



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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November 26, 2012

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Bobbi Jo Kenyon, 2012-2013 Michigan Teacher of the Year

SUBJECT: Teacher of the Year Report

In Grand Rapids - Ottawa Hills High School

Our Instructional Leadership Team planned our School Improvement Grants professional development time around writing across the curriculum. A writing rubric was developed that all teachers could use in their classrooms which follows an ACT style scoring. As writing continues to be an area that needs to be addressed (based on our data), we thought this rubric would help focus our efforts and assist teachers in other content areas to more easily incorporate writing in their curriculum. Teachers practiced using the rubric on sample student work and discussed their scoring. We also talked about the importance of specific feedback to help students improve their writing and gave teachers a chart on feedback suggestions based on their rubric scoring in each area. In addition, we are re-introducing teachers to Collins Writing (we had introduced this writing several years ago, but have had a lot of teacher turnover since then) and are asking them to use Type 1 and 2 writings during the next marking period. Based on previous success of this program, we are hoping it will help increase our standardized test scores.

Our school had its first Governance Board presentation of the year. This is a process in which each teacher prepares a presentation that will be given to district personnel, principals, and instructional coaches. For a learning cycle, they talk about learning targets, content standards addressed, pre- and post-assessments, strategies used to increase student achievement, and how they use assessment data to drive instruction. Data are shared about the number of students who are proficient on pre-tests and post-tests as well as the percentage of students showing mastery. This is our third year doing this process which takes place three times a year. I think it is a great way to have teachers develop a habit of reflecting on their practices and learn how to look at assessment data to drive their instruction and determine what strategies to use.

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I believe reflection is critical for teachers to become more effective and initiatives such as the Governance Board can help them learn how to be intentional in this process. It is our hope as school leaders that teachers will incorporate this process throughout the year as they continue to grow professionally while positively affecting student learning.

Our District

Our Superintendent presented to the Board of Education a proposed transformation plan for our district as we continue to move forward. "The plan seeks to rationalize resources to strategically build human capital and ensure high quality school choices are equally available for every student. It's about stopping what's not working and reinvesting the savings to expand, replicate, and create new high quality schools, with the best teachers and principals, for stronger, sustainable outcomes." To bring about this plan, she has to make some hard decisions as she is suggesting closing several schools including one of our long-standing high schools. She states that "consolidation at the district and school level is required if Grand Rapid Public Schools (GRPS) is to compete as an option in the city" and that "the resources saved from funding schools that are not economically viable must be used to fund new, more attractive options for parents and students."

GRPS implemented a new concept at its most recent district-wide professional development. Last month a survey was emailed to all employees asking them to choose sessions they would like to attend for professional growth from a list of around 20 different topics. The list was then narrowed down to around eight topics and teachers picked their first and second choices. Our school started implementing this concept of "sessions" for teachers last year and it was a huge success! It was exciting to see the district now offer this. Too often teachers feel that professional development (PD) days are irrelevant to them, and they are often heard saying they were a waste of time. This PD day, teachers decided what area they needed growth in and could attend that session for the day. The sessions were held in several locations throughout the district and included such topics as technology, classroom management, close and critical reading, questioning in the classroom, and Educational Planning and Assessment System assessments. I think this is a great concept and mimics that of conferences where participants can plan out their day choosing sessions to attend based on areas of needed growth or interest. The other great thing was that GRPS had all sessions presented by staff. Too often schools bring in and pay for outside "experts" in areas when there is highly qualified and knowledgeable staff in their building or district that can deliver effective professional development. I believe there is a lot more "buy in" from staff as well when they hear from colleagues and see what is working for them. We plan to continue to use this concept in our building and after hearing about the positive feedback from this PD, I believe we will be using this format as a district again as well.

An additional noteworthy component of this district's PD was a commitment by teachers to try strategies. All teachers wrote a plan of action to implement three strategies they learned about and turned in a copy. I think this is important as too often we hear and learn great ideas, but do not formulate a plan of action. Accountability needs to be a factor as well as support, follow through, and feedback on the school and district level in order for PD to be effective.

In My Classroom

My students had an opportunity to go on a field trip to Blandford Nature Center through a grant from the Student Advancement Foundation. Students attended three different stations in groups with a guide. At the first station, they learned about adaptations by looking at a variety of injured wildlife that had been taken in by the center. They did an activity on beak and feet adaptations, saw adaptations of skulls and wings, and reviewed levels of classification that they have been learning in class. At a second station, they entered an old cabin and learned about how people used to live a more sustainable life. Students really enjoyed seeing things like the hay mattress, barrel shower, the hand-powered washing machine, and various hand-powered tools. They compared the resources we use today to what people used in the past and concluded how much better the old ways were for the earth. They thought about their own use of resources and how they could be more conservative. At the final station students explored water as a resource. They did an activity where they saw how much water was required for various tasks. Many of these tasks were ones that students never thought used water (such as making electricity or manufacturing). They brainstormed ways that each area could conserve water and then made one commitment they would do to conserve water. The students enjoyed the field trip and because many do not travel out of their neighborhoods very often, it is great when they do get a chance to see other things and think about the world on a bigger scale. The lessons they learned here will be tied to our unit on human impact on the environment which will be taught in the spring.

The first marking period ended, and this is always a very busy time of the year. My classes took their unit assessment on evolution and the scores were great! I attribute a large part of this to my "chunking" of content and pre- and post-assessing students weekly. I use formative assessments daily to assess learning and to adjust my teaching. It also helps me to know when to re-teach or develop a lesson that will address a concept in a different way. Because I have students take weekly quizzes and allow them to re-take their quiz if they want a better grade, they usually do quite well on the final unit assessments. I have implemented this process for the past couple years and have found positive and consistent results. I love to share with other educators about how this cycle can increase student achievement.

As Michigan Teacher of the Year

I presented at the MiGoogle Conference in Southfield. It was great to meet educators from around the state and hear how they use Google applications in the classroom to enhance student learning. I attended many sessions myself where I learned about flipping the classroom, using Google Sites for your own online textbooks, Google Docs for collaborative work, and Goggle Hangouts for live presentations. I presented on Using Google Forms in Practical and Exciting Ways in the Classroom. Google Forms is a great tool to collect data from students and have it conveniently displayed in a spreadsheet. I use it to easily assess student understanding of concepts, collect information, as a drop box for assignments, extra credit, exit tickets, and more. What I found recently (so exciting), is the ability for students to take an online quiz and have it grade itself as well as send the results to students via email. It was great to share my uses of Google forms and ideas that I use in my classroom with other educators. I also came home with some great ideas that I picked up from other sessions. I find a lot of value in conferences such as these where teachers can learn from one another!

I participated in "A Dinner with Seven Strangers" at the Grand Valley State University Alumni House this month where I was invited to attend a dinner with other successful alumni professionals. I loved the concept – professionals from ten areas (education, criminal justice, nursing, engineering, etc.) were seated at different tables and seven GVSU students who were interested in the careers of the alumni joined us for dinner. This gave the students an opportunity to talk with us throughout the evening and ask questions or gain insights into our profession. I met several students at my table and enjoyed sharing my love of teaching with them. Whenever I have an opportunity to share my passion with others, I love to take it! It was also great to hear about them and their goals. This was GVSU's 3rd annual event of this type, and I hope they continue. It is great for students to connect with professionals to network in the field they want to go into. I think more colleges should do events like this and often. I had an awesome night and I wish the students at my table the best of luck in the future!

I presented on classroom management at our district PD. I talked about the importance of routines and relationships in the classroom as it relates to classroom management. Over the years, I have found that having clearly established routines for students can make the classroom flow so much more efficiently and allow more learning to take place. A lot of my students often lack consistency and structure in their home life and really need it. Not having this in school can create anxiety and frustration which in turn can lead to classroom management problems. I also addressed topics such as learning targets, agendas, the physical atmosphere of the classroom, and efficient transitions and groupings. In the latter part of my presentation I talked about the importance of relationships and talked about some things that I do to build those relationships with both my students and their parents or guardians. I cannot stress how important it is to have positive relationships with students and as one of my favorite quotes simply states, "Students do not care what you know until they know that you care."

During my presentation, I had the teachers reflect on their own practices, share ideas, and write down ways they could improve or implement something new in their classrooms. Often classroom management can be very tough, especially in the inner city schools. If we help one another become more efficient in our practices, develop clear expectations, and build better relationships, greater student achievement will follow. I had some excellent feedback from my session and hope fellow teachers took away relevant information that they can implement in their classrooms right away!