

## **Blackham School Research Summary, Bridgeport, Connecticut**

*Thinking Maps, Thinking Teams, Thinking Schools:*

Using Thinking Maps as a Catalyst for Strengthening School-wide Leadership and Increasing Communication that Will Lead to Improved Student Learning

### **Outcomes**

An unexpected and insightful “How come?” question raised by a visiting educator propelled the Blackham School to ask an honest and intriguing “What if?” question. The visiting educator noticed that classrooms and professional development sessions involved the use of many visible strategies, including Thinking Maps. “How come,” the educator asked, “the Vertical Data Team does not use the Maps during their meetings?” This led the school to wonder what would happen if Thinking Maps were used as a common visual language in the service of the work of the Vertical Data Team, work that was critical to turning around an NCLB “failing” school. The focus of this proposal, then, is to explore this “What if” question in the form of action research designed to document and analyze the effects of using Thinking Maps as a leadership tool in a school committed to supporting distributive leadership and effective communication in the service of improving student outcomes.

### **Name and Qualifications of Principal Investigators:**

Cathleen Anderson, Grade 6, Jacqueline Simmons, Numeracy Coach,  
Christine Booth, Grade 6, Mary Beth Trafecante, Literacy Coach,  
Renee Chevalier, Middle school math, Flora Wilson, Literacy Coach,  
Kay Dolyak, Literacy Coach, Paulette Miller, Grade 7/8

### **Summary, Method(s) of Research, and Anticipated Results**

This action research will document and analyze the effects of using Thinking Maps as a leadership tool in the work of the newly-instituted Blackham School Vertical Data Team, a team that plays a central role in the school’s continuous improvement plan. The research will seek to examine the ways in which using Thinking Maps as a leadership tool supports the development of distributive leadership skills and improves communication in the service of increasing student outcomes. By documenting and analyzing various sources of information gathered over time - including videotapes of meetings, Maps in use, and portfolios of team and student products, the research will paint a portrait of the changes in the way in which the vertical data team operates and communicates, and, secondarily, how these modifications improve student learning outcomes. It is anticipated that the strategic and deliberate use of Thinking Maps as a leadership tool will impact the operation of the Vertical Data Team will lead to deeper discussions, increased participation of members, clearer goals, improved efficiency, and a trickle down effect on the operation of the horizontal data teams. It is also anticipated that the Maps will create a universal language that will increase communication internally and externally and assist in organizing and reporting data. Finally, it is anticipated that improvements in team operations and communication will result in classroom changes and achievement of school academic goals, while increased facility in using Maps by participants will result in independent and more sophisticated use of Thinking Maps by students.