Current Reality and GAPSS

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The vision for the use of technology at Thomas County Middle School is an expanding idea. We would like for our teachers and students to be forerunners in classrooms with technology. Having tools and ideas to encourage student-centered learning is part of our current reality and expanding on that is part of our vision. At Thomas County Middle School we see technology as a tool and not just as a means to continue the same methods from the last 30 years. Reaching and teaching students is our goal, and technology is part of the way we can do that more effectively.

The professional learning needs are identified through different means. When looking at student achievement data, we have identified different subjects that could use professional development. We also have sent out surveys and listened to suggestions from teachers of areas that they would like to learn more about.

While many of our professional learning opportunities are collaborative, there are also various groups that may participate in different capacities. Our grades are divided by subjects for planning lessons weekly, and many times have professional development in their small (4-8 teachers) groups. We take advantage of veteran teachers and provide a mentoring program for teachers who are new to our system and/or teaching. However, if a teacher expresses interest in an area that could be beneficial to many, we have sent teachers to a professional learning session and they have “redelivered” to peer teachers.

Within the last year our teachers have attended trainings on Google Apps for Education, Chromebooks, Project Lead the Way with iPads, and mini-technology expos to share expertise of teachers already in our school with others who need it.

Currently, there is not a set method to follow-up with teachers after a session. We do have 3 excellent technology coaches who are available for teachers as a resource when needed.

The professional learning that is available for teachers at Thomas County Middle School is aligned with our school improvement goals. In our school improvement goals, we specifically highlight the importance of providing appropriate professional learning to help increase student achievement.

Funding for professional learning comes from a variety of sources. Some funds are allocated from grant monies, while others come from local funds as well.

The environment at Thomas County Middle School is unlike many schools, we have a tight-net group of educators who encourage and strive to do well. Professional learning is something that most of our teachers volunteer for as opposed to dread. There isn’t a pay incentive for professional learning other than paying for all necessities (substitute, registration, hotel room if applicable, etc.).

We do have professional learning that is offered to assist teachers in working with students with special needs and those who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. We partner with Southwest Georgia RESA and send teachers often to different learning sessions. Some recently offered were the Exceptional Students Course, Gifted Learners and 6 Core Practices of World Language.

Our teachers are divided in to school-wide groups/teams by subject. When a small group attends a professional learning session, they redeliver the content to the larger subject group. This is related to the school improvement plan in that encouraging alignment through the grades can increase students understanding of concepts. By having all grades attend a redelivery session, they can discuss how it applies to them and how they can use it in their classrooms whether it’s 5th or 8th grade.

The impact of professional learning on teacher practice and student learning is evaluated by formal and informal means. For some of our summer sessions, a survey was sent out to assess what is working for teachers, what needs some extra assistance, and what doesn’t work. We have also looked for the new strategies when evaluating teachers on their formative and summative evaluations in TKES. To know if professional learning is improving student learning, talking to a teacher or consulting their students’ data from recent assessments (especially those in All In Learning) is a strong indicator.

*PROFESSIONAL LEARNING*

The means by which teachers, administrators, and other staff acquire, enhance, and refine the knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions necessary to create and support high levels of learning for all students

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| **Professional Learning Standard 1:** Aligns professional learning with needs identified through analysis of a variety of data | | | |
| **Level 4**  **Exemplary** | **Level 3**  **Operational** | **Level 2**  **Emerging** | **Level 1**  **Not Evident** |
| Professional learning needs are identified and differentiated through a collaborative analysis process using a variety of data (e.g., student achievement data, examination of student work, process data, teacher and leader effectiveness data, action research data, perception data from students, staff, and families). Ongoing support is provided through differentiated professional learning. | Professional learning needs are identified through a collaborative analysis process using a variety of data (e.g., student achievement data, examination of student work, process data, teacher and leader effectiveness data, action research data, perception data from students, staff, and families). | Professional learning needs are identified using limited sources of data. | Professional learning needs are identified using little or no data. |
| EVIDENCE: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above –  Professional learning needs are identified using a variety of data (surveys, student achievement data, teacher suggestions, etc.) | | | |
| RECOMMENDATIONS:  It is recommended that the professional learning needs be identified more heavily on data instead of teacher suggestions. Ongoing support is present but not consistent and should be available at the school when needed. According to Darling-Hammond et. al, authors of Professional Learning in the Learning Profession, “Effective professional development is intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice; focuses on the teaching and learning of specific academic content; is connected to other school initiatives; and builds strong working relationships among teachers” (2009). | | | |

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| **Professional Learning Standard 2:** Establishes a culture of collaboration among administrators and staff to enhance individual and collective performance | | | |
| **Level 4**  **Exemplary** | **Level 3**  **Operational** | **Level 2**  **Emerging** | **Level 1**  **Not Evident** |
| Administrators and staff, as a foundational practice, consistently collaborate to support leadership and personal accountability and to enhance individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback).  Teachers conduct action research and assume ownership of professional learning processes. | Administrators and staff routinely collaborate to improve individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback). | Administrators and staff routinely collaborate to improve individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback). | Administrators and staff routinely collaborate to improve individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback). |
| EVIDENCE: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above –  Staff at Thomas County Middle School meets routinely to discuss teaching practices, lessons, and professional development. Grade- level meetings occur weekly, whereas Subject Meetings are once per month. Many of these meetings have interactive sessions for professional learning or redelivery of content from a professional development session. | | | |
| RECOMMENDATIONS:  It is recommended that in order for teachers to take more ownership, they should research what is happening in their own classrooms and how they can improve the classroom environment and student learning. “When well-designed, professional learning helps teachers master content, hone teaching skills, evaluate their own and their students’ performance, and address changes needed in teaching and learning in their schools” (2009). Providing applicable professional learning and encouraging teacher buy-in/ownership is essential to change. | | | |

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| **Professional Learning Standard 3:** Defines expectations for implementing professional learning | | | |
| **Level 4**  **Exemplary** | **Level 3**  **Operational** | **Level 2**  **Emerging** | **Level 1**  **Not Evident** |
| Administrators, teacher leaders, or both consistently define expectations for the implementation of professional learning, including details regarding the stages of implementation and how monitoring will occur as implementation progresses. | Administrators, teacher leaders, or both regularly define expectations for the implementation of professional learning. | Administrators, teacher leaders, or both occasionally define expectations for the implementation of professional learning. | Administrators, teacher leaders, or both rarely, if ever, define expectations for the implementation of professional learning. |
| EVIDENCE: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above –  Teachers are given many opportunities to attend professional learning but do not have clear expectations on what to do after. In the past, initiatives have been required and checked with teacher assessments, but not with all professional development. | | | |
| RECOMMENDATIONS:  Ample opportunities for professional learning are provided, but it is recommended that after professional learning that teachers have an expectation of how and when to integrate learned strategies and ideas. After integration, teachers should be able to reflect on how the new strategy or idea worked in the classroom, what could be done differently, and if they need any further development in the area. | | | |

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| **Professional Learning Standard 4:** Uses multiple professional learning designs to support the various learning needs of the staff | | | |
| **Level 4**  **Exemplary** | **Level 3**  **Operational** | **Level 2**  **Emerging** | **Level 1**  **Not Evident** |
| Staff members actively participate in job-embedded professional learning that engages collaborative teams in a variety of appropriate learning designs (e.g., collaborative lesson study, analysis of student work, problem solving sessions, curriculum development, coursework, action research, classroom observations, online networks). Professional learning includes extensive follow-up with descriptive feedback and coaching. | Staff members actively participate in professional learning, most of which is job-embedded, which includes multiple designs (e.g., collaborative lesson study, analysis of student work, problem-solving sessions, curriculum development, coursework, action research, classroom observations, online networks) to support their various learning needs. Professional learning includes follow-up with feedback and coaching. | Some staff members are engaged in professional learning that makes use of more than one learning design to address their identified needs. | Staff members receive single, stand-alone professional learning events that are informational and mostly large-group presentation designs. |
| EVIDENCE: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above –  Many of the job-embedded professional learning sessions are on Teacher Workdays. Thomas County Middle School uses these days to the fullest by providing many sessions and allowing teachers to participate in 30 min- 1 hour sessions about different subjects that apply to our school. There are also 3 technology coaches at TCMS who are available for follow-up when requested. | | | |
| RECOMMENDATIONS:  It is recommended that follow-up be more consistent and appropriate. Teachers will not always ask for feedback from a technology coach, so it would be more appropriate if follow-up was a consistent expectation after professional learning. | | | |

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| **Professional Learning Standard 5:** Allocates resources and establishes systems to support and sustain effective professional learning | | | |
| **Level 4**  **Exemplary** | **Level 3**  **Operational** | **Level 2**  **Emerging** | **Level 1**  **Not Evident** |
| Extensive resources (e.g., substitute teachers, materials, handouts, tools, stipends, facilitators, technology) and systems (e.g., conducive schedules, adequate collaborative time, model classrooms) are allocated to support and sustain effective professional learning. Opportunities to practice skills, receive follow-up, feedback, and coaching are provided to support the effectiveness of professional learning. | Adequate resources (e.g., substitute teachers, materials, handouts, tools, stipends, facilitators, technology) and systems (e.g., conducive schedules, adequate collaborative time, model classrooms) are in place to support and sustain professional learning. | Some resources and systems are allocated to support and sustain professional learning. | Few, if any, resources and systems are provided to support and sustain professional learning. |
| EVIDENCE: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above –  As previously discussed, ample opportunities for professional learning are provided, as are the resources needed to obtain the professional learning (substitute, registration, hotel- if applicable). However, there is not an adequate plan to sustain the professional learning. | | | |
| RECOMMENDATIONS: It is recommended that the school provide opportunities for sustaining the professional learning. Teachers should be able to have consistent feedback, follow-up, etc. Hammond et al also noted in their article that teachers in the US were given many opportunities for professional development, but not as much for peer observation and feedback after development (2009). | | | |

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| **Professional Learning Standard 6:** Monitors and evaluates the impact of professional learning on staff practices and student learning | | | |
| **Level 4**  **Exemplary** | **Level 3**  **Operational** | **Level 2**  **Emerging** | **Level 1**  **Not Evident** |
| Monitoring and evaluating the impact of professional learning on staff practices and increases in student learning occurs extensively. Evaluation results are used to identify and implement processes to extend student learning. | Monitoring and evaluating the impact of professional learning on staff practices and student learning occurs routinely. | Monitoring and evaluating the impact of professional learning on staff practices occurs sporadically. | Monitoring and evaluating the impact of professional learning on staff practices occurs rarely, if ever. |
| EVIDENCE: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above –  Teacher performance and student learning is evaluated often and routinely. At weekly meetings, grade levels dissect data to find trends and learn effective processes from each other. Using the school-wide assessment program, All In Learning, teachers are able to compare assessment data across classrooms and by students. Using this data guides discussion on effective methods that teachers can share to help improve student achievement. | | | |
| RECOMMENDATIONS:  It is recommended that teachers are able to have at least one work day each quarter to meet, look at data, and discuss methods. While weekly meetings are invaluable, teachers do not have enough time to plan and construct ideas/methods/strategies during one planning session a week. “Intensive professional development, especially when it includes applications of knowledge to teachers’ planning and instruction, has a greater chance of influencing teaching practices and, in turn, leading to gains in student learning” (Darling-Hammond, et. al, 2009). While intensive professional development may not be available in this context as often as we would like, once per quarter is a starting point. | | | |

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| **KSU ITEC Professional Learning Standard:** Professional learning reinforces educators’ understanding and use of strategies for promoting equity and high expectations for all students, application of research-based teaching strategies and assessment processes, and involvement of families and other stakeholders in promoting student learning. | | | |
| **Level 4**  **Exemplary** | **Level 3**  **Operational** | **Level 2**  **Emerging** | **Level 1**  **Not Evident** |
| Classroom practices (e.g., considering interests, backgrounds, strengths, and preferences to provide meaningful, relevant lessons and assess student progress, differentiating instruction, and nurturing student capacity for self-management) of all teachers reflect an emotionally and physically safe environment where respect and appreciation for a diverse population is evident. There are high achievement expectations for all students and teachers. The principal and other leaders provide professional learning for teachers lacking understanding of the impact that attitudes regarding race, disabilities, background, culture, high expectations, and social class of both students and teachers have on the teaching and learning process. | Classroom practices of most teachers reflect skill in communicating high expectations for each student and adjusting classroom activities to meet student needs. Respect for students’ cultures and life experiences is evident through the emotionally and physically safe learning environment where students of diverse backgrounds and experiences are taught the school code of conduct (customs) to help them be successful in the school context. | Classroom practices of some  teachers reflect evidence of teachers’ training in understanding the impact that attitudes regarding race, disabilities, background, culture, high expectations, and social class of both students and teachers have on the teaching and learning process. | Classroom practices reflect little or no evidence of teachers’ training in understanding the impact that attitudes regarding race, disabilities, background, culture, high expectations, and social class of both students and teachers have on the teaching and learning process. |
| EVIDENCE: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above –  Teachers at TCMS are encouraged to teach expectations for the school for the first few days if not the first week of school and to revisit routinely with the students. As a school, TCMS has a history of supporting students and providing positive learning environments. According to the 2015-2016 TKE’s data, students at TCMS rated a 1.69 for providing a positive learning environment (2=yes, 1= sometimes, 0=no). | | | |
| RECOMMENDATIONS:  While there is evidence of providing positive learning environments, teachers can improve. Professional learning on high expectations for students and being sensitive to students with different backgrounds, cultures, disabilities, etc. can only improve the school as a whole. “The evidence is clear that low teacher expectations can negatively affect student performance. Meanwhile, the evidence that high expectations for students can also have an impact has been clearly documented” (Bamburg, 1994). | | | |

References

Darling-Hammond, L., Chung Wei, R., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009). Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the United States and Abroad. Retrieved September, 2016, from https://learningforward.org/docs/pdf/nsdcstudy2009.pdf

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