Student outcomes are predicted by race and economic disadvantage. Some districts, like Washington County, have invested heavily in equity and are seeing the gaps closing. One way to do this is to have a Diverse Educator Pipeline where we are actively recruiting into education kids who are minorities. This is an area where we might be seeing some money from the state, so we should be thinking about how we would do that if that does happen.

Are we actively recruiting minorities into Sonia's class? Working with Nix to have their kids participate in the education class?

9th GRADE ON TRACK IMPORTANCE

The University of Chicago has done a lot of research on the importance of the 9th grade on track data. Their data shows that there is nothing more predictive than the 9th grade on track numbers. While 11th grade may give you more concrete numbers, 9th grade allows you to look at the numbers and still have time to do something about it.

5 IDEAS THAT CHANGE EVERYTHING

1. Dropping out is not a characteristic of students. Schools themselves, teachers, etc. have a major impact on whether students graduate or not.
2. The transition to high school is the most critical time that affects graduation rates. We need to have more communication from middle school to high school, and more mentoring at 9th grade. We can't expect that students will just manage this transition by themselves without any help. This is a major reason students are not successful in 9th grade and then end up dropping out.
3. Who will graduate (and enroll and persist in college) can be accurately predicted based on course grades freshman year.
4. The primary driver of course failure is course absence, not weak skills.
5. Monitoring and support from adults can prevent failure.

When teachers give a student an F, they think they are teaching the kid that high school is a serious business and that they need to work harder, show their independence and step up their game. They think it's a wakeup call.

When students get an F, they think that high school is impossible, that they are not smart enough anyway, so why bother to try, that no one here wants to help them and that they don't belong there. Not at all what the teachers think they are teaching by giving an F.

We need to somehow get the teachers to understand this difference. Especially in 9th grade, where they are transitioning and really need a lot of mentoring and support, failing them is one way to make them choose not to come back to school. When we allow teachers to do this, we are derailing the education and almost certainly causing some kids to drop out.

We need to understand that kids are not to blame if they are not successful. We need to learn how to help them be successful in ways that make sense to them.

Building strategies for freshman success

This transition year is an extremely important indicator. We have got to do everything we can do to help these students. This means we need to improve communication between the middle school and the high school. The high school freshman teachers should be PLCing (or something) with the 8th grade teachers in the month before school starts so that they are aware of what the kids need when they get to the high school. What strategies work best with what kids, how we can best help each kid. We also need to have more consistent discipline from the middle school to the high school. Consequences for not doing what is expected should be the same across the board. Obviously, what is expected won't be exactly the same from the middle school to the high school, but the kids should walk into the high school and know that the consequences for their actions are going to be the same as they were at the

middle school. If they can do something at the middle school that they know is wrong, but there are no serious consequences, it will be a tough transition when they get to the high school and suddenly there are consequences.

Instead of:

giving every teacher one freshman course
collaborating in silos by department (English plc, math plc)
talking about skills alignment across content areas
developing intervention outside of teacher practice

We need to try:

creating a team of dedicated freshman only teachers - freshman specialists
holding space for collaboration by grade level instead of department
talking about student's experience across courses
developing classroom based strategies for improvement

Improvement Science/Networked continuous improvement

1. Understand the problem from the user perspective. The user needs to be involved in the solution. We need to ask the kids to help solve the problem. We can't solve the reduced graduation rates with adults sitting in a room talking about it. We need to ask the kids. Do "empathy interviews".
2. Map the system that produces the problem.
3. Produce change ideas to address the problem. Ask the kids. Make small changes and get immediate feedback.
4. Disciplined rapid cycles of inquiry to test solutions. Ask the questions. Get some suggestions. Make small changes and look for feedback in a 3 week time frame rather than a 3 month time frame.
5. Measure tests and focus on variation. Look at the users on both ends of the spectrum. Why did this work for one population and not the other? When you are asking kids questions, try to choose a population where if you are successful with them you will be successful with all of the students.
6. Accelerate learning through the network.

My thoughts are that maybe we need to look at what we are doing in the 8-9 grade transition, as well as how we are working with the freshmen. Maybe we need to look at doing a team approach, similar to what happens at the middle school in 6th grade. That seems to work well at transitioning the kids from 5th to 6th grade, would it work as well at the high school level? Other schools are having significant success with it.