**How Learning Walks Have Renewed Passions for**

**Teaching in My District**

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One of the best strategies to increase student achievement is to “develop a ’laser-like‘ focus on improving teaching,” says Dr. Kevin Feldman.

We took that message to heart, and with his approach and guidance, my colleagues at Ingham Intermediate School District (ISD) and I developed an initiative called [Teachers Learning Together (TLT)](http://www.inghamisd.org/academic-services/mtss/tlt-video-library/). This effort focuses on improving student engagement and literacy strategies through Learning Walks and teacher collaboration.

Ingham ISD is unique in that we provide support to 12 different public school districts, serving 44,570 students. As a leader of the TLT initiative, I have had the opportunity to participate in countless Learning Walks, which have all resulted in productive learning, collegial conversations, excitement, and renewed passions for teaching.

The TLT initiative initially started when elementary and middle schools in the ISD service area embarked on a grant-funded statewide plan to implement Multiple Systems of Support. (MTSS) The grant didn’t include high schools, so we sought help from [Dr. Feldman](http://edublog.scholastic.com/author/kevin-feldman) to include our secondary teachers in the MTSS work. During our first year of implementation, he led seminars that were focused on instructional strategies and provided training in giving and getting specific feedback through the Learning Walk process. Teachers who attended the seminars committed to this process in collaboration with their colleagues. We immediately found that the typically reserved high school teachers were visibly excited to go back to their schools and begin implementation.

Before our TLT initiative, many of our teachers had never observed another instructor’s classroom despite having spent many years in the profession. The experience was powerful. Participants gained deeper knowledge of instructional strategies as well as a renewed vigor for teaching.

After attending one of Dr. Feldman’s seminars, a group of middle school teachers initiated their own observations during each other’s prep hours, and saw that the engagement and literacy strategies were working. They began discussing these strategies during the 5 minutes between classes, and even got together after school at a local restaurant to continue the fruitful conversations about teaching and learning. The excitement was infectious, and soon, other teachers wanted to get involved. By the end of the year, TLT participation at their school swelled to 100%. At present, approximately 500 teachers from our service area are involved in the TLT initiative.

We continue to find that Learning Walks are exceptional vehicles for motivating teachers to improve their practice. Plus there is an added bonus of creating a collaborative culture for instructors. I have observed this phenomenon firsthand. Instructors, who regularly butted heads with each other in staff meetings, have learned from each other and found a new mutual respect. Teachers, who taught in the same building for almost 20 years, entered some of their colleague’s classrooms for the first time and gained both valuable insights into teaching techniques and the value of collaboration.

Leadership support is a key component of our TLT initiative, and one brave principal who had been out of the classroom for over 10 years volunteered to teach a lesson and get feedback from a large group of teachers. This group included people she had never met from other districts. Her results were overwhelmingly positive because she gained even more credibility with her staff, demonstrating a willingness to “walk the talk,” and show them her commitment to the Learning Walk process. Having said that, the TLT initiative has largely been teacher driven, and is sustained by committed, “grass roots” groups of teachers.

As part of the TLT initiative we have established [a TLT video library](http://www.inghamisd.org/academic-services/mtss/tlt-video-library/success-stories/) on our website so that teachers can post videos and give and get feedback online. Staff in several school districts have posted videos of their teaching for other TLT participants to view. In many schools, Learning Walks have become a part of the culture. One teacher reported that they don’t have TLT “events” anymore, it’s just part of what they do – business as usual.

Teachers at one high school have color-coded signs on their classroom doors indicating that they are open to visitors at any time, or open to visitors with some advance notice. These teachers have what Dr. Feldman calls “collaborative coherence” for teaching and learning in their building. They have learned valuable engagement strategies, thus breathing new life into their teaching. For example, during a Learning Walk at this school you might see students engaged in a “Give One, Get One” activity: Each student writes down thoughts in response to a prompt, and then pairs up with others to exchange ideas. Teachers are focused on Dr. Feldman’s mantra, “Everyone does everything,” by using engagement strategies designed to include all students, with no opting out.

We are now in our 5th year of TLT implementation, and expanded the audience to include elementary and middle school educators who begged to be involved after hearing positive stories from their high school colleagues. Teachers are experiencing increased student engagement, resulting in a vibrant, energized learning environment. I have never been more proud to call myself an educator than when I experience the thoughtful, supportive, collaborative conversations that take place among teachers during Learning Walks.