

Curriculum Blitz

By: Chad Rodgers, Mt. Vernon Junior High School

Team Members Names: Staci Reese, Christine Franklin

Contact: crodgers@mvschool.org

Background That Led to Your Team's Inquiry:

Our school has a structured team planning period for the four core subjects: English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. These teams are grade level specific and have around six teachers per team. It is expected that they meet twice a week to plan, strategize, and collaborate. One of the things our team took away from early workshops was that we did not have clear expectations during team time, and we did not have a focus.

Through our action research project we also had hoped to change the meaning of professional development. We wanted to change the narrative and give it purpose. We wanted to integrate professional development into our team meetings and then go beyond. To do this, we felt like we needed to answer tough questions like "Why are we meeting?" and "How are we going to do this?" Therefore, the purpose of our action research was to create a more productive team time where teachers can share best practices, use data, and rely on each other to develop professionally.

Statement of Your Team's Wondering:

How can we restructure our team time increase collaboration about teaching practices and increase capacity of students as redefine professional development ?

Methods/Procedures:

One of the first things that our team had to do was answer "why we needed to meet?". We felt that we had to very big factors working with us. We had a new flex period this year titled Prime Time. This was designed to work in three basic area: Targeted interventions for selected students, Enrichment classes for students, or study hall for students. We felt that the amount of data and analysis for selecting students for interventions would give us many reasons WHY we should meet.

Team teachers were also teaching enrichment classes if they wanted to do so. These were classes that could be out of their content area; no grades were to be given. This was designed to teach for the sake of teaching and learn for the sake of learning. These classes gave rise to another reason WHY they needed to meet. Collaboration of ideas, classes, topics, resources would be essential to success and survival of teachers taking risks in teaching new classes.

Lastly, ISTEP+ results were being released a year late. School grades were coming out in January. Our teachers loved how we looked at their own data and calculated growth the past year. We decided that second semester upon receiving all scores and our new school grade we would go through a Curriculum Blitz. This would be a comprehensive analysis of ELA and Math teachers rating their own students as if they were their own school. From there, we would share thoughts and ideas in departments both Math and ELA separate. After those meetings, teachers would then share and develop within the teams or grade levels. Then we would branch out to the entire school. Our focus would be simple: 1.) Know how our school grade was

calculated 2.) Share takeaways and insights from our ELA & Math data 3.) Develop essential vocabulary at each grade level supported by the standards.

Stating Your Team's Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing our data, two important things we learned include:

- With valid reasons WHY or meaning, seeds spread and grow
- Ideas from all teachers were flying, and the creative and collaborative process went beyond team time

Providing authentic meaning or reasons WHY we should meet allowed teachers to have a purpose and a focus. There was no lamenting meeting just to meet. Our data to support this was that we had requests from teachers to have more structured meeting in 2017-2018 school year. Our School Improvement Team elected to use professional development money to pay for time outside of school to allow vertical meetings or departments meetings. There is no structured time for this during the course of the normal school day. We now had teachers from the non-ISTEP classes seeking buy-in and being a part of the solution.

Ideas from all teachers and all subjects occurred outside of the conventional team time. With the energy and excitement from the curriculum blitz, many creative minds went to work. We had social studies teachers come to us after their section of ISTEP requesting a keyboarding class for enrichment next year. They noticed that students took too long typing (all of our students test on computers). Teams developed their own essential and even common vocabulary. One team is developing their own word wall for next school year.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

Our team learned that we needed to have purpose if we are going to be successful. We cannot just meet to meet or talk about development if it is not relevant. Teacher's time is sacred; we must find a way to connect to what we are doing and make sure what we do is meaningful. When it is meaningful, that gives us an answer to WHY we are doing something.

We knew our teachers were professionals and driven. They are creative and they care. We learned that allowing them the freedom, providing them with the information and tools, and a platform allowed for ideas to really blossom. Their minds were working all the time on school-side issues, not just their own issues. The creative and collaborative process did not have to just take place twice a week during team time.

References:

N/A