

GAPSS Part A – Professional Learning Current Reality

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Part A: Professional Learning Current Reality

Vision:

Holcomb Bridge Middle School's mission is the commitment to academic and individual excellence. In this commitment the school fosters college and career readiness, strength of character, and cultural enrichment in a safe global learning environment. Matt Vance (Curriculum Assistant Principal) stated, "Holcomb Bridge Middle School motto is "Excellence Whatever It Takes" our commitment to student achievement and to ensure we prepare our students to be successful in the 21st century. Technology is a key in meeting these goals in providing data driven innovative and engaging instruction."

21st century technology in the classroom is part of the mission at Holcomb Bridge Middle School. At the end of the school year in 2013, all teachers were given an iPad to use for instructional purposes. The school purchased two iPad carts for student use. The iPads were given at prior to summer break to allow teachers to work with the devices over summer to be proficient at the beginning of the school year. Professional development was able to take place during the summer for teachers to come in at various times to receive assistance. Holcomb Bridge strives to provide students access to technology every day during instruction. The school has three computer labs including in the media center and as well as two laptop classroom carts. Classrooms either have a SMART or Promethean Board along with at least three desktop computers. This year a teacher introduced her peers to the web site Donor Chose and they have worked together for the school to receive over \$20,000 in additional technology through grants. With the influx of instructional technology in classroom, the administration selected a teacher to offer additional professional learning in relation to technology. In order to achieve this, teacher has two classroom periods devoted to offering workshops, peer coaching and individual

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assistance in technology integration, instruction and strategies. Holcomb Bridge Middle strives to be on the cutting edge with the use of technology by using school funding to purchase technology and training from school funds. The school has purchased two interactive projectors for teachers to use in the classroom prior to the district integrating this technology in schools. Student assessments are given in using various forms of technology and software along with technology driven instruction. As part of fostering College and Career Readiness enrichment programs which are STEM based such as Coder DoJo has been implemented in the school. As Fulton County schools became a charter school district, Holcomb Bridge Middle is moving toward a charter school alignment. The school had elections for the School Governance Council for the upcoming year. This council is made up of teachers, staff, parents and school community members. In the future this council will be the guiding force in the school mission and vision.

Needs Assessment:

Holcomb Bridge Middle School has two learning communities which guide the direction of the school, administration community and the Guiding Coalition. The Guiding Coalition makes suggests and guides decisions of the school. It is made up of administration staff along with teacher leaders of the school. It is this shard leadership model which teacher leaders guide the direction the school takes in following the mission and vision and making decisions on professional development. Several of the coalition members are part of the committee which developed and implements Instructional Rounds professional development in our school. At the end of the school year last year after feedback from staff regarding behavior management, a committee was formed as a PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) team to develop positive behavior program at our school. The leadership at Holcomb Bridge continues to

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gather feedback from the staff and teachers to ensure we are on the right path in reaching our goals and for continuous improvement and direction. Holcomb Bridge does not have homeroom time for the last 5 years these 20 minutes in the day was moved to mid day and offered “Learning Lab” an opportunity for enrichment, remediation and data collection. In the last year, teachers felt this time needed to be evaluated and restructured. Surveys and teacher committees were developed and after two re-launches the program is back to being a success. Teachers were the ones guiding these decisions after gaining feedback from each other and reviewing student data. Teacher reviewed student data and gauged what strategies increased student achievement. Along with professional development and learning which is job- embedded, teachers are welcome to make self assessments of their own needs as well as from peer feedback and attend professional development offered through various programs. Professional development is guided through student data discussion, staff requested and those which align with the school goals.

Professional Learning:

Holcomb Bridge Middle School is a Professional Learning Community which focuses on data driven decision making through various content collaborations and community professional learning communities. Professional learning is an integral part of Holcomb Bridge Middle’s commitment to the students in providing instruction which “develops their higher order and critical thinking skills and cooperative learning” (HBMS, SPO, 2013). In developing teacher skills in these areas, professional learning sessions are offered once a month during the school day to focus on one of the TKES standards (Teacher Keys Effectiveness System). After this once a month professional learning takes place, staff participates in Instructional Rounds to further develop their understanding and skills of the TKES standards. Teachers learn tools and strategies which they can implement in their classrooms. Staff participate in Instructional Rounds to further

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develop their understanding and skills of the TKES standards. This follow up support to the previous week's professional development helps guide the teachers understanding and ability to gauge where they are in meeting the standard. As a Professional Learning calendar has been set for the year, teachers have a guide to develop their own professional learning goals. Gaining and reviewing student achievement through the discussion of assessment scores tells the success of professional development as well. The implementation of Professional Learning for TKES and Instructional Rounds helps ensure this learning opportunity is translated into practice. Teachers have the many opportunities for professional learning from attending workshops and conferences, peer-led brown bags, peer observations and instructional coaching as well as being members of PLC's. The administration commitment professional development is reflected in professional development being a large part of the school's strategic plan. In doing so, "combine a deep understanding of and cultural responsiveness to the community they serve with high expectations and support results to achieve school and system goals" (Learning Forward, 2011, p53). Along with job embedded professional learning, teachers are advised of any and all additional learning opportunities which are able to them. They are encouraged to attend and professional development days off are widely approved. A mentoring program is in place for new teachers at Holcomb Bridge. New teachers and their mentors meet once a month for professional development along with mentoring sessions. Many teachers from Holcomb Bridge attend and present at conferences throughout the country. Teachers are able to guide their own development plan based upon their needs and wants outside of what is offered at the school. While attendance in job embedded professional development is required at the same time teachers do not feel forced to seek additional opportunities. "Teacher commitment to professional learning does allow us to develop as a community of lifelong learners which

strengthen our commitment to the achievement of our students” (M. Vance, personal communication, 2014).

Align to School Improvement Goals:

Holcomb Bridge Middle School has developed and implemented specific reform strategies in several areas. The school “will provide opportunities for all children in the school to meet or exceed Georgia’s proficient and advanced levels of student performance (HBMS, SPO, 2013). There are four primary goals: higher order thinking skills, literacy across all sub groups, specific SMART goals in STEM and Language Arts. One SMART goal is to improve student achievement by 5% in reading comprehension in the subgroups of English Language Learners (ELL) and Students with Disabilities (SWD). In the hopes to bridge the gap between the rest of the student body and these two sub groups, teachers at Holcomb Bridge Middle School work together to implement various literacy strategies throughout the contents. Teachers who work with these students in the Humanities contents have attended workshops which focus on innovative literacy instructional strategies. Staff has access two Instructional Coaches in the areas of Math and Language Arts as well as STEM and Humanities Specialists to provide targeted support in these specific areas. Two aspects of the school mission is to provide a learning environment which is innovative and engaged standards based instruction along with comprehension and continuous progress monitoring and assessment. Holcomb Bridge Middle aligns to this mission through Backwards Design planning. Teachers are provided a “Backward Design” planning day each semester with their content to develop common summative and formative assessments and differentiated instructional strategies. Teachers are guided to make data driven decision making during instructional planning and this takes places during various content collaborations and community PLC’s. In developing standards based instruction teachers

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look to the standards in TKES and have the opportunity for peer feedback and peer observation through Instructional Rounds. Teachers strive to meet and exceed standards just like their students in areas of differentiation, assessment strategies, assessment uses, and academically challenging environment. The school's mission to provide instruction with 21st century technology, the school budget includes a large amount of funding to the purchase and support of technology in the classroom. Teachers have implemented various technology tools in their classrooms as part of the TKES standards. Key piece of professional rounds and inclusion of support to the TKES standards is the integration of technology into instructional planning and assessment. With the addition of Instructional Technology Lead Teacher has allowed teachers to receive various forms of professional learning in integration of technology through various means. This teacher has given brown bag lunches, held workshops, peer coaching and one on one guidance to the staff. Additionally members of the district's Instructional Technology team has offered technology assistance in the use of iPads in instruction.

Funding and Incentives:

The majority of professional learning at Holcomb Bridge Middle takes place at the school as part of the *HBMS School Strategic Plan*. Part of the school mission to have teacher delve into the TKES standards. This professional development is delivered either by members of HBMS administration team or instructional or assessment support staff from the school district. Even though Holcomb Bridge is a Title 1 school, using free resources in house and from the district allows any other funding to allocate to the cost of having substitutes in the building during the days each individual content area has "Backward Design" days. The school this year will spend \$7,000 on substitute for these days set aside this school year. An additional \$1500.00 from the

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Title 1 budget is ear marked for teacher and staff who would like to attend a conference and these funds will cover their registration fees. While there is no incentive in attending professional development, teacher and staff are recognized in various manners as part of the success of the school and school achievement. Our school has a program called “ICARE” Commit Acts of Kindness, Act Responsibly, Respect People and Property, Ensure Safety bucks. This program was designed to reward students when they display this behavior. The 2013-2014 school year, teachers and staff may ask that another teacher receive bucks as regiontion for their work. The reward could be given for helping some with a lesson, assistance with technology or great collaboration. Additionally each grade level has a Spotlight Teacher award every month by their peer, a teacher is recognized for her contributions to student achievement and as an excellent team member. While these two recognitions are not directly tied to professional learning, many cases, it is faculty members who are commitment to growing as a leader and student achievement as those who are acknowledged. Vance believes these two programs along with the implementation of Positive Behavior Management System foster the school mission, in which we foster college and career readiness, strength of character, and cultural enrichment in a safe, respectful, global learning environment (M. Vance, personal communication, 2014).

Diversity:

The diversity of Holcomb Bridge Middle School in itself guides the variety of different forms of professional development for the staff. As the school is a Title 1 school, with students from over 35 countries it also has two separate students with special needs programs. Holcomb Bridge has a special program for autistic students as well as Moderate Intellectual Disable (MOID). Teachers in these two programs are leaders in the school district had developed and

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lead professional development for teachers in these programs at a district Middle School Summit. Staff members of these programs participated in all professional development including our Instructional Rounds. The special education teachers at the school attend professional development held by the county in the relation to instructional and behavioral strategies and components in relation their students. However the school needs to improve in the area of professional development for teachers in the team taught environment in regards to co-teaching strategies and instructional strategies for students with disabilities (M. Vance, personal communication, January 2014). As part of being a Title 1 school, Holcomb Bridge has access to a Title 1 Math Instructional Coach and a Title 1 ELA Instructional Coach this two supports work with our team of teachers to bridge the achievement gap in these two contents in the sub-groups of Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners.

Collaboration:

As a PLC, collaboration is a foremost priority at the school. Various PLC's are a part of Holcomb Bridge Middle School. Grade levels are broken into two or three communities and these communities meet once a week to discuss and analyze student data which is gathered by team members through various software tools. Community's members have the pulse on student achievement, engagement and behavior at any moment in time. This data is gathered through use of Google documents which allows the community to be most effective. This document also records strategies and/or interventions which are put in place and are available for administration to review at anytime. This is reflective of how "Technology facilitates and expands community interaction, learning, resources archiving and sharing" (Learning Forward, 2011, p47). Content communities meet throughout the month in various forms to further developed data driven strategies to implement in their classrooms. Grade level content teams meet twice a week during

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planning to develop various formative and summative assessment based upon student data. The data gathered from these assessments allows the team to develop instruction which is CCRPI (College and Career Ready), Common Core and technology integrated lessons. Humanities and STEM teams meet once a month after school to collaborate on content –related instruction and work to develop cross-curricular lessons. This fosters the development of collective responsibility. The collective participation advances the goals of the whole school as individuals as well as the value of education for the students. When teachers design assessments and engage in collaborative analysis of student work, they gain critical information on their effectiveness of their learning on students (Learning Forward, 2011, pg.67).

Evaluation:

As students are evaluated throughout the learning process, teachers at Holcomb Bridge Middle School are evaluated in various manners including self-evaluation, peer observations and formal observation. As part of TKES, teacher must self evaluate at the beginning of the year. Along with this evaluation, teachers at HBMS take part in a guiding survey to determine professional learning in regards to TKES at the school. HBMS implemented a program called Instructional Rounds. The goal and purpose of Instructional Rounds is “to allow teacher opportunities to see their colleagues implement teaching strategies and methods and to gain additional practice implementing TKES standards (HBMS Instructional Rounds, 2013). Once a month after the staff has attended professional learning on component of TKES, a day of Instructional Rounds is held. On Instructional Rounds day, each teacher must implement a lesson which is data driven and focus on one of the TKES standards which are: differentiation, assessment strategies, positive learning environment, academically challenging environment, assessment uses, instructional strategies, and instructional planning. The staff indicates through an online survey which one of

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the TKES standards they plan to implement in their classroom that day and also which standard they would like to observe. This part of the professional learning plan allows for peer feedback along with formal observation feedback which fosters a collaborative learning environment. Grade level communities come back and discuss strategies which they witnessed and could integrate to their instructional design. “Modeling, observation and feedback are important, sometimes essential for learning (Knight, 2007). More formal evaluation is done by the administrators as part of the TKES process, which is ongoing and consistent feedback through formal and informal observations. Instructional Rounds peer-feedback and formal TKES observations allow administration to determine if professional learning is translated into practice. As Instructional Rounds have taken place at Holcomb Bridge Middle evaluation has taken place of the system itself by administration and staff. In the evaluation of the professional development, changes have been made to increase its quality and effectiveness. Evaluation of professional learning provides information for those who engage in, plan and facilitate it and support professional learning to determine the impact it has on student achievement (Learning Forward, 2011, pg.68).

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