

The Learning Network

A Newsletter for Washington State High Schools that Receive Gates Reinvention Grants

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Turning Reform Into the Way We Do Business

We are all familiar—too familiar—with reforms that come and go, turning teachers into cynics, confusing parents, and leaving kids with the status quo. It's an unfortunate pattern.

In this issue, you'll read three stories about schools that are committed to breaking this pattern, to sustaining changes they are making.

These schools are very different—located in suburban and rural districts, on the west and east side of Washington State's Cascades. But all are committed to sustainability because they believe the changes they are making support improved student learning.

You will read about the three autonomous small schools newly formed on the Highline School District's Tyee campus. According to the former principal of the old Tyee High School, planners and design team members recognized that autonomy was critical if they wanted conversion—an incredibly challenging change—to stick. And they do.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Tonasket Uses Framework to Support Improved Instructional Strategies

Selecting an instructional framework can be a good starting point for a small school that's looking to improve teaching and learning. However, as staff members from Tonasket High School will tell you, how you implement that framework and how you use it to support the "something else"—in this case, other instructional strategies—is equally important.

Framework: a structure for supporting something else; a scaffold.

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Tonasket's selection of Understanding by Design (UBD) as an instructional framework wasn't actually the starting point for the staff's push to improve student learning. Instead, librarian Monte Smith points to an important 2002 retreat held after receiving the Gates Achievers Scholars grant, when the faculty decided to focus on assessment and personalization.

Seeking "instructional intentionality"

At first, the performance assessment strand led primarily to developing standard rubrics. "Halfway through the next school year, however, we realized we needed to take bigger risks than just drawing up rubrics," says Kevin Terris, English teacher and member of the school's planning team. "We needed to build instructional intentionality and a common working language."

Shortly thereafter, the district hired Kevin to fill a newly created full-time position of performance-based facilitator; his role was to build the staff's instructional capacity through in-house training. (Julie Colbert now holds the position half time.)

Along with several other Tonasket planning team members, Kevin had participated in the Gates Teacher Leadership Project (TLP) and had received training in UBD. He and the rest of the team felt that it was a framework that would help teachers pro-



Photo courtesy of Kim Kristensen

Clockwise from left: Kim Kristensen, Carol Lanigan, Kevin Terris, Jack Goyette, Cathie Dinkins, and Gordon Kent discuss milestones for their senior advisory projects.

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Photo courtesy of Kim Kristensen

Cathie Kinkins, Lida Lind, Jeff Hardesty, Gary Richie and Birdie Garner look over STAR's data, identifying students' weaknesses to improve student learning.

vide students with meaningful, authentic, and rigorous learning opportunities.

The school started with a two-year plan, in which teachers would become familiar with project-based learning (PBL) and with the way UBD could help shape projects to make them performance-based. In the first year, every teacher designed two lessons (called milestones) using UBD. At the same time, each met six times one-on-one with Kevin to discuss and improve these milestone lessons. The second year the staff was required to meet additional milestones.

Adding to the framework

While Kevin calls UBD “the gourmet meal of lesson planning,” he also notes that as staff members have developed their milestone lessons, they have added strategies and practices to their repertoires. For example, they meet in Critical Friends Groups (CFGs) to collaborate in what principal Jeff Hardesty calls “co-plan-

ning”—looking at milestone lessons and fine-tuning them.

This year, the staff is also practicing deeper data analysis. Looking at the WASL or other tests, each teacher is identifying a “common struggling strand” or deficit among students in one of their classes and then developing a lesson around that deficiency.

For example, when Monte looked at one class, she identified “critical reading of non-fiction texts” as a struggling strand. “So, since these kids are high school juniors, I designed a lesson around reading college catalogs,” she says.

Learning to use the UBD template, looking at data to identify deficiencies, and using CFGs as a way to tweak lesson design have been important steps for Tonasket teachers. “But now we are pushing to the next steps,” says Kim Kristensen, English and history teacher. “We’re talking about going into each others’ classrooms, and we’re about to start looking at student work in our CFGs.”

He says that while a small group of Tonasket teachers have had a chance to observe in other districts and practice using STAR (a classroom observation protocol that addresses UBD components), “going public” in their own classrooms will be a new challenge.

Creating sustainability

Monte and Kim both admit that the continued add-on of new strategies and requirements can, on occasion, seem overwhelming for the staff. But they point to the value of what’s happened—for the staff as a whole and for their own practice.

Monte believes that having a framework—and the work that’s been done to build upon it—has led to “more intentional and consistent instruction throughout the school” as well as to a common language for teachers and students. She says, “Now, when a class comes into the library to do research, I have the teacher and sometimes the kids fill out a form with their projects’ essential questions. Students may not know the term UBD, but they know what essential questions are. Clearly, as we’ve ramped up the rigor, the kids have responded.”

Jeff agrees that the staff now shares a common language and adds, “The dialogue that is taking place is so much more intellectual and rigorous.” He explains that the high school has been fortunate to have district support in the form of two early release half days a month, a practice that he believes is becoming institutionalized as staff use the time wisely.

Kevin sees teachers regularly using tools such as essential questions and learning plans to prepare lessons. As one of those teachers, Kim says, “Using the framework and essential questions guides what I do. I tend to cut extraneous stuff out of my lessons. It gives me more focus, and it gives the kids a clear focus, too.”

When Kim considers that the work that’s been done with the UBD framework and other instructional strategies, he concludes, “We’re beginning to view instruction as a process rather than an event.” And he’s hopeful that this work will “create a model of sustainability” that will last well beyond the life of the school’s Gates grant.

“Using the framework and essential questions guides what I do. ... It gives me more focus and it gives the kids a clear focus, too.”

KIM KRISTENSEN, TEACHER
TONASKET HIGH SCHOOL

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Register Now for the CES Northwest Symposium

The 14th annual Northwest Symposium will be held at Highline’s Tyee Campus on **Saturday, February 11**, and will include

workshops, panel presentations, an equity discussion, and a student summit. The cost is \$70 for adults and \$30 for students (presenters attend for free). You can register online at www.cesnorthwest.org.

SCHOOL NEWS



CREATING SOMETHING TRULY DIFFERENT ON THE TYEE CAMPUS

The Academy of Citizenship and Empowerment (ACE), Global Connections, and Odyssey: New Small Schools on Highline's Tyee Campus

- Each small school has 350 to 380 students, grades 9–12, including special education and ELL students.
- Each school has its own principal, counselor, budget, space, and staff.
- Shared services, supervised by a campus manager, include maintenance, security, lunch room, athletics, and the library.
- During the morning, each school has its own bell schedule. Electives (non-crossovers) are available throughout the day, as each school has its own PE/health teacher, and 1/3 of the art teacher and career specialist's time. The only two crossover offerings are band and Upward Bound during sixth period.
- Students from all schools can participate in after-school extracurricular activities.

“When we were a comprehensive high school...” or “last year at Tyee....” Those are the kinds of sentence starters you’re apt to hear when you visit the Tyee Campus in the Highline School District.

The sentences end with what’s going on in one of the three new small schools that opened on the campus this fall. A student says, “At Global Connections, you feel your voice is really being heard. It makes our learning environment safer.” Another student says, “At the Academy of Citizenship and Empowerment (ACE), you can already tell the difference. There’s more one-on-one contact with teachers.” A teacher says, “At Odyssey, the start of our school year was much less chaotic.”

A three-year journey begins

Max Silverman, who introduces himself as “Tyee’s former principal,” credits a dedicated staff, district support, and a commitment to autonomy as reasons why the opening of the new small schools went so well. Although he’s worked himself out of a job, you’d never know it by the smile on Max’s face when he talks about the results of three years of work.

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Hired as Tyee's principal in 2003, Max and the staff involved knew they wanted to do something different, although they didn't know what that would entail. Max says, "We just knew this wasn't the school we wanted for kids." Superintendent John Welch (then the district's deputy superintendent) shared that urgency, not just for Tyee, but for all district high schools.

At a recent "grand opening" event, John explained, "When we looked at data, we saw that although some students were being prepared for college, careers, and citizenship, many, many were not." The district's graduation rate currently stands at about 64 percent, and Tyee's historical rate is actually lower than that.

Under John's guidance, and with the support of Max and his staff, the Highline School board adopted a May 2004 policy that outlined its goal of graduating all students ready for postsecondary education, career, and citizenship. The policy outlined a number of core guiding principles and accountability measures.

The change process involves everyone

Over a period of several years, John and Max took groups that included teachers, classified staff, administrators, and parents on local and national trips to see schools that were "doing something different."

Colleen Brandt-Schluter, the school's community engagement coordinator, recalls, "The impact of those trips was huge. Seeing what others were doing really made a difference." Max says, "Given what we saw, we got clear about the fact that autonomy is critical."

Back on the Tyee campus, the process of dividing into small schools went forward, although Max says, "We didn't even know how many there would be until after January 05."

With the help of CES Northwest director Jan Reeder and others, students and teachers whittled about 40 ideas to 10 and then to three with the criteria being, "which three would help all kids get ready for college, life, and work." ACE, Global Connections, and Odyssey made the final cut.

Throughout the year, Colleen and grant coordinator Val Allan hosted 17 community conversations held in venues like middle schools and apartment complexes. During these events, participants discussed questions such as, "What do you want for your children and your neighbor's children? What are you willing to sacrifice to get what you want?"

Colleen says, "By the end of these events, parents got to see that we all want the same things for our children, no matter the race or the gender."

In June, students and their parents sent in their school preferences and the three new principals were hired. Earlier in the spring, teachers had noted their preferences, although in a staff-wide vote, they



Odyssey staff meets every other Tuesday after school.

agreed that they would be willing to work in any school.

Over the summer, work continued with the district doing the remodeling necessary to create separate offices for the new schools, and many of the staff helping to schedule students and smooth out details. And then on September 7, students came back to campus and their new schools.

The challenges of autonomy

Max notes that the opening of school was the smoothest and quietest in his memory, and that discipline incidents have decreased tremendously from last year's. Interestingly, his biggest headache, as the "former" principal, has been getting the phone system to work campus-wide.

However, transforming one big high school into three small ones continues to present plenty of challenges. For Odyssey principal Joan Ferrigno, one challenge

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Grant Support for the Tyee Conversion

Tyee received a small grant from the Discuren Foundation to begin research.

2003

Tyee was one of two comprehensive high schools nationally to receive a substantial Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) small schools grant. Conditions of this four-year grant state that each of the high schools located on Tyee's campus will consist of no more than 400 students and have separate principals and budgets, designated space, building decision-making processes, and staff that focus on providing high-quality education for all students.

With Highline's other three large high schools, Tyee received a four-year Department of Education Small Learning Community grant.

2004

The Highline School District received a four-year Gates Foundation grant to make improvements throughout the school system that will support the district's mission of graduating all students ready for college, career, and citizenship.

2005

SCHOOL NEWS

The Power of Belief—and Equitable Access

How do you create equity of outcomes?

At a recent Connecting Schools and Communities (CSAC) meeting, a panel of two adults and two students from Forks High School discussed how this issue is playing out in the school's internship program.

Counselor Stephanie Hofland began by describing the demographics of the school. In particular, she noted that while 80 to 90 percent of the students who come to her office to talk about college are Caucasian, those who are sent to her office for discipline are only 60 percent Caucasian. She also said girls score about 30 percent higher on the WASL than boys.

Then moderator and school coach Joe Hall asked the two students on the panel how they thought teachers would describe them. Senior Kelly Santman said, "As an A student," adding that "teachers will cut you more slack when you get good grades." Senior Jose Sanchez described himself as a "C" student.

Kelly and Jose illustrate what led Dave Demiglio, CSAC program director in Forks, to a "crisis of conscience" shortly after he arrived in Forks last summer. While he was impressed that



Photo courtesy of Ben Rutherford

Forks seniors Kelly Santman and Jose Sanchez talk about their internship experiences while Forks CSAC program director Dave Demiglio looks on.

86 community organizations and businesses had signed up to be part of the program, he soon learned that most of the internships were teachers' aide positions filled by students who fit that role.

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Truly Different, *continued from page 4*

is knowing that because the three schools share a campus and a number of services, there are always compromises to be made. She and the other two principals meet frequently with the campus manager and Max to work out the details of sharing.

For Odyssey language teacher Amy Vattuone, the challenge lies in teacher time and energy. She says, "We are all taking on more. And we are trying to do what we do better." In her role as grant coordinator and social worker, Val concurs with Amy and sees finding time to do everything that needs to be done—and do it well—as a major issue.

As community coordinator, Colleen sees how personalization can add to a teacher's sphere of influence. She explains, "As teachers get to know kids better, they see the deficits in their lives and what outside things are getting in the way of their learning. But teachers don't have the resources to meet these kinds of needs." So Colleen is working even harder to build community relationships and bring services to the Tye Campus.

The students, too, have struggled with some issues. For example, what about events like Homecoming? One school promoted having a campus-wide dance with royalty and formal dress while another school did not support the idea for social justice and equity reasons. A campus-wide dance was eventually held.

The rewards of autonomy

Just two months into the school year, Odyssey's principal can list plenty of positives. Near the top of Joan's list is "the beauty of being able to plan our own professional development." Her staff meets every other Tuesday after school. They sit in a circle and share what's happening

for them and their kids before tackling other issues. They also have early-release days and waiver days for instructional issues, but they always meet as Odyssey, and they are building close relationships.

And accountability, Joan adds. She explains, "Our teachers are willing to go public. They've agreed that it's okay to go into each other's classrooms at any time. So while you can't hide anymore, you can also feel safe."

One of Joan's favorite stories—one she believes illustrates the power of a small school—happened shortly after school began. When a new teacher shared her classroom management struggles with other Odyssey teachers, everyone jumped in to help. They called their advisees' homes, explaining to parents what kind of behavior is expected, and also helped in the classroom.

As a teacher, Amy says the culture of Odyssey is different than the culture of a larger school, and she credits advisories for some of this change. With a curriculum that is designed in-house, advisories meet for 20 minutes three days a week, and 50 minutes two days a week. "We all started out in our advisories doing work around how we treat each other," Amy says.

And what do the students say? At the recent grand opening, senior Yadira Mejia of Global Connections said, "This is my best year so far. It might not seem like a lot to have a teacher come up and say 'How was your day?' but it is." Helen Skipworth, Odyssey junior, said, "We're not as tense because we're not as lost. I can talk to any of my teachers now."

Both seemed to be affirming Superintendent John Welch's closing words at the event: "Something different is truly possible."

"Something different is truly possible."

JOHN WELCH,

HIGHLINE SUPERINTENDENT

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TLN



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“What we had was equitable opportunity for kids, but not equitable access,” Dave told participants. “In fact, some faculty told me to expect less from minority students and that if I let Jose do an internship he would embarrass me.”

Far from being embarrassed, Dave ended up being “as proud of Jose as if he were my own son,” especially when he heard Jose’s voice on a radio PSA announcing a community-wide children’s health event on November 17.

Jose has been interning this semester with Patsy Brown, director of the Community Resource Center at Forks Community Hospital. According to Patsy, he’s been a great intern, helping with office duties as needed.

He spent the entire day at the November 17 event helping parents fill out applications for health care. Patsy says, “Jose

interacted very respectfully with the parents and was sensitive to the fact that some of the information was very personal. He also interacted well with the teen volunteers we recruited... and showed a great example of serious mindedness.” She describes him as “personable, outgoing and hip.”

At the December CSAC meeting, Jose did not share many of these internship accomplishments, but he did tell participants, “I’m doing better now. I would say that I’ve changed.”

How do you create equity of outcomes?

According to the Forks panel, dealing with beliefs is an important component. Dave summarized the panel discussion—and echoed several audience responses to the school’s presentation—when he said, “They [our students] believe what we believe.”

“They [our students] believe
what we believe.”
DAVE DEMIGLIO,
CSAC PROGRAM DIRECTOR
FORKS HIGH SCHOOL

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