

DOINGWHATWORKS



Audio

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Establishing a Common Understanding

Thurgood Marshall Academy Public Charter School, Washington, DC
December 2009

Topic: Using Student Achievement Data to Support
Instructional Decision Making
Practice: Vision for Data Use

Highlights

- Thurgood Marshall Academy Public Charter School defines critical concepts encompassing the school's vision for data use.
- Some critical concepts defined include data, achievement, proficiency, and formative and summative assessments.
- To establish a common understanding of the critical concepts on data use, the school provides professional development activities to teachers and includes the definitions of these critical concepts in the faculty and staff handbook.

About the Site

Thurgood Marshall Academy Public Charter School

Washington, DC

Demographics

99% Black

69% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

Thurgood Marshall Academy Public Charter School has established a strong culture of consistently using student achievement data to support instructional decision making through the following activities:

- Implementing a two-pronged assessment system
- Working collaboratively in subject-area teams to analyze data
- Providing data-based support to ensure the success of all students
- Engaging students in data use across grade levels

Full Transcript

My name is Alexandra Pardo. I am the academic director for Thurgood Marshall Academy High School, in DC. The school has a very strong belief, and our vision in terms of data use is rampant across our entire building. And we truly feel that data is critical to improving instruction of our students.

It is important for the school to establish a common understanding of key concepts that comprise our schoolwide vision and our terminology around data use. The way we went about that is we really looked at our data use around student achievement as a means to revamp and consider what curricular decisions we need to make. And so we didn't start with the curriculum, we started with our student achievement and the data. From that we then looked at how do we want to define what our students should know and how do we measure that, using the state standards as a starting point, then looking at from the state standards what objectives we have in our classrooms. We looked at the data and defining data as to what are key elements and what are key points that we want to know. We found that there are a lot of data points available to schools. But we had to define what key data points we wanted, and that came out of dialogues with our teachers, dialogue with faculty, staff, administration. In terms of achievement, we understood that people have different definitions of achievement, and so we looked at what does our state test define as achievement, at what levels do students need to be proficient. And that was the starting point for that. And we found it important to define all of our terms in our faculty and staff handbook, so our faculty and staff handbook now consists of a data section that actually has the definitions for all of our assessment programs, our key terms, so that everybody understands when we are talking about formative/summative assessments, achievement proficiency data, that is all in there as a reference point to go back to.

The process to work with teachers and ensure that they have a common understanding of our key concepts around data use begins in August in our teacher orientation. Our entire data program is outlined in our staff and faculty handbook, and we offer differentiated professional development in August to those who are novice teachers and those who are returning teachers who have been familiar with our data and assessment program. Having a common understanding really is important for teachers to change instruction and improve instruction, and so our teachers have to start off with realistic goals for their classrooms based on who is sitting in their classroom and figuring out how to work with those students and work with those individuals.

It's really important for the teachers to understand what proficiency is on our state test or the AP test or the SAT so they can communicate that to the students. Our students may not come in knowing, how do I know if I did well on the AP or what's a good score on SAT? And our teachers have to have that common terminology in order to communicate that to students and also look at each student as an individual, because students may have different levels of successes. An 800 on the SAT may be great for one student, but it may not be the same for another student. And so having that understanding and also knowing the students becomes critical to defining success and improving student achievement at the student level as well as at the school level.