

Holyoke in forefront of educator effectiveness

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Colorado Senate Bill 191, passed in May of 2010, addresses educator effectiveness and establishes new requirements for evaluating teachers and principals.

The new system was piloted in 2012-2013, will be implemented statewide in 2013-2014 and finalized in 2014-2015.

Holyoke School District leadership team chairman Angie Powell reported on this district's progress with SB 191 at the March 5 school board meeting.

"Our district is in a unique position. We've been on the forefront," said Powell. She noted Superintendent Bret Miles has worked with the leadership team, who is in turn working with the whole teaching staff.

Other districts show fear in the implementation of SB 191, while Holyoke is undertaking the challenge to better understand it for implementation.

SB 191 was addressed at a leadership team meeting a year ago, and the team met with BOCES last fall.

This past January, the leadership team attended BOCES training. Then Powell, Standards of Excellence chair Andrea Kammer, building principals Susan Ortner and Kyle Stumpf and Supt. Miles attended a Colorado Association of School Executives session. The leadership team then presented training to district staff Feb. 15.

Powell said the training she received on grading with a rubric was extremely valuable. She appreciates that this district is being proactive instead of reactive in implementing the educator effectiveness requirements. It has taken fear away that other districts are expressing.

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“This is a great district to be in,” added Powell. “Collaboration among teachers is great.”

The leadership team will continue to work with staff on rubrics and evaluation tools and will begin work with the BOCES collaborative.

Miles reported on the Northeast Consortium for Student Achievement & Growth, highlighting BOCES curriculum and calendar collaboration.

The purpose is to collectively implement the new Colorado Academic Standards and to improve instruction through collaboration and alignment.

From the N.E. BOCES Superintendent’s Advisory Committee, Kendra Anderson has been designated coordinator of the BOCES collaborative. She serves as N.E. BOCES director of special projects.

In the draft plan, all schools will utilize the same curriculum document, setting the order of units and an approximate pacing of those units. The draft will be further reviewed later this month.

Schools will commit to the outcomes stated in the curriculum document and will work together to form consortium-wide assessments to measure attainment of the standards.

Flexibility will be seen in use of materials and daily lesson planning.

Schools will be invited to participate in the professional learning communities six times per year at a central location and to house curriculum documents, educational resources and common assessments on the DREAM site, created as a teacher resource.

There will also be the opportunity to participate in a shared cost structure for resources.

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Within the BOCES collaborative, there will be some tight calendar agreements and others that will give flexibility.

Tight calendar agreements in the draft plan include seven consortium-wide professional development days, start and end dates for distance learning classes, spring break March 17-21, 2014, and high school TCAP testing schedule March 3-7, 2014.

Flexibility will be seen for start and end dates in each school district, other holidays, Christmas break, comp days for conferences, work days, teacher contract days, total student days, consortium-wide professional development day in May, elementary TCAP schedule and distance learning bell schedule for participating districts.

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Progress on unified improvement plans detailed

While unified improvement plans for Holyoke Elementary and Holyoke JR/SR High are not finalized, as they're due April 15, principals Stumpf and Ortnier took the opportunity at last week's board meeting to report on their progress.

An in-depth process for the improvement plans began in January of 2011, reported Stumpf.

The elementary school staff identified four big areas they wanted to focus on. These included improving writing through implementation of Every Child a Writer. Every K-6 teacher was trained by the same person for continuity.

Other focus areas were number sense, interventions and helping bubble kids who are identified as those close to moving up or close to moving down and how they can be led on the road to

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improvement.

Staff created and established Essential Skills K-6, continued with Reading First programs and researched and implemented several different intervention plans.

Staff has now noticed grammar weaknesses and is looking at options to assist with grammar achievement.

Stumpf emphasized the value of the late-starts every Friday this school year to give teachers the opportunity to meet. He said those late-starts have been well-utilized, giving staff a chance to look at data and establish plans. That time has been used for mini trainings and technology education.

He praised the data-driven dialog process, noting that when staff identifies weaknesses they have a buy-in for solutions. It becomes a group process and not something handed down from the top.

Ortner also described the unified improvement plan as an evolving process.

Three root causes were identified by JR/SR High staff in the winter of 2011.

The first was to improve paragraph writing through the use of Every Child a Writer.

Staff identified the need to expand time for critical thinking and problem solving as the second root cause.

Ortner said they targeted instruction toward what they thought was more essential. They wanted to get cross-curriculum projects, and they now have many more.

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Teaching academic vocabulary exclusively was the third targeted root cause, as staff could see there weren't good vocabulary test scores. She said they now frontload it, and there's vocabulary emphasis in about every class.

The JR/SR High staff is keeping the same three root causes, but the amount and direction these have gone has been fun to watch, said Ortner.

On the Friday late-start sessions, they have re-evaluated data including ACT tests, NWEA and TCAP growth and radar graphs.

The data evaluation helps them identify gaps and the Friday sessions give staff time to talk about strategies.

From the staff, Ortner said she can't thank the board enough for the late-start Fridays. Eleven of 15 staff members said "yes," they need that Friday time.

It has given them time to work together. Ortner said there has been lots of input this year as to what they want to put into this unified improvement plan document.

She added that staff has learned about depth of knowledge and how to get students to analyze work. She also cited the benefits of leadership team members attending state workshops and returning to share what they learned.

Much has been learned on teaching strategies and ways to impact student achievement, as well.

Ortner said she's looking forward to using the curriculum collaborative time with BOCES "so we don't have to guess anymore."

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She highlighted the benefits of working with a group of teachers on a regular basis rather than being the lone chemistry teacher, for instance. She also noted professional development goals are based on the unified improvement plan.

Other business

In other business March 5, the Re-1J board:

—approved the retirement of Title I teacher Mary Austin at the close of the 2012-13 school year.

—rescheduled the April board meetings to Tuesday, April 9 at 7 p.m. and Tuesday, April 23 at 8 p.m. instead of April 2 and 16.

—approved several coaching resignations and new assignments for the 2012-13 school year.

Coaching resignations were received from Kelsey Reimink, HS assistant track; Angela Powell, JH head track; and Allie Billings, HS assistant girls' golf.

Coaches hired for this spring season include Cindi Beavers, HS assistant track; Billings, JH head track; Chuck Bruce, JH assistant track; and Garrett Gordon, volunteer HS girls' golf.

—reviewed three proposed policy changes that were presented at the Feb. 25 board meeting by Supt. Miles. The policies will return to the March 19 meeting for first reading.

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