

VALLEY STREAM UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT THIRTY

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Dear Valley Stream 30 School Community,

Recently, I was invited to be a member of a doctoral student's Dissertation Committee and reader of the dissertation at Columbia University Teachers' College. The student's research I evaluated concerned conditions that positively supported the growth of student literacy. I am happy to say that many of the practices cited in this research are those that we are undertaking in Valley Stream 30. Here are some examples below:

Collaborative leadership and school capacity development

This is characterized by a school culture in which district and building administrators work closely with teachers and staff in collaborative decision-making. Valley Stream 30 has a Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Council (CIAC) where teachers and administrative representatives from all of our buildings meet to develop and suggest long-range and yearly instructional goals. Once each month, all of our teachers and administrators meet in a variety of different curriculum content circles chaired by a teacher/leader. We have a District Level Team (DLT) consisting of parent, teacher and administrator representatives that share input from the various buildings regarding such District level projects as report cards and new curriculum resources for science. School capacity development is supported in the District by the many resources provided to enhance literacy instruction such as the year-long training for all primary grade teachers in Foundations, our K-2 phonics, spelling and handwriting program, as well as the specialized training our reading teachers are receiving in such intervention strategies as Wilson Language and Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) and the piloting of new writing resources.

Strategic use of student assessment

This refers to a systemic use of formative (process) and summative (end of year/unit) data on student performance to plan classroom instruction and staff development. Valley Stream 30 has implemented AIMSweb, a progress monitoring tool for reading in all grades K-6. Universal screening of all of our students, in reading, takes place three times a year, and for those students whose results indicate the need for additional support, progress monitoring can take place as frequently as once a week in some cases. In addition, this year, the District invested in Fountas and Pinnell benchmarking resources which, administered at regular points during the school year, provide the classroom teacher with key information regarding student reading level in order to help the classroom teacher match both instruction and book levels to students' specific needs/challenge levels. Our second grades participate in an end-of-the-year, BOCES-developed New York State parallel second grade assessment in ELA (Reading/Writing) and Mathematics to ascertain progress toward the expectations of the New York State tests' third grade benchmarks. Newly-developed ELA Curriculum maps in grades 3-5 delineate mini assessments in a variety of skill areas to be tested on the New York State ELA in May and provide teachers with information regarding in what areas students need additional instruction/support. Classroom teachers, support teachers and building administrators build in regular times to discuss individual student and whole-class progress on an ongoing basis.

Professional development

Administrators and teachers are provided professional development to support literacy. Valley Stream 30's commitment to professional development is strong and teacher and administrator learning is directly tied to building staff capacity that will result in increased student learning and achievement. A Professional Development Planning Committee (PDP) made up of teacher, administrator and parent representation met last spring and summer to plan a coherent program of staff development for this school year that directly linked to CIAC goals. Some of the staff development initiatives include administrator and teacher training in AIMSweb administration and data analysis, training in Fountas and Pinnell benchmarking, Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol (SIOP) and training for English Language Learner teachers and classroom teachers in supporting content area literacy.

Instructional Practices

Teachers use a variety of strategies before, during and after reading to help students comprehend reading materials. Explicit, direct strategy instruction plays a key role in Valley Stream 30's reading program. Mini lessons in reading skills set the focus for reading workshop and other pre-reading activities and closure activities for both fiction and informational text. Strategies, such as learning what to do when you come across a vocabulary word you don't know, making connections between what you read and what you already know in order to facilitate comprehension, and using details to

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extract main idea, are the type of strategies students learn to apply to their content area reading, as well as to their fiction books.

Interventions to improve student achievement

Administrators and teachers create highly-structured plans to meet the individual needs of struggling readers and the school offers extra tutoring or classes for struggling students. Last summer, District 30 redesigned the summer school program to provide small group instruction for our most at-risk students in the area of literacy, tied directly to particular student area of need. This school year our reading support program has been restructured, so that rather than being assigned to grade levels, our reading teachers support small groups of students with like needs, sometimes across grade levels, with an intervention specifically designed for the particular students. Principals, reading teachers and classroom teachers in grades K-2 meet every two weeks to discuss the progress of “Red Zone” students -- those children who AIM-Sweb indicates are falling furthest below the grade -level benchmark. In addition to in-school support, before- and after-school clubs and extra help provide students with additional support and instruction on a regular basis.

Budget Vote

A reminder that on March 22nd the Board of Education adopted a proposed budget. It maintains all programs with the lowest budget-to-budget increase (2.7%) and tax levy increase (1.36%) in five years. Based on current assessment values (and assessment values can change), the proposed budget currently projects a decrease in the taxes of the average homeowner. Mindful of the difficult economic climate, the Board and the District Administration worked very hard to take advantage of every efficiency to keep costs low and maintain current program.

The school Budget Vote takes place between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. at each elementary school. You must be registered to vote in order to take part in the election. You can register at your home school from Monday through Friday when school is in session, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. or in the District Office located at 175 N. Central Avenue. The last day to register is Tuesday, May 11, 2010, and on this date there is evening registration from 4:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at each school. After May 11, 2010, the only way you can vote on May 19, 2010 is for you to register at the Nassau County Board of Elections. Please contact Anne O'Brien, District Clerk, at 285-9829 extension 227 if you have any questions.

I wish everyone a good weekend! Please email (ekanas@vs30.org) or call me (285-9881, ext. 222) with any suggestions, comments, questions, etc.

Sincerely,

Elaine Kanas

Elaine Kanas, Ed.D.