

The Importance of Administrative Leadership in Student Achievement

By Heather L. Johnson

“Strong, consistent, administrative leadership is essential for student achievement,” says Diana Jo Johnston, Engage Learning President and Principal Consultant. As a seasoned administrator and experienced consultant, Diana Jo knows how important on-site staff development is and works with school administrators to develop action plans to support the progress that happens between consultant visits.

During FOCUS site support visits to Tohaali’ Community School in Toadlena, New Mexico, Delores Bitsilly meets with Diana Jo for several conferences during the week to discuss the progress of the site support visit and to follow-up on what the needs are of each classroom and individual staff members. Principal Bitsilly regularly conducts walk-through observations of the consultant modeling instructional strategies in the classroom and sits in on any coaching conference or training that she can. “This sends the strong message that she is interested and supportive of her staff and recognizes the change process that must occur. When an administrator is this involved, it helps to accelerate implementation of new learning because teachers feel supported and also have an on-site resource when the consultants leave,” remarks Diana Jo.



Principal Delores Bitsilly meets with Engage Learning consultant Diana Jo Johnston.

At the last FOCUS site visit, Principal Bitsilly reviewed specific staff development concerns that she and her administrative team had before the training so that consultants could prepare specific articles and resources to address those concerns. Additionally, she began the staff development training by sharing her observations and celebrations of that FOCUS visit with the entire staff. The tone was set for a very open and focused staff development session. “Staff members were open to new ideas and teaching strategies because they know that they will be encouraged and supported in the implementation process.” said Principal Bitsilly. Diana Jo went on to note that “because of her [Principal Bitsilly’s] feedback, participants commented in their evaluations that we were able to answer many questions they had during our training.”

Principals and school administrators are in a very significant position to motivate staff, provide team building opportunities, observe teachers and provide feedback to fine tune implementation. Through her dedication to her staff and students, Delores Bitsilly provides the administrative leadership that makes the most out of FOCUS site support visits and that will sustain continuous growth.