

MINNIEVILLE "PRESS IN" IMPLEMENTATION

MAXIMIZING INSTRUCTIONAL TIME IN LANGUAGE ARTS TO INCREASE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

The Problem...

One of the most common factors we found in talking with our teachers about reasons and factors causing our students not to make the kind of academic progress needed is consistently "TIME"!!! More specifically, time to teach all of the components of balanced literacy.

As a federally funded school, we have all the resources and materials we need for our students. We have additional staff to support teachers and students during the day and all of our staff are highly qualified and have taken advantage of countless hours of professional development.

With that being said, our students simply do not have the time they need to be exposed to all of the key elements of balanced literacy on a daily basis. For our grades in K-2, we currently have a 120 minute Language Arts block. For grades 3-5, we currently have a 90 min Language Arts block. Historically, in a traditional Balanced Literacy/Guided Reading block, teachers would cycle through four to five guided reading groups at 20 minutes apiece. This leaves less than 10 to 30 minutes of literacy instructional time for Writing, Silent Reading, etc. to be done daily. A typical 3rd grader would only receive 30 minutes of direct instruction. The rest of his/her time would be devoted to center based activities with little to no real accountability or engagement. For a high needs school where the majority of students are Economically Disadvantaged and Second Language Learners, this presents a problem. If reading truly is fundamental, why is it that arguably the most important instructional block of the day is getting the least amount of direct instruction???

A school with a large population of diverse learners with many needs, the most logical answer was small differentiated literacy groups conducted by the teacher. Principals would then utilize additional funds for Interventionists or support personnel to pull students out of the class when they needed additional or very specific, prescribed support. But what if there was another way?

For a school that has embraced the Response to Intervention philosophy, we had begun to realize that we needed to be more proactive as well with our Core Tier 1 classroom instruction as opposed to sending kids off with specialists if they weren't performing on grade level.

The Strategy...

Our teachers and parents raised the issue of maximizing the instructional time and student engagement during the Language Arts block. The school leadership team conducted numerous engagement walkthroughs and student time on task analysis observations to gauge whether or not students were directly being involved with the literacy learning and the type of materials and work they were exposed to during independent literacy center tasks. The administrative and literacy teams found, that even with the best thought out and managed classrooms, the teacher simply didn't have enough direct instructional time with the students. Classrooms could very well have four to five different reading groups, all with various ability levels. The observational data was presented to the leadership team and to the entire school faculty. Using that information, the school leadership team began to look at reasons for the concern and solutions.

The leadership team also reached out to other schools in the state that faced this similar challenge. Some of their solutions were to...

1. Invest more time and training on developing better crafted centers that could be more closely monitored.
2. Hire teacher assistants to monitor the classrooms during Language Arts.
3. Utilize our current reading specialists to provide more Tier 1 support than intervention support.

All of these options were discussed.

The leadership team also examined every resource specialist currently providing Tier 2 and 3 interventions along with the Second Language Support staff. One realization occurred: many students that had been pulled out of the classroom for Tier 2 instruction were doing the same things that were happening in the classroom, but they were missing out on Writing, and core Literacy skills.

We began looking at our current schedules and found that some interventionists' and teachers' schedules were also overlapping in times. After a little thought, the school's Literacy PLC and Leadership team asked to meet with our Reading Specialists, ESOL support team, and Literacy Assistants, and create a schedule so that a team of teachers could be in each classroom during Language Arts. Each Literacy specialist, ESOL specialist, Reading Assistant and Classroom Teacher would be responsible for a reading group at the same time. The remaining 60 to 90 minutes of Language Arts could be used for quality direct literacy instruction, mirroring a true balanced literacy model. Students could now be guaranteed daily guided reading and literacy small groups, and not miss out on quality

writing instruction, reading skills instruction and interventions. Through the work, research, and efforts of our school based collaborative teams, we felt that we were on to a very positive and applicable solution.

The Implementation...

As a school we had to research even more schools that utilized this type of resource alignment for their Language Arts block. The school's administration team found a school outside our Division that utilized multiple resources to support the classroom teacher at the same time. Teams of teachers visited various schools and brought the feedback to Minnieville. As a school, the decision was made to implement this new strategy in one grade level.

This new plan was entitled the PRESS IN Plan or (Pushing in Reading Exceptional Support Services). With this plan, our Reading Specialist, Language Support Specialist and one Teacher Assistant came into a classroom with the classroom teacher during Reading. Each took a Guided Reading small group. This support team was in charge of the resources and instruction for that small group. Now, instead of the classroom teacher using the entire block of time for guided reading, only 20 to 30 minutes were used. Now, quality daily guided reading support could be implemented and direct instruction in Writing and Language Arts Objectives also could be taught by the classroom teacher.

After the PRESS IN team finished with one classroom, they then traveled to the second classroom to begin their Guided Reading time, and so on. A carefully created schedule was collaboratively created to assist with the implementation. This initial plan was carried out for six weeks and monitored by the administration.

Opportunities for the staff to give feedback about the implementation were very helpful in modifying the structure. Because this implementation was a second order change, potential issues and pitfalls were brought up and discussed. Some of the original concerns were

1. Teachers would lose control over all of their groups.
2. Communication among teachers would be more difficult.
3. Would it be too noisy?
4. Who is ultimately responsible for the progress of the students?

All of the questions and concerns were very legitimate and all concerns were answered by the leadership and literacy collaborative team. This was a very important aspect in our process. Giving the

teachers ownership of the successes, challenges and solutions of the PRESS IN model was absolutely pivotal in its implementation.

The Results....

The results of this implementation were almost immediate. Student engagement and time on task increased to 90 to 100%. Students were now guaranteed daily literacy and guided reading skills. Writing instruction improved and now there was time for sacred silent reading as well as the direct Language Arts objectives. Discipline referrals during Language Arts dropped to virtually 0%. State assessment scores were raised and On Grade Level Reading percentages increased as well!

The number of specialists supporting the entire school required a vast increase in collaboration, data sharing and effective communication. PRESS IN gave the classroom teachers even more information about how their students were performing. The increased communication also significantly brought the staff closer with a shared/revamped purpose. During the second year of the PRESS IN implementation, grades 2 through 5 participated and in our third year, grades K-5 will participate.

The challenge of maximizing instructional time throughout the day and increasing student engagement is not a unique challenge. Many schools across the nation have been very creative and resourceful in finding solutions to this question. For our school with our needs, utilizing highly collaborative teams to search out solutions to needs was extremely powerful. Creating and sustaining a culture that fosters school wide support for effective literacy instruction has been an amazing and integral part of our school wide success.

Attached are the beginning and ending reading level results of students in grades K-5 as measured by the DRA2 reading assessment from 2010-2013.

	2010/2011		2011/2012		2012-2013	
	TRADITIONAL LITERACY BLOCK IMPLEMENTATION		PRESS IN YEAR 1		PRESS IN YEAR 2	
	Sept.	June	Sept.	June	Sept.	June
Kindergarten	N/A	78%	N/A	89	65%	94%
1 st	80%	65%	63%	76	77%	83%
2 nd	61%	71%	50%	76	60%	76%

3rd	65%	62%	54%	77	53%	78%
4th	61%	66%	56%	70	78%	87%
5th	71%	82%	61%	87	63%	68%

Minnieville Elementary School has been recognized Nation Wide Professional Learning Community Model school by Leading for Learning. For more information, contact Nathaniel Provencio, Principal, Minnieville Elementary School, 13639 Greenwood Dr, Woodbridge, VA 22193 703.670.6106