



School Innovation Fund Geneva City School District: Geneva High School Best Practice

The Geneva City School District has made a critical and honest assessment of structural/systems gaps and needs, as well as student achievement gaps and needs of the Geneva High School, home to approximately 675 full time students. This includes an intensive and deep analysis of the High School through a Joint Intervention Team (JIT) study. The team included experts in school improvement, school turnaround, Literacy, Mathematics, and curriculum and instruction. The team assessed Geneva High School in seven categories: curriculum; teaching and learning; school leadership; infrastructure for student success; collection, analysis and utilization of data; professional development; and district support.

The race and ethnicity of Ontario County is comprised of White Non-Hispanic at 67.8%, African American at 13.3%, Hispanic at 12.6%, other races at 6.3% based on the 2010 census data. The City of Geneva shows the strain of years of steady economic decline. Geneva has the biggest concentration of poverty in Ontario County. Geneva is home to 13,660 people many of whom are the county's poorest residents attracted by the pool of affordable housing and access to public transportation.

Numerous studies have linked children's educational success to their parent's educational attainment. Yet, many parents in Geneva are poorly educated themselves. 24% of new mothers in 2004 did not have a high school degree compared to only 13% in the surrounding county. 17% of Geneva's adults are functionally illiterate and 28% more are in need of literacy support services. In Geneva 21.5% of 18-24 year olds do not have a high school diploma. GCSD is making efforts to eliminate race, class and disability as predictors of student academic performance, but we still have far to go.

There are chronic and wide academic achievement gaps in these schools between white and minority students and affluent and low income students. Low income and minority students score 50% lower on standardized tests than their affluent and white peers. Hispanic students often struggle academically because of language barriers and because they are often from limited resource families. Academically we have not reached our Annual Measureable Objective (AMO) on our school report card for both ELA and Math for Students with Disabilities and the Economically Disadvantaged. Also we need to reach the state target on graduation rates for Students with Disabilities, Blacks or African Americans, and the Economically Disadvantaged. The Geneva community is increasingly committed to advocacy and direct involvement toward improving systems, effecting policy and practice, and ensuring a supportive climate and culture for the learning experiences of our children.

One change that came about from the JIT report was the need for a consistent instructional model for the high school. Having a consistent model of instruction for students would allow staff to have common language and academic vocabulary. The focused pedagogical approach would also allow for targeted instruction for all students and all abilities as well as for targeted professional development for staff. Due to the SIF Grant, Geneva High School, and since the Geneva City School District, has adopted the Learning Focused Model of teaching based on the research of Max Thompson. The Learning Focused model moves students to higher levels of performance and understanding. Learning Focused lessons are engaging and challenging for all students supported by best practice and strategies. Research has found that there are specific strategies that increase student learning and achievement; higher order thinking, summarizing, vocabulary in context, advance organizers, and non-verbal representations. Each of the above mentioned strategies are an integral part of each Learning-Focused lesson. Learning-Focused lessons ensure that these most effective strategies are used consistently and pervasively. The adoption of this instructional model has promoted collaborative planning and implementation building wide.

Teachers have received 4 years of training in this model and have addressed the following in term of lesson planning and student achievement:

- Why plan Learning Focused lessons and the rationale behind the instructional format.
- The exploration of exemplary practices both research and evidence based strategies.
- How lesson essential questions can clearly and effectively communicate learning goals.
- How to plan and use learning strategies to engage students and maximize learning.
- How to use summarizing strategies as evidence of student learning.
- How to effectively teach a well-planned Learning Focused lesson?
- How to accelerate learning for all students – a proactive approach for struggling learners.

The adoption of this instructional model has allowed staff to collaborate as well as the opportunity for professional development to be differentiated for all instructional staff. Areas of need are identified through formal and informal observations, teacher input, and department input. As a high school we have seen an increase in regents performance for the following areas: English, Global Studies, US History, Earth Science, Chemistry, Geometry, Algebra 2/Trig, and Physics. Teachers rated as effective or highly effective for this past school year (2013-2014) was 100%. Our graduation rate has exceeded our target of 80% by 5%. We are preparing our students for college and career readiness.

As a district the sustainability of this instructional model has been address by training our lead teachers to be certified Learning-Focused coaches and provide the needed professional development in district. The district invested money to send 8 staff members, ELA/Math coaches along with the Associate Principal to a 2 week training where they went through intensive Learning-Focused professional development. The district now has 8 Learning-Focused coaches that provide mini-sessions in building, Superintendent Conference Days PD, and classroom visit/coaching where and when needed. This has allowed our district to differentiate according to need and level of both staff and students.

For additional information about this district, please visit www.genevacsd.org.

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