Proposal for Year-Long Plan for Teacher Learning

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I.   Introduction

During my tenure at this school, the professional development opportunities have been sporadic and noncommittal where the faculty is rarely encouraged to experiment with new ideas and techniques. Therefore, I propose that this institution implement a plan for formal professional learning opportunities including the following: staff-led discussions, staff-led observations, and professional learning opportunities. Three major learning designs will be employed to implement this plan. This proposal will be organized and operated during the 2014-2015 school year.

II.   Background & Rationale

After completing the assessment of current reality collaborative professional learning communities, the school culture survey, and the survey on professional learning communities, it has become abundantly clear that the following three statements do not reflect this school:

- This school encourages and supports experimentation with new ideas and techniques.

- This school has high expectations for teachers and administrators.

- There is little awareness of what or how colleagues are teaching.

As a result, the following proposal for leading teacher learning will assist the school in the above mentioned three areas needing improvement. The teachers will be encouraged to experiment, high expectations of all faculty members will be expected,

and each teacher will increase his/her awareness of the best practices already being

taught by other professionals in the building.

III.   Proposal for Leading Teacher Learning

There are three main goals meant to ensure the success of this professional

development endeavor. Through implementation of this proposed plan, this institution

will be able to answer "yes" to the following three questions:

1. Do the school and teachers actively and efficiently experiment with best

    practices in the field in an effort to support student achievement?

2. Are the expectations of teachers and administrators elevated, attainable,

    familiar, and understood by all stakeholders?

3. Are all faculty members informed of the best practices having previously being

    taught by fellow colleagues in the building?

There will be three learning designs utilized to realize the goals listed above. The

following is a list of the three learning designs, each with a sub-goal for the learning

design, a description, and how the design will be successful:

Classroom Walk-Throughs – Learning Design 1

A classroom walk-through is meant to be a casual, "non-evaluative" experience

where effective teacher observation occurs. "The walk-through is most effective when

it generates dialogue with teachers about their practices and decisions and when it

leads to reflective inquiry." The goal of a classroom walk-through is to "mentor and

coach teachers to self-reflection, self-analysis, and self-direction" (Downey, et al., 2004, p. 98). This particular learning design will require the hard work of teachers and administrators alike to be successful. All faculty members will be informed of the new walk-through procedure at the beginning of the year meeting in August 2014. The administrator will complete at least two walk-throughs of each teacher's classroom every month. The teachers will be expected to make at least one walk-through during each month. Also in August, a structured professional development session will be organized to help all faculty members build a better understanding of the classroom walk-through. For example, all stakeholders will need to understand the following three important concepts before beginning the actual learning design:

1. The walk-through is meant to gather specific information and all participants should be non-judgmental during the entire process.

2. When entering a classroom the observer needs to be "as unobtrusive as possible."

3. There needs to be a plan created by the teacher and the observer regarding what the focus of the observation will be. This should occur _before_ the observer ever enters the classroom (Downey, 2004, pp. 98-99).

Standards in Practice – Learning Design 2

Standards in practice, simply put, is the process in which teachers and administrators examine assignments previously taught with the focus of improving the assignment in the future. The goal of utilizing standards in practice is for teachers to create assignments that are more rigorous, easily understood, and aligned with only the

important concepts being taught. The first informational staff meeting on standards in

practice will take place during the first few weeks of school in September 2014. After

the informational meeting is complete and teachers better understand this learning

design, weekly meetings will be designated for the team to meet to focus on one

assignment per meeting (Mitchell & Kennedy-Salchow, 2008, p. 230).

Critical Friends Groups – Learning Design 3

A critical friend group (CFG) is a small group of educators who meet regularly to

have a "structured professional conversation." A CFG is designed with one goal in mind:

"colleagues learning together over time" (Quate, 2008, p.109). A "how-to" meeting will

occur at the end of the school year in May 2014. During this meeting, all participants

will learn the four step process to an effective CFG: (1) The meeting will begin with some

sort of ice-breaker/team building activity. (2) The team will create norms at the first

meeting to follow at each subsequent meeting. (3) Each CFG meeting is approximately

one half hour long focusing on one particular area of need. (4) As the group becomes

more successful, each CFG meeting is approximately one hour long of structured

conversation.

The CFG will then meet twice a month for a minimum of two hours to

accomplish the following objectives:

1. Study each professional's teaching practices

2. Build enough knowledge to create a common foundation for future meetings

3. Discuss, in detail, student work, required responsibilities of the teachers, and

any problematic professional situations.

IV.   Timeline

This professional development plan will be carried out over the 2014-2015 school year. In an effort to keep the meetings sufficiently separate, this plan will be introduced to the faculty at the end of the 2013-2014 school year in May. This particular timeline is intentional; this plan requires immense amounts of work and effort by all faculty members. It is the hope that by keeping the initial information gathering meetings separate, the teachers and administrators will not experience extreme exhaustion or information overload. At this meeting the teachers will be briefly introduced to the three learning designs being used, the overall goals of the plan, the individual sub-goals for each learning design, and the timeline being outlined here.

The following is a list of the three learning designs, when the first introductory meeting will take place, and other important steps to meet the sub-goals of each learning design:

- Classroom Walk-Through
    - Introductory meeting – Beginning of year meeting in August 2014.
        - An overall school schedule with teacher planning periods will be handed out. Each professional will need to pick a different colleague to observe each month of the first quarter. The teacher will be responsible for two walk-throughs during this time period.
        - The "Components of the reflective question" handout is given to each teacher in an effort to assist each teacher in actively reflecting on each walk-through.

- After each walk-through is complete the observer and observed will set up a meeting to discuss the observation as professionals.
  - This schedule will repeat each quarter.

- Standards in Practice
  - Introductory meeting – First week in September 2014.
    - A schedule will be disseminated to all faculty detailing the dates and times of each standards in practice meeting.
    - Each week a different teacher will bring one assignment already used in the classroom to the meeting. Each teacher on staff will bring one assignment for the first quarter.
    - At each meeting the members of the standards in practice team will evaluate the usefulness of the assignment by questioning what the students needed to know to be successful with the assignment, finding what standards apply to the assignment, and creating a "task-specific" scoring guide/rubric (Mitchell & Kennedy-Salchow, 2008, p. 233).
  - This schedule will repeat each quarter.

- Critical Friends Groups
  - Introductory meeting – End of 2013-2014 school year in May
    - The schedule for the CFGs will be given to each participating teacher and administrator.

- The CFGs will occur a minimum of two times each month lasting a minimum of one hour.

- After each CFG meeting is complete the lead professional will use the "Tips for debriefing" handout as a guide to ask each participant their opinion on the meeting.

  o This schedule will repeat each quarter.

V.   Evidence of Accomplishment

At the end of this proposed one year plan, the following three artifacts will be used to show that the three central goals and the multiple sub-goals were realized:

1. Chapter 8, Handout 2, "Five-step observation structure of the classroom walk-through with reflective inquiry" (Appendix A)

2. Chapter 21, Handout 2, "Guiding questions for facilitators and/or coaches" (Appendix B)

3. Chapter 9, Handout 7, "Tips for debriefing" (Appendix C)

Each teacher on staff will need to hand in these completed handouts at the end of each quarter. These quarterly handouts will be used to monitor the progress of this plan.

VI.   Anticipated Impact

It is anticipated that when this plan is successful the following statements will be true of all faculty members, the school culture, and teacher learning:

- The school culture is thus that teachers regularly experiment with new best practices in an effort to support student achievement.

- Teachers are participating in an active and effective professional learning community.

- Higher expectations of teachers and administrators are now being required.

VII.   Summary

All current staff members have at least two years experience with this institution. It can be insinuated that many of the staff members will be initially reluctant to "get on board." It is vital that the administration and teacher leaders remain positive, reflective role models for all other staff members during this first experimental year. It is also essential to the success of this proposal that the administration creates valuable learning experiences and continuously monitors the progress of each participating professional in the building.

VIII.   Next Steps

The anticipated next steps will be headlined by the application and acceptance as a "School of Distinction" from the Michigan Association of Non-Public Schools (MANS). During this accreditation process, the school will be visited by a MANS team during the third or fourth year of the process. A school improvement team will be established to create two or three goals that must meet the following three MANS requirements: "(1) The goals must be directly linked to the school improvements and must have positive impact for students. (2) The goals must be an enhancement of

MNSAA Standards as cited in the self-study manual. (3) The goal results must be

measurable" ("School of Distinction", 2010). The school then has three years to

accomplish these goals to be named a "School of Distinction" in Michigan.

IX.   Appendices of Work

APPENDIX A

Five-step observation structure of the classroom walk-through with reflective inquiry

Step 1	Orientation to the work: Are students doing what the teacher wants them to do? Are they attending?	
Step 2	Curricular decisions: What standards and objectives is the teacher teaching to, and how do they match system curricular standards/expectations?	
	Part 1: Taught objectives	What is the content of the taught objective(s)? What is the context of the taught objective(s)? What cognitive type is used in the taught objective(s)?
	Part 2: Intended objectives	How congruent are the taught objective(s) and the teacher's intended (stated or written) objective(s)?
	Part 3: Calibrated objectives	How aligned are the content of the taught objective(s) and the system's curriculum standards/expectations?
Step 3	Instructional decisions: What instructional practices does the teacher use to teach the standards and objectives?	
	Part 1: Generic practices	What practices that research has indicated are powerful when teaching in most instructional situations does the teacher use?
	Part 2: School- or district-focused practices	What practices that the school or district is focusing on does the teacher use?
	Part 3: Subject-specific practices	What practices that research has indicated are powerful when teaching a particular subject area does the teacher use?
Step 4	If there is time, walk the walls: What past curricular and instructional decisions can be discerned by examining easily accessed materials — student products on the wall, teacher-made charts, student portfolios, future worksheets, past quiz papers, etc?	
Step 5	Safety and health: Are there any safety, facility, or health situations that need attention?	

Source: *Participant's Manual for Conducting Walk-Throughs With Reflective Feedback to Maximize Student Achievement: Basic Seminar* (3rd ed.), by Carolyn J. Downey and Larry E. Frase, 2003. (Available from Curriculum Management Systems, 5415 NW 88th St., Suite 300, Johnston, IA 50131.) Reprinted with permission.

APPENDIX B

Guiding questions for facilitators and/or coaches

Possible questions for Step 1
- Was this assignment given to students exactly as it is on this sheet?
- Did you add instructions orally?
- How were the students expected to respond? In writing? Orally?
- What did you want the students to learn from this assignment?
- Why does the student have to make a flip chart, draw a poster, or make a decorated title page? How much time do these activities take? How do they contribute to learning?

Possible questions for Step 2
- Could you explain what you mean by "prior knowledge"?
- Did the students also have to read and/or write?

Possible questions for Step 3
- Could you tell me what the student has to analyze?
- Are all the answers in the text?
- Does this assignment align with that standard, or with this one?
- Why do we need so many standards? Could we be stretching the alignment a bit?
- Is there a standard for making a poster/flip chart/cube?
- How will this assignment move students toward proficiency on the standard?

Possible questions for Step 4
- Does your assignment ask for neatness and/ or no mechanics, usage, grammatical, or spelling errors?
- Why are we asking for voice in expository writing?
- Do your justifications in this math problem need complete sentences?

Possible questions for Step 5
- Are you comparing student work?
- Did you look at the task-specific rubric we developed?

Possible questions for Step 6
- Have you talked to another English teacher about how to promote sophisticated vocabulary and/or compound/complex sentences?
- How can we make sure that all students know the steps of problem solving?
- How can we teach students to recognize the main idea and supporting details?
- How can we raise the level of this worksheet to make it challenging and rigorous?

APPENDIX C

Tips for debriefing

Skipping a debriefing session to save time is tempting, but unwise. Through careful attention to how the group works together, debriefing enables the group to monitor its evolution and continually improve. A debriefing can begin with the facilitator asking the entire group to spend a few minutes writing or discussing. Discussion can be open-ended and freewheeling or structured in a round, with participation by those who wish to comment. If the debriefing is open-ended, the facilitator should encourage varying perspectives by frequently asking, "Does anyone see this in another way?"

TO UNDERSTAND OVERALL IMPRESSIONS	TO CONSIDER PROCESS	TO ASSESS ROLES	TO CHECK IMPRESSIONS
How did our CFG go today?	How did this protocol work for this problem?	Let's talk about the facilitation of this protocol.	How did you feel when X said Y?
What did we learn from our work today?	What other protocol might we have used?	What comments from the process observer were most informative?	What made you uncomfortable?
What comments made an impact on you?	Were you listened to?	Do we need a timekeeper?	
How can we build on our conversation?	What did we do well as a group?		
Did we attend to our goals from last month?	What do we need to do to get better as a group?		
How did you feel validated as a professional?	Did we follow our norms? Do we need a new one?		
	Were we more silent tonight than at other times?		
	What might this mean?		
	Were our comments too warm? Not warm enough?		
	Did we have enough time? Too much time?		

X.   References

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