

Transcript for Video 3: Collaborative Problem Solving and Data-Based Goals and Outcomes

- [Narrator] It would be great if solving challenges in education were like solving math problems, tidy and logical. The principal of Northumberland High School had a challenge, and he didn't solve it with math, but he did solve it with numbers.

- I think there was a lot of reluctance on the part of our staff initially, when we began discussing PBIS and efforts to engage families. For many teachers, many staff, the only tool sometimes in our tool kit is to suspend students, and so the way that we build buy-in, or have built buy-in with our staff, is to show them the data. How restorative practices and alternative options to suspensions are leading to better outcomes for kids.

- [Narrator] This is part three of a three-part series on strengthening family engagement in Virginia public schools. In this part, we focus on setting goals and assessing outcomes based on data. We also show how engaged families are valuable partners in solving problems at schools.

- Family engagement does not occur overnight. You have to be persistent and realize the impact that will occur for one child, ten children, one hundred children.

- I think it's very important for parents and teachers and the community to work together for a child to actually be successful, because it doesn't just take one person, and one person can't carry the weight of one child's success.

- [Narrator] Collaborative problem-solving and data-based goals and outcomes are two of six factors that make up a comprehensive approach to family engagement in Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports. The most common data used to measure student progress are grades and standardized test scores. Those measures provide benchmarks for gauging whether family engagement is reaching its goal of improved achievement of students, but that's just the beginning of the use of data. School leaders can use many other kinds of data to measure the quality and results of family engagement itself.

- We use data for everything. We use data when we are looking at attendance, when we are looking at academic success.

- Referrals.

- Time of day.

- Poverty rates.

- For folks commuting.

- Locations.

- Ethnicity.

- We use our data with just looking at a cohort of children, how they're progressing.

- The amount of students that arrive late.
- Gender. That's right.
- The amount of students that call and don't have a ride.
- We recognize that we have students from all demographics. We're very fortunate to have a diverse population, and what we recognized is the students that were coming to us had different experiences. So about four years ago we really dug in, started looking at what we have in place with our tiered interventions, not only academically but behaviorally, and through that we've come up with a great RTI program that recognizes our students' needs, where they are, and going through a process of recognizing that using our data, and really supporting our teachers on understanding interventions.
- [Narrator] A wide variety of data can be used in Tiered Systems of Supports, both to demonstrate a need for services and to track progress and improvement among students receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 services.
- We've seen a lot of trends of students who are struggling more in school with behavior or with any social-emotional concerns. We really try and support them, but in order to make the most success and be the most effective, we really need that family engagement to support the student to come up with strategies for here, supporting students here at school, as well as supporting their social-emotional needs at home.
- We will come together as a team and invite the families in as well, and just see what supports are needed. That could be with academic, that could be with behavior with their children. But also during that time, oftentimes we will have conversations with parents and find out things that may be going on in the home as well. So therefore that will lead us to kind of understand why the child may be performing in a certain way or may have shut down.
- Many times we'd come into a meeting, and say, "This is what I think we need to get done," and you have a preconceived notion. If you come with a true mindset saying, "Tell me about your family. "Tell me what you see in how your child being successful." And if we're really truly open to hearing what they say, not just saying those words but actually being receptive and reflective on it, I think we have a great opportunity to kind of hear some things that we may not ordinarily hear.
- Sometimes we've rushed a little bit. We've had those meetings. We've said, "Okay it's an hour, "I gotta get to the next parent." And we mean well, no harm, no foul, but we're realizing that those are things that are really aha moments for us, ways that we can really then join forces in the right way. Help that parent to be informed, help them to be more empowered, because they also want to feel like they know what to do for their child.
- [Narrator] In problem-solving meetings with family members, educators may use jargon or acronyms that a family member doesn't know. The family member may not speak up to ask for clarification.

- I think it's really important when parents are at the table, or that information is followed up with parents that is explained in a way that parents understand. I can remember being at my first educational meeting, because I came from community-based social work, that I think I sat at a meeting and thought, "I don't have any idea what people are talking about." And I had a parent, you know, I was there supporting a parent, and I remember thinking, "I can't tell this parent anything. "I don't know."
- There's so many moving parts that sometimes at the school level we kind of lapse into jargon. We'll start talking about QRIs and things like that, and we always want to stop and say again, "Can the parent get informed? "Does the parent know what you're talking about? "Can they give that informed consent?"
- I'm paying very close attention to eyes. I'm paying attention to their body, movements, and just seeing if it seems as though there's a blank stare, or they may not quite, and making sure that I'm repeating myself in different ways. So maybe I may state something using data, or whatever, and then after that, I will then explain what that actually means.
- Sometimes I will just say to a parent, especially one that I have a good relationship with, just very directly, "Did you understand all that? "That was a lot of information."
- [Narrator] When initial barriers are overcome and true collaboration begins, the results can be transformational.
- Once we were able to have a good connection and communication with the family, we really saw success, not only for the student, and seeing them achieve more in the classroom, but also parents reporting back, saying that, "You know what, "I've seen this has made such a big improvement. "Thank you so much. "It's finally going a lot easier."
- We don't know everything and we need you guys to help us inform, make better informed decisions and have better relationships and have better conversations.
- [Narrator] The community where schools operate and families live can also be a valuable partner in improving student success.
- We live in a very rural and isolated community, and it really takes all stakeholders to make the educational environment as positive and productive as possible.
- When everyone is working cohesively together, and the child knows they have that support, I feel like they feel like they can't fail, because they know they always have someone to count on whether it's at home, at school, or outside of the school system within the community.
- [Narrator] Businesses and individuals in the community visit schools frequently. Some provide one-on-one help to students and others bring their expertise to classrooms. A community group called WatchDOGS brings another kind of support to students: positive male role models.
- Not a lot of guys are seeing men in their life, especially in their homes, and many other situations that they're in. Bringing men in can help them to be role models for our young men.

- A lot of the students love it. Their eyes light up when they see they have a WatchDOG in their class, especially when it's their dad or the person from their life.
- We have really tried to get people into the building so the kids can see that there are people that genuinely care about them. They want to be a part of their life, their everyday life.
- These things don't happen in isolation. We have representatives from two of our big church communities as part of our ESOL Parents Advisory Committee, in order to be able to connect them with administrators and to connect them with our teachers, and to connect them with our parents, because it's everybody working together in order to be able to help our students and to help our families.
- Engagement extends beyond just the community, where they live, and the school. So again, we are meeting families where they are, and that's their workplace, their medical field, their faith-based organizations, and what every idea, if someone gives it to us, this is a great way to reach parents, our team is willing. We have a great group of people who are doing whatever it takes to reach parents. This is hard work, and it's heart work, but it's worth it.