



4 initiatives help small office serve large district

As told to Anthony Armstrong

In the past, our districtwide staff development program has offered a large catalog of courses to employees. However, we saw a need to streamline the catalog and add additional services to better meet the professional learning needs of the schools. We conducted a review, analyzing the courses we offered, any overlap between courses, and the impact of course participation on student achievement data. Based on that review, Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) embarked on four new initiatives designed to provide more targeted services to the local schools.

PROTOCOLS TRAINING

Gwinnett schools and departments have been using protocols, to varying degrees, for many years. To ensure that protocols are used more broadly and consistently, we offer protocols training to promote and support teacher collaboration. Training includes protocols for framing conversations relevant to instructional needs, analyzing student work, using data to drive decisions, and determining best practices through research and analysis.

FACILITATOR TRAINING

Facilitator training is similar to protocols training but with a different audience. Both are designed to empower staff developers closest to the work (at the local school), but

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facilitator training is designed to share Learning Forward's definition of professional learning, Standards for Professional Learning, and how the Innovation Configuration maps can be used to guide our work. These sessions focus on strategies for using adult learning theory, for determining session goals and objectives and designing experiences to meet them, for assessing outcomes, and for developing plans for follow-up training and sustainability.

LESSON STUDY PILOT

We are piloting a lesson study program at three schools — one elementary, one middle school, and one high school. This unique opportunity allows us to assist schools in transforming their staff development programs into laser-focused, intensive staff development experiences designed to meet specific needs in their buildings. It is more than sharing lesson plans. Rather, teachers involved in lesson study collaborate with peers to develop a lesson, teach, observe, and collect data on the shared lesson. This process allows teachers to focus on teacher practice and observe the direct impact on student learning.

COACH ENDORSEMENT PROGRAM

Our coach endorsement program is designed to equip school and district coaches with the knowledge, skills, and support to have greater impact on teacher practice and student learning. The coach endorsement program provides a year of training and support, ranging from coaching fundamentals to restructuring the work of a learning team. Due to the job-embedded nature of coaching, this endorsement is responsive to local school and individual coaching needs by scaffolding components of the program to allow for appropriate transitions based on those needs. The coach endorsement focuses on the knowledge and skills needed to be successful as a coach and facilitates the application of new learning through guided practice and reflection with a lead coach.

In moving away from the generic, one-size-fits-all staff development catalog, we have the opportunity to work closely with local learning teams to strengthen capacity at the school level. With this shift in focus, Gwinnett's staff development program is stronger and better aligned with Learning Forward and its vision for staff development in our schools.

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