

ELLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
DISTRICT AREAS OF FOCUS
MONTHLY REPORT
January 2017

Mastery Based Learning

The Center School SRBI (Scientific Research-Based Interventions) teams met during the month of January to monitor the progress of students receiving Tier III instructions. Classroom and Intervention teachers reported on students progress toward goals previously set, determined the effectiveness of the intervention plan, made needed revisions and set goals for the next 6-8 weeks.

Mr. Neil Rinaldi, Mrs. Susan Chandler, and Mr. Aaron Hoffman from Ellington High School recently attended the League of Innovative Schools Connecticut state meeting at CAS. These educators brought back to the high school faculty a reflective exercise providing the faculty time to reflect on their own experience as students - and how that experience has influenced their practice. The high school faculty were given 10 student profiles and were asked to group themselves accordingly to the profile that most resembled them during their high school years.

Teachers responded to questions such as, “what was it like to be this kind of student? The groups discussed what people need to know about students like themselves if they want them to learn at high levels and do meaningful work. All teachers discussed how their student profiles influenced their teaching practice and what type of student might be more difficult for them to understand or work with. Numerous faculty members had positive comments about what they had learned and its impact on their future work.

At Ellington High School geometry students practiced using a clinometer and ruler to apply their learning of trigonometry in a “real-world” application. A clinometer or inclinometer is an instrument for measuring angles of slope (or tilt), elevation or depression of an object with respect to gravity. Students had hands on experiences looking at places in the high school and calculating their heights. Students could answer question like the following, “What angle would you measure if looking up to the top of the empire state building?”

Ms. Jen Plis, EHS health teacher has been integrating mindfulness strategies into the 9th grade health curriculum. By the end of the 2016/2017 school year, all 9th grade students will be introduced to a number of mindfulness strategies to help them reduce stress, improve emotional regulation, focus and memory.

Mr. DeCormier’s ECE Physics classes were engaged in a problem solving hands on laboratory based midterm exam where students rose to the challenge of thoroughly explaining and justifying a solution to the challenge of determining how much force a bouncing ball puts on the ground. Students used previous knowledge, defined values and critical thinking to solve this problem both individually and then revised in laboratory groups.

At EHS world language teachers investigated culturally authentic materials to use when teaching grammar and vocabulary units so that students can “live” the language, not just “learn” the language.

Advanced Accounting students completed a trouble-shooting project for their midterms which began with them being given a set of financial statements with a variety of errors planted throughout. The errors ranged in complexity and challenged the students to use their knowledge of accounting practices, principles and techniques. With a partner, the students had to audit for errors and explain how they should be corrected and then recreate a correct set of financial statements.

Equitable Opportunities

The Equitable Opportunities faculty study group at Crystal Lake School presented at the January faculty meeting on their work to date. The group shared their working definition, from the book Excellence Through Equity by Noguera and Blankstein, “Equity is premised on a recognition that because all children are different there must be a deep commitment to meet the needs of every child in order to ensure that each child receives what he or she needs to grow and develop and ultimately succeed.”

Several special education faculty and administrators attended the Ross Green Workshop. Faculty who work with students in the Program for Alternative Learning (PAL) as well as the Multiple Ability Programs (MAP) at the elementary level participated in this workshop which focused on supporting students using positive instructional and behavioral techniques. Michael Glasgow, Sarah Anderson, Megan Glunt, Valerie Baigert, Melissa Haberern, Becky Derby, Kandace Murdoch and Kristy LaPorte will work to incorporate recommendations through this workshop to improve student educational opportunities.

Teachers from across the district attended the district’s first Equity Summit and participated in conversations around looking closely at our own and our school’s implicit biases, and establishing cultural competence as a standard for our professional learning.

Since the Board of Education approved Unified PE several years ago, the class has been a tremendous success. Feedback from students has been extremely positive and many new friendships have been cultivated. Here are a few student quotes shared on the final exam. “Through this class I have been paired with numerous groups and that has allowed me to not only get to meet all of my classmates but also to have the opportunity to make new friends. That is what has changed me as a person and I feel that if it weren't for this class I would only gravitate towards those that I am comfortable with.” (Max Splain) “I like how this class is one of a kind, a class where you probably take the most away from it yet do not have to study for the values that are taught. You pick up priceless social skills and character builders which will definitely help me later on in life.” (Erik Nordmark)

Innovative Practices

At Windermere School, Mrs. Donovan and Ms. Bashaw opened their classrooms to teachers from Stafford to observe reader’s and writer’s workshop. Stafford School District intends to send another group of educators in February as a follow up to this informative and helpful visit. So many area educators are seeking to find the best way to teach students and Ellington is desirable for learning cutting-edge instructional strategies.

In our second year of “mindfulness as a mindset,” Windermere staff has embraced the use of mindfulness and yoga in their classrooms. A myriad of teachers have attended mindfulness conferences and presented their specific learnings to district teachers throughout the year. Numerous classes in grades K-6 have immersed themselves in growth mindset instruction as well, implementing such initiatives as the *Mindful Minute* and *Zen Zone* to help re-direct and focus students, preparing them for learning now and future self-regulation and assessment. Teachers are creating space and opportunities

for students to learn self-de-escalating skills. We are developing these spaces/initiatives to help stressed and anxious students (which there are many with our special needs students as well as a product of large heterogeneous classes) help themselves – to carry as a life skill. Our mindfulness efforts help students focus, control impulsive behavior and frustration, and can help ease the heightened stress that any typical student faces in academics, test-taking, and extracurricular activities. They learn skills and tools to help them flourish and improve resilience.

The Crystal Lake School Innovative Practices faculty study group presented at the January faculty meeting on their work to date. The group has been using George Couros's book The Innovator's Mindset at their monthly meetings to build their capacity on what it means to be an innovative educator. The group posed the following big ideas to the staff:

- Innovation is a way of thinking and NOT the tools we use
- Engagement is not the “ceiling”, we should be striving to empower students (giving them the knowledge and skills to pursue their passion, interests and future)
- Innovation should not just be a one-time event (like just during Genius Hour)
- Consider learning outcomes rather than physical creations and model this for our students.

Nancy Connelly, Jessica Giroux, Nicole Satagaj, Emily Bellone and Ines Knospe are all on the Innovative Practices faculty study group this year.

AP Computer Science Principle students are coding and encoding. Students have written a Caesar cipher to encode messages and soon will be completing a Vigenere cipher. Both work by shifting letters in the alphabet, but students are careful to identify capitals, lowercase, and even punctuation. Can you figure out their advice? Or fher gb qevax lbhe Binygvar!

The EHS instrumental program has commissioned a new piece of music to be written by world famous composer Andrew Boysen Jr. Dr. Boysen (University of New Hampshire) has finished writing the piece and will be working with EHS concert band students on April 27 in an “open rehearsal” that will be attended by music educators from around the state. The piece, Ludwig's Dream, will have its World Premier at the EHS instrumental concert on May 25.

EHS Honors Biology teachers have been working to design and implement units based on the new NGSS framework. The newly designed units place an emphasis on student modeling - that is students illustrating molecular interactions in the system they are studying. To begin each unit students are presented with a phenomena (ex. sailor stranded on deserted island ... can he drink the ocean water?) that they are trying to solve throughout the units activities.

Personalized Learning

Recently, four teachers from Windermere attended a SERC workshop which focused on personalized instruction and enhanced PBIS strategies to help students focus on academics and learn cognizance of their class surroundings. The workshop, entitled, “Classroom Practices – Embedding the Language of your Expectations into Praise and Correction,” provided attendees with a variety of current, proven practices in supporting students in the classroom. The teachers shared ideas around restorative practices, positive connections with students, and supportive language in the classroom. It is all about building relationships in the classroom. The core group of teachers who attended this conference will be presenting a workshop for the Windermere staff at an upcoming faculty meeting.

The first Parent Conversation Special Services Breakfast was held in January. Faculty members Carin Faraci, Robin Kline, and Leslie Mancuso participated in the breakfast. Kristy LaPorte and Melissa

Haberern planned the breakfast in conjunction with Ellington Youth Services leaders Diane Lasher-Penti and Tressa Giordano. There were several stations set up with various staff members for parents to visit and learn more about individual services available for their children.

The Center School staff participated in a whole school Learning Walk. The focus was Element #2 of the Great Schools Partnership's Self-Assessment tool:

- *Are the learning outcomes clear to me and to my students - both long term (graduation standards) and short term (learning objectives)?*
- *Are descriptors of what success looks like available to and known by my students?*
- *Are my materials and activities aligned with outcomes? Could any of my students explain that alignment?*
- *Do students use learning outcomes to reflect on their own progress and set goals for growth?*

Teams of teachers visited classrooms, noticing resources in the environment and speaking with students about their personal goals. A list of wonderings was created and shared with staff in their data team meetings. Questions about consistent language across the school, the gradual release of responsibility for students, and how teachers monitor and support student assessment of progress toward goals were discussed. Teachers will work together to identify areas to perfect and adjust their collective practice to be revisited at the school level in the spring.

EHS visual arts drawing students completed their final project for semester 1 classes. Drawing students researched artists books and used their research and analysis of exemplars to design their own artist book. Each student individualized the art book assignment by choosing and personalizing the form and binding of the book, the media and the techniques used to illustrate the book as well as the overall subject and theme of their book.

Students in the EHS Transition Program were able to complete an Employee Information Project where they had to analyze their different vocational sites and choose which site is their favorite. The students also had to self reflect on why they like this vocational experience, what skills they need to be successful at this site, and what skills they need to improve on in order to become more independent and successful at this job site. The students also had to come up with at least one future job placement that they would be willing to try. The students typed their reports and are posting them on the bulletin board along with pictures of them at their job site.

In EHS Civics, students completed a final project in January where they were able to choose a President to research and evaluate. Students were also able to choose the technological medium to create a presentation that highlighted presidential decisions and evaluated successes and failures of their administration.

Students in the EHS Personal Finance are keeping a spending log of their own spending, saving and income for the next few weeks. The logs will be used for self-reflection and for use in learning to prepare a budget. Students are also practicing writing SMART financial goals for themselves.