Results of the Spring 2015 Survey of Professional Learning for Bellingham Public Schools' Certificated Staff

This past spring, members of the Department of Teaching and Learning, in collaboration with the joint BEA-District Professional Development Committee, surveyed all certificated staff to both assess their experiences in professional learning during the 2014-15 school year, and to learn about their preferences for professional learning as we gear up for the 2015-16 school year. The survey got a strong level of response, with more than 400 certificated staff responding. In the paragraphs that follow, we report on the results from that survey that will help to inform our work on professional development now and into the future.

Rating Your 2014-15 Professional Learning Experiences

Certificated staff responded to the survey were split exactly in half with respect to rating the quality of the professional learning initiated by the district (typically the morning session on a "Staff Learning Friday"). As this time encompassed many different experiences, the varied responses potentially reflect both individual learning preferences as well as inconsistent quality across different course offerings. Fewer than 40 percent of teachers reported that this time had an impact on improving teaching practice.

Respondents were more positive about their building-directed professional learning, with almost 70 percent rating it favorably and nearly two-thirds saying that it improved their teaching practice.

Learning Format Preferences

Respondents were clear in their belief that forms of professional learning need to follow function and that variety in staff ability to make choices for their professional growth is appreciated.

Four out of five elementary certificated staff who responded to the survey suggested that they learn best with their building PLC/grade level team. Over half of the respondents learn best with a small group of colleagues who are working on similar goals and instructional practices, regardless of where they were in the district. Those who do not have a grade-level team have valued the job-alike groups. Many respondents engage in, and want to have more opportunities for, one-to-one learning with a coach or mentor.

About half of responding middle school certificated staff preferred learning with their building team, with content-alike colleagues across the district, and with a small group of colleagues

working on similar goals and instructional practices across the district. Additional comments heavily focused on learning with colleagues within one's own building, whether that was grouped by grade-level, content-alike or job alike.

Two-thirds of high school teachers prefer to learn with their content-alike colleagues in their building, while almost half like to learn with course-alike colleagues across the district or with a small group of colleagues who are working on similar goals and instructional practices across the district. Particular roles, like counselors and librarians, are seeking a balance between time with job-alike colleagues across the district and time with building staff to better support integrated work within the building.

Staff that teach at more than one level are looking for opportunities to learn with their content-alike colleagues across the district. There is a desire to have separate itinerant groups work together to better address special education issues as a cohesive team.

Learning Content Preferences

Certificated staff throughout the district selected collaborative opportunities for planning as an important way to continue to learn with colleagues. Collaboration with an instructional coach or specialist was also a preferred approach, especially with elementary and middle school respondents. Elementary respondents in particular chose observing other staff members in action as a way to support their learning. High school respondents highlighted a preference for discussing problems of practice in small groups. Appendix A shows a more elaborated listing of the content area preferences revealed in the survey.

Assessment for Student Learning

Helping students to self-assess their learning in relation to learning targets and success criteria and then enabling them to use the assessment data to determine goals and monitor their progress were the two areas of assessment literacy that more than half of the respondents across all levels selected as areas of most importance. Additionally, using formative assessment data to inform instruction and developing and monitoring student growth goals were also selected with relative frequency across all levels. Appendix B shows the more elaborated listing of interests in the area of Assessment for Learning.

Topics for Professional Learning

Across all levels, the areas that received the greatest level of interest for 2015-16 were social-emotional learning, technology integration, and restorative justice/practices. The table below

All			
Social-emotional Learning	Technology integration		Restorative justice/practices
Elementary School	Middle School	High School	Multiple Levels
Social-emotional Learning	SIOP	Technology Integration	Social-emotional Learning
GLAD strategies	Social-emotional Learning	AVID Strategies	Technology Integration
Math	Technology Integration	Restorative Justice/Practices	Restorative Justice/Practices

shows the top overall priority topics articulated by staff at each level, and by those who work across more than one level in the district.

Representative Comments from Certificated Staff Survey Data

Many certificated staff who responded to the survey included comments to embellish or elaborate on their survey choices. Comments fell into four broad categories, including: balancing school and district collaboration time; utilizing Bellingham certificated staff and external experts; ensuring opportunities for certificated staff to direct their own professional learning experiences; and valuing the opportunity for staff to provide input. Representative comments follow in each category.

Balancing School and District Collaboration Time

Several respondents commented on comparisons between school-directed and district-directed professional learning opportunities. Some representative examples included:

"The quality of PD was good, and I appreciate all of the work. My team at school works very efficiently and collaboratively so I feel we would have accomplished more in less time."

"The one value that I have found in district-directed PD is the rare opportunity to work with grade-level colleagues toward self-selected goals that are directly contextual for our group of learners."

"It's been incredibly supportive to have time with the district elementary counseling team."

"[District-directed professional development] helped my team become more focused because we created out own investigation into the Bridges Program. We built our leadership and support within our team."

"It's important to connect. We just need a more mission driven agenda."

"Physical education, music and library specialists usually do not enhance their teaching with topics at the building level."

"For teachers that don't have content-alike colleagues in their school (e.g. visual and performing arts), having the opportunity to meet district-wide is vital."

"I would really enjoy the opportunity to collaborate with other social studies teachers at other buildings."

"The district 'blanket' staff development has little to do with my staff development needs."

"It was hard to meet everyone's needs during our Bridges Math PD. Individual work time was the most valuable on those Purple Fridays."

"I love Purple Fridays. They make me feel appreciated and valued."

Utilizing Bellingham Certificated Staff and External Expertise

Certificated staff who responded to the survey noted the importance of utilizing both external experts in specific content areas, as well as a desire to work more closely with internal colleagues who also have particular areas of expertise. Comments included:

"Folks from Teachers College were trained specifically in delivering quality PD. We were also in small groups (around 25 to 30) so that interaction and hands-on practice were a vital part of the learning"

"Please give us time to work with our colleagues. We work with some brilliant people and we need time to learn from them!"

"Thank you for valuing the importance of PD for classroom teachers! I can't emphasize enough how valuable it is to WATCH quality teachers in actions and then have time to discuss and debrief."

 "It was great in terms of providing structure in getting through new curriculum materials but not so great in terms of differentiation (so tough to do with such a large range of learners)."

"There was actually very little of [building-directed professional development] which was directed by staff"

"I appreciated the fact that we got guidance and training from district admin and TOSAs in order to lead professional development in our buildings."

"People do not have enough time to teach full-time and also prepare quality PD for colleagues"

"The (CCSS) steering team in our school did an outstanding job. They adjusted to our feedback as well as planned engaging, "useful-of-our-time" things to do."

"I strongly feel that we should take advantage of the many diverse and knowledgeable professionals in Bellingham."

"I think when you have teachers preparing for the professional development; it helps those teachers who are preparing as well. They become better teachers, too. Staff is able to come to those teachers for ideas!"

"Teacher-led PD is a huge improvement!"

"Teachers (even if given a day to plan the training) were not experts in the area that they were supposed to be training their colleagues in. This put them in the difficult situation of attempting to train their peers on topics that they were just recently told to be experts in. It seemed difficult for them to be excited about teaching a topic that they had been told. Additionally, I don't think they were fairly compensated for their work organizing the trainings."

Ensuring Opportunities to Direct Own Professional Learning

Respondents voiced a desire to help to plan and guide their own professional learning opportunities, to ensure that these efforts directly align with the work that they do. Other comments expressed the need for more differentiated learning for all professionals in the district. Examples included:

"Teachers should be allowed to work with their colleagues to address needs and problems in the courses they teach now. We are professionals, we know how to do the work and know how to modify our practice to meet student needs if given the time."

"Some of the PD has nothing to do with my day to day responsibilities"

"I envision there being more than one option for professional development opportunities around the district."

"Hope to do cross discipline work with colleagues next year."

"Teachers are professionals. They should be allowed to decide the best use of their professional development."

"The district wide focus does not work well. Let individual teachers decide what they need!"

Importance of Teacher Input

A number of respondents noted appreciation for the opportunity to provide feedback and help to shape the direction for professional learning in Bellingham Public Schools. Typical comments included:

"Thanks for sending out this survey! Looking forward to seeing some amazing changes happen next year for PD!"

"Teachers are a tough audience. Keep up the good work."

"I like to have input and control of my own PD. I know what I know and I know what I want to learn and how I want to improve."

"Thank you for the opportunity to give input and feedback. This is one of the things I love about our district."

Conclusion

The survey results provide excellent input and guidance for decisions about professional learning this year (2015-16) and beyond. The joint BEA-District committee on professional development will use this information to assist with the vetting of professional development choice options this year that will be offered as part of staff learning Fridays.

Appendix A: Overall Interests & Needs for 2015-16 Professional Learning

Content Area	# of teachers indicating interest on survey
Social-Emotional Learning • Strategies for student behavior, including ADHD • Habits of mind • Working with high impact kids/students impacted by trauma • Support for curriculum and discipline	113
Technology Integration • CTE technology integration	87
Math • Differentiation within Bridges curriculum • Mathematical practices	76
Restorative Justice/Practices • Student behavior • Working with high impact kids, students impacted by trauma	70
Literacy/English Language Arts • Writing practice structures for feedback • Struggling readers and writers • Literacy Intervention teachers	65
GLAD	61
SIOP	60
Science • NGSS • STEM	56
"Other" • Inquiry- and project-based learning • IB/PYP • PAL- Let's Move Active Schools (PE) • Collaboration & Coaching; sharing problems of practice • Counselors • Kindergarten-specific content • TPEP • Cooperative skill development/collaborative classrooms • Library standards and practices • CTE (learning, practices, equipment repair) • Music • National Board certification renewal • Nurses	55

- Special Education
  - Autism strategies
  - HS SpEd curriculum
  - Impact of health conditions in classroom
- Assessment
  - Overview
  - Aligning expectations between teachers
  - Formative assessment
  - Creating surveys, gathering data efficiently
  - Differentiated teaching based on assessments

Appendix B: Assessment for Student Learning Needs for 2015-16 Professional Learning

Content Area	# of respondents indicating interest on survey
Students self-assessing their learning in relation to learning targets and success criteria • Cognitive psychology/biology literature on retrieval practice & its impact on learning	183
Enabling students to use assessment data to determine goals and monitor progress • Refining 1-1 conferring model to use in more content areas	171
Developing and monitoring student growth goals • Refining measurable goals and objectives	122
Using formative assessment data to inform instruction • How do we assess the essential learning in each of the curricular areas? • Developing practices and routines to implemented differentiated instruction • Differentiation based on assessed needs of students	119
Creating systems for recording and using formative assessment data • How to automate data to visualize practice (Can Skyward be a dashboard?) • Developing data notebooks	118
Communicating goals and progress with families and students • Tools to make corrective feedback more efficient • Efficient ways to provide meaningful feedback to 120 students	109
Aligning assessment tasks so students can demonstrate their learning • Variety of ways for students to show their understanding (beyond reading and writing) • Developing/refining summative assessments to align with CCSS/NGSS	105
Developing and delivering formative assessments • Creating and using online assessments through Skyward • Common assessments • Sharing assessments across respondents	85
Grading practices • Standards-based assessment or other non-points grading system for HS • How to use assessment data to score when standards are so clumped together	55
Other • Working in teaching teams to address assessment issues together • Knowing standards and aligning reports and assessments • Aligning district assessments with PYP summative assessments • Aligning instruction with required assessments (SBAC) • Assessment of social emotional learning • Latest brain research on teaching and learning • Support for gathering and analyzing data to make more efficient use of time	46

- spent developing interventions with students
- Developing assessments that capture the connections between big ideas that are worth coming back to over time (rather than just discrete skills)
- Assessment through behavior intervention and behavior goals