

# ***Oak Park and River Forest High School District 200***

*201 North Scoville Avenue Oak Park, IL 60302-2296*

TO: Board of Education

FROM: Dr. Laurie Fiorenza, Assistant Superintendent for Student Learning

DATE: May 26, 2022

RE: Priority 2 Professional Development & Grading

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BACKGROUND**

Priority 2 of the Oak Park and River Forest High School strategic plan indicates that through the 2022-2023 school year, a professional development plan will be implemented that is comprehensive and differentiated to support the needs of all teachers and the learning of all students. “Nothing within a school has more impact upon students in terms of skill development, self-confidence, or classroom behavior than the personal and professional growth of teachers” (Barth, 1981, p.145). Given the recent pandemic and changes in student needs, providing quality support and aligned professional development opportunities has been a critical task. Recognizing that to deliver high-quality and powerful learning experiences by positioning resources strategically, the Transformative Education Leadership Team (TELT) restructured professional learning time during the 2021-2022 school year. In previous years district-led professional development occurred during the two Institute Days and five Staff Development Days. Aware that the year and a half pandemic brought new and different challenges, the Transformative Education Leadership Team leveraged teacher collaborative time to increase the time available for theory and practice. The 90 minutes of teacher collaboration was divided into two parts. The first 30 minutes involved a district-led professional learning opportunity, with the remaining time allotted for the teacher collaboration teams to apply the theory utilizing guided questions from the district leadership team. In addition, all learning opportunities were aligned to the three district initiatives, assessment, restorative practices, instructional technology, and centered on racial equity. A summary of the professional learning opportunities provided during the 2021-2022 school year in each initiative category is detailed below.

## Assessment:

- *Equitable Assessment* - Dr. Robert Marzano and Dr. Patrick Hardy co-presented on Equitable Assessment, the intersection between assessment design, practices, equity, and philosophy. The opportunity to gain new perspectives around equitable assessments began with Dr. Marzano challenging our thinking around assessment validity and, more importantly, how we use this inexact information to make decisions about students' academic abilities, areas for growth, and need for intervention. Dr. Marzano and Dr. Hardy provided insight into more equitable assessment practices that would better inform all stakeholders about student learning experiences and ultimately support our work to create a district-wide assessment philosophy. Teachers considered and responded to the following questions:
  - In what ways can assessment acknowledge, facilitate, and reward growth?
  - What information should assessment communicate to students, parents, and teachers?
  - What practices and strategies contribute to the development of culturally relevant assessment?
  - What barriers exist to assessment that facilitates and rewards growth over time?

The professional learning experience and questions framed our work throughout the year to align a district-wide assessment philosophy to research and best practice.

- *Equity Through Assessment: Focusing on the Why Rather than the How* - Ashley Avila (English teacher), Megan Delaney (Instructional Coach), and Alexander Aschoff (Science Teacher/District Science and Technology Coordinator) shared a presentation focused on real-world ideas and examples of assessment strategies that foster equity in schools. These educators addressed practical topics like excluding nonacademic factors in grading, developing explicit learning targets from priority standards, aligning assessment items to instructional levels, assessing what is explicitly taught, and using summative assessments to affirm previous evidence.

The professional learning further framed our work to align to best practices and collaboratively craft a district-wide assessment philosophy.

- *Formative Assessment: the purpose, nature, and impact* - Teachers were provided three short excerpts from notable educational researchers and had time to read and process them. The excerpts included the following definition of formative assessment by Dylan William “assessments are formative to the extent teachers gather, interpret, and use evidence about student performance to make decisions about next steps in instruction that are likely to be better or better-grounded than the decisions they would have made without the evidence. In other words, assessment becomes formative when used to adapt teaching practices to meet student needs” (Black & William, 1998, p.140). After reading the excerpts, the teachers indicated on a jam board what they aspired to or would act on based on the information they read.

The learning opportunity served as a formative assessment for administration and guided the subsequent professional development on formative assessment. Additionally, this definition and common language guide the district toward a more systematic process of improved student outcomes.

- *Differentiation* - Lisa Westman, accompanied by Sarah Rosas (Instructional Coach), provided two professional learning sessions to all freshman teachers who are part of the detracked courses and the sophomore writing curriculum teachers in History, English, Science, and World Languages. The focus of this time was to understand how to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of students. Teachers engaged in a deep dive into the four categories of differentiation and common misconceptions about differentiation. The teachers also spent time previewing the roadmap for *Student-Driven Differentiation*. As a result, the teachers began to develop a shared understanding of what differentiation is and is not.
- *Executive Functioning* - Susane Allen, Executive Functioning Study Skills Interventionist, Amy Hill, History Division Head, and Dr. Lesley Roberts, Assistant Director of Special Education, provided two professional development sessions to all freshman teachers who are part of the detracked courses. The focus of this time was to identify areas of need and consider the supports that are required.

As a result of the work done by the presenters and teachers in these sessions, teachers made a collective commitment to teaching several common executive functioning skills to all freshman. In addition, these experiences resulted in teachers requesting additional professional learning sessions this summer to solidify executive functioning skills around homework, Google Classroom use, approaches to acclimating freshman, scaffolding, and training to use Formative (teacher data monitoring tool).

### **Instructional Technology:**

- *Co-creators* - The instructional technology department created a video to support teachers' understanding of and capacity to establish practices that engage students as co-creators in their learning using technology. There was also dedicated time allotted for teachers to engage in a rich discussion around the impact of establishing students as co-creators. The video included:
  - examples of lessons taught at OPRFHS that exemplify students as co-creators
  - further clarification on students as co-creators = empowered learners
  - strategies for embedding co-creation opportunities for students
  - templates to provide structure for enhancing or creating lessons that highlight students as co-creators

After the video, teachers used a template provided to select a lesson/project that could improve student voice and choice, thus empowering them as co-creators

- *Breakout EDU* - Similar to the commercialized "Escape Rooms," a Breakout EDU provides clues related to a chosen content and immerses participants in an active and collaborative learning experience. Oak Park and River Forest High School faculty and staff participated in a live session with BreakoutEDU team member Devin Lawton. Ms. Lawton introduced teachers to the Digital BreakoutEdu platform. In addition, she provided an overview of the resources, support, tips for success, how to adapt to your lessons, and how to put students in the driver's seat to create their content.

### **Restorative Practices:**

- *WIN (What I Need)* - Our faculty members took the ARTIC (Attitudes Related to Trauma-Informed Care) survey, one of the first psychometrically valid measures of trauma-informed care to be published. Survey results indicated that staff were

experiencing significant compassion fatigue (stress and weariness that results from the constant and changing demands associated with caring for our students). WIN allowed staff to focus inwardly and learn ways to decompress and place self needs at the center of attention to rejuvenate the mind, body, and spirit. Various faculty members facilitated WIN (What I Need) sessions that addressed the overarching need for staff to engage in self-care intentionally. Examples of the provided activities were: Introduction to the Calm app, Walking Club, Yoga, Reading Nook, and Stretching with Meditation. The purpose of this work was twofold; to help normalize the need for taking time daily for self and sharing the knowledge acquired in the spaces we occupy with our students to help them better understand what self-care in practice can be.

- *Trauma-Informed Care*- Invested Consultant Firm facilitated a customized, culturally responsive workshop that invited the staff to see their students and themselves as agents potentially affected by trauma. Staff was guided in identifying responsive strategies to support dysregulated encounters stemming from trauma while ensuring that the strategies are embedded with both grace and empathy. The goal of this learning experience was to provide staff members an opportunity to define trauma and explore how traumatic experiences can impact a school's educational ecosystem. The session concluded with four mindfulness activities to support the learning.
- *Gender Equity Training* - Potocsnak Family Division of Adolescent & Young Adult Medicine with Lurie Children's provided teachers with a workshop around gender sensitivity. The training addressed key terms and concepts related to gender and outlined the characteristics of gender-inclusive schools to implement inclusivity effectively. Additionally, the presenter shared approaches to talking about gender diversity with students, guardians, and the school community. Finally, teachers heard about behaviors that promote inclusive schools for staff, students, and families. After the training, teachers received the following resources to continue supporting an *inclusive and affirming school for all*:
  - [\*Beyond Binary: Gender in Schools \(Training Slides\)\*](#)
  - [\*Supporting the Transgender People in Your Life\*](#)
  - [\*Understanding Non-Binary People: How to be Respectful and Supportive\*](#)

- *Multi-Tiered Systems of Support*- The building Multi-Tiered Systems of Support Social-Emotional Behavior Team began the year orienting all faculty on using Community Agreements in the classroom. Each teacher was asked to develop classroom norms in every class in collaboration with their students, allowing students to feel a part of the agreed management of the setting. The MTSS-SEB team also introduced staff to the Panorama survey tool, which had a 2-fold purpose: Tier 1 identification of needs and placement for necessary skill-building through research-based Tier 2 Interventions. The team also utilized the time to refresh and facilitate circle practice and social-emotional learning strategies for the Tier 1 level, ensuring teachers are equipped to use these Tier 1 strategies in their classrooms.
- *Collaborative Action Research Team (CARE)* - Dr. Hardy and CARE Team leaders led five sessions. Each session was 90 minutes and paired equity with one of the three district initiatives. Teachers engaged in opportunities such as:
  - Interactive \*VIRTUAL\* leadership session using Instructional Technology to discuss and consider.
    - Currently, issues of technology and equity in education are often framed in terms of “access” and digital “participation,” both measures of formal equality that may leave us significantly short of substantive equity. Today’s conversations must begin to examine what it means to interrogate our assumptions about technology in broader ethical contexts and critically engage technology specifically for transformative educational goals of equity.
  - Affinity space allowed teachers of color to engage in a valuable discussion centered on the potential realities of our experience as Black/African American educators. This recognition of the experience/s and need for partnership in exploration and healing will guide teachers of color as they engage and support students and colleagues, creating valuable opportunities for learning and healing for students and staff alike.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

- During the 2021-2022 school year, a long-term professional development plan was developed and guided the learning opportunities.
- Survey responses following most Institute and Staff Development Days indicated that over 70% of the teachers agreed that the professional development would impact professional or student growth. Over 90% agreed that the professional development aligned with the district school improvement plan. Additionally, some teachers left comments indicating that the professional development opportunities needed to be more differentiated and more centered on their immediate classroom needs.
- Teacher Collaboration Team leaders provided feedback that the split time was hindering their ability to collaborate and work productively. As a result, the Transformative Leadership Team determined it was best to stop splitting the teacher collaboration time to include district-led professional learning and instead clarify the research-based purpose of collaboration time to ensure that shifts to instructional practices are systemically occurring and at a pace that provides equitable learning experiences for all students.

Focused on the four essential questions of a collaborative team:

- What do we want students to know?
- How will we know when students have learned the standard(s) (analysis and discussion of formative assessment data)?
- How will we respond when they don't learn?
- How will we respond when they already know it?

Collaborative discussions grounded in ongoing data analysis enhance the continuity of educational practices and skills among team members and ensure that professional learning is teacher-driven.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Feedback and data collected during the 2021-2022 school year guide the development of next year's professional development plan and include contributions from all departments in the building. This new approach will allow more individuals to have agency in the adult learning experiences of all staff members.

### *Administration*

- Provide resources and time for teachers to collaborate around clear proficiency standards and student performance.

### *Teacher Collaboration Team Leaders*

- Leadership training for the 2022-2023 Teacher Collaborative Team leaders will be provided on an ongoing basis beginning May 2022.

### *Instructional Coaches*

- Two instructional coaches focused on literacy, one instructional coach focused on classroom environment, and two special education instructional coaches (Math/Science, English/History) have been hired. They will be working with teachers in classrooms during teacher collaboration time, division meetings, and other professional learning occasions.
- Instructional coaches will provide job-embedded professional development to teachers based on their learning needs.

## **GRADING & ASSESSMENT BACKGROUND**

Priority 2 of the Oak Park and River Forest High School strategic plan indicates that by the Fall of 2023, OPRFHS educators will consistently integrate equitable assessment and grading practices into all academic and elective courses. In his book *Get Set, Go*, Thomas Gusky (2020) asserts that no one person can tackle grading and reporting reform. Instead, change requires a coalition of dedicated individuals committed to improving. Moreover, this coalition needs the support and backing of others when challenges arise. Ultimately, “grading and reporting reform is a complex process that requires the collaborative efforts of a team of leaders committed to improvement” (58). During the 2020/2021 school year, a team of teachers and administrators gathered to learn and discuss equitable assessment and grading practices. Collectively that group read and discussed five texts, including:

- *Grading for Equity* - Joe Feldman
- *Get Set, Go* - Thomas Guskey
- *Pointless* - Sarah Zerwin
- *What We Know About Grading* - Thomas Guskey & Susan Brookhart

- *On Your Mark* - Thomas Guskey

During the 2021/2022 school year, the Grading and Assessment Committee met to continue the work of clearly understanding equitable grading practices and consider the implications for their practice and impact on students utilizing the text *Get Set Go* by Thomas Guskey. In addition to rich discussions about grading and assessment practices at OPRFHS, the team invited three diverse students to engage in a panel discussion about their experiences with grading and assessment while at OPRFHS. The conversation was vibrant as teachers asked the students questions and received honest feedback. Teachers were inspired by the student's perspectives and insights and discussed inviting other students to share their experiences or even engaging students in a focus group.

In addition to the work of the Grading and Assessment Committee, our collaborative team leaders recently participated in a learning opportunity with Dr. Douglas Reeves, an accomplished and distinguished practitioner in the field of education. Dr. Reeves discussed grading with equity and shared practical issues for immediate impact with the group. While there is much to consider and understand in terms of the meaningful changes needed for equitable grading practices, there is no question that the “objective assessment of academic mastery, transparent expectations, growth mindsets, a focus on learning instead of points, and student agency” (Feldman, 2019, pg. 14) are necessary components of a culturally responsive classroom.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

Traditional grading practices perpetuate inequities and intensify the opportunity gap. Integrating equitable assessment and grading practices into all academic and elective courses requires the collaborative effort of a team of educators committed to improvements that benefit all students. Researchers like Thomas Guskey (2020) assert that “changing grading and reporting is a multi-year process that must be supported and sustained over a two - five year period” (pg. 58). Many OPRFHS teachers are successfully exploring and implementing more equitable grading practices such as: utilizing aspects of competency-based grading, eliminating zeros from the grade book, and encouraging and rewarding growth over time. Teachers and administrators at OPRFHS will continue the process necessary to make grading improvements that reflect our core beliefs.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Oak Park and River Forest High School administration and faculty will examine grading and reporting practices in academic and elective courses utilizing evidence-backed research and the racial equity analysis tool. The examination and reflection of practices will require that OPRFHS administration and faculty clearly define the following:

- Purpose for grading
- Proficiency

As a result of this reflective process, Oak Park and River Forest High School will establish a Philosophy of Grading that reflects a rigorous, meaningful, and evidence-based process by which student learning is understood.

## References

Black, P., & Wiliam, D.(1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education: principles, policy & practice* 5(1), 7-74.

Feldman, J. (2018). *Grading for Equity: What It Is, Why It Matters, and How It Can Transform Schools and Classrooms*. SAGE Publications.

Guskey, T. (2020). *Get Set, Go!* Solution Tree Press.