

School Readiness

Brenda Tomlin: As a manager, I take a look at the data that we get in our school readiness base at least monthly. And we can use that data to impact our planning on a very quick turnaround basis that we -- you know, we can look at it more often than monthly if we chose to. And so as we analyze it from month to month, we can see, are we spending a lot of extra time in one particular area?

Over this last year, we were closely monitoring the support that we gave to new employees: How much time did it really take to get them up and running? And so, we were able to compare across our districts, across our sites, the amount of time that we spent with new employees and the types of things that we trained them on. And from those two pieces of data, we were able to develop a brand new new employee orientation process.

And so we're putting that into place this year, and we've streamlined it, we've pulled everything together, and so we can institutionalize the training that we provide to new employees. We have created checklists; we've created forms. We've been able to take a complete look at that just based on the data that we got out of the school readiness, that that was an important piece for us to look at. It was important for us to get a sense of real, actual facts: How much time did we spend and what did we do versus just the anecdotal?

We knew we spent a lot of time with new employees and we knew had a lot of things to cover, but this gave us actual data that we could plan on. Another piece of data that we've looked at from the school readiness is -- has to do with our teaching assistants. We know as a program that we're continuing to expect more from our teacher assistants, that they provide a lot more of the instruction in the classroom. They are a teacher, and they need to perform as such.

And so, we were able to look at, you know, are we providing sufficient support to our teacher assistants to really get them to the level that we want them to do? And I think that was a critical piece for us to say, "You know, maybe not." Maybe we need to take another look at that, and analyze more closely what -- how are we spending our time with them, what are the particular topics that we're working on with them so we can use that data again to go back and plan what is a really good support system for our assistants. What does that have to look like, what are the topics it needs to include, how much time does it need to take to really, again, get the good outcomes for children? Our school readiness is based on ready teachers, ready children, ready families, and so these are some really critical pieces. We can't just have one piece work; we have to have all of them work.

We do have some big ideas for the future. We would really like to continue to take a close look at what are the teaching strategies that need to be in place that will show up as we do a class assessment. We're all very focused on classroom organization, instructional support, making sure that those good teaching practices are in place so that children are receiving -- you know, receiving that on a daily basis. We know that when those good teaching practices are in place, we'll be able to see good outcomes for children, that those assessment of child behaviors and child development should go up, will go up over the course of the year.

So what we're going to look at this year, and of course for years probably moving forward, is trying to get a sense of when we spend time and attention focusing on teachers and building their skills, how does that impact actual child outcomes? So we're going to start to take a look at that this year, and

continue to see and -- and use the data to make our plans moving forward. How will that impact our T/TA? How will that impact what we actually do with our children? And how will that impact how we involve our parents as well? So we're excited about comparing and contrasting different data points to really continue to make good plans for our children and our families.