

# THE PASSKEY

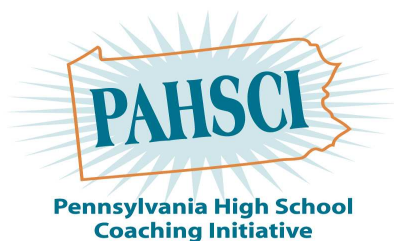
HELPING TEACHERS HELP STUDENTS

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## SOLUTIONS FOR THE HETEROGENEOUS CLASSROOM

by Erin McCarthy, Social Studies Teacher, Hazleton Area High School

A Hazleton Area 9th grade classroom mirrors what many of today's schools are seeing. In one classroom we find ourselves facing 35 adolescents ranging from the level of advanced to special needs and/or language barriers.

When I sat in my first PLN course I found myself frustrated and doubtful that I could use the strategies for my Newcomer Civics class. This course is composed of 23 non-

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English speakers who range in age from 14 through 19. They are here from various Latin American countries where they

either had excellent schooling or less schooling than most have for their age. How could literacy strategies work if they don't even know the English language?

This was my focus, and while trying to type lesson materials for this class, I came to a conclusion. I cannot teach students every piece of information concerning U.S. History and Civics in 180 days. I even had difficulty retaining every piece of information from one test to the next when I was in high school. I did, however, remember the studying, reading, writing, and note-taking skills my teachers used from year to year, even into college.

My classrooms are about succeeding and demonstrating progress. The primary purpose of all my classes, but especially my newcomer class, is to show them how to use literary works as tools, how to understand what they're reading and take notes from the text, and how to write effectively.

Through PLN 1 and ESL seminars this past summer, I learned of four essential techniques that accompany every chapter. I always list the daily content and language objectives (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) on the board as a guide. Second, we always do a written and spoken Chapter Walkthrough. They are made aware of the title,

### ACT NOW TO SUPPORT PAHSCI

The Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative has generated positive results in classroom instruction and student learning over the last two years --- and prompted numerous comments over the last few months from participants who are growing increasingly concerned about the program's future, especially as the end of PAHSCI funding approaches.

This is a critical time for teachers and administrators who want what's best for their students: institutionalized instructional coaching across Pennsylvania. On Feb. 5, Governor Edward G. Rendell will announce his proposed 2008-09 General Fund budget. Now is the time to show your support to keep a one-on-one instructional coaching, mentoring, and statewide professional development model implemented in high schools across the Commonwealth.

PAHSCI is in the final year of a \$31 million program to provide one math and one literacy coach for every 600 students in 24 high schools across 15 school districts in Pennsylvania. Whether it is state funding, foundation support or some public-private partnership, support is needed to continue with the program. Reach out to the Governor and elected officials to tell them how important the program is to you.

PAHSCI's future begins now. For more information please visit [www.pacoaching.org](http://www.pacoaching.org).

main headings, pictures, captions, charts and tables, and vocabulary, which are all words they need to familiarize themselves with anyway. Third, low level ELL students work individually and in small groups to construct word walls in T-chart format of the cognates in the text. Cognates are words similar in sound and spelling in Spanish and English. Students can usually scan the text on their own and write the

*Continued on page 3, Solutions*

## LETTER FROM: PAHSCI'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Transformation, according to Webster, is “An act, process, or instance of change in structure, appearance, or character; a conversion, revolution, makeover, alteration, or renovation.” Certainly, that is what happens when a one-on-one instructional coaching, mentoring, and sustained professional development model is implemented in schools. Such is the case with PAHSCI.

Transforming schools is challenging and PAHSCI has found a way to help change the culture of schools and promote a collaborative, collegial, collective problem solving environment conducive to improved teaching and learning. It means trying new ways of doing “old” things.

Striving to engage students in learning and the world around them is not a novel thought; it is an implicit aspect of the educational calling. Helping young people become productive citizens has always been one of our goals. How we achieve that goal has changed.

Teaching and learning must reflect a plan for differenti-

ated learning, a vision for global success, and a passion for making a difference in the world. It means not just reforming what we do or how we do it but transforming our thoughts, beliefs, and guiding principles into actions that challenge our thinking and help us understand the relationship between actions and outcomes. It means reflecting on what we do and making the necessary changes to achieve the desired outcomes.

Transforming schools means more than a coat of paint or the purchase of new furniture. It means focusing on leadership and whole school structures that support effective teaching. It means recognizing that everyone is responsible for true transformation of our schools.

Sincerely,



Ellen B. Eisenberg

**“Teaching and learning must reflect a plan for differentiated learning, a vision for global success, and a passion for making a difference in the world.”**

## THE PATH TO CROSS-CURRICULAR COLLABORATION

by Diane Hubona, Literacy Coach, Bellwood-Antis High School

When our math coach and I were brainstorming at the start of the school year, our key question was: How do we foster true, sustainable collaboration once we are no longer coaches? Our resounding response: interdisciplinary teaching. Often dubbed the “teaching of thinking,” interdisciplinary teaching gives purpose to study that goes far beyond the memorization of information. It can push teachers and students toward more powerful thinking, making comparisons that bridge disciplines, span eras, and encourage the application of knowledge.

The ideal situation is, of course, to have teachers team teaching the lesson in the same classroom at the same time. Rather than obsess over what we were not able to do, we decided to focus on making the best of our situation, rife with scheduling issues and time constraints. So that is what

we set out to do in year three of the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative at Bellwood-Antis High School. Let’s take a look at some of the potential pitfalls and tips to avoid them along the way for coaches who wish to encourage collaboration among teachers.

As coaches, we identified four major areas that needed to be addressed to accomplish our goal. Our 4 T’s included: Time, Teachers, Theme, and Teamwork. Teachers should be willing, innovative and self-motivated; teachers should be content strong; and teachers should be willing to embrace the importance of a literature-centered classroom. We also discovered quickly to begin small, with perhaps 2-4 teachers and then branch out from there.

The time factor can pose the greatest obstacle when encouraging teachers to collaborate and develop units. Some areas where time may be generated might include: common planning time for grade levels; in a block schedule, advisory or tutoring time may be used; schools may use early dismissal or late-start days; non-teaching duties could be covered to afford teachers the time to meet; in-service or professional days may be used. This year our school district has implemented extended two-hour days, and last year our administration planned late-start days to be used for professional development.

The theme is what defines interdisciplinary teaching. The teaching team brainstorms to determine an organizing center or theme. The coach’s role is to act as a facilitator without

*Continued on page 3, Collaboration*

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*Solutions, continued from page 1*

cognates after modeled by the teacher. Vocabulary is then used to write sentences, accompanied by the cognates. Last, we connect the text to an appropriate graphic organizer, which transitions to essay writing.

These consistent strategies, as well as the effective model of engagement, have allowed me to be much more organized and time efficient. Students seem to be more comfortable with the strategies and confident in their capabilities, and therefore more willing to tackle new information. Two newcomer students, for instance, who entered my class in October and were very hesitant about participating are finally starting to complete their assignments and participating when I call on them. They even stay after class for extra help. Previously, they would not speak unless they were repeating my words and would try to copy from other students.

I just started using the Models for Informational Text in all my classes. After typing simple text using as many cognates as possible or finding an article online, students read the text and underline important information, and circle words or phrases they don't understand. I absolutely love this strategy because no matter what language barrier special need or intelligence level they have, they are forced to have a purpose for reading, to acknowledge the title and words they don't understand, and revisit the text to find relevant information to answer a question.

One young man entered my World Cultures class in November. The first time I asked him to read from the book he refused. After a seven minute stand off he did read, and I could immediately see that his reading skills were lower than the ninth grade level. His refusal to participate in writing assignments resulted in the same analysis. This student is one of four students in this class who needs literacy instruction. After practicing the models for informational text with external articles, he specifically showed more involvement in

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the reading and through minimal persuasion will now complete the assignment. Also, after using graphic organizers for writing essays, he has shown more confidence in his ability to write. I must assist him during tests to do this, but he is making progress. With no persuasion he was able to complete a graphic organizer for his quarterly exam and showed me his work with pride. He even finds me in the halls after our class to show me his work.

I am thrilled with the results in all my classes. As teachers we are constantly trying to find ways to inspire our students and get them more involved. The PLN strategies work. In the month of January, I am confident that I can hand my students a chapter walk-through worksheet, a model for informational text, and creative writing assignments, and the majority of them would be able to complete the work without a problem and volunteer to share their work during the class discussion.

What more can you ask for as a high school teacher? Students are engaged and interested in what they are reading. They are taking notes and analyzing the text. Disruptions are minimal. Confidence levels are high. All students are brought together into a more homogeneous grouping because they are doing the same activity but adapting it to their own level. And best of all, they want to read and write more.



*Erin McCarthy participating in December Networking Sessions.*

*Collaboration, continued from page 2*

becoming part of the team. The idea of teacher ownership is integral if the process is to succeed. The teachers may be overwhelmed at the time invested in an entire unit, so as a coach you might want to suggest starting with a series of lessons rather than an entire unit. You may also help teachers seek content-area connections that could be the starting point for thematic discussions.

The last piece of the puzzle is Teamwork. The teachers choosing to work together have a path to follow which may be a lengthy process, but the rewards are countless. Coaches must lay the groundwork, bring teachers together to brainstorm and identify themes, help gather possible resources, and devise a timeline for development as well as

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implementation. The teachers then work in their content areas, reconvene to share, refine lessons and finalize plans to implement, actually implement the interdisciplinary lessons or unit, and lastly assess the process and reflect on changes.

While there are many obstacles to developing interdisciplinary units, the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. The results are irrefutable: students seeing connections between school, lessons, and life; students understanding their own ways of thinking and learning; students becoming independent learners; lastly, teachers feeling energized by using a fresh approach to old content. Always remember to start with a reasonable goal and then expand. The collaboration will prove contagious!

## PLAUDITS FROM PAHSCI PARTICIPANTS

“As a result of the coaching that our teachers now receive, students are performing better than ever in both the classroom and on statewide testing. Students, such as myself, are showing a higher level of interest and understanding in the classroom, which in turn leads to better grades and a better overall education. Isn’t that truly what teaching is all about, providing the best possible education for students? Our classes have benefited greatly from the new strategies and ideas used by our teachers. In a brief two-year time frame, I have truly seen a positive change within the classrooms.”

- *Nicholas Adams, Sophomore at Bellwood-Antis High School*

“We had a significant increase in our PSSA scores. We had a 23% increase in reading scores, and a 7% increase in math scores. When we assessed the differences from year to year, the only variables that changed were the implementation of a literacy coach and PLN strategies. We are 100% behind the Initiative, and have bought into the power of quality literacy based instruction.”

- *Mike Reed, Principal at SciTech High School*

“My school has participated in the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative for the past two years. This program has changed the learning environment for students. The students in my school are now better equipped with the necessary tools and in an atmosphere to better comprehend and understand the material. This program has really helped students to learn and interact with the lessons and chapters put forth by our teachers.”

- *Joshua Davinsizer, Senior at Bellwood-Antis High School*

“The coaches provide me with the support and guidance necessary to implement new strategies which are helping my students reach higher levels of achievement.”

- *Paul Lucas, Science Teacher, Burgettstown High School*

“PAHSCI has heightened my awareness as an educator to improve classroom instruction. Being in so many varied classrooms this year, I have seen the climate of change among students and teachers alike. PAHSCI has given me the tools to look beyond the curriculum and the need to use data on a regular basis.”

- *Marlene Radov, Literacy Coach, Strong Vincent High School*



*Judy Sallemi and Rick Barletta, Math Coaches from Hazleton High School, at the December networking session.*

**Please visit us on the web at [www.pacoaching.org](http://www.pacoaching.org)**

### PENNSYLVANIA HIGH SCHOOL COACHING INITIATIVE

Instructional coaching has emerged as a promising strategy for increasing student achievement and affecting education reform nationwide. In 2005, The Annenberg Foundation joined with the Pennsylvania Department of Education to implement the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative (PAHSCI). Funded by The Annenberg Foundation, PAHSCI is a three-year, \$31 million instructional coaching initiative. Four additional partner organizations provide support for program implementation: Foundations, Inc., Penn Literacy Network from the University of Pennsylvania, Research for Action, and The Philadelphia Foundation. Research support is also provided by the Success for All Founda-

tion from the Johns Hopkins University, MPR Associates, Inc., and the Academy of Educational Development.

The PAHSCI model is designed to provide trained teacher-leaders, or coaches, to schools and school districts. The Initiative places one literacy and one math coach for every 600 students in 24 high-need high schools located in 15 school districts across Pennsylvania, with a total enrollment of over 32,000 students. Instructional coaches sustain ongoing, site-based, job-embedded professional development for teachers and administrators. They also facilitate in-class coaching and modeling, peer collaboration, and teacher training in order to improve learning at participating schools.

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