

Case Study #4:

Liverpool Central School District, New York



q. How did one district raise its course pass rates by double digit margins for its most at-risk students?

a. By implementing a summer program developing the thoughtful skills students need to focus their independent learning.

In May 2001, the summer program for eighth and ninth graders in Liverpool, New York piloted a new approach to supporting student achievement. Five major changes transformed individual content courses to become a three-hour program of content, skills, and student reflection upon their personalized daily goals. The data showing the course pass rate from the 2001 student cohort was collected over the course of the following academic year. This data was then contrasted with the year-end data from 2000 for the summer cohort of students who had not participated in the pilot program. Double digit gains in yearlong pass rates for math, science, and English classes were the reward and ninth graders were 12 times more likely to have passed all four core content courses.

Emphasizing Thoughtful Skills and Independent Learning

Change 1: The four core curriculum areas reflected an emphasis on content and skills. The teachers identified the areas where students need to focus in order to be successful the following year in each content area.

Change 2: Individual courses were replaced with a three-hour program consisting of two blocks focusing on content and skills in two core areas. Students were evaluated and placed in the two core areas most beneficial for them. The first block of each day was a 30 to 40-minute “Learning to Learn” lesson developed by Silver, Strong & Associates. The second block ended each day with a 15-minute reflection lesson in which the goals they had set for themselves were reinforced.

Change 3: A writing specialist supplied teachers and students with a consistent writing model, provided direct instruction on the writing process, and assisted the staff in teaching the “Learning to Learn” lessons.

Change 4: A pass/fail system was implemented to focus on skill development, not grades.

Change 5: A rubric scale mirrored the state scoring for eighth grade assessment to reflect each student’s progress in skill development.

The results are in...

According to Cindy Weber, the Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education, after two seasons the program was so successful in developing thoughtful learners that parents of children who had not failed courses were asking for their child to be enrolled in the summer program. Since 2003, Liverpool’s three middle schools have adapted this “Learning to Learn” program for their general education students throughout the academic year. All teachers are now trained in the use of Thoughtful Classroom strategies and tools. Teams of grade-level teachers meet regularly to reflect upon and refine their instructional planning using these approaches. The common language and consistent use of strategies across the content areas has been so successful in boosting student achievement that after five years the administration remains behind this program “100%!”

Successful Completion of Academic Courses for the Year Following Summer School

Summer Cohort:	2000	2001	2000	2001	Summer Cohort:	2000	2001	2000	2001
	8thGrade n=17	n=40	9thGrade n=38	n=47		8thGrade		9thGrade	
4 Courses	35%	20%	03%	36%	Math	53%	73%	47%	47%
3 Courses	06%	33%	37%	13%	Science	41%	58%	34%	64%
2 Courses	18%	18%	13%	17%	English	53%	33%	34%	62%
1 Course	12%	23%	34%	19%					
None	24%	08%	13%	15%					

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