Burns Middle School
Model PLC Update - April 2021

This school year has been a challenge as we work to ensure learning for all in the midst of a pandemic. Our year started with students having the option to attend school two days per week in cohorts (cohort A: Monday/Tuesday; cohort B Thursday/Friday) or attend 100% virtually. As a school, we were required to staff both learning modalities. In reviewing numbers last summer (63% choosing hybrid instruction + 37% choosing full remote instruction), it was a challenge to staff in isolation (i.e. teachers not being responsible for both hybrid *and* remote learners). We could either staff our hybrid classrooms and meet social distancing guidelines without a problem leaving 200+ students for virtual teachers; or, staff our virtual classrooms effectively while creating issues with COVID protocols. When looking at the big picture (what is going to be best for learning for all students, what is going to create the safest learning environment, what is going to be best for students who wish to transition back to school during the course of the year, what is going to be the best approach to take should our state/district allow us to transition back to a 'normal' setting, etc), our team decided teachers would serve both hybrid and virtual students. Based on directives from our district for virtual instruction, it was possible for teachers to serve both groups of students. Reflecting on this as we move into the final weeks of school, this was beneficial because:

- Students were able to receive instruction from their teacher who discusses learning, plans, assessments, etc. with their PLC
- As students chose to transition back, we were able to accommodate this (175 students chose to move from remote instruction to in person learning August-present). Our remote percentage decreased from 37% to under 15%.
- In January, we received additional COVID funds and were able to create an in-house Virtual Academy for fully remote students. We hired retired teachers and a teacher looking to transition back into the profession to staff the Academy. Doing this created additional opportunities for learning for our virtual students. What made this transition and plan successful was the fact that the Virtual Academy teachers could join PLCs and the virtual students were exposed to the same pace, standards, instruction, common assessments, etc.
- Our state/district removed the social distancing guidelines allowing all students to return with minimal social distancing which allowed us to move to full weeks of instruction. Our plan accommodated this transition with ease.

While life since March 14, 2020 (date our governor announced schools in our state were 'closed' for in person learning) has been a challenge, our established systems and professional learning communities have not only eased the burden, but have played a large role in ensuring our students attain the skills they need, even with the limited amount of instructional time they are receiving this year. When schools transitioned to remote learning March 16, 2020, PLCs began the process of re-working their pacing guides to ensure the most important standards would be

covered during remote learning for the remainder of the year. They then turned to their attention to how the learning would happen - over 60% of our students lacked reliable internet connectivity. PLCs were creative in their delivery and provided feedback to students regarding their progress.

As we began to plan for the 2020-21 school year, PLCs created and completed a [standards transition sheet](#) showing what standards were addressed prior to March 14 and what standards were addressed through remote learning as these standards would need to be reviewed, scaffolded, etc. when students returned to class in the fall if of vertical importance. Also during the summer, PLCs refined their pacing to adapt to the limited amount of instructional/facetime they would have with students (2 days/week). They focused on standards and research-based strategies students would need to be successful in their current grade and future grades - power/leverage standards were discussed heavily. As PLCs built their pacing, we chose to continue to implement our state's formative assessments (NC Check Ins), so teachers scheduled time to assess. Additionally, PLCs scheduled time for smaller CFAs within their scope and sequence. For each assessment, time was schedule to review data and create a plan of action.

In the spring of 2020, staff access to campus was limited, therefore, PLCs moved to virtual platforms. Upon our return in the fall, grade level content area PLCs were scheduled for Wednesdays. If teachers chose to work remotely, they joined their PLC virtually (however, most were in person). With Wednesdays being a remote day for students, this proved to be a great opportunity for teachers to collaborate, review assessment data (during 'normal' years, data days would require teachers to miss a full or half day), share professional development opportunities, etc.

Even with COVID, we continued to work to serve and monitor student progress in all areas - academics, behavior, and social emotional - to inform decision making for this school year and beyond.
- NC Check Ins (three interim assessments per grade level content area measuring state standards scheduled throughout the year) for reading and math continued across grade levels. PLCs continue to complete data discussions and use the data to drive instructional decisions. Although not perfect comparisons (due to assessing a smaller percentage of students), there have not been drastic changes in our Check In scores (only measures percentage correct). Longitudinal data can be found [here](#). We have these data broken down by individual sections, domain, etc. for the year, however, the sheet above provides a current/historic view of our scores. For areas showing sharper than expected decreases this year when compared to previous year, deep(er) discussions and problem solving have taken place to discuss concerns and ways to improve - we've re-visited standards, reviewed assessment questions, ensured our classroom instruction is meeting the rigor of assessment questions, reviewed intervention data, scheduled remediation, etc.

- At the end of the first quarter, we had a large number of failures - as did most schools across the country. Weekly, starting in August, as a leadership team, we would monitor the number of students failing zero to all courses. Therefore, at the end of the quarter, it was not a surprise. Our team established a grade floor of 50 in order to give students a fighting chance to recover. Grades were not 'averaged up,' teachers overrode grades so we could share actual earned scores with parents. Throughout the first quarter all staff called parents, met with students, offered remediation, etc. However, at the end of the quarter, we had 302 failures in core classes and 138 in elective classes [most years number of failures is in single digits]. At the end of the quarter, we met with teachers by grade levels and had deep conversations about grades. Essentially, teachers were not adapting grading practices/expectations to pandemic times. We walked through this [presentation](#) - discussed the data and completed the exercise in the presentation to raise awareness. For the second quarter, there was a 13.6% decrease in overall failures and an 8.28% decrease in core failures. For the third quarter, the number of overall failures decreased by 34.1% (from first quarter) and the number of core failures decreased by 32.5% (from first quarter) with a majority of the failures being held by fully remote students.
- Students needing tier 2 or tier 3 literacy and/or math intervention continue to be served. COVID (and other) funding allotments have allowed us to hire interventionists to work with students. We completed a targeted screening (all classes except accelerated) at the beginning of the year in ELA and math classes to initially identify students. For students scoring below the 40 percentile, we combined screening data with historical data to make decisions about intervention placement. We began serving these students on the days their cohorts were in attendance and progress monitored every 3-4 weeks and the MTSS Leadership Team, along with interventionists, analyzed the data to make decisions about students needing to exit interventions and be core-support only, students needing to move from tier 3 to tier 2 or tier 2 to tier 3, or students who needed to enter individual problem solving. Generally, we complete a targeted screening at the beginning of each quarter, however, with the limited amount of instructional time, we created a data profile for each student consisting of current grades, NC Check In scores, historical state test data, value added data, and initial targeted assessment score. If we needed further data to make decisions about a student's possible placement in intervention, we pulled and screened individually. This method saved instructional time for core classes.
- Masks, social distancing, and smaller-than-normal classes have been natural interventions for behavior. However, we continue to serve students based on data from SRSS (Student Risk Screening Scale) completion, teacher feedback, and current discipline data. We have 16 students on a level one or level two behavior plan (tier 2). We continue to meet with and monitor those students through conversation and goal setting, in addition to our students on formal behavior intervention plans (tier 3).
- We continue to serve students across tiers in social emotional learning. Counselors pushed into health classes to complete core SEL lessons. Content was driven by our school's chosen curriculum and supplemented by results from a back to school survey

students were administered in August/September. Students needing tier 2 supports were identified by traditional data collection (SRSS, office discipline referrals [very limited this year], teacher input] and individual back to school survey results. Tier 2 groups were created, led, and progress monitored by our student services team. Two students entered problem solving for social emotional learning and served by our part time mental health clinician. Students completed a pre-assessment in September and are in the process of completing the post-assessment. An early (and incomplete) glance at the data show a .7 increase in average score and 1 point increase in the median score. We will further disaggregate the data when the post assessment is complete.

Unfortunately, we have students who are failing to meet academic expectations, therefore, we are working to find ways to ensure their success. While retention is our last option, it is a real possibility for students who are not attending instructional sessions, completing work, or showing any progress regardless of the interventions we are putting in place to (re)engage them with school. We have created a rubric to help us problem solve students who are not meeting academic standards. Once complete, our MTSS Leadership Team will review each student and make plans (with the student) for their future. Again, retention is our last resort - we are looking at multiple options and strategies, reaching 'outside the box,' in order to avoid the decision to hold a student back.

No one on staff had a college course on teaching through pandemics. We have worked to provide students (and staff) with what they need to excel - relationships and consistency. We have achieved this through our work in professional learning communities. In reviewing multiple data sources, the only major change has been the percent of students assessed (which is increasing, but will not reach the 95-100% until students are required to re-enter school). We continue to collaboratively and relentlessly focus on learning and results through unpacking, assessing, re-teaching, and re-assessing standards; focusing on research-based best practices and strategies, using action research and discussing outcomes related to learning, pursuing professional development opportunities, etc. PLC conversations continue to center on the four critical questions driving our work - be it in the middle of a pandemic or a regular school year. By being consistent, maintaining high expectations, and adhering to the tenets of PLCs, we have weathered the storm and are setting our students and colleagues up for future success.