

How are the Changes Proceeding?

Example Middle School

Several years ago, as part of her regular discussions with her leadership team, Shirley Russell, the principal of Example Junior High School, began talking about the idea of interdisciplinary teams and a move to a more “middle school” approach. Her leadership team conveyed general enthusiasm for the change and Russell, sensing an urgency to improve the quality of teaching, learning, and adult planning and collaboration, jumped at the chance to make this change.

Prior to this, Example was a more traditional junior high school, with 55-minute “periods” and an overall feel which reminded a visitor of a “mini-high school” schedule. With the traditional junior high school schedule, the school departments had significant influence over teaching. By many observable measures, Example had functioned pretty well. Its departments met regularly to discuss curriculum and instruction as well as to troubleshoot observed difficulties in scheduling and learning. Trust and congeniality at this point seemed fairly high both within and among departments at Example, and members enjoyed friendly professional and personal relationships with each other.

The district office fully supported the change to a middle school approach, however, and worked with the community to both reassure them and to align community support for the name change to Example Middle School. District officials regularly checked in with Russell to get a sense of how the change was going. The Superintendent made frequent visits to the school during the initial change to offer support.

Russell and her team thought that the move to interdisciplinary teams would go smoothly, and they planned and implemented professional development (training) to initiate the change. Russell sought a few opportunities to consistently communicate the purpose for the initial change with the staff, and those opportunities seemed to go well with little apparent opposition. After the first series of trainings, however, Russell and her team noticed that the shift to interdisciplinary teams was not a uniform hit at the school. Planning in these new interdisciplinary team meetings was not of uniformly high quality. There seemed to be a fair amount of confusion as to “how” interdisciplinary planning should look like. Teachers began to openly voice . . .

Group Tasks (Your team will report on one of these questions, so be ready!):

- 1) What do you think teachers began to voice? Why?
- 2) Where were the mistakes? Who made them? Why?