



PLC AT WORK[®]

Success Story

Fern Creek High School LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

Using PLC at Work[®] and RTI at Work[™] processes, Fern Creek High School increased its test scores from the state's bottom 10 percent to the 76th percentile of all students within five years.



Fern Creek High School

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY



► DEMOGRAPHICS

- › 1,599 Students
- › 70% Free and reduced lunch
- › 7% Limited English proficient
- › 12% Special education
- › 46.2% White
- › 36.3% Black
- › 10.3% Hispanic
- › 4.1% Asian
- › 2% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- › 0.1% American Indian or Alaska native
- › 1% Multiracial

Fern Creek High School is a communication and media arts school located in Louisville, Kentucky, and is part of Jefferson County Public Schools.



► CHALLENGE

When newspaper headlines detailed Fern Creek High School's low test scores—a “hit in the gut” falling within the state's bottom 10 percent of schools—former principal Nathan Meyer knew that his staff would need to become more accountable for student success. The school, labeled as Persistently Low Achieving by the state, also faced a regular six-week testing cycle of formative and summative assessments from the Jefferson County Public Schools district administration. Nathan sought change for his school through collaborative PLC meetings and RTI plans to address Fern Creek's sinking statistics, as well as to meet the school district's regular testing challenges.

► IMPLEMENTATION

Fern Creek responded with professional collaboration based around Dr. Richard DuFour's work with professional learning communities (PLCs). Using a standards-based approach, teachers administered formative assessments, analyzed common data, and designed interventions based on a tiered system of student needs. Teachers met in content-specific PLCs every Tuesday from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m., working together in designated time to build quality lessons that supported

“If you talk to our kids, universally, they’ll say something like ‘my teacher really cares about me.’ And that comes from our commitment that ‘all means all,’ and that failure is not an option.”

—Dr. Rebecca Nicolas, principal, Fern Creek High School, Kentucky

► IMPLEMENTATION CONTINUED

student learning, as well as to make adjustments and plan for the district’s next six-week summative assessment. Teachers also used a common language to guide instruction, providing transparency and a fixed point of reference for all.

Staff also used formative assessments to inform instruction and share experiences with their fellow PLC members. Common data was shared and analyzed in a search for trends, helping ascertain strategies that worked successfully and strategies that did not, as well as next steps for instruction. Teachers also intervened with struggling students to offer support and recovery based on individual needs. Some were provided alternate ways to show competency, such as through in-class Tier 2 RTI support or academic advising.

► RESULTS

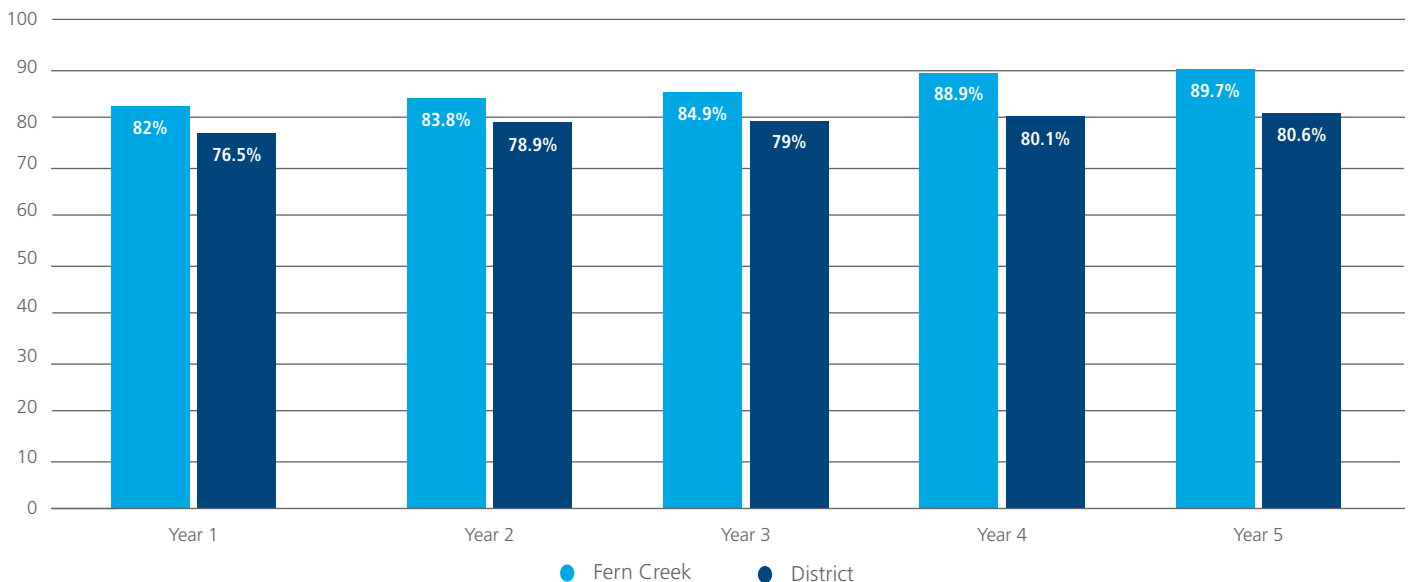
Fern Creek’s commitment to the PLC at Work® and RTI at Work™ processes paid off significantly: the school increased its testing rate from the state’s bottom 10 percent to the 76th percentile of all Kentucky schools

within five years. During a 2015 visit, US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan commended Fern Creek for its “dramatic academic transformation” in that span. The school also shed its “persistently low achievement” label in the process.

Fern Creek was also one of five schools nationally to receive the School Change and Innovation Award from the National Principals Leadership Institute. Fern Creek also began graduating students 9 percent higher than the district average, and Advanced Placement students earning qualifying scores and college credit on their AP exams had increased by 34 percent from the previous year.

“Perhaps the statistic of which Fern Creek is most proud is the fact that we have continued to show gains in our Achievement and Gap (at risk) scores despite our increasingly challenging population,” former principal Nathan Meyer said. “The percentage of our students with disabilities, our English language learners, our free/reduced lunch status, and our minority population has increased over the last five years. Our teachers’ dedication to recovery and professional collaboration has allowed us realize gains despite the challenges some of these students face in achieving proficiency.”

Graduation Rates by Year





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