

JOPLIN HIGH SCHOOL



A Message from the Principal ***By Kerry Sachetta, Ed. D***

WINTER 2007

This semester is “flying by” and very soon we will be enjoying a break around the holiday season. We have much to be proud of during the first part of the school year especially considering our district has recently learned we will be Accredited with Distinction in Improvement for the 4th year in a row. We are extremely proud at Joplin High School to help the district receive the award by earning points in areas such as ACT scores, advanced courses, attendance, and career education courses.

A Job Well Done... Keep Up The Good Work!

The fall semester has seen our girl’s softball team once again prove they are the team to beat in Ozark Conference. The JHS football program had another good year and our debate squad continues to emerge as one of the top rated programs in southwest Missouri.

Next, our Eagle Time student incentive has provided us with an average of 50% of our students in the junior and senior classes meeting the incentive as it pertains to attendance and grades. Thus far we are pleased with our progress with Eagle Time and we will continue to monitor student progress for the incentive every grading period.

What is a Professional Learning Community?

Parents and community members, as well many students, may wonder just what really happens during Wednesday “Late Start” days when students are not yet in school. Each Wednesday morning Joplin High School begins school at 8:35 AM. But what do the teachers do from their typical start time of 7:30 AM till 8:15 AM each Wednesday?

The short answer is the teachers “collectively” review student work and plan common tests and exams to help measure students progress. The entire faculty is divided into departments (i.e. math, science, art, etc...) and they work together to improve student achievement in their respective classes. In addition, overall school improvement decisions are made by additional committees that are comprised of teachers from all departments. At each meeting a detailed log of the items discussed is documented for future reference.

Please refer to the following article that will help explain the basic philosophy of the initiative. Have a great holiday season!

Sincerely,

K Sachetta

Dr. Kerry Sachetta, Principal



**Professional Learning Communities:
Data Drives the Decisions While We Work Together
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Today it is not enough to make systemic changes in an educational system based on a hunch or a feeling a program or intervention will improve services. Our schools and school districts are often very large and bureaucratic. With the demands of improved academic performance and expected outcomes, educational leaders must be very thorough and calculated when implementing new programs and services. In addition, school officials must utilize effective professional development approaches to ensure their faculty gets the exposure and training necessary to properly implement new programs (or strategies) and to learn to properly evaluate their effectiveness.

The attitudes and beliefs about continued school improvement can be assessed very quickly by observing the behaviors of a school's faculty and administration. Does the staff meet consistently to review student data? Are meetings product oriented and organized to accomplish tasks related to improved student performances? And, could an outsider relate what he or she sees by observing professional learning in the school directly to the stated mission and vision of the organization? These questions can be answered positively in a professional learning community (PLC).

A properly implemented professional learning community initiative has in its foundation the three key questions about students: 1) What should students know and be able to do? 2) How do we know when students know what we have taught them? and 3) What do we do when students have not mastered the knowledge and skills we have taught them? And to answer those questions, faculties must develop high caliber quality common assessments to be implemented in the classroom consistently. After implementation, common assessments should be reviewed for quality, and student performance must be analyzed collectively and individually to ensure learning has or soon will be able to occur.

When the faculty organizes its meetings and discussions around student performance with agreed upon standards and expectations for mastery, instruction can eventually be improved in the collaborative process because of the burning questions that will be asked when comparing student progress on tests, "Why did your students score so well? Or how did you teach your students to get those types of scores?"

During the collaborative process trust must be built within each department and meeting group to alleviate bias and increase the sharing of successful ideas between faculty members. Trust takes time to build, and when it happens within groups great things can be accomplished for students.

Finally, every PLC will have different approaches to reach the same goal - improved student achievement. However, schools must address all of the following in some form to be called a professional learning community according to the Missouri Professional Learning Communities initiative:

- *The faculty utilizes on-going collaboration designed to achieve agreed upon goals through planning, implementing, and analyzing common assessments.*
- *Teachers develop their own leadership capacity, and the leadership of the school is widely dispersed.*
- *The constant use of data and best practice permeates the school culture.*
- *A system is developed that promotes a culture for sustainable school improvement with built in checks for quality.*
- *The learning of each student is monitored on a timely basis using a common core curriculum and common assessments with time within the school day for students to learn if they have demonstrated they are not achieving.*
- *Job embedded professional development leads faculty to best practices to attain student achievement improvements.*

By working with their faculty to create the conditions for a successful implementation of a PLC, school leaders must constantly use their own data on school performance and compare it to research based strategies and interventions that have been determined to be successful. The success or failure of any professional learning community rests not with the initiative itself but with the desire, fortitude, and willingness to embed the culture of a professional learning community into a school to solve problems - no matter what problems or situations arise.

Reference: Deffenbaugh, Carolyn. (2004). Missouri Professional Learning Communities Project Fact Sheet.

