

Professional Development

As articulated in Goal 6 of the BCSD 2008-2015 Strategic Plan, **the district will develop highly competent, caring, and student-focused staff.**

What BCSD does well:

Blaine County School District has done an outstanding job in the area of professional development. The district has encouraged individual employees to continue down the path of being lifelong learners by providing a generous stipend and release time for teachers to seek higher levels of professional training. The salary scale reflects the schools district's commitment and regard for highly qualified teachers and employees.

Blaine County School District makes available to all teachers a stipend of \$275.00 dollars a year to be used for professional development. The stipend may be used in a two-year period and is renewed annually. Teachers are also awarded work days for approved development activities. The classes are chosen by the teachers and often reflect personal choice of development. This approach to professional development assumes that if an individual teacher becomes a better teacher in his or her own classroom, the school will become more effective in teaching all children.

The district has also consistently brought to the Wood River Valley professionals trainers who are experts in the most current ideas and educational methods of education. They have provided six paid in-service days for their employees to listen and work with these professionals. The district has consistently culled from teachers, patron and administration alike, ideas and suggestions about the most current and exciting training.

The training has covered a wide range of topics and ideas. Training has covered personal growth, classroom management, technology, district-wide pedagogy and curriculum training to mention a few. From Kris King personal awareness seminars to ODEM training, the district has tried to cover many different approaches to good education.

What We Can Do Differently:

Professional Learning Communities (PLC's), previously adopted by BCSD, can provide an excellent strategy for guiding professional development activities.

PLC's, as described in "Getting Started – Reculturing Schools to Become Professional Learning Communities," Eaker, Dufour and Dufour (2002), are based on the following conceptual framework:

1. Shared mission, vision, values and goals
2. High performing collaborative teams
3. Results oriented culture

The first element of PLC's, *shared mission, vision, values and goals*, answers the questions "Who are we? Where are we heading? How will we get there?" The second element, *high performing collaborative teams* addresses a major difference between PLC's and traditional school models. Teachers, united by a shared vision of student

learning, with sufficient time and opportunities to engage in collaborative inquiry, are able to develop solutions to instructional problems and deepen their professional understanding. According to Boyer (1995), professional collaboration leads to:

- reduction of isolation of teachers
- increased commitment to the mission and goals of the school and increased vigor in working to strengthen the mission
- shared responsibility for the total development of students and collective responsibility for students' success
- powerful learning that defines good teaching and classroom practice, that creates new knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learners
- increased meaning and understanding of the content that teachers teach and the roles that they play in helping all students achieve expectations
- higher likelihood that teachers will be well informed, professionally renewed, and inspired to inspire students
- more satisfaction and higher morale, and lower rates of absenteeism
- significant advances into making teaching adaptations for students, and changes for learners made more quickly than in traditional schools
- commitment to making significant and lasting changes
- higher likelihood of undertaking fundamental, systemic change.

The third element of PLC's, *results-oriented culture*, is based on what Louis and Kruse (1995) describe as "an undeviating focus on student learning." Working collaboratively, teachers develop answers to questions about what students should learn, how to assess that learning, and how to prepare appropriate strategies for remediation.

In conclusion, well developed PLC's provide a powerful mechanism for professional growth. McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) reported that teachers' groups and professional communities "offer the most effective unit of intervention and powerful opportunity for reform" (p. 18) and that "participation in a professional community supports the risk-taking and struggle entailed in transforming practice" (p. 15). According to O'Day, Goertz, & Floden (1995), teacher attitudes and abilities are shaped and reinforced most successfully in contexts in which they work and learn, including the communities formed by their relationships with other professionals. In these communities, individuals or groups of individuals bring in new ideas for examination and discussion with their colleagues. This structure provides the forum and the support for collective learning (professional development). A paradigm shift is needed, however, both in the public and in teachers themselves about what the role of teacher entails. Many in the public and in the profession believe that the only legitimate use of a teacher's time is standing in front of the class, working directly with students. In studies comparing how teachers around

the globe spend their time, it is clear that in countries such as Japan, teachers teach fewer classes, using a greater portion of their time in planning, conferring with colleagues, working with students individually, visiting other classrooms, and engaging in other professional development activities (Darling-Hammond, 1994, 1996).

References

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Blaine County School District No. 61
Recruitment Plan
2009-2010

Blaine County School District's mission is to be a world class, student-focused, community of teaching and learning. In accomplishing this objective we must first attract knowledgeable and talented applicants. Our Administrators then screen, interview, and hire the most qualified candidates for the position.

Attracting qualified applicants may be particularly important and more difficult in the next four years as the Baby Boomer generation begins to retire. This next year, 2009-2010, 89 of our staff will fall into the age 55 or older category. In 2012-2013, 109 staff will be in this age group.

BCSD uses a variety of resources to attract competent and caring applicants. A list of our primary advertising tools are:

- Website advertising
- University Partnership programs
- Grow Your Own Program
- Rent subsidy program
- Job Fairs
- Brochures and banners
- Newspaper and magazine advertising
- Applicant feedback
- Word of mouth

The District website offers a wealth of information on a wide range of topics aimed at inviting qualified candidates to apply for employment with our District. These topics include job opportunities, District philosophies/goals/achievements, staff benefits, affordable housing, student offerings, curriculum, and community resources, to name a few. Interested parties have the opportunity to submit on-line applications via our website for consideration. As openings are posted auto generated emails are sent to applicants to notify and invite them to apply. The District website is frequently reviewed and updated in order to provide the most visible, relevant, and appealing information possible.

Further we take advantage of advertising on other websites such as www.teachers-teachers.com, Idaho Commerce & Labor website, Job Fair websites, and specialty websites as the need and opportunity arise.

Developing and cultivating relationships with Colleges and Universities in the United States and abroad is another recruitment tool utilized. We interact with Schools of Education that produce students, especially in hard to fill endorsement areas. Our goal is to support students and expose them to hiring protocols. At the same time we market our District and give them opportunities to apply for Student Teaching. If Student Teachers

have a successful experience in our District they will be inclined to apply for a teaching vacancy(s). This also gives us the opportunity to evaluate their skills prior to considering them for employment.

Because of the high cost of living we have developed a Rent Subsidy Program that has been highly successful in attracting applicants and supporting staff. Currently, the District reimburses new teachers, moving to the Wood River Valley, \$300 a month the first year, \$200 a month the second year, and \$100 a month the third year towards their rental housing expense.

Affordable Housing is being investigated and may be available to staff in the future if reasonably priced units can be produced. Some Deed restrictions would apply but the savings would offer a great way for our staff to become invested in the local real estate market.

Down payment assistance grants are currently being offered by the Education Foundation to certified staff who do not own housing in Blaine County. The grant is in the amount of \$10,000 and is forgiven as long as the staff member stays with the District for five years. These grants can be used to purchase market rate housing as well as affordable housing units, when available.

The District's Grow Your Own program is offered to Classified staff. It has been a particularly successful tool for producing Educators in hard to fill areas such as Bilingual and Special Education. This program pre-pays Classified staff tuition and books for classes in a teacher education program. Candidates who complete their Teacher Education program often end up Student Teaching in our District and then applying for certified vacancies.

Job Fairs are a great tool for accessing large numbers of qualified teaching applicants. At the fairs we promote our District, visit and interview with prospective candidates, distribute informational brochures and promotional items, and direct applicants to our Website to learn more about our District and apply for vacancies.

Our "Why Choose Blaine County Schools?" brochure promotes the District's mission & vision, excellent pay & benefits, school programs, recreational opportunities, area attractions, and community programs.

Data compiled from our applications provides us with information that is continuously reviewed and used to update our hiring processes. Other dynamics are also regularly reviewed, such as the demographics of our target audience so we can revise our advertising methods, if necessary, in order to magnify our exposure and effectively attract more qualified applicants.

Retaining Teachers

Current Practices

- Mentors provided for new-to-the-profession teachers
- Mentoring program surveys conducted for feedback
- Buddies assigned to experienced new teachers
- Strong leadership from principals
- Job sharing
- Pay/benefits
- Teacher resources
- Professional Development Funds

What we can do differently

- Even if not new-to-profession, all staff could be eligible for paid mentor
- Collaborative time
 - PLC for all schools
 - Mentors/mentees and experienced teachers new-to-the-district have paid time the week before school contract starts to become familiar with specific school district programs
- Use of retired teachers with stipend to mentor
- Make Cognitive Coaches available to support staff observations of other professionals
- Standardized list of supplies and equipment needed for specific job description

Ideas from other districts

- *Connecticut BEST Program*

State of Connecticut Beginning Educator Support & Training (BEST) Program

Ultimately, the goal of BEST Program support is to ensure that all beginning teachers have opportunities to strengthen their knowledge of subject matter and instructional strategies, enhance their understanding of students as learners and begin a process of lifelong learning and professional growth.

All beginning teachers holding “initial educator certificates” must complete the minimum two-year BEST program and successfully submit a portfolio documenting their foundational skills and competencies, as well as discipline-specific teaching standards in order to receive “provisional certification.”

All portfolios, regardless of the content area, require the following documentation:

- daily lesson plans for a five to eight hour unit of instruction with one class;
- examples of student work; and
- reflective commentaries on teaching and learning that took place during the unit.

There are two types of support provided while in the BEST Program:

1. School-based Support:

- A. Assignment of a *mentor* or *support team* within 10 days of commencing teaching; provision of instructional support specific to one's content area or discipline.

Examples of instructional support provided by the mentor or support team:

- Gaining practice in how to document one's teaching and reflect on practice
- Assistance in demonstrating essential teaching competencies as defined by Connecticut's Common Core of Teaching
- Assistance in planning lessons and units of instruction
- Providing feedback on instruction
- Learning how to evaluate student work

- B. Regular contacts with a mentor or support team member: at least biweekly meetings or other forms of contact with the mentor or a support team member.

- C. C. Availability of released time: local district provision of released time on at least eight occasions (or equivalent of 8 half days) to allow beginning teachers to observe or be observed by their mentors or support team members or for professional development related activities.

2. State-based Support:

- A. A. Online Learning Units: All online learning units are designed specifically to support beginning teachers by encouraging collaboration between beginning teachers and their mentors, content colleagues and/or administrators, on topics related to effective planning, instruction and assessment.

- B. Regional Seminars: These seminars complement the online learning units and provide an opportunity for beginning teachers to deepen their understanding of Connecticut's teaching standards and portfolio requirements through participation in structured collaborations with peers and seminar leaders.

- Jerome School District Three Year/Tier Program

The design of the Jerome Teacher Support Program was based on the research principal that successful teacher training must be “imbedded into the workday and become a normal part of our profession” (National Staff Development Council website). The Program is organized around a learning team concept facilitated by 2 teacher-leaders per team. The meetings occur during the school day and guest teachers are hired. They meet a minimum of 15 hours/credit. The Program’s facilitator and the teacher-leaders meet with the principals to keep the communication lines open. There are also paid mentors for each teacher. These mentors are trained using The New Teacher Center’s Formative Assessment System (FAS) from UC Santa Cruz.

Three Year/Tier Program:

Year 1/Tier 1 - The new-to-the-profession teachers study the research on classroom management (Robert Marzano, Fred Jones and others) and work with their facilitators to learn management expectations.

Year 2/Tier 2 - All second year teachers and any experienced teachers new to the district are required to participate. The content of this learning team is all about instructional research based on Robert Marzano’s Classroom Instruction That Works. After discussing the research, the teachers apply these learnings to their classrooms.

Year 3/Tier 3 - During the last year of the Teacher Support Program, the teachers study the issues of formative and summative assessment using the work of Rick Stiggins.