

Wallace Newsletter April, 2005

Newsletter Overview

The purpose of the newsletter is to provide our partners with updates on our progress in implementing the Wallace Grant. There has been a great deal of activity since the grant began in December 2004. Much of the work completed thus far has been related to meeting with superintendents, principals, reviewing the literature in reference to data driven decision making, analyzing data collected from principals, developing the agenda for the June 2005 retreat at Crystal Mountain.



The Newsletter will be disseminated via email. It is critical to keep all of the Wallace partners informed about the project.

THE WALLACE PROJECT

Constructivist Design for Professional Learning

To initiate the first phase of the Wallace Project professional development process, the implementation team has planned a three-day retreat during which Wallace Project participants will:

- Begin to shape a learning collaborative where participating principals, the implementation team, and resource consultants will examine the issues, processes, and practices associated with effective use of data to make decisions that lead to improved student results at the building level.
- Begin to identify building leadership issues of primary concern to participating principals.
- Begin to connect participating principals' priority issues to project professional development opportunities, project resources, and project design.
- Begin the process of designing a statewide model for the effective use of data to improve student achievement.

This project is not about fixing anyone. The role of the sixteen participating principals and selected principal mentors is to use their experiences and expertise to assist the implementation team and project consultants in examining the various data streams within K-12 schools and collaboratively developing a framework of protocols, processes, and systemic responses that make student data meaningful, useful, and powerful tools to improve student achievement. Principals are bombarded with data, and this data overflow results in frustration, fragmentation of effort, dissipation of time, and the inability to connect data with student achievement. We might think of this project as bringing “order out of chaos” through a systematic use of the data that actually makes a difference in student learning.



The Wallace Project Implementation Team has been busy collecting and analyzing a rich array of school-based information from each participating school in order to understand the full context of each participating school's current unique student achievement status, demographic profile, and school improvement process. Through this context analysis and interviews with each participating principal, the implementation team has completed the first step in the identification of current collective strengths, areas of need, and priority concerns. We will work with participating principals to affirm, amend, and expand our initial assessments, during the first Wallace Project retreat, then utilize our expert data

consultants to help identify initial strategies that will provide immediate utility for participating principals and potential building blocks for development of an effective model. We will also contract with experts on balanced leadership and instructional leadership to systematically address some of the barriers to using data to improve student achievement. We will, then, incorporate what we learn about the leadership side of data-driven decision making into our developing model and continue refining the model as participating principals apply both data utilization and leadership principles in their own work with their school improvement process and with their staffs.

Project consultants will help us build on what we have learned and developed, what we are applying in real school settings, and what we are experiencing as the application process plays out. They will provide us with expertise and guidance based on their experience with best practices and help to consolidate our ideas into a workable model. This project will operate on exchange of information and learning from one another as we connect theories and practices from research-supported models, processes, and practices and meld them into systemic approaches that principals can incorporate into their schools. As our model emerges, we will facilitate implementation through the use of on-site mentoring and coaching, trouble-shooting consultations, application seminars, and new workshops and retreats.

Planned professional development for participating principals, their mentors and coaches, and the implementation team will focus on enhancing our collective understandings, skills, and expertise in the area of using data to improve student achievement. Grant funds allow us to contract with a "reflector" to aide the implementation of the model. The purpose of the reflector is to provide us with facilitation to discuss, debate, and share our thoughts, frustrations, concerns, and accomplishments during the learning and implementation process. As an integral part of the development team, the reflector will assist us in building the mutual trust and respect to become a true learning community with a shared mission of creating a powerful model for data-driven decision making at a school level.

Partnership Schools

The four partnership schools include the Benton Harbor Area Schools, Flint Community Schools, Grand Rapids Community Schools, and the Lansing Community Schools. Members of the WMU project team have met with superintendents and their team members to discuss project goals and expectations. The WMU project team met with Dr. Bert Bleke, Superintendent of the Grand Rapids Schools and Charles Stertevant on May 6, 2005. We are pleased to announce that Grand Rapids will participate in the project. Four principals have been identified.

Context Analysis

Western Michigan University project team members developed a context analysis instrument. The purpose of the instrument is to gather data on data driven decision-making practices in their respective schools. Twelve principals were interviewed. Four principals from the Grand Rapids School district will be interviewed in the near future. This information will be used as a resource to develop the program for the project.

Even during the grant writing phase of this project, program developers acknowledged the challenges and burdens faced by principals. The development team felt a model for effective analysis of data and the use of data represented was critical to increasing student achievement. Members of the Executive Committee and the Implementation Team supported a constructivist approach where principals using their collective expertise would assist in the development of a model that might serve other Michigan principals.

Crystal Mountain Retreat

The Crystal Mountain Retreat will be held on June 21, 22, and 23. The 16 principals, their superintendents and/or designees, members of the Executive Committee and Implementation Team will participate in the retreat. Participating principals are also encouraged to bring their families to the retreat. There are a number of activities in which family members can participate while principals are involved in program activities.

The retreat focuses on data driven decision-making using the constructivist design for professional learning described above. We have contracted with Dr. Debra Walstrom (an expert in data driven decision-making) and representative from McREL. The research-based work on “balanced leadership” served as a critical information resource for program implementation.

Members of the WMU planning team will hold a pre-workshop planning session May 21 and 22. The purpose of the pre-planning session is to review data from the context analysis and to finalize planning for the Crystal Mountain retreat. Flexibility is critical. It is important that the needs of participating principals are met.

Activities Following the Retreat

The June retreat provides members of the Executive Team and the Implementation Team the opportunity to listen to principals in reference to their needs and challenges. Coaching and technical support are important resources. Discussions with principals at the retreat will precede coaching and professional development activities.

CEU's and Graduate Credit

Continuing Education Units (CEU's) and graduate credit will be available for all participants. Our application for State Board -CEU's has been approved by the Michigan Department of Education. Participants will receive three (3) State Board Continuing Education Units for their participating in the retreat.

Opportunities to earn Western Michigan University graduate credit will be discussed at the retreat.

New York Times: Complementary Newspapers for Wallace Partners

Participating Wallace partners (K-12 school districts and Colleges of Education) will receive complementary copies of the New York Times for both K-12 and university students during the project. The newspapers serve as an instructional resource for participants and their students.

In partnership with The Wallace Foundation, The New York Times' News in Education Foundation has created a national Leadership for Learning Project aimed at promoting greater awareness and understanding of education leadership and education policy among policymakers and educators.

The Leadership for Learning website, www.nytimes.com/leadership, is a featured part of the Times' Knowledge Network, which currently reaches more than three million visitors a month. Launched September 2004, the leadership website provides information and analysis of critical policy issues affecting education leadership to those in a position to change and enact effective policy, including P-16 educators, district, state and system leaders, state policymakers and college leaders.

The site includes a daily news feed of relevant articles from NYTimes.com; newly commissioned articles and opinion pieces, with an opportunity for online discussion; and links to research and other resources. A section called "Promising Practices" features the innovative work of LEAD districts and SAELP states; the "Models" section explains and gives an example of Wallace's "strategic through-line" tool to clarify the connections between developing leaders and improving conditions among different levels in the system (state, district, school and classroom). An Advisory Council is being formed to recommend topics and writers for new content development.

Last year, The Times hosted two regional Town Hall meetings to create awareness of the work being done by Wallace-funded states and districts. The first meeting on cultural competency took place on November 30th in Portland, Oregon, and included a special taping of NPR's "Justice Talking" as part of the event. The second meeting, focusing on governance issues, was held on December 13th in Trenton, New Jersey. New York Times correspondents moderated both meetings.

Together, The New York Times and The Wallace Foundation work to better align education stakeholders around education leadership and policy issues. The Times is well suited to help participants achieve richer understanding of the critical issues facing education leaders, and the role that policy plays in our systems. As part of its mission, The Times strives to assist educators to foster intellectual growth, curiosity and civic participation.