

Focusing Improvement Efforts at Frank M. Silvia Elementary School / Fall River, MA



Frank M. Silvia Elementary School

Principal: Denise Ward

School schedule: 7:30am–3:40pm

Additional time compared to surrounding district: 110 min/day

Student Population

Grades served: PK–5

Number of students: 637

Qualify for free/reduced lunch: 66%

Students Scoring At or Above Proficient on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment system Test in 2010 (difference compared to surrounding district)

ELA: 58% (+23%)

Math: 58% (+25%)

In 2008, a year after becoming a Massachusetts Expanded Learning Time school, Frank M. Silvia Elementary School embarked upon a comprehensive instructional improvement effort. To lead this effort, the principal formed an instructional leadership team (ILT) and also formed a smaller data team devoted to the examination of school and student-level data.

As a first step in their work together, these teams led the Silvia faculty in a careful analysis of student results on teacher-

developed assessments and the most recent Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). Through this process, Silvia teachers and administrators realized that students needed to strengthen their reading comprehension skills, and so the faculty decided to adopt a school-wide instructional focus on improving students' reading comprehension across the curriculum.

Anchored by this clear, school-wide focus, these educators scheduled more time to teach valuable skills in this arena. The ILT and data group helped each grade-level team set student achievement goals in reading comprehension and also redesigned the professional development and planning time to support teachers in meeting these goals. To keep everyone “focused on the focus,”

the ILT worked with staff to post student data inside classrooms and created grade-level data boards in the school's more public spaces. The data displays became a daily reminder of the school's goals and allowed staff to quickly visualize the progress students were making toward attaining these aims. Further, to make certain that the additional time for reading comprehension would be used effectively, the ILT also identified a set of “School-wide Best Practices” and used the redesigned common planning and professional development meetings to help teachers master these practices.

Over the years, as the instructional focus became more infused into all aspects of their teacher development and classroom instruction, Silvia educators recognized that the assessment instruments used to determine student progress were inadequate. Consequently, they developed new reading comprehension assessments and rubrics to evaluate student work. As they employed these new assessments, Silvia teachers and administrators realized that students had improved in reading comprehension but were now struggling to demonstrate their skills in writing. During the 2011-2012 academic year, Silvia's leadership decided to expand the original school-wide focus also include helping students to communicate in writing and answer open-response questions. To support this broader school-wide instructional focus, school leaders divided the school's additional learning time into two separate periods: a literacy period focused on strengthening reading comprehension skills and a separate writing period focused on improving their ability to communicate their thoughts through writing.

Silvia has begun reaping the benefits of this focused approach to expanding learning time. Students at each grade level have shown marked improvement in the annual ELA MCAS since the instructional focus was implemented. In contrast, during this same period, proficiency rates have stagnated across other district elementary schools. Silvia's methods for teaching elementary school students how to competently and confidently answer open-response questions are now being adopted by all other elementary schools in the district.

