Implementation Spotlight: Integrating Initiatives at Greater Lawrence Technical School

This month’s Spotlight is written by Assistant Superintendent/Principal Elizabeth Freedman from Greater Lawrence Technical School (GLTS). GLTS is one of six grant recipients of the 2013 Professional Practice Innovation grant focused on integrating implementation of educator evaluation and the MA Curriculum Frameworks (see sidebar article on page 2 for more information about the grant recipients). Read on to learn about how GLTS is promoting integration between these two initiatives.

GLTS is embarking on an exciting approach to curriculum development, professional collaboration, and educator evaluation—one that brings our academic and vocational faculty together to answer the question, “What is Great Curriculum?” Last year, GLTS implemented a restructured Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) to guide changes to curriculum based on the MA Curriculum Frameworks. Building off the ILT’s initial focus—the identification of mastery learning objectives—this group of teacher leaders and administrators is now leveraging the Professional Practice Innovation (PPI) Grant to support collaborative efforts of teachers in common planning groups to map the scope and sequence of each course down to the unit level.

“We are very excited about this funding. It will help us accelerate the process of bringing everyone together to create a common understanding of quality curriculum. We believe this work will result in us working smarter not harder.” Cherilee and Sue, ILT members

“The ILT has been developing the framework to begin a school wide curriculum initiative that will require further collaboration among staff and more connections to the new evaluation system. The grant will also provide us the opportunity to develop additional teacher leaders who can facilitate curriculum workshops for the entire faculty.” John Lavoie, Superintendent

As an Early Adopter school for the new educator evaluation system, we are constantly focused on the intersection between educator practice, program improvement and student growth. The PPI Grant has compelled us to take it one step further by making the connection between curriculum development, student learning and educator practice even more seamless.

Common planning groups will develop revised units of instruction that include activities and exemplars of high quality work, as well as benchmarked assessments that connect what students know to what standards were taught (and become the basis of our District-Determined Measures). Meanwhile, the ILT will develop a universal template to help instructors store successful units, mastery learning objectives, lesson plans and assessments in an online environment that is accessible to the entire GLTS community.

This coalescing of curriculum materials will also support a dialogue on what constitutes effective teacher performance, which will in turn solidify a common understanding of proficient practice. Supervisors will be tracking progress by continuing a system of six walk-throughs that engage evaluators to: a) observe classroom activity, b) identify levels of instructional proficiency, and c) provide feedback that will help teachers adapt their practice toward more successful teaching within the context of our updated curriculum.

Leadership at GLTS means modeling behavior that reflects caring about learning and improving opportunities for students to learn. The focused, collaborative work of the ILT, our common planning groups, and our administrative team will result in a stronger curriculum and set of benchmark assessments that align to the MA curriculum frameworks, support the growth and development of our instructional staff, and lead to real changes in student learning and achievement.

Announcements

Apply for the Educator Effectiveness Teacher Cabinet

ESE is excited to announce an opportunity for teachers to provide feedback and input on educator effectiveness initiatives!

Applications are due by Sunday, February 2nd. For more information and the application, please go here.

Recognize Exemplary Teachers

Nominations are now being accepted for the following programs:
- MA Teacher of the Year
- MA History Teacher of the Year
- Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching
- Distinguished Elementary Educator
- George Washington Teachers’ Institute (application)

For information on the different programs and on how to nominate teachers, please visit http://www.doe.mass.edu/educators/recognition.

Upcoming Grant Opportunity

Due to the popularity of Fund Code 213 and the ongoing work associated with educator evaluation and the MA Curriculum Frameworks, ESE will be offering the Professional Practice Innovation Grant again in February 2014. An informational webinar on Fund Code 213 will take place on March 4th, 2014. To attend, register here.
Implementation Study of MA Evaluation System

In Fall 2012, an research team led by SRI International, an independent non-profit organization, launched a multi-year study of Massachusetts’ new educator evaluation model. Preliminary findings from implementation year 1 are now available (Research Brief: Early Implementation of the MA Educator Evaluation Framework) and indicate areas of strength and progress, as well as areas of challenge. ESE is working to respond to these findings as we continue our support to districts. ESE’s responses to key findings are below.

- The majority of educators expressed generally positive views of the new evaluation system and reported that the new system has significant advantages over past evaluation practices. This finding is integral to the long-term success of the new evaluation model. In order to ensure that districts continue to move toward evaluation practices that promote professional growth and improve student learning, ESE will maintain its commitment to working with educators to build confidence in and find success with the MA evaluation system.

- Educators had mixed views of the fairness of the new system. This finding echoes educator concerns related to evaluator capacity, specifically evaluators’ ability to conduct evaluations accurately and thoroughly. Existing and upcoming resources will assist districts in helping evaluators to do this work well:
  - Distributed Leadership: The ESE Model System includes strategies for distributing leadership around the evaluation process, including (1) the identification of “supervising evaluators” (see Model Collective Bargaining language); and (2) adoption of a Peer Assistance & Review model (see Part I: District-Level Planning & Implementation Guide).
  - Role-Specific Supports: ESE encourages districts to explore Role Specific Indicators to augment the model rubrics, as well as rubric supports specific to school business administrators, nurses, and school counselors.
  - Comprehensive Evaluator Training: ESE has pre-approved four vendors to provide high quality evaluator training and coaching (see Category B vendors). Upcoming: ESE resource on evaluator calibration.
  - Implementation Timeline: ESE extended the implementation timeframe related to DDMs and the integration of student and staff feedback in order to give districts more time to do this work well.

- Labor-management relations based on collaborative resolution of implementation issues enhanced the rollout of the new evaluation system. ESE will be releasing model contract language related to DDMs (Winter 2014) and student and staff feedback (Spring 2014) to assist with the collective bargaining process.

- [E]ducators are still working to integrate the new evaluation system with other district reform initiatives… Districts are currently devoting time and resources to multiple, concurrent reform efforts of critical importance to our students. ESE’s goal is to help educators identify and facilitate synergies across initiatives, such that implementation of all initiatives is more effective and efficient. To that end:
  - ESE released a guide for using current assessments as a starting point for DDMs that features the Curriculum Embedded Performance Assessments included in ESE’s Model Curriculum Units.
  - ESE has published Quick Reference Guides on the integration of educator evaluation and the 2011 MA curriculum frameworks and professional development.
  - In Fall 2013, ESE launched the first Professional Practice Innovation Grant to support practices that integrate implementation of educator evaluation with the MA Curriculum Frameworks. Upcoming: December 2013 winners will share best practices at the 2014 Educator Evaluation Spring Convening, and ESE will open the grant a second time in February 2014.

- Administrators and school staff reported that they understood the components of the evaluation cycle; both groups, however, wanted more training and guidance on goal-setting and evidence collection.
  - To assist educators in the goal setting process, ESE has released training modules and workshops, as well as a suggested protocol for developing S.M.A.R.T. goal statements. Upcoming: ESE will be publishing example S.M.A.R.T. goals in Spring 2014 for all roles and responsibilities. To contribute your own S.M.A.R.T. goal(s), please email EducatorEvaluation@doe.mass.edu.
  - ESE has published tips and guidance related to strategic evidence collection in Part II: School-Level Planning & Implementation Guide, as well as the FAQ resource. Training modules and workshops related to evidence collection are also available.

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Supporting Integration with Educator Evaluation & MA Curriculum Frameworks

ESE congratulates the six recipients of the 2013 Professional Practice Innovation Grant:

- Abington Public Schools (in collaboration with Avon, Bridgewater-Raynham, Hanover, Rockland, West Bridgewater, Whitman-Hanson)
- Greater Lawrence Technical School
- Milton Public Schools (Pierce Middle School)
- Newton Public Schools
- Northampton Public Schools (in collaboration with Belchertown, Gill-Montague, Hadley, South Hadley, and Berkshire Hills Regional District)
- Watertown Public Schools

The Professional Practice Innovation Grant (Fund Code 213) was designed to: (1) support districts committed to integrating implementation of two of the state’s highest priority projects: the educator evaluation system and the MA Curriculum Frameworks, and (2) to promote innovative professional practices designed to strengthen coherence between high quality instruction and evaluation. The innovative professional practice initiatives put forth by this diverse group include:

- Inter-district collaboration to strengthen standards-based curriculum and develop related DDMs in Science, PE, Arts and Music
- Leveraging PLCs to engage in curriculum mapping and DDM-development with corresponding S.M.A.R.T. goals
- Development of an online Resource Bank for DDMs and resources associated with Writing-to-Text and Technology Literacy
- Teacher-led creation of curriculum unit plans and embedded assessments to be used as DDMs, all aligned to meet WIDA standards

The recipients are innovators in advancing professional practice and will collect, document, and share promising practices to inform and support other MA districts.
Questions from the Field

1. What resources are available to support educators and evaluators in completing formative assessments?

Formative assessments are an opportunity for educators and evaluators to review and discuss educator progress towards attaining goals, performance on the performance Standards, or both. Formative assessments typically occur midway through an evaluation cycle there are “no surprises” during the summative evaluation. Beginning on page 40, Part II of the Model System: School-Level Planning and Implementation Guide walks through the formative assessment process. ESE has also published several example forms that can be used by evaluators to guide formative assessments conversations.

2. What information will districts submit to ESE in preparation for implementing district-determined measures (DDMs) in the 2014-15 school year?

By February 2014, ESE will be publishing a DDM implementation plan template for districts to submit by June 1st, 2014. The implementation plan will request information about the DDMs being used for teachers, specialized instructional support personnel, and administrators. Districts will provide information on each DDM, including the DDM name, source (locally developed, open-source, or commercial), and information about the number of educators who will be using the measure. For more information about DDM implementation, review the Commissioner’s August 15th memo and look for updates about the submission process in the February newsletter.

Questions or Comments are always welcome at EducatorEvaluation@doe.mass.edu

Contact the Educator Evaluation Team

Claire Abbott, Evaluation Training Program, Implementation Support, Student and Staff Feedback
Susan Berglund, Evaluation Liaison to Level 3 and Level 4 Districts
Kate Ducharme, Implementation Support, Student and Staff Feedback
Kat Johnston, Communications, Peer Assistance & Review, Implementation Support
Simone Lynch, Assistant Director, Office of Educator Policy, Preparation and Leadership
Ron Noble, Evaluation Project Lead, District-Determined Measures, Student & Staff Feedback
Samantha Warburton, MA Model System, Evaluation Training Program, Data Reporting
Craig Waterman, Assessment Coordinator, District-Determined Measures

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is committed to preparing all students for success in the world that awaits them after high school. Whether you are a student, parent, educator, community leader, taxpayer, or other stakeholder interested in education, we invite you to join us in this endeavor.

“To strengthen the Commonwealth’s public education system so that every student is prepared to succeed in postsecondary education, compete in the global economy, and understand the rights and responsibilities of American citizens, and in so doing, to close all proficiency gaps.”

- Strengthen curriculum, instruction, and assessment
- Improve educator effectiveness
- Turn around the lowest performing districts and schools
- Use data and technology to support student performance