



Leadership Development

Anywhere, Anytime

Practical Tips for School Leaders – #15

May 20, 2020

What Matters Most to Students and Teachers for Learning Right Now

Many of you have had the opportunity to be part of the Brian Dassler Leadership Academy, formerly known as the Commissioner's Leadership Academy. During the group sessions with principals representing all 67 counties in Florida as well as several private schools and FL DOE representatives we were inspired by the work of the Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Washington (UW). Our trainers exposed us to the Five-Dimensions of Teaching Model/UW and reminded us it could be applied using any evaluation tool. They taught us a protocol to use as instructional leaders to inspire teacher growth. In our walk throughs, at various schools in the assigned cohort, we listened to the Principal tell us what the instructional goals/targets of the school were before we went into the classrooms.

While in the classrooms we focused our attention on specific behaviors of the teacher and students. We scripted the lesson to note what we objectively noticed. Later, as we shared the information with our colleagues, we were instructed to draw correlations between what we noticed and the Principal's instructional goals. The facilitator/trainer for the cohort reminded us to be specific noting objective evidence from the lesson. From the noticings we developed a list of wonderings and finally, some recommendations for questions to help the teacher identify what they might be on the verge of with regard to instruction. Throughout the entire process the facilitator reminded us to 'invite the teacher' into the feedback conversation using objective data collected during the walkthrough. Each time I participated in a walk through I was inspired and gained insight as an instructional leader.

Today in the University of Washington blog *Instructional Leadership is Action*, focused on '*What matters most to students and teachers for learning now*'. "How can we assess our students and make sure that learning is happening? How can we make that more visible to us, and move away from knowledge and towards understanding?"

The Director of Teacher Leadership and Learning, Joanna Michelson, at the UW Center for Educational leadership spoke with Assistant Principal, Jody DeGroot, Tacoma, WA. All students in DeGroot's district are now participating in online learning. She reflected on several questions related to engagement and assessment. Below are some of her comments:

- Her district went to a four-day schedule of instruction with Friday designated as a teacher office day. The teachers were asked to use a portion of Friday for PLC work. The first task the teachers focused on was to determine priority standards for each course.
- The second priority for teachers was, "How do we keep students engaged? How do I know they are engaged? What will I do if they need additional instruction on a topic?"
- Teachers were encouraged to design new lessons that met the changing needs of students in the environment of on-line learning with a pandemic around them. Teachers were provided professional learning opportunities and resources necessary to reinvent or create new lessons.
- In looking at the 5-Dimensions of Teaching/UW she referenced; 1. Classroom Environment & Culture – on-line, 2. Purpose – priority standards, 3. Student Engagement – designing opportunities for students to engage with lessons, 4. Curriculum & Pedagogy – how do teachers deliver the lessons, and 5. Assessment for Learning – how does the instruction offer opportunities for students to demonstrate learning?.
- In her district they looked at assessment with a focus on the connection between the learning target and the assessment methodology being used. They knew that some students were thriving and excelling while other students were falling behind. Their focus is on how to meet the needs of the struggling or disengaged students. Support systems in the school have assisted teachers with administrators and non-classroom teachers making frequent contact with families. Strategies are developed together to aide parents in helping their students engage in the lessons.
- Teachers have been driven by the fact that all students are in a unique place and have been impacted 'psychologically, physically and emotionally' during the past few months. Teachers continue to understand and plan to accommodate the differing learning needs of all students. Teachers determine how to assure all students are learning by using more formative assessments which are used to plan necessary instructional changes.

These five questions are used to help teachers consider, 'Teaching Right Now':

1. "What are our priority standards? Do they change because of distance learning and our current situation?"
2. "How do we keep our students engaged? Since the distance learning adds another layer, how do we know they are engaged?"
3. "How do we create an environment that honors the relationships we've already built with our students? How do we create that environment in this distant way?"
4. "How can we assess our students and make sure that learning is happening? How can we make that more visible to us, and move away from knowledge and towards understanding?"
5. "Are our students really meeting the learning goals we've set for them or they've set for themselves?"