

New Teacher Handbook and Support by Jeffery McCullough

For my IPLI action research project, I chose to create a new teacher handbook for Adams Central Community Schools. Adams Central is a small, rural school which experiences very little turnover when it comes to teachers. During the summer of 2019, I had to hire a total of six new instructors to fill positions that were being vacated mostly due to retirements. Once the 2019-20 school year started, it became very apparent that these new teachers were looking for various resources and support that simply were not readily available to them. It was at this point that I had decided to help create a new teacher handbook that would address many of the questions that other teachers and I were being asked by our new staff members.

This led me to the purpose of my inquiry, developing a new teacher handbook with resources for new staff members to utilize to be successful in their teaching at Adams Central.

My wonderings were very simplistic, what would these new staff members share with me when it comes to resources that they felt would make them a highly effective teacher.

In November, I spoke with all six of my new staff members asking them if it would be helpful to have a resource such as a new teacher's handbook for procedures, protocols, and general information. After having these discussions with all six new staff members, three more fairly new staff members asked if they could join the group. After gaining valuable insight from a new staff member's perspective, I set up a weekly meeting time from 7:30 am until 8:15 am starting on January 8th, 2020. As a group, we had decided to use Todd Whitaker's book, What Great Teachers Do Differently, to aid in our discussion, as classroom management questions often came up as well.

Meetings were held every Wednesday morning during AC's professional development time, and I would record notes of the meetings as various staff members shared their questions, concerns, frustrations, and celebrations. All of the staff members brought with them ideas about the information that should be contained within the new teacher handbook. Clarification about expectations on what lesson plans should look like, expectations of safety drills, how to navigate within Schoology, how to use and set up PowerSchool for grades, and even the procedures associated with taking a sick day. The idea of each having a mentor teacher came up quite frequently, or even holding a "New Teacher Day" where many of these items could be discussed. Last, many of these new staff members were looking for additional feedback on classroom observations along with getting some questions answered surrounding AC's grading system.

What I had intended to be a short-lived process of approximately 3-5 weeks, quickly turned into a weekly meeting with deeper concerns such as classroom management, discipline issues, and other items that often make or break new teachers. All nine staff members were quick to share with one another and myself as to what it was going to take for them to be a successful teacher. The book study enhanced this process greatly, as these teachers discussed the merits of Todd's writings and his experiences. We continued to meet as a group up until the IDOE shut

the school systems down due to the Covid-19 virus. This action research project quickly turned into a new staff development program to ensure that we are helping mold highly effective teachers for the next generation or two. All of the staff members involved want to continue this process as the next school year begins.

Looking at my three discoveries that I have listed on my slide show, there is no big aha moment for me, rather, I was saddened to see that as administrators we need to do a better job of making sure new teachers are properly equipped when they enter the classroom each and every day. The sharing of frustrations, concerns and celebrating achievements was widely viewed as a beacon of light to these young teachers each and every Wednesday morning.

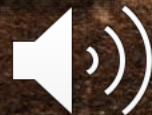
I will continue to put the final touches on the new teacher handbook for Adams Central as we go into the summer months, but one thing is certain, I will be meeting with these young teachers most Wednesday mornings to start the school year to give them confidence as they look to become highly effective teachers.

NEW TEACHER HANDBOOK AND SUPPORT

ADAMS CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL

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BACKGROUND LEADING TO THIS INQUIRY

- **ACHS EXPERIENCES VERY LOW TURNOVER OF STAFF**
- **LAST YEAR SIX NEW TEACHING POSITIONS BECAME AVAILABLE, MOSTLY THROUGH RETIREMENTS**
- **THE NEED FOR RESOURCES AND SUPPORT WAS VOICED FROM NEW STAFF**
- **THERE WERE VERY LITTLE DEVELOPED MATERIALS AVAILABLE FOR NEW STAFF TO BECOME ACQUAINTED WITH PROCEDURES, PROTOCOLS, ETC.**



PURPOSE OF THIS INQUIRY

- **THEREFORE, THE PURPOSE OF MY ACTION INQUIRY WAS TO MEET WITH NEW STAFF ON A WEEKLY BASIS DURING OUR REGULARLY SCHEDULED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TIME AND LISTEN TO THEIR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS WHILE DEVELOPING A HANDBOOK FOR FUTURE STAFF MEMBERS TO GUIDE THEM AND HELP MEET THEIR NEEDS.**



MY WONDERING

- **WITH THIS PURPOSE, I WONDERED WHAT INFORMATION FROM A NEW STAFF MEMBERS PERSPECTIVE WOULD BE SHARED.**
- **RESOURCES**
- **INFORMATION**
- **SUPPORT**
- **TRAININGS**



MY ACTIONS

- **IN NOVEMBER OF 2019, I BEGAN THE INQUIRY PROCESS BY SPEAKING TO NEW STAFF MEMBERS**
- **WEEKLY MEETINGS WERE ESTABLISHED DURING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TIME BEGINNING IN JANUARY OF 2020**
- **TODD WHITAKER'S BOOK, WHAT GREAT TEACHERS DO DIFFERENTLY, WAS UTILIZED TO AID DISCUSSION**
- **TEACHERS WITH ONE TO THREE YEARS OF EXPERIENCE ASKED TO JOIN THE GROUP, TAKING MY GROUP SIZE TO NINE.**
- **WEEKLY MEETINGS WERE HELD UP UNTIL AC'S EXTENDED SCHOOL CLOSURE**



DATA COLLECTION

- **IN THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW STAFF WEEKLY MEETINGS, I RECORDED WHAT ITEMS FUTURE STAFF MEMBERS WOULD NEED TO KNOW.**
- **UTILIZING OUR BOOK STUDY TO AID IN DISCUSSION, IT BECAME VERY APPARENT THAT THERE WERE MANY MORE TOPICS RELATED TO THE CLASSROOM FOR NEW STAFF THAT NEEDED ATTENTION.**
- **I RECORDED NOTES OF EACH MEETING WHILE NEW STAFF MEMBERS WOULD SHARE EMAILS, HANDWRITTEN NOTES, AND ORAL DISCUSSION WITH ME.**



MY DATA

- **JANUARY 8, 2020—GROUND RULES ARE ESTABLISHED FOR THE GROUP TO SHARE**
- **EACH TEACHER BROUGHT ITEMS THAT NEEDED TO BE LISTED IN A NEW TEACHER HANDBOOK AND INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING**
 - **EXPECTATIONS OF LESSON PLANS**
 - **EXPECTATIONS OF SAFETY DRILLS / EMERGENCIES**
 - **HOW TO UTILIZE OUR LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (LMS) SCHOOLGY**
 - **HOW TO USE POWERSCHOOL**
 - **PROCEDURES AND EXPECTATIONS FOR WHEN A STAFF MEMBER IS ILL**



MY DATA

- **OTHER INFORMATION SHARED IN THE BEGINNING INCLUDED:**
 - **ASSIGNING A MENTOR TEACHER**
 - **HOLDING A “NEW TEACHER DAY”**
 - **UNDERSTANDING OF HOW THE DISCIPLINE SYSTEM WORKS**
 - **INCREASED OBSERVATIONS FOR INFORMAL FEEDBACK—CHECK-INS**
 - **QUESTIONS SURROUNDING THE GRADING SYSTEM**



MY DATA

- **AS THE BOOK STUDY STARTED TO PROGRESS, IT BECAME VERY APPARENT THAT THESE NEW STAFF MEMBERS WERE LOOKING FOR WAYS TO BECOME EXCELLENT TEACHERS WHILE HONING THEIR CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT SKILLS AND TAKING CARE OF DISCIPLINARY MATTERS WHILE CREATING ENGAGING LESSONS FOR THEIR STUDENTS**



MY DATA

- **WEEKLY MEETINGS CONTINUED UNTIL THE EXTENDED SCHOOL CLOSURE DUE TO COVID-19 COVERING APPROXIMATELY HALF OF TODD WHITAKER'S BOOK, WHAT GREAT TEACHERS DO DIFFERENTLY.**
- **DURING FINAL EVALUATIONS IN MAY, NEW STAFF MEMBERS ASKED TO CONTINUE WHERE WE LEFT OFF IN MARCH AS WE START THE 2020-21 SCHOOL YEAR**



MY DISCOVERIES

LEARNING STATEMENT ONE: NEW STAFF MEMBERS NEED A PLETHORA OF RESOURCES TO BE SUCCESSFUL.

LEARNING STATEMENT TWO: CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT IDEAS NEED TO BE SHARED OFTEN WITH NEW STAFF MEMBERS

LEARNING STATEMENT THREE: EVERY STAFF MEMBER GOES INTO EDUCATION WANTING TO BE A GREAT TEACHER!



Learning Statement One: New staff members need a plethora of resources to be successful.

Even though new teachers undergo extensive teacher training programs, most, if not all, need much more guidance when it comes to learning the expectations of a new school system. How to use tools such as PowerSchool, Learning Management Systems, procedures for emergencies, local expectations of lesson plans, and many more items that could be shared through the use of a mentor and accompanying handbook.



Learning Statement Two: Classroom management ideas need to be shared often with new staff members.

Throughout the course of our weekly meetings, each and every week would have one or more new staff members asking for advice as to how to deal with a certain situation. By studying Todd Whitaker's book, *What Great Teachers Do Differently*, these new staff members gained insight as to how to deal with various classroom issues.



Learning Statement Three: Every staff member goes into education wanting to be a great teacher!

Since our weekly meetings were cut short due to the Covid-19 virus, all new staff members want to continue with our meetings when school resumes in the fall of 2020. The remarks were often one in the same: “This will help me be the best teacher that I can possibly be.”



WHERE AM I HEADING NEXT

- **THIS SUMMER, I WILL FINISH CREATING A NEW TEACHER HANDBOOK IN CONJUNCTION WITH OUR ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS TO HAVE A K-12 HANDBOOK FOR NEW STAFF MEMBERS FOR THE OPENING OF THE 2020-21 SCHOOL YEAR.**
- **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MEETINGS WILL CONTINUE WITH NEW STAFF IN THE FALL TO FINISH TODD WHITAKER'S BOOK, WHAT GREAT TEACHERS DO DIFFERENTLY AND TO FINISH PROVIDING FEEDBACK FOR THE NUMEROUS QUESTIONS THEY HAVE POSED.**



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- **WHITAKER, TODD (2013). WHAT GREAT TEACHERS DO DIFFERENTLY: SEVENTEEN THINGS THAT MATTER MOST. NEW YORK, NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE**

