

**Year-Long Proposal Plan for Teacher Learning**

**Michigan State University**

**EAD 824 – Dr. Nancy Colflesh**

**Kevin Nathan Moore**

## **Proposal for Year-long Plan for Teaching Learning**

### **I. Introduction**

After five years as a teacher at North Saginaw Charter Academy, I believe we are at a crossroads. On the one hand, I feel confident in the fact we have made significant growth with academic achievement and creating positive student relationships. The success we have had can be credited to implementation of programs such as Capturing Kids Hearts, as well as structuring our school day to include grade – level planning periods for staff. I can speak from personal experience on these changes when I reflect on how my own teaching practices have improved – both in content, and in my ability to teach high order thinking skills to help students connect knowledge across standards.

However, there are mitigating factors at our proverbial doorstep that could create potential problems down the road. An influx of students from the Saginaw School District, along with a higher turnover rate for staff, brings new issues to the forefront. For one, how do we (as a staff) expect to grow from Professional Development without taking the time to foster strong connections with one another? How do we quickly assimilate new members of the learning community – staff or student – to the NSCA way? Lastly, how do we continue to hone and shape our ability to grow from thoughtful discussion and feedback?

It is with these questions in mind that led me to create this proposal you are about to read. My proposal contains two components that will help the school continue to thrive towards excellence. The first proposal is help teachers and other staff members communicate effectively through the use of dialogue; this best practice will be focused on in a large group setting. The second part of the proposal, to be completed in a smaller group setting, involves the creation of

Critical Friends Groups (or CFGs) to give staff members an outlet to practice listening, observing, and subsequently learning how to receive feedback from peers to guide student instruction.

Both proposals will be done throughout the year, with the purpose of giving the staff new strategies they can use in the school environment. The intended goal of the proposals is to extend the practices to our students, to create a classroom environment where students have a better understanding of the collaboration process.

## **II. Background & Rationale**

The idea for these proposals directly stems from my work in Assignment One of TE 824. In that assignment, I was asked to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses I felt existed at North Saginaw Charter Academy. One of the biggest weaknesses I believe we have is an unhealthy amount of competition within our staff. When everyone is trying to outperform each other – at the expense of working as a team to improve school culture – it keeps us from having a true growth mindset.

Often times, staff meetings are debates, rather than true dialogue. As mentioned in the book *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning* (on pages, 132-133), debates are more oppositional in nature; opposing sides are competing to be proven right. With dialogue, the intended focus is to listen and create meaning from differing ideas to find common ground.

Along with an unhealthy competitive spirit, the staff of NSCA also struggles with accountability and an inability (by some members of the staff) to be open-minded to best practices. This is why it is essential to have CFGs in our school culture. CFGs will hold staff members accountable for what they are discussing with group members. It will also connect

members of our staff that previously had little to no communication with each other. The intended effect of the proposal will be to instill trust and belief that there is a lot of good information and input to be found with colleagues.

### **III. Proposal for Leading Teaching Learning**

**Dialogue:** The goal of establishing effective dialogue with the members of the staff would be to aid in the development of compromise and finding common ground between grade levels. If our school decided to place a higher level of importance on dialogue, more of the staff would be willing to offer suggestions and input. Has we acquired new ideas and suggestions, the opportunity to have truly find best practices.

#### *Anticipated Experiences:*

- At the beginning of the school year, the staff will become familiar with the two forms of dialogue: planned and spontaneous. Planned dialogue occurs when people know in advance that the intended talk will be a dialogue, as opposed to a discussion or debate. Spontaneous dialogue, which occurs more frequently, comes more naturally to those who practice structured dialogue.
- To help us become familiar with dialogue, I will supply the steps found within the Powerful Designs for Professional Learning on pages 137-139 to help facilitate a greater understanding of the topic.
- For an example of how to set up planned dialogue at the beginning of the school year, I looked to our recently made decision to offer busing transportation to our students. This decision has created the need to have staff either arrive at the school at least a half hour prior to what was previously requested, or stay at least that amount of time afterwards. It

would be beneficial to have staff members use planned dialogue to discuss who wants to arrive early or late to help support the administration.

- Our school data illustrates that the boys in our building account for a higher percentage of disciplinary issues. Furthermore, they are being outperformed by the girls on both NWEA and MEAP testing. Therefore, in my proposal I have set aside time at the beginning of the year to discuss how to equip our male students with the necessary skills to be successful.
- The concept of practicing effective dialogue will be led by our Principal and Deans, and will occur during full staff meetings. The role of the teachers and faculty will be to receive the guidelines and expectations of dialogue, and then apply the principles of dialogue in both the larger group format, as well as within the confinement of small group.

**Critical Friends Groups:** The goal of beginning Critical Friends Groups within the building is to create accountability and buy-in to the steps and strategies we are using school wide. Critical Friends Groups would meet regularly to establish a strong foundation between staff. Through consistent contact, staff members would learn to trust and support each other, which help to raise the amount of learning and growth that can be created. CFGs will foster a more beneficial working relationship across our K-8 teams.

*Anticipated Experiences:*

- Initially, the participation in a Critical Friends Group would be on a voluntary basis. The reasoning behind this would be to begin the process with members of the staff who feel strongly about the potential impact of learning that could come from being a part of the team. Making it mandatory would create initial feelings of hostility, which would cause a large disruption in the early stages of development.

- Using the website [www.nsrfharmong.org](http://www.nsrfharmong.org), staff members would view a presentation on the purpose of a CFG to help create interest and enthusiasm in the project.
- Since we are shifting our planning on units and assessments towards the Common Core State Standards, the first role of the Critical Friends Groups would be to explore best practices in the classroom. An example of this would be to look at creating Accountable Talk across the curriculum. Reviewing teaching and assessments for rigor will also be addressed.
- Critical Friends Groups will begin in a small group setting, with the intended result of being an integral part of our large group discussions.

#### **IV. Timeline**

##### Dialogue Timeline:

- The facilitator (i.e. Principal or Dean) will cover the steps to learn and practice dialogue skills during Professional Development before the start of the school year.
- Staff members will be shown the steps and norms necessary to run a Socratic Seminar on reading content. The goal will be to enhance teacher learning and development. The first Socratic Seminar will be a walk-through led by the facilitator to demonstrate an effectively run discussion. Staff members will take notes on the process, as well as ask clarifying questions.
- At least one of our 4 monthly staff meetings – preferably the third staff meeting of the month, will be dedicated to conducting Socratic Seminars. Expectations will be clear, and teachers will be given opportunities to showcase leadership skills by running these seminars themselves. Each Seminar will have a leader and a reporter, who will jot down notes and observations

- Additional staff meetings will feature varying structured forms of dialogue – such as a final word protocol – as needed throughout the school year.

#### Critical Friends Group Timeline:

- Group members will meet on a monthly basis for a time duration no greater than 2 hours.
- As previously stated, CFGs will have a focus on assessment strategies and best practices. Teachers will discuss class experiences, share data and observations, and analyze student and teacher observations.
- A barometer of success for the CFG will be taken from the results of the NWEA testing, which occurs in September, January, and May. Data from these assessments will be used to drive or shift focus onto another concept.
- Teacher feedback and reflection – though informal – will also be used to gauge if the CFG is meeting its' intended outcome.

#### **V. Evidence of Accomplishment**

One of the first pieces of data I would look at to gauge the success of introducing effective dialogue would be to review employee satisfaction. When we recently discussed staff satisfaction, one of our critical elements to address was making sure employees felt supported and nurtured by both faculty members and administration. If we are successfully adopting dialogue – whenever possible – our staff will begin to feel appreciated and prioritized as an essential part of the learning community.

Evidence can also be gleaned from staff meetings. The amount of time spent on planned dialogue can be monitored, as well as how often we use resources dedicated towards strong discussion. Protocols for dialogue can be found at [www.harmonyschool.org](http://www.harmonyschool.org).

When it comes to Critical Friends Groups, evidence of accomplishment can be found both formally and informally. Results of student achievement, derived from MEAP, NWEA, and classroom instruction will be used as a measuring stick of accomplishments. Informally, teacher feedback about the positive outcomes that came from working with colleagues will help draw more faculty members to the process. Much like dialogue, the notes and observations taken from the CFG participants can be reviewed from the first meeting to the one at the end of the school year for clarity and rigor.

## **VI. Anticipated Impact**

The impact of placing these two relatively cost effective learning designs in place would be to create a more open and supportive school culture. This would have a great effect on both returning teachers and new hires to the building. The learning designs have a symbiotic relationship: dialogue creates genuine feedback and helps strengthen listening and collaboration skills, which can then be applied to Critical Friends Groups. With a growth mindset in place across K-8, the opportunities for each of us to become stronger leaders and learners dramatically increases.

Through these protocols, we can also reflect on the progress of our male students, as a way to see the positive aspects of applying both proposals with fidelity. I believe with a high degree of certainty, that the hard work we put into ourselves as educators and the collective school culture, will yield high expectations and development for everyone. Furthermore, I feel more faculty members will be drawn to create additional CFG's during the next year. This will occur because of the tangible results and enthusiasm shown through implementation.



## **VII. Summary**

In conclusion, I feel confident that what has been identified in my proposal will help usher North Saginaw Charter Academy to the next level. We have always had the faculty members in place...with genuine belief that each child can succeed, regardless of gender, race, or economic status. What we have been lacking are protocols that help to “teach” us how to interact with one another. My proposal will help staff to see that differences do not need to create conflict; rather, our differences will help foster a community of compassion and understanding. When we get to that type of growth mindset, the sky truly would be the limit to what we could accomplish.

## **VIII. Next Steps**

While the introduction of dialogue would be applied school wide from the beginning, Critical Friends Groups would start on a much smaller scale. The intended outcome of this would be to showcase to the staff the amount of growth and development of the teachers that chose to be a part of the initial CFG. Knowing the amount of competition among staff members (which, while greatly reduced by the effects of dialogue, would still be prevalent amongst the faculty), CFGs would be adopted by more teachers, since it produced a quality gain.

As for dialogue, my expected next steps would be to take the skills acquired throughout the year, and move them from the teachers to the students. One way we could achieve this would be through the process of Accountable Talk. Accountable Talk creates an environment within the classroom setting where students are challenged academically through positive discussion and feedback. The greater amount of time students have to discuss and reach a consensus

without being fully teacher-led, the higher the probability that information is being processed on a higher order level. When students are undertaking the talking and thinking in a class, they are also achieving the learning.