



District uses Systems Approach for Quality Improvement

The District

The School District of Menomonee Falls is committed to pursuing excellence one student at a time. The district enrolls 4,201 students and employs 658 teachers and staff across 6 schools (4 elementary, 1 middle, and 1 high school). The graduation rate is greater than 98% with over 90% of the graduates attending four-year colleges or technical/specialty colleges; the district performs within the top 5 percent of Wisconsin school districts and was selected as a national case study by The Carnegie Foundation.

The Challenge

Creating school environments where students are inspired to achieve excellence is becoming more and more challenging as financial resources remain tight. Today, more than simply creating such environments, districts are challenged to improve the academic performance for all children and to sustain levels of high performance. The challenge of improving and sustaining performance excellence begins with a focus on effectiveness and efficiency at all levels and across all leaders, teachers, staff, and functions of the district. That is, for a school system to be great, all schools and all departments within the system must be great.

The Solution

The School District of Menomonee Falls (SDMF) established a partnership in 2013 with Studer Education, the education division of Studer Group, to provide a guiding framework for the quality principles (Lean Six Sigma; Plan Do Study Act) already in place in the school district. An initial step in the partnership included an organizational and leadership assessment to diagnose school district strengths and areas to improve.

In SDMF, the focus was on skill development for leaders. Beginning with the superintendent and cascading across all levels of leadership, clearly defined goals, skill sets/behaviors, processes and accountability measures for ensuring the highest levels of student achievement were established. This included **coaching leaders** in core leadership skills, **identifying and managing data** to create key performance drivers, and **determining the best metrics to monitor progress** aligned to key performance drivers.



Studer Education's Evidence-Based LeadershipSM framework helped drive systems improvement and performance by structuring focus on aligned goals, aligned behaviors, and aligned processes. Progress monitoring of the key goals and measures helped show areas of strength and areas needing improvement. Data were used to identify performance gaps in leadership and employee skill areas so that leadership training and coaching aligned to improve performance where needed most. Year 1 results highlight the district's application of the Evidence-Based LeadershipSM framework.

The Results

Employees who perceive their immediate supervisor (leader) is engaged with them in the workplace will be more satisfied and therefore do a better job. Beginning in May 2013, Menomonee Falls began using a district-wide **Employee Engagement Survey** to measure the perception of employees with regard to the degree to which their immediate supervisor provides the type of work environment that supports their ability to perform at the highest level. Excluding the superintendent and district-level items, the top three mean scores one year following the baseline survey administration were:

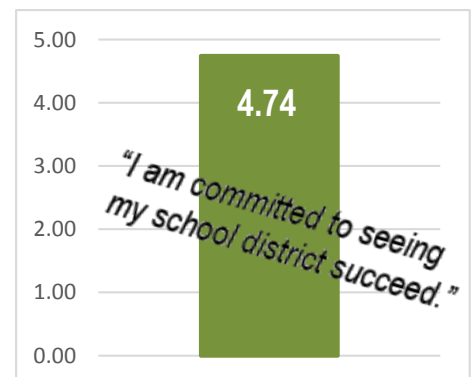
My principal/supervisor demonstrates a genuine concern for my welfare (4.16);

My principal/supervisor recognizes good performance (4.05); and

My principal/supervisor provides me with good processes and resources to do my job (4.00).

To determine the level of service schools receive from district departments, school leaders complete a **District Services Survey** every 45 days. The survey assesses the level of service across five categories—Accessibility, Accuracy, Attitude, Operations, and Timeliness—and the consistent flow of data helps district departments focus on the needs of schools and continuous improvement of services.

District departments (n=9) averaged **4.32 / 5.00** overall mean across District Support Services Survey (May 2013 - May 2014).



The key to the district's early success was not simply collecting and analyzing data; it was using the data to monitor key goals and measures, to identify performance gaps, and to coach district and school leaders to:



- Cascade communication using key words at key times;
- Develop an engaged work environment by applying various types of professional conversations; and
- Build a team approach to proactively apply results to solve problems.

District and school leaders' actions created a systematic approach to drive employee engagement and service excellence results to support all of the district's goals. This is a key component of continuous improvement. For school districts to be the best places for students to learn, employees to work, teachers to teach and parents to send their children for an excellent education, all schools and all service departments of the district must be excellent.