ONE SCHOOL'S SMORGASBORD
APPROACH TO TEACHER PROFESSIONAL GROWTH
Four strategies to increase teacher efficacy and agency

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PRINCIPAL EVALUATION CRITERIA
Creating a Culture, Improving Instruction, Managing Resources, Closing the Gap

Creating a school culture where every student experiences common practices through common language, regardless of which of the six classrooms they might be in during their middle school day, was goal number one when we started school improvement work at First Creek Middle School on the Eastside of Tacoma. We knew improving learning and achievement for our students would come from aligning and strengthening instruction schoolwide. We also knew this wouldn't happen from just one training, program or approach.

Here are a few things we did to address school wide teacher professional growth:

1. KNOWING WHERE TO START

Schoolwide improvement is big work. When so many issues need to be addressed, how do you determine where to even begin? It was evident from the start; we needed to bring in school-wide common practices and common language as our first step. We determined some practices and programs all teachers needed training in initially. Specifically, training in programs to address school-wide expectations and social emotional learning. This all-staff training approach was our first work in school-wide implementation. It was a good start resulting in an over 60 percent reduction of out-of-school suspensions from year one to year two.

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After creating common systems for safety and social emotional learning, we knew the next step had to be overall instructional improvement. We met and surveyed teachers to ask, "What do you need?" Two common needs were frequently requested. Teachers wanted more tools in their toolbox to engage students and they wanted choice in what professional learning they got and how they got it.

Both of these requests helped us provide meaningful professional learning that sticks with our teachers. We can't just expect teachers to change how they've taught for years without providing them new or improved ways to engage students in deep learning. We also can't expect experienced to have the same needs as first year teachers, or even teachers who have a few years of experience, but in very different school populations.

2. PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

My staff will tell you I regularly provide them with articles and share books that motivate me, but I also hope they would tell you I know they are very busy people and may not always have time to read everything that resonates with me. I'm an avid home cook and host, and my philosophy about professional reading is like a food buffet or smorgasbord I would host at home. Just like I might host a buffet of all sorts of delicious food and try providing plenty of options to allow everyone to find something they might like to eat. I think of professional reading being my school learning buffet. I'll put out all types of articles and books and staff can choose what resonates or excites them. We wanted to provide the buffet or smorgasbord approach to professional learning for our staff.

With this idea in mind, we approached our planning for professional development a little differently. After our district shared a helpful graphic (see below) designating the three types of professional learning (training, professional development, and professional learning), we decided to lay out our plan aligned to those three types. We created a plan with some offerings intended for all, some for specific contents/purposes, and some by choice. Professional learning options proven to impact student learning the most are embedded into our school day through release time or during late start days, as much as possible. Most of our First Creek Middle School (FCMS) "trainings" occur after school with pay, but by contract are optional for teachers to participate in.

the likelihood of increasing teacher agency grows. There is nothing more disappointing than sending a school team to a great conference and seeing no evidence of implementation back in the classroom. Since we've been more intentional about the types of PD we offer and attempt to differentiate by making it more like a buffet or smorgasbord, we have seen greater school-wide implementation of specific strategies and practices starting to grow.

4. KEEPING IT LOCAL

After a few years of contracting with outside trainers and consultants, we surveyed our staff. We found they preferred learning from their peers and with their peers. We started recruiting and hiring credible instructional coaches (one literacy and one math/science coach) who

buffet of offerings, we've also seen an increase in teacher agency and efficacy from classroom to classroom. Clearly, this has the opportunity for long-lasting, sustainable impact and has significantly changed the adult culture of collaboration in our building as well.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

My response to anyone who asks, "Well, is it working?" is typically "Not fast enough." Although test scores show some unprecedented student growth, our proficiency is still only making small incremental gains since the three years of starting our PD plan. When I allow myself to really reflect and take in what I see in classrooms across our building, I can see the elevated teaching and learning at First Creek. Students now consistently have the opportunity to experience common language and common systems in every class, allowing teachers to maximize learning time and students to access more engaging and rigorous learning. Students see teachers working together as learners through studio lessons, and that helps them see firsthand we can and all want to do better by them.

Promoting a professional learning culture in our school to better meets the needs of our teachers has improved access to learning for students. It's a direct result of:

- Making professional development and learning a priority for all teachers from the start.

- Finding ways to differentiate PD options for teachers by giving them choice.

- Growing our own in-building experts to learn with and from.

Those are the three key ingredients you can use in your school's recipe for success. ◼

Sample of FCMS Professional Growth Opportunities		
FCMS Trainings	**FCMS Professional Development**	**FCMS Professional Learning**
"How do I use…?"	*"What does this look like in my practice?"*	*"How do I impact Student Learning?"*
iReady	CHAMPS	Weekly Content PLCs
Office 365	RULER	Monthly Data Teams
Imagine Learning	GLAD	School leadership Team
Technology training	AVID	Quarterly Content Studio Labs
Accessing Optional Hours	Cooperative Learning	Semesters GLAD Studios
Content curriculum trainings	Conscious Classroom	Monthly Peer Learning Walks
New teacher training	Number Talks	Quarterly Peer observation release time
New to FCMS training	Formative Assessment	Monthly Co-Teaching PLCs
	Differentiation	Monthly Book Studies
	Rigor & Engagement	
	Culturally Responsive Teaching	
	Weekly articles	

3. GIVING CHOICE MATTERS

We think when teachers have time along with some amount of choice in how much and what type of professional development they get,

teachers respect and want to work with. The past two years, we've been very intentional to also try to keep it local by growing our own experts through a trainer of trainers approach whenever possible. By developing our own teacher leaders to be part of the