Case Study of Problem of Practice with Critical Friends

Problems of Practice: East side small districts

District Name: Republic School District

Problem:

- Isolated, poverty, how do we get our students prepared for college?? PreK-12 process. GEAR UP grant, challenges in communication and motivation of introducing something new. Changing not only instructional practice but the standards as well. What instructional framework are we going to move towards (Marzano?). New superintendent (2nd year). Implemented positive changes around communication—potential Monday meetings that will be late start, staff not all aware of new standards.
- How can we use these Monday meetings effectively so 100% of the staff feel comfortable and informed with the CCSS implementation by the end of the year??
- 1st Monday of every month for 1 hour and 20 hours of collaboration time (time when teachers work together in small groups—part of contract time and done outside of normal day but they get paid for time)
- Early release vs. late start—late start seemed to work better with their community.
- How do you formulate a PLC when you only have 1 math teacher? Have some cross curriculum collaboration—create lessons aligned with CCSS. 5th grade, middle and high school teachers will form a PLC (such as in math).

Suggestions/Recommendations:

- Working on vertical alignment—will have K-12 meetings and put aside time to talk about critical pieces that students need to learn to be successful in the next grade level/section—what the previous grades can do to help support that.
- Principals to model the learning targets at each staff meeting with core theme so teachers are hearing it and teachers would know that it is a walk through item.
- PLC – highly beneficial if you have a calendar at beginning of schools year to identify purpose of each meeting and reporting form—what did you accomplish, what do you need to do in the future, who is responsible?
- Top down mentality, want to make sure that it is not a “dog and pony show”—bring authentic examples of what students are doing in their class. Here is the standard we are working on and here is a student example.
- Were given time to go and observe each other’s math class and how other teachers were teaching math concepts--opened up the door for significant dialogue and awareness between grade levels. Student work being the center, not just the standard.

Next Steps:

What Helped?
• how does CCSS relate to the assessment system—two brand new systems can be overwhelming

**District Name:** Brewster School District  
**Problem:**
• Late start every Monday 1 ½ hour, PLC training last summer, 7-12 were more isolated, not teaming together, 3 days in summer teachers are given time to work together  
• Aligning curriculum and beginning to align curriculum to Common Core,  
• getting K-12 teachers to a point where they are working collaboratively even when given time to do so.  
• Instruction is the issue, not the curriculum.  
• Elementary is by grade level, PLC grade level advisory and PLC subject area. This year will incorporate SS and LA.  
• Prioritize focus on issues that would be addressed in grade levels/content areas—some grade levels are better at addressing this—7-12 not as focused on this  
• Possible retention policy for middle school math, working on increasing student vocabulary  

**Suggestions/Recommendations:**
• Some teachers have shown success, have you created a structure where those successful teachers can share with others and model their teaching? Instructional coaches will be covering classes so those teachers can observe other teachers.  
• Fill out a form of who was present, goals we accomplished, etc.  
• K-5, they determine their focus and work monthly together as a staff (they chose math), learning to use data to inform their practice/success  
• At the end of the PLC everyone was given something to do and had to bring something back at next meeting, allows teachers to reflect on their teaching and bring successes/issues back to next PLC meeting.  

**Next Steps:**
• Having specific topics and PLC meetings—

**District Name:** Inchelium school district  
**Problem:**
• Text complexity, how do you engage a Kindergarten and high school teacher? Want everyone to see the big picture—only one teacher per grade level.  

**Suggestions/Recommendations:**
• Would not do it—I would break into small groups.
• Talk to entire staff about what text complexity is, what are the components and then break into more grade level groups and have them evaluate text complexity for their grade level.
• Ask staff what is text complexity and how does this relate to the curriculum you are using?
• Give a picture book with much text complexity, can do this with all grade levels and dive into the text complexity together and then break into smaller groups.
• AP English teacher did a lesson on graphic novels.

Next Steps:
• I think it is a good idea to break into small groups
• Text complexity “Oprah” style and then break into table groups to see how that would look at each grade level.

District: Sprague School District

Problem:
• How to structure day so they have time for PLC’s with teachers that teach in both districts.

Suggestions/Recommendations:
• Combining classes
• You have a blank slate, you can use Skype, web based demonstrations, etc. You are wide open on how you can design this.
• The leadership in the district should support what your collaboration needs are to ensure structures are in place –be as creative as possible and take the lead in what you need.

Next Steps:
• web cam is something that we have been considering,
• Utilize time in later afternoon, sporting events with down time—can get staff together and create time where they can work together collaboratively. Get staff to watch classes while teachers work together. Struggling with not having much time to actually get in the classroom as district leader.

Problems of Practice: East side medium districts

District: Ephrata

Questions for Clarification:
• Get the whole administrative team on board?
• 9-12 buildings are different the K-8. How do we bring these two levels together? (GLAD Training- only for little kids?)

Suggestions; Recommended Strategies:
• Administration make it mandatory
• Action team brought these together in Deer Park. Although the RTI model did not seem to work at the high school level they discovered use of interventions from the RtI model.
• Principal PLCs on a weekly basis for consistency between buildings
• ELA Middle and High School educators met together
• 4th grade teacher and high school teacher observed each other’s math lessons. Brought new appreciation for each other.
• Same strategies presented on a different level

**Next Steps:**
• Team educators and principals at the same level in PLCs
• High school can use the same strategies as elementary, delivered in a different manor.

**District:** Deer Park

**Questions for Clarification:**
• Time, how do we find it? 45 min. twice a month wasn’t enough
• Too many changes in the past 10 years; frustration with the standards churn. How will these be different?

**Suggestions; Recommended Strategies:**
• Late arrival schedule/early release
• Twice a month teachers met and tackled standards in Reading. Created an “unpacking” document where the assessments will come from.
• Started with Power Standards and realized that the CCSS has already written focused standards.
• Use of OER (Open Education Resources)
• Funding coaches, curriculum leadership
• Countries that have success with these standards and what have they done
• Use of appendices of CCSS as examples. SS teachers close look at reading materials
• Evaluation tool (TPEP) and common Core work together

**Next Steps:**
• Common, clear understanding of what CCSS is: Dr. Austin Buffin is coming in to talk about PLCs and Standards.
• The Elephant one bit at a time. Start with one standard: Identify standard, what does expectable/rigorous evidence look like, assess it.

Notes: Core principles: resources and time to teachers; clear expectations; celebrations

Structured PLC work
PLC definition
Overarching Targets: Three goals (power standards, assessment
Identified PLC leaders and offered training
August-June Timeline: Guidance given to teachers at the beginning of the school year.
PLC Action Team (P-12): Create a central knowledge base
- pulled out for the plan at the beginning, given a vision of what teachers will do.
- Met 4-5 times throughout the school year
- Facilitators met back with action team to report what was working/wasn’t working

Resources
- Deer Park PLC Webpage: The plan along with access to resources links to exemplars from other districts. Ended with a May update.
- CCSS Webpage
- OSPI transition documents
- Assessment
  - Smarter Balanced
  - PARCC (used the content frameworks offered through PARCC links)

Problems of Practice: East side large districts

I. Walla Walla
Context:
Major initiatives:
- RtI
- CCSS
- large AVID program at HS -- moving to MS and elementary
- standards-based grading and reporting (MS & HS “dabbling”)

Problem of practice:
Standards-based grading and reporting has been worked on by quite a few people at different levels (Marzano conferences... grassroots effort building steam over years). A 4 year plan to transition completely was rolled out.
- how do we make sure that what we are doing with the SBGR initiative makes sense with CCSS... all kinds of wrinkles with HS and the waiver and the federal government
- how do we still make sure the transition makes sense for our kids who have been in our WA Education system... do we keep going with WA Standards? How do we make all this happen?
- How do we make sure everyone feels supported
- how do we [district] keep track of all the kids [ELL, LAP... ] work in this system...

Questions from the group:
On your standards based grading report cards (SBGR) are you using rubrics to assess work?
Have you developed benchmark assessments by grade levels?
K-2 implementing English language arts and math—are any other grades/groups?
Do they have the discretion to report on the standards they want, or do they have to report on the WA standards?
Do you have common PLC time across district?

**Districts share their experiences:**

**Renton:**
- Doing K-2 implementation,
- Decided to do CCSS Domains K-5
- Created 3-5 supporting documents that showcase how the different PEs fit into the domains--teachers can use the rubric as a piece of evidence to show working to CCSS...

**Kent**
- Trying to build tools for teachers to collect evidence of [domains] as a gateway back to good formative assessment practice
- We’ve had a SBRG for elementary for quite some time (8 years) just last year we moved to goal-setting conferences in Oct with two report cards

**Reflect: What was helpful? What did we learn?**
- Slow and steady wins the race.
- That training piece.
- Getting everybody to understand.
- Filtering down... not letting that gap happen...
- “We’ll be wrong together!”
- “Capacity issue... all these people at all these different levels... need professional learning at all different levels... it’s staggering... it’s a lot to think about...”
- Dedicated PLC time... create systems that allow meaningful collaborative work
- We really all have the same problems of practice.
- Think about what grades really mean—not just as artificial points in time, but moving to a representation of actual mastery

**II. East Valley:**

*Problem of practice:*
- Not a place to examine curriculum, and not knowing what to “do” with it... not having what you need to start the process, knowing that what you have doesn’t match up to the processes of the ccss?

**Questions from the group:**
- What do your math teachers know about CCSS?
Do you have curriculum maps or pacing guides?
Tell us a little more about the context?

**Districts share their experiences:**

**Kent:**
- We look to the state of Florida—because they have CCSS resources that identify alignments and textbooks...
- One advantage: we don’t have to buy anything yet, but can do training of teachers so when they do see resources, they can make a wise decision... is this really CCSS?

**Walla Walla:**
- Math specialists are looking at what’s out there, but nothing’s been aligned yet... we are looking at instruction instead
- We tried the *Triumphs* parts of *MathConnects*... that company hasn’t been as willing to cooperate with us on transition but it has helped some.

**Reflect: What was helpful? What did we learn?**
- Reassuring and confirming: the path we are on, focusing on mathematical practices as our beginning steps
- The gift of time... training teachers so they know what to look for, with their expertise...
- Having the time to do certain practices, certain items from different curricula...