

Proposal for Year-long Plan for Teacher Learning at Somerset Elementary School

Carly Schmand

Michigan State University

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### I. Introduction

- A. The ultimate goal at Somerset Elementary School is to work toward creating a professional learning community that would benefit us as teachers and subsequently help our students. I propose that we incorporate different Learning Designs outlined by Lois Brown Easton in her book *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning*. Since we know that Somerset already has a solid culture of trust, the best way to use that to our advantage is by creating different teams to encourage teacher education.
- B. Imagine that the entire faculty is engaged in different types of professional learning that would allow them to develop both as an educator and a person. This plan will foster our growth as a school, creating time during the school day for the learning to occur as well as full support from the administration. I believe when the incredible minds at Somerset are pooled together, we can create a professional learning community capable of anything.

### II. Background & Rationale

- A. At Somerset, the teachers who interact with each other have great relationships- there is trust and confidence in each other and the school itself. They feel comfortable informally talking about challenges or potential strategies and support each other when a new technique is attempted. There is no real fear of failure. Since the teachers already feel comfortable and trust has been established, it is my goal to introduce learning designs that are geared toward exploiting these positive relationships.
- B. There are four Stages of Group Development, orientation, dissatisfaction, resolution, and production (Lacoursiere, 1980). In creating this proposal, the goal is to take the group from the orientation stage straight to the resolution and ultimately the production stage while avoiding dissatisfaction. Since there are already positive relationships and a high level of trust, it should be an easy step to achieve.

### III. Proposal for Leading Teacher Learning

- A. Overall Goal: The goal for Somerset Elementary is to create more organized and productive relationships among the teachers and between teacher and administrator by using different learning strategies.
  - 1. Critical Friends Groups: Teachers and administrators learn together in a formal, structured setting over time with a goal of problem solving and continual learning.

2. Classroom Walk-Throughs: The principal will observe different classrooms throughout the school year, in a purely observational sense, to increase collaboration and positive relationships.

B. Learning Designs:

1. Critical Friends Groups (CFGs):

- According to Easton, a CFG “is a group of six to 10 educators who meet monthly for at least two hours to have structured professional conversations about their work and to deepen their knowledge of their craft. They study their practices, build a shared knowledge base, and talk in depth about student work, teacher tasks, or professional dilemmas” (2008, p. 109).
- Each group member has a different responsibility in the group; coach/facilitator, presenter, process observer, or responders.
- There are protocols in place on how to organize the conversations. Those who choose to go through training will be familiar with them.
- Using a variety of teachers encourages a wide variety of ideas and opinions as well as creates a stronger community and culture of trust.

2. Classroom Walk-Throughs:

- They are “an informal, non-evaluative means to observe teaching and is meant to encourage reflective dialogue among teachers, administrators, and other key staff. Walk-throughs are intended to help each educator become self-analytical and personally accountable for his or her work, and to encourage educators to learn collaboratively (Easton, 2008, p. 96).
- They encourage self-reflection, self-analysis, and self-direction.
- Are not meant to be evaluations, just observations
- Have two phases: the first is the actual observation, followed by the dialogue between the observer (myself in this situation) and the teacher.
- Encourages collaborative culture, not judgmental.

C. How the designs will work

1. CFGs

- Before the school year begins, I will poll the teachers to see who is interested in going through the training to be a CFG coach/facilitator. Dependent on initial interest, the volunteers as well as I will go through the training before the school year starts so there is ample time to form groups.
- During planning time for the teachers, I will poll the teachers again to see who is interested in joining a CFG. Again, depending on interest level will depend on the number of groups we have.

- Teachers must voluntarily choose to join the CFG. Anything forced or mandatory will only hurt the collaborative culture I am trying to foster.
- With district approval, I want to create a two-hour delay once a month to accommodate the CFGs. This will allow the groups to meet and show that they are supported from the administration. This will also give other teachers a chance to sit in and observe the groups and hopefully encourage them to want to create their own.
- My goal is to start with at least one CFG with between six and 10 people and hopefully create more as the year progresses and development occurs.

## 2. Classroom Walk-Throughs

- At the beginning of the year, I will explain to the entire staff what a walk-through entails and why I want to implement it.
  - They are informal, non-evaluative, and short in duration (10-15 minutes).
  - Focused on creating a culture of reflection and collaboration about teaching styles and choices the teachers make.
  - Will happen frequently, at least 10 times a year
  - Two phases: Observation followed by reflection/discussion
- To begin I will conduct walk-throughs at least once a month per class. The teachers will be encouraged to explain the process to the students so there is no interruption in learning.
- I will plan ahead of time with the teacher on the topic he or she would like to have observed.
- Observations will include but are not limited to: what the students are doing, the content and context of the lesson, what cognitive type of learning is occurring, and the decisions the teacher makes in teaching and classroom set-up.
- Reflections/discussion will be set up in advance, will remain brief, only 10-15 minutes, and will be non-evaluative. The goal is to use positive statements and to review the teaching practices by posing a reflective question. The reflective question will include five components, situation, teaching practice, criteria, decision, and student impact.
- I will be in charge of managing and arranging the walk-throughs and will keep notes and data on my observations and the subsequent reflective dialogue.
- All teachers will be involved in the walk-throughs.

## IV. Timeline

- A. In order to accomplish my goals of increasing productive collaboration, I have created a timeline to keep track of my plan.

1. Late July/Early August, before the school year starts: Poll teachers to see who is interested in becoming a CFG coach/trainer.
2. Early August: Send selected teachers and myself to CFG training.
3. Late August, before the students arrive: Accept volunteers for CFG groups and divide accordingly. Explain the process of walk-throughs and what they entail.
4. September: Meet with CFG groups to go over their progress after their first meeting to see how it is going and what other support they may need. Begin walk-throughs of classrooms, at least one time in each class.
5. Continual through the rest of the year: Bi-monthly meetings with the CFG coach/facilitator to gauge progress. Weekly walk-throughs with reflective dialogue.
6. End of school year: Full staff meeting to discuss the benefits of teacher learning as well as understand what the teachers want to change or add as a school. Do we want to create more CFGs? More or less walk-throughs? Add on other strategies? Etc. This would be a valuable time to do a Gallery Walk where the teachers can select a problem that they want to address for the next year and come up with solutions and strategies (Gregory & Kuzmich, 2007, pp. 130-131). This is a useful strategy to come up with what we as a school want to address in the future while giving the teachers the power to problem-solve.

#### B. Tracking Progress

1. I will keep track of the ongoing process at Somerset through my discussions with the CFG coach/facilitators, my own notes and data on the walk-throughs as well as informal feedback from the teachers as the school year progresses.

#### V. Evidence of Accomplishment

A. Teachers will take surveys before and after the plan was implemented so we can see the changes in their attitudes and beliefs. They will take the School Culture Survey, the Professional Learning Community Survey, and the Self-Assessment to improve instruction. Additionally, I will collect my own notes and data on the walk-throughs and discussion with CFG team leaders. The CFG leaders will contribute their own data and I will collect informal reflections from other staff members.

B. I will gather the evidence through check-ins with the CFG coaches, organize my own data from my findings, listen to the teachers reflections, and analyze their survey results.

#### VI. Anticipated Impact

A. Overall Impact: The impact of the proposed plan is to encourage more formal collaboration among the staff that leads to positive outcomes for the students.

1. To encourage a strong collaborative community through ongoing professional learning.
  2. To show the teachers that they are valued and hoping that their learning will positively impact that of their students.
- B. This plan will benefit the administration, the school, teachers, students, parents, and the entire district. The positive learning community that I hope to develop will both trickle down through the entire community as well as climb the level to the district level.
- C. The school culture will build on what was already present at Somerset. It will focus on increasing the trust and collaboration among the teachers and will create stronger more trusting relationships for the teachers with the administration.

## VII. Summary

- A. My goal in creating this plan was to increase the collaboration among staff members and use the positive thinking to encourage professional development. Through the use of CFGs and Classroom Walk-Throughs, I propose that we will create a stronger learning community for professional growth and ultimately benefit student learning.

## VIII. Next Steps

- A. The next step will be to maintain our current strategies as well as introducing new ones with teacher input. I will continue to stay involved with the entire staff to maintain the positive relationships. The ultimate goal will be to have every teacher in a CFG and become a true Professional Learning Community.
- B. To encourage the entire faculty to join in the learning, I would have the teachers not involved in CFGs to observe the learning going on in the groups. I will continue to do the walk-throughs as well as encourage other administrators and other teachers to participate as well.

### References

Easton, L. B. (2008). *Powerful designs for professional learning* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

Gregory, G. H., & Kuzmich, L. *Teacher teams that get results: 61 strategies for sustaining and renewing professional learning communities*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Lacoursiere, R. B. (1980). *The Life Cycle of Groups: Group Development Stage Theory*. New York, NY: Human Service Press.