

Frequently Asked Questions
(that might arise at Late Start)

Q. How are we paying for this? I thought budget was very tight.

A. We are funding this initiative with several sources: a District Improvement Grant that we received after the CADI visit, money that will be set aside from our regular Title I allocation that can be used for the entire district because our district is on Corrective Action, money we would have used this year to fund our PLCs from Title IIA and ARRA funds that we haven't used, SPED ARRA funds, and money from fund balance. Approximately \$50,000 will be used from fund balance. The money will be needed for the calendar year of 2011. Only four months of 2012 will need to be funded, and that is with only a small number of teacher and administrators.

Q. If several of the days of training take place during school hours, why do teachers involved get stipends?

A. Even though teachers will have some days from school hours, half the time will be taken from vacations, weekends, and summer. Also, even those trainings during school time will require substitute preparation and additional work by these teachers at home and on their own time to complete curriculum development.

Q. How will Special Education be involved?

A. We intend to add at least four SPED teachers to the Phase II work where intervention strands will be added to unit planning.

Q. Will this effort impact the teachers' ability to get steps this year on their contracts?

A. No, because the majority of the funding comes from outside sources, not district general funds. Salary "steps" is a separate issue the Budget Task Force will have to address.

Q. If you are nominated for the Phase I process, but don't get selected, will you be a part of Phase II?

A. You will definitely be considered for Phase II if you don't get selected for Phase I. We are looking not only for our best curriculum writers, but also for great team players so a teacher's ability to work with others to reach consensus is crucial. Also, in Phase II we will have only one representative per grade so many times three or four great candidates may come out of the same grade level so only one gets chosen.

Q. Will all schools be represented in the process?

A. All principals will attend training so that is a major representative. We will make a great effort to have every school represented in Phase I and II, but not necessarily in Phase I alone since that includes only 20 teachers in four different areas.

Q. Why do all principals have to attend the trainings?

A. After the unit organizers and assessments are built, it will be the responsibility of the principals to carry this initiative through into 2012 and beyond. School PLCs and individual teachers will be writing the units' weekly and daily plans, and the principals will need to have the training to monitor and grow this process.

Q. Will we all become "cookie cutter" schools with this process?

A. No. We will come out of this process with a pacing guide and unit titles set up with a framework, which will cause us to all be teaching the same essentials in the same weeks and quarter. We will have common assessments, which will demonstrate how students are learning these essentials. However, the weekly and daily plans of how these units are taught will still be determined by individual teachers and school level PLCs. We will ask that created units will be posted on our district site so that others can get ideas of what other schools are doing, but teachers will be allowed to teach the material in their own style as long as they are meeting learning goals with the post and quarterly assessments, and they are following the unit templates.

Q. How will teachers not involved in writing the curriculum know what is happening and be able to give input?

A. Our technology people are working right now in having an interactive site on our desktops for the work to be posted so everyone can see the progress and then email in questions or ideas. Monthly principal meetings will have curriculum as our main topic throughout 2011 and 12 and principals will be reporting back at their staff meetings as to progress also.

Q. Will all schools have to use the same schedule to make this work?

A. Yes and no. Every school leadership team will need to take the curriculum map, which is built fairly quickly into the process, and see how they can make their schedule work to be able to accomplish what is set. That may require modifying a block schedule, etc. We will be teaching similar content at approximately the same time so we have to come to an agreement about what year we teach specific content or if we teach by skill "buckets" rather than course names. These are tough decisions that will have to be dealt with in the process.

Q. Will every course have to be aligned and mapped including singleton elective courses?

A. We will be using a specific template that will need to be followed district wide. The initiative of curriculum design will cover the core areas including electives, and will not address specific courses, which differ from school to school or even higher-level classes such as Calculus. We will be aligning curriculum that have state or federal standards and ACT standards. The other courses will need to have the template applied, and there will be continuity in the template used. Assessments

will have to be developed at some time in the future for these courses also. Much of the work of Cohort II (electives) has not been detailed at this time, but will become more so as we move toward June of 2011.

Q. What should we be doing right now in terms of district PLC work? Do we keep creating curriculum maps at our buildings, rubrics, etc?

A. You should continue the work of improving student achievement in your building. That includes common scoring of formative and district assessments, developing maps and units that will improve your delivery of instruction, and having those data-driven discussions about trends and individual students in your PLCs. The district PLCs are being replaced by this new initiative, but teachers are still expected to teach the essentials and are responsible for the district assessments by quarter. Don't begin any huge efforts at "new" work in your school, but you should continue with the ongoing work of teaching the standards.

Q. How do we make sure integration of essentials among content areas is taking place?

A. The four core content areas will be doing much of their work together, and this will bring integration to the forefront. As we build units, integration will be a primary concern and will be built into the unit templates.

Q. Isn't it scary to have only one teacher per grade level, or less in Phase I, determining what will be taught in the entire district?

A. Phase I involves taking what we've already developed in the district and at individual schools and sifting and sorting it to put it into a common template. This work will be done vertically, not with one person responsible for one grade level only, which is a superior organizational strategy not currently being used. We won't get into building units until Phase II when we do have one person per grade level. Technology will also enable us to do our work with the entire district watching and giving input along the way.

Q. How will this affect graduation requirements?

A. It doesn't; graduation requirements will remain the same.

Q. How will we make sure that teachers post their units? What if they don't want to share their ideas and strategies?

A. At the district level principals will be looking at results of unit posttests and district assessments. Where they see significant positive results, teachers who get those results will be asked to post units.

Q. We already spend tons of time testing. Won't this just add to the load?

A. At the elementary level, we will continue to do district quarterlies only in language arts and math; however, we'll be able to see growth in the pre and

posttests of the units. This will chunk learning and give us a better set of data to look at interim progress instead of depending only on CSAP and ACT to determine if students have learned. This is not more testing than previously required, and will look at other areas previously not assessed such as science, social studies, and electives, which have not been accountable in the past. Teachers have been doing unit and end of chapter tests all along; this will make this more common testing so we can see trends and where gaps occur at the district level.

Q. Will the district help schools get more personnel to teach some of the required areas such as social studies?

A. We will be looking at this from a district point of view...what schools need which teachers? Just as resources such as materials will be shared, some movement of teachers may be required.

Q. Will our data be shared throughout the district? Will there be any recognition that a teacher might have a lower class than others in the district or a greater number of SPED or ELL students?

A. Just like the state, the district will be looking at growth...results from pre to post tests and district quarterlies compared to post test results for each unit. With the passage of Senate Bill 191, there is a greater emphasis on transparency and results that everyone is accountable to including principals and district administration. These scores belong to all of us, not just the teacher, and as a system we are responsible for improvement. Therefore, we all need the data to work on the improvement effort. By sharing ideas, resources, and best practice strategies, everyone will benefit.

Q. Will the district determine what classes are taught in each school?

A. Common core classes such as Algebra, Geometry, and Algebra II, for example, will be required. Singleton classes or higher-level classes such as Calculus will still be determined by building, but the common template of unit development will be required for all classes. If a class is to be offered, it must pass the "litmus test" of unit building that the district is pursuing.

Q. Why can't we do this work during the summer so we don't have to miss class time with students?

A. There is not enough time in the summer to get this done in a timely manner. The money is available for a limited time, plus there is more work than one summer can provide. The curriculum design team made a real effort to divide the days between number of days out of school and number taken from vacations, at home work, etc. This is important work and will require a number of days to do well.

Q. Why can't we have a couple of teachers on special assignment do this work along with district leadership instead of pulling teachers out of classrooms?

A. The major reason is lack of buy-in from district teachers if only one or two people do the work. Also the scope of this work is so large that it would be an almost impossible task for a few people to do it. Having representation from each school plus having people who teach specific grades should produce a much more effective product and bring specific perspectives to the process.