Do You See What I See? Developing A Common Vision For Excellent Teaching and Learning

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Background That Led to Your Team's Inquiry:

Highland Elementary was introduced to the PLC process during the 2014-2015 school year. During that same year, our district introduced a number of other initiatives including: longer school day, revised school schedule, new teacher evaluation tool, new union contract, new state assessment, virtual snow make up days, PBIS, RTI with multiple intervention programs, LDA assessments, and daily PLC team meetings. It was initiative overload for everyone. That school year seemed like an exercise in survival while maintaining our sanity fest. Our school culture and climate were in need of improvement along with student academic progress that had been on a slow but steady decline.

We began working with IPLI during the 2015-2016 school year with a newly revised curriculum, refining our guaranteed viable curriculum, and beginning to learn how to write common assessments while still trying to master many of the initiatives introduced the previous year. We were devastated to receive a school letter grade that was poor and very thankful we could hold on to our letter grade from the previous year for one more year. We tackled school climate with fervor and demonstrated gains based on anonymous staff surveys and our district climate survey data that included feedback from staff, students, and families.

The most valuable data for us at that time, though, was from the first level of our High Reliability Schools (HRS) framework surveys. We were able to discern the following:

- Our PLC teams needed written goals
- Our school data team needed written goals

We immediately established those goals and incorporated both into our school improvement plan. While still feeling flustered and struggling, we knew we were beginning to make some progress.

During the summer of 2016, we entered year two of IPLI and returned to school with more revisions to our district curriculum. This was frustrating, as our staff had spent considerable time writing assessments and creating detailed lessons prior to leaving for the summer. We returned to school surprised that the curriculum had been changed again, significant changes. We are flexible, so we immediately made adjustments. We later learned after making those adjustments that the curriculum had been revised again. Teachers reported that our report cards were not in alignment with the curriculum, but instead of revising the grade cards, the curriculum was revised yet again, and teachers had no idea that was taking place. Once we discovered the additional curriculum changes, we made more revisions.

Thankfully, we were attending valuable professional development with IPLI, and we learned that we needed to revise our GVC with our staff and use the results of our work to drive the writing of our assessments and the creation of our detailed lessons. Therefore, the purpose of our action research was to develop a common vision of curriculum and assessment that would ensure success of every student in our school.

Statement of Your Team's Wondering:

With this purpose, we wondered how we could create this common vision for teaching and learning, with high levels of academic success for all students, among all members of our staff. We quickly learned this would require a multi-faceted approach.

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into our wonderings about how to create this common vision for teaching and learning, we consulted our results from the Marzano survey for the second and third levels of the High Reliability Schools framework. We discovered many concerns and multiple areas in need of improvement, so we analyzed what areas to begin with for maximum progress and reviewed the needs assessment on our school improvement plan. In addition to the need to revise our curriculum and assessments, we identified the following:

• Needed a written document articulating our schoolwide model of instruction
• Needed to describe our predominant instructional practices
• Teachers needed, deserved and desired frequent feedback
• Needed to view and discuss examples of effective teaching
• Needed to analyze our assessments to ensure accurate measurement of curriculum
• Needed to analyze the relationship between our schools curriculum and assessments
• Needed to identify essential vocabulary
• Needed to examine the time used to adequately address our curriculum
• Our leadership team needed to regularly analyze student growth data

We began by asking our staff to create three lists of what we should see in classrooms on a daily basis, what we might see, and what we should never see. Our staff was immediately in agreement regarding what we should never see, but more discussion was needed to clarify what should happen daily and what might be observed but not necessarily daily. Then, to introduce peer observations, we asked staff to observe a peer and tally the items from our instructional framework that they observed during their visit to a colleague's classroom. We conducted informal conferences with staff members following the peer observations and asked staff to do the following:

• Identify something you observed that reinforced something you have been doing.
• Share any questions you have or something you would like to know more about.
• Identify something you observed that you would like to implement in your classroom.

Important to this process was asking not to identify whose classroom they observed and to make the process more of a focus on what the observer was learning versus providing feedback to a peer. We hope to eventually get to peer-to-peer feedback, but our staff are not comfortable with that at this time.
Later, we realized our instructional framework was too lengthy, so we looked at some high leverage strategies based on the work of Hattie and prioritized the areas on our framework. We then asked staff to identify what areas they felt like they needed more support with to be fully successful or what areas they would like more professional development. Administration created Google walkthrough documents that correlated with the items on the instructional framework and scheduled walkthroughs and feedback meetings with date of subsequent walkthrough identified.

Next, we tackled our first attempt to finalize our GVC by providing our grade level teams with color coded curriculum documents indicating standards we had initially identified as GVC, standards the district had selected, standards on the report card, and standards noted as priority or essential by IDOE. Each grade level team was asked to narrow down their list of standards to 15-25 topics for each grade level and content area. We then had each grade level meet with the grade above and below them to collaborate and come to consensus. Finally, we color coded a spreadsheet and shared final standards selected for GVC with our leadership and data teams to see if we had any gaps or inconsistencies in the standards we had selected for each grade level. This process yielded very valuable discussion. Many teams had already unpacked the standards and were able to identify specifically parts of the standards they would guarantee and indicators that would be taught but not necessarily guaranteed.

After the GVC was revised, we created grade level priority standard data trackers. At our combined leadership and data team meetings, each grade level team shared out the summative assessment data for the priority standards chosen for our GVC. Teams discussed options to address percentages below stated goals and successful strategies for areas of strength. Again, cross grade level collaboration was powerful and productive.

After careful analysis of student learning based on assessment results, our grade level teams then went to work refining assessments and lesson plans. Prior to leaving for the summer, each team submitted their revised math and ELA assessments for GVC to administration for review and feedback. After assessments were approved or refined, detailed lesson planning continued in PLC team meetings.

Finally, we made a better connection for staff regarding the work that needed to be accomplished during our daily RTI period. Again, we had to schedule some meetings to discuss how we used the data from our GVC to group students for instruction and RTI periods.

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

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

•   Our staff did not have a common vision for teaching and learning nor did staff feel true ownership of their work. Our staff felt most like an equal partner with their PLC then school administration and coaches, and staff felt least connected with our district due to feeling like they had not been included on important decisions that directly impact their work.

•   Teams working together during daily PLC meetings with peer support and coaching were able to complete important work and goals and take ownership of their learning and increased responsibility for the learning of their students.

When we worked on creating our instructional framework, we quickly discovered that while everyone was aware of what they should not do, staff were not clear on what they should be doing daily during PLC team meetings and in their classrooms while working with students. We did not have a common vision for teaching and learning, and we knew that was vital to our success and continued improvement.

We opted to take the necessary steps to empower our staff. More than anything, we wanted our staff to stop feeling like things were being done to them and to start feeling like decisions were being made with them. We believed by giving our staff the opportunity to make important decisions for our school, they would feel more

ownership. We emphasized the importance and critical need of holding one another accountable for completing this important work.

After sharing our learning from IPLI meetings during our bi-monthly professional development staff meetings and an invitation to join us in their work to eliminate redoing work and wasting valuable time, staff enthusiasm began to grow. We used the training we received at IPLI to facilitate each grade level's identification of standards for our GVC. This work took a few weeks to complete. After individual grade level meetings, cross grade level meetings, and combined leadership and data team meetings, we felt like we had a great foundation with a manageable GVC identified for each grade level and a school-wide data tracker to monitor our ongoing progress based on summative assessment data. Our district provided some support for us on analyzing assessments. We worked with other schools in our district on this. Our district also extended an promise to provide more assessment support. Teachers felt empowered and valued.

Our coaches worked with our teams on creating data trackers for teams to use with formative assessment data focused on indicators in the GVC standards and a school-wide priority standard tracker for our summative assessments of the entire standard for our GVC.

Teachers helped us narrow down the items on our instructional framework with their peer observations. We were able to identify the items that were clearly in place as well as the items that did not seem to be evident. Our examination of Hattie's work revealed the most high leverage practices were the items least observed. We now had clear direction where we needed to focus. Staff completed a questionnaire to indicate the areas on our instructional framework that they most wanted to focus on for future professional development offerings.

Near the end of our work in 2016-2017, we administered an anonymous questionnaire to our staff to solicit some feedback. Results from some of our questions are below along with quantitative and qualitative data.

Staff Survey Question: Do you feel like an equal partner, like your thoughts and beliefs about teaching and learning are valued by others and heard?				
Area	PLC Team	Administration	District Staff	Coaches
Yes	40	33	13	29
No	2	8	29	9

Staff Comments - Yes:

• Supportive team, administrator asks for input. Coaches listen and offer support where we need it.
• Team is great in sharing, listening, and collaborating. Administrators are allowing teachers to choose Highland GVC.
• Team works well together. Administrators are allowing us to look at standards and choose GVC.
• Daily in PLC, we are able to share thoughts about teaching and learning. Our administrators have always been open to listen and discuss new thoughts and ideas and have been willing to support the follow-through.
• Administrator is always positive and allows me opportunities to explore my ideas and challenges me to constantly improve.
• We talk and make decisions as a team. Administrator supports our team and works well with us.
• As a PLC, we are able to share ideas & vote when we have disagreements. Highland Administration does a nice job of advocating to the district on our behalf - for example the curriculum map.
• The administration is very supportive of our team. We all work together well.
• The administration always supports our program. We are always made to feel valued and appreciated.

Staff Comments Answering No:
• I feel that teachers aren't given the freedom to choose what standards need to be taught at what time and given freedom to choose their best teaching strategy for teaching the standards.
• EVSC is very inconsistent with maps and report cards and gets defensive when we try to problem solve. Things are rolled out too quickly with not lots of thought put into it.
• Whenever a big change (such as curriculum mapping) occurs that greatly affects a teacher's day-to-day work, we should have more input.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

Our work with IPLI has been extremely valuable to us and to our school community. We are in awe of all the work we have completed in the past two years. We know we are better now than when we started, but we want to become much better than we are right now. We know we can improve and the power to make it happen is in the hearts and hard work of our dedicated staff.

For the past three years, we have worked diligently. Our teachers have always worked hard but have been extremely frustrated with that work, at times, due to what they felt were factors far outside of their control. We learned through this action research journey that we must be solution and data focused, and IPLI provided us with multiple important solutions that have worked and fueled our efforts.

Our teachers completed the curriculum mapping process. We are moving forward by focusing on what we have created but realize it isn't carved in stone. We believe future changes will come from within, not from outside forces beyond our control. We learned that our school needed to be improved, and we believe our staff has more buy-in to the belief that improvement is a continuous journey, not a final destination. We have not reached our final destination, and have learned through our work with IPLI and Marzano that arriving at that final destination of absolute perfection will never happen, and we are not disheartened with that fact. One thing we learned from Marzano that we will not forget: "Instructional strategies are best likened to techniques that an artist might develop and refine over years of practice. The more skill the artist exhibits with available techniques, the better his or her creations."

IPLI helped all of us improve our skills. We created some great work this year with new techniques that we honed from the wonderful people we learned from with IPLI. We are, indeed, thankful and appreciative.

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