

Looking forward...

It is hopeful to think that next school year will be our first “post-pandemic” school year and that life will have returned to normal by September. What would “normal” mean for us in school? Optimistically, it would mean that we would have all of our students back in school with us, five days a week. It would mean an end to podding and hybrid teaching and desks spaced six feet apart in every classroom. We may still be wearing masks, using lots of hand sanitizer, and screening for symptoms of COVID-19, but we would have our kids with us each and every day. And that will be something to celebrate.

Thinking ahead to next fall, we also have to acknowledge that the students who will be in front of us will need something different from us than the students who have entered our classrooms in previous Septembers. They will need us to be prepared to teach to a wider range of academic skills and needs than ever before, while also acknowledging and being sensitive to the multiple forms of trauma many of them have experienced over the past year. They will need us to recognize and continue fostering the skills of organization, time management, perseverance, and flexibility that so many of them developed and learned to rely on during the many months of pandemic-schooling. They will be looking to us to ease their anxiety and help them feel safe in what will feel like crowded classrooms, hallways, and lunchrooms, even as those environments initially raise our own anxieties. They will expect us to continue engaging them through the effective use of the instructional technology tools and platforms that have been central to their learning this year. They will rely on us to express our deep caring for them through the use of culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining language, curriculum, and practices.

As of this writing, it is too soon to tell whether we will have the opportunity this spring to adjust our Temporary Learning Models, in accordance with the new CDC guidelines, in a manner that would allow us to return our hybrid students to school full time and/or adjust our elementary structures in ways that might make sense for buildings or grade levels. The ability to make changes as early as this spring could help students, and staff, get a jump start on the transition back to “normal” that we are currently anticipating and planning for the fall. However, even if we do make changes this spring, we know that come September we are - once again - facing a new school year unlike any we have experienced previously.

It is for these reasons that during the fourth quarter of this school year, much attention turns to what we need to do to prepare for next year. Summer Professional Learning opportunities are being planned and put together to meet the unique challenges we face; discussions are underway about how best to support the continued, effective use of instructional technology; and considerations are being given to how best to support all students, academically and social-emotionally, as they transition back into fulltime in-person schooling in the fall. There are still many unknowns, but looking forward gives us hope, and time to prepare.

Until next time...

Melanie

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>Professional Learning Information</i>	2
<i>Supt. Conference Day</i>	3
<i>NYS Testing</i>	3
<i>Silver Linings</i>	4

Thinking a little differently about PD...

This is the time of year when we begin making plans for summer professional learning offerings. The Teacher Center, in partnership with the Student Services, Special Education, and Technology Departments, along with Standards Leaders and many others, always does an outstanding job of creating a robust and well-rounded catalog of offerings. This summer will be no different in that regard.

One of the things that will be different, however, as we plan for this year's catalog is the consideration given to the optimal format in which to offer various courses. Until last summer, everything was done live and in-person. Last summer, we were forced to switch over to an almost completely virtual set of offerings, and while that presented it's own set of challenges there were definitely some unanticipated benefits discovered along the way. At this point, it looks like we will be able to make some choices for this summer as to whether we use an in-person, synchronous, asynchronous, or blended format for each offering. How that choice is made for each course may depend on several different factors, including:

- ◇ The total potential audience we would hope to reach with any given learning opportunity.
- ◇ The value of having some, or all, of the learning “banked” for teachers to go back and review in the future when they are actually trying to implement the new learning.
- ◇ The value-added to the learning experience of being able to interact with the presenter and/or colleagues in-the-moment versus being able to engage, virtually over time, via a chat channel in Teams.
- ◇ What research tells us about best practices for adult learning.

These, and other factors, will all be taken into account as we develop offerings designed to meet the professional learning needs of all staff members. It is exciting to think about our ability to better differentiate our approach to professional learning as one of the true silver linings of this pandemic!

PD Highlights from the Curriculum Office

Every year our Standards Leaders do an exceptional job crafting, supporting, and delivering professional learning opportunities designed to meet the needs of the teachers in their departments. This year will be no different with offerings tailored to members of various departments designed to deepen teachers' content knowledge, unpack new learning standards, or introduce them to new skills and strategies. There a couple of offerings under development, however, that will cut across discipline lines and are being developed specifically in response to our need to prepare differently for next year, and I want to highlight those - yet to be titled - workshops here:

The first is an opportunity to look at **the intersection between our Instructional Roadmapping work and our PLCs**. Like the Roadmapping workshops last summer, there will be time allocated in this workshop for PLCs to work together to update (or create) their Roadmaps for the 2021-22 school year. This will be targeted to K-12 and 6-12 departments/PLCs, rather than the elementary classroom teacher. Again, like last summer, the Roadmapping/PLC workshop will be offered multiple times in an effort to accommodate schedules and have PLCs attend together.

The second opportunity to highlight is one focused on **highly effective, research-based Tier I instructional strategies for meeting the wide range of academic needs in the elementary classroom**. The goal of this workshop will be to look at the application of a handful of high-leverage, proven strategies across multiple content areas in an effort to empower classroom teachers to feel confident taking on the challenges of what we anticipate will be a wider range of needs than in a typical year.

Much more information to come on these, and other, important professional learning opportunities!

Superintendent's Conference Day

Friday, April 30th is our Spring Superintendent's Conference Day. The day runs from 8:00 - 3:00 and staff should plan to report directly to their buildings on that day. During the first portion of the day building leaders will engage staff in conversations designed to surface the short-term and longer-term considerations buildings need to be planning and preparing for as we anticipate fully re-opening in September. Thinking through things ranging from the logistics of furniture and room arrangements to the re-integration of our fully remote learners, most of whom will not have been inside a school building for 18 months, and everything in between will be part of the conversation.

At the conclusion of this portion of the day, teachers will have time to work with their PLC colleagues on the work that feels most pressing to each PLC to focus on at that time. This may include time spent looking at how to chunk and space out essential aspects of an "end-of-year" assessment; time spent considering the Instructional Roadmap for your course and making any necessary adjustments for the final weeks of the school year; time spent looking at ideas and resources for the next upcoming unit of instruction in an effort to ease each individual's planning time by sharing ideas and responsibilities. It is important to understand that unlike most Spring Superintendent's Conference Days, Standards Leaders are NOT responsible for planning and facilitating the second half of the day. Our goal is to give teachers, and others, what seems to be most needed right now: time to catch your breath and focus on the work you most need to do!

New York State Testing updates



The New York State Education Department (NYSED), in consideration of the many challenges faced by school districts, teachers, and students this year, applied to the United States Department of Education (USDOE) for a waiver from all state assessments. That waiver, unfortunately, has not been granted and therefore the NYSED is required to administer those assessments that are part of all districts federal accountability rules. Those rules involve assessing all students in ELA and math every year, grades 3-8 and once again in high school, as well as assessing all students in science once time each while they are in elementary, middle, and high school. To that end, we are required to administer the following assessments:

Grades 3-8 ELA and Math - Session 1 ONLY. This consists entirely of multiple choice questions. The tests will be untimed, but typically take students between 45-60 minutes to complete. Fully remote students are not required to come into school to participate in the assessment. Districts have significant flexibility regarding scheduling of these assessments; there is no requirement that grade levels or schools within a district follow the same testing schedule. Each building will be establishing the testing schedule that works best for them, within the parameters of the given testing window.

Grades 4 & 8 Science - Written portion ONLY. The written portion of the state science assessment will be administered in early June to all 4th graders and all 8th graders taking Science 8. Again, fully remote students are not required to participate.

As in previous years, families will have the opportunity to let their child's principal know if they do not want their child to participate in any or all of these assessments; families of fully remote students have been asked to inform building principals if they DO want their child to participate, so that arrangements can be made to provide the test(s) in school.

Regents Exams - Only the Algebra 1, Earth Science, Living Environment, and English 11 exams will be offered this year. Students enrolled in any course that typically culminates in a Regents exam (including the four courses for which a Regents will be administered) will be exempt from taking the associated Regents exam as part of their graduation requirement. The exemption will have no impact on the type of diploma a student is eligible to receive. Once again, students enrolled in our fully remote program are not required to come into school solely for the purpose of taking one of the four identified Regents exams, but they will be invited to do so and appropriate arrangements will be made.

Silver Linings captured...

Let's face it, this year has been, and continues to be, challenging on so many levels. However, out of our collective struggles, many positives are emerging. Listed below are a few of the ideas captured at a recent ILC meeting when members were asked to share examples of things that we are doing in our TLMs that we should carry forward and continue to embed in our practice.

- ◇ Collaboration, interaction, and sharing of resources between colleagues and students;
- ◇ Using technology as a tool for learning, as opposed to learning technology;
- ◇ Teachers recording lessons so that their students can look back on them later for review;
- ◇ Collecting evidence of student work via video, photos, storytelling, etc.;
- ◇ Using technology for writing - "it's been a game changer";
- ◇ Students using unique resources at home to create artwork;
- ◇ Using every aspect of Seesaw, rather than just using it as a message board for parents;
- ◇ Using Teams and Seesaw as powerful tools for teacher collaboration;
- ◇ The use of quick forms, polls, etc. to get instant formative feedback and then adjusting the direction or scope of the lesson discussion based on that feedback;
- ◇ Increased opportunities to personalize the learning and provide individualized feedback to students;
- ◇ Virtual field trips and online interactions with scientists, authors, other experts in various fields of study.

Those were just a few of the many examples that quickly came to mind! If we are able to hold on to what we have learned, particularly when it comes to giving students a greater voice and choice in their learning, engaging in more frequent formative assessment/growth-producing feedback cycles, and using technology as a powerful tool for collaboration among all parties, then some significantly positive silver linings will have emerged from the past year. On a related note, the Edutopia article, [Takeaways from Distance Learning](#), written by Christopher Klein speaks to the many ways that our collective experience with teaching and learning throughout the pandemic will, hopefully, impact our practices for the good moving forward.

Why we do what we do...

