

FirstSchool

UNITING THE BEST OF EARLY CHILDHOOD,
ELEMENTARY, AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

Last Month in FirstSchool

March 2013



Mural by Leo Rucker

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North Carolina Kellogg Schools

In February, the FS Leadership Teams from each of our four partner schools met for a full day to engage in exploration and analysis of data resulting from our fall FS Snapshot data collection. Comparisons between Time 1 and Time 2 data revealed some interesting results documenting progress. Overall, teachers engaged in higher amounts of time teaching, the amount of time spent in transitions was decreased, and more of the transition time was used to address content. Participants also engaged in considering salient research on the importance of use of small groups for instruction, balance in teaching approaches, exposure to content, and oral language development. They discussed implications for classroom practice, challenges, and solutions for increasing these important instructional practices.

Although Kellogg funding for work with our partner schools ends at the close of the current school year, many of our FS “champions” have expressed strong interest in keeping the work going within their schools and in continuing to work with us. Therefore, we also spent time exploring what important supports FirstSchool has provided and ways for keeping the momentum of institutionalizing FS principles. Schools considered ways to continue engaging in

-Early Learning Collaborative (NC-DCDEE)
-PreK-3rd Grade National Work Group Webinar
-Quarterly Format-New!

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collaborative inquiry to improve practice and how to further engage their colleagues.

Currently school teams are in the process of presenting the school-wide data to the rest of the staff and determining next steps for using the results in crafting their School Improvement Plans. The FirstSchool team will soon be delivering and distributing individual data to non-leadership team teachers and engaging in conversations about the results.

Early Learning Challenge Collaborative

In early January, Dr. June Atkinson, State Superintendent, officially announced that FirstSchool and the NC DPI Department of Early Learning had selected both Bertie County and Martin County to receive technical assistance as part of the Race To the Top – Early Learning Challenge Grant received by North Carolina. The purpose of this aspect of the grant is to build district capacity to support high quality instruction in Pre K through Grade 3 classrooms. Although initially only one district was to be selected for this endeavor, it was determined that forming a collaborative with both districts would enable more children, teachers, and leaders to benefit from this unique opportunity. Both county school systems are very enthusiastic about being selected to work with FirstSchool and with one another over the next three years.

In February, each elementary school formed a FS Leadership Team consisting of the principal and a teacher leader from each grade level Pre K through 3rd grade. Each leadership team teacher will have data collected in her classroom annually and will attend all quarterly professional development sessions and the annual Summer Institute. A

Kick-Off meeting was held by FirstSchool at each district's administrative office to welcome the teachers to the project and provide an overview of the project. Superintendents, Board of Education representatives, central office curriculum and instruction personnel, principals, and leadership team teachers attended the event. Dr. Cindy Bagwell, Jody Koon, and Catherine Woodall, from DPI Office of Early Learning, joined the festivities to officially congratulate the districts for having been selected and to offer their support for this work.

In late February, our data collectors began collecting data using the FirstSchool Snapshot and the CLASS. This process will continue through April. Resulting data will be distributed during upcoming professional development sessions and used to guide collaborative inquiry and the cycle of continuous improvement.

Michigan Kellogg Schools

During our January Retreat, Michigan FirstSchool leadership teams examined their data from the Fall 2012 Snapshot observations and took time to dig into the research that guides practice. Participants were excited to make comparisons with the data collected in the spring of 2011 and emotions ran from elation to despair.

Some of the comments heard as school groups scrutinized their data:

This gives us the opportunity to “really think about what the data means...more complex than just good or bad”.

“All the information gives the opportunity to make more change...without it how would we know?”

“...always so hard on ourselves...this really shows how much we do.”

“Change is possible...we can see and we can do it. Keep reflecting...if you have a goal you can achieve it.”

During February, Betty Underwood worked with the Michigan FirstSchool teachers across all three schools to assist individual teachers with the interpretation of the data and to identify goals to improve practice. Teachers are very interested in learning more about how to incorporate scaffolding and reflection into their practice.

Scaling Up- Lansing iCollaborate Project

The Lansing School District in Lansing, MI, under the direction of Superintendent Yvonne Caamal Canul and her administrative team has implemented the Lansing iCollaborate Project, an initiative to improve instructional effectiveness through a culture of mutual respect, collaboration, trust, and shared responsibility. Lansing iCollaborate is guided by FirstSchool principles with a focus on collaborative inquiry and effective use of research and data. Betty Underwood– Project Lead and Sharon Ritchie – Project Consultant are directing the project with PreK-6th grade schools.

Observations were completed in two hundred twenty-five PreK-3 classes using the Snapshot and ninety-five 4-6th grade classes using the CLASS.

During five professional development sessions throughout the year, teachers and school leaders are examining instructional process data results from the Snapshot and CLASS at grade, school, and district levels. The data drives

collegial conversations about how to improve instruction, focus professional development, and increase student achievement.

Leadership Action Teams comprised of Principals and 2 teachers from each school are meeting bi-monthly to focus on creating, maintaining, and supporting a culture of collaborative inquiry within their buildings. They are using their data to develop an instructional program action plan by identifying components that indicate strengths and opportunities. This venue is an excellent opportunity for conversation and sharing of promising practices among schools.

Outreach

Sharing our work

FirstSchool hosted a team of professionals organized by Karen Ponder, who developed and served as President of North Carolina Smart Start for nearly 15 years.

Representatives from the Ford Foundation, Ounce of Prevention, and Oregon Child Institute spent time learning about FirstSchool efforts to improve the school experience for children in Pre K through Grade 3. They were very interested in our Cultures Framework and the data resulting from the FS Snapshot as well as how it is serving to develop reflective practice and guide instructional improvements in schools.

Collaboration with the Michigan Department of Education (MDE)

Sharon Ritchie and Betty Underwood met with Director Lindy Buch and her staff from the Early Childhood Education and Family Services, Office of Great Start (MDE) on February 19 to share successes of Michigan FirstSchools. MDE continues to be a supportive of FirstSchool and is collaborating with us to develop ways to sustain FirstSchool

in the state.

University of Chicago Urban Education Institute and Ounce of Prevention Fund: Birth-to-Eight Project

The Urban Education Institute (UEI) and the Ounce of Prevention Fund (Ounce) are in partnership designed to improve student outcomes by creating and implementing new systems to provide vulnerable children and their families with an effective, cohesive continuum of education and support during the first eight years of life.

Sharon was invited for a two day visit that included tours of Educare, and two elementary charter school campuses. The goal of the visit was to share our work across our two projects and look for ways to support one another. They were very interested in our approach to data and especially liked our focus on how boys fare in our educational system.

It was gratifying to see programs and schools that truly embodied FirstSchool principles. For example, leadership and staff have chosen their curriculum to promote higher order thinking skills, collaboration, and attention to balanced literacy and math as well as a focus on science and social studies. Brain breaks, yoga, and gross motor activities are prevalent throughout the day. Teachers have 160 minutes a week to meet in teams and professional development is provided for two hours each week. It was clear that classroom curriculum and instruction was responsive to the race and culture of the children who are in the school. This is just a sampling of the work they are doing on behalf of young children. We look forward to continued collaboration with this project.

RTT-ELC Assessment Think Tank

On February 15th, Sharon and Cristina attended the first meeting of the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Think Tank. They are part of 22 member panel appointed by June St. Clair Atkinson-North Carolina Superintendent of Public Instruction and led by John Pruette-executive director of the NC Office of Early Learning and Ken Dodge-director of the Center for Child and Family Policy at Duke University. As part of expectations from RTT-ELC, this Think Tank will spend six months providing recommendations for assessment content, processes and supports that will eventually arm educators with tools that will provide information and insight about all aspects of young children's development and learning. This panel is well versed in the issues that surround effective assessment of young children and bring expertise and innovative thinking to these challenges. This Think Tank is just one of the many groups who will be contributing thinking to this multi-year effort to truly make assessment for young children important and useful.

Early Learning Collaborative (NC-DCDEE)

Quarterly meetings of the Early Learning Collaborative are hosted by the NC Division of Child Development and Early Education. This is a professional development and networking opportunity for state and local early childhood partners who include representatives from health, early childhood/elementary education, social services, licensure, and teacher education. FirstSchool was asked to present our work at the February meeting. Participants were very interested in our efforts to implement high quality instructional practices, and the effective use of data and research build district capacity to improve school experiences of Pre K – Grade 3 African American, Latino and low income students.

PreK-3rd Grade National Work Group Webinar

On Wednesday, January 30th, the National Work Group concluded the 8 part PreK-3rd Grade series, in a presentation on **Scale and Sustainability: Implications for State and District Policy**. By definition, the PreK-3rd approach requires bringing together disparate systems across multiple sectors. Creating an aligned educational experience for children from prekindergarten through third grade involves building a collaborative infrastructure that includes school districts, local and state government agencies, and community-based organizations. New administrative structures that govern and fund PreK-3rd work often must be established (at both state and local levels) and their roles and responsibilities coordinated to support meaningful and sustainable implementation. In this webinar we examined strategies to integrate and align federal, state, and local policies, regulations, and funding to create a coherent system of learning from prekindergarten through third grade Slides are available on the website: [http://prek-](http://prek-3rdgradenationalworkgroup.org/node/16)

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We are working to determine the next steps for the Work Group and will keep you apprised of our progress.

Quarterly Format

Seven years ago we began with Last Week in FirstSchool. Two years ago we switched to Last Month in FirstSchool and now we will send updates on a quarterly basis. We appreciate all of you who continue to show interest in our work.