

The purpose of the Georgia Assessment of Performance on School Standards (GAPSS) Analysis is to assess the success of the school and use it to determine what is needed for school improvement. Each school has a team of representatives that collectively collects data from various sources throughout the school. Once data is retrieved, the team has a meeting to discuss recommendations and suggestions based on all strands from School Keys. There are eight strands that are assessed which include Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, Planning and Organization, Student, Family, and Community Support, Professional Learning, Leadership, School Culture. I would think technology is involved in all strands. However, it is listed most importantly under Instruction. Technology is listed under Instructional Standard 2.7. This standard assesses the teachers' use of technology within a lesson and if it is implemented correctly. (Barge, 2012, p. 5-6.)

The data compiled for the GAPSS is based on observations for the entire school. The analysis does not score each individual teacher. An observation form is used that has a rubric that has several components that are observed through the school. The data collected for the entire analysis is not only classroom observations. It also includes surveys, data for assessments, interviews and focus groups. (Barge, 2012, p. 21).

Due to my school receiving a new interim principal within the second or third week of school, it took a while for me to receive a new school improvement plan. I also waited to interview my principal because I wanted her to get acclimated and become somewhat familiar with the school's culture, climate, policies, and procedures that were already in place. When I asked to interview, she stated that she would answer to the best of her ability and some of her responses were based on her previous experiences as a principal and what is her vision for the future of our school. My interim principal's name is Cheryl Tywman.

During the interview, to understand what was the vision for technology in the school, I asked Mrs. Tywman, 'What is the vision for the use of technology in our school? In other words, describe the school's aspirations and intents for how teachers and students will use technology in the teaching and learning process.' Mrs. Tywman answered, "Technology is expected to be used in all classroom every day. Students should be observed using computers, iPads, iPods, and interacting with the Promethean Board. The Promethean Board should be used as a tool for learning and not just a method to display information." (personal communication, Sept. 25, 2013) After reviewing the School Improvement plan, I noticed that technology should be used by the teachers and students daily to improve on reading skill, daily progress in mathematics, developing science knowledge, and all other content areas.

When asked to identify the professional learning needs at the school and whether they are data driven, Mrs. Tywman stated, "I am not sure what was done in the past, but professional learning for teachers is data driven. The scores from the teacher evaluation instrument (Teacher Keys) are used to drive the professional development for the entire staff. For example, based on the analyzes done for APS, it was discovered that as a district, teachers need more professional development in the area standard 6, academically challenging environment. Therefore, as a school that will be one of the areas where we will have professional learning. Professional learning can also be

determined by giving a survey to teachers to ask what they think their needs are for professional growth.” (personal communication, Sept. 25, 2013). I can speak on what has happened at my school in previous years. Each year, we are required to complete the Self-Assessment portion of the Teacher Key and Class Keys. With the self-assessment, principals will have a pre-conference with teachers and discuss individually what that teacher feels are some area of improvements from themselves. The principal gathers what were the top two or three areas that many chose and determine professional learning for their staff. They also determine outside professional learning for individual teachers based off of the self-assessment. The data gathered determines the most needed areas of improvement for the school.

After discussing what determines the professional learning, I asked Mrs. Twyman about the types of professional learning that is offered at our school. She stated “Professional learning is done primarily with professional learning communities (PLC). The meeting times for the PLCs will occur during common planning time, faculty meetings, teacher work days, or special meetings after school (new teachers, data team, leadership team. I have used protocols from the School Reform Initiative (SRI) to examine student work and facilitate professional learning sessions.” (personal communication, Sept. 25, 2013). I observe professional learning on a daily basic at work. Sometimes it may be individually speaking to coaches or specialists about classroom strategies or data. It may be a collaborative meeting with team or co-teacher. We have faculty meetings every Tuesday.

Every year, I see an increase on implementing technology within our classrooms. That increase has been determined on the resources that we have available. Every year, more and more technology comes into the building and teachers will definitely use it if they are exposed and trained on how to use it. When asked about the types of technology related trainings has been offered to the staff, Mrs. Tywman explained, “The professional learning with technology that I have observed have centered around the use of iPads, iPods, and the Promethean Board.” (personal communication, Sept. 25, 2013) Another technology related training that has been offered this year was the document camera/reader demonstration presented by our media specialist. Many times during our faculty meetings, there has been block of time that requires us to go to the computer lab for some form of training with technology. I later asked what type of follow-up support is provided after we are trained as a whole. Mrs. Tywman stated, “Continuous support has come from the instructional coaches, technology specialist, and the media specialist.” (personal communication, Sept. 25, 2013). We have had outside technology specialists to come in during our team collaborative meeting time to demonstrate the use of the promethean board, Google Docs, Socrates, Remind101, and several other websites that would be beneficial to use to improve our instruction. Last year, the school received a IPAD chart. Some have received trainings on downloading apps for instructional purposes.

When reviewing the school improvement plan, I noticed that technology was included in the Assessment Standard 1.1 Planning and Organization and Standard 3.2 throughout the entire plan. Therefore, the next question in my principal’s interview was ‘Is the professional learning aligned to the school improvement goals? If so, how?’ Mrs.

Twyman replied, “The professional learning has been incorporated as an instructional strategy with differentiated instruction for all content areas. Teachers have received training with how to use instructional programs, such as Accelerated Reader and Study Island.” (personal communication, Sept. 25, 2013). Based on the school improvement plan, Study Island can be used by the teachers to monitor student and class reports weekly. Teacher can use the data and plan actions to address student needs by individual or as a class. By using Study Island, the students are assisted with mastering the CCGPS standards.

The next question that I asked was ‘How is professional learning funded in our school?’ Twyman stated, “The primary funding source for technology comes from Title 1 and the general school budget.” (personal communication, Sept. 25, 2013). I preceded to ask if there were any incentives for her teachers who participate in professional learning. Twyman’s response confirmed my thoughts. She replied, “There are no external incentives for teachers to receive professional learning; however, internal motivation would be the drive for most teachers to be more prepared to improve their craft of teaching.” (personal communication, Sept. 25, 2013). I always felt that professional learning is something that teachers should want in order to improve on their profession, even if they are exemplary in everything that they do. However, there is always need for growth somewhere.

My next question was about something that I observe being discussed quite often during faculty meetings. I asked ‘Is professional learning offered that assists teachers in working with students with special needs and those who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds? If so, describe.’ Twyman stated, “Professional learning for staff members primarily has been conducted through faculty meetings by providing instructional strategies for teachers who teach students with special needs and who have another primary language. The audiences of students that we target are Program of Exceptional Children (PEC) and English Speakers of Other Language.” (personal communication, Sept. 25, 2013). In the School Improvement Plan, under the Instruction Standard 2.6, it is discussed how special education lead teachers should deliver two trainings on effective co-teaching models. It will help teachers to understand how to implement stations and practice the co-teacher model where one teacher teaches and the other is support.

There are several collaborative school-wide professional learning opportunities that the teachers must participate in. Many are done during faculty meeting when we break off into different PLC groups. We often meet during all pre-planning and in-service teacher development planning days. We also must participate in these groups on Early Release days. In these groups, we are learning and discussing topics related to one of the eight strands. When I asked Twyman about it, she stated “All professional learning is tied directly to the School Improvement Plan. Collaborative learning is conducted during the PLCs.” (personal communication, Sept. 25, 2013).

My finally question that I asked my principal was ‘How do you know if the professional learning is helping with the improvement of student learning?’ Twyman replied, “We know that the professional learning is effective by seeing an increase in student achievement and more teachers scoring at the "proficient" and "exemplary"

rating with Teacher Keys Evaluation System.” (personal communication, Sept. 25, 2013). Principals often use data from the teachers and students to determine to success of the professional learning. If the strategies are not improving student or teacher data, principals know that they must go back to the drawing board and present new strategies.

References

Barge, J. D. (March 2012). *GAPSS ANALYSIS: Georgia Assessment of Performance on School Standards: Closing the Gap*. Georgia Department of Education.

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