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Mural by Leo Rucker

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## FirstSchool Links

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## North Carolina Schools

### Home-School Partnership Consortia

The FirstSchool team of Cristina Gillanders, Iheoma Iruka, Sam Oertwig, and Sharon Ritchie spent a day with the four schools' principals and a small group of their staff to discuss how to integrate the knowledge and skills of their families and surrounding community into their curriculum and instruction. Dr. Marta Civil, a UNC-Chapel Hill School of Education professor, opened the session describing her work on family and home math knowledge and its implications for instruction. Participants engaged in interesting conversations about their views on families' funds of knowledge and the challenges of finding out about them and integrating them into the curriculum and instruction. The FirstSchool team also presented to the group examples of this kind of work conducted in other schools in the country and internationally. Each school discussed a set of next steps to take back to their schools for implementation in the upcoming months.

### South Graham Elementary

At South Graham Elementary, the FirstSchool team of Cristina Gillanders, Iheoma Iruka, Sam Oertwig, and Sharon Ritchie conducted a half-day follow-up session building upon the July session focused on promoting a culture of collaborative inquiry. The FirstSchool team described some of the strengths and weaknesses of the school's culture based on the data collected in the summer academy. This discussion led to an analysis of how the school culture and individual cultural beliefs influence the classroom culture and instructional practices. Staff then engaged in an exploration of four strategies that promote success for African American, Latino, and low-income children and how these strategies manifest themselves within the culture of the classroom. For each strategy, teachers generated classroom practices that are useful to support this targeted group of students to improve their chances of success.



### **Bogue Sound Elementary**

Sam Oertwig and literacy consultant, Susie Wilde, spent four days at Bogue Sound Elementary engaged in the second of six professional development sessions slated for this school year. This session focused on developing and promoting critical thinking in classrooms and increasing the engagement of boys. In-class modeling, a review of engaging fiction books with strong story structure, and development of a bibliography customized to the school's needs and interests were incorporated.

### **Stocks Elementary School**

Sharon spent one afternoon with the Stocks Elementary Staff examining their school wide data based on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) developed by Bob Pianta, Karen LaParo and Bridget Hamre at the University of Virginia. The CLASS is an observation instrument designed to measure classroom quality in PreK through third-grade classrooms. The focus of the instrument is on the interactions between teachers and students, and is grouped into three domains: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support. Each domain is divided into specific dimensions that capture a distinct aspect of the classroom. The afternoon session helped staff understand the measure and graphic representations of the results. Sharon returned the next day with Iheoma Iruka to talk with each grade level about the more specific applications of the results to their work with children. We helped them focus primarily on their African American and Latino students. Overall it was apparent that the Stocks teachers provided emotional support and classroom organization which meant that they had the foundations in place to really bolster the instructional support for their students.

### **Michigan Schools**

#### **School Leadership Team**

One of the major components in the Michigan project under the leadership of Yvonne Caamal Canul, is convening monthly meetings with the Principals from the FirstSchool sites to present and review their data, discuss ways in which to share the data with their whole school staff, and share thinking about effective strategies for addressing the opportunity areas their data reveal. For the November meeting, results from the Parent Questionnaires were shared. The participants were very interested in comparing their own perceptions with what the data

suggested. Each school is actively engaged in many school and classroom level activities to involve both parents and the community at large but they agreed that there is always room for improvement and are anxious to find out what the Focus Group conversations reveal. Participants in our monthly meetings also include the Home School Partnership Liaisons and a representative from the Michigan Department of Education who provides great insight as to the connections the schools can make with statewide resources.

Conversations were also held with principals to determine dates and formats for presenting Snapshot data to grade-level teams, topics for continued professional learning, and identifying additional topics for their monthly meetings. Much of the work that continues to be done in Michigan is around establishing a FirstSchool presence in this, our first full year of the project.

One of FirstSchool's target sites, El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz Academy was recently selected by the Michigan Department of Education as one of a handful of schools in Michigan "beating the odds." A wonderful article in the Lansing State Journal highlighted the several accomplishments and unique learning environment of this successful school. For more on this honor: <http://www.lansingstatejournal.com/article/20111128/NEWS01/111280324/-1/7daysarchives/El-Hajj-Malik-El-Shabazz-Academy-stands-out>.

### **Outreach**

NAEYC Annual Conference

As part of our ongoing relationship with the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), Sharon had the opportunity to join Laura Bornfreund from New American Foundation in presenting some of the work done by an NAESP task force focused on PreK-3 Principals earlier this year. Laura presented the frame of the work developed by a multi-disciplinary work group throughout 2011: Building & Supporting an Aligned System: A Vision for Transforming Education Across the PreK-3rd Years. Her more conceptual work was validated and elucidated from the grounded work from FirstSchool. Barbara Bowman from Erikson Center facilitated a very good conversation at the end of the presentation. We were pleased to have Jacqueline Jones, senior advisor to Education Secretary Arne Duncan in attendance.