

Promising Practices and Implementation Tools

- 1. Name & Position:** Russell Johnston, Superintendent of Schools
- 2. Email & Phone:** rjohnston@wsps.org
- 3. Lever Addressed:** Supervision and Evaluation
- 4. Title of Promising Practice:** Pilot & 1st Year Implementation of the New Educator Evaluation System

- 5. District(s) Where Implemented:** West Springfield School District
- 6. Applicable Grade Levels:** PreK–12

7. How This Practice Reflects District's Mission & Core Values: The new supervision and evaluation system embodies the mission and core values of the West Springfield Public Schools in that it focuses on student learning and the centrality of the classroom; establishes high expectations; ensures equity; fosters integrity; and creates an environment that supports collaborative problem solving at all levels and across all disciplines.

8. Goals of This Practice:

The goals of this practice are 1) Effectively introduce and then partially and fully implement the new evaluation system for educators and administrators. 2) Use this system as a way to connect to the overall improvement process for the district so it aligns with professional development, teacher collaboration, goal setting and professional practices.

9. Description of This Practice and How it Addresses Criteria for This Lever:

West Springfield is not an early adopter district, however, the decision to pilot during the school year 2010–2011, was based on the premise that all affected by the new evaluation system would learn by doing. One of the most important underpinnings of the pilot is the shared commitment of the Teachers Association and Administration to jointly work together to address any change that presents new challenges and new opportunities for all involved.

In the pilot year, representatives of both groups began by acquiring and reviewing the forms that the adoptive systems were using, and decided that the best course of action was to ask for volunteers from each school to work with the supervisor and evaluator in their building. In essence, one volunteer was teamed up with one principal, assistant principal and SPED director (4 volunteers at the high school level) to review the process and attend DESE trainings, which greatly helped to clarify how to best use the forms.

This pilot group met quarterly to share what they had learned and to begin planning for taking the process to a much larger group in school year 2012–13. This collaboration not only provided better understanding of the process, but created experts in each building to help support and strengthen the 1st year implementation phase of the new system.

Based on this successful experience throughout the district, the change in the contract language was negotiated and easily ratified, which paved the way for the Co-President of the Teachers' Union and the Superintendent to co-lead trainings for the entire district in May of 2012. This joint venture was symbolic of the trust and shared commitment to work together and yielded a great amount of positive feedback from teachers.

Additional PD time was given teachers and administrators in June that resulted in two important next steps: teachers starting the process of writing their self assessment and goals for the upcoming year, and completing a lottery to determine which 50% of the teachers on professional status would participate in the first year of implementation. Teachers were placed on logical teams, i.e. 6th grade math, 4th grade building team, so that the drawing was based on teams who would then collaborate to create their individual self-assessments and goals. This approach also resulted in a great deal of positive feedback, which set the tone for continuing the process in the 2012–2013 school year with a positive perspective.

Another factor that put both teachers and administrators at ease in the 1st year of implementation was identifying and focusing on seven

primary elements most important for West Springfield, while keeping the others running in the background. These same seven elements were identified across the board so that the rubric for teachers, specialized instruction support, principal and superintendent focus were consistent, allowing alignment of practices across all standards and indicators.

To keep abreast of progress and support teachers and administrators, a Steering Committee was formed comprised of the nine building reps and union representatives to meet once a month with the Superintendent. Throughout the pilot and implementation stages it has been important to check in with teachers to gauge how the process was working as well as the learning that was taking place.

This feedback loop, sharing, and group problem solving has produced a number of positive outcomes to date (five of which are attached as implementation tools):

- 1.) Out of the growing concern for identifying appropriate artifacts at all levels, a suggested list was generated and shared. In addition, a "Bring Out Your Artifacts Day" was planned in February as an opportunity for staff to meet with the principal on an optional basis to obtain feedback mid year. Prior to this, the Superintendent modeled this feedback opportunity with all principals in January, each sharing their own artifacts for feedback, as a way of experiencing both the learning and anxiety the new process may produce for teachers.
- 2.) A resource list with links to articles and videos was created to support a shared understanding of rubric terms, such as "student engagement" and "guided practice.
- 3.) A FAQ forum and Superintendent's blog was created so that the entire process is transparent for teachers, principals, and school committee.
- 4.) In addition, the seven elements identified for West Springfield were embedded into everything that the district has done throughout the year. For example, every month the Administrative team selects one of the articles from the literature bank to review and discuss; a list was

created for principals, identifying the key areas to address during monthly walk-throughs with the superintendent; and embedded into the New Teacher Induction Program meetings is the practice of reading an article or watching a video etc. to address one of the seven elements per meeting. As a result a deeper understanding of terms such as guided practice, student engagement, differentiated instruction and focused assessment is created for teachers and administrators at all levels of experience.

5. A Memorandum of Agreement was developed with the teachers' union stating that any teacher entering the first or second year of this new system will end year 1 as proficient. This has gone a long way to enhance the trust level between teachers and administrators and reinforce that this first year of implementation is a learning year for all.

6.) As part of the superintendent's growth plan, a survey was developed for eliciting feedback in December 2012 and June 2013. The December survey has also gleaned positive feedback as well as identifying areas needing further work. For example, one critical outcome that surfaced in the survey, even though it was a concern beforehand, was the principal's capacity to keep up with the demands and expectations this new system requires. The district will continue to move forward to address this issue with hopes that department chairs will eventually have the capacity to go into the classroom to supervise and evaluate, a position that the survey has helped to strengthen.

7.) Lastly, one "aha" moment regarding the collection of artifacts has resulted to date. A growing concern of administrators is that some teachers are spending more time focusing on artifacts than reflection on their instruction. One step toward addressing this is currently under negotiation with the union, identifying the circumstances when a list would be acceptable as proof of specific goals vs. all seven elements, e.g. participating in an IEP or Child Study meeting. If this is agreed upon, the process would be similar to the IRS system of collecting evidence, meaning that one would need to be prepared to show evidence if "audited".

8.) Based on survey and Steering Committee feedback, plans are

currently underway for continued professional development and full implementation of the New Evaluator System during the 2013–2014 school year.

Criteria Addressed Within This Practice:

Supervision and Evaluation

The district provides frequent, on-going high-quality feedback focused on professional growth to maintain high standards of performance aligned with the Common Core of Professional Knowledge and Skills. The district promotes a culture of continuous improvement through a combination of formal evaluations and ongoing, informal instructional feedback. Reflection, self-assessment, and self-improvement are designed into the evaluation system for all teachers.

Educators are evaluated in alignment with the Common Core of Professional Knowledge and Skills.

The evaluation instrument of the district provides for comment and feedback to teachers on the full range of roles, responsibilities, and skills of professional teaching including Relations with Parent and Community, Contributing Member of the Staff, Performance of Routine Business and Duties and one's Own Professional Growth.

The district provides evaluators with extensive professional development and support to ensure compatibility and congruence with one another, proficiency in observing and analyzing instruction, and skill at communicating instructional feedback. Evaluator professional development is provided each year to those new to the evaluator role, and periodic updates are conducted for all personnel.

Professional Culture

- The superintendent at the district level and the principal at the school level ensure there is an articulated set of core values that drive behavior and decisions as well as an organizational culture that supports open and honest communication, continuous professional improvement, data-based decision-making, and joint responsibility for student learning and achievement. District and schools are characterized by a climate of shared

responsibility for continuous improvement.
Data are continuously examined and analyzed to guide instructional decision-making.
District and school culture is characterized by trust and willingness to discuss “undiscussable” issues.
Superintendents and principals are evaluated on their ability to build a workplace culture of non-defensive examination of teaching practice and leadership practice in relation to student results.
Superintendents and principals receive professional development to enhance this capacity.

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

One factor that has made this more successful than other practices is that teachers were asked to volunteer to pilot this new system as a way to learn, address issues and work together to match the new implementation system to the needs of the West Springfield School District. Narrowing the elements and aligning them at all levels, so that the teachers are working on the same areas as the principals and superintendent, has also helped the district rise up to create critical practices together. Unlike past practices, it is also believed that if you asked teachers what the critical elements West Springfield is working on based on the focused rubric, they would be able to tell you.

11. How This Practice Changed The District or School:

The district is more unified and definitely more focused on key practices. This focus has also helped to align professional development, leadership work and resources across the district.

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

1. Use of OASYS, a web based program within My Learning Plan. The Superintendent can then use it as a monitoring system and teachers have easy access to all resources, district webinars, forms and evaluation write-ups.
2. Quarterly meetings with the Steering Committee and release time for leaders.

3. Time for DESE training, which includes Teacher Union and School Committee reps.
4. Survey Monkey – resource acquired and used to conduct bi-annual survey.
5. Reciprocal sharing of resources with the Teachers' Union and School Committee such as MASS and MTA newsletters.
6. Superintendent's Blog

13. Tools You Used To Implement Or Advance This Practice (surveys, needs assessments, technology tools, rubrics, feedback Forms etc.)

See separate attachments:

1. Educator Evaluation System Focused Elements Resources
2. Educator Evaluation System Suggested Artifacts List – TEACHERS
3. Teacher Survey
4. WSPS Teacher Rubric Priorities
5. Educator Evaluation Steering Committee– March meeting minutes