

## PROMISING PRACTICE AND IMPLEMENTATION TOOL

The following is the Lever for Educator Excellence that most closely applies to the practice detailed below.

### Professional Development

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**Title of Promising Practice:** *Partnering Up to Provide Professional Development for Low-incidence Specialists*

**District where implemented:** Malden Public Schools, Malden, MA 02148

**How would you describe this practice?** As has been noted by many researchers, professional learning can come in many guises, some familiar and some not, some from within a district and some from without. What happens to professional development in program areas for which there is no formal district leadership? For specialists who do not have on-site directors as advocates, it may be necessary and effective for PD initiatives to be facilitated by an objective outside expert, with subsequent long-term faculty work occurring within the professional learning communities faculty members create. How did Malden use this type of model to serve the professional development needs of some low-incidence specialists?

The Malden Public School district has numerous days and hours dedicated to on-site professional development, including three full days (one in September, one in November and one in January), three early release days with 90 minutes of PD, and potential additional time on weekends with a small stipend provided to teachers who participate. This time is used to address district, building and program needs, so it is a particular challenge to provide high quality content-focused professional development for program areas that do not have program directors and whose teachers

are spread out in many different schools. That challenge became apparent to Kelly Chase, new to the assistant superintendency in Malden, when she created a PD grid to detail the nature, quality, and logistics of what was happening with professional development throughout the district. Data made clear that the Visual Arts, Music, Technology Education and Foreign Language programs did not have cohesive professional development plans that connected theory and practice. For that reason, Dr. Chase met with each program area to complete a detailed professional development needs assessment.

Once needs were articulated for each program area and plans were in place, Dr. Chase and the teachers looked to successful past PD experiences and relationships to (1) identify facilitators whose expertise and interests matched those of the faculty members' needs and (2) arrange for those individuals or institutions to provide professional development to meet the needs identified in the Malden PD plans. For example, Foreign Language engaged an assistant professor of literacy and language education from Boston University to provide curriculum guidance. That guidance included a full-day curriculum review followed by guiding questions and discussion materials for teachers to be used in meetings at the building level. Notes from these discussions were sent to the professor who then followed-up with electronic feedback. At least one additional full-day session was used to establish a vision and course of action for the Foreign Language department. For a small stipend, teachers continued their work on two scheduled Saturday sessions where the assistant professor guided available teachers through curriculum development and related discussions. Teachers not only enjoyed the interaction with someone from higher education, but also the time for vertical discussion.

In other program areas, similar partnerships evolved. Tech Ed made a connection with a local vocational technical high school and its faculty for visitations geared to updating curricula and pedagogy. Music engaged an assistant professor of music education from Boston University to discuss music curriculum as it relates to the Common Core and how to deliver a solid curriculum given the fact that specialist teachers often meet with students on a less-than-regular schedule. Visual Arts established a relationship with the Boston Museum of Fine Arts curriculum liaison to participate in curriculum

workshops, gallery walks, and connecting art to classroom activities. These partnerships will continue to evolve over time.

**6. What are the goals of this practice?** Building professional development partnerships with universities, other public schools, and cultural institutions is designed to provide teachers with opportunities to work together to add to their content knowledge and improve their teaching practice. This goal is consistent with the characteristics of effective professional development as a lever of change in a district: 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, critical friends groups, lesson studies, professional improvement partnerships, and others). Teachers and administrators collaboratively plan professional development. Professional development aligns district-wide and individual school priorities.

**How does this practice reflect your district's mission and core values?** The Malden Public School district seeks to foster a culture of collaboration among all stakeholders in the district. To that end, it has focused the year on providing Malden faculty members professional development opportunities to learn from others and themselves; thus the partnerships that have been fostered help the district to build capacity among teachers. What they learn they take back to the classroom and use. Similarly, the ideas that emerge at each session are fodder for subsequent online discussion and refinement.

**8. What grade levels are applicable?** K-12 faculty in identified departments

**9. How did you implement this practice so that it has been more successful than others you have used?** The district reached out to teachers in the identified departments in order to hear their voices on what they needed for professional development. It was their ideas that gave the assistant superintendent the guidance she needed to secure professional development opportunities that were valuable for them.

**How has this practice changed your district?** This practice is still very new and, as such, continues to evolve. The district will be examining data from needs assessments given to identified faculty at both the beginning and end of the academic year to see how to best nurture and grow these partnerships so that they become long-term relationships for the district.

**What are the resources (time, money, materials, etc.) required for successful implementation?** The district used Title IIA funding to support a portion of the professional development. To make a trip to the MFA a reasonable expectation, the district organized a later start day (to allow for travel time) and covered the cost of parking. In terms of materials, the cost was very low, since teachers brought to the PD exactly what was needed: the capital necessary to engage in meaningful discussion.

**Please see the attached professional development day menu, which is one of the tools used to implement or advance this practice.**

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