

# Scheduling for Results

Nicholas J. Myers, Anne Fox Elementary School, Illinois

Story posted December 9, 2008. Results Updated October 28, 2014.

## Results:

- **In 2013, the school outperformed the state average on reading assessments in every grade, and by 10% or more in grades 3, 4 and 6**
- **In 2013, the school also performed well on math assessments, with all grades outperforming the state average by 10% or more**

All children can learn. When a school staff truly embraces this core belief and openly demonstrates it to students, parents, and each other, dramatic improvements in academic performance can result.

Take, for example, Anne Fox Elementary School. Fox is a moderately low-income, demographically diverse school in the working-class suburb of Hanover Park, Illinois. The student population is 34 percent white, 30 percent Hispanic, 17 percent black, and 19 percent Asian/Pacific Islander. Students speak more than 35 different languages, and the school's low-income and mobility rates are double the district average. Until recently, Fox School ranked dead last in academic achievement among the district's 21 elementary schools and was known as a "problem spot." But the incorporation of new student support systems has produced dramatic increases in overall student achievement.

## A Troubled School

The road to improvement was not easy for a faculty that, until very recently, was greatly frustrated over persistently low levels of student performance on local and state assessments. Teachers were largely fending for themselves in assessing student progress and determining grade-level proficiency, there was no collaborative planning to develop intervention strategies for students in need, and the school relied on outdated and ineffective modes of helping struggling students, such as optional afterschool tutoring and large-group pullout instruction using a "canned" literacy remediation program. Fox School was dangerously close to failing to make the adequate yearly progress required by the No Child Left Behind Act.

To turn the school's performance around, the principal and staff carefully examined their educational practices, focusing on the following questions:

- Have we clearly identified the essential outcomes in core academic areas that all children must meet?

- Have we developed meaningful assessments that truly identify the specific learning needs of each child and help teachers address those needs?
- Do we intervene the moment any child demonstrates difficulty mastering essential grade-level skills and concepts?
- Do we systematically build our interventions into our school day and deliver to all students in need of additional time and support?

### **Ninety sacred minutes**

If past realities were to change, school staff realized they needed to devise new systems of support for the learning of all children. The first critical step involved teachers committing to a learning environment built around a daily 90-minute literacy block. During that time, teachers in all classrooms implement a comprehensive and balanced literacy model including guided, shared, and independent reading and writing as well as vocabulary and word-study instruction. This model ensures that all children receive high-quality initial instruction from grade-level teachers.

Because staff regards the 90-minute literacy block as sacred instruction time that no child can afford to miss, they decided to stop pulling students out for remedial instruction. Now special education and regular classroom teachers provide remedial support in the classroom. This practice guarantees that all children are exposed to a rigorous curriculum.

### **Regrouping for Intervention and Enrichment**

To provide time for intervention and enrichment, Fox School established a 45-minute block for each grade level in which all new instruction stops and students are regrouped by instructional need as determined by formative assessments. Those in need of additional time and support to master a skill or concept move to a classroom for structured, small-group intervention (the adult-to-student ratio never exceeds 1-to-8). Students who have mastered grade-level skills are grouped for enrichment instruction in a whole-class setting.

Teachers use a wide variety of instructional practices during daily intervention block periods, including guided reading, vocabulary lessons, and mini-lessons in formal writing. Students working in enrichment blocks benefit from instruction directed to their learning level, with literature circles and independent research projects to push them to higher levels of academic performance. In addition, clustering students identified as gifted allows a part-time gifted resource teacher to maximize her teaching time.

Teacher collaboration is a critical component in ensuring that parallel block time is used effectively. Grade-level teams begin the school year by setting goals in core academic areas and are then accountable for the performance of their students. The principal reviews the results of “formative” assessments, which helps teachers diagnose and address student needs, and

posts them in the faculty lounge for all to see and discuss. In addition, staff regularly discuss critical questions such as:

- Which students are in need of academic intervention and which are in need of enrichment?
- What will daily lesson plans be for both the intervention and enrichment blocks?
- How will we redistribute personnel to deliver instruction effectively?

To provide teams with the time needed to collaborate around these and other critical questions, Fox School redesigned its master schedule. A horizontal master schedule was set up in which all classes in a grade-level team receive arts specialist instruction at the same time. This way grade-level teams have two to three hours each week to meet and collaborate.

The parallel block system of intervention and enrichment has proved to be an extremely effective way for the Fox School staff to systematically “differentiate,” or personalize, instruction to our diverse group of student learners. Today, Fox guarantees every student a timely, structured intervention for each skill he or she needs. In addition, increased collaboration among the teaching staff has provided focus and direction for Fox’s academic mission. Most importantly, Anne Fox School is truly living up to its primary responsibility of ensuring that all students have mastered essential skills.

Fox school has achieved double-digit increases in student performance for each of the past two school years, as measured by the Illinois Standards Achievement Test. It exceeds the state average in percent of students meeting or exceeding state standards in every area tested, and is poised and motivated for future success. All children truly can learn if educators across the country have the courage to examine ineffective past practices and realign time and support in a way that ensures success.

**For additional information, please contact:**

Nicholas J. Myers

Principal, Anne Fox Elementary School

[nicholasmyers@sd54.k12.il.us](mailto:nicholasmyers@sd54.k12.il.us)

## Power Hour

- Four days per week.... small group intervention. During Power Hour all new instruction stops.
- Groups formed based on assessment data and grade level teacher input
- Research based resources are used to target specific skill deficits (LLI)
- Evidence based interventions are used to work on specific skills also (letters, sounds, Dolch words, etc)
- Students at grade level or above in reading placed in larger groups with teacher for specific skills
- Student with greatest need in small groups with instructional assistants
- Flexible grouping-students move as needed
- Monthly meetings held to review data and reassign students as needed.

## **POWER HOUR**

7:30 – 8:00: 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Tutoring

8:00 – 8:35: Instructional Assistant Planning

8:45 – 9:45: Tier 3 Intervention

9:45 – 10:45: 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Power Hour

10:45 – 11:45: 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Power Hour

11:45 – 12:30: Power Hour Team Lunch

12:30 – 1:30: 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Power Hour

1:30 – 2:30 : K Power Hour

2:30 – 3:00 : Tier 3 Intervention

3:10 – 3:40: 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Tutoring