

Rural school's Dream Team initiates big change with

XTREME READING



Members of the Swain County Middle School Literacy Leadership Team: Principal Brandon Sutton, Megan Lucas, Amber Gillam, Dora Robinson, Deanna Booth, Jason Webb, Lauren Arsufo, K-8 Director of Instruction Janet Clapsaddle and Team Chairperson Kim Jamison. As one staff member said, "It's the people who make this place special."

Henry Ford once said, "Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success." The Swain County Middle School Literacy Leadership Team is living proof of Ford's words. In 2013, only 38% of the students at Swain County Middle School in Bryson City, North Carolina were proficient on the state's English Language Arts/Reading Assessment. At the end of three years, 68% of all students were proficient!

In 2013, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction teamed with KUCRL to focus on improving adolescent literacy outcomes statewide. Professional Developer Pam Leitzell guided the work and support for Swain County Schools.

In Swain County, under the leadership of Principal Brandon Sutton and SIM Professional Developer and ELA teacher Kim Jamison, the Swain County Middle School Literacy Leadership Team came together to develop plans for implementing school-wide changes needed to support literacy.

The school's picturesque but isolated setting in the Smoky Mountains might mask the fact that many of the students live in poverty and face challenges as a result of limited background experiences. Teachers work hard to motivate students, and staff members are like "family." Teachers are willing to try new things to help their students. However, three years ago, the question brought to the literacy leadership team was, "What are the changes that would have the greatest impact on the success rate of our students?"

The principal shared his vision with the team: *Improve the scores on the state's English Language Arts/Reading test from the current 38% proficiency rate to 70% proficiency rate within a three-year period.*

At first, the goal seemed overly aggressive. How could the school

make such dramatic improvements when scores had remained flat for years?

The team became 100% committed to the goal. They began by analyzing data from various sources and building a literacy profile of the school, which helped team members make decisions about needed actions. They decided that *Xtreme Reading* would be delivered to a targeted group of 7th and 8th grade students in need of intensive reading instruction. The students demonstrated an average 2.4 years of growth on the *Test of Silent Contextual Reading Fluency (TOSCRF)*, which was used as a pre and post-test measure for the one-year course.

The reading teachers joined the English teachers during certain periods of the day to help embed some of the reading strategies in English classes. English teachers

became familiar with *SIM Learning Strategies* and began using them in their ELA curriculum.

Teachers throughout the school also used *SIM Content Enhancement Routines* to support content literacy, and the team recommended that Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) begin discussing the use of their instructional practices such as unit organizers and frames during PLC meetings.

The team continues to work together to analyze data, adjust plans, communicate with staff, and recommend professional development for teachers. Henry Ford was right... a group of dedicated individuals working together can achieve success.

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