

Manatee County School District

A Classroom Walkthrough Case Study

Manatee County School District's Challenge

While the state of Florida gave the Manatee County School District (MCSD), located in the suburban area of Bradenton, Florida, a B grade based on the overall performance of its 51 schools, some individual schools within the district were consistently receiving grades of C on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).

As the head of academics for MCSD, Dr. Lynn Gillman had the responsibility of making sure that struggling schools strove for a B grade or better and that schools already achieving Bs were moving toward an A. Although the schools used informal classroom walkthroughs, Dr. Gillman found that they were not obtaining the data required to effectively make decisions on how to best deliver instruction. She decided that the district needed more systematic walkthroughs, as well as a way to store and analyze the collected information.

Manatee School District's Solution

Dr. Gillman had heard about Teachscape from the Florida Department of Education, which awarded a statewide contract to Teachscape in 2005 to offer tools, resources, and training around improving instructional effectiveness. In 2007, once she determined MCSD's needs, she investigated Teachscape's Classroom Walkthrough professional development program and concluded it was a great fit for the district. "It had the components that we believed in and the strategies we were looking for," Dr. Gillman said.

During the 2007 summer break, 23 administrators received training on walkthrough procedures. After their Teachscape orientation, these leaders spread the information to every MCSD supervisor or administrator. In addition, the district's professional development department conducted month-long training on instructional best practices at each school.

Each school has a required number of walkthroughs per week: 40 for middle and high schools and 20 for elementary schools. "The more walks you have, the more reliable the data," explained Dr. Gillman. In addition to individual walkthroughs, assistant principals and principals conduct cluster walkthroughs so that classroom practices and conditions can be observed from multiple viewpoints. Those observations are recorded on handheld PDAs and smartphones that synchronize easily with Teachscape's online software.



"A veteran elementary principal told us that although he has been at his school for 27 years, he has never known more about what is going on in his classrooms: what instruction is taking place and what lessons they are on. Teachscape truly has made our principals into instructional leaders."

Dr. Lynn Gillman,
Executive Director of Academics,
Manatee County School District

Program Benefits

“Now the principals are using a scientific, organized way to capture what they see,” said Dr. Gillman. “It perfects what we’re looking for to drive success.” The following are some of the benefits MCSD has realized from the Teachscape program:

- At faculty meetings, principals share their findings from walkthroughs, and the staff collectively chooses an area of priority to focus on for the next 1–2 months.
- Department heads use the data to determine how to make improvements in instruction in content areas.
- If educators identify a deficiency in instruction, they can review Teachscape’s online learning modules containing video clips which demonstrate exemplary practices in the relevant area.
- Faculty members are learning how to integrate proven alternatives to whole-group instruction such as cooperative learning, one-on-one instruction, and shared-pair reading.
- Dr. Gillman can easily view online reports for the entire district to discover how many schools are doing walkthroughs on a given day, as well as the times when strong instruction does or does not occur throughout the school year.
- Teachers’ names do not go on the walkthrough reports, so educators examine overall results for the grade level and determine the directions in which they need to move. This procedure helps all teachers better realize specific areas where they can improve and focuses teachers on their shared goal of improvement.



PROGRAM DEMOGRAPHICS:

Number of Schools: 53
Number of Teachers: 2,579
Number of Students: 42,000

49% free and reduced lunch

Program Results

In 2008, MCSD’s schools experienced an overall increase in FCAT scores. Dr. Gillman cites two high schools that moved from a B grade to an A, a feat that she attributes in part to their tremendous number of walkthroughs. She has also noted more evidence of best practices being implemented in classrooms on a daily basis. For example, Teachscape’s reports have shown that teachers throughout MCSD are now more regularly stating lesson objectives, applying higher-level questioning skills, and using graphic organizers, even in kindergarten.

In the future, she wants to move beyond just principals and assistant principals collecting and analyzing the data. “I’d like to have teachers, maybe department heads, more involved in studying the data,” Dr. Gillman said.

This case study was completed with the gracious cooperation of Manatee County School District.

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