

Theory of Action to Improve Teaching and Student Learning Matt Curtis Superintendent of the Simsbury Public Schools

The theory of action for improving teaching and learning in the Simsbury Public Schools is a set of interrelated casual statements that describe how the work of teachers and administrators will cause improvement in learning over time.

In sharing this theory of action, I outline my thinking and demonstrate how improvement is a process, one that connects our actions to the instructional core; the core being the intersection of content, teacher knowledge and skill, and student engagement. It is only through our collective efforts that we can continue our success as a community of practice. “Good to great comes by a cumulative process-step by step, action by action, decision by decision, turn upon turn of the flywheel-that adds up to sustained and spectacular results....It is a quiet, deliberate process of figuring out what needs to be done to create the best future results and then taking those steps one way or the other” (Collins, 2001).

During these complex times, creating organizational coherence has never been as important. By identifying our values as they relate to systematic actions, we take the initial steps together in transforming our practice. Engagement in this “organizational learning process” (Elmore, 2009) is vital to our success as a school system.

Systemic Beliefs:

1. We believe in the unlimited potential of each student.
2. We believe in building capacity in leadership amongst our staff.
3. We believe in the value of collaboration and communication among faculty.
4. We believe that commitment to and implementation of continuous learning lead to improved student performance.
5. We believe in collecting, analyzing, and sharing data to guide decisions that improve student learning; individualize instruction and promote social, emotional, and physical development.
6. We believe in the power of personal connections and relations amongst staff, students, and families.
7. We believe in relevant job embedded professional development, effective supervision and evaluation practices.

In our work, these beliefs represent our district theory of action.

If we use a district and school based Improvement Process that engages each administrator and teacher in a collaborative cycle of goal setting, action planning and refinement, then we will build the capacity of our leaders and teachers to achieve targeted areas of improvement and develop coherence between district level continuous improvement planning and school based improvement planning.

If we cultivate collaborative communities of practice that foster input from administrators and classroom teachers on issues related to instructional practice and student achievement, then we will create a shared vision and purpose for our work leading to more effective practice and higher levels of student learning.

If we identify the knowledge and skills needed for students to be college and career ready in the 21st century and develop a guaranteed, standards-based curriculum, then there will be clarity, consistency and equity to what all students will learn and what all faculty teach.

If we foster leadership at every level of the organization through a focus on instructional improvement and student learning outcomes, then instructional leadership will be enhanced district-wide leading to improved instruction and student learning.

If district leadership develops their skill set relative to providing timely, substantive, and specific feedback on high leverage instructional strategies and teaching practices, then the overall quality of teaching will improve and student learning will increase.

If we develop a district and school based climate and culture that fosters a sense of solidarity amongst teachers, students and families, then our understanding of students' needs will deepen leading to improved levels of support and learning.

If we provide ongoing, high quality, relevant, professional learning based on identified student and teacher needs, then teachers will utilize their new knowledge and student learning will improve.

If supervision and evaluation practices are designed to identify and give specific feedback to teachers about their use of high quality instructional techniques and their delivery of the curriculum and professional practice, then the overall quality of teaching will improve and student learning will increase.