

DOINGWHATWORKS



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

It's Not Something That's Static

MacArthur Ninth Grade School, Texas • December 2009

Topic: Using Student Achievement Data to Support
Instructional Decision Making
Practice: Data-Driven Culture

Highlights

- MacArthur Ninth Grade School uses data to develop curriculum each year. Staff members examine data to identify student needs and to align curriculum to those needs and to standards.
- Curriculum teams write the curriculum in the summer and refine it throughout the school year.
- Based on assessment results, teachers may change their instructional strategies to better fit certain content areas.

About the Site

MacArthur Ninth Grade School

Houston, TX

Demographics

83% Hispanic

12% Black

4% White

79% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

MacArthur Ninth Grade School uses student achievement data to support instructional decision making through such activities as:

- Engaging in three-week and six-week assessment cycles
- Embedding data use into the school's mission and vision
- Using data to develop curriculum and key areas of focus for instruction
- Implementing tools for students that provide clear expectations and grading criteria for all core classes
- Accessing and analyzing data from the districtwide data warehouse system

Full Transcript

Craig Mullenix: I am Craig Mullenix, principal at MacArthur Ninth Grade School, in Aldine Independent School District, Houston, Texas.

Chris McCurry: And I am Chris McCurry, department chair of biology at MacArthur Ninth Grade School.

Mullenix: It's important to use data to develop curriculum because you want to know exactly what strengths and weaknesses students have coming into the school before you develop your curriculum. You need to know what areas students have low scores in so that you know when you develop your curriculum, what areas need more concentration. You have to balance student needs with national, state, and district curriculum standards.

I think the first thing that we do before we write curriculum in the summer, we get all of the students' data in at the end of May or the beginning of June, then we get several curriculum teams together for our core areas, and when I talk about core areas, we're talking about math, science, social studies, and English. We get teams of curriculum writers together. You want to have an administrator that's able to look at what's being written. You want to have teachers writing the curriculum so that they buy in to it. And you also want to have some curriculum experts that can look at the content of what's being written, as well as teachers that know about pedagogy and teaching techniques. So we get our teams together in the summer. We look at the data, we look at national standards, we look at state standards, we look at district requirements, and we make a determination of exactly what's the process that needs to be followed throughout the year. We take the district objectives and then we try to get as specific as we can with each objective according to student needs, according to student data, and according to state standards.

McCurry: Although we do write the curriculum in the summer, during the school year we build on what we have done in the summer by making the kind of changes that we need, and those changes are based on the data that we gather at every assessment. The use of data to develop curriculum has impacted our

instruction in that we found that certain teaching strategies are more successful with certain content areas. For example, in science, we teach the structure of the DNA molecule, and we have found that creating a visual diagram of the DNA molecule in a whole-group setting led by the teacher is much more successful with that certain specific content area. In other ways though, working in small groups, such as studying the steps of cellular reproduction, mitosis, is much more successful when students are working with students because activities such as mitosis are more of a sequencing activity, putting things in correct sequence, using visual cues and prior knowledge is better between student and student with the teacher more guiding, rather than directly leading, the instruction.

Mullenix: Just as important as the final document is in writing curriculum is the process that the teachers go through when they write the curriculum, because in effect what you are doing is you have professional development or staff development going on while you are writing the curriculum because the administrators, the teachers—everybody participating in the process—have to look at curriculum. You have to study, you have to look at what the objectives are, you have to study what national standards are, you have to know what state standards are.

McCurry: In my experiences writing curriculum, I have learned that curriculum writing is something that cannot be repeated year after year and expected to get the same result. You have to look back at the data every time that you assess your students, whether that would be through a six weeks' exam or even a weekly lesson, and see where you were successful, where you were unsuccessful, and continue to apply the skills that you have learned through curriculum writing to the next week's lesson, the next six weeks' groups of lessons, and even the next year's set of curriculum. It's not something that can be static at any point, and it's truly the greatest challenge I find as a teacher.