

THE PASSKEY

HELPING TEACHERS HELP STUDENTS

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Coaching Initiative**

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COLLABORATIVE PRACTICES ENHANCE INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

by Anne-Marie Layhue, Math Coach, Albert Gallatin Area High School, IU#1

Since teaching has traditionally been a skill practiced in isolation, teachers often are lured into thinking that they should teach page-by-page, at the center of attention in a quiet classroom behind closed doors, just as they were taught. That seems like a safe place to exist when not fully equipped with relevant curriculum, engaging teaching practices, or appropriate levels of peer support. Bombarded with day-to-day activities, many teachers only get to see another adult face in the lunch room or on hall duty, where it's a brief chat before heading back to class. Who has time to talk about anything meaningful during such

quick encounters?

Collaboration skills are essential when working with a group of adults in a professional environment. However, collaboration today is much more than the idealistic view of team-teaching models that many have come to know. That model has regressed to parallel play: each teacher preparing and carrying out their own lesson plans that may happen to coincide with another's. When looking for lesson enhancements, ironically, teachers may search online for ideas to recycle, rather than share and/or trade lessons and ideas

**“Collaboration skills are essential
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GOVERNOR'S BUDGET EMBRACES TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Pennsylvania General Assembly recently wrapped up a series of budget hearings in Harrisburg, where the House and Senate spent the last month looking closely at portions of Governor Edward G. Rendell's proposed 2008-09 spending plan, including initiatives targeted for the state Department of Education.

The department would receive additional support to help school districts meet students' needs, including a \$20 million increase for intensive teacher training to expand "Classrooms of the Future." The department utilizes PAHSCI's services when facilitating professional development for statewide coaching programs, including "Classrooms of the Future."

Overall, Governor Rendell's budget would strengthen the state's education system by investing in programs proven to enhance student achievement. The Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative --- an embedded one-on-one instructional coaching, mentoring and professional development program for high school educators --- fits that model perfectly.

PAHSCI has been working with the administration, legislators and others to preserve and expand its coaching model, whether through state or federal funding, foundation support or some public-private partnership. But we still need your help.

With budget hearings concluded, the General Assembly has returned to voting session to begin consideration of bills and spending matters related to the budget, which must be adopted June 30. It is critical that you contact your state legislators and urge their support of the Initiative by telling them how important PAHSCI is to your school, your teachers and your students.

PAHSCI has made a difference in our schools. Now it's up to us to ensure the success we achieved continues into the future. For more information, visit www.pacoaching.org.

LETTER FROM: PAHSCI'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In schools where teachers feel supported by their administrators, work together to improve teaching and learning, share a common vision, provide relevant professional learning opportunities, and have high expectations for both students and teachers, a willingness to learn and experience new skills prospers. That willingness to try new learning strategies implies that a trusting and respectful environment is mutually thriving. It also suggests that assessment for continuous learning is the norm, providing the opportunity for constructive and thoughtful follow-up, and serving as reinforcement for establishing a productive whole-school environment. These enabling conditions are seminal to improving teacher practices, the single most important factor in improving student outcomes.

PAHSCI's instructional coaches have helped shape school learning environments and have fostered collaboration within and among schools. Cross-school and cross-district visitations have enabled coaches to visit each other and engage in meaningful conversations around the art and science of instructional coaching. The next step is to advocate for cross-teacher visitations. In places where teachers visit one another, make their practices visible, have open dialogues about their practices, and encourage each other to "step out of the box," isolation is an anomaly.

"It is about helping one another feel comfortable and confident with their own learning."

Teachers recognize the importance and value of working collaboratively. It is not just about working together in a faculty meeting or small group setting where the conversation focuses around a particular issue; it is about engaging in sometimes difficult conversations that are reflective and aim to change practices. It is about helping one another feel comfortable and confident with their own learning. It is about being a member in a community of practice and learning.

As Roland Barth suggests, "A precondition for doing anything to strengthen our practice and improve a school is the existence of a collegial culture in which professionals talk about practice, share their craft knowledge, and observe and root for the success of one another. Without these in place, no meaningful improvement—no staff or curriculum development, no teacher leadership, no student appraisal, no team teaching, no parent involvement, and no sustained change is possible." (Educational Leadership, Vol. 63, no. 6.)

Please continue to learn together.

Sincerely,

Ellen B. Eisenberg

COLLABORATION IS CONTAGIOUS

by *Diane Hubona and Lisa Hartsock, Literacy and Math Coaches, Bellwood-Antis High School*

The fostering of collaboration in our high school has afforded us countless opportunities that would not have been available without PAHSCI. For the past two and a half years, we have embraced change. We have tried to capitalize on the tremendous training and time provided to us as we have laid the groundwork for sustainability beyond the Initiative.

As our math coach and I were developing materials for a networking presentation on interdisciplinary units for teach-

ing, we thought it would be interesting to chart the evolution of collaboration in our school. When I completed the rough draft and shared it with Lisa, our math coach, it was amazing how much had been accomplished in such a short span of time.

I would suggest this activity for any PAHSCI school; as coaches, we tend to focus on what is lacking and what still needs to be done, rather than on all the occurring progress. While it is true that change takes time, we have found that the most arduous task at Bellwood Antis High School was establishing the culture for change. Once that was accomplished, our faculty, coaches, and administrators were all on board and all equally accepted the daunting challenge ahead: to take a traditional, "good-performing" high school and make it a "great-performing" school. We began this as a team and will complete the Initiative as a team; Bellwood Antis coaches, building principals, and district superintendent attend all trainings and networking sessions.

So, where does collaboration begin? On a small scale, simple steps can be taken that yield complex results. The

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with the teacher across the hall. As teachers are encouraged to include more and more student-centered instructional strategies to meet the growing educational needs of students in the twenty-first century, there is no need for them to reinvent the wheel when refining their lesson plans. Learning to apply strategies in a more meaningful fashion will allow them to create new, and enhance existing, teacher-to-teacher relationships.

Instead of relying on like-content discussion, classroom placement in the building, common preparation periods, or “outside-of-school” friendships, teachers may need a more direct option to interact with their peers.

Coaching has put a new spin on what it means to collaborate, both for the new and veteran teacher. At Albert Gallatin High School, we’ve had the opportunity to run a professional development course during the school day for eighteen teachers who attend during their prep period twice a month. The course includes teachers from all content areas and there is a unique mix represented in each of the seven periods throughout the day. It follows the formal Before-During-After cycle and is designed to have all of the participants become more familiar with various instructional strategies. Teachers are asked to revise an existing upcoming les-

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son plan to include a specific strategy. Then, two weeks later, the teachers regroup to discuss what they specifically tried and how it worked.

As coaches are course facilitators, we’re able to provide the communication bridge between sessions, so that by the end of the day, all participants can receive a list of collected strategy uses. Recently, we have shifted our course requirements to include participants visiting each other’s classrooms in hopes that the teachers themselves will begin to act as peer coaches. Collaborative practices have already started to extend beyond the classroom walls, as teachers become more comfortable going to their peers for instructional support.

Coaching helps to create a safe and comfortable environment in which professional relationships are enhanced and collaboration becomes the norm. As the year is quickly coming to an end, it is our goal that our teachers will continue to take ownership of their professional relationships. As we pass the baton, they become the ones to initiate the collaborative strategies. As ownership spreads, the natural bridges will be built to create even more of a collaborative environment which focuses on instructional strategies that increase student engagement and achievement.

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development of grade-level teams as well as departmental teams has proven quite helpful. When we began to look at lesson study, peer observation, and ultimately interdisciplinary units, the teachers were already accustomed to working across content areas. It is integral to break down the isolation that permeates a typical high school, and our groupings have helped in this task. When teachers of various content areas are given the time and mission to work together, the result is a greater appreciation and respect for peers as well as for other disciplines. Principal Diane Williams comments, “By implementing strategies that enhance opportunities for collaboration, we succeed in diminishing the isolation that has occurred in high schools for decades.” This is vital for sustainability of the fruits seeded by PAHSCI.

Our use of small study groups addressing the needs of the faculty has been a huge boost to the fostering of collaboration in our district. In fact, though the initial introduction to peer observations, coaches modeling/co-teaching, and small study groups proved intimidating, our faculty now sees these elements as part of their profession. We have even enlisted PLN trained teachers as presenters at several of our

professional development sessions. This is a huge shift in paradigm for our school.

If you look at where your school is now in contrast to two and a half years ago, the changes may range from subtle to dramatic. Keep in mind that collaboration comes in all shapes and sizes. Our school now has collaboration among teachers through study groups and whole group professional development; collaboration between faculty and administrators where teachers’ voices are heard; collaboration between students and parents with the implementation of parent/child book clubs; and collaboration between faculty and students through the summer reading program. School-wide collaboration is celebrated in projects such as Read Across America Week, National Poetry Month, Pi Day (once only celebrated by the Math Department), and in May, a community-wide One Book, One Community Read. None of these programs would be possible without the fostering of collaboration that has occurred as a result of the sharing and support PAHSCI has afforded our high school.

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CROSS-DISTRICT VISITATION: A COLLABORATIVE FIELD TRIP

by Christine Kingsbery, Literacy Mentor, Erie and Reading School Districts

Early on the morning of February 26, PAHSCI participants from three eastern districts gathered at SciTech High in Harrisburg to share a professional learning opportunity highlighting SciTech's learning walk protocol. Approximately 30 members from Harrisburg, Lancaster, and Reading participated in this collaborative event. Coaches, mentors, and administrators partnered to make this a meaningful learning experience.

The day affably began with a networking breakfast. Deb Hines, SciTech coach, opened with the story of SciTech, describing the school's history and culture. Director Michael Reed was introduced next and spoke to the group about the importance of administrator and staff collaboration and the power of a shared goal to help all students achieve. After his address, the group viewed a student produced film of a culminating project, followed by a presentation from cooperating teachers Delia Gongloff, Kim Simington and Jill Schiessl. They focused on the value of collaboration, instructional coach support, and administrative cooperation in making this project a success.

The target of the day was SciTech's learning walk protocol. These walks take place on a regular basis, include teachers and administrators, and focus on what's working for students. Teachers learning from one another is the main intent

of these walks. It was evident that this was a regular practice at SciTech because the students didn't miss a beat.

Comments shared about the visit:
"I was impressed with the sense of family among the staff, administrator, coach and teachers working together to help their students achieve their dreams. I like the procedure for learning walks. I especially enjoyed feeling the excitement of teaching with the staff of teachers. They truly work together as a team." *Michelle Merkel, Literacy Coach.*

"I was truly inspired by the leadership and dedication to all students that was exhibited by the SciTech staff." *Lisa Marshall, Math Coach.*

Six teachers invited us into their classrooms where we were treated to a variety of classroom pursuits: in a mathematics classroom students were creating flip charts for mathematical vocabulary; in a chemistry classroom students were practicing a song to learn about net electric charge; in a third classroom student presentations were being peer evaluated using a standard rubric; and in a computer lab students paired to rate websites. After each visit, the group gathered outside the teacher's classroom to share and discuss the positive practices observed. The final step in the walk protocol is a report provided to the entire staff by the learning walk facilitator.

Following the learning walks, we reconvened for lunch and a group debrief of the experience. While most of the participants did not work in similar contexts, all saw possibilities for bringing the concept of a collegial learning walk back to their buildings. Ideas for trying this protocol in a larger setting were shared. Some of these ideas included using the protocol as the basis for a regular study group with a team of teachers, using the protocol with a content department, and participating in the protocol with a cross curricular grade level team. As our visit concluded, participants remarked on the many benefits of the day.

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

PENNSYLVANIA HIGH SCHOOL COACHING INITIATIVE

Instructional coaching has emerged as a promising strategy for increasing student achievement and affecting education reform nationwide. In 2005, The Annenberg Foundation joined with the Pennsylvania Department of Education to implement the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative (PAHSCI). Funded by The Annenberg Foundation, PAHSCI is a three-year, \$31 million instructional coaching initiative. Four additional partner organizations provide support for program implementation: Foundations, Inc., Penn Literacy Network from the University of Pennsylvania, Research for Action, and The Philadelphia Foundation. Research support is also provided by the Success for All Foun-

ation from the Johns Hopkins University, MPR Associates, Inc., and the Academy of Educational Development.

The PAHSCI model is designed to provide trained teacher-leaders, or coaches, to schools and school districts. The Initiative places one literacy and one math coach for every 600 students in 24 high-need high schools located in 15 school districts across Pennsylvania, with a total enrollment of over 32,000 students. Instructional coaches sustain ongoing, site-based, job-embedded professional development for teachers and administrators. They also facilitate in-class coaching and modeling, peer collaboration, and teacher training in order to improve learning at participating schools.

PENNSYLVANIA HIGH SCHOOL COACHING INITIATIVE

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