

Collaborative Curriculum Development

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My action research topic was Collaborative Curriculum Development. Through a Regional Opportunity Initiatives grant, my school district and two neighboring districts have partnered together as what we termed the COSMOS (Collaboration of Shoals, Mitchell and Orleans Schools). In addition to eventually having shared coursework for students in high school, the COSMOS was also tasked with creating a common "Profile of a Graduate". Our corporation decided to continue on with profiling students all the way down to Kindergarten.

As principal of our grades 3-5 building in Mitchell, our educators needed to collaborate in the creation of profiles for our 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders. Our profiles were to focus on the competency skills of College and Career Ready, Communication, Critical Thinking, and Employability.

An important skill for a principal to acquire is effectively leading educators in the development of curriculum. Through my research, I was hoping to work toward improving myself in this skillset.

My wondering was, "What are the most efficient and effective collaborative practices for a leader to use in curriculum development?". Sub-questions included:

1. How do we ensure our curriculum is not too broad or too narrow?
2. How do we ensure all stakeholder voices are represented in our curriculum development?
3. How do we ensure our curriculum is aligned vertically K-12?
4. How do we ensure our curriculum plans are developmentally appropriate for grade 3-5?
5. How do we ensure we are integrating critical state standards and state employability standards into our curriculum plans?

In order to gain insight into my wondering, I began conducting research on collaborative curriculum development. I found several different tools and strategies, and ended up choosing Understanding by Design due to its flexibility and ability to adapt from specific lessons to broad courses of study.

Our district had two planned practice eLearning days for staff professional development. This allowed me a 2 hour time, once in January and once in February, to share the strategy of Understanding by Design for curriculum development. The first session gave an overview of UbD, and the second session allowed teachers time to jump in and use the tools to start planning the competency skills.

After each professional development session, I gave teachers and myself a few days to process before gathering data. My personal data was in the form of a reflection journal. Our

teachers were interviewed during grade level meetings as a team, and they were given a personal survey to complete.

Additional data I collected included grade level team draft documents, digital pictures of the collaborative work, and literature on best practices in curriculum development and collaboration.

In analyzing the data I collected, I looked for common themes in responses and majority responses for the quantitative data.

The most important and critical facets of what I learned are:

1. Understanding by Design is a great tool for unit planning, but might not be the best tool for competency skill planning and/or profile planning.
2. Any time you can create collaborative opportunities for the whole staff instead of grade levels and departments, your staff as a whole is strengthened.
3. Giving all teachers the opportunity to give their personal feedback after process time allows you to gauge individual and group needs.

Although I chose UbD for its adaptability to various types of planning, the format ended up being too detailed for profile and competency planning. Our teachers found themselves using the tool to plan great units of study with several competencies of the profiles woven within, so the time still ended up being valuable and worthwhile, leading to some innovative learning experiences for our students in the year to come.

I went into this action research anticipating when all grade level teams were together in the same room, they would still function as individuals teams. Through building in whole group collaborative sharing within our task, it was evident our staff came together as a whole. Not only did they appreciate hearing similar ideas from other teams, these similarities created a shared vision and ownership for all students between the grade levels, including special education and specials teachers. This was inspiring to see and wasn't something I expected going into the project.

Another secondary value to data collection that I noted was allowing educators who are less vocal in person to share their ideas and thoughts after process time through Google Forms. Even after my action research was completed, I've given quick feedback forms for several PD experiences and received great insight from these opportunities. I do make sure to respond back to individual teachers as well as give whole group summaries to all. I don't want teachers to view the survey as one more thing to do, but instead as a way to communicate their personal thoughts and insights after being allowed time to process our work and development time. I feel I have a better understanding of our teachers and our school as a whole from this feedback routine.

I have learned that our teacher team at Burriss is eager and willing to try new things, productively struggle with the task at hand, but adapt our new practices to ensure we have some sort of productive outcome, even if our problem still isn't solved. Our teachers are starting to

come together as one unit instead of grade level teams, and this is inspiring to watch evolve. My work will now be to go back to the drawing board, seek advice from other principals and our district leaders, and determine the best approach for profile planning at the various grade levels. We were the first building to try the UbD approach. Other buildings have yet to start due to an unclear vision of what our end goal should be as well as halts created from COVID-19.

One insightful change that came from this experience was implementing quick feedback forms after professional development sessions. This creates dialogue between individual teachers and me, and also allows me to gain and share group consensus and insights. My new wondering, of course, is how to best approach our profile planning since UbD did not lead to our profiles being created.

Collaborative Curriculum Development

Burris Elementary

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Background Leading to this Inquiry

Our school corporation has partnered with two neighboring school corporations to develop the “Profile of a Graduate” down to the “Profile of a Kindergartener”. Our three corporations together are known as the COSMOS (Collaboration of Shoals, Mitchell, and Orleans Schools). As principal in our grades 3-5 building in Mitchell, I will facilitate curriculum development for the profiles of a third, fourth, and fifth grader.

Purpose of This Inquiry

The purpose of my action research is to increase my effectiveness as a facilitator of teacher collaboration in curriculum development.

My Wondering

With this purpose, I wondered in what ways can a “Profile of a Third Grader”, “Profile of a Fourth Grader”, and “Profile of a Fifth Grader” be developed at Burris Elementary? What are the most efficient and effective collaborative practices for a leader to use in curriculum development?

Subquestions:

- How do we ensure our curriculum is not too broad or too narrow?
- How do we ensure all stakeholder voices are represented in our curriculum development?
- How do we ensure our curriculum is aligned vertically K-12?
- How do we ensure our curriculum plans are developmentally appropriate for grade 3-5?
- How do we ensure we are integrating critical state standards and state employability standards into our curriculum plans?

My Actions

In order to gain insight into my wondering, I began conducting research on collaborative curriculum development. I found several different tools and strategies, and ended up choosing **Understanding by Design** due to its flexibility and ability to adapt from specific lessons to broad courses of study.

My Actions

To gain insights into my wonderings, I will be facilitating the collaboration of grade level teams, cross-grade level teams, and cross-building teams in the creation of profiles for students in grades 3-5. This will include developing overarching essential characteristics of students, necessary skills to reach the characteristics, and standards that help in developing the skills. I will create opportunities to ensure our curriculum plans are a shared vision of all stakeholders, are focused and the right balance of breadth and depth, are vertically aligned K-12, are developmentally appropriate, and are addressing critical academic and employability standards for grades 3-5 students.

Data Collection

- Interviews - Individuals and Focus Groups
- Documents - Curriculum Map Planning Notes and Work
- Digital Pictures - Collaborative Groups and Work
- Reflective Journals - My Reflections throughout the Work
- Surveys - Teacher Surveys on the Work and Process
- Literature - Best Practices in Curriculum Development and Collaboration

My Data

Interviews:

- I liked the collaboration and communication between grades 3-5
- It was exciting to hear similar ideas between 3-5
- UbD is a basic thing teachers try to do anyway, and it was nice to have time to think deeply about why we do what we do
- We liked the template to follow as a guide for discussion
- I liked being able to self reflect and see what colleagues were thinking with the Padlet quote to reflections
- More time for the Intro to UbD would have been helpful - The What, So What, and Now What



My Data

padlet

REMAKE SHARE

Jessica Jones + 20 • 4mo

Curriculum Planning Quotes

Our thoughts on curriculum

Quote 1

- Agree because we know our students and community the best. We know our students' needs and resources.
- We learn by failure sometimes. So to build on imperfection, means we are reflecting and growing which in essence is the process of learning and succeeding.
- It's OK to fail! Take a risk and take on a challenge
- Curriculum**
I agree with this. I think many teachers feel a pull to define curriculum as a series or product

Quote 2

- We are the creators of our own world to share with our students everyday. Not only do we create, but students create though their experiences with us - building awesome teachable moments that lend to artistry, enrichment, and collaboration.**
- Agree! We should be able to use our own personal style of teaching and not be a cookie cutter teacher. What works for you may not work for someone else and the students can tell this.
- Teachable moments are the most

Quote 3

- Trivial Pursuit is not the name of the game. A purpose behind the content is important so students can build on it.
- I do agree for the most part. Knowing random facts is not always a bad thing and actually can be fun and be a springboard for deeper understanding. But content without context and connections is just trivia. In education we must be purposeful in our teaching so that that learning is purposeful.
- I feel this is what has spurred project based learning. We can receive large amounts of content

Quote 4

- A map is a guide. We have to understand the key to be able to share with our students what is important and what is not to be a success in life.
- I agree. I like the "new situations" because that is important that we uncover and prepare students to apply the learning to a variety of situations.
- As spoken this morning, if we are given the tools, a curriculum that doesn't have to be cut up to meet the needs of our students, more time can be spent on all of the listed items.

Video

- It takes time to develop a good idea and make it work.
- Stop, collaborate & listen:)**
have patience, provide conversation with others, build on ideas
- Connectivity is at the center and forefront of all things. The more connected teachers, students, and people are in general, the more learning happens. We are better together.
- I find it interesting that the use of internet can be so beneficial and so distracting at the same time. I feel

My Data

Personal Reflection:

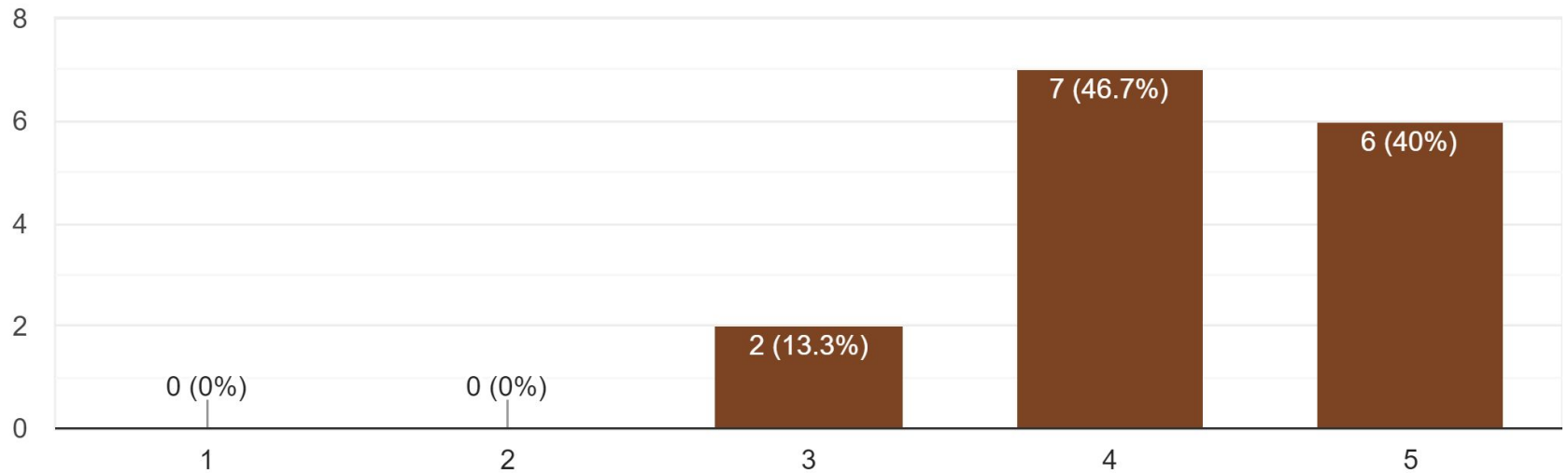
- Pros:
 - Collaboration between ALL teachers was powerful
 - Time to thoroughly think through units
- Cons:
 - Not the right tool for competency skills planning

My Data

Teacher Surveys

UbD allowed our team to think purposefully about curricular planning and school reform.

15 responses

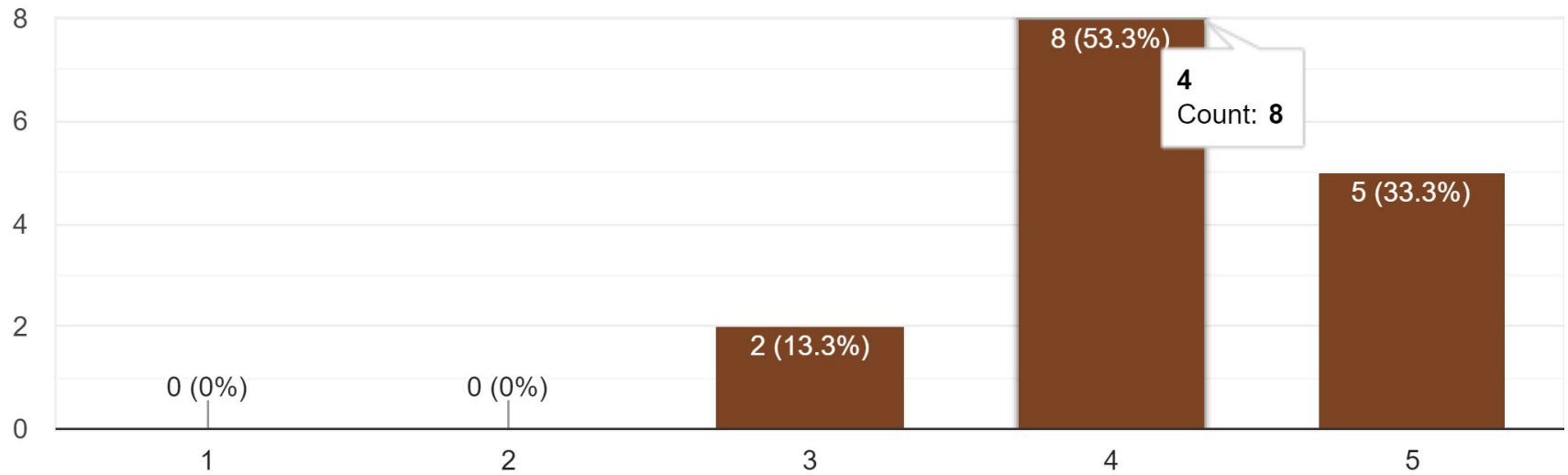


My Data

Teacher Surveys

UbD is a set of helpful design tools and design standards.

15 responses

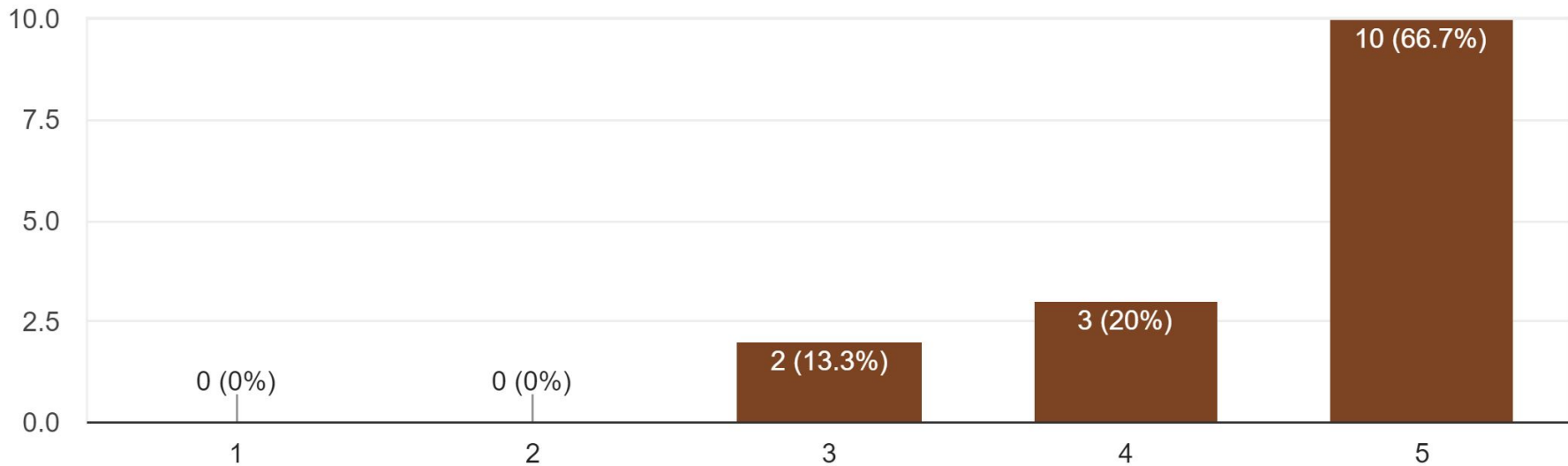


My Data

Teacher Surveys

UbD IS NOT a rigid program or prescriptive recipe.

15 responses

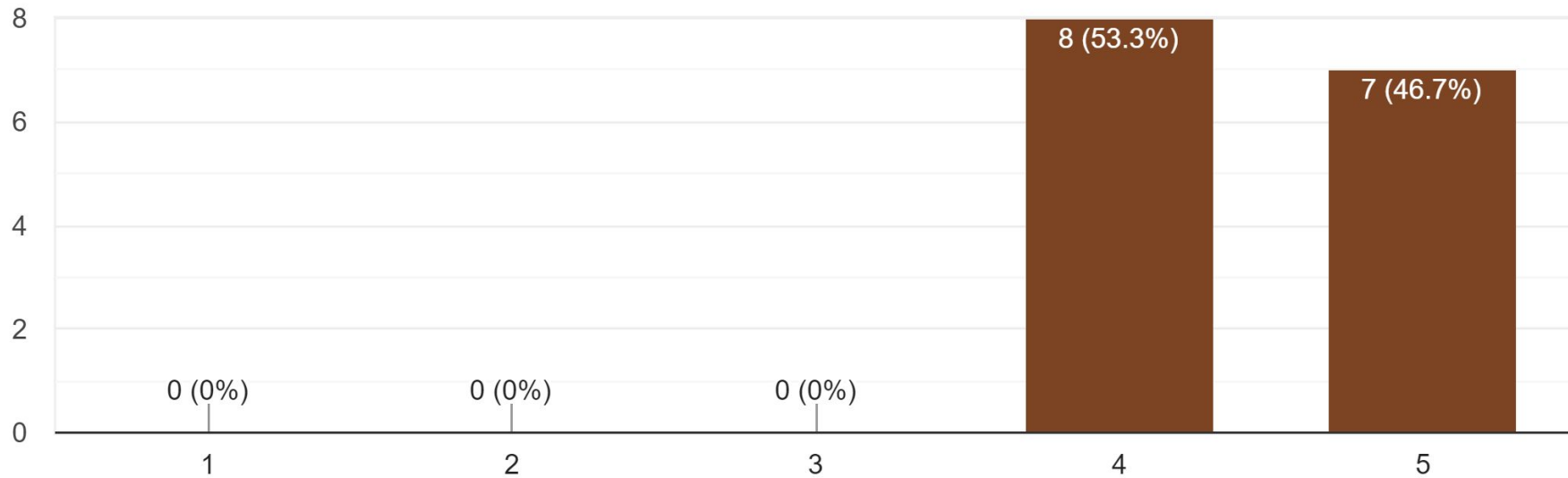


My Data

Teacher Surveys

UbD's primary goal is student understanding: the ability to make meaning of "big ideas".

15 responses

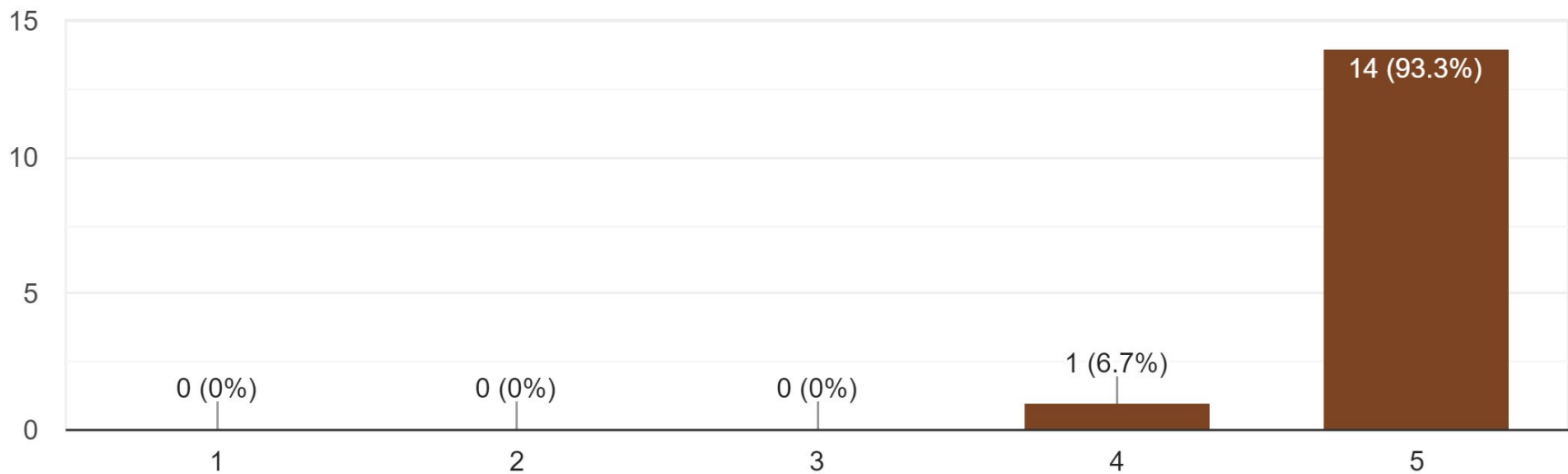


My Data

Teacher Surveys

Student understanding is truly revealed when students can explain, interpret, apply, shift perspective, empathize, and self assess.

15 responses

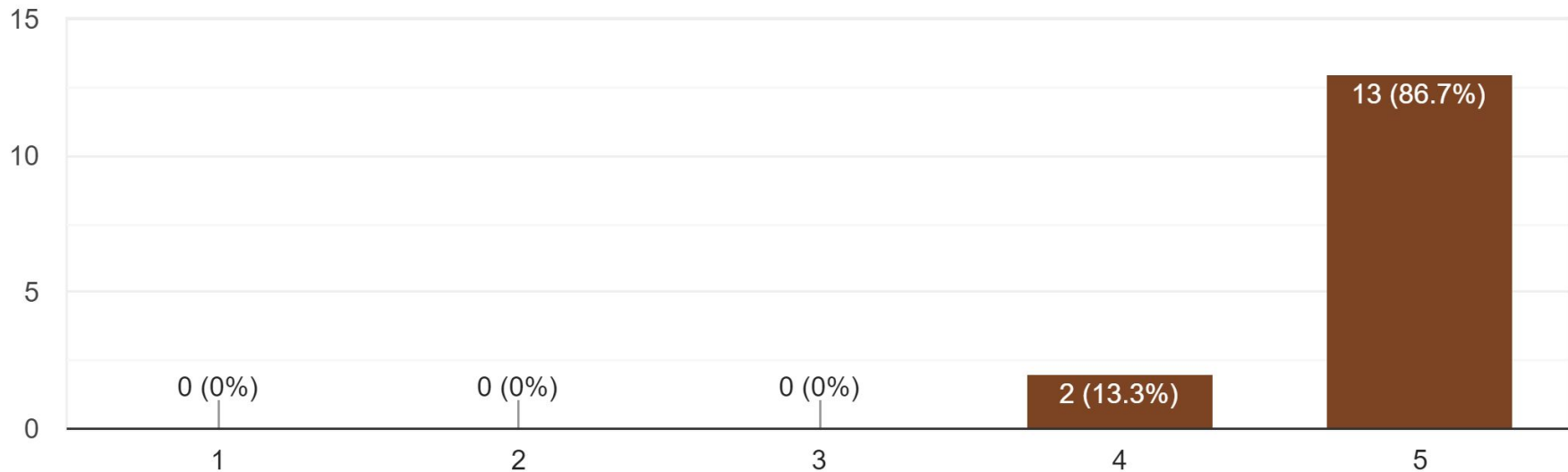


My Data

Teacher Surveys

Teachers should be coaches of understanding, not mere providers of content or activity.

15 responses

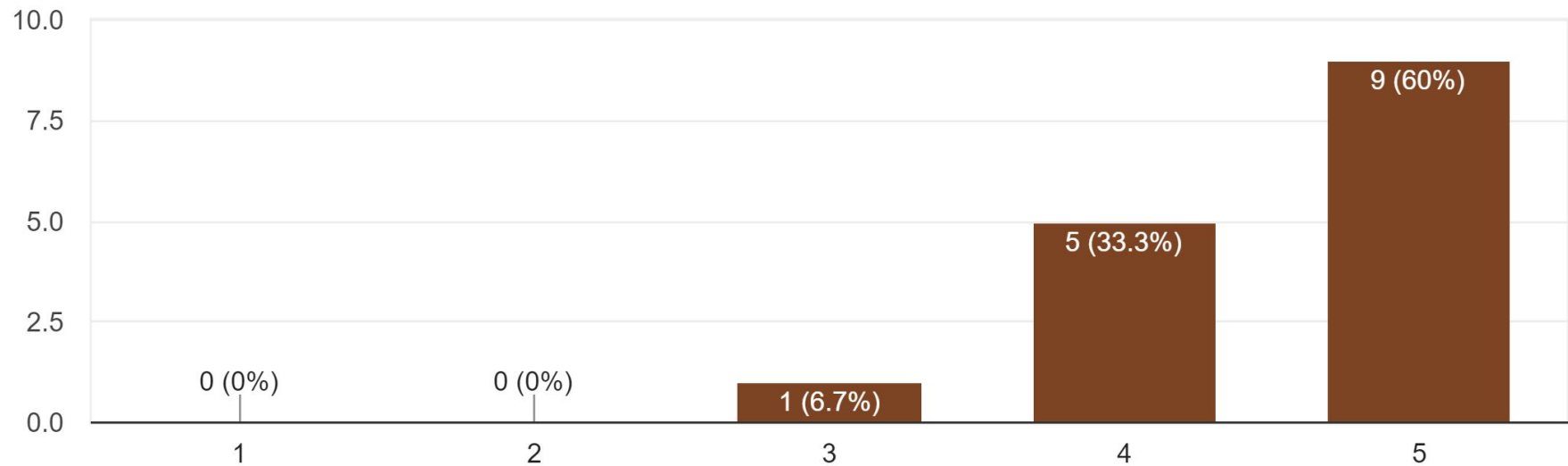


My Data

Teacher Surveys

UbD requires teams to continuously review student performance in order to adjust the curriculum for improvement.

15 responses



My Data

Teacher Surveys

General comments about the first stage of UbD - Desired Results

- It was good to look at the big picture.
- This stage seemed a bit repetitive and difficult to fill out when focusing on one main standard. I think it might work better if planning out an entire unit or PBL.
- I thought it was valuable to converse with my team and decide what was actually relevant and what our students' learning outcome needed to be.
- The Essential Questions were toughest for me and from the one time we worked in groups, it seemed we kind of bypassed that piece. It takes time to think more deeply about and generate those provocative questions. I need more practice at that, as well as maybe some examples to clarify what those questions might look like.
- It seemed very open ended--not a whole lot of structure. Each grade level had a different approach and this resulted in different "outcomes".

My Data

Teacher Surveys

General comments about the second stage of UbD - Assessment

Evidence

- This seemed the most challenging for us, but I also feel like it will be the most meaningful part when we actually put things in place. Having everyone agree on what students need to do to "show they know" will be helpful.
- Question- Will we have other opportunities to complete/continue this process?
- Performance tasks are exciting to think about - we are good at projects/rubrics for some content but it would be interesting to learn how to apply these to math learning.

My Data

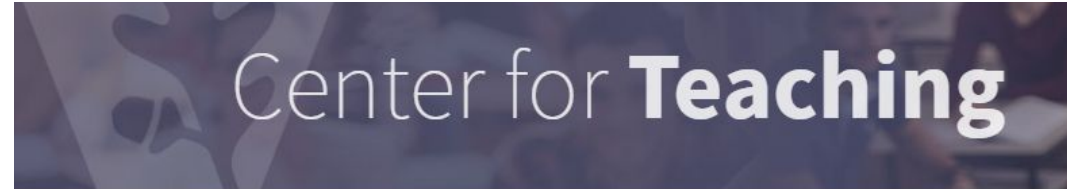
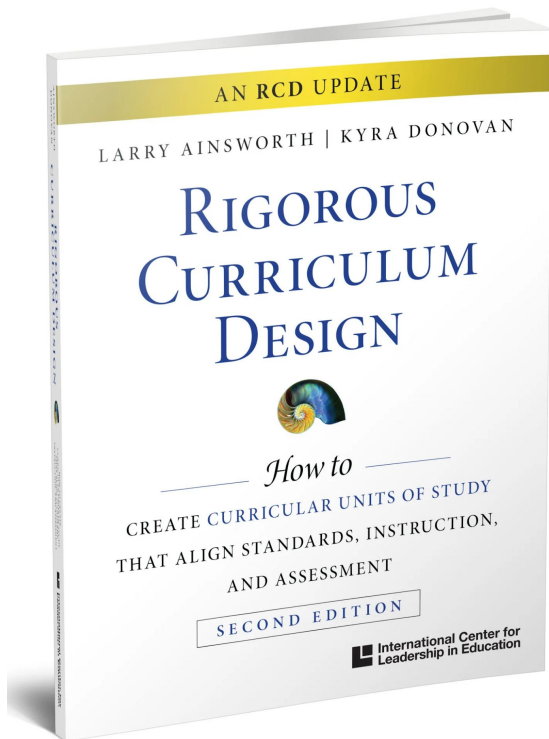
Teacher Surveys

General comments about the second stage of UbD - Learning Plan

- We didn't get too far on this stage yet.
- Question- What is the long-term goal for this as far as completing, planning, and assessing?
- There are a lot of aspects to think about using the 'WHERE TO' stems!

My Data

Literature



Understanding by Design

Rigorous Curriculum Design by Larry Ainsworth & Kyra Donovan

- Good book for thorough curriculum mapping
- I was looking for a planning tool for specific competencies

Center for Teaching: Understanding by Design based on the work of Grant Wiggins

- This planning tools seemed more adaptable to lessons, units, or courses, therefore, I decided to try using it with our competency skills

My Discoveries

1. Understanding by Design is a great tool for unit planning, but might not be the best tool for competency skill planning.
2. Any time you can create collaborative opportunities for the whole staff instead of grade levels and departments, your staff as a whole is strengthened.
3. Giving all teachers the opportunity to give their personal feedback after process time allows you to gauge individual and group needs.

Understanding by Design is a great tool for unit planning, but might not be the best tool for competency skill planning.

Based on data from teacher interviews, surveys, and my personal reflection, Understanding by Design did not lead to a clear curriculum for our competency skills (College and Career Ready, Communication, Critical Thinking, and Employability Skills).

Understanding by Design is a great tool for unit planning, but might not be the best tool for competency skill planning.

Data To Support:

Teacher quote: This stage seemed a bit repetitive and difficult to fill out when focusing on one main standard. I think it might work better if planning out an entire unit or PBL. It seemed very open ended--not a whole lot of structure. Each grade level had a different approach and this resulted in different "outcomes".

Any time you can create collaborative opportunities for the whole staff instead of grade levels and departments, your staff as a whole is strengthened.

Based on personal reflection data, interviews, and surveys, having whole group collaboration was a turning point in us looking at ourselves as a Burris team instead of grade level teams.

Any time you can create collaborative opportunities for the whole staff instead of grade levels and departments, your staff as a whole is strengthened.

Data To Support:

I liked the collaboration and communication between grades 3-5

It was exciting to hear similar ideas between 3-5

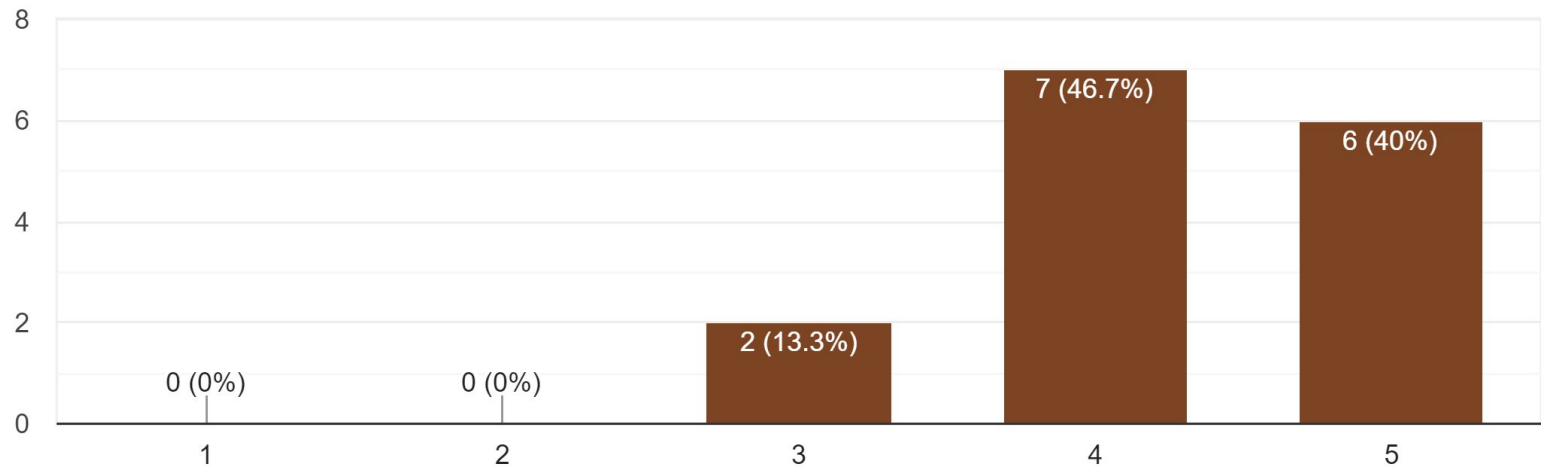
I liked being able to self reflect and see what colleagues were thinking with the Padlet quote to reflections

Any time you can create collaborative opportunities for the whole staff instead of grade levels and departments, your staff as a whole is strengthened.

Data To Support Continued:

UbD allowed our team to think purposefully about curricular planning and school reform.

15 responses



Giving all teachers the opportunity to give their personal feedback after process time allows you to gauge individual and group needs.

Based on teacher surveys, interviews, and personal reflection, I realized I was able to get a clearer picture of our individuals teachers' needs, our teams' needs, and the needs of our teaching staff as a whole.

Giving all teachers the opportunity to give their personal feedback after process time allows you to gauge individual and group needs.

Data To Support:

- The Essential Questions were toughest for me and from the one time we worked in groups, it seemed we kind of bypassed that piece. It takes time to think more deeply about and generate those provocative questions. I need more practice at that, as well as maybe some examples to clarify what those questions might look like.
- There are a lot of aspects to think about using the 'WHERE TO' stems!
- Performance tasks are exciting to think about - we are good at projects/rubrics for some content but it would be interesting to learn how to apply these to math learning.

Where Am I Heading Next

Changes I will make in my practice will be to approach competency planning in a different way, but I will keep the UbD tool in my back pocket for future needs in curriculum as it may be a better fit for a different type of design work. I am wondering how I might lead our educators through some structured, collaborative learning opportunities in order to get more out of our collaborative time.

Where Am I Heading Next

I have learned our educators are willing and eager to start learning and growing together as a whole, not just grade level teams. Our teachers are developing their collaboration skills, but may need a little more guidance in how to best be collaborative in working toward a common purpose. I am excited to have more opportunities to see whole school collaboration with our late start Wednesday professional development hours next school year. EdTech Editor, Former Department Chair and Instructional Coach, Lauren Davis (2020) reveals four strategies for teacher collaboration: Develop and Agree Upon a Shared Vision and Mutual Goals, Foster a Sense of Community, Establish Group Norms and Expectation, and Leverage Discussion to Work Through Conflicts. I am excited to implement these strategies in our late start Wednesday professional development days for the 2020-2021 school year.

Bibliography

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