

## REaL Grant Initiatives Update

The faculty has been working very hard this year on various committees to improve West High School. Many staff members serve on more than one committee and have given many hours of their time. These committees have researched best practice, gone on site visits and collaborated with one another. Without the hard work and dedication of our outstanding staff and administration, none of this work would get done. If you have any questions or concerns, or would like to be involved, please contact Heather Lott or Melanie Thiel.

**SIP:** Beth Thompson, Melanie Thiel, Len Mormino, Nancy Roth, Rick Rosen, Laura Lang, Jonathan Davis, Fred Swanson, Denise Hurd

The School Improvement Committee has spent this year investigating academic support models in other schools to begin to develop an effective model for West High School. The committee visited Memorial High School, Evanston High School, Wheeling High School, and New Trier High School, in IL. Some of the common themes that were discovered, especially in the Illinois schools, were as follows:

- Many schools have an identified academic team who intervene with struggling students. These teams of support people have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The students are regularly monitored, they develop both short and long term goals and the students develop meaningful relationships with an adult in the building. The academic support team has regular communication with teaching staff and makes recommendations for student support.
- There are mandatory study tables in each academic content areas where students are directed to go if they are receiving a D or F in any given course.
- Students who are skill deficient are identified in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and are provided with a summer program designed to prepare them for high school, enhanced English and Math instruction in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and creative scheduling that allows for students to catch up to grade level.
- Some schools have a family liaison person who is able to make meaningful connections in the community and with parents.
- After school homework centers are thriving.
- Social privileges are used as incentives for students to keep their grades up.

### Recommendations from the SIP Committee

- Design more creative use of academic support allocation to better meet the needs of struggling students.
- Create an intervention team with specific role definition for each team member.
- Design and implement an after school homework center that will be available for all students, not just those struggling academically.
- Design and implement student centers and tables that meet specific academic and time needs (after school, lunch, etc.)
- Identify a key staff person to serve in a specialized family liaison role.
- Develop a clear intervention scaffold that is easy for staff to interpret and use.

- Design and implement enhanced Math and English interventions for skill deficient students.

**Equity Team:** Ed Holmes, Melody Mar Pohl, Heather Lott, Carrie Bohman, Mike Merline, Jenni Vondrak, Lucerne Rice

The equity team began its work this year by reading several articles as part of the staff development days. There were discussions in both small and large group settings. These articles were taken from the book *Everyday Antiracism*, edited by Mica Pollock. From these articles, a book discussion group formed. There were 20 participants who were representative of all content areas. An open discussion and examination of issues included topics such as including, supporting and engaging our students and learning to value student's diverse perspectives.

Next year the Equity Team will be working on Be The Change - Challenge Day. The team has recommended this initiative be implemented in late October, 2009. This program includes outreach to students, staff, and parents. For more information about Challenge Day, visit their web site at [www.challengeday.org](http://www.challengeday.org)

**Communication Committee:** Theresa Calderon, Melanie Thiel, Jennifer Talarczyk, Avril Hanson, Andy Kuemmel

The communication committee discussed ways to increase communication within our West High community. This included such things as creating the expectation that all staff check mailboxes, email and voicemail daily. The faculty bulletin and department chair minutes are sent out electronically each week. There is a staff/student/parent messaging system that is provided on a message board in Infinite Campus.

Some things the Communication Committee will be working on next year:

- Name will change from Communication to Community Outreach.
- Building community among staff through a "Kudos" board to share and celebrate success.
- Development of the West High Communication Center to showcase student engagement in classroom and co-curricular activities.
- Participation in the World Café. This event is being hosted by the West High PTSO and includes parents, students and staff. These community members are involved in round table discussions to develop the Vision and Mission of West High School. Look for more information on this as it becomes available.
- Evaluate current procedures for parent/teacher conference sign up format.
- Evaluate current outreach programs and plan for increasing parent involvement.

**PBS - Positive Behavior Supports:** David Watkins, Melanie Thiel, Heather Lott, Kelle Adams, Karen Anderson, Larry Iles, Ellen Pryor, Jennifer Talarczyk, Jenni Vondrak, Donna Strabala, Cindy Weisner, Becky Bebbler-Wells, Rick Rosen, Linda Brewer, Pat Wathen, Sean Gray, Frank Rodriguez

Next fall West will be fully implementing the PBS system. This approach will work to establish the social culture and behavior at West. A site team of 16 staff spent 2 days in May developing a behavior matrix around our theme HOUSE – which is representative of the popular WEST HOUSE. The team developed words that were representative of the things that West values and expects from all students and staff. H – honor, O – opportunity, U – understanding, S – safe, E – education. This committee will continue it’s work over the summer with full implementation in the fall. For more information about PBS, visit their web site at [www.pbis.com](http://www.pbis.com)

**AVID:** David Watkins, Lee Ann Johnson, Melanie Thiel, Carrie Bohman, Carla Geovanis, Lori Wesolek, Frank Rodriguez, Chris Hager, Sara Neuenschwander, Pat Wathen

- Site team of 15 teachers, counselors and administrators was formed.
- Student selection process was developed and used in order to place students in the program for next year.
- The team consulted with the Boys & Girls club for tutorial program and enrichment activities, who are providing all the tutors, tutor training and funding for the activities.

To do this Summer

- Finalize student schedules
- Set up team building activities for the AVID site team, AVID students, and AVID tutors.
- 8 West staff will be attending the AVID Summer Institute in August to be trained on AVID methodology.
- Develop a long term strategic plan for AVID

**Curriculum and Assessment:** David Watkins, Nancy Roth, Betsy Barnard, Jonathan Davis, Paul Berger–Durnbaugh, Cara Rea–Garcia

Curriculum mapping has begun across all 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade Core classes. The committee recommends this standards–based curriculum design which includes identifying essential and enduring themes for each course. Eclipse software is being used as a tool to facilitate this mapping, help departments “inventory” their curriculum/standards, and to communicate, share and differentiate.

The committee recommends:

- West inventory the current assessments being used by teachers.
- Use standardized test scores to identify students’ strengths and weaknesses.
- Identify ways to assess knowledge and skills in order to differentiate
- A conversation about the expectations for final exams
- Use eclipse and professional development to share assessment ideas

**Professional Development:** Beth Thompson, Mike Kopish (UW), Jan Bernstein, Joe Brunner, Avril Hanson, Heather Lott, Betsy Barnard, Don Vincent

Attendance at professional conferences for staff was a focus for this team. The team is looking at ways to create a fair application process for staff to attend conferences in their content areas.

Professional Collaboration Time and developing how our potential late start days will look is also a focus of this group. The team, along with the Innovation Team, has developed a focus for this time: To improve student learning and our instructional practice. As we plan for this embedded staff development, the team is charged with maintaining that focus.

**Literacy Committee:** Mitch McGrath, Laura Lang, Kelle Adams, Larry Iles, Andy Norderhaug, Mike Lipp, Steven Olson, Christine Reeb, Charmaine Sprengelmeyer-Podein, Ellen Pryor, Karen Anderson, Katherine Sinkewicz, Jane Bernstein, Ken Potter, Emily Miller

#### **Accomplishments**

- Developed a shared vision of literacy at West
- Shared our perceptions of literacy needs based on classroom experiences and observations
- Created, distributed and began to analyze teacher literacy survey
- Began our own staff development work around reading strategies (“Do I Really Have to Teach Reading?” by Cris Tovani)
- Brainstormed ideas for the Literacy Center
- Discussed potential assessments that could be used to better gauge students’ literacy needs

#### **Next Year...**

- Literacy Center will move into its new space and will house 8 student computers. Volunteer tutors, many of whom are retired teachers, will be available to assist students. We are looking at additional ways to encourage and/or require struggling readers and writers to seek assistance (i.e. Tuesday Reports).
- Literacy Committee will identify 3–4 literacy strategies to be used school-wide. Committee members, in conjunction with the Literacy Coach, will teach others in their departments how to use those strategies effectively.
- Continue conversation about the most effective ways to assess students’ literacy skills
- Plan opportunities for West staff to engage in literacy staff development

#### **Department Chairs**

The group has had two ½ day retreats this year in order to focus on their work as instructional leaders. The shift in focus from a general manager of department business to a leader of the curriculum mapping and design work has required different skills than in years past. The group has identified a set of skills to build upon and is relying on the Adaptive Schools training to move the work forward.

**Innovation Team** Melanie Thiel, Heather Lott, Melody Mar-Pohl, Laura Lang, Len Mormino, Ellen Pryor, Dan Dreckschmidt, Cindy Neusen, Betsy Barnard  
West’s Innovation Team has grown, adding members as recently as March. The group worked primarily on the proposed Professional Collaboration Time by surveying the staff, crunching minutes, and creating a schedule for West. Continued work in combination with the Professional Development Team will continue over the summer and into next school year.

Possible projects for next year:

- Analyze other parent/teacher models and develop recommendations for parent/teacher conferences.
- Analyze current technology use in schools and develop recommendations about how to incorporate 21<sup>st</sup> century skills into West High School
- Examine current final exam models and make recommendations.

### **Team Teaching**

Twenty-two teaching teams of special education and general education teachers met during two full-day retreats this year. They designed universal instructional methods for their co-taught classes and will continue this work in the coming year. Their ideas and methods will be shared with all of the West staff in the future.