Using Data For Middle School Miracles
CONNECTING FOR SUCCESS

Community leaders across Hawai‘i understand the power that lies in evaluating data trends to improve student achievement. Connecting for Success (CFS) promoted the use of data and had significant impact for “at-risk” middle school students. CFS was a collaboration between the Hawai‘i State Department of Education (HIDOE), Hawai‘i Community Foundation (HCF), and Hawai‘i P-20 Partnerships for Education.

Strengthening A Student’s Connection To School

Middle school can be a trying time for students, and it’s even tougher for those who don’t have a strong support system around them. In 2013, HCF reported that out of 37,000 students in the 6th, 7th and 8th grades, over 6,000 were “at-risk” and would not graduate from high school on time without intervention. Research has found that students who feel connected to their school – when they believe that adults and peers in their school care about their learning and about them as individuals – are more likely to stay in school and have better academic achievement, including higher grades, test scores and graduation rates.¹

HIDOE launched new tools to track students’ attendance, behavior, and course grades, which allowed schools to identify students who were falling “off-track.” HCF recognized that deeper analyses of schools’ data and monitoring the impact of academic and behavioral supports would provide HIDOE with additional insight on how to keep more middle school students “on-track”.

In 2013, HCF and other funders awarded grants to 10 public and charter middle schools to launch CFS. Schools implemented a mix of support programs designed to improve school connectedness including tutoring, counseling, mentoring, social-emotional learning, and family engagement. Participating schools met regularly to share progress, exchange best practices, and to explore data trends.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING IMPACTS STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

In the beginning, school staff expected that tutoring and creative learning practices would have the biggest impact on student behavior and academic performance. However, by the second year of the grant, students who received a combination of quality counseling and effective social-emotional learning (SEL) practices, such as building self-awareness and developing relationship skills, showed the greatest change in academic performance.

Students who received SEL and counseling support saw the greatest improvements in English and math grades

Percent of students who improve their grades from the first to second year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Math</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No SEL or Counseling</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Either SEL or Counseling</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEL and Counseling</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td></td>
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Embracing A Data-Informed Culture

While the CFS funding has ended, participating schools have identified the practices that work best for them and made it a priority to continue to fund the program.

CFS has shifted the way school staff view and value data. Schools developed processes for examining data in purposeful ways. CFS schools created a culture that embraces information – teachers now sit down together as teams, sharing multiple data points to discuss the well-being of individual students. Data has helped pull together a cross-section of teachers and counselors to champion the success of each student.

CFS changed the conversation. It wasn’t just about numbers anymore, but us looking at what those numbers meant for an individual student. The data helped us find ways to address issues and better serve our students.”
– Linell Dilwith, Principal of Stevenson Middle School

Data can be a powerful tool for change. By itself it’s not the answer, but by collecting and reviewing meaningful data, teachers can start asking questions to address the root cause of behaviors.”
– Christine Van Bergejik, Hawai‘i Community Foundation

What questions can Hawai‘i DXP help answer for you?

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