



Pennsylvania High School
Coaching Initiative

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PLANNING THE FUTURE: USING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANS TO CREATE PERMANENT CHANGE

by *K. T. Gus Patukas, Literacy Coach, McCaskey High School*

Education is the process of building the next generation and teachers are the workers behind that process. In the School District of Lancaster, the blueprint for change at J.P. McCaskey and McCaskey East High Schools can be found in the 2008-2009 School Improvement Plan (SIP). The central emphasis of this plan is on increasing the quality of our teachers. "The quality of teachers and teaching in our classrooms makes the greatest impact on learning," says J.P. McCaskey Principal Dwight Nolt. "And while our 227 teachers are terrific, district administrators, academic coaches and small learning community facilitators (SLCFs) are all working to unify and improve educational services delivery to elevate teaching. This improvement largely comes through regular school professional development and the work of academic coaches one-on-one with teachers both in and out of the classroom."

A cohort of about 240 incoming 9th graders is structured to provide an extra ½ period of Communications Arts (CA) and Math daily to classes of no more than 20 students. These

sessions will also include elements of the Social Studies and Science curricula as needed.

"The thing I'm most excited about in the 9th grade cohort is that those students who really need another 15 or 20 minutes to work on a particular aspect of a given subject will now have that chance," says Joshua Parmer, Social Studies teacher. Mr. Parmer's excitement is echoed by one of the 9th grade cohort specialist teachers, Rhauni Gregory, a McCaskey CA teacher, who says, "I believe the 9th grade cohort will give needy students the time and support to zero-in on their weaknesses. Teachers and coaches are going to help provide specific classroom literacy guidance to students – teaching each how to decode reading passages, create meaning, understand high-level questions, unpack vocabulary, and determine what type of writing and response skills apply to specific school situations."

The cohort will also include specific math strategies delivered by accredited mathematics instructors and coaches. This multi-pronged approach seeks to vault McCaskey student performance upward to Proficient and Advanced levels.

The professional development program for 2008-2009 highlights ongoing formative assessment by classroom teachers to monitor student performance and to pinpoint areas of weakness. This year the McCaskey Educational Campus will expect teachers to distinguish between on-going formative assessment and regular summative assessments such as unit tests, final exams, classroom projects, etc. "The difference is that formative assessments are sort of like dipstick readings

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DATES

October 5 (evening) - 6 New Schools
Holiday Inn, Harrisburg West

December 4 (evening) - 5 West Region
Pittsburgh Marriott North, Cranberry,
PA

December 9- East Region
Holiday Inn, Breinigsville, PA

See our website for more information:
www.pacoaching.org

In addition to this ambitious staff development program, some of SDoL's priorities for 2008-2009 include:

- The new 9th grade cohort;
- On-going classroom formative assessment to identify and close student achievement gaps;
- Continuing the C.H.A.T.S.© approach spearheaded by Dr. Pérsida Himmele, from the School District of Lancaster's Office of Teaching and Learning;
- Focusing services on IEP and ELL students in Reading and Math;
- Increasing parental involvement and building interactions with the community.

LETTER FROM: PAHSCI'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Welcome back! I hope you had a wonderful summer, filled with activities that energized your body and replenished your soul.

Many changes are expected in PAHSCI Year 4. There are sixteen high schools currently receiving PAHSCI support. They are: Bellwood Antis, Central Mountain, John Harris, SciTech, Hazleton, J.P.McCaskey, McCaskey East, Reading, Germantown, Martin Luther King, Albert Gallatin, Jefferson-Morgan, Mapletown, and McGuffey high schools. New schools this year are Allderdice High School and Brashear High School from the Pittsburgh Public Schools. All PAHSCI schools, current and former, are invited and encouraged to attend our ongoing professional learning opportunities. The dates and locations are posted on our website: www.pacoaching.org.

With a focus on consistency in language and practice, PLN 1 is offered to all of our schools for 2008-09. Our goal is to enable more teachers to experience the fundamentals of PLN and engage in conversations around student learning. Our service model of delivery has also changed. Supporting this professional

learning are the mentors who will continue to visit coaches and administrators and help them institutionalize instructional coaching in their districts. Some of our schools will receive onsite mentoring and some will receive offsite mentoring. Both groups will communicate electronically with the mentors assigned to their schools. More information about our new design will be disseminated shortly.

2008-09 also brings us an incredible opportunity for expanding instructional coaching, mentoring, and professional development across the state. As you know, the Pennsylvania Department of Education has allocated \$1.4 million to PAHSCI for continued teacher professional development. In addition, we have received a \$10 million grant from the Annenberg Foundation over the next seven years to establish the Pennsylvania Instructional Coaching Academy (PICA) for schools across the Commonwealth.

PICA is a training and professional development academy that supports mentors and coaches. Services are provided statewide with the goal of providing the consistent and uniform delivery

of professional development around instructional coaching and mentoring throughout the state.

Instructional coaching is changing the landscape of teaching and learning. Thanks to your dedication and belief in the value of instructional coaching, mentoring, and sustained professional development, administrators, other school staff, and key decision makers in the state clearly understand that coaches are not just “able bodies” but are truly facilitators and catalysts for change. The culture in our schools is changing. This is PICA’s message and what we advocate.

“To learn is to change. Education is a process that changes the learner” (Author Unknown). The PAHSCI process is changing the community of learning and practice.

Have a great year!

With my greatest respect,

Ellen B. Eisenberg

LEARNING WALKS: OPPORTUNITIES TO BROWSE, BORROW, AND BUILD

by Debra Hines, Literacy Coach, SciTech High School

Good teachers elevate student achievement. Research suggests that curriculum, class size, district funding, family and community involvement, and many other related factors contribute to school improvement and student achievement

(Cawelti, 1999). The single most influential school-based factor, however, is the quality of the teacher (Stronge & Tucker, 2000). Learning walks provide teachers a weekly opportunity to engage in instructional reflection with the hope of increasing student achievement.

At SciTech High School in Harrisburg, weekly learning walks give colleagues an opportunity to browse, borrow, and build from one another; deliberate and dialogue about instruction; and provide positive reflections on student learning and pedagogical delivery. Walks provide an opportunity to see what is working for individuals regarding the implementation of specific instructional initiatives and furnish participants with a better sense of the big picture and the opportunity to learn from one another.

“I love our walks because I get to see all the great things going on in other classrooms,” says math teacher Jared

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~ STAFF ~

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that provide teachers with immediate feedback information on whether or not students have “gotten it” and – if not – what are their areas of deficit, and how teachers can address them,” says John Bingham, 12th Grade Honors Science Teacher and Department Liaison.

The new focus on formative assessment will include classroom visits by administrators, regular work between academic coaches and all teachers, and a thorough data analysis of assessment to inform all teaching.

C.H.A.T.S. © is a trademarked acronym by Dr. Pérsida Himmele that allows for student comprehension and access to linguistically and academically challenging content. Dr. Himmele and her husband, fellow PhD researcher William Himmele, have written about their best practices approach of deconstructing typical classroom interactions and educational services. Their

systematic, step-by-step approach to improving education delivery sets specific and high student and teacher expecta-

tions, presents visualization and inferring methods, analyzes assessment data, reviews numerous class participation methods, and covers an array of scaffolding and alignment strategies. C.H.A.T.S. © is a roadmap toward student academic success and higher-level teacher instruction and guidance.

Documentation of these approaches will be handled through regular professional development, heightened observation and supervision of all teachers with an emphasis on the 9th grade cohort, as well as select classroom visitation by administrators, SLCFs, department chairs and teacher colleagues across the larger campus. Success in formative assessments will be celebrated by grade level and by larger SLC groupings, and summative assessment results and standardized test scores will be publicized — with improvements noted and rewarded.

As the teachers grow together through ongoing department, SLC, and professional development collaboration and sharing, our students grow through shared challenges and shared academic successes. The complete teaching, guidance, administrative, and academic coaching staff members at McCaskey Educational Campus are eager to face this evolving challenge. And the regular and on-going sharing of people and ideas through PAHSCI will be critical for our long-term success.



*Kimberlee Cruz, Math Coach,
JP McCaskey High School*

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Campbell. “I have learned so much about teaching math from people outside of the curriculum. That would not have been possible without our learning walks.”

Learning walks are not evaluative and are scheduled weekly throughout the school year. A yearly schedule is provided to faculty by the instructional coach. Each week the day and period of the walks are rotated; for example, during week one the walk is held on a Thursday during the first teaching block and second block on Friday the following week. By rotating the days and blocks, all teachers have the opportunity to participate in a walk when the rotation coincides with planning periods. Walks last approximately 40 minutes, allowing participants to visit several classrooms. Participants do not take notes during their classroom visits. After observing in each classroom for several minutes, participants form a circle outside the classroom to debrief. Only best practice techniques observed in the classroom and the implications for future use may be discussed. Administrators join teachers on these walks, but the walks and debriefing sessions are led by the coach or another teacher. At the end of the walk, teachers meet in the coach’s office to reflect on the insights gained from observing their peers. The coach sends a summary to faculty which contains the highlights of that day’s walk.

“I just wanted to let you know that your summaries of these weekly learning walks are absolutely wonderful,” emails ELL teacher Lori Jo Whitehaus. “I have only been able to participate on a few of these sessions personally, but feel as if I’ve been there when I read your reports. Traveling from room to room as I do, I see all of the wonderful strategies being used throughout the day, and it is great positive rein-

forcement for teachers to see their efforts rewarded with these positive reviews. Keep it up!”

Learning walks create a collaborative culture at SciTech that leads to continual improvement. “Schools show the greatest promise where there are expectations for shared work, a norm of collegiality, and expectations for analysis, evaluation, and experimentation, a norm of continuous improvement” (Little, 1982). Learning walks foster these conditions.

“Learning walks have not only allowed me to reflect on the strategies I use in the classroom and whether or not they are being implemented correctly and effectively,” says biology teacher Erin Pittman, “but I have also been given the opportunity to observe my colleagues’ approach to these strategies as well. Seeing them teach sheds a new light on these techniques and allows me to adjust my own methods accordingly.” Effective teachers constitute a school’s most valuable resource in closing achievement gaps, and learning walks help improve teacher effectiveness.



*Debra Hines, Literacy Coach,
SciTech High School*

THE END OF THE ASSEMBLY LINE

by Alice Marie Marotta, Literacy Coach, McGuffey High School

In the early part of the twentieth century, Henry Ford revolutionized the automobile industry with the development of an assembly line where each worker performed a specific task in a routine manner, producing thousands of identical units. Ford's standardization –



Cheryl Greenwood, Literacy Coach,
McGuffey High School

“you can have a car in any color, as long as it's black” – brought the automobile into the reach of nearly every American.

The unfortunate by-product of such thinking was that innovation, craftsmanship, and personalization were removed from the process of building cars.

That same kind of assembly-line thinking, built upon the twin concepts of routine and standardization, dominated education for most of the last century. Teachers were expected to perform a series of tasks in a routine manner, with the goal of delivering the same learning experience to every student,

regardless of the individual student's abilities or needs. Teachers had few opportunities for collegial exchanges with other teachers in the same discipline, let alone with teachers from other areas or other schools.

Today, we know that in order for students to realize their potential, we must customize the delivery of our educational services by shifting from a teacher-centered classroom to a student-centered classroom with the focus on student engagement and learning.

Shifting the paradigm is, of course, easier said than done, especially among experienced teachers who have had the teacher-centered model reinforced to them over many years. But at McGuffey High School, teachers across the curriculum have, indeed, begun to make that shift. For many of our teachers, their PAHSCI experiences have been the first sustained opportunity to break away from the routine and standardization of the educational assembly line. PAHSCI coaches have helped provide a framework for change and have served as catalysts, while the teachers have become eager, enthusiastic participants.

As an entrepreneur and CEO, Henry Ford valued routine and discouraged independence and innovation in the workplace. Much as a CEO sets the

tone and direction of a business, a superintendent sets both the tone and direction for a school district. In his opening day remarks, McGuffey Superintendent Joseph Stefka referred to Bryan Goodwin's article “What Makes a Good Teacher?” In that article, Goodwin listed “...a few intangibles that research suggests are important for teachers' effectiveness with students.” Among the intangibles are a belief that all students can learn, a belief in their own abilities, and an ability to connect with students by demonstrating that they care about them as individuals.

In that spirit, the coaches at McGuffey are working for the sustainability of the coaching model by: continuing study groups which will be led by teacher-leaders; working to develop an in-house WIKI and web-page to help teachers collaborate and share information on their own schedule; finding more opportunities for teachers to visit other classrooms with successful strategy implementations; continuing development of teacher-ownership through PLN and coaching training; and developing resources that will serve as a means to continue the best practices that have been shared through PAHSCI.

Please visit us on the web at www.pacoaching.org

NEXT STEPS... FROM INITIATIVE TO ACADEMY

For over three years, PAHSCI has demonstrated that one-on-one instructional coaching can lead to significant changes in classroom instruction and student engagement—and can contribute to significant increases in pupil achievement, including scores on standardized tests.

The content and processes piloted through PAHSCI will become the foundation of a statewide system of training and support for instructional coaches. Lessons learned from the evaluation of PAHSCI will help shape initial efforts to determine the most effective and sustainable strategies for service delivery that supports instructional coaching. In a statewide effort designed to develop and support high quality instruc-

tional coaching, ongoing mentoring, and sustained professional development, the Annenberg Foundation and the Pennsylvania Department of Education are partnering to establish the Pennsylvania Instructional Coaching Academy (PICA). PICA will work to expand the use of a wide range of instructional coaching strategies across Pennsylvania through the implementation of consistent statewide approaches to selection, training, support, and assessment with these primary goals: a) providing a professional development model for the consistent delivery of research based literacy strategies and instructional coaching skills; and b) helping IUs develop and build mentor capacity.

PENNSYLVANIA HIGH SCHOOL COACHING INITIATIVE

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