

## Promising Practices and Implementation Tools

### 1. Names & Positions:

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**3. Lever Addressed:** Professional Development

**4. Title of Promising Practice:** Professional Development: The Link to Student Learning

**5. District Where Implemented:** Brockton Public Schools

**6. Applicable Grade Levels:** K-12

### 7. How This Practice Reflects District's Mission & Core Values:

This promising practice reflects the districts mission to "Learn, Teach, Inspire and Achieve" and related commitments to achieve this mission such as: "invest in high quality researched-based best practices in professional development for faculty, staff and administration" as well as to "utilize data to develop curriculum, inform instructional practices, implement interventions and design professional development."

### 8. Goals of This Practice:

- 1.) Support and improve teaching and learning.
- 2.) Increase teacher time to analyze student work and collaborate on instruction strategies geared to the needs of students.
- 3.) Create a common language through a number of district wide initiatives.

### 9. Description of This Practice:

Brockton is committed to focused Professional Development designed to support teachers in implementing the Common Core Standards, as well as responding to the needs of teachers and administrators at varying levels of experience, through implementation of the New Educator Evaluation System. The district PD efforts operate on two simple but profound assumptions:

- 1.) If we want students to perform better than we must improve instruction.
- 2.) The way we improve instruction is to engage teachers and administrators in a systematic way, utilizing their leadership expertise.

Professional Development in Brockton is also focused on the integration of various initiatives on a citywide basis. Administrators and teacher leaders have worked hard to clearly communicate the message to all teachers that professional development, supervision and evaluation, school structures, teacher leadership, culture, induction,

recruitment and hiring are not separate initiatives, but all inextricably linked to the primary goal of improving teaching and learning. Linking the work of all levers is also intended to ensure sustainability over time.

Some examples of the dynamic Professional Development initiatives in Brockton are:

**K-12 Writing.** In preparing to adopt the new standards, Brockton recognized the need for a common language, common resources, and common expectations for writing across the district. As an initial step in building a unified understanding, a district team created a one-page writing overview produced by a diverse committee, which included teachers and administrators from the high school, middle school, and elementary levels. All disciplines were represented on the committee as well. A two-hour professional development module was designed to introduce the writing overview and template, followed by more in depth topic and content specific trainings at the building level. Some examples are: professional development on 6+1 writing traits, how writing can be incorporated into other disciplines such as social studies, art, health etc., how to write persuasively, research skills, and content specific modules in math.

At the K-8 level, a citywide training also occurred for the implementation of virtual science books through Discovery Education Textbooks. Utilizing this enhanced technology, students are exposed to richer resources not available through traditional paper versions, such as virtual labs, that bring student learning to another dimension. One indicator that reinforced the need to enhance science instruction at these levels was Brockton's Grade 5 Science MCAS scores. Overall, these results revealed a lack of readiness and inadequate exposure to inquiry based science. Similar to the teaching of reading, the implementation of this science curriculum is now achieved through a citywide interdisciplinary approach where the use of this virtual textbook is utilized across grade level and disciplines with a strong teacher support component. In essence, all K-8 teachers are now readily able to teach aspects of science, using a common tool and a common language.

At the elementary level, all K-5 teachers are engaged in the *Understanding By Design* process, as this model best aligns with Brockton's mission and core values. Two years ago, UBD was implemented in response to concerns over math scores at the 3rd and 5th grade levels. To improve math achievement, Brockton preferred to rely less on the specifics of their two adopted K-5 math programs, and more on common standards of mathematics by grade level. Using the backward design tool, teachers are engaged in on-going professional development where they meet for a day by grade level before they teach each math unit to

- 1) Unpack the standards
- 2.) Review student understandings
- 3.) Agree on varied assessments to demonstrate these understandings
- 4.) Collaborate on planning lessons differentiated to meet the needs of their students
- 5.) Make collective decisions about overall math instruction

Through a grant obtained from Lesley University, substitute teachers cover classrooms while teachers, special educators and ELL teachers participate in these daylong meetings. This year, an added value to these grade level meetings has been the pairing of the district's 11 elementary schools so that these unit planning meetings are conducted jointly between two sister schools, creating an even richer opportunity to share ideas, align instruction and plan lessons to match and challenge student needs.

Approximately two years ago, Brockton was chosen by the Center for Collaborative Education and DESE to pilot a professional learning community protocol, and two elementary schools participated in this initial endeavor. Five full days of training was provided to a cross section of teachers who then became the building based teacher leaders, responsible for expanding the training to their respective faculties. Since this time, the program has expanded to other elementary schools utilizing teacher leaders to facilitate additional trainings district wide.

Professional Development for paraprofessionals is another hallmark of Brockton's commitment to support and develop every professional who has a stake in student achievement at every level. In the fall of this year, over 350 K-12 paraprofessionals began trainings in a 7 session series that focuses on key areas such as cultural diversity in Brockton, behavior management, social and emotional learning, supporting children experiencing homelessness, emergency response in the classroom, disability awareness and the role of the paraprofessional in Health Services.

**How This Practice Addresses Criteria for the Professional Development Lever:**

As detailed below, this promising practice exemplifies many of the criteria necessary for successful implementation of Professional Development as it relates to continual school improvement:

The district provides data-driven, sustained learning opportunities aligned with the Common Core of Professional Knowledge and Skills for educators at all stages in their careers.

District has a comprehensive plan for providing educators with systematic access to all domains of the Common Core of Professional Knowledge and Skills.

Professional development provides substantive learning of content and pedagogy through sustained, ongoing experiences.

Professional development takes place in a variety of formats (workshops, courses, coaching, mentoring, lesson studies, professional improvement partnerships, and others)

Professional development is structured to meet the varying experience, needs, and content of teachers and administrators.

Multiple measures of student performance drive and inform professional development.

Teachers and administrators collaboratively plan professional development.

Professional development aligns district-wide and individual school priorities.

District uses qualitative and quantitative indicators to assess the impact of professional development on teaching excellence and student achievement. Professional development resources and allocated funds are used solely for professional development services.

#### **10. How This Practice Was Implemented So It Was More Successful Than Others:**

Brocton's approach is steeped in an obligation to professionally develop all teachers regardless of level of experience over their long-term careers in Brocton Public Schools. The success Brockton has achieved in implementing this lever is based on a commitment to citywide trainings in both content and pedagogy that underscore common expectations, common language and common resources.

The process of developing the K-12 writing overview, with input from a range of educators throughout the district, was vital to its success vs. adopting a more commercial based writing template. Because all levels and subject areas were represented, it was possible for all participants to brainstorm about how writing could be incorporated into their own teaching. The overall goal is that common expectations, spanning from elementary to middle school to high school, will help students to transfer their learning across subjects and grade levels. The collaborative review of drafts and the building of consensus during each step of the process also increased ownership across the district. As a result, the final product was highly focused on the specific needs of teachers and students in Brockton.

The districts' concerted effort to improve K-5 math scores by adopting the UBD model of design have resulted in clear advancements as measured by MCAS, district common assessments, and qualitative measures like walk-throughs. In addition, the full day that teachers are engaged in data based conversations about what they know their kids need, whether conducted by building or with a paired school, has underscored a shared responsibility, and have been more results based, collaborative and empowering.

#### **11. How This Practice Changed The District or School:**

Through citywide professional development at both the district and building levels, decisions that impact instruction at the K-12 level are more data driven, including a cultural shift that centers around less what teachers like to do and more about what the data suggests needs to be done to differentiate instruction. District wide efforts have also solidified a more consistent approach to all professional development efforts and created a stronger culture of collaboration.

District coherence to implementing strategies learned in professional development is supported and monitored in two ways: at the building level through observations and at the district level through periodic reports and common assessments. Rather than waiting for MCAS scores to measure the success of professional development, the district measures progress by focusing on the data gleaned from observation of instructional practice and formative student assessments.

Through successful implementation of the K-12 Writing Process and the K-8 Virtual

Textbook, teachers and administrators are more committed to the shared responsibility of teaching the skills of reading, writing and science content across all disciplines and grade levels.

**12. Resources (time, money, materials etc.) Required For Successful Implementation:**

Budget allocations for related materials, substitute teachers, stipends for leadership roles and developing the writing overview.

Partnership and grant funding from Lesley University, DESE and Center for Collaborative Education.

Time, in the form of common planning times, professional days, staff meetings, summer workshops and retreats are also a key resource. In addition, discussions are currently underway to increase time for professional development by 6 half days for the 2014-1015 school year and reinstate critical retreat time for all K-12 administrators to plan and collaborate.

**13. Tools You Used To Implement or Advance This Practice:**

**See separate attachments:**

1. Brockton Writing Overview-Pre K-12
2. Brockton Public Schools- Paraprofessional Development program
3. *Understanding By Design* Planning Template- Adapted for Brockton Public Schools