

## Partner Spotlight

# Partnering for Middle School Transformation in Allentown, PA

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## The Context:

The Allentown School District (ASD) in Allentown, Pennsylvania, serves over 16,000 students in 21 schools. ASD currently has 78% of students from economically disadvantaged families, 18% of students who are English language learners, and 18% of students with disabilities.



African American 13%  
Hispanic 73%  
White 8%  
Multi-Race 5%  
Other Races/Ethnicities <2%

## The Partnership Journey

In 2018, district leaders and the community were keen to transform their middle schools, all four of which were designated as comprehensive school improvement (CSI) schools by the state. Mi's partnership with ASD was designed to focus on systems and structures that would strengthen the instructional core—the intersection between students, teachers, and content—to improve student learning outcomes. Our partnership approach focused on developing school leader capacity and systems to drive continuous improvement of Tier 1 instruction.

After conducting School Readiness Assessments (SRAs) at each middle school to better understand school-specific strengths and areas for improvement, the district took two key steps to support transformation:

- First, it appointed an executive director for Middle School Transformation. The executive director supervised all four middle schools, streamlined communication while advocating for school needs, and became the key person to help connect and build trust between schools and central office.
- Second, schools selected an external transformation partner to support their process. Mass Insight was selected as South Mountain Middle School's (SMMS) transformation partner for the 2020-22 school years.

## Partner Insight:

"The support I have received from Mi... has been very impactful. I feel the partnership has helped us accomplish more than we would have been able to achieve alone or with another partner."

District Leader  
Allentown School District

Our school partnership encompassed three major components: 1) developing a building-based instructional coaching model; 2) building the leadership team's capacity to manage the school plan; and 3) building the school's partnership management and communication system. The instructional coaching model, in particular, was well received, and we were asked by the district to scale it across all the four middle schools in the 2022-23 school year.

## The Impact:

After launching instructional coaching in early 2022, instructional coaches completed over 250 instructional walkthroughs in the subsequent year and a half. Over 90% of these “instructional visits” had an associated action item or instructional next step for teachers. The Mass Insight team provided over 75 hours of leadership coaching and support to the SMMS principal and over 100 hours of coaching and support to the school’s two supervisors of instruction. One administrator shared, *“My Mi coach helped me develop my leadership skills so that I was better able to reach the teachers so that they could improve in their tier one instruction. This will lead to better student performance as they are given action steps to improve their instruction.”*

After two years of our partnership focused on building instructional leadership capacity, student data on the STAR indicated:

- The percentage of students demonstrating growth above the 35th percentile in reading increased from 49.0% in the fall of 2021 to 71.4% in the spring of 2023.
- The percentage of students demonstrating growth above the 35th percentile in math increased from 39.4% in the fall of 2021 to 76.1% in the spring 2023.

The instructional coaching programming led to a consistent change management framework, a new academic leadership team to drive instructional systems and structures, and developmental check-ins between the supervisors of instruction and instructional coaches. To streamline communication and evaluate effectiveness, Mass Insight also supported the development of a partnership management dashboard, which gave an at-a-glance access to all partners about their purpose, effectiveness, and alignment to the mission, vision, and values of the school. A school leader indicated, *“They [Mi] shifted the culture away from everyone just kind of doing their own thing and doing it well to being more collaborative, to being a place where someone who has a great idea can have the space to share that idea, where we celebrate each other and what’s going well... Our building became more of a community; it became more collaborative, more focus[ed].”*

## Get in touch:



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## Partner Insight:

“I’ve worked with a lot of different companies where it’s like they were kind of pulling their own agendas... because it was very obvious they were getting something out of it, where Mass Insight’s more like, ‘let me understand the climate of your school, let me understand what you need, and we’re going to build off that.’”

Instructional Leader  
Allentown School District