Superintendent's Report

June 19th, 2009

LEARNING UPDATE

- **Lab Classroom Project Workshop** – On June 18th, twenty-six teachers, four administrators and two guests from ESD 112 participated in what we call the Lab Classroom Project (LCP). As I shared with you in my last superintendent's report, this an effort that will create one lab classroom at each grade band (primary, intermediate, middle school and high school) where the teacher would be connected by a cohort of fellow teachers in order to develop ideas on how to improve their professional practice. These ideas would first be implemented by the lab classroom teacher and observed by the cohort teachers. Once the practice was confirmed as promising, other teachers in the cohort would then give it a try. This idea is a potential new way of creating self-initiated professional development internally rather than holding massive all staff "sit and get" sessions. At this training, I was very impressed with how our staff is deeply committed to improving their professional practice as educators. For so many to sign up and dive into this effort (considering how tired teachers can get at the end of school) with so much energy. This group of teachers included relatively new teachers (two or three years of service) to some of our most veteran staff (more than thirty-years of service in the district). The examples they shared with each other were amazing about how over the past year they have worked together to erode the isolation they have experienced their entire career in order to learn together. We are asking our students to work together (21st Century Learning) in a way to meet the Board's Ends Policies, and then we need to rethink our own learning processes and the structures that we work within so as to do the same thing as practitioners. Their enthusiasm for the new thinking was powerful. I was deeply impressed with them. I am very interested in my learning walks next year to see their work and learn from them. Attached is a copy of both the Flow of Information Matrix (locally developed) that they are using to help them create a new view of learning, as well as a one-page description of the concepts behind this work. More on this as their work continues.

BOARD UPDATE

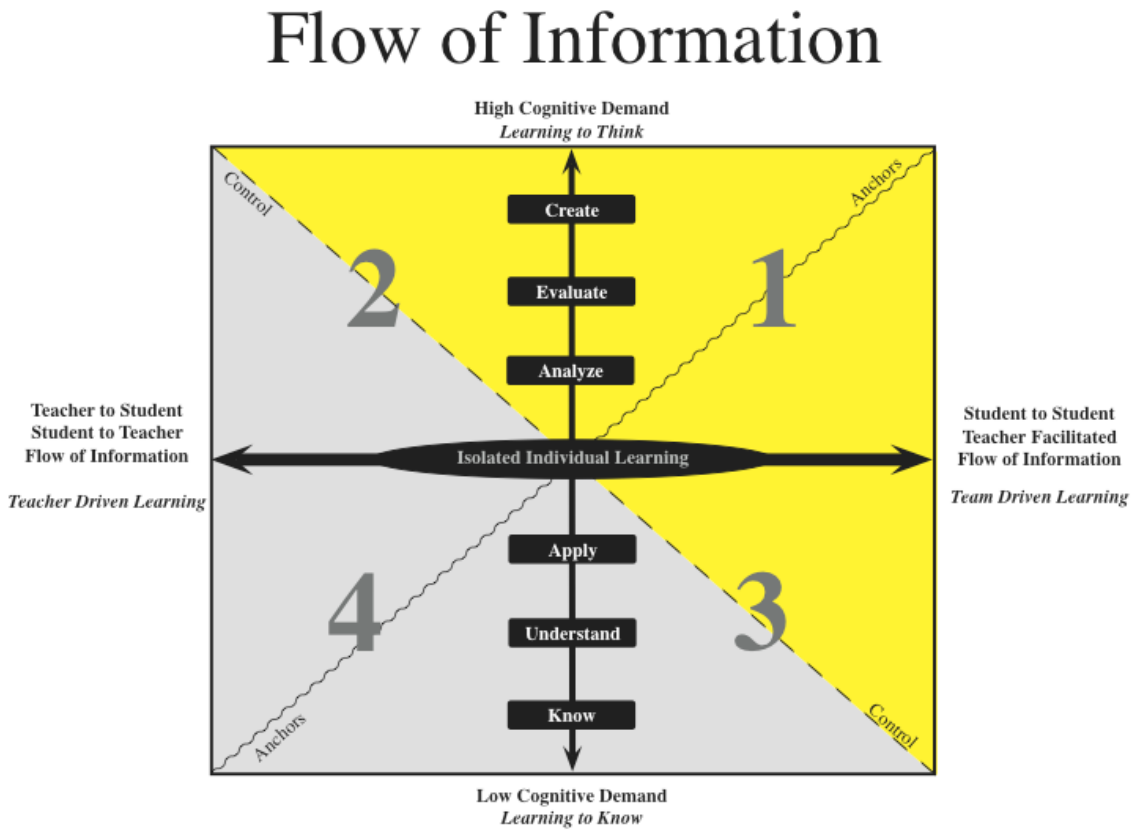
- **PowerSchool to WESPac Student Records Conversion** – We continue the work preparing for this conversion. So far so good, but there clearly is a lot of work that is left to do. I feel this conversion is both timely and needed. We had a significant data loss the Friday before graduation (only impacted grades that were entered over graduation weekend). Staff who worked over the weekend to get ahead (there were many who did this, particularly in the elementary school), had to re-enter all their work. To their credit, they all rolled up their sleeves and got it all done on time. My point is that WESPac student records system is a much more stable system than PowerSchool and my hope is that this situation will not happen again (knock on wood).
- **Classified Staff Negotiations** – I have met with the association leadership with our counter proposal relative to a new three-year agreement. We have another meeting set for next

Monday (June 22nd). In the agenda for the board meeting, you will notice that there is an executive session where I will provide you with the association's counter proposal.

- **KWRL Property Purchase** – This effort continues to progress and there is nothing new to report at this time.
- **Open Athletic Director Position** – We are working to advertise for this open position. The closing date will be June 24th and we will take a look at the applicant pool at that time. If there are no acceptable candidates or after the interview process the candidates do not meet our needs, we may elect to change some staff responsibilities and get through one year and open it again next spring. We will just have to see who applies for this important position.
- **Lighting Project at the High School** – The lighting project in the high school is progressing. Rob estimates that the contractor will be done in the next week or so. Beyond the energy savings from all these new lights, the increased amount of lighting is significant. For example, in the HS kitchen, I actually asked if we painted the walls because if was so bright (I didn't connect the change to the lighting project). I have only heard positive comments from staff on these changes.
- **Middle School Gym Floor** – I don't know if you remember, but over the winter break we had a leak in the drinking fountains in the middle school gym. The water damaged the gym floor to the point that it caused buckling of the flooring. We have since turned this into our insurance and the determination was to replace a portion of the gym floor (moisture in the wood). This work requires that the border striping on the entire floor needs to be redone in order to make it right. Additionally, the middle school asked if they could put a new Hawk on center court if they paid for it. I have authorized this work to be done in conjunction with the repair work. The Hawk is similar to the version painted on the main wall across from the bleachers. The next time you are in the middle school gym, please take a look at these new changes.
- **Small School Repair Grant** – We are writing a state grant to garner funds to replace the hot water system at the high school (requesting $42,000). The original boiler system has been a constant maintenance issue over the past 20 years. Rob estimates that all the money we have spent repairing this system could have purchased a completely new system. Hopefully we can receive the support from the state to make this needed repair a reality. FYI.

I think that is all for now. Please give me a call if you have any questions. Talk with you later.

Mark



21st Century Learning

We believe our work is rooted in the drive to create powerful learning environments in order to harness every learner's natural human need to learn. This work has resulted in a rethinking of our roles as teachers toward that of a learning environment leader. This shift has resulted in the development of a concept we now identify as the Learning to Learn classroom. To help with this effort, we have created a tool called the Flow of Information Matrix, which is built upon Ikujiro Nonaka's theory describing how organizations create, transfer and store knowledge. We have begun to apply this concept to the learning environments throughout our district (i.e. district leadership team, building leadership teams and classrooms), which we see as micro versions of a learning organization.

A key aspect of this rethinking is to be aware of what Nonaka describes as the flow of information (knowledge to information back to knowledge conversions) occurring within the learning environment. The Flow of Information Matrix blends together this flow of information with a scale of the cognitive demand (Blooms taxonomy) occurring within the learning environment that results from the learning target, student activities and assessments. An observer can use the window to describe the flow of information occurring along with the cognitive demands placed on the learner to describe the overall learning environment (identified as one of four quadrants). We believe that by chunking the flow of information

occurring into a scatter-gram will show an overall picture of the learning space over time and therefore show the overall environment quadrant the learner spends the majority of time learning within. Quadrant 4 learning environments will help students become better "knowers" of what the teacher sees as important to know. Quadrant 1 learning environments will help students to become better "thinkers" as to what is important for them. This shift from "knowers" to "thinkers" results from a shift of ownership of the work away from the teacher towards the learner. We believe this results in students becoming internally motivated learners rather than simply "biological file cabinets" in which to store what the teacher thinks as important knowledge.

The Flow of Information Matrix as a tool to help calibrate our observational lens shows promise for all learners (teachers and administrators) to see the learning environment in a completely different way. This new view has lead us to explore ideas designed to increase the flow of information between learners as well as increase the cognitive demand of the exchanges that are occurring within the learning space. We have begun to see increases in learner engagement, enhanced internal motivation for learning as well as educators who are beginning to see themselves as learning environment leaders rather than simply delivers of content. Content is important, but we are now beginning to see it not as the end, but rather as the fuel to grow a learners ability to learn how to be an independent, self-directed learner (our ultimate end). This shift in thinking has also helped erode the barriers of isolation between teachers (who are learners as well) so as to increase professional synergy and improve the learning environments of the entire school and the district as a whole.

Our initial observations have shown that the focus of our lesson designs are beginning to shift toward real learning rather than simply devising better ways for students to retain what the teachers or the textbooks say is the truth. This, we believe, helps students develop critical thinking skills in order to become independent, self-directed learners rather than simply good memorizers. In the end, these critical thinking skills developed within a learning to learn classroom environment is what we believe students need to be prepared for living and working in the knowledge age of the 21st century.