

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANT (SIG) PRACTICE: JOB-EMBEDDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

ROSE-FERRERO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

SOLEDAD UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT ♦ SOLEDAD, CALIFORNIA

Rose-Ferrero Elementary School (Rose-Ferrero) struggled to meet the needs of all its students through consistent and engaging instruction. Faced with declining student performance in English language arts and mathematics, Rose-Ferrero focused on increasing the skills of teachers to address the specific needs of students. The school implemented a three-pronged approach that provides job-embedded support for teachers and increases teacher collaboration through peer observations and data use.

THE STRATEGY: Supporting Schoolwide Instructional Improvement Through Job-Embedded Coaching and Teacher Collaboration

Rose-Ferrero leaders designed a three-pronged professional development strategy to give teachers the information and support they need to consistently implement specific schoolwide instructional practices¹ in their classrooms. The three prongs of the strategy are as follows:

- Instructional coaching
- Peer observation
- Structured opportunities to use student data to inform and strengthen instruction

These activities result from careful identification of teachers' instructional needs as well as coordination and planning of professional development.²

Instructional Coaching. At Rose-Ferrero, instructional coaching is conducted by both a school coach and a coaching consultant. Rose-Ferrero uses a portion of its SIG grant for a coaching consultant, who trains the school coach and provides additional coaching for classroom teachers. The consultant trains the school coach by modeling effective coaching techniques with teachers while the coach observes. Following these observations, the consultant observes the school coach's interactions with teachers and provides feedback. The consultant visits the school eight to 10 times per year, for two days at a time. In addition to training the school coach, the consultant works directly with every teacher at least six times during the year.

Instructional coaching at Rose-Ferrero takes two forms: real-time coaching and walk-through coaching.

Rose-Ferrero Elementary School at a Glance

SIG Model: Turnaround
Start of SIG Implementation: 2010–11
Locale: Town, Distant
Grades: PK–6
Enrollment: 509
Free or Reduced-Price Lunch: *
Racial/Ethnic Composition: 94% Hispanic, 3% White, 1% Asian, 1% Black, <1% American Indian
English Learners: 53%
Students With Disabilities: 8%

Student Outcomes	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12
Reading % proficient	33%	40%	50%
Math % proficient	39%	42%	63%

Note: Percentages for English Learners and students with disabilities are from the Civil Rights Data Collection and may be based on a different total enrollment of students than the enrollment figure reported by the Common Core of Data.

* Data do not meet NCES data quality standards.

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Real-Time Coaching. During real-time coaching, the school coach and teacher work side-by-side co-teaching a lesson for a full class period. The school coach provides at least three sessions of real-time coaching per year for each teacher. Prior to each session, the school coach reviews the teacher's lesson plan, and then the coach and teacher conduct a 45- to 60-minute lesson together. The use of this model allows the teacher to question the coach during the class and allows the coach to model strategies on the spot. After the lesson, the teacher and coach debrief. This debriefing takes place during the teacher's preparation period, before or after school, or while students are working independently.

Walk-Through Coaching. The Rose-Ferrero principal, the SIG-funded learning director (an administrative team member without disciplinary responsibilities), and the school coach conduct 10-minute walk-through classroom visits every week. The school coach spends approximately half her time conducting these scheduled walk-throughs, providing coaching as needed. Teachers participate in at least 20 walk-through coaching sessions with the school coach per year. The principal and learning director also conduct weekly walk-through coaching with each teacher. These sessions are not scheduled in advance; instead, observers view the typical instructional practices of each teacher. The principal and learning director offer feedback to teachers that might extend beyond the instructional focus offered by the school coach. For instance, they might ask a teacher to explain how he uses student data to inform his instructional practice.

Although all teachers participate in coaching, the intensity and frequency of sessions is based on teacher needs, which are determined by administrators' observations, requests by teachers, new content-area curricular demands, or simply by rotation. Teachers who are new or struggling, or both, are provided additional coaching. Teachers of core subject areas (mathematics, science, language arts, social science) receive more frequent coaching than teachers of non-core subject areas (physical education, art, special education, and specialized English Learner classes). The principal, learning director, school coach, and individual teachers all use classroom observations or student achievement data, or both, to identify areas where additional coaching is needed.

Peer Observation. Rose-Ferrero offers teachers three opportunities to observe the instructional practices of their peers: instructional leadership rounds, peer visitation, and observations of real-time coaching sessions.

Instructional Leadership Rounds. In 2012, Rose-Ferrero began inviting teachers to join administrators on instructional leadership rounds (ILRs), monthly walk-through observations of classroom practices. Groups of five teachers³—along with the school coach, learning director, and principal—make these rounds in two-hour blocks, spending five minutes in each classroom. ILRs are conducted in addition to walk-through coaching sessions. Using an observation tool developed by an outside organization, each member of the group records the key components of the teacher's instructional model, pedagogical tools (e.g., graphic organizers), and practices (e.g., peer sharing). At the end of the five-minute observation, the group members debrief to reach consensus about the instructional practices they observed; these practices are recorded on a spreadsheet. All core subject-area teachers, in addition to special education and English Learner teachers, participate as ILR observers two to three times per year.

Data collected during ILRs are not used to provide feedback to individual teachers. Instead, the collected classroom data are aggregated across all teachers to identify school-level trends. At monthly staff meetings, the principal shares ILR data, discusses school-level needs for professional development, and solicits teacher feedback and ideas for designing school improvements. For example, ILR data showed that observed teachers did not implement effective student response systems (such as students writing on whiteboards) to check for understanding during lessons. To address this issue, the principal asked teachers for suggestions on how the school could improve the use of whiteboards or other effective student-response systems. Several teachers suggested strategies.

Peer Visitation. Rose-Ferrero teachers also strengthen their instructional practices by visiting other teachers' classrooms during monthly 45- to 60-minute peer observations. Peer visitations are a routine part of their work, and

teachers who receive peer observers are being highlighted for excelling in a particular area. Peer visitations are not prearranged; instead, visiting teachers observe typical instructional practices. In some cases, observing teachers decide why they want to visit a specific classroom; in others, the principal or coach makes recommendations. For instance, the principal might suggest that a teacher struggling with classroom management visit a classroom in which the teacher demonstrates strong classroom management skills. Or, if a teacher is moving from teaching first grade to teaching third grade, the principal might suggest that the teacher observe some third-grade classes. Rose-Ferrero arranges for substitutes so that all teachers can participate in peer visitation at least two to three times per year.

Observations of Real-Time Coaching Sessions. Real-time coaching sessions conducted by the consultant provide Rose-Ferrero teachers with coaching and peer-observation opportunities at their grade level. During these real-time coaching sessions, a teacher is observed by the coach or consultant along with other teachers at the same grade level. The coach provides feedback on the observed teacher's lesson and then leads a peer-teacher group debriefing before observing and coaching another teacher. Using this technique allows every teacher at the grade level to receive coaching, observe and learn from their grade-level peers, and discuss instructional practice as a group. Prior to using this model, Rose-Ferrero teachers lacked a structured opportunity to share instructional practices and learn from each other.

Structured Opportunities to Use Student Data. A third approach used at Rose-Ferrero to support the consistent use of agreed-on instructional practices involves establishing structured opportunities for teachers to access, analyze, and use student data. Teachers use student data (including benchmark assessments and classroom assessments) during whole-staff and grade-level team meetings, collaborative staff planning time, and individual meetings with the principal. Teachers have access to a range of student data, including annual statewide summative assessment data, benchmark assessments, and other data generated by formative assessments. The school's student data system allows teachers to compare the achievement of subgroups of students, generate custom reports, and identify individual students who show gains or declines in performance. The school provides appropriate training to teachers on using this system and examining student data. More than 90 percent of teachers attended a three-day training conducted by a consultant on how to examine data.

Whole-Staff and Grade-Level Teacher Meetings. Teachers meet weekly in grade-level teams and monthly as a whole staff to discuss schoolwide student achievement data and instructional strategies. The principal leads the monthly meetings that focus on formative achievement data from the most recent benchmark assessment (administered every six weeks). Certain teachers, selected by their colleagues, facilitate weekly grade-level meetings. They follow an agenda developed by the principal, learning director, and school coach that (1) encourages teachers to reflect on their instruction by examining student achievement data from the most recent benchmark assessment, and (2) asks teachers to share ideas about how to increase student achievement across the grade level. The principal, school coach, and learning director attend these meetings only when invited by the grade-level teams. However, after the meetings, grade-level teams submit their minutes to the principal, which can lead to administrative follow-up.

Collaborative Staff Planning Time. While students attend their weekly 45-minute art and physical education classes, grade-level core-content teachers meet to examine student data, discuss student work and formative assessment results, and collaboratively plan interventions. This collaborative staff planning time is different from the whole-staff and grade-level teacher meetings in that it allows teachers to discuss and address specific grade-level and student needs. Collaborative planning time allows teachers to meet more frequently and provides time to consider interventions for students demonstrating a need (through assessments and teacher observations). Periodically, at the request of the team, the school coach meets with these grade-level groups to review trends in achievement, behavior data, and data gathered from ILRs.

Individual Teacher Meetings With the Principal. Another data-use strategy involves teachers meeting individually every six weeks with the principal for student progress-review discussions. During these discussions, the principal and teacher examine individual student achievement data from the most recent mathematics and English benchmark

assessments. The teacher and principal compare the achievement of individual students to that of others at that grade level, paying particular attention to English Learners and students who are not scoring at the *proficient* level on the assessments.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The concept of instructional coaching initially caused anxiety for some teachers at Rose-Ferrero. They expressed concern that a coach might take over a classroom or provide feedback to a teacher in front of students. Despite their apprehensions, the principal encouraged staff to “stick with it through the rough waters” and not to give up. To show their commitment to the new professional development approach, school leaders attended training alongside teachers; this approach built credibility and a sense of community with teachers.

SUSTAINABILITY

Rose-Ferrero leaders acknowledge that job-embedded coaching is costly. Recognizing that the level of coaching may not be maintained after SIG funding ends, the principal required that a school-based coach be trained alongside the consultant coach to increase the sustainability of the role.

CONCLUSION

SIG funding enabled Rose-Ferrero Elementary School to build a new system of professional development for teachers and to invest in long-term capacity to sustain this approach. Initial teacher skepticism was overcome through transparency, committed leadership, and teacher cooperation.

SOURCES

Data for the tables on page 1 are from the following sources: School at-a-glance data are from the NCES Common Core of Data (2011–12); and SIG information is from SIG-Awarded Schools (2010–11, 2011–12, 2012–13) located at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/index.html>; students with disabilities and English Learner student percentage enrollment data are from the Civil Rights Data Collection (2011–12); and student outcomes data are from ED Facts (2009–10, 2010–11, 2011–12).

IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

¹ At Rose-Ferrero, teachers use a six-step model of instruction that consists of (1) checking for understanding; (2) setting lesson objectives; (3) activating prior knowledge; (4) developing students' skills by explaining, modeling, and demonstrating; (5) presenting content; and (6) providing guided practice.

² The principal, learning director, and school coach meet regularly—sometimes daily—to coordinate and plan professional development activities. They also involve teachers in decision making to help teachers take collective responsibility for themselves and each other as learners. For example, they work together with teachers to keep track of the number of times that each teacher participates in different types of coaching and instructional leadership rounds (ILRs) and to decide which teachers could benefit most from additional support. The principal also leads a staff instructional council (SIC) and a school leadership team (SLT) that meet monthly and are responsible for identifying professional development needs. The SIC consists of the principal, learning director, school coach, and a teacher representative from the lower grades (K–3) and upper grades (4–6). This group conducts the initial review of student achievement and ILR data and identifies areas for improvement. For example, the SIC draws on data to identify grade or subject areas that need additional support and determines a plan for presenting the SLT with these data. The SLT—which consists of the principal, learning director, school coach, English Learner resource teacher, and one teacher representative from each grade level—develops plans for professional development based on these data.

³ Substitute teachers cover classrooms while teachers participate in the ILRs and classroom visitations. Funding for substitutes is paid from Title I and other categorical funding streams. After SIG funds expire, Rose Ferrero will continue to fund substitutes, but likely there will be fewer ILRs and observations because fewer resources will be available.