

**Teacher Working Group Meeting
West High School Library Classroom
Tuesday, December 10, 2013**

Attendees:

Lynne Fugate, Board of Education Chair
Dr. Jim McIntyre, Superintendent
Eric Aguilar, Chilhowee Intermediate School
Glenn Arnold, L & N STEM Academy
Abigail Buczynski, Cedar Bluff Middle School
Kelly Clemmer, Gap Creek Elementary School
Tanya Coats, KCEA President
Mark Duff, Halls High School
Jessica Holman, Inskip Elementary School
Lauren Hopson, Halls Elementary School
Robby Howard, South-Doyle High School
Wandy Lacy, Farragut High School
Tenisha Marchbanks, Bearden Middle School
Jessica McDonald, Vine Middle School
Valeta Norris, Central High School
Suzanne Sherman, Hardin Valley Academy
Lindsey Stinnett, West High School
Heidi Walsh, Christenberry Elementary School
Vanita Williamson, Karns Middle School

Introduction - Ms. Fugate

- The Board of Education and Superintendent know that teachers have concerns
- The Board and Superintendent are ready to listen and take any needed actions quickly
- Education drives everything in Knox County
- Everyone wants same goal – excellence for children
- Effort to include educators in this group from elementary, middle and high school levels; some who have TVAAS data, some who don't
- Want to discuss limited topics at each meeting; testing/assessments will be main topic today

Testing – General Discussion

- Discretionary tests/assessments currently utilized by KCS include Discovery Ed (Discovery Education Assessment); TCAP (Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program); Field Testing for PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers); SAT 10 (Stanford Achievement Tests, 10th Edition); multiple writing assessments
- Some tests for practice/information purposes only – good to do?
- Some teachers believe testing is excessive; too much instructional time lost
- Some teachers/parents have experienced concerns about what testing is doing to students – stress/anxiety
- Test proctors (teachers, TAs, other staff) taken from other areas creates anxiety for young children
- Lower-grade level students will need keyboarding skills required for online assessments
- Significant technology devices needed for coming online assessments
- Time spent reviewing data may not be as valuable as using time for lesson plans

- Teacher noted data is driving force, would rather be “data informed”
- “Data informed”= using data to benefit student learning, while still looking at students individually, not just at numbers
- Teaching is not all about data and test scores, but about relationships
- Teachers want to be trusted as professionals who know what is best for their students
- Teachers not “owning” assessments, frustration comes from not having enough time to review/utilize testing information
- Breakdown in communication from Central Office to Administrators to Teachers
- So much test data, teachers much pick and choose what to review/take action on
- Teachers being asked to set aside their expertise and use assessments that may not be valuable to all
- Test scores should not be ultimate goal, having educated students should be ultimate goal
- Is district focus on how to raise test scores?
- From parent viewpoint, testing and test-taking skills are important – especially for college preparation
- Unfortunately, world does look at test scores
- Teachers simply want choices about testing and other things such as evaluations, choice would empower teachers
- What does “required” testing mean, some tests mandated by State, some by district, some by departments/administrators
- Many school days spent on testing including actual testing, re-assessment, feedback
- Teachers are “artists” not just “mechanics”

Discovery Ed

- Usefulness of Discovery Ed test data varies greatly for grade levels/subject areas
- Some reports that some data from Discovery Ed testing is subjective
- Some teachers feel Discovery Ed test data is a student motivational tool at best; others believe it gives helpful information
- No true connection to Discovery Ed test data for 7th/8th grade math
- Some teachers feel Discovery Ed test data is valuable; some do not
- Discovery Ed test data for reading/language arts is more helpful than math; math data simply tells what hasn’t been taught yet
- Please don’t take away Discovery Ed, it’s really valuable; use it to know how kids are doing
- Discovery Ed test would be better if aligned to curriculum
- Discovery Ed tests are better than TCAPs for some results
- Could Discovery Ed testing be optional – teacher choice?
- Some consensus that allowing teachers to choose whether or not to do Discovery Ed testing would be good since it is optional and not State mandated
- Some classes completed Discovery Ed assessments online this week, very exciting to see students on task and excited using devices, good for teachers to receive instant results/feedback

TCAPs

- Some teachers frustrated with amount of detailed information they are able to retrieve from TCAP data
- More information can be retrieved TCAP data, teachers just need more training to know how to extract
- Coaches should have knowledge/be trained on how to extract needed TCAP information

PARCC Assessments

- PARCC testing seems overwhelming to some teachers, KCS does not appear ready for technology requirements
- KCS is in much more prepared than some other districts for PARCC assessments
- KCS is communicating concerns about PARCC readiness with State officials
- Connectivity needed for coming PARCC assessments overwhelming for some teachers – KCS must provide adequate training and earn teacher buy-in

Technology

- Teachers need more/better training for devices, but also keeping applications/software up-to-date on all devices
- Expertise of L & N STEM Academy staff should be utilized for technology implementation at other schools
- Technology training for teachers by tier/clusters seems to work very well

Writing Assessments

- Writing prompts can take joy out of writing
- Take up too much time that could be utilized for instruction
- Writing has improved with more focus on writing

PLCs

- If people listened to some PLC meetings, would think that KCS is all about data, not children – seems that data always dominates discussion
- Only 2-3 minutes spent discussing best practices during some PLC meetings
- Purpose of PLCs is meant to be collaborative planning informed by student progress monitoring
- When done right, PLCs can be effective and powerful
- KCS will try to re-focus and bring clarity and guidance to PLCs
- PLCs would be more effective if developed around common goals, interests, and subject areas
- PLC subgroups very effective – teachers more open in smaller groups
- Some PLCs seem to have a pre-ordained goal as determined by leader
- Teachers don't like to be held accountable for things they didn't choose or didn't want
- One teacher cited "fake" PLCs with coaches; "real" PLCs without coaches
- Some coaches/teachers do not understand what SMART goal should be
- Teachers have tried to understand purpose of PLCs, but very painful
- PLC difficulties tie back to disconnect of communication
- Good that some coaches asked teachers to bring struggles to table to affect changes
- Coaches seem to be so adamant about some things, need to be flexible
- In some PLCs, come up with strategies following Discovery Ed testing and that worked well
- PLCs must be teacher-driven, not follow preconceived schedule
- Bureaucracy has penetrated PLCs and created fear – some teachers fear the "PLC police" who call people out for not dealing with model
- PLCs have moved away from teacher ownership
- PLCs should be about instructional topics, not a time to plan field trips, fun days, school events, etc. – when these things happened, it drove PLCs to be more rigidly structured format
- Teachers want administrators/coaches to facilitate PLCs, not judge
- Teachers need time to build relationships with administrators and coaches – this would create trust
- Teachers love idea of PLCs – feel they could be amazing and successful if done right

SAT10

- Why does KCS administer the SAT10? Need to know where K-2 students were academically
- SAT10 is optional assessment
- Teachers do not know what SAT10 Battery score means, seems to be no correlation between test and score
- Students don't understand some SAT10 questions, some questions seem age-inappropriate
- KCS should check to see what other assessments are available for K-2 level to determine where students are academically
- Teachers could create own SAT10-like test that would be better and would determine more about students
- Some teachers are nervous about SAT10 results being included in evaluations
- SAT10 requires oral questions that can be read only once, can make it difficult for some students especially those with auditory processing difficulties
- If SAT10 content doesn't align with curriculum, problematic that scores are included in teacher evaluations
- Outside factors, such as an illness, seem to effect student success on SAT10
- SAT10 does create a TVAAS score, therefore included in teacher evaluations
- KCS should trust teachers to inform where K-2 students are academically
- There was a previous assessment that was utilized, could that be used again?
- Did KCS move away from data teams that use to provide teachers with student data?
- KCS still has some data teams, but fewer teachers seem to want to take a leadership role on a data team
- Some feel that KCS didn't do data teams as well this school-year
- KCS has sophisticated data warehouse tools and has tried to consolidate data at the classroom level, some queries and/or reports are fast and easy to access
- Teachers do not have enough time to run queries, would be helpful if they were already generated/had more training

Special Education Testing Concerns

- Special Education teachers have concerns with testing accommodations – administrators are instructing them not to include accommodation information on IEPs because of coming PARCC assessments
- KCS still doing TCAPs this year, Special Education teachers want accommodations included on IEPs
- IEPs must follow federal guidelines
- Anticipated that PARCC assessments will have accessibility tools built in (computer will read questions aloud) and State is asking local education agencies to prepare for that
- Message/answers from Central Office about accommodations on IEPs needs to happen quickly

Teacher Paper Survey

- Paper survey distributed to all schools due back by next week; administrators were asked to distribute surveys to all teachers during staff meetings
- Paper surveys are truly anonymous, teachers should not fear survey or voicing concerns
- Some had issues with how survey questions were worded – for example, asking question about how a teacher feels about the school/district; school and district should be separated since some teachers feel great about their school, but not about the district
- Last 2 questions separate school from district

Wrap-up

- KCS is a very large district, makes it hard to implement things quickly
- Communication must be more efficient
- Board Chair will report information from these working group meetings back to full Board of Education in January for discussion/action
- Consensus that future meetings should include discussion on limited topics or it could be easy to “get off track”
- Teachers believe action on part of Board and/or Superintendent will result in teacher buy-in
- Board and Superintendent both dedicated to fixing problems, but believe KCS is generally heading in right direction
- Consensus that meeting was very productive
- Next meeting topic will be teacher evaluations
- Next meeting will be Tuesday, December 17, 2013 at 4:30 p.m. at West High School Library Classroom