



# CICELY L. TYSON COMMUNITY SCHOOL OF PERFORMING AND FINE ARTS

EAST ORANGE, NJ

## A Model of: Improving Instructional Practices and School Climate Through Data-Driven Decision-Making

ANITA CHAMPAGNE, PRINCIPAL

### BY THE NUMBERS

- 773 Students
- 97% African-American
- 3% Hispanic
- 4% Students with Disabilities
- 14% Special Education
- 81% Free/Reduced Lunch
- 95% Attendance Rate

### WHAT is our strategy?

For years, our school was lauded as an outstanding school for the arts with accolades such as singing for the President of the United States. However, we were not praised for academics. When Anita Champagne became principal in 2012, the state of New Jersey had given Tyson a “Priority” designation, granting it significant funds to address academic and cultural improvement, but requiring that it improve on a set schedule. An overhaul of instructional practice and data awareness was going to be essential.

Principal Champagne developed a multi-faceted improvement plan based on:

- Building a common language around trust and transparency by conducting book studies, focusing on such issues as organizational unity, collaborative leadership, student attitudes and mindsets, and communication styles by reading a common set of texts.
- Infusing the leadership team with confidence and strategies for data-driven improvement.
- Shifting the school culture to be data-driven and data-focused.
- Supplying professional development based on instructional focus and climate needs.
- Grounding improvement in strategic planning for the long haul.

### DATA ANALYSIS AND A DATA COMMITTEE

The way to embed data awareness and data literacy into a culture is to create a leadership team that models their expectations. At Tyson, our Data Committee effectively breaks down state, unit, and district assessment data into these categories:

- Grade level
- Subgroups (economically and students with disability)
- Teacher proficiency
- Participation rate
- Individual Common Core State Standards proficiency
- Student(s) identified as urgent intervention, intervention, on watch, and above level

We analyze all data groups for their strengths and challenges and present the data to various stakeholders for collaborative dialogue pertaining to best practices and next steps. Additionally, our leadership team has developed methods of evaluating and improving other areas based on:

#### Walk-through data (Baseline, Mid-Year, and End-Of-Year)

- Student engagement
- Question and discussion techniques
- Using assessments in instruction and demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness
- Setting instructional outcomes and objectives
- Designing coherent instruction
- Classroom environment
- Student interviews

#### Climate and culture data

- Discipline
- Attendance (teacher and student)
- Stakeholder surveys
- Parent involvement
- Rewards and incentives

#### Programs related to interventions and student usage:

- Efficacy
- Effectiveness

The immediate, accurate, and diverse data we collect informs both current performance and conditions at the school as well as professional development and coaching.

#### DATA-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development at Tyson is targeted on improving instruction and responding to climate and culture needs. The professional development program we developed in the last four years has included:

1. Creation of a master schedule that allows for vertical and horizontal integration for professional learning communities (PLCs) and PLC and team meetings five days a week
2. Implementation of professional development during faculty meetings and department meetings
3. Use of district in-service time for a school-wide targeted approach to instruction
4. Job-embedded coaching through the use of building instructional coaches, as well as outside consultants, focusing on the individual needs of the teacher, especially those with partially effective and/or ineffective evaluations
5. Time allotted for visiting model classrooms
6. Modeling in the classroom for areas such as classroom management as well as instruction

As an inspirational quote for her first year as principal at Tyson, Anita Champagne reflected on the words of Mohandas Gandhi: "Look below the surface and identify the hidden and unarticulated needs that others cannot see and create a bond with those you are trying to serve."

## HOW did we build this strategy?

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Though Tyson had been granted a three-year \$2,000,000 School Improvement Grant in 2010, most of the funds had been spent on technology. The root causes of low student achievement was neither addressed nor explored.

Our culture needed an overhaul from the ground up. As an inspirational quote for her first year as principal at Tyson, Anita Champagne reflected on the words of Mohandas Gandhi: "Look below the surface and identify the hidden and unarticulated needs that others cannot see and create a bond with those you are trying to serve."

### **BRINGING DATA TO THE FOREFRONT, IN SPITE OF FEAR AND RESISTANCE**

When Principal Champagne came into her role, she immediately saw that the level of instruction needed to be raised and made coherent and relevant to the students at our school. In order to measure instructional improvement, data awareness would need to become central. She recognized that the staff needed to evolve into a more transparent and trusting community. At the first meeting for the staff at the opening of school, she communicated that if they were going to truly impact student achievement, they would have to look at the data in all areas, explaining that the lack of student achievement and/or low proficiency rates was why the school had been labeled as "Priority Status."

She first met with the staff and then, during Back to School Night, she shared the data with the parents and students, modeling transparency so everyone understood how the culture was going to change and the importance of the approach.

As a SIG school, we were required to create a school improvement plan yearly, and in September of 2013, we established our first data team and started to create a culture in which teachers would comfortably understand and value data. Our leadership team announced that they would post the academic, as well as climate and culture data, including teacher proficiency data, at the main entrance of the building for all to see. This was shocking, especially for teachers as everyone had become accustomed to hiding from the data.

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The new shift to transparency and data-driven instruction was met with resistance from our staff, parents, and students. When parents voiced concern about the changes in classroom instruction at the school, Principal Champagne initiated Parent Corners once a month—essentially dinner with the principal in the spirit of “Come, let’s look at the data. Let’s talk about the impact and see how things are changing.” Much of the job of turning Tyson around was educating the community.

We also implemented “D Days,” twice annual days when students get involved in examining data, creating posters, putting data up on walls for display and coming up with actions that are tied to their own achievement data.

## WHAT evidence measures the success of our work?

Through this foundational exposure there was an automatic response in test scores: On the 2014 high school state assessment the school received its highest scores reflecting a 97% proficiency in ELA and 83% in math. In that same year, grades 6-8 saw a 25% increase in both ELA and Math on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK).

“With any successful implementation, monitoring is essential for sustainability and the coaches have to be involved,” Principal Champagne said. However, resistance and reluctance also came from our building coaches when they were asked to enter classrooms without being invited. Teachers shared their concerns that walkthroughs of their classrooms would become evaluative, and the teachers’ union took a position that walkthroughs were evaluations and, therefore, the coaches should not participate. Our leadership team and the coaches devised a method where the coach would put a walkthrough form on the teacher’s desk and the teacher knew that if she put it in the right corner it signaled that she or he was open to the walkthrough and feedback from the coaches. All teachers ended up placing the form on their desk, marking a turn in the tide and a willingness to learn and collaborate with leadership.

### FOCUSING ON SPECIAL EDUCATION

Our data team became effective in not only presenting the data, but also in developing workshops that required teachers to collaborate on effective strategies to improve student achievement based on the data they were analyzing. Our leadership team, as well as the teachers, began to look at the individual standards in ELA and math and at the mastery level data associated with them at the specific grade level. What areas would they need to focus on? What instruction would align? As a result of these steps, they saw approximately 2% improvement in results. However, it was clear that there was still one sub-group that had not significantly moved in the three years of implementation: special education.

Our leadership team decided to target interventions in the special education subgroup, making sure all teachers understood how to read and break down data for IEPs. Therefore, they were able to focus on modifications and appropriate accommodations. Our school improvement goals for the year would be created around the increase of proficiency for the special education populations. At the end

of each unit, coaches were sent names of students who were not proficient and they went to the classroom and modeled strategies by working directly with the students. Meetings were held with the specific teachers and lesson plans were developed that showed tiered planning and differentiation. The acute focus would bring about a much greater collaboration among staff and impact all of the students in the building.

All of our professional development had become job-embedded. With this focus the results came back much stronger because the Special Education subgroup had improved so much; there was a 48% increase in ELA and 24% in Math. Our school was finally closing the achievement gap.

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES: IT TAKES FIVE YEARS**

An important tool our leadership team has drawn on is the [Danielson Framework for Effective Teaching](#). With this framework, as well our own experience, we now require a check for understanding every 7-10 minutes of the class. Everything is done purposefully. Having spent three years building data teams, we are now equipped to measure and use this type of data to improve instruction.

Professional development has moved into instructional coaching and modeling in classrooms, looking at lesson plans, figuring out gaps, and working directly with students who are on the borderline, infusing new strategies for small groups and differentiated instruction, among other approaches. Going forward, we are intent on even greater collaboration with parents, all teachers, all students and all administrators.

### **IN ADDITION TO BEING A 2016 ICLE MODEL SCHOOL, CICELY L. TYSON COMMUNITY SCHOOL HAS ALSO BEEN AWARDED AND RECOGNIZED WITH THE FOLLOWING:**

2013: [Model School in the Arts](#) designation given by the New Jersey Arts Education Partnership

2014: Featured in [Inside NJ](#) as a top-performing public high school for academics and the arts

2015: *US News and World Report*: Bronze Status High School

2016: *US News and World Report*: Bronze Status High School

2016: [US News and World Report](#), Model School

## FOLLOWING UP on this Strategy

### RELEVANT RESOURCES

[Good to Great](#) and [Great by Choice](#)

by Jim Collins

*Examine areas of management strategy and practice, looking at: the types of leadership required to achieve greatness; the culture of discipline and how to think about the role of technology; and how to build a successful enterprise in unpredictable conditions.*

[Evocative Coaching: Transforming Schools One Conversation at a Time](#)

by Bob Tschannen-Moran and Megan Tschannen-Moran

*A teacher-centered, no-fault, strengths-based approach to performance improvement that enables teachers and schools to achieve desired outcomes and enhance quality of life, choreographed in four steps: Story, Empathy, Inquiry, and Design.*

[Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and In Life One Conversation at a Time](#)

by Susan Scott

*Includes exercises and tools to overcome barriers to meaningful communication, expand and enrich conversations with colleagues, friends, and family, increase clarity and improve understanding, and handle strong emotions-on both sides of the table.*

