

West Hartford Public School District

Agenda Item: Professional Learning Update

Meeting Date: October 21, 2014

From: Nancy DePalma, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

Through: Tom Moore, Superintendent

Background:

Board goals provide for a focus on the development and retention of a professionally educated, highly skilled staff through a targeted and meaningful professional learning program. Structures, to include our early-release professional development Wednesdays, Election Day professional development workshops, and beginning of the year activities, exemplify our district's commitment to supporting teachers within their professional responsibilities. Engaging in continuous professional learning impacts instruction and collaboration and develops and sustains a professional learning environment that supports student learning. The release of new state guidelines for teacher evaluation and development prompted the district to review its professional development model through the lens of individualization and collaboration. The Connecticut State Department of Education's model for educator evaluation outlines the following points for districts to consider when reviewing professional development structures:

- Structures should create learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, accountability and goal alignment
- Alignment of job-embedded professional learning with school and district goals and priorities, curriculum and assessments
- Creation of structures and systems that enable teams of educators to engage in job-embedded professional learning on an ongoing basis
- Extend the reach of highly effective teachers by prompting teacher collaboration and professional development
- Develop capacity for learning and leading through shared leadership and collaboration
- Provide focused targeted professional learning opportunities identified through the evaluation process and school/district needs

2014 SEED Handbook

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VI.B.1

In order to provide for ongoing professional learning opportunities that leverage teacher leadership and collaboration, the Curriculum and Professional Development Council (CPDC) recommended altering of the structure of the CSI series from 3 consecutive weeks to a series of four sessions spread out over a semester. While the former structure allowed for in depth study on a topic in a concentrated period of time, the revised structure would better support an ongoing focus on instructional practice within a model for collaborative inquiry. The collaborative inquiry CSI structure is designed for teachers to engage in self-directed professional learning, leveraging collective skills to enhance individual teacher capacity. Recognizing that collaboration is a critical component to effective professional learning, teachers were encouraged to team with staff members beyond those that they interact with on a daily basis. Roughly following an Ed-Camp model, teachers were surveyed about their general areas of interest and professional need. They were given the opportunity to discuss and refine their focus and, ultimately, teachers self-identified collaborative inquiry teams for ongoing work within a focus area. Inquiry teams consisting of between 3-10 teachers then began formalizing their inquiry question (topics related to instructional practice), conducting research, and developing action plans. Between meetings, teachers will put new instructional methodologies into practice, make observations, collect data, and reflect on their practice. In subsequent meetings, they will share the results of their practice within the collaborative process and continue the cycle of continuous improvement.



Nearly two hundred approved proposals outline engaging professional learning activities across a range of topics to include effective teaching strategies, differentiation and student centered instruction, content area reading and writing strategies, technology integration for effective instruction, formative assessment practices, culturally relevant pedagogy, improving student self-regulation and perseverance, and many more. The broad range of topics reflects the flexibility and individualization of professional learning targets and the multi-dimensional nature of our professional development program.

The district has identified two key critical actions under the Board goal to attract, retain, and develop a high quality staff by providing professional development, resources and appropriate learning environments:

- (i) Create environments of collective inquiry, leveraging the necessary structures, supports, and resources in order to improve teaching and learning for all students.
- (ii) Design and implement ongoing professional learning opportunities for teachers and administrators that support a culture of distributed leadership, self-directed professional learning, and supervisory practices in service to teacher development. Align professional learning efforts to achieve a common understanding of effective, high quality teaching that results in enhanced learning for all.

Through the collaborative inquiry model, we have created the conditions that promote individualized professional learning, shared and distributed leadership, and a culture of life-long learning. The quality of the activities speaks to the dedication of our staff and their commitment to improving instructional practice in support of student learning.

Dr. DePalma, Paul Vicinus, and Kerry Jones will be available for questions.