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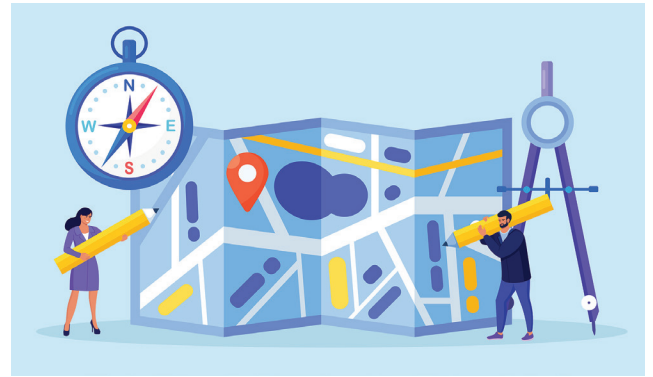
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CONFERENCE SPOTLIGHT

Jenny Talburt, Springfield Public Schools, Missouri

CURRICULUM DIRECTOR PUTS CONFERENCE LEARNING TO WORK IN HER DISTRICT

Jenny Talburt is director of K-5 curriculum and instruction for Springfield Public Schools in Missouri. She was inspired by her participation in the 2023 Learning Forward Annual Conference to focus on curriculum-based professional learning in her district. She has been applying what she learned and plans to build on it at the 2024 conference.



Her learning goal at the 2023 Learning Forward Annual Conference: I wanted to learn more about building our educators' capacity to implement curriculum well. I attended with my colleague, who is director of curriculum and instruction for grades 6-12. Together, we oversee curriculum for the district. We have developed rigorous processes to evaluate our programs, select high-quality resources, write teacher-friendly guides, train teachers, and distribute the materials to schools. However, we have been seeing less than 50% implementation at our campuses, and of that, about 45% was low-level implementation. We knew we needed to increase teacher buy-in and that we needed to show teachers not only *what* the curriculum is but *how* to use it.

What she learned: One of the most helpful sessions I went to was a (daylong) preconference session on "Transforming Teaching Through Curriculum-Based Professional Learning," which was facilitated by Stephanie Hirsh and Jim Short. During this session, we began by establishing our beliefs around what we expected to see in high-quality lessons. We experienced a lesson as students and then shifted perspective to make connections to how the written curriculum supported the facilitator's instructional moves.

We then went back to our beliefs and confirmed that what we believed should be a part of a high-quality curriculum was actually present. This was an aha moment for us as we knew that our teachers may gain the buy-in we were looking for through exploring their own beliefs and making connections to the high-quality resources provided to them.

How she is putting her learning into practice: Our curriculum, instruction, and assessment team was inspired to do a book study of *Transforming Teaching Through Curriculum-Based Professional Learning: The Elements*, on which the preconference session was based. From there, we decided to create model classrooms where teachers can learn how to use the district-recommended curricula. We trained 60 teacher leaders to run model classrooms across the district, following the principles of curriculum-based professional learning.

For each unit of the curriculum, the teacher leaders offer a curriculum-based professional learning session after school. All teachers are invited to participate — it's voluntary — and they get an hourly stipend. New teachers in our early career teacher program are required to participate in a session each semester. We laid out a schedule for the year so the teacher leaders and the participants can plan ahead and know they have ongoing support throughout the year.

Model classrooms have also become our new way of professional learning. We have included

it in our induction days, principal and assistant principal monthly meetings, and curriculum development council meetings. In November, we are offering a half-day of model classrooms in English language arts and math during one of our district professional learning days.

How the district is engaging leaders:

Over the summer, we invested two days in professional learning for school leaders to support their instructional leadership and help them understand what to look for in teachers’ implementation of curriculum. We also asked them to choose two model classrooms to observe. The impact of this work is evident through increased buy-in from principals.

How it’s going: Model classrooms are proving to be a great experience for our

teachers and leaders. When teachers are immersed in a lesson and experience it as a student, it doesn’t seem difficult — in fact, it seems fun! This is probably the first time I’ve experienced people excited about curriculum. A lot of teachers think the curriculum robs them of their creativity and autonomy, but that’s not true.

We want teachers to use their instructional agility to meet their students’ needs. Now our teachers are starting to understand the freedom within the framework and focus more on their instructional moves. During induction days over the summer, teachers were asking the model classroom teacher leaders, “Can I have your contact info so I can reach out to you if I get stuck?” It’s encouraging to see instructional practices grow, as well as teacher networks authentically develop.

What she hopes to learn at this year’s conference:

This year, we hope to deepen our understanding and application of curriculum-based professional learning. Our time with teachers is limited, and we want to support them to understand the standards and the structure, arc, and research behind curriculum resources and development. It’s important that teachers can trust the resource and the process so they can prioritize anticipating student misconceptions and adjusting support to meet their needs. We also hope to make connections with other districts that are applying this learning.

We are on the journey to curriculum-based professional learning and see this work making a difference for students across Springfield Public Schools for many years to come. ■

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