From 53% to 72%:
What Happens When Leadership Changes First?

SCHOOL PROFILE
South Elementary,
New Philadelphia City Schools

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New Philadelphia City Schools

PRINCIPAL:
Christa Frantz

ENROLLMENT:
400+ Students

AiPL PARTICIPATION:
2023-2025

At South Elementary in New Philadelphia City Schools, a 19-point jump in ELA proficiency did not start with a new curriculum or program. It started with a question:

> *"What if improving student engagement could drive better results?"*

"We realized that if we had students who were more engaged in learning, we would find better results on our test scores," said principal Christa Frantz.

That idea became the foundation for a two-year effort to strengthen student behavior and adult practice—leading to measurable gains and a noticeable shift in school culture.

BUILDING A SHARED VISION FOR STUDENTS

The work began by clearly defining what engagement looked like for students.

Through a framework called Quaker Pride, staff and students aligned around five key academic behaviors, including being:

- Perseverant
- Responsible
- Inquisitive
- Determined
- Engaged

These were not just posters on the wall—they were explicitly taught, modeled, and reinforced in every classroom every day.

Teachers recognized and celebrated these behaviors, even using simple tools like "Pride trackers" to reinforce expectations and communicate success with families.

But as the team quickly realized, focusing on students alone was not enough.

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SHIFTING ADULT PRACTICE THROUGH AiPL

Alongside this work, Frantz and her team were participating in Ohio's Advancing Inclusive Principal Leadership (AiPL) process—supporting them in strengthening collaboration, building teacher leadership, and reflecting on instructional practice.

That work prompted an important shift. Instead of asking only how students could improve, teachers began asking how their own practices influenced engagement and learning.

> *"We talk a lot about how adult behavior influences student behavior," Frantz explained.*

Staff identified specific areas for growth, examined their instructional approaches, and worked together to create more engaging, consistent learning experiences across classrooms. **What emerged was not a top-down initiative—but a shared effort shaped by teacher voice.**

"This is not us telling you," Frantz emphasized in conversations with staff. "We're reflecting back what you've shared with us."

CREATING CONSISTENCY THAT DRIVES RESULTS

As expectations for both students and staff became clearer, something equally important began to take shape—**instructional coherence.**

Across classrooms, students experienced the same language, shared expectations, and more intentional engagement strategies—creating a more predictable and supportive learning environment. At the same time, teachers developed a stronger sense of alignment and purpose, grounded in a common understanding of effective instructional practices. This growing coherence—paired with consistent implementation—meant that efforts were no longer isolated or dependent on individual classrooms. Instead, instruction was intentionally connected across the system, reinforcing priorities and accelerating impact.

Together, instructional consistency and coherence played a critical role in the school's academic gains.

> *"We went from a 53% ELA passage rate last year to a 72% this past spring," said assistant superintendent Jeff Williams.*

While multiple factors contributed to that improvement, leaders consistently point to the role of this work—particularly the **focus on engagement and reflection—as a major driver.**

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UNLOCKING LEADERSHIP ACROSS THE BUILDING

Beyond test scores, one of the most meaningful outcomes has been the growth of teacher leadership. Through their work in AiPL, teachers who were once hesitant to speak up began facilitating conversations, leading initiatives, and supporting their peers.

"It's just something about the program that made those teachers more confident in their abilities," Williams shared.

One teacher, previously quiet and reserved, captured that growth in a note to her principal:

> *"Thank you for helping me see what I can do."*

That shift—from compliance to confidence—**has strengthened the school's ability to sustain improvement over time.**

FROM ONE SCHOOL TO A DISTRICTWIDE VISION

What started at South Elementary is now shaping thinking across the district. District leaders are exploring how to expand this work—starting with small groups of teacher leaders in other buildings and gradually building toward a broader, districtwide approach.

For assistant superintendent Williams, the impact is clear.

> *"I'm really excited to take what has been done and expand it," he said, noting the growing confidence in both the process and the people leading it.*

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR OHIO EDUCATORS

South Elementary's story highlights the impact of AiPL in helping schools move from fragmented efforts to aligned, intentional practice. Through the program, leaders gained the structure, tools, and support needed to strengthen instructional focus, deepen collaboration, and drive continuous improvement.

Just as importantly, it was the educators who brought that work to life. By leaning into the process—prioritizing engagement, investing in leadership, and creating space for reflection and shared ownership—they built the conditions for meaningful, measurable change.

And while a 19-point gain in ELA is significant, the deeper impact may be even more important:

- ✓ A stronger culture.
- ✓ More confident educators.
- ✓ And a shared commitment to improving outcomes for every student.

That is the kind of change that lasts.