TEAM TEACHING & COLLABORATION

St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Academy in Slave Lake is a small school, and teachers of speciality subjects were becoming isolated – this became apparent through the staff satisfaction surveys. Data gathered on this issue from the *TELL Them FROM Me* and the Accountability Pillar prompted the school to implement a formalized team teaching approach.

This series of resources presents effective practices implemented by some of the 27 schools involved in the original High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project (HSFEPP) as they explored ways to use flexibility to increase student engagement and achievement and to support quality teaching in their schools.

This series represents a sampling of the effective practices being implemented in redesign schools across the province.

What are Team Teaching and Collaboration?

Trevor Mitchell of the Academy says, "Team Teaching is the assignment of teachers to teams according to genre, so for example, the Humanities teachers and support staff comprise one team." For one half day, they are responsible for teaching students their assigned courses – for Humanities, the courses would include Social Studies, Health, Religion, English and CALM.

Teachers within the team sort out how much time they need with students. The team may decide to split up students on a skills basis or for remediation. Another configuration may be according to interest – one teacher might teach a certain type of short story to one group of students, while another teacher teaches a different type of story to another group of students, based on their own choice. The teachers also focus on hands-on learning that allows for cross-disciplinary work, incorporating subjects like English, Social Studies and CALM. As is common in small schools, teachers sometimes have to combine courses already, so cross-disciplinary work wasn't a great leap for the school's teachers.

How the school set up Team Teaching

Through pre-assessment, multiple intelligence surveys and a boot camp for skills testing, data is gathered that allows teachers to see what areas they should focus on. Students are then grouped unit by unit. For example, short stories is a unit, as is essay writing and creative writing. The focal point for students will differ depending on their skills – some students may need to focus on finding valid sources, or writing, or citing evidence. Teachers will work together, across curricula, to help develop these skills.

"We also emphasize the use of rigorous and relevant curriculum," says Mitchell. "The team teaching helps teachers collaborate on developing a curriculum and skills-based learning that resonates with students and staff."

How success is measured

Teachers are asked if they feel they are making a difference. Are they progressing in their work? Students are asked how they feel about the approach to teaching. Are they satisfied? Students and teachers are interviewed at the beginning of the school year and again at the end of the year. Responses are compared, year over year, and changes are made to improve the system. It should be noted that every year, fewer and fewer changes are needed.

What we learned

Planning for Team Teaching in April and May can result in system-wide changes, but as the year progresses, teams also make adjustments to meet the needs of their students. "Some components are always changing," says Mitchell. "Students change, so we change with them, and that changes our perspective." And from that new perspective, the teams create focal points; that is what the projects are about and how the teams find overlap between areas. "Because the approach has been used for many years, it is more about tweaking now," explains Mitchell.

For more on Team Teaching and Collaboration, contact:
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