

Spotlight Strategy: Be Intentional and Systemic About Change

Central Westmoreland Career and Technology Center

When Mr. Joseph Biondo and Mr. Kevin Rice joined the school leadership team at Central Westmoreland Career and Technology Center (CWCTC) in 2008 as Director and Assistant Director, respectively, they realized that CWCTC was a “good 20th century CTC on the verge of becoming a good 21st century CTC.” To help CWCTC fully transition to a strong 21st century CTC, they are focused on changing the school culture so that it supports high quality instruction. As Mr. Rice stated, the leadership team “worked to elevate the culture of the building” in order to improve student achievement. To accomplish this change, they focused on using a reform model, forming faculty committees and targeting their professional development.

For such change and re-culturing to be supported and sustained by the faculty, the team realized it needed to implement change in an intentional and systematic manner. The team was “very thirsty for a model to follow” to help direct its reform efforts and found the Technical Centers That Work (TCTW) initiative met its needs. The ten key practices that define TCTW’s approach to school improvement provided CWCTC leadership with an articulated model for change that could be shared and presented to key stakeholders. The ten practices documented what the leadership team envisioned for CWCTC’s future and, the team leverages the available research supporting these practices to build buy-in from stakeholders.

CWCTC school leadership followed the TCTW recommendation to develop committees for curriculum, professional development, data and guidance/transition, and notes that “the committees are starting to be helpful” in their efforts to implement change. For example, based on results from a survey conducted of faculty by the professional development committee, the leadership team realized that many faculty members did not fully understand TCTW. As a result, the team organized an in-service session to address this issue. The data committee is developing a system to monitor retention rates in each of the CTE program areas.

To implement change that would improve school culture and the level of instruction, the leadership team at CWCTC realized that it needed to provide instructors with meaningful professional development that supported its reform efforts. Instructors participate in onsite professional development focused on MAX teaching, TCTW and numeracy. In addition, every year the leadership team selects an education-themed book and purchases a copy for each instructor. Once a month, the supervisor of career and technical education holds a “literacy meeting” for instructors and instructional assistants interested in integrating literacy skills into their lessons. During these 45-minute meetings held before and after school, participants discuss specific literacy strategies, techniques they have implemented or the issues addressed in the books purchased for them. Participants receive professional development credit for attending.

While great strides have been made to refocus the instructional practices at CWCTC and to improve student learning, the school leadership team recognizes the need for continued and substantial improvement. As one team member noted, change “has not been easy; but slowly, and one issue at a

time, change is occurring.” With the emphasis on systematic and targeted change, it appears the team is turning the school into a stronger 21st century CTC.

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Central Westmoreland Career and Technology Center (CWCTC) is located in New Stanton, Pennsylvania. As a part-time career and technology center, it enrolls approximately 1,100 students in grades 9 through 12 and provides 23 career and technical education programs. CWCTC serves 10 school districts.