



HOLY FAMILY  
CATHOLIC SCHOOL

# A Principal's Playbook: How Holy Family School Built a Layered Professional Learning Partnership With FACTS

*Holy Family School in Des Moines, Iowa is a year-round Catholic school where twelve different languages are spoken in students' homes. Three years ago, a new principal walked into a building that was working well by most measures, and saw room to grow. What followed was not a workshop or a one-time training. It was a layered partnership with FACTS Education Services that has reshaped how teachers teach, how the principal leads, and what students experience in classrooms.*

When Paulette Theisen took over as principal at Holy Family School, the building was working. The faculty was strong. The professional learning communities had been in place for years. The curriculum was solid. By most measures, things were running well. They were also ready for the next step.

Theisen had come from the high school level, and what she found in her new K-8 building was a school that did not need to be rebuilt but did need a partner. The PLCs had grown routine in the way long-running practices sometimes do. The school was preparing to move to a push-in ELL model, and most staff had never co-taught. There was no formal MTSS structure yet in place.

**“They were just stuck in some ruts, and our PLCs were all stuck at different places. We needed somebody to come in and do some coaching.”**

## Paulette Theisen

Principal  
Holy Family School



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# Building a Working Relationship

The single biggest factor in why the coaching has worked, in Theisen's telling, is time.

The same FACTS Ed coach has worked with Holy Family for two and a half years. By now, he knows the staff. He knows the new hires. He knows the building. That continuity is what lets him walk through a classroom and offer feedback that lands, instead of feedback that gets nodded at and ignored.

**“With other companies, I don't think we would get that. You go to a big workshop with thousands of people, and you're just a number. I don't feel that way with FACTS.”**

**Paulette Theisen**  
Principal  
Holy Family School

The cadence matters too. The relationship is sustained, not staged, and the difference shows up in what teachers are willing to try. As Theisen puts it, when teachers are given something that works, “they want to continue to learn and learn and do more.”

# The Case for an Outside Partner

Theisen had a working philosophy from her high school principal days: sometimes the message lands harder when it does not come from you. “It's not just hearing it from you,” she says, “it's hearing it from another source. And it's good for us, because we get to learn at the same time.”

She started with the PLCs. The first move was not a workshop. It was a working session to redesign how PLCs ran: standing agendas, teacher share-outs, dedicated data dig days, a yearly schedule of who covers what. Not a new philosophy. A new structure.

That structural change opened up the next move, which was tackling MTSS the same way. The work began with a question, not a framework. The coach started by helping the school identify its own culture and needs, and only then did the team look at what MTSS should look like for Holy Family specifically. From there: start with tier 2 to surface the gaps in tier 1, then move into student engagement work in tier 1.

## What grew from there was not a single PD strategy. It was several, layered together:

- ✓ **Coaching** for PLCs, ELL co-teaching, and MTSS structure
- ✓ **Workshops on student engagement** to support the tier 1 MTSS work
- ✓ **Zoom office hours** where teachers can meet one-on-one with their coach throughout the year
- ✓ **On-site days** with classroom walkthroughs to see strategies in practice
- ✓ **Leadership coaching** for the principal

Each piece reinforces the others. Workshops introduce the practice. Coaching helps teachers implement it. Office hours give teachers a place to ask specific questions as they go. Walkthroughs let the coach see what is landing. As Theisen describes it, the cycle is intentional: “We do these things and then there's some collaboration time, and then we do some more things and there's some collaboration time.”

## Coaching Doesn't Stop at the Classroom Door

Theisen receives leadership coaching from the same coach who works with her teachers. It has helped her grow not only as an educator but as a leader. More importantly, it has changed how her staff sees her.

“My staff sees that I'm just as vulnerable as they are, that I have questions, that I'm learning right alongside them.”

### Paulette Theisen

Principal  
Holy Family School

That kind of modeling matters. As Theisen puts it, “We as administrators sometimes feel we have to do everything all the time. We need to cut ourselves some breaks and step back and be a learner as well.” When the principal admits she is learning, every teacher in the building gets permission to do the same.

## Doing More with a Modest Budget

Holy Family works with modest federal funding. None of that kept the school from building a sustained professional learning program.

“FACTS is very reasonable price-wise,” Theisen says. “I knew coming in that I was going to get quality professional development, and it was not going to cost me more than what I had money for.”

FACTS also handles the proposals, the funding paperwork, and the compliance documentation that come with Title funds. “It's like writing a grant,” Theisen says. “FACTS is really good about helping us with that and doing the behind-the-scenes office work.”

The most replicable piece of the Holy Family story is not the budget. It is the coordination. Holy Family is a small, single-track school, which means Theisen's teachers do not always have a grade-level peer down the hall to plan with. To open up that collaboration, she partnered with two other small schools and pooled their federal funds. FACTS designed one proposal across all three schools, with pricing split by school, so the partnership was administratively simple from the start.

The benefit is bigger than the budget math. Three small schools coordinating their funding can access professional learning that none of them could build alone, and the teachers in each building gain peers across grade bands at the partner schools. For a small-school principal working with limited federal funding and wondering what is possible, this is the answer.

## Why It Has Worked

Three years in, what makes the FACTS partnership work is not any single element. It is the combination: a coach who knows the building, a partner who thinks with the principal, a team willing to design around real-world constraints, and a relationship that keeps evolving as the school's needs do.

## Ready for the Next Step?

Whatever your school's starting point, FACTS Ed builds professional learning partnerships designed around your goals, your calendar, and your budget.



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