
Leading for Equity: *Mini-Case Studies (K-5)*

Focus: During the bi-weekly Principals Meeting, the Alford School District presented leaders with the 2018-2019 pacing guide for the school year. Upon reviewing the pacing guide, you notice that the first quarter unit in second grade spends 15 instructional days working with time and money. Upon further inspection of the guide you notice that there are only five days dedicated to working with length. When you inquire about the increased amount of time focused on time and money during the first quarter of the year, and the subsequent days dedicated to time and money throughout the year, the Instructional Superintendent shares that on the previous year's state standardized assessment over 50% of students lacked proficiency around the skills; as a result, spending more instruction around time and money has been added to the second, third, and fourth grade pacing guides for all schools within the district.

Coherence: George is a fun, engaging first grade math teacher at Ronald McNair Elementary School. The school serves a population where 90% of students receive free or reduced meals (FARMs) and 96% are students of color. During the October professional development session, you overhear Mr. George state the he typically spends an extra 15 minutes engaging in academic drills around colors, shapes, and counting to 100 because his students come to him with major academic deficits. Overhearing this conversation concerns you because at a 30-minute classroom observation last week you witnessed Mr. George engaging in this academic review with his students for 18 minutes during the 60-minute math block. Although his stated objective was for his students to show their thinking around how 10 can be thought of as a bundle of ten ones, he spent the remaining time with students writing their numbers to 20 and practicing handwriting. Although he was preparing to move students to engage in making bundles of ten with bear counters, he was forced to end the lesson because the art teacher arrived to take the students to their specials block.

Rigor: Mrs. Watkins is the parent of a current third grader, Allen, and two former students at Andrew Wilson Elementary School. She sends an email urgently asking for an in-person meeting with you over her concerns about her child's academic performance at the school. During the meeting, she shares that she is concerned with the quality of work her child has been receiving and her continued challenges with Mrs. Lally, her son's math teacher. During the conversation, Mrs. Watkins stated that she felt her son was no longer growing academically and is quickly losing his interest in school. She shared that he previously loved coming to school and now it is a daily battle to get him to attend. Mrs. Watkins produces samples of her son's work, including one geometry assessment comprised of solely matching shapes to their names and five homework packets comprised of stapled worksheets from *Teachers Pay Teachers*. When asked about her concerns with her son's academic performance and the challenges she's experiencing with Mrs. Lally, Mrs. Watkins says she feels the teacher is purposely giving her child worksheets that don't challenge him academically and lead to him getting further behind in math. She stated that Mrs. Lally has said to her on more than one occasion that Mrs. Watkins is overreacting because her son is an A student and her concerns are unfounded. When you pulled Allen's latest benchmark assessment, you noticed that he scored at 30% proficiency level and was highlighted for Tier 2 intervention.

Bias: During a leadership team meeting at Cesar Chavez Academy for Advanced Studies, two instructional coaches engaged in a debate regarding the recent adoption of their humanities textbooks. When you intervened to inquire about the nature of the debate, the two coaches stated it was over a line in the textbook which stated, "The Atlantic Slave trade between the 1500s and 1900s brought millions of workers from Africa to the southern states to work on agricultural plantations." Mr. Bianchi, the fifth grade humanities teacher, took great offense to the wording in the textbook and argued that they should not be used the following year. Ms. Taylor, the middle school social studies master teacher, argued that they waited four years for a new textbook adoption and wouldn't have the funds to replace the book. She strongly believed that the books should be used despite the controversial language and that Mr. Bianchi was overreacting over word choice, further arguing that Mr. Bianchi was being too sensitive and that if the book was inappropriate to use, the textbook makers wouldn't have been able to publish it.

Deficit Thinking: Theresa is a third grade math teacher at your school. She is in her fourth year of teaching and her first year of third grade math. She has 24 students in her classroom, six of whom are English Language Learners. When you enter her class for a 15-minute observation, you notice that all of the students who are English Language Learners are on the computers doing two-digit addition problems while the remainder of the class is engaging in whole group instruction around one-digit multiplication of whole numbers. As Teresa transitions the students to work in partners, you pull her aside and ask what the students on computers are working on. She responds by saying that her English Language Learners are working independently on reinforcing previous math skills because the whole group was working on introducing multiplication and they would be using terms that those students would struggle to understand. Further, they would work on the multiplication content with the ESOL teacher during their pull-out group in the afternoon. She states that she will teach them in a small group once the other students move into independent practice. After 10 minutes, Teresa calls the students to the kidney table where she has them practice skip counting using a 100s chart as a group. Throughout the observation, you notice that Teresa rarely uses appropriate math vocabulary with her class and often uses language like “put together the friends” or “take-aways” when engaging in discourse with students.

Resistance to Change: During the Spring 2018 school review conducted at Excellence Charter School, it was noted that teachers were doing most of the thinking in the classroom, especially in the fourth and fifth grade math classrooms. The report provided by the reviewers identified high instances of teacher talk, lecture and whole group instruction as the primary instructional delivery style, and teachers over-prompting and providing answers before providing adequate think time as key practices that were undermining the school efforts around increasing student achievement. The organization dedicated the summer teacher professional development workshops to addressing these challenges along with hiring a dedicated math coach for grades K-2 and 3-5 to support the efforts. After two months of instruction, the school leadership team noticed that there was little change in the identified areas of improvement.
