An “A” School in Danger Takes Action

CASE STUDY
DEMONSTRATION SCHOOL FOR RIGOR

By Learning Sciences International
An “A” School in Danger Takes Action

Although Acreage Pines Elementary was an "A"-rated Florida school, state assessment scores were dropping. Many teachers were struggling to cope with rigorous new standards, assessments, district initiatives, and di   r initiative. As expected in a historically good school, there were pockets of faculty resistance at the outset, but that was quickly transformed as everyone began to see the value in the initiative.

- School leaders participated in RigorWalks to gauge levels of rigorous instruction, determine root causes, and develop action plans
- Teachers trained on the Essentials for Achieving Rigor model
- Coaching and technology tools augmented all the hard work

A Huge Upswing in Classroom Rigor Throughout the School

By the fourth walkthrough, 80% of Acreage Pines classrooms were engaged in analysis, cognitively complex thinking, and student autonomy—a huge jump from the 33% seen on the first walk. Rigorous, standards-based instruction rapidly rose from 67% to 80%. And by the end of the first year, reading and math assessment scores had increased significantly.

Word of the success quickly spread throughout the Palm Beach County School District and beyond. Before long, teams of educators were visiting Acreage Pines from around the country. This school that was already really good is now a model school that other administrators can visit and replicate.

Learn more about how even the best schools can bring about meaningful, lasting growth with the Demonstration Schools for Rigor initiative.

“I have so much more time in my classrooms. I can do personalized instruction because the kids are working harder than I am.”
- Acreage Pines Teacher

Challenges

State assessment scores were dropping significantly
Time constraints hindered the adoption of a new initiative
Many faculty members were resistant to change

The Approach

Deep training on the Essentials for Achieving Rigor model of instruction
Diagnostic walkthroughs to identify root causes, collect data, and monitor progress
Intensive leadership coaching and technology support

The District Is Now...

Enjoying significantly higher state assessment scores for math and reading
Serving as a model of rigorous, standards-based classroom instruction for visiting districts
Continuing to implement powerful professional development for meaningful, lasting growth
An “A” School in Danger Takes Action

In the summer of 2014, at the request of Palm Beach County Schools, Acreage Pines Elementary adopted a school-wide initiative to transform and align the entire school to achieve an important goal: to educate all Acreage Pines students to a level of rigorous learning that would prepare them to meet national standards and succeed in college and career. The foundation of this transformation was the Demonstration Schools for Rigor initiative developed by Learning Sciences International.

As a demonstration school, Acreage Pines would receive intensive training and support to elevate every classroom to the level of rigor required to meet Florida’s new state standards. Additionally, the school would become a model laboratory for other schools in the district to visit and learn from. Dujon felt that her already high-performing school would be a natural fit—and that the timing was right. The previous year’s Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test scores had been disappointing, significantly lower than previous years.

“I saw that in spite of the fact that we had good teachers, teachers were going chapter by chapter through the textbooks. They’d rip out a page, photocopy some passages or worksheets, and get the kids to answer some questions. Frankly, we didn’t know what we didn’t know.”

ACREAGE PINES DEMOGRAPHICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>This school</th>
<th>State average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Population:</td>
<td>448</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Teachers:</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch:</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida School Grade:</td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>This school</th>
<th>State average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Florida Department of Education, 2014-2015*
The Initiative

The Demonstration School for Rigor initiative at Acreage Pines was built on three pillars:

1. **An evidence-based model of instruction**, the *Essentials for Achieving Rigor*, that set in place a system-wide instructional model designed to ensure rigorous pedagogy and learning aligned to standards in every classroom;

2. **Professional development** for school leaders and classroom staff to help them successfully make the shift to a new model of teaching and learning;

3. **Intensive coaching and technologies**—*Rigorwalk, Standards Tracker*, and *Growth Tracker*—to support a school-wide cultural shift that would embrace second-order change and develop the growth mindset necessary to achieve deep and sustained results.

Teachers at Acreage Pines said their primary worry was adequate time to implement new programs. The faculty was struggling to cope with changes piled upon changes, as rigorous new state standards and new assessments collided with other district initiatives. Many teachers felt overwhelmed as they struggled to make connections with the revised state standards and the development of common assessments. Like other "A"-rated schools, Acreage Pines also had small pockets of faculty resistance—if the school wasn’t broken, why fix it?

But Dujon felt that she and her teachers needed to push themselves past their plateau. Quoting Mohammed Ali, Dujon told her staff, “The wins and losses take place in the gym long before the fight. This year, with the Demonstration Schools initiative, we have a road map. All we have to do is follow it.”

“This year, with the Demonstration Schools initiative, we have a road map. All we have to do is follow it.”
Results

By the end of 2015-2016, reading and math scores had made some big jumps. Only fifth-grade ELA scores saw a drop; Acreage Pines teachers and administrators have stepped up and intensified their work in that area.

“I’m not going to say the process at the beginning was not painful,” Dujon admits. “We had tears. But we pushed and we pushed, and even the teachers who initially said, ‘I don’t have time’ are now telling me, ‘I have so much more time in my classrooms. I can do personalized instruction because the kids are working harder than I am.’”

The Demonstration Schools initiative transformed teaching and learning at Acreage Pines. “Now, our performance scales and learning targets drive instruction,” Dujon said. “Students can tell you what the scale means—where they were yesterday, where they are today. They can give you evidence for where they are in their learning. Even kindergarten kids know their learning goals now, and what the target of the lesson is.”

Acreage Pines Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test Results

Reading and math scores increased significantly in third and fourth grades.
By the end of the 2016 school year, word of the successes at Acreage Pines had spread throughout the Palm Beach County School District and well beyond. Teams of educators were visiting from around the country. As one Assistant Superintendent put it after visiting Acreage Pines:

I was extremely impressed with how the students at Acreage Pines were actively engaged with rigorous content in every classroom. The initiative was yielding evidence that could be seen immediately. Methodology in the classrooms had clearly shifted, and teachers were excited—there was a collective pride and synergy at that school because they knew they were part of something very special.

What I experienced with Dujon and the teachers and [through] classroom visits was so authentically transformational that it compelled me to share it. I was confident the same model of treatment and support in my schools would produce tremendous results.

To learn more about Demonstration Schools for Rigor, call us at 877.411.7114 or visit us online at LearningSciences.com