

## **Professional Learning Communities...Year One**

On the survey, a few of you voiced concerns that the goals of Professional Learning Communities were not communicated satisfactorily. Below is a short synopsis of what the three big ideas of Professional Learning Communities are and what we are doing in each of those areas to improve student learning. I will include a link to an article by Richard DuFour that explains these ideas further. ( [http://pdonline.ascd.org/pd\\_online/secondary\\_reading/el200405\\_dufour.html](http://pdonline.ascd.org/pd_online/secondary_reading/el200405_dufour.html) ) It has been stressed all year that student learning is the focus and everything we are doing going forward must positively affect learning. I want to stress again that these articles and concepts are not meant to make anyone feel as if they are not a good teacher; rather, I am trying to instill in every one of you the desire to continually be a better teacher. I am trying to inform everyone about effective practices so we all can continue to make changes to improve student learning. Getting results will look differently in different classrooms, but the ideas must be the same. We have had a great year and I look forward to continuing our work next year.

### **Big idea #1—Ensuring that students learn**

The DuFours maintain that a Professional Learning Community must focus answering three important questions:

- What do we want each student to learn?
- How will we know when each student has learned it?
- How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?

### **What have we been doing to answer these questions?**

#### **"What do we want each student to learn?"**

- Throughout the 2007-2009 school years, each individual teacher focused on the curriculum at their grade level and aligned the curriculum to the assessment frameworks, ensuring that we were covering all of the material the students were to be tested on prior to the ISAT testing at each grade. This, in itself, has paid dividends for our students and our scores.
- This year we moved our focus to vertical articulation at the Intermediate School. In order to do this more effectively, We needed to change our Leadership Team to Fundamental Learning Area leaders. This change in structure has been effective in opening up collaboration between grade levels. The articulation work and the discussion at the FLA meetings has been centered on “what we want each student to learn?”. We are doing an excellent job in our Learning Area Teams, and our curriculum is as strong as ever in all areas.
- Many teachers began working on their essential learnings for each of their units

#### **"How will we know when each student has learned it?"**

- The next question, “How will we know when each student has learned it?”, was one that we focused our research on this year.
- Assessment was an area that, if improved, could help us to make gains in achievement.

- We read and discussed articles on developing a balanced system of assessment which includes both formative and summative assessments.
- As we go forward next year, all staff will be required to utilize formative assessment to inform instruction.
- We also read and discussed how grades must reflect learning not extra credit or responsibility grades.
- I instituted a no zero policy and we were strict about homework completion.
- We are to be directive with students who are not performing. We can no longer offer an invitation to come in to get help.
- Learning areas are developing common assessments.

### **"How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?"**

- The final question, "How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?" is the question that the DuFours say separates learning communities from traditional schools.
- Our RtI program has been improving student performance in reading and we will be including assessment and interventions in math next year.
- RtI has given an excellent framework for working with students having difficulties with homework and who need tutoring in other areas other than math and reading.
- Differentiating Instruction will be the focus of our Learning Centers for 2010-2011

### **Big Idea #2 A Culture of Collaboration**

#### **"Collaboration for School Improvement"**

- Typically, we have engaged in collaboration at grade level or between grade levels with those who eat lunch with us
- This year, we have increased collaboration with other grade levels
- More work needs to be done to increase collaboration and trust within learning area teams, but the collaboration about our learning areas is already paying dividends.
- Brian will be attending more FLA and Grade Level Meetings in 10-11
- Grade Level and FLA meetings need to be focused on student learning. Brian will meet with grade level representatives to discuss all school issues that need administrative attention and to get feedback.

### **Big Idea #3 Focus on Results**

- Teams have begun the process of creating assessments to determine the extent of student learning in each area
- 5th grade has collected writing assessment data throughout the year to determine growth and influence instruction
- Learning areas have looked at ISAT and STS data to identify areas of weakness in our achievement and have focused on creating activities and lessons to address these areas.
- Teachers must focus on making changes to teaching practices that are not getting results. This is crucial for continuous improvement