

Continuous Improvement and Effective Instruction

By Dawn Schiro, K-12 Director of Continuous Improvement

It is the belief of Norwalk Community School District that we are growing learners and leaders! Further, we believe that we can be highly effective in promoting student learning if we utilize a research-based framework to guide our school improvement efforts. One such research-based approach is the Marzano High Reliability Schools (2014) framework. Norwalk Schools has been engaged in the study of Dr. Marzano's work for many years and we continue to use research to monitor our own effectiveness as a learning organization. The High Reliability Schools framework, based on forty years of educational research, defines five progressive levels of performance that a school must master to become a high reliability school—where all students learn the content and skills they need for success in college, careers, and beyond. Our schools have all been Certified in Level 1 as Safe and Collaborative Schools through the Marzano HRS certification process.

In the 2019 - 2020 school year, Norwalk Schools will be continuing working on our Level 1 (Safe and Collaborative Culture) work and at the same time, focus on developing Highly Effective Teaching in Every Classroom(Level 2). Our Level 2 school improvement strategies, focused on improving instruction in every classroom, is supported by teacher leaders who provide a variety of differentiated supports for teachers. One of the pivotal teacher leader roles that supports this work are our instructional coaches. In Norwalk, we have utilized instructional coaches to assist in our continuous improvement work since we received the state grant for Teacher Leadership in 2014. The work of our instructional coaches is to respond to individual buildings' professional learning needs based on data from a variety of sources and assessments. Instructional coaches then provide and support job-embedded professional learning for teachers with an emphasis on student learning. As our coaching program has grown, we have moved to a student-centered coaching model to support teachers to improve student learning. Student-centered coaching focuses on using student data to drive coaching conversations. Our instructional coaches' ongoing work with teachers include both time in the classroom and collaboratively planning with teachers as they examine student data. In turn, student achievement is more likely to increase when the quality and consistency of classroom instruction improves through the supports of coaching. One of Norwalk Schools ongoing improvement efforts for the 2019-2020 school year will be to support teachers to develop highly effective practices to improve student learning with the support of our district, building and teacher leaders.