PLC Practices

1. Monitoring student learning on a timely basis.

CCSD has an established pacing guide and it is communicated through CTLS (Cobb Teaching and Learning System). This guide comes with ideas and lessons designed by county personnel to aid in student learning. Teachers can pick and choose assignments from CTLS and through the Collaborative Teams process also design local assignments that meet the needs of the students. With this system in place county wide there is an assurance of accountability at the school level for student success. Our Collaborative Teams are expected to adhere to the overall county expectation and also develop appropriate local assessments to measure student academic understanding.

Many avenues for gathering data are used: paper and pencil common formatives, I Responds, the CTLS system of mini Touchstones and full Touchstones, and the RI and MI given three times each year to aid in monitoring student progress across the year. The math teachers utilize a local common fluency assessment and record progress data. The reading teachers use a common vocabulary assessment and record the progress data. Read 180/SYS 44 for low readers and ESOL students and IXL for math are also used to gather data for teacher analysis to further student progress.

Having utilized common formative and summative assessments for many years, the faculty at Hightower Trail MS is trained and vigorous about utilizing data from local assessments to aid in student learning. SMART goals are a requirement for each Collaborative Team and used to monitor personalized progress throughout the year. The conversations are rich within the Collaborative Team structure about who got what and who didn’t get it.

As we continue to grow in Success For All, Collaborative Teams work to utilize all data to enhance the learning of every child.

**UPDATE FOR 2020-2021**

To say ending the 2020 school year and completing the 2021 school year was a challenge does not begin to adequately describe what both teachers and students have experienced. The 2020 school year came to an abrupt face to face halt in March. Teachers scrambled to reach students and worked to assess learning. Collaborative teams became even more critical as their planning process had to make a dramatic change overnight. Planning for formative information became critical and an almost daily conversation as all teachers had to work remotely and work to communicate within their collaborative teams.

The following email was received by all teachers on March 17, 2020 as we scrambled and struggled to reach our kids:

The following guidance regarding digital learning days has again been stated by the county:

* All students will be considered present (no students should be marked absent) and
* **No permanent grades should be posted while Cobb Schools are closed. Ongoing feedback, monitoring, and assessment of student progress is encouraged and can be used once Cobb Schools are re-opened and have been provided for all students.**

The collaborative conversations intensified as we scrambled to reduce the ask and stay true to the standards.

The 2020-2021 school year began with a totally virtual instructional format and collaborative teams became even more critical as middle school teachers were allowed virtual, face to face access of students for instruction 2 times a week. (Please see schedule in resources.) The concept of common formative and summative information reached a critical point as deep conversation continued on how we get the data, is it accurate, thus what is it really telling us. The EOGs were cancelled for the end of the 2020 school year and we were not able to complete the RI/MI cycle. As a school we struggled to get RI/MI data during the 2020-2021 year that we felt was accurate as it became apparent that for some students there was parent involvement in the assessment. The EOGs were taken. (Please refer to data in resource folder.)

1. Creating systems of intervention to provide students with additional time and support for learning.

For many years Hightower Trail has held a help session for very content before school. Our Foundation has paid someone to open the building at 8:00 partially for this purpose – different from the county stated doors open at 8:45AM for middle schools. Teachers in a Collaborative Team divide who will be teaching what and when and any student in the grade level can attend the help session. This gives students exposure to different teaching styles and input. Our master schedule is difficult so we must be highly creative to give students many opportunities to hear and see curriculum from different teacher’s styles. Teachers have utilized the morning help sessions, the new remediation schedule with extended HR time, and students are given opportunities to meet weekly with content specific teachers.

Also, for many years we have offered remediation opportunities for reading and math during our connections time block. Collaborative Teams identify students who are struggling, and they are offered extra support. This changes every nine weeks according to individual student progress. We have also offered students math help during the regular day if the student is showing a weakness in math but on grade level for reading. Instead of reading being their fifth academic class they are offered math literacy. Within the math literacy structure students have accountability for grade level reading and are offered remediation in math. The support structure of that class is that any other subject can also be addressed if appropriate – ex: science test the next day. This too has been shown to be successful. Students who are in the math literacy class or in the support class during connections are at least on a Tier II within the Response to Intervention structure.

In the 2019-2020 school year we have implemented an extended homeroom time in addition to Read 180/SYS 44, math literacy, remedial connections classes and Response to Intervention strategies. The significance of the extended HR is that all subjects can take part – not just remedial subjects. This has been incredibly successful in the 8th grade with the high school courses which are offered along with the 8th grade courses. From the time a student enters the building until 9:35 they can be remediated by their assigned teacher or by a teacher of the Collaborative Team. This variation is necessary as most teachers teach multiple levels of the same subject or different subjects. (Refer to the master schedule)

**UPDATE FOR 2020-2021**

Remediation and extended opportunities became critical during this time frame and stayed critical across the entire year of 2020-2021. The Guiding Coalition aided in the rewriting of the late work policy and teachers worked within their Collaborative Communities to establish how academic information was going to be gathered. The new schedule, hybrid schedule implemented in October of 2020, gave 4 days of instruction with Wednesdays being the remediation day. (See schedule in resources.) Every teacher established a specific time for students to log in virtually and receive specific help. Some teachers were having help sessions at 8:00PM for families who were trying to share devices.

Hightower Trail continues with the specialized classes of Read 180/Sys 44, the Foundation purchased IXL for all students in both ELA and math, Math literacy classes continued and finally in March of 2021 we began to have individualized help sessions again in addition to the specialized Wednesday sessions for the 2020-2021 year.

1. Building teacher capacity to work as members of high performing collaborative teams that focus on improved learning for all students.

We are fortunate to have a very stable faculty. With that can come complacency. Administrators hold themselves accountable for measuring the pulse and providing professional learning that will cause reflection and growth in all faculty.

For our small group of newer teachers, we have a group of experienced teacher leaders and an administrator that meet with the “newbie” group to discuss those items that will help to make the overall school run smoothly and aid in guiding new teachers into our highly expected and monitored Collaborative Team process. There are discussions about individual expectations and the concept of growing in professionalism, the atmosphere is set for all to feel free to share in the misunderstandings and to grow as part of the HTMS faculty. The expectation is set that every member of the Collaborative Team is honored, norms are important, and that sharing ideas helps all to grow professionally. This group formally meets every month and informally much more often.

As stated earlier, CCSD offers an established set of professional learning with a slate from which teachers can choose – these typically apply to content knowledge enhancement. It then becomes necessary for individual schools to establish PL for continued growth in the Collaborative Team process. To do that we use the collaboration rubric to judge where Collaborative Teams are operating. Teacher leaders are developed and utilized to deliver professional learning. Specific examples include training the faculty on PBL (Problem Based Learning – 8th grade science and math; STEAM in the connections area – music, CTAE and PE/Health, and school wide vocabulary app – 8th grade ELA, reading teacher).

In the 2016-2017 school year we focused on reestablishing who we are and where we are in the Collaborative Teams process. As a faculty we again explored the meaning of the 4 questions and what professional conversation looks and sounds like. We used the collaboration rubric and the results were shared. The faculty was surprised to hear that some areas were lower than the year before. There was a long conversation about trust and honesty. The statement was discussed that as you grow as a Collaborative Team you will understand the significance of the items on the rubric at a much deeper level. The planning logs were again reiterated and monitored by administration. Administrators held themselves accountable for attending their assigned Collaborative Teams’ weekly meetings.

The 2017-2018 school year brought a refocusing on common formative and summative assessments. Again, the collaboration rubric was used, and the results brought deep professional conversations within the Collaborative Teams. The Collaborative Teams were acknowledging that as trust builds so does honesty about what is being planned within the Collaborative Team. The ability to have true self reflection and conversation deepened professionalism and constructive conversation across the teams.

In the 2018-2019 school year administrators continued to attend weekly Collaborative Team meetings and the training was focused on revisiting SMART goals – what are they, how to write them, and most importantly how to hold ourselves accountable for the students who did not show academic progress. By the end of that year we were beginning the discussion of redefining SMART goals to be more unit, content specific. In every administrative meeting there is conversation about the Collaborative Teams strengths and weaknesses. Administration also discusses overall needs of the faculty based upon weekly collaborative Team observation.

In the 2019-2020 school year we focused internally on Learning Targets with an emphasis on understanding the need for constant, consistent, individualized student “Feedforward.” Collaborative Teams are expected to share within their structure how they are giving appropriate feedback (feedforward) and support each other in the individualized growth of every student. Also, in this year we have reached out to our main feeder elementary school to correlate vertical expectations within the ELA framework. HTMS shared our Non-Negotiables (see chart in resources) with the elementary school and are hopeful that the vertical planning will aid in overall student success. This same information was shared with a second feeder school in March of 2020.

HTMS has several sets of teams that work for the overall progress of the school whether it is operational or academic. The BLT (Building Leadership Team) makes operational decisions for the school. This team is made up of area captains who discuss operational concerns, aid in the decisions and are responsible for communicating the decisions and monitoring implementation of the decision within their area. All areas of the school are represented – custodial, food services, paraprofessionals, front office, grade levels and connections. Along with the faculty members are the School Council, PTSA and the Foundation. There are also Action Teams which are responsible for organizing year long implementation of items such as student recognition, faculty recognition, and decisions concerning faculty classroom needs.

A primary team is the HTMS Guiding Coalition - comprised of administrators, counselor, and subject area coordinators. This team assesses achievement data and works to make decisions concerning faculty professional learning and “next steps” for academic progress. This team is instrumental in deciding structure for Collaborative Teams and monitoring their specific subject areas. The team members are the liaison between the county and the teachers for their subject areas. They aid in relaying information to protect the classroom learning environment.

**UPDATE FOR 2020-2021**

To say that teachers had a great deal of professional leaning this year is an incredible understatement. The CCSD developed their own virtual platform that has been in progress during this entire year. The sharing, planning, and coaching that occurred during CCC’s was intense and incredible. Teachers worked with each other to coach, rewrite, and establish the best they could for every child.

One of the surprising side effects of this incredibly difficult time in education is the strength that came from the Collaborative Teams. Every Wednesday, administrators were able to attend their assigned teams and the conversation was rich as professional conversation occurred constantly and consistently about priority standards and how are we going to know they learned it. One of the great side effects from this is the professional and personal support that came out during this time. Teachers were literally mentally and physically exhausted, as were the students, and fighting every day to be a professional.

The Guiding Coalition, BLT, and Action teams continued. Shockingly, the Teams or Zoom approach to all meetings actually facilitated easier scheduling. Hightower Trail met with all feeder elementary schools and was pleased to discover that vertical alignment is taking place concerning writing non negotiables.

One of the interesting side effects was what happened to SMART goals. Literally, some subject areas began to develop SMART goals about class engagement – especially science classes. (See shared information in resources.)

Due to what we know about parent involvement in students’ work, there has already been intense conversation about reframing and reworking the academic approach to students for the 2021-2022 school year. The Collaborative Teams are rethinking how they can be supportive, find out where students really are, and move them forward productively. The conversation within the Guiding Coalition has already been about focusing on reading, writing and math. Each subject area has established their vertical guidelines through the Guiding Coalition structure. (See plan in resources.)