Notes from Assessment Meeting: Modification of Instruction

Thank you to everybody who turned up last night. I would greatly appreciate any notes or learning nuggets that you picked up our meeting. I would like to put all of these together so that we can plan from there.

Some of the comments that stuck with me last night were:

- Staff would like more planning time to modify/individualize assignments
- How do we make at-risk kids advocates for themselves?
- How do we improve our instructional method so that all students can improve and not just Sped, ELL or at-risk?
- How do we help students get over their sense of unfairness?

Andrew said that he would like to see teachers give suggestions for accommodations. If a teacher has been successful with a strategy it would be important to have that implemented school wide.

Students struggle to express themselves in written form. They also struggle with openers. While extra time may be a concern, there is also a concern that the 504 may be a crutch. For example, a student said that he can do it by the end of the week because he is on a 504.

We discussed what the kids need. This included:

- Make early connections with Sped kids
- Make sure that students have small and regular success along the way
- Less lecturing
- Support to get work done after an absence
- Break projects into parts (Chunking)
- Allow group work instead of individual especially earlier in the year
- In the student letters the SpEd students said that they like working with friends to help understand the lesson.

Other strategies that came up included:

- Bolding important words
- Understanding Vocabulary
- Accurate due dates
- Chunking with checkpoints
- Giving options for assignments

The discussion on vocabulary led into a debate on simplifying terms. If students are expected to pass the 10th grade standardized testing and be competitive in the work force, is it in the best interest of the students to simplify everything. Do we want our students to find methods to tackle the tough challenges? Do we want our students to step up and be advocates? Do we not only want the at-risk students to speak up and be advocates but also every child?

The team decided that it would be interesting to have students analyze

assignments that they are given to assess the requirements and develop strategies to be successful. Students working in collaborative groups would analyze the assignment and write down questions and concerns to present to their partners and the rest of the class. Through this process all of the students questions would be answered and a 'map' to get through the assignment to address all road blocks would be created. This would also give the teacher an opportunity to reflect on the lesson to make sure that they are hitting the intended learning target. The teacher could also analyze where additional instruction may be needed and create a chunking checklist to assess stages of work along the way of the assignment.

Staff also suggested presenting sections at a time or letting students know that certain parts are due at particular times.

Mike and I discussed yesterday's class more this afternoon and I like his suggestion that students who are seen as higher achieving analyze the same assignments that the SpEd students did. Are our higher achieving students have the same problems understanding the assignments as the other students.

I thought about the many students who are successful at high school but are not successful at college. Could they have the same problem that they do not know how to advocate for themselves when they come across a difficult assignment. Students of all abilities who could analyze an assignment and feel comfortable learning from each other to overcome hurdles would definitely be an advantage.

Homework for our team was to develop some strategies to get students to analyze an assignment prior to them starting it. We will come together at our next meeting to discuss what you tried. I would appreciate it if you would send me a copy of your plan. I would also like to come and watch when you try this to give some feedback for your reflection.

La Center students are compliant kids. I am starting to worry if this compliance gets in the way of them advocating for themselves. They have been raised to be respectful to adults which could be seen as to never question the teacher. That's what I was told growing up. There is a lot of trust in this building and I think if students feel comfortable to analyze and ask question about our projects then it would show them that we value their input, thoughts and concerns and we are working alongside them to help them be successful. It is certainly worth trying.

Thanks to all of your efforts yesterday. I felt that we are starting to put the rubber to the road to help our struggling students succeed.

We enjoyed having three high school teachers at the moment and would welcome more, especially at the freshman level to help our kids transition successfully.