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Review and Follow-up of Fall Professional Development

Context

The 2014-15 fall professional development days for teachers in the Sitka School District involved a combination of building-level and district-wide inservice days that occurred over four days before school started. Additionally, teachers received a day of pay to work to ready their classroom; the workdays are outside of our required 180-day calendar of instruction/non-instruction days approved by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (EED). Specifically, the four days of professional development that occurred this year included two building-level, one district-wide, and one half-day welcome event that was for all staff in the district with the event focused on setting the tone for the year with an inspirational keynote speaker. After a BBQ lunch, the afternoon of the welcome event was spent in classrooms with students and families invited to schools to meet the teachers.

Organization for and implementation of all district-wide inservice days is the responsibility of the PD Committee, which consists of a teacher from each of the five schools, two principals, and a district office staff. The PD Committee, by teacher's contract, manages \$30,000 a year to support the district-wide professional development efforts with 60% of the annual allocation used to support sending teachers to individual professional development events outside of Sitka (e.g., content area conference) and the remaining 40% used to support bringing in or accessing professional development events in Sitka. Typically, professional development organized by the PD Committee is just for certified employees.

Building-level inservice opportunities are the responsibility of the school principal with support from the district office staff, as needed. During the 2014-15 fall inservice time, K-5 schools spent one day working with a literacy consultant and one day participating in training with the new math instructional materials. The 6-12 schools spent the better part of one day in suicide prevention training, and also had time to address preparation for accreditation and other school-specific topics. Building-level training is typically for certified employees, and may also include classified employees if the topic warrants.

Other fall professional development events that were held before the teacher's first contract day included a day with all new teachers and administrators in the district designed to give an orientation or context to our processes and initiatives, as well as make sure their salary is finalized and human resources (HR) paperwork is processed so they can be entered into our databases. Administrators also had a 1-¹/₂ day meeting designed to begin the team bonding process and also have discussions that help shape the direction of the year, and this year the Admin Team meeting included training in Social Emotional Learning (SEL). The Admin Team typically has only a 1-day meeting at this time; however, with the addition of the SEL training, we needed to add some time to the event. Special education teachers and specialists also have a day of professional development around issues unique to their field.

Planning

The goal of our fall professional development was to further our district initiatives through professional development events that engaged teachers in the content and stayed focused on classroom application. The following events are listed in mostly chronological order, although since each school had a unique schedule there is no one set chronological list of all of the fall professional development events; however, I wanted to capture the flow of training events in this paper.

PD Area	Needs Assessment	Stated Outcomes	Planning Strategies
All-Day Admin Team Meeting	Admin Team examined a number of possible topics during the previous school year, and selected SEL as a focus area.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Principals will gain knowledge needed to lead the development of a school-based SEL plan. 2) Admin Team will discuss operational (e.g., establish meeting norms) and issues around instruction (e.g., student achievement data) in a matter that allows for deep exploration and meaning making. 	A local non-profit approached the district last year asking if we wanted support with any SEL training, as they felt that SEL would be a meaningful topic to address a school board goal of closing the achievement gap. We were already discussing this topic; joint planning occurred with the non-profit who brought in an SEL facilitator.
Special Education Day	Known weaknesses documented during previous year (e.g., common paperwork issues), and new legal findings critical to share.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Special education staff will receive training designed to ensure compliance with stated regulations and laws. 2) Opportunity for special education staff to ask questions, and collaborate with colleagues. 	The special education director collects information throughout the year that she feels warrants discussion/ review at this all day professional development event, and then she plans for the delivery and coordinates with co-presenters.
New Teacher/ Administrator Orientation	Annual training event that is co-sponsored by the teacher's union.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) New teachers and administrators feel welcomed to the district and know who to go to for questions. 2) Teachers meet with a union rep and the business manager to finalize their salary and contract. 3) Teachers complete HR paperwork so they can be entered into our email and other electronic systems in a timely fashion. 	The assistant superintendent coordinates all aspects of this day of training including communicating with the new teachers and administrators ahead of time, and working with the various presenters that come and go throughout the day. The teacher's union provided lunch.
District-wide inservice focused on Response to Instruction (RTI) keynote and training with Dr. Kevin Feldman	The PD Committee sets a focus topic area that builds on training from the previous year, and then teacher reps get feedback from each school on the relevancy of the chosen topic and ideas to help shape the day of learning. Other topics are gathered from the schools to complete a mini-conference schedule that allows for active learning in smaller groups.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Teachers will be audience members during a keynote so that all teachers hear the same context regarding the topic. (Note: Previously only K-5 teachers had any training in RTI.) 2) Teachers will participate in self-selected sessions during a mini-conference with all teachers required to select an RTI session at some point during the mini-conference. 	The PD Committee was responsible for all aspects of planning for the day including communicating with the keynote speaker, developing the agenda for the day's events, coordinating with the presenters, developing a survey tool that allowed teachers to self-select their mini-conference schedule and topics, and communicating the plan for the day with others.

PD Area	Needs Assessment	Stated Outcomes	Planning Strategies
K-5 Literacy Day	Data from 6-years ago showed that 50% of students in grade 2 were not proficient readers despite 3 full-time reading interventionist at the K-1 school. Two full-time reading interventionists at the 2-5 school were not sufficient to provide the necessary remediation. There was no RTI plan for Tier I or Tier II intervention, as teachers only knew to refer students to a Tier III interventionist.	1) Teachers will continue their professional development in classroom-based reading intervention strategies, and examination of the data from the RTI benchmark screenings. 2) Teachers will continue their discussions and application of foundation skills (e.g., phonics) instruction as identified in the new English Language Arts (ELA) standards.	At this point in our process, each principal works directly with our K-5 literacy consultant to plan for the day of professional development at each of our schools serving K-5 students. The principals work with the Federal Programs Coordinator to ensure that adequate Title I funds are available to meet the planned literacy professional development needs for the school year.
New K-5 Math Instructional Materials Day Note: Training in the new 6-8 Math Instructional Materials was held before the teachers started, as it only involved 4 teachers. Narrative is for K-8.	A Math Audit was conducted during the 2011-12 school year, which identified 4 recommendations. The district has been strategically working to implement the recommendations, and we are at the point where new K-8 Math instructional materials were selected last year through a review process open to the public.	Teachers will receive initial training in the new Math instructional materials. Note: Our purchase this summer included 6-years of publisher-recommended levels of professional development, and we hired a Math Implementation Coach for 1-year.	Teacher, principal, and community-based teams selected the new Math Instructional Materials after a yearlong process that included piloting selected materials with students. The publisher-supported trainer did the planning; however, the Coach and district office staff facilitated school/publisher coordination.
6-12 Suicide prevention training	Legislative mandated training that is reported to EED when completed, which is only required of teachers of students in grades 6-12.	Teachers will complete mandatory trainings that are best conducted through discussion-based learning strategies.	Principals reviewed the list of approved training from EED and selected a training option. This year they decided to use the avatar training, and tested it out on our computers before hand. Teachers collaborated about the topic as an avatar in a virtual world.
6-12 school-specific training (e.g. high school accreditation planning)	Principals identified major training needs specific to each of our 6-12 schools.	Teachers will engage in discussions around topics of importance to their school/students.	Each principal was responsible for the planning aspects, which varied by school.
District Welcome event with Brain-based Kinesthetic Learning keynote by Dr. Jan Abramowitz	In the summer of 2012, we hosted a Basic Arts Institute (BAI) in which 17 of our teachers participated. Dr. Abramowitz was one of the BAI instructors, and ever since teachers have persistently asked that he be a keynote at our Welcome event.	Teachers will gain awareness about the value of adding movement during academic classroom learning activities.	District office staff worked directly with Dr. Abramowitz regarding the purpose of the keynote. Additionally, district office staff organized and facilitated all other activities that happened during the Welcome event (e.g., longevity awards).

Analysis of Effectiveness

PD Area	Measure of Effectiveness	Changes for the Future
All-Day Admin Team Meeting	Comments shared and captured during a closure activity, and formal evaluation of SEL training.	Before teachers report is a good time to do real planning. Consider extending training even longer.
Special Education Day	Teacher compliance with stated regulation and laws.	Ensure that principals are also involved in the training.
New Teacher/Administrator Orientation	Signed teacher contracts and completed HR paperwork.	Agenda for the orientation is still focused on sit-n-get. Re-work agenda to focus on building connections, and eliminate time on content they now have access to through a new mentoring program.
District-wide inservice focused on Response to Instruction (RTI) training with Dr. Kevin Feldman	Feedback was solicited during the RTI mini-conference, which was then reviewed by the Admin Team for analysis and planning for next steps.	Teacher feedback focused on desire to immerse themselves in all aspects of RTI vs. a little RTI and then other topics, too.
K-5 Literacy Day	Teacher compliance with classroom-based RTI strategy implementation, and student achievement scores in reading.	K-5 teachers felt there were too many topics covered in the fall inservice days, and would have liked to focus 2-days on literacy or 2-days on math but not both, especially when adding RTI and movement learning events.
New K-5 Math Instructional Materials Day	Fidelity of implementation of new K-5 Math instructional materials in all classrooms.	
6-12 Suicide prevention training	All teachers complete required training.	It did not work well to have each person in his/her classroom due to novelty of interacting in a virtual world. The high school principal eventually pulled all the teachers together in the Library, which worked better. Next time start together if it is a new interface.
6-12 school-specific training (e.g. high school accreditation planning)	Teacher engagement in the various topics.	It was very difficult for the K-5 schools this fall because they did not have time like this.
District Welcome event with Brain-based Learning Keynote by Dr. Jan Abramowitz	Discussion with Admin Team about teacher feedback at the school level.	Restructure the Welcome event and eliminate introductions that took 1-hour and 20 minutes; too much sitting. Additionally, move event to the first day teachers come back, so they aren't sitting there the whole time worried about what they aren't getting ready in their classroom before students and families arrive.

Continuing and Developing Needs

Public schools are facing a dizzying array of topics that we are required to be addressing at this single moment in time. EED states that educator evaluation is the most important of all things one day, and then the next email you get from EED states that online assessment is the immediate most important thing to focus on. The result is that everyone is just feeling pummeled, and this is even without considering the attack on public education from our federal and state legislatures. Even though we have been very strategic in our planning and taken the long-road to each topic to ensure teacher engagement, everyone is so far beyond information

overload that they forget what they themselves helped to create just six months previously (e.g., teachers spent 6-months developing a curriculum map of new standards used in his/her classroom, but now they do not have confidence to speak about the new standards to parents if asked during parent/teacher conferences). Teachers are on overload.

I want to ensure that teachers get to focus on creating learning environments that every day with every student engages them in the learning process while helping to prepare them for success in the life they will enter after graduation. Consequently, I need to figure out how to be that buffer for the teachers, and how to truly empower and engage principals in the process so that we are collectively charting the future for our district. As I write this paper, I can see so clearly how our fall professional development events, although each one individually thoughtfully orchestrated, did not help to calm our teachers but instead only added to the panic. Just like the Albatross bolus (vomit) story I shared where I had to be brave and hold down the bolus so that the 8th grade students could take their time and explore the debris, I need to hold down the stress and let my teachers start to explore a new learning landscape.

To me the key to holding down the metaphorical bolus for teachers means clear communication, and special trainings for the principals so they can lead their school along our district's mission continuum in a manner that focuses on teacher exploration and moving on with confidence. Communication will have to take many forms, and I am fortunate to have the resources in Sitka to develop a comprehensive communication plan. ...And I can make some significant progress in a short time, as parent/teacher conferences are next week!