Dennis-Yarmouth RSD

Instruction Office Newsletter

RETELL FYI:

The DESE plans to offer a limited number of SEI endorsement courses during the 2016-2017 school year for educators who were required to earn the endorsement but, through no fault of their own, were unable to do so. Educators who will be eligible for no-cost, state-offered courses in 2016-2017 are those who were required to earn the endorsement during their districts' cohort windows and who:

1. ***enrolled in a course that was subsequently cancelled by the DESE,***
2. ***placed themselves on a waitlist, but were not offered an open seat in a course, or***
3. ***applied for and were granted a hardship extension.***

Enrollment in these courses will be restricted to only those educator who are eligible. The DESE is compiling a list of these educators and will notify them individually of their eligibility an course registration procedures in the late spring.

Four Steps to Transforming a School

It seems as though it really comes down to four. Four practices that, taken together, create a transformational school environment. What do I mean by transformational? An environment where students are achieving academically and taking ownership of their learning: exhibiting agency.

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April 2016

Volume 3, Issue 8

IMPORTANT DATES

Saturday, April 2-	New Mentor Training
April 18-	Patriots Day
April 18-April 22 –	Spring Vacation
April 25-	DESE Licensure Workshop @ DYH library & Auditorium, 4:00-5:30

Important Notice:

Central office is a **fragrance-free zone** so please be respectful and plan accordingly when you visit.

Due to one of our members at the CO being highly sensitive to any type of fragrance, we ask that staff visiting/meeting at the Administration building refrain from using any scented products. Fragrances from personal care products, air fresheners, laundry and other cleaning products have been associated with adversely affecting a person's health. We ask that we all work together to make the environment a safe and healthy workplace for everyone. Thank you very much for your cooperation!

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- These environments can look many different ways, but are based on certain characteristics: they have a focus on academic rigor;
- They create learning experiences that allow students to experience "flow", where time and space drop away;
- And they develop their own best instructional practices rather than trying to follow someone else's checklist or pacing guide.

And they follow four higher level practices that entail their school culture.

Data-Informed Instruction

I say data-informed rather than data-driven, not to imply any lessening of rigor, but rather to emphasize the role of teacher judgment in instruction. In fact, rigor is what data-informed instruction is all about.

In many ways, teachers have always used data-informed instruction in the form of formative assessment – things like quizzes used to find out what students know and to re-cover areas where students are still confused. Today however, with technology, teachers have access to more data than ever and can drill down to get a more complete picture of what students do and don't understand. For example, many software programs like McGraw-Hill's *Thrive* support students working independently at their own pace, and sends an alert to the teacher if students are having trouble in a particular area. The teacher can then pull those students aside for immediate feedback and help.

The software also provides reports showing details of a particular student's performance, the whole class's performance, or performance on a particular question. This data shows up as a side effect of students working through their learning, without stopping learning to take a quiz or test. It is a form of "stealth assessment" that doesn't make students feel as though they are being tested. This data used to be laborious to collect, but with technology it becomes automated.

Automated reports become incredible time-savers in data-informed instruction. They become the basis for instructional conversations. These conversations may be with the Principal as instructional leader – this approach is beautifully described in the book *Leverage Leadership* by Paul Bambrick-Santoyo. The conversations could just as easily be with peers in a data meeting or Professional Learning Community environment. The key is to first analyze what individual students are missing or places where the whole class is confused, then to tailor instruction to get students caught up before moving ahead to new content.

Student-Centered Pedagogy and Approaches

There are innumerable student-centered pedagogical approaches from **Project-Based Learning** to Inquiry to **Making** to **Game Based Learning** and so on, each with its own slightly different focus. The many X-based learning approaches do have some critical things in common though when done well, and it is these common denominators that make them so powerful:

- Teachers gradually release control to the students, becoming coaches rather than keepers of information
- Students take ownership of their learning
- The conditions for intrinsic motivation are in place:
  - **Autonomy. Control of what they work on, where they work on it, how they do it, when they do it and/or who they work with**
  - **Mastery. The opportunity for the deep learning that comes from a state of "flow"**
  - **Purpose. The learning is authentic and based on questions the students consider meaningful**
- There is a public presentation of student work to authentic audiences (Watch Ted Dintersmith's Most

Likely to Succeed for a great example from High Tech High)

There is a simple, yet incredibly difficult shift of mindset required for teachers to support student-centered learning. There is an uncomfortable giving up of control to students while providing a framework within which the students will work. This mindset is the core of the student-centered learning approaches and can always be applied to teaching and learning, transcending any particular pedagogy. And once teachers get used to it, they find their enjoyment of work as they can focus more on true teaching than controlling student behavior or laboriously pulling students along.

Continual Improvement and Innovation Process

Mastery of data-informed instruction and student-centered teaching can never be fully achieved. That is a goal that can only be approached, not reached. There is always room for improvement and responding to a changing environment. To approach mastery, three elements are required:

- **Reflection**
- **Experimentation**
- **Analysis**

A self-reflective practitioner will take time frequently to consider how their data-informed instruction and student-centered approaches are working. Are they achieving their goals? How can outcomes be further improved? Are the working goals the right ones, or do even the goals themselves need to evolve? This reflection often occurs intentionally as part of school-based Professional Learning Community meetings.

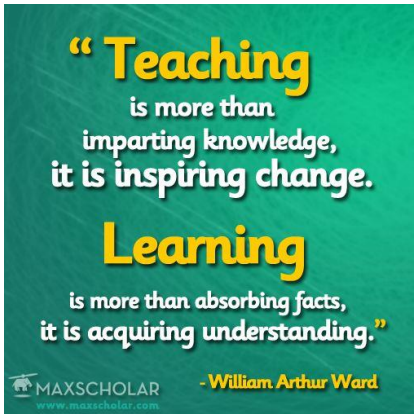
Then the practitioner will experiment with new approaches, analyze the results, and look for ways to refine his or her practice. He or she will share new insights with the rest of the community, look for feedback, and then keep the practices that improve outcomes while discarding those that don't.

Secret Sauce

The three practices listed above are the result of intentional practice and reflective process. However, there is one more element that is critical to making the others effective.

Every student must be known by a caring adult in the building, both academically and as a person.

Without this ingredient, the recipe for success falls flat.



Putting It All Together

When a student is known, when a student is intrinsically motivated, when a student takes ownership of his or her own learning, and when a student is caught up on concepts and understanding before moving on, that student is engaged in transformational learning.

It is common, when given a list of to-do's to somehow leech the meaning out of them and believe you are following them when, in fact, you are still doing things the old way and simply renaming them.

So how do you know if you are truly on the path to transformation? Consider:

- **Are all four practices in place?**
- **Do you hear conversations about student work and reflective practice in the break room?**
- **Do teachers, students, and parents insist they could never go back to the old way?**
- **Are there conversations about how goals are evolving in PLC's?**
- **Are teachers truly letting go of control? How do you know?**

- **Are agency and academic growth equally valued and given equal priority in day to day decision making? How do you know?**
- **Do students have voice and choice in what they work on, when and where they work on it, how they work on it, and with whom they work?**
- **Are you seeing continual improvement in your data-informed instruction practices? How do you know?**
- **Are teachers regularly experimenting with new approaches or instructional techniques and keeping what works?**
- **Are teachers and students enjoying their work more than ever while accomplishing more than ever?**

If most of these elements are a normal part of your culture, and all are "side effects" of putting the four practices in place rather than coached behaviors, then you are on the path to transformation.

Adapting to New Standards for Teaching World Languages

In this article in *The Language Educator*, curriculum directors Greta Lundgaard (Plano, Texas) and Brandon Locke (Anchorage, Alaska) say that the 1996 *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* and their "Five C's" made a positive difference to world language instruction across the U.S. But over time, say Lundgaard and Locke, the standards became "comfortable and routine." The 2015 publication of the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* has been a jolt for many foreign-language teachers with its emphasis on college and career preparation, critical thinking, creativity, and the collaborative interplay between language, culture, and communication. To overcome teachers' natural resistance to change, there will have to be "solid modeling," says Sheryl Castro of Catalina Foothills, Arizona. "They will want examples of what the World-Readiness Standards look like and sound like in the classroom. They will need time and feedback as they make adjustments to their assessments and daily teaching and learning practices."

Lundgaard and Locke suggest three guidelines to create a "greenhouse" that will help nurture the transition to the new standards:

(a) communicate and share everything; (b) celebrate breakthroughs, large and small; and

(c) consistently involve the entire community of learners. They suggest focusing on several significant changes in the new standards:

- ***The definition of communication*** – The 1996 standards said: "Students communicate in languages other than English." The 2015 standards require that students: "Communicate effectively in more than one language in order to function in a variety of situations for multiple purposes." The professional development challenge is addressing the concept of *functional* language in different settings – interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational.
- ***The emphasis on analysis*** – The 1996 standards described the presentational mode thus: "Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers in a variety of topics." The 2015 standards say: "Learners present information, concepts, and ideas to inform, explain, persuade, and narrate on a variety of topics using appropriate media and adapting to various audiences of listeners, readers, or viewers." The new standards ask students to notice, reflect, and analyze communication in real-world situations, which is more cognitively demanding. It's the emphasis on *analysis* that poses the biggest shift from the previous standards' emphasis on the more passive modes of *understanding* and *interpretation*.

- ***The definitions of connections, comparisons, and communities*** – The 2015 standards put more emphasis than their predecessors on developing

students' cultural competence – "a skill that is now, more than ever, of critical importance," say Lundgaard and Locke. The ability to communicate and understand across cultures offers economic as well as intellectual advantages to students. Curiosity, empathy, compassion, and flexibility will serve graduates well, and it's an important part of the mission of world-language teachers to develop these traits in their students. Technology is a key classroom tool in helping teachers and students escape their parochial limitations. On this point, the new standards say, "learners often do not recognize and understand the cultural roots of many of the behaviors and beliefs in their own society until they see how these are manifested in another culture."

Interestingly, the instructional approach recommended by the World-Readiness Standards demands less of teachers in terms of being an expert on specific aspects of the target culture and students' home cultures – historically a source of anxiety for teachers. The new standards suggest that students should act as "cultural sleuths," investigating, explaining, and reflecting on the target culture's perspectives, practices, and products. Orchestrating this process should be more comfortable for teachers – and more productive for students.

"No longer can we view ourselves simply as elective teachers teaching luxury classes," conclude the authors. "We must embrace the innovation and change embedded within the World-Readiness Standards and recognize the critical importance of our profession."

"A Different Perspective: Seeing the World-Readiness Standards as Innovation" by Greta Lundgaard and Brandon Locke in *The Language Educator*, January/February 2016 (Vol. 11, #1, p. 32-36), no e-link available

Six Suggestions for Effective Instruction of English Language Learners

(Originally titled "Engaging Your Beginners")

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, Jane Hill (McREL International) offers these suggestions for engaging and challenging beginning-level ELLs:

- *Consider each student's stage of language acquisition*. This allows educators to set realistic expectations for what each student should be able to do. These are the levels and the kinds of questions appropriate to each one:
  - Pre-production (often called "the silent period") – *Show me… Circle the… Where is…? Who has…?*
  - Early Production (single words or two-word phrases, yes-or-no responses, and repeating familiar patterns) – *Yes-or-no; either-or; Who, What, How many?*
  - Speech Emergence (short sentences) – *Why…? How…? Explain… Questions requiring short sentences.*
  - Intermediate Fluency (sentences of increasing length and complexity) – *What would happen if…? Why do you think…? Questions requiring more than one sentence.*
  - Advanced Fluency (near-native fluency) – *Decide if… Retell…*

"Although ELLs need to be held to the same standards as native English speakers on what they know and understand," says Hill, "how they get there and how they demonstrate that knowledge will look different, depending on their level of English skill."

- ***Use tiered questions.*** Teachers should ask students questions appropriate to their level, but when they

approach the upper end of a level, it's effective to start asking questions from the next level up. For example, students at the Early Production stage get *yes-or-no* questions and then, as they become more proficient, *Why? How?* and *Explain…* questions.

- ***Don't expect the same product from all students.*** "When every student receives the same homework assignment, ELLs may struggle because they haven't learned the skills they're supposed to practice through that task," says Hill. "They may even practice incorrectly." Better to tier homework and in-class assignments, tailoring the language demands to students' levels.

- ***Engage Pre-production students at the same level of thinking as other students.*** Don't water down the curriculum for ELLs at early stages of English acquisition, says Hill. The five levels of English do *not* correspond to Bloom's taxonomy of learning, she says: "How well a student can speak a second language has nothing to do with her or his ability to think abstractly." A question can be at a low level of English usage but a high level of conceptual understanding. For example, a Pre-production student studying ecosystems might demonstrate analysis by categorizing types of plants found in desert and alpine tundra biomes using pictures and labels.
- ***Don't assess language when you want to assess content knowledge***. In a science lesson on how the eyeball allows humans to see, it would be a mistake to ask ELLs to write a comparison of nearsightedness and farsightedness. Instead, the teacher might ask those students to use the results of an experiment to construct models of eyeball shapes that would result in near- or farsightedness.

- ***Be aware of one's own language use***. Teachers should slow their rate of speech, speak in complete sentences, and make full use manipulatives, miniature objects, photos, pictures, drawings, gestures, body movement, pantomime, and facial expressions. Hill also advises that teachers not overuse idioms and pronouns, opting instead for nouns, which convey more meaning to ELLs.

"Engaging Your Beginners" by Jane Hill in *Educational Leadership*, February 2016 (Vol. 73, #5, p. 18-23), http://bit.ly/1RGb5Cs; Hill can be reached at jhill@mcrel.org.

Project-Based Learning 101

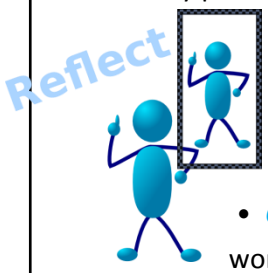
(Originally titled "It's a Project-Based World")

"When students engage in project-based learning over the course of their time in school," says John Larmer (Buck Institute for Education) in this article in *Educational Leadership*, "there's an accumulating effect. They feel empowered. They see that they can make a difference." In addition, they're more likely to acquire the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed for college and career success. Here is how Larmer sees the key elements of project-based learning, carefully planned and skillfully managed by the teacher:

- ***A challenging problem or question*** – It should be novel, complex, and open-ended. Students assess what's required and, with guidance from their teacher, find the resources they need to complete the task.
- ***Sustained inquiry*** – Students are challenged to work on the project over a period of days or weeks.
- ***Authenticity*** – As much as possible, projects expose

students to the outside world in all its complexity. "They understand what it's like to meet real deadlines, not the arbitrary ones typically set by teachers but the ones they had to meet because people were counting on them," says Larmer. "They learn how to behave, make eye contact, and dress appropriately."

• ***Student voice and choice*** – Students take responsibility for a series of tasks and make decisions on how to proceed. "They troubleshoot problems and often find themselves in situations that stretch them," says Larmer, "such as when they interview an expert, use new tech tools, or propose solutions for a community problem to an audience of adults."



• ***Reflection*** – Teams of students engage in projects that involve ongoing analysis on how they're doing.

• ***Critique and revision*** – As students work, they fine-tune their process and product. "Sometimes their ideas fail, and they have to return to the drawing board," says Larmer.

• ***Public product*** – The students conclude their project by demonstrating what they have learned to an adult audience.

Larmer gives three examples of successful projects conducted by students at different grade levels:

- **Fifth graders researched brain cancer, conducted a fund-raiser, and contributed $1,300 to a children's hospital.**
- **High-school economics students researched home ownership in their community and, working with a local bank, conducted a community education event to inform parents and local residents of the benefits of home ownership.**
- **Ninth-grade science students studied local water quality, produced a video, and wrote a class book based on their findings. They also contacted state officials and successfully proposed an adopt-a-shoreline program to improve a local lake.**

Larmer closes with four ways that project-based learning can go off the rails and not fulfill its potential:

- **Mistake #1:** *Using materials that aren't truly project-based; beware of PBL-lite!*
- **Mistake #2:** *Providing inadequate training and support for teachers; one-shot workshops are not enough.*
- **Mistake #3**: *Over-using projects in the curriculum; basic skills can still be taught in a more conventional format*.
- **Mistake #4:** *Implementing project-based learning on an ad hoc basis; to get the long-term effect, students need to engage in high-quality projects on a regular basis through their school years.*

"It's a Project-Based World" by John Larmer in *Educational Leadership*, March 2016 (Vol. 73, #6, p. 66-70), available for purchase at http://bit.ly/1QZNyHB; Larmer can be reached at johnlarmer@bie.org; further resources are available at www.bie.org.

Teaching ELA and Math Students to Use Their Brains in Similar Ways

In this article in *Kappan*, former ELA teacher Nancy Gardner and math teacher Nicole Smith argue that the Common Core standards form a natural bridge between the seemingly disparate subject areas of English language arts and math. The similarities:

• ***Grit*** – In both subjects, the new standards emphasize perseverance – sticking with a task, especially a difficult one. In ELA, this manifests itself in getting students to read more-difficult texts. "We want all students to have a productive struggle with texts," say Gardner and Smith. "Sometimes this means more

time devoted to shorter passages" – for example, spending two weeks delving into just two chapters of *Frankenstein*. In math, Common Core ramps up the importance of solving word problems with real-world relevance. "Teaching perseverance depends heavily on the questioning skills of teachers," say the authors. "Teachers need to understand the *how* and *why* of good questions so they can help students dig deeply and avoid superficial responses."

• ***Supporting claims*** – In both ELA and math, Common Core standards involve using claims, reasons, and evidence to back up arguments. In ELA, this means returning again and again to the text for actual evidence, versus the previous emphasis on relating texts to one's own personal experiences and opinions.

In math, students are asked to show the steps of solving a problem or completing a proof. "This means students start to articulate why a given answer must be true – or how a logical conclusion can be reached," say Gardner and Smith. "In both ELA and math, the focus shifts from finding the ***what*** answer to ***how*** to find the best answer and why that answer is best. The conversation may even continue to include whether there is a best answer."

• ***Precision*** – In ELA, this includes close attention to grammar and word choice in students' writing and in the texts they read – for example, why did the author use the word *catastrophe* rather than *problem*? In math, students are called upon to know what level of precision is necessary for a given task – for example, is the best unit of measurement centimeters or millimeters? – and debating with classmates about the most efficient and elegant way to solve a problem. "The importance of precision goes beyond being right," say the authors, "to a deeper understanding of how right or how effective something is or isn't."

• ***Structure analysis*** – In ELA, why did the author use particular images or rhyme schemes? Why did the writer choose this extended metaphor? Why was the argument constructed this way? In math, students need to learn how to step back and look at the big picture as they analyze mathematical structure, looking for similarities, differences, and patterns. "This helps students make formulas their own and reach past the superficial level of memorizing a formula," say Gardner and Smith.

• ***Using tools strategically*** – Common Core standards ask students to use vocabulary and grammar with skill and careful intent. This is essential given the way students are bombarded with words and ideas from the Internet and other sources, and the challenging nature of tasks they will face in the years ahead.

"Math and ELA Meet at the Common Core" by Nancy Gardner and Nicole Smith in *Phi Delta Kappan*, March 2016 (Vol. 97, #6, p. 53-56), www.kappanmagazine.org; Gardner can be reached at ngardner@teachingquality.org.