

## **Growing School Leaders**

As a district we are faced with the daunting task of growing our school leaders who are for the most part, possess many talents as leaders. I say “daunting” because at all levels of leadership, even in the face of greatness, there is still room for growth to maximize talent and to become even more effective. Leaders come from all sorts of backgrounds, educational expertise and work-related experiences. It becomes our responsibility to deliver information, motivation, support, and stylized techniques that will facilitate further development of all their best leadership qualities, while at the same time helping them to become more aware of their own potential for additional growth and development. The goal is to provide support to our school leaders as they support/lead their staff on the delivery of quality instruction. We understand the importance of working together on behalf of our students and supporting our teachers in their work.

The exciting journey to growing our Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) began in the summer of 2013 when we held our first Administrative Retreat at the KASA Conference. Our goal was to make sure we were functioning as a “school system” and not a “system of schools”. The first order of business at that retreat was to establish team norms that would guide the way we conducted all future leadership meetings. The norms established were simple and to the point, generated by team members and agreed upon by all.

### **Instructional Leadership Team Norms:**

- We will be positive, honest, and confidential.
- We will use data as the basis for decision-making, setting meeting agendas, and prioritizing our work.
- We will work together as a team toward common goals.
- We will actively listen and value one another’s input.
- We will start and end meetings on time.
- We will be free from distractions.
- We will come to our meetings with a growth mindset, and will focus on student achievement.

These are read at the beginning of every leadership team meeting to set the tone and remind us of mutual expectations. We also revisit these annually to make sure they are still appropriate and collectively agreeable. These norms are our foundation for a strong leadership team.

One of the most successful practices in growing our leadership team has been the implementation of weekly instructional leadership meetings (ILT). We try to always stay within a one hour time limit so as to value one of our most popular norms, “We will start and end meetings on time.” We meet each Tuesday morning at the same time. Approximately 90% of our meeting time is focused on improving instruction. We are truly a Professional Learning Community (PLC). At the end of each meeting, we each complete a Plus Delta page to provide feedback that enhances our continual improvement process. At many meetings, after agenda items are completed, we each share a positive thought from the meeting or from activities of the past week. This is a nice way to end any meeting!

Our ILT members spend the majority of each meeting learning and practicing new instructional strategies to take back to the schools. District initiatives such as learning Kagan Structures, participating in Mike Rutherford's Coaching Lab, implementing 30-60-90 day plans, and learning how to improve effectiveness of school-level PLC work have all been integral parts of our meeting agendas.

Just to name a few, we have spent time on the following strategies: Cornell Notes, Guided Notes, Plickers, Kahoot.com, Professional Growth in the areas of MAP data usage, John Maxwell readings, and Mike Rutherford principles (clear learning goals, mid-course corrections, 5 minute feedback, etc.). Our team became more cohesive when we participated in a ONE WORD activity wherein we each came up with a word that we wanted to exemplify during the year. We made a visual representation of that word and committed to focus on that concept to grow both personally and professionally.

A critical aspect of professional learning is follow-through and support. This happens in a number of ways for Garrard County's ILT. Minutes are taken at each meeting and shared with the whole team. Follow-up emails are sent to clarify, remind and provide resources. Our Central Office staff is visible in the schools to help implement and monitor strategies and techniques as they are implemented district-wide. Mr. Keith has even cooked pancakes for the team occasionally just to demonstrate a servant leadership style that has also been emulated by our principals in their schools.

Comments from our Plus Delta feedback provide more tangible evidence of the effectiveness of our ILT team-building efforts. When asked what they liked most about the meetings, some of the replies included:

- The length- 1 hour
- Agenda-driven meetings
- Organized meetings
- Opportunities to share
- Active participation- not just "sit and get"
- Learning from other principals
- Getting into the "meat" of learning

Likewise, participants shared the following comments when asked which strategies have had the biggest impact when taken back to the schools? Responses included:

- Kagan
- Note-taking
- 30-60-90 day plans
- Data analysis protocol use
- Motivation

As you can see from actual team member feedback, the work has been well-received. While we continue to grow together professionally, we are looking to the future knowing we have a structure in place to allow for teamwork and support for each team member. The weekly meetings have become our vehicle to improve our team's knowledge and capacity to lead. Regardless of each person's individual strengths and talents, we continue to grow in a supportive team-oriented network as we lead our leaders.

