

11-7-10

For: All Palermo Staff

Re: Guided Democratic Inquiry Committee: Update on our learning.

Dear Palermo Staff,

Our committee enjoyed another recent opportunity to engage in a powerful conversation with an educational expert, Kim Marshall. An author and consultant, Kim works with teachers and principals to improve both teaching and student learning.

As with the list of Questions and Answers from our conversation with Professor Johnson, I'm sending this memo to you in order to share some of the key concepts we are learning in our study of teacher compensation and teacher evaluation models. Again, the purpose of our committee is to learn about current issues in teacher compensation and evaluation, inquire into these issues as they apply to Palermo, and then submit a report to both the district and teachers association bargaining teams.

The following questions and answers are the result of the hourlong video-conference between our GDI Committee on teacher compensation and evaluation, and Kim Marshall. Our conversation took place on 10-25-10. Our questions are in normal type and Kim's answers are in italics. Both questions and answers reflect the main concepts and ideas that were discussed. The name of each committee member who asked the question is included immediately above the question.

Since the topics of compensation and evaluation are of great interest, we would like to maintain open communication with all staff in the district as we gain knowledge. A binder of the articles we have read is in each staff room along with a question box so that anyone can ask a question about our work. A list of individuals who are serving on the GDI committee is posted on the Palermo District Home page. Summaries of our reading to date are posted as well. Please let us know if you have questions or sources of knowledge and information that would support our learning.

Yours,

Bill Rich

Anna

What are the key qualities and behaviors of excellent teachers?
How should teachers acquire the knowledge and skills they need to become truly excellent? Is it more in-service? Is it more university courses?

Kim has developed Teacher Evaluation rubrics that include 5 criteria 60 in 6 domains. The criteria follow the acronym "SOTEL." S is for physical and emotional safety. O is for objectives that are linked to standards. T is for teaching. E is for student engagement. L is for learning that is assessed.

Rubric domains include 1. planning; 2. classroom management; 3. delivery of instruction; 4. monitoring, assessment and follow-up; 5. family and community outreach; 6. professional responsibilities.

Sam

What is the role of principals in developing teacher excellence?
What is the role of shared leadership, principals and teachers, in developing teacher excellence?

Kim is not a fan of traditional evaluation processes. It turns out to be a "dog and pony show." The evidence shows there is basically no impact on teaching and learning. He espouses short, unannounced observations 10-12 per year. He gives short feedback as soon as possible (within 24 hours) in the classroom without students present. These "mini-observations" are linked to ongoing team learning and PLCs. The current system brings discredit to the profession. His idea is not the "walkthrough" with a hand held. It is authentic.

Kathy

What do great teachers always do? What do great teachers never do?
How can we learn about the kinds of knowledge and skills our teaching staff possesses? How can we measure their expertise at using best practices?

First we need to separate teaching from teachers. Only half of the students in any class receive mastery from initial instruction. The question is, "What happens then?" Historically, teachers would teach and move on. Now, teachers must correct student misunderstandings as quickly as possible.

*You may have seen the rubrics from Charlotte Danielson. I have the one I developed called, again, SOTEL. Teachers can self-assess on a 4,3,2,1 scale and then work for improvement. There is also a new book by Lemov, **Teach Like a Champion**.*

Nikki

The push for curriculum fidelity seems to dampen teacher autonomy and judgment in the determination of appropriate teaching strategies. Following a scripted or nearly scripted curriculum doesn't seem to require much beyond basic classroom management skills. How do excellent teachers deal with the issue of curriculum fidelity?

The only scripted curriculum Kim is in favor of is the sex ed curriculum. That way you don't get into trouble with anyone. Otherwise, Kim is not in favor of scripted curriculum.

What kids should know and be able to do is negotiated with the state. This becomes the curriculum. But HOW TO is in the teachers' hands.

Some of our teachers hold different philosophies about teaching and learning. How can we keep our uniqueness and individuality as teachers yet come together and unite in ways that best serve student learning?

*There is no right way to teach. But you can't just go off and do anything you want to. You need common assessments that help you get at skills and understanding. We need to shift the conversation to results. This is a big issue and is dealt with by Stigler from UCLA in his book **The Teaching Gap**. It is about Japanese lesson study. The teachers in Japan observe each other regularly in groups, give feedback in order to analyze and improve lessons. These teachers spend an entire career perfecting lessons with the goal of all students learning.*

Carol

What would an ideal teacher evaluation system look like?
Can we achieve the most effective evaluation of teachers if we rely only on administrators to conduct the evaluations?

Peer observation is very powerful, but there is a big danger. The "Culture of Nice" inhibits colleagues from giving each other accurate feedback. Teachers observing other teachers are unlikely to go for the jugular. Now there are effective processes such as critical friends watching a video of teaching and giving feedback.

But the current system actually has a term in law. Kim's wife is an education lawyer and he learned the term from her. It is called a "collusive deal." You'll pretend to teach authentically and I'll pretend to evaluate authentically. Often the evaluation observed by the principal is based on the pre-planned "dog and pony" show and is approved by the principal as if it is real teaching.

Kim related that he has been able to see some incredible schools, the 90-90-90 schools (90% of students in poverty, 90% high achievement). They have discovered an engine of improvement.

Heather

When evaluating teachers we want to look at multiple measures of teacher effectiveness, just as we do with student learning. What are the measures of teacher effectiveness that we should use?

How can we give teachers the most effective feedback about their teaching and student learning?

We need to observe how persistent is the teacher in finding out who doesn't get it and why. Typically the teacher teaches and then moves on.

My thoughts about Merit pay are that it needs to be helpful and fair. Who gets rewarded, the teacher, the team or the school? Kim says the team.

What do we measure? Kim says we measure the team goal using the associated assessment, and principal observation. For instance high frequency words could be a goal for students; and teachers would develop an agreed upon assessment.

What is the reward? Kim says the teacher team should get a reward of being recognized institutionally with a letter of authentic commendation from the principal placed in the personnel file.

Susan

What about the role of technology? Can you be an excellent teacher without expertise in technology? How should technology be use to improve student learning and teacher learning?

Technology has a mixed review. It can be very good and teachers don't use it. Or teachers can use it but it is not very good. The most effective use is to enhance the curriculum they are currently teaching. Research is "murky". Watch how it is being used. Kim likes to use clickers for immediate feedback. For technology we should ask teaching and learning questions.

Terra

How do we find out if gaps exist between best practices and our own practices as individuals and as a whole school teaching staff? How do we fill in those gaps?

There can be too much emphasis on skills and not enough on knowledge and content. Elementary classrooms need balanced reading groups, a good classroom library of 2000 books, getting kids reading at just the right reading level to challenge and not frustrate. Too much pressure on teachers causes them to fudge on the tests. We need rigorous assessments but teachers need to feel safe. We need data without blame. Teachers should be evaluated based on processes such as involvement, risk taking with the team, alignment of assessments with standards and instruction. We need a “driven by data mindset.”

The past “culture of nice” needs to shift to a professional and collegial culture.

The stakes need to be low for teachers. Instruction based on good facilitation of learning and data display becomes magically rigorous.

Next, get the kids involved in the analysis of performance based on the rubrics. Kids need to be invested in the learning goals. Principals have to create time where that could happen. Needed is 90 uninterrupted minutes. This kind of work will create the drive to get all kids over the bar.

In Finland, number 1 in student achievement in the world, they made policy decisions at a national level to treat teachers well, treat teaching as a respected profession with support. And they attack student misunderstanding of lessons on the same day. They teach, assess and re-teach the same day. They conduct agile teaching.