Running Head: GAPSS Part A

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**1. Vision**

The vision of Carlton J. Kell High School (KHS) in Cobb County School District, Georgia, is stated as “Student learning is the collaborative responsibility of students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the community which positively affects increasing student achievement (Kell High School, 2013). This is reiterated by Ed Wagner (Principal of KHS) when he states “The vision is obviously that we use as much technology as possible to engage students in learning and also to bring other resources in (personal communication, February 20, 2014).” This vision is made clear through numerous technology trainings taking place during the school year on a small group basis and as a faculty. Student clickers in the form of iRespond are available and utilization is encouraged in every classroom. All classrooms have ceiling-mounted projectors which are connected to internet-enabled laptops. Principal Wagner stated that these projectors are slated to be updated during this school year to ones that enable any white board to become a smart board (personal communication, February 20, 2014). During the 2013-2014 school year, several more computer laboratories were added such that each department has access to at least one. Blogs are required of every teacher and are mandated to be updated at least weekly. E-mail correspondence with parents is highly encouraged with contact logs submitted for review by administration on a semester basis. Teachers’ unit plans and assessments are monitored through Blackboard and classroom observations. Other technological resources are vetted by media center professionals and teachers and introduced to faculty via e-mail or faculty meetings. Overall, the vision of KHS to make learning the collaborative responsibility of students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the community (Kell High School, 2013) is clearly reinforced by the use of technology in the classrooms and the school as a whole.

**2. Needs Assessment**

According to Principal Wagner, professional learning is driven by end of course tests, ACT, SAT, and Georgia High School Writing Test scores and is focused towards classroom instruction, assessments, and collaboration (personal communication, February 20, 2014). This is in line with the school strategic plan, which lists activators and summarizers, writing plan, CLOSE reading, Lexile levels, learning questions, assessment, co-teaching models, and technology talks as topics of professional learning for the school year (Kell High School, 2013). The majority of this professional learning is required for all teachers with the exception of the technology talks which teachers may choose to go to as needed. Principal Wagner stated that his focus on required professional training is to give teachers access to methods for the classroom that have been proven by research and then to provide follow up observation and assistance by administrators and specialists (personal communication, February 20, 2014). This is in alignment with Learning Forward’s (2011) statement that “Like all learners, educators learn in different ways and at different rates (pg. 15).” By allowing for follow up and assistance by administrators and specialists, differentiation in professional learning is possible. In addition, the technology talks are provided as options for teachers to choose to fulfill their own needs for training. With this being an option, however, attendance at these sessions tends to be lower.

**3. Professional Learning**

Professional learning at KHS is offered on a monthly basis by the school in workshops separated by departments and includes subjects related to classroom instruction. Areas such as activators and summarizers, writing plan, CLOSE readings, Lexile levels, learning questions, assessment, and co-teaching models are being addressed this school year (Kell High School, 2013). With the exception of choosing which planning period a teacher wishes to participate in the workshop, there is really no choice embedded in these particular workshops. This can cause issues for teachers because as stated by Knight (2007), “Teachers should have choice regarding what and how they learn (pg. 41).” However, in an attempt to remedy this, optional technology talks are offered on a monthly basis on varying subjects such as iRespond, classroom iPads, and blogs. These optional talks give teachers a choice about what to attend, but as stated previously, are only attended in low numbers.

**4. Alignment to School Improvement Goals**

Professional learning is clearly aligned to school improvement goals on the school strategic plan. Specific goals include increasing the school’s goal on the CCRPI, increasing student Lexile levels, and increasing the pass and exceeds rate on the Georgia High School Writing Test and end of course tests (Kell High School, 2013). These goals are seen in the planned professional learnings for the school year focusing on classroom instruction, Lexile levels, and reading comprehension (Kell High School, 2013). Principal Wagner’s clear focus is on literacy within KHS, and it is his belief that “you can’t succeed if you can’t read or write (personal communication, February 20, 2014).” This focus is evidenced in the focus on reading and writing strategies in professional learning sessions.

**5. Funding and Incentives**

Funding for professional learning is listed on the school strategic plan as primarily coming from Title II funds and special education funds. However, when interviewed, Principal Wagner stated that the current state of the budget in the state has limited the funding KHS actually receives. At the time of the interview, KHS had still not received its Title II funds from the state, and Principal Wagner has paid for most of the professional learning from the local school budget (personal communication, February 20, 2014).

According to Principal Wagner, the incentives for teachers to participate in professional learning at KHS include it being job-embedded learning with no time typically required outside of the school day, there not being a whole lot of wasted time in the professional learning, and the professional learning including strategies that actually work and are research-tested (personal communication, February 20, 2014). Learning Forward (2011) states, “Dedicated job-embedded learning time elevates the importance of continuous, career-long learning as a professional responsibility of all educators and aligns the focus of their learning to the identified needs of students they serve (pg. 33).” While professional learning at KHS appears to be aligned to this, some teachers remain disgruntled about professional learning. However, it is entirely possible that this is simply the case any time workshops are targeted to an entire school’s teaching population.

**6. Diversity**

Carlton J. Kell High School tends not to target diverse student populations as much as other schools. As Principal Wagner stated, “The plan that we have here at Kell is for all kids (personal communication, February 20, 2014).” Although Wagner recognizes the need for specializing instruction for students with disabilities and for students for whom English is a second language (ESLs), the professional learning for these groups is limited. Teachers are given professional learning on differentiating instruction based on different Lexile levels, which is helpful when teaching students with disabilities. Co-teaching professional learning was scheduled to take place twice this school year, but due to the inclement weather and testing schedules, it has been cancelled both times. An ESOL coordinator is available to answer questions on strategies for working with ESLs, but the coordinator has a full class load as well.

**7. Collaboration**

“Professional learning within communities requires continuous improvement, promotes collective responsibility, and supports alignment of individual, team, school, and school system goals (Learning Forward, 2011, pg. 24).” Teachers participate in varying professional learning communities (PLCs) throughout Carlton J. Kell High School. Each teacher participates in a subject area PLC, which meets at least twice a week to develop and review unit plans, assessments, and activities as well as reviewing data for classes in an effort to revise instruction. Learning Forward (2011) states that PLC members “exchange feedback about their practice with one another, visit each other’s classrooms or work settings, and share resources (pg. 25).” Although feedback on practice and resource sharing do take place, classroom visits seem to be rare within PLCs. Additionally, teachers participate in department PLCs on a biweekly to monthly basis to review information from the school leadership team (comprised of the principal, administrators, and department chairs). In these department meetings, teachers also examine data on student standardized testing scores. As a department, teachers draw conclusions concerning best practices and share these with each other. Finally, all teachers participate in monthly faculty meetings where attendance is mandatory. At these meetings, the principal and school administrators review testing data, discuss expectations, and prepare teachers for upcoming events. By participating in each of these PLCs, teachers are focused on the school’s vision that “Student learning is the collaborative responsibility of students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the community which positively affects increasing student achievement (Kell High School, 2013).”

**8. Evaluation**

The effectiveness of professional learning at Carlton J. Kell High School is evaluated in a variety of manners. Unit plans, common assessments, and unit reflections are uploaded to Blackboard for review by the administrator over each department. Classroom walkthroughs are utilized by administration to target specific objectives, such as learning questions, standards, lesson plans, activators and summarizers, and formative assessments. However, Principal Wagner acknowledges that with increasing class sizes, formative assessment is becoming more difficult each year, and he typically allows several walkthroughs to find evidence of formative assessment (personal communication, February 20, 2014).

References

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