

Three components for SIM success at Montana high school

For more than a decade, I have worked on literacy initiatives as a SIM/CLC professional developer. Schools demonstrated achievement gains in each initiative, but these gains were never as great as I believed could be made. Keith Lenz invited me to participate in the Montana Striving Readers Project. As a part of this work, I first met with Paul Furthmyre, Principal of Anaconda High School in Montana. I told him that I was looking for the school with all the components needed for optimal success. He said, "Your search is over. Tell me what you need, and Anaconda High School will provide it."

That is exactly what happened....

Need #1: Strong, collaborative leadership.

Paul attended SIM professional development with his teachers and implemented the *Course and Unit Organizers* immediately in faculty meetings. He created a Literacy Team represented by teachers from all curricular departments. He made it clear to the staff that all teachers would participate in the new learning and implementation of SIM and established classroom walk-throughs for teacher support and feedback.

Paul had leadership support from the district superintendent as well as from Debbie Hunsaker at the Montana Office of Public Instruction. Debbie provided professional support to Paul and all sites involved with the Striving Readers' Literacy project. This leadership support was key to the success that was evidenced at Anaconda High School.

Although Paul did not have a Literacy Coach at the onset of this project, Keith Lenz and I advised him that optimal success would more easily be achieved with an effective coach. As a result, Paul employed Liz Tuss as a half-time coach and *Xtreme Reading* teacher. Liz was a phenomenal teacher and coach. Each student surpassed the expectation of gaining two grade levels in reading. Two students gained seven grade levels, and on average, the gain for all students was more than three grade levels.

Paul Furthmyre (Principal)

The CLC Program has allowed my schools to implement literacy programs that focus on a variety of strategies for improving text fluency and comprehension. Along with these strategies, the continuum has also allowed intervention strategies to support achievement in the core subjects. In both schools where I have implemented CLC, I have made certain that the same strategies that have been taught in the intervention classrooms are also implemented in the general education classrooms. This has made a tremendous impact on the struggling students. Their confidence has motivated them to engage in classroom activities in which they never participated before learning these strategies.

Erin Senst (Language Arts teacher)

The use of the *Course and Unit Organizers* has really increased student engagement in my ELA classes. The freshman students have demonstrated better note taking skills, and they have focused on specific literary elements and concepts taught in each lesson and unit. The *Organizer Routines* have truly helped students develop and master skills that they can transfer to other classes and even continue to use in college.

Megan Hasquet (Social Studies teacher)

I am still using the Content Enhancement Routines. When I started teaching, I utilized CERs in all units of my curriculum. After three years, I continue to design my courses and units using these routines.

Need #2: Dedicated teachers who welcome new learning.

The teachers at Anaconda High School made collaboration a pleasure. They actively participated in all professional development with cooperative attitudes. The elective teachers implemented the *Content Enhancement Routines* equally as well as the core content teachers. Paul provided time during the school day for new learning and capitalized on the days that the project consultants were on site. It was a school culture of learning that professional developers/ project consultants dream of having to achieve success.

Need #3: Consistent implementation to create school culture.

The staff of Anaconda High School continue to succeed. The principal, Paul Furthmyre, received Montana's "Principal of the Year" award during the project and the assistant principal, Shawn Hansen, earned Montana's "Assistant Principal of the Year" for the state of Montana the following year. Shawn has now become the principal at Anaconda High School and continues to lead the school in consistent implementation of Content Enhancement. Liz Tuss, the Literacy Coach, became a Learning Strategies Professional Developer and is now employed by the Montana Office of Public Instruction.

Vicki Ricketts
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SIM Professional Developer Vicki Ricketts finds the right school partner for success.