



IT WORKED!

Developing Curriculum with Teachers — NOT for Teachers

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I am the K-12 District Coordinator for a district of about 3900 students and 2016-2017 is the first year for our district to be in existence. Our district is made up of 6 elementary buildings, a middle school and a high school. We have been through several growing pains, including a large class of beginning teachers and a disjointed K-5 curriculum. We began the year with the previous district's calendar, not much communication between the elementary buildings, or between teachers and information from the district office which sometimes stopped in the principal's email.

I began the curriculum conversation in the grade level PLCs in each building. I asked the teachers to tell me how it was going with the current curriculum resource and I wanted the good, the bad, and the ugly. I wanted to establish an open dialogue with the teachers in the buildings. They shared with me the frustrations as well as what they liked. I asked about another curriculum that had been developed through the Race to the Top grant funding. I learned that some of our teachers had used this other curriculum and I encouraged them to tell me, as before, the good, the bad and the ugly. Through these discussions, I learned that each building, and in some areas each teacher, were creating their own lesson plans independently and sometimes with resources that may or may not be vetted. One common issue was with the sequencing and unit plan of the provided resource. Some teachers followed the resource as written and other teachers were creating their own plans. The lack of consistency needed to be addressed.

Armed with this information, I began to plan an initial curriculum development day. I pulled grade level teams of K-1, 2-3, 4-5, and 6-8. I provided the state standards on colored 6x8 index cards, with each color representing a different domain. I had the teachers group the standards as they made sense to them. We discussed order, selected power standards and new curriculum resources during our day. These discussions were very much teacher driven; I only provided guidance when they were stuck or if they asked. When the day was over, the teachers filled out a reflection survey and the results from the survey were very positive. For example, one teacher said, "I enjoyed this PD and can't wait to share my knowledge with my team members. This will also allow me to get feedback from them to share the next time we meet. Together we can make great changes and choices for our students. "They helped to develop the next steps and many of the teams have already began working on the next steps in preparation for our next planning day. They also left at the end of the day excited and I even heard from principals how excited their teachers were to be creating their own curriculum. During our day together, teachers came to understand our standards more deeply, and were empowered to develop curriculum that was based on these standards. I believe it was so successful because these days were teacher driven. We encourage that classroom teaching be student driven so this day served two purposes. It let them take the lead and it showed them how learning looks when it is driven by the "students."

Time for teachers to have conversations with each other about how to teach the standards are as important as the time they spend teaching the standards. I believe that the work teachers do together on curriculum is the key to increasing the success of the students of our district. Keeping the importance of this work in mind and to let the teachers know how much I appreciated their work, I wrote each teacher a thank you note.

Our next meeting will focus on formalizing units, including the assessments to be used, and will select units to develop through the backward design process using Understanding by Design. This process will need to be duplicated at each elementary building with grade level teams during the PLC time. Therefore, some of our conversation will need to center around a plan to disseminate the learning and rational for why we did some of the things we did and to get feedback on how the curriculum is working.

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