

CASE STUDY

# Wenatchee School District

WENATCHEE AND SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

2015-16 Enrollment:	<b>7,962</b>	2:	High Schools
Free and Reduced Price Lunch:	<b>62%</b>	3:	Middle Schools
Transitional Bilingual:	<b>23%</b>	7:	Elementary Schools
Percent of teachers with at least Master's Degree:	<b>62%</b>		



# Wenatchee School District



*Trees reflected in the window of Wenatchee Public Schools administrative offices.*

When Jodi Smith, Wenatchee School District's enthusiastic Assistant Superintendent of Learning and Teaching, saw the phrase "transforming professional learning" she immediately was interested in learning more about the WA-TPL grant. Professional development and learning was a huge focus for the district and important to Jodi, so she went all in. She decided to "just go for it" and applied as a lab district.

Wenatchee always offered impressive professional learning for teachers and staff but they didn't have a sense of how it was working. They decided their problem of practice was "evidence of implementation of professional learning."

## Weaving Professional Learning with GLAD

As the WA-TPL team started, the district was heavily invested in training all teachers on Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) strategies in support of bilingual students. Cindy Valdez was leading this effort and recalls: "We had almost trained 100% of elementary teachers on GLAD

strategies, and we were looking to do a summer refresh because at the end of the training, teachers walked out with 70 highly effective research based strategies. But it was like, here: go forth, try something. This time, we thought, wouldn't it be cool if we could narrow it down, and have a systematic implementation?" Cindy and her team shortened the list to ten strategies and listed critical attributes of implementation using professional learning standards. To complete the training, teachers had to model all ten strategies for a GLAD trainer or administrator at least three times. The goal was to work on a small slice and repeat it, with district-wide monitoring and support. Even the school board got engaged, and participated in walk throughs to observe and recognize the strategies. Ninety teachers completed this phase of training and the team was impressed with the outcome. They had successfully systematized implementation of a framework and could point to evidence of its transference through monitoring. They were ready for a new challenge and a wider reach.

## Implementing PBIS with The Container Challenge

In 2015, Wenatchee's school board voted for district-wide implementation of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). The team knew this was the challenge they were looking for. They took what they learned from implementing GLAD and applied what they could to PBIS. They also knew they needed to make a bigger shift toward job-embedded professional learning.

Teachers received a training on PBIS, but instead of a 'one-and-done' approach, they received ongoing monitoring and support through the Container Challenge, a program the

team designed to explain the structure of PBIS through the metaphor of containers. The Challenge encouraged teachers to progress through the structure, and share and observe each other practicing the strategies, in a friendly engaging way that offered incentives. Kory Kalahar, Principal of Westside High School shared his experience, “For my building, the Challenge made implementation of PBIS smooth...it gave us a common language. There was more collaboration with

double year over year. This year, engagement is up to 317 from 159 in last year’s Container Challenge. The team attributes this to the challenges being Optional with a Capital O. They didn’t worry about the naysayers at the beginning. Over time, as teachers saw the discretion they had, and the fun in a safe and supported way to learn and grow, the momentum just took off.



“From the start, we built coherence into the core of every professional learning opportunity. We connect the dots by showing how each district initiative ties to the previous ones... We weave the threads together to construct a coherent whole instead of a mishmash of ever changing new ideas to try.”

JODI SMITH, ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT OF LEARNING AND TEACHING,  
WENATCHEE SCHOOL DISTRICT

teachers and sharing of practices... I’ve seen staff open up.”

Though the PBIS training was required, the Container Challenge was optional. The team reports that 159 teachers, nearly one-third of teachers in the district, completed the Container Challenge, and many more participated.

## The Purple Clipboard and Optional with a Capital “O”

Jodi describes her creative marketing approach to professional learning initiatives over the past few years. She knew that for the work to take a life of its own, teachers had to want it for themselves. Drawing on influences from Eric Jensen, founder of Brain-Based Teaching and Learning, to the reality-TV show The Biggest Loser, each initiative had small, inexpensive ways to build buzz. One year, it was a door cling recognition, another it was a free purple clipboard for signing up for the challenge at a certain date. These incentives, minor on the surface, were to get the fence-sitters to give it a shot.

The team has seen teachers’ engagement grow by nearly

## Team Transformation

The WA-TPL project may have come to an end, but for Wenatchee the work of professional learning continues. The team, a semi-fluid composition of representatives from elementary, middle, and high school, continues to meet and has re-branded itself. They are now the District Professional Learning Design Team and their latest challenge is strategies for engagement. Significant for sustaining this work, the culture among the educators in Wenatchee School District has been transformed. Kory describes, “It used to be that I would plan my own lesson, and time with colleagues was spent talking about the weather. There was this feeling like you’ve got a degree, so you should know what you’re doing. We’ve come a long way from that culture.”

## WORDS OF ADVICE

# “Use it or lose it.”



The Wenatchee team stresses the importance of using and practicing your learning to make it stick. The professional learning model should support evidence of implementation and be focused on changing behavior, not checking the box.

“Change is disturbing when it is done to us. Change is exhilarating when it is done by us. The structures are in place to support me, but I am the driver of my change.”

BILL EAGLE, SPECIAL PROGRAMS, WENATCHEE SCHOOL DISTRICT