

Transforming Curriculum and Instruction for the Common Core

DISTRICT PROFILE

Metro Status: Urban

Total Schools: 5

Grades: K–12

Total Enrollment: 1,843

**Eligible for Free or Reduced
Lunch:** 81%

“[With curriculum transformation], we really had an opportunity to get ahead. We couldn’t wait. ICLE helps us stay ahead of other districts in our area, across the state, and even across the country.”

GOALS

- Development of a coherent model of instructional leadership to guide student and professional learning focused on all students meeting the higher expectations of the new standards.
- System-wide realization of what the Common Core State Standards require of both students and teachers, learned via deep understanding of the curriculum mapping process.
- Template for Common Core State Standards unit construction, standards alignment to units, and complete unit templates.
- Creation of summative performance tasks and formative assessment items for unit assessments.

CHALLENGES

Warren City Schools’ curriculum maps were long out of date. The district had never created units and assessments aligned with state standards. Frequent changes in leadership and continuing adjustments to school configurations had resulted in uncertainty and anxiety, which strongly impacted the culture of learning, teaching, and leading.

When Melissa Watson joined the team as Director of Teaching, she was determined to get the district on track with their Common Core transition. She realized the right partner would be critical to the curriculum transformation process. “As good as our team is, we need some help. We can’t possibly keep up on all the national changes.” The district made it a priority, budget-wise and time-wise, to get teachers involved in the curriculum mapping process, as a means of understanding the instructional shifts necessitated by the Common Core.

SOLUTION

■ Overview of the curriculum mapping process and schedule with the district leadership team

The first school year was dedicated to educating an instructional leadership team on the standards and building new units. Goal number one was educating and training district leaders on what the curriculum mapping process entailed. The next school year was focused on implementation, practice, and revision, and after that, the implementation of the new standards. “Expect to struggle with it and expect to get a lot of push back. But when you get to the other side of it? It’s like the feeling of exhilaration is unbelievable.”

■ Common Core State Standards deconstruction with 400+ teachers & leaders from all grades and subjects

Warren educators thought they had an understanding of the standards, but it was not until going through the unpacking process that they realized they had been mistaken. With a non-traditional professional learning approach, the International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE) worked side by side Warren educators involving them in the process of matching curriculum to the new standards and developing Next Generation Assessments. The two teams asked essential questions, focused on big ideas, and broke down the standards into manageable chunks.

“Now you feel this high level of comfort, as teachers delved into it and worked together and synergistically built the curriculum components or the units of study.”

■ Collaborating on protocol for unit audits and creating unit templates facilitated by ICLE consultants

During this process, collaboration both with ICLE and between buildings and grade levels was encouraged. Through a hands-on approach and teamwork, participants started to realize the necessity of evolving instruction in order to achieve the results they were looking for. Describes Watson, “[Consultants were] actually sitting down, at a table, with a group of teachers, and answering their questions, listening to their frustrations, looking at their units, working them through it.”

ICLE’s facilitation of group work allowed the whole K–12 community of educators to come together, opening the dialog and bridging the divides between elementary, middle, and high schools. Ownership at every grade level, and communication and collaboration was the catalyst.

■ Common Core State Standard assessment design presentation and protocol aligned to PARCC

The assessment design process has been a huge wake-up call, says Watson, who points out that Warren’s teachers had no exposure to the new assessments and little understanding of what they will entail. While she realizes now that there is no shortcut to preparing educators for the demands of the new standards, it is also clear that the benefits that have resulted from the collaboration and hard work extend far beyond the units that were created. The teachers are reinvigorated.

SUCCESS

After completing the first year partnership with ICLE, Watson says Warren’s curriculum maps are “1000 times better than the maps that we had before.” At the end of the school year, teachers walked out with their entire first set of units in their hands—carrying with them their aligned new units, activities, lesson plans, and assessments. Phase two of the partnership will begin in the upcoming school year, giving teachers the opportunity to revise and refine their units while continuing to receive support from the ICLE team.

In addition, the district is working to develop a three-year strategic plan for aligning and implementing the district’s efforts to increase student achievement and support powerful instruction. This plan will be one that focuses on prioritized needs, programs, and supports, while tying together the positive work and results already underway. A clear set of roles and responsibilities for leadership effectiveness is to be implemented, coordinated, and monitored.

“From that very first meeting it was evident that ICLE was going to be able to provide us that national perspective we were looking for. They had someone to support each grade-level span.”

