



Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy

PERSEVERANCE. RESPECT. INTEGRITY. DISCIPLINE. ENTHUSIASM.

A District-Charter Partnership: CSP Dissemination Grant

A partnership made possible thanks to grant funding provided by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE)

Implementation Summary

June 15, 2015

Overview

Starting in the spring of 2013, Blackstone Valley Prep (BVP) Mayoral Academy partnered with Central Falls High School and Harry Kizirian Elementary School in Providence, Rhode Island. The focus of this partnership centered around two major areas that help promote a strong and healthy school culture that is focused on student outcomes: **(1) using video analysis to drive greater student results**; and **(2) replicating best practices via conducting school visits and peer observations**. Building on previous successes in these areas, our goal was to disseminate and replicate these successes while also learning from best practices at our partner schools.

This report provides an overview of accomplishments as it relates to this partnership and the CSP Dissemination Grant, our lessons learned, and a reflection on our final progress towards the goals of the project. More importantly, it highlights key elements of the project so that other teachers and leaders can learn from our experience and tailor the successful practices for use at their own schools. It should be noted that a research team at Brown University also conducted a third-party evaluation that consisted of both an interim evaluation and a final report. Several of those findings are highlighted in this report, denoted by an asterisk where applicable.

About the partners

Blackstone Valley Prep (BVP) Mayoral Academy is an intentionally diverse network of public schools chartered by the Rhode Island Department of Education. A growing network, BVP currently serves over 1,000 students in grades K-9 from Central Falls, Cumberland, Lincoln and Pawtucket. BVP's mission is to prepare every scholar for success in college and the world beyond.

Central Falls (CF) High School is part of the Central Falls School District, which is an urban school district of 2,900 students and 19,000 residents approximately 10 miles north of Providence.

Harry Kizirian Elementary School serves grades K-5 and is part of the Providence Public Schools District, which serves over 23,000 students.

I. Using video to drive greater student results.

Research supports that frequent, informal feedback has been shown to increase teacher effectiveness. Video is a useful tool that both teachers and leaders can use to document and disseminate exemplar teaching practices. It's also a reflective tool that can be used for exchanging discussion and feedback between instructional coaches and teachers. BVP researched a variety of educational video-sharing platforms, including Torsh, Teaching Channel and Smarter Cookie, that could be used for both of these purposes. BVP contracted with Smarter Cookie for the first two years of the grant period and will seek other options in the future.

Here is a link to a video that highlights our partnership, as well as several reflections from BVP teachers on why the tool has been helpful for them, personally.

As part of the video sharing platform, teachers had the option to share their videos with one other individual-- such as a dean or instructional coach-- a few other people, or the entire school and district. Having this capability helped ease teachers into using a tool that some would otherwise find intimidating. Each school was provided with Sony Playtouch cameras and tripods, and all teachers from all three districts were provided with training on how to use the platform and the cameras. On the video sharing platform, videos were tagged by focus strands of the Rhode Island Teacher's rubric, general labels like "classroom management," and both content and grade level so teachers could easily search for videos of a specific interest (i.e. I'm a 5th grade social studies teacher looking for videos about using questioning techniques). The goal was to organize the video library so that teachers could quickly find videos related to an area with which they needed help and to also provide them with opportunities to receive useful feedback on their own videos in a safe, collaborative environment.

Showing 13 Videos

March 17th, 2014 Music	January 24th, 2014 Musical Transitions	December 13th, 2013 Sharing Positively Framed Feedback	October 23rd, 2013 10/16/13 Professional Development by Tess Brustein
August 17th, 2013 Social Studies	August 17th, 2013 School Meeting	August 17th, 2013 School Arrival	August 16th, 2013 Social Studies- Academic Conversations, Closing & Reflecting
August 16th, 2013 Social Studies- Academic Conversation #3	August 16th, 2013 Social Studies- Academic Conversation #2	August 16th, 2013 Social Studies- Academic Conversation #1	August 16th, 2013 Social Studies- Preparing for an Academic Conversation

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Reflections

Several teachers said recording their lessons allowed them expanded opportunities to ask for feedback from their peers and school leaders outside of the school day. Instead of navigating schedules and trying to fit in observations during the day, school leaders were able to watch a previously recorded lesson and give feedback anywhere, anytime, even outside of the normal schedule.

Because the videos showcased teachers in their own schools and communities, teachers also felt more connected to the exemplars. Watching exemplars of teachers in other districts and states can often make what's showcased in the video-- like hyper-engaged students and a high level of instructional rigor-- feel intangible. Because the videos were of their peers, if a teacher liked a video, he or she could either walk down the hall or call the person to talk about what they'd seen. The videos also proved what results were possible for the students in their very own communities--not for students in a community hundreds of miles away. Some teachers noted that the platform would be more useful if videos were added that showcased even more topics of interest. They also wanted increased functionality and organizational capabilities, including the ability to save and "like" videos they found useful.

Overall, teachers appreciated having the opportunity to observe lessons from teachers at different schools and in our partner districts. Both CF High and Kizirian Elementary School teachers expressed that they sometimes feel that teachers in other schools and districts can be dismissive or critical of them, but that this partnership felt supportive rather than evaluative. They also felt like everyone was genuinely learning from one another-- public charter school teachers from district school teachers and vice versa. CF High in particular mentioned that BVP accepts students from Central Falls, so both schools are trying to help students from the same communities. They like working together toward a common goal.*

II. Professional learning communities

In addition to providing every teacher with opportunities to share and receive feedback via the video platform, we created additional opportunities for teachers to collaborate with one another through professional learning communities. At BVP, our schools were invited to create and use their own structures tailored to the needs of their teams. For example, at the middle school level, our teachers were separated into groups by content. Every week, one teacher would share a video related to a specific area or topic of interest. Then, the group would get together at a morning meeting and take 10 or 15 minutes to discuss their feedback on that teacher's video in person. **[Here is a sample outline for the structure of those groups.](#)** Other teachers were grouped together by their common instructional areas needing improvement, which were identified through their student learning objectives set at the beginning of the year.



Aly Chatham

April 28, 2014 at 3:03pm

Help needed! I've been reading about "academic systems and routines" for advice on how to set up an accountable system for annotation or as we call it, "active reading". Students currently really dislike our system, so any suggestions are greatly appreciated!

Doug Lemov discusses here: <http://teachlikeachampion.com/blog/systems-routines-academic-tool/>



Like · Reply · Share · More



Write a reply...



Nick Mosher

April 27, 2014 at 3:50pm

I am so glad that so many people have been joining our Teach Like a Champion Book Club. One of the things that I wanted us to each talk about is one of the techniques in the text that we found useful. I couldn't pick just one when I was thinking about it this

In order to establish a sense of community between all BVP schools and our partner schools, we also set up an online Yammer group where teachers could pose questions to one another and share helpful tips or advice. As part of the grant, BVP purchased books for every school's professional library. In that vein, the Yammer group also served as a meeting point for teachers to discuss what they'd read-- an online book club of sorts for teachers. It was also used as a forum where teachers could post what they'd learned after attending recent school visits or professional development.

A picture that captures a PLC meeting in action can be found [here](#). In this photo, one Elementary School 2 PLCs are meeting and viewing video from a teacher in the group and preparing to give warm and cool feedback.

Reflections

Establishing professional learning communities takes time, and collaborating across schools and districts can be difficult given the busy schedule of teachers and administrators. Although technology has made collaboration easier and more convenient than ever before, nothing can replace the value of having a face to face conversation. That's why we focused on establishing quality opportunities for teachers to come together for professional development, as you'll read in the next section.

III. School visits/Professional Development

BVP teachers have found tremendous value in visiting other school to observe best practices in action and attending professional development to help hone their instructional practices. In providing our partner schools with this opportunity, we were also able to have more personal, face-to-face interactions with one another. As part of school visits, our teachers visited our partner schools and vice versa. As part of a monthly blast, BVP also sent out a round-up of upcoming professional development to which our partner schools were invited. Professional development was approved and determined according to interest and budget considerations. After attending, teachers were asked to share their takeaways with the group via Yammer, especially when it was a session attended by a group of teachers from just one school, not a collaborative visit.

Reflections

Kizirian teachers said they haven't been able to travel for PD for years and they don't have the budget to buy books for the teachers. Thirteen teachers got to travel this past year and they would not have had that opportunity otherwise. Each of the teachers did a debrief session with their Instructional Leadership Team, and they are using some of the ideas at their school for professional development next year, like promoting a positive culture.*

The first year of partnership between CF High and BVP was limited because BVP High School does not open until August 2014. Teachers at CF High know they can learn things from elementary and middle school teachers, but they are looking forward to working with the same age group of children.*

Some teachers did share that attending professional development that was more local would help stretch the budget and help increase relevance, particularly for traditional district schools that might not use similar models across states, as would be the case for some networks of charters.

IV. Progress towards goals

BVP outlined several outcomes at the beginning of the grant funding period in order to determine whether or not the partnership was successful. The following outlines the outcomes set for the partnership as a whole, between all three schools, along with our results at the end of the grant period:

- Attend 8 joint-professional developments
- Engage in 25 observations/school visits
 - BVP and our partner schools met the first goal, but engaged in less than 25 observations and school visits. This is because we focused on sending larger cohorts of teachers to high quality professional development, which required a higher budget than anticipated when factoring in total travel expenses.
- Increase 50% in teacher confidence as it relates to video analysis.
 - According to data collected from a pre and post survey that was administered to teachers participating in this partnership, the following is especially worth noting:
 - There was an increase in the percent of teachers who film themselves “a few times a year” and a decrease in the percent of teachers who “never” film themselves.
 - There was an increase in teachers’ average level of comfort watching a video of themselves.
 - There was an increase in the use of, and comfort with, using a flip camera for recording
 - There was an increase in the percent of teachers who use filming to improve their teaching
- Publish 30 clips from partner schools in video library
 - It is unclear whether or not our partners published 30 video clips-- this is mostly because teachers often opted to share videos privately with one another or their instructional coaches, not with everyone.
- At BVP, 90% of all teachers will meet the SLOs.
 - 99% of teachers (93 out of 94 total teachers) at BVP met their SLOs with 34% (32 teachers) exceeding their goals.
- BVP will have a video library of effective instructional practices of at least 100 clips.
 - BVP far exceeded this goal.

V. Conclusion

As evidenced by a formal evaluation and more informal, anecdotal evidence, our teachers at BVP and at Kizirian Elementary School and CF High School experienced significant professional growth as a result of participating in this partnership. By the end of the grant period, teachers felt more comfortable using technology and video to reflect on their teaching practice, and there was an increased level of collaboration as a result of engaging in school visits and professional development together.

District-charter collaboration is possible, and projects like this open the door for future opportunities to continue learning from one another. As just one example, BVP recently hosted the 2015 High Expectations Conference: College and Career for All with 200+ attendees from across the state and region, including teachers from our partner schools. Some of the workshops were modeled after the work completed as part of this grant-- including the use of professional learning communities and using video in the classroom.

In the end, partnerships like this help us all get better at doing what we care about the most: teaching and helping our students achieve their highest potential.