District Collaboration Yields Instructional Benefits
Jennifer Sisul, Coordinator of Professional Development
Parkway School District

Ask a group of teachers to describe their ideal professional learning experience and chances are you will hear phrases such as “collaborating with peers,” “thoughtful critique,” “time,” “deep study of my content,” “applicable to instruction,” and “subject area experts.” Phrases like these are often found on the professional development exit surveys completed by teachers from four St. Louis County school districts, who have grown their own unique partnership to further their understanding and practice of a powerful curriculum design model—Understanding by Design.

Theorized by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, the Understanding by Design methodology asks the teacher to switch her role to that of a curriculum designer. Using the logic of backwards design, practitioners first determine what standards and goals they are addressing, and then outline how students will demonstrate mastery of these goals. Once these two critical pieces are in place, the designer creates the blueprint of lessons, experiences, and activities that support student learning. Alignment of these three stages is the key!

Is this a massive undertaking, even for those who have teaching experience? Yes, but when surrounded by like-minded colleagues who offer thoughtful critique, the units created emerge as the most powerful these experienced teachers have created.

The structure to support this collaborative learning is a partnership started between the Parkway School District and the Maplewood Richmond Heights School District. While very different districts in terms of size, a common desire to improve student achievement led to this unique collaboration. Invitations to join in the initiative were extended to the Bayless School District and Pattonville School District, and thus began the Achievement by Design Conference. The title of the conference is intentional. The focus of the work is on collaborative redesigning of units to ensure student achievement.

The structure of the conference is simple, also by design. The conference is divided into learning sessions—led by various

Partner Districts Awarded Prestigious Designation

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has named fourteen MPER partner districts as 2008 recipients the Distinction in Performance designation. Partnership districts earning the honor include Blue Springs, Centralia, Chillicothe, Columbia, Hallsville, Hannibal, Independence, Lee’s Summit, Lindbergh, Mexico, Moberly, New Franklin, Parkway, and Pilot Grove. Congratulations!

Important Upcoming Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 20</td>
<td>Operations Council Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 27</td>
<td>TFP Potential Involvement Forms Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 3</td>
<td>Governing Board Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 10</td>
<td>TFP Monthly Mentor/Liaison Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 10</td>
<td>Urban Education Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 12</td>
<td>TFP Mentor/Principal Orientation (West)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 18</td>
<td>Mental Health Leadership Academy Session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 24</td>
<td>TFP Mentor/Principal Orientation (Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 26</td>
<td>TFP Mentor/Principal Orientation (East)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 3</td>
<td>TFP Mentor/Principal Orientation (Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 10</td>
<td>TFP Interview Day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Study Group and Teacher Inquiry Funding Awarded

An unprecedented thirty-seven educational initiatives in seventeen partner districts received Study Group and Teacher Inquiry Funding awards of up to $1,500 for implementation of their projects during the 2008-09 school year. Congratulations to those schools in Blue Springs, Centralia, Chillicothe, Columbia, Hallsville, Hannibal, Hazelwood, Independence, Lee’s Summit, Lindbergh, Mexico, Moberly, Parkway, Pilot Grove, Southern Boone County (Ashland), Sedalia, and St. Louis City districts.

Not perfection as a final goal, but the ever-enduring process of perfecting, maturing, refining is the aim of living.

—John Dewey

MPERspective is interested in publishing articles on partner districts and university departments. Narrative reports on successful improvement initiatives, district and departmental updates, quotes on MPER and affiliated programs, and other feedback are all welcomed for consideration. Submissions may be directed to MPERspective Editor David J. Downs, via email (jdowns@hallsville.org).
School Mental Health Leadership Academy News

MPER/CAMHPS SMH Leadership Academy Greetings

April A. Ravert, MPER/SMH Leadership Academy Project Coordinator
Center for the Advancement of Mental Health Practices in Schools
University of Missouri

The Center for the Advancement of Mental Health Practices in Schools (CAMHPS) is very proud to have the opportunity to work in association with MPER and its partner school districts. We are excited to share our experience and expertise in bringing the most innovative and proven concepts and ideas in school mental health (SMH) directly to Missouri school leaders. The SMH Leadership Academy is dedicated to providing training and technical assistance with the following components in 2008-09:

- Tips for getting started in the design and implementation of a SMH program (See Issue Brief, School Mental Health Capacity Building: Getting Started).
- Tools for mapping, assessing, and utilizing already existing resources in your school and local community.
- Strategies for building capacity by partnering with families and community organizations.
- Tools for developing funding streams that ensure short and long-term sustainability (See Issue Brief, Funding for Sustainability).
- Evaluation techniques to assess what works, what doesn’t, what to change, and how to move forward.

The Center will be providing several papers in the form of issue briefs, offering interactive webcasts, and hosting information sessions where expert guest speakers will present on the various topics listed above. In addition, we will be posting many tools and resources on the SMH Leadership Academy website. Be sure to visit the site for access to these tools and updated information on this exciting initiative.

For Further Information

Would you like information on the School Mental Health Leadership Academy or do you have questions on how to become involved in Academy events? If so, please contact:

April A. Ravert, Project Coordinator
raverta@missouri.edu
(573) 882-1794

Upcoming SMH Leadership Academy Events

January 22nd ~ 8:30 – 11:30 AM
Live webcasts from CAMHPS—Sign on and enjoy this interactive workshop from the privacy of your own computer.

Getting Started and Avoiding Pitfalls
Guest Speakers: Dr. Ed Morris of CAMHPS & Mr. Tim Roling of Moberly Schools

Blending and Braiding Funding with Community Partners
Guest Speakers: Dr. Tricia Bridgewater, Psychologist and part owner of The Wellness Company in Nevada, Missouri and Dr. David Stephens, Superintendent of the Nevada School District will present on school-community-family collaboration and discuss the Youth Task Force of Vernon County

February 18th ~ 9:15 – 2:00 PM
School Mental Health Leadership Academy Session Topic: Funding for Sustainability. Guest panel will include experts in SMH from the State of Missouri DMH and DESE.

March 18th ~ 8:30 – 10:30 AM
Live webcast from CAMHPS—Barrier Busting Strategies. Guest speakers to be announced.

March 6th ~ 8:30 – 10:30 AM
Live webcast from CAMHPS—Implementation & Evaluation. Guest speakers to be announced.

New SMH Issue Brief Now Available

“Sustainability is undoubtedly one of the most important aspects of any comprehensive project or program, but is often a source of confusion that may not receive full attention until the end of funding is imminent. The purpose of the following issue brief is to help clarify some of the more confusing aspects, while highlighting the key features, benefits, and challenges of sustainability.”

(MPER/CAMHPS SMH Leadership Academy Issue Brief, v.1, n.2)

Learn more by downloading the complete issue brief.
Achievement by Design Conference (Continued from page 1)

participants—and Professional Learning Team (PLT) planning sessions. PLTs are small, content-area specific cohort groups.

Participants arrive with a completed instructional unit and select the breakout sessions that are most likely to improve their own work. The unit becomes their “text” for the sessions, and continuous collaboration results in significant revisions to their instructional plans. When the PLTs meet, participants use established protocols to “tune” one another’s work or debrief around their content. Each group is facilitated by a teacher or administrator strong in the PLT’s content area.

The conference planning committee also recognized a need to include experts in the field, and therefore decided to involve keynote speakers. The first ABD conference was enlightened by the words of author and consultant Gwen Doty, and the 2008 conference received guidance from the work and words of Alison Zmuda. The 2009 conference is pleased to welcome Susan Brookhart and her thinking on effective feedback.

Keynote speakers are carefully selected based on the needs of participants and where the learning left off at the previous conference. This is a luxury other conferences may not be able to guarantee, but the small size of the ABD conference is another important factor…by design. The planning committee continues to limit conference capacity to 150 participants, and preference is awarded to those teachers who previously attended. The annual teacher return rate to the conference is high, as is continued communication among PLT members during the regular school year. Participants become invested in the work of their PLT and wish to see and learn from their colleagues’ continued unit revisions. A number of participants returned to the 2008 conference with their 2007 unit—tweaked, revised and re-taught—for further tuning with their peers. The process serves as a model of grassroots district collaboration leading to continuous instructional improvement.

In a day and age when time for high-quality faculty collaboration is the precious commodity, the Achievement by Design Conference carves it out, and the teachers who participate make the most of every second.

If you would like to learn more about the origins, history, and implementation of the Achievement by Design Conference, the project coordinator—Jennifer Sisul—welcomes requests for more information. Contact her by email or phone (314-415-5093).

Kansas City Schools Pilot MPER/COE Programs

Suzy Katz, Mentor Teacher, Kansas City School District

Kansas City School District—an urban district of 40 elementary schools, six middle schools, nine high schools, three early childhood centers, and four alternative schools that educate more than 20,000 students—has selected two buildings to pilot the MU Teaching Fellowship Program and the Senior Year On-Site Program during the 2008–09 school year.

East at Rogers Elementary School Principal Dr. Wendy McNitt and Lincoln College Preparatory Academy Principal Jamia Dock welcomed the district’s first participants from the two programs. The young teachers, who by all accounts are off to a wonderful start with their students, bring new educational tools and knowledge from the University of Missouri.