

ELEMENTARY FACILITIES STUDY

The Elementary Facilities Committee is asking all members of the Portsmouth School Community to complete an online survey. This brief survey can be accessed at the link below:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YMB3JTG>

The survey will close on Friday, February 17th and the committee will reconvene on Tuesday, February 21st to review the data. Thank you, in advance, for participating.

TECHNOLOGY

Beginning Monday, January 30th, the school department will begin a “proof of concept” and test drive a virtual desktop environment (VMware). The test will occur at the middle school where teachers and students will have five to six weeks to explore the cloud computing model. Since our goal is to ensure all students and staff have access to comprehensive infrastructure for learning, when and where they need it, we await feedback on how well users had access to their applications and files at school and home as well as their experiences with “thin” client laptop and desktop computer units. We are hopeful this solution will permit more robust classroom integration.

Over the next few weeks, the middle school will also be driving towards decision points on other technology devices. Vendors will be providing teachers access to a variety of classroom interactive components to view ranging from interactive boards and projectors to a variety of student computer types.

UPCOMING EVENTS, KUDOS AND DISTRICT DOINGS

Kudos to Elementary School Teachers **Tess Hall, Cheryl Harrington, Roxanne Monmaney, Ann O’Connell and Stacey Weeks** for their presentation to School Board members on the elementary schools’ workshop model and the need for appropriate class size to deliver individualized instruction.

Congratulations to **PHS student Junqian Li** on being selected as a candidate for the **United States Presidential Scholars Program**. We wish her well as she applies to become one of 500 semifinalists.

Congratulations to **Principal John Stokel** on his recognition as **Middle School Role Model of the Year** by the New Hampshire Principal’s Association.

The **School Board** will re-open its **Public Hearing** on the **FY 13 Budget**, next Thursday, February 9th, 7 pm, at City Hall.

Thank you to the **Portsmouth Rotary** and the **Jeremy Alex Fund** for providing a chess set and booklet for every 4th grader in our elementary schools.

Kudos to **PHS students**, who in collaboration with the **Seacoast Martin Luther King Jr. Coalition**, worked with **local artist, Richard Haynes and Professor Sean McGhee** from the University of New Hampshire’s multicultural affairs office through a series of workshops and created a mural. The mural is currently on display at the Portsmouth Public Library.

ENJOY YOUR FEBRUARY WINTER RECESS



Superintendent’s Update

February 2012



Portsmouth
School
Department

Educating all students by challenging them to become thinking, responsible, contributing citizens who continue to learn throughout their lives.

SUPERVISION & EVALUATION

“PEER CYCLE”

In the fall, professional staff were asked to meet with administrators to review goals and activities for the upcoming school year. Specifically, staff were asked to share their team’s PLC goals for the year and establish a personal goal using Danielson’s *Framework for Enhancing Professional Practice*. Additionally, staff were asked to identify their professional development objectives. In short, staff were being asked to align and plan their PD to support their PLC and personal goals and share it with their school administrator.

This year, in order to make the process doable for administrators and meaningful for teachers, we have established a two-year cycle where teachers will alternately go through an administrative cycle followed by a peer cycle. Staff reported a desire to have more opportunities for focused feedback on their practice. Staff who are on the peer cycle are expected to solicit feedback from colleagues rather than administrators. We expect this will allow staff to be observed and receive feedback more regularly. We are hopeful this provides greater opportunities to see one another’s practice and discuss teaching techniques.

I would recommend an article by Carrie Leana entitled “*The Missing LINK in School Reform*” where she speaks to how current educational reforms are “overselling the role of highly skilled individual teachers and undervaluing the benefits that comes from teacher collaborations that strengthen skills, competence, and a school’s overall social capital.” We believe the peer cycle enhances our PLC work in building a culture of collaboration and social capital. Each of you brings tremendous abilities, knowledge and skills to your role as a teacher,

the human capital side. To be sure, teacher experience, content knowledge and pedagogy are key, but so is what Ms. Leana and others call “social capital,” the “patterns of interactions among teachers.” To this end, we trust those on the peer cycle will have, at a minimum, provided and sought feedback from a colleague on two occasions. We are confident there will be benefit not only for the teacher being observed, but for the observing teacher as well.

As we move forward with this cycle, we have developed a PEER CYCLE FEEDBACK FORM available on the department’s website. In short, we are asking you to write a narrative that outlines the progress you have made against the goals and activities plan you shared last fall. This form will frame your conference with your building administrator in the next few months. Your narrative will be forwarded with both teacher and administrator signatures to become part of your file. We hope this helps clarify the expectations and process.

TEACHER QUALITY NH TASK FORCE WORK

Nationwide, educational reform remains focused on improving the competence and skills of individual teachers; it is axiomatic that a quality educational system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. Last October, Commissioner Barry published the recommendations of a task force focused on “teacher effectiveness and student achievement.” In short, the framework is organized on “four pillars,” namely:

- 1) Teacher Preparation, aligned to standards
- 2) Induction with Mentoring during the initial 3-5 years
- 3) Job-embedded professional development that helps teachers develop and refine their skills

- 4) Teacher evaluation policies and practices that support teachers continuous improvement and usable data about teacher performance

Phase I of the report can be found on the NH DOE website.

Phase II of the task force will recommend a teacher evaluation framework to help districts design and implement a teacher effectiveness system. Here in Portsmouth, we feel as though we have made great progress on two counts. First, we have adopted a supervision and evaluation system based on Danielson’s framework and have begun to think about how to provide more frequent feedback from peers, coaches and mentors, as well as administrators. Second, we assert that our PLC model at its core is embedded-professional development. The drivers in a PLC are collaboration, shared practice and solutions, and focus on the learning of specific academic content.

Areas where we can improve upon include establishing clear, agreed upon criteria as a district for what constitutes excellence in a teaching candidate. Upon hiring such staff, we must provide new hires an induction program with access to high quality mentors who will share curricula, model best practices and provide meaningful feedback.

To this end, a small working group of teachers and administrators will meet over the next few months to establish a systemic model to ensure we continue to attract, hire and retain highly effective teachers committed to our professional learning communities model. This group will report out its initial recommendations to the School Board in late March.

We continue to believe in the importance of investing in our teachers and look forward to the opportunities to develop a teacher effectiveness system that works for the Portsmouth Schools.