



Superintendent's Corner

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October 9, 2015

In an effort to ensure ongoing communication, I am going to try to send out weekly updates – my *week in review*, which will highlight any important activities in the schools and identify any of my work or discussions that may be of interest to the community. This week was another busy week of meetings with various parents, community members, and school staff.

Leadership Team Meeting

I meet weekly with our central office leadership staff and every other week with the district leadership team, which includes central office staff and our building principals. This week, our conversations focused on procedures and protocol around hiring of staff, evaluation of staff, and personnel issues. We were able to engage in some deep, initial conversations about what good teaching and learning looks like, how to recognize and acknowledge it through the evaluation process, and how to support continued teacher growth. This will be an ongoing discussion at upcoming meetings. In terms of hiring of staff, we were able to identify best practices in ensuring that we are selecting the best candidates for positions. As a former superintendent of mine used to say, for every teacher you hire, you are making a million dollar decision for the district. There is much research around the significant long-term implications of spending a year with an effective versus an ineffective teacher.

Statement of Interest

Las spring, the district submitted a 'statement of interest' to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) to explore the potential of improving the facilities at Amesbury Elementary School. MSBA is coming for a site visit to AES on October 27th. While this site visit does not suggest that we will move forward in the next steps with MSBA, it is certainly a positive sign to have them come to explore our statement of interest in more detail.

NSIP

On Wednesday, I had the opportunity to spend my first full day participating in the New Superintendent Induction Program. Along with 30 other new superintendents, I was exposed to some strategies and approaches that I can bring back to my work with the administrators and teachers in Amesbury. In particular, we spent time reviewing an example of a strategic plan and Skyping with the superintendent that developed the plan. Throughout this year, we will be reviewing many different examples of strategic plans and breaking down the process to

ensure that we end the year with a comprehensive strategic proposal that incorporates the key areas for improvement and reflects a wide range of input from the community. Our work is being guided by a book called *Strategy in Action: How School Systems Can Support Powerful Teaching and Learning*, by Rachel Curtis and Elizabeth City.

School Happenings

It is my goal to get into the buildings each week and spend time in classrooms and for other central office staff members to also get into schools more frequently. I anticipate that 'School Visits' will be a regular entry in my weekly report where I can highlight some of the good practices in the buildings. For this week, I would like to focus on AES, AMS, and AIHS.

AES started their intervention block this week. This intervention block provides an opportunity for students to address specific areas of weakness, as identified using data, in a small group setting. All staff are available during this block to work with students based on their needs, so it is very possible that a student would be working during this time with someone other than their classroom teacher. The teachers will progress monitor (periodically assess) students and their progress and make adjustments to groupings as needed. This is a half hour block of time each day. It is a great example of the concept of 'it takes a village'. The entire school takes ownership for the success of each student.

While visiting Amesbury Middle School today, I spent time in five different six grade classrooms. Two common themes emerged in my visits to those rooms – accountable talk and student engagement. Accountable talk refers to a process that moves from teacher centered control to student centered control. Students, with prompting and modeling from the teachers, learn how to engage with one another during discussions to further probe and expand everyone's understanding of concepts. They are taught how to 'challenge' another student's thinking in a respectful, purposeful manner. I watched as students worked together to discuss themes from a book, solve a math problem, barter over goods and services, and 'design' a society. Accountable talk has an outcome of promoting a respectful learning environment, but it also teaches students to be more responsible for their learning. The other theme that was noticeable in all of the classrooms was the level of student engagement. In every room I visited, the students were actively immersed in their work and the teachers were circulating around facilitating the learning.

At my NSIP workshop this week, we spent time discussing culture and climate. The Innovation High School is a great example of a school promoting a positive culture that encourages both learning and social/emotional development. The school hosted its first Poetry Slam for the school year. Students were excited to share both poetry they wrote, as well as read poems from books. Students and staff took the opportunity to share out poetry – it was a great learning experience, but more importantly, a positive school-team building exercise. Principal Eryn Maguire and her staff are doing a wonderful job meeting a special population of students where they are and developing a personalized approach to help the students continue to learn and grow!

Closing Thoughts

As a finish up my first month here in Amesbury, I just want to take this opportunity to express how much I am enjoying my work. I have had the chance to talk with many people already and will continue my conversations throughout this month. It is so evident from my meetings that this is a community that supports education and wants the best for our kids.