

Compass Committee & the Instructional Review Process

Canon City School District

Canyon City, CO

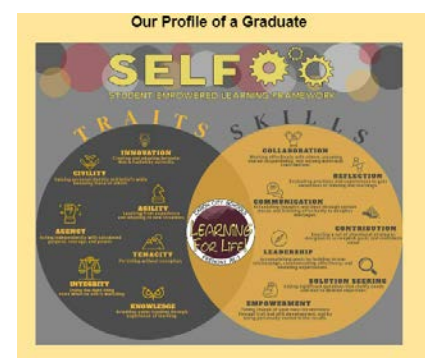


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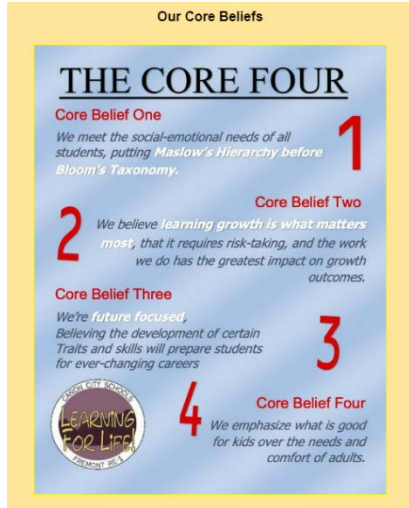


Canon City School District (CCSD) recognized they were not receiving enough information from traditional accountability structures such as the district performance framework or state testing data. The former superintendent had experience with a smaller district in which an instructional review process was utilized. They felt this model held promise for Canon City. The goal was to conduct a full review of every school every year and identify opportunities for improvement. This allowed the district to conduct trend analyses year over year to see growth and areas of need.

The Compass Committee, Canon City's District Accountability Committee, plans and implements the review process. The Compass Committee is made up of the superintendent, the Canon City mayor, board members, the high school principal, a representative from the teacher's union, a representative from the classified staff's union, members of community organizations, school staff, students, and families. While Compass Committee members conduct the review, all school principals and staff participate.



Instructional Program Reviews take place each school year from February through March. Evaluations are conducted in the following nine areas: Climate, Culture, Vision, and Purpose; Student Health and Social-Emotional Wellness; Innovative Instruction; Equity of Opportunity; Opportunities for Learning Experiences; Effective Assessment Practices; Improvement of Instruction and Learning; Support for Positive Student Behavior; and Resource Acquisition and Maintenance of a Safe Learning Environment. A tenth area added into the final report is Parent and Student Perception, which is assessed using perception surveys. While it is called an Instructional Program Review, it is clear it goes beyond instruction. The Compass Committee appoints a review team to visit each school. These are called site reviews. They take a full school day and include opportunities for staff and students to present information and evidence as well as opportunities to observe classroom instruction.



A final assessment during the spring semester shows each school staff the results of their year's work. Panels composed of 12-20 participants trained in the process review a broad array of collected data, including surveys from families, students, and staff. Additionally, each school must complete a self-reflection using the same scoring instrument and provide artifacts that prove their performance level. After reviewing a school's evidence, the panel members spend a full day inside the school where they observe the educational environment and interview staff and students. Finally, the group uses either a computer or cell phone to submit their individual scores.

After discussing and finalizing ratings the following day, each panel submits its ratings to the Compass Committee for final approval. Before the end of the



school year, each school and its community members receive a comprehensive overview of scores, strengths, and areas of growth. The district then uses the information to help identify and support the professional needs of staff for the upcoming year. The comprehensive overview is shared again in September. Sharing the results a second time ensures that any families new to the district have access to and are aware of the results and know what the district and school's plans are for improvement.

The Compass Committee meets monthly and continuously assesses the process. Ideas for modification are discussed and the committee decides together to implement those modifications or not. The committee also partners with the University of Colorado, Boulder's Center for Assessment, Design, Research, and Evaluation (CADRE). CADRE evaluated the district's assessment design, provided constructive feedback to help make improvements, and studied the district's data. The main challenge of this program is that it is a time intensive process, though well worth it. The program also found that when new members join the Compass Committee, it is a challenge to train them on the process without taking up the whole committee's time with redundant information and effort.

For those who wish to utilize this practice, consider scale. This practice can be quite difficult to implement in a large school district and would certainly need to be modified. Secondly, consider authenticity. Try to tell staff that you want to observe a normal day and a normal lesson, and that staff should not put on a "dog and pony show" for you. However, one seventh grade student shared, "I wish [the review panel] was here every day, my teacher is never like this!" Because of this the Compass Committee is thinking about making the site reviews unannounced, though that presents its own challenges. The committee is also thinking about conducting multiple, smaller reviews. The most authentic site review will provide the most meaningful data. Lastly, it is critical that the superintendent's voice is not louder than anyone else's on the Compass Committee. All opinions are valued, and you should do your best to create a safe space where people are comfortable sharing and having difficult conversations.