

Tri-State Consortium Social Studies Visit Report

April 19, 2016

Purpose of the Visit

- To provide feedback to the District by measuring our posed essential questions against a demanding rubric across eight performance indicators;
- The focus is on authentic and interdisciplinary teaching and learning, and purposeful assessment practices that are directly linked to optimal student performance;
- Within a critical friends model, an objective lens is used to confirm, reaffirm, and recommend the steps necessary to engage in a continuous growth and improvement process;
- The goal of the visiting team is to analyze our data in order to find practices already in use that have the potential for a more systematic approach, and to share perspectives and experiences as colleagues of similarly high performing districts.

Essential Questions

- To what extent does our curriculum develop critical thinking skills?
- To what extent are there opportunities for students to independently practice and to demonstrate their social studies learning?
- Ardsley is in the process of creating a five year strategic plan. One of the goals is to cultivate informed global citizens. To what extent do our current curriculum practices support this goal?

Performance Indicators

-Indicator 1: Performance Based Assessments

-Indicator 2: Metacognition

-Indicator 3: Student Performance Data

-Indicator 4: Curriculum and Instruction

-Indicator 5: Professional Learning

-Indicator 6: Equitable Support

-Indicator 7: Shared Vision

-Indicator 8: Parents and Community

Commendations

- Students interviewed at the secondary level demonstrated an impressive ability to reflect on their learning in an articulate and thoughtful manner.
- Teachers at all levels, K-12, plan for and develop curriculum to promote global awareness leading to student work that reflects global citizenship.
- The system-wide development and implementation of the research and writing curriculum is clearly articulated in all grades and supports the cultivation of critical thinking skills.
- There are multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate their social studies learning by engaging in real-world problem-solving as part of the classroom curriculum as well as in co-curriculars.

Commendations

- The District is commended for scheduling a weekly period of collaboration and collegial learning at each level.
- There is evidence of goal setting opportunities for students K-8, who are also asked to reflect on what they learned. In addition, there are examples of group processing practices on the middle and high school level.
- There is evidence of student choice linked to specific assignments related to their understanding of their learning styles.

Commendations

- Teachers at all levels, K-12, have developed engaging curriculum which fosters passionate learning in their students.
- The elementary school should be commended for its initiatives to promote global awareness through character education and outreach activities.
- The District via the development of the five year Strategic Plan has established a dynamic framework through which instructional creativity and student empowerment are being promoted and emphasized.
- Teachers throughout the District are empowered and supported to creatively engage students and innovate instructional practice.

Commendations

-Beyond district budget support, the PTAs at each level provide funds for learning opportunities that extend student learning beyond the classroom.

-eChalk is in place in the District and teachers post classroom information consistently. Parents interviewed described their accessibility to assignments, research data, and curriculum.

-The Ardsley Education Foundation is an active partner with the District's staff, and offers enhancements for student learning through mini-grants to teachers, specific appropriations: iPads, 3D Printers, Science Lab probes. Annual fund-raising social events, volunteer requests, and current information are posted on the Foundation website.

Commendations

-Enthusiastic student cognitive engagement and demonstrated critical thinking skills were evident throughout classroom observations and from parent/student conversations.

-There is considerable evidence of direct communication between the District's staff and parent community about programs, enrichment opportunities within and out of the classroom. e.g., Cultural Days, International Day, classroom newsletters that describe Social Studies units, MS-HS transition meetings, HS field trips, and museum visits.

Recommendations

- Consider providing consistent opportunities K-12 for students to reflect on and assess their performance and growth over time to guide and extend their own learning.
- Think about the sorts of evidence/data that would help the District understand the extent to which its global citizenship goal is being met, and how the District would go about capturing that evidence.
- Consider engaging teachers in discussions about the types of data they would find most helpful in understanding the extent to which their students engage in critical thinking, and how to generate those data.

Recommendations

- Develop a formal process that brings K-12 teachers together to define, discuss, and agree upon what critical thinking, independent practice and global citizenship mean in each grade.
- Consider ways to identify and highlight exemplary units of study that are tied to global citizenship and critical thinking.
- Consider whether the current structure allows for consistency within grade levels and from grade to grade so that all students are provided equitable experiences.
- Consider providing opportunities for faculty to meet across buildings, particularly the transition years (4 to 5, 8 to 9), to articulate curriculum continuums.

Recommendations

- Consider structures that would facilitate communication among social studies teachers, within and between buildings (e.g. shared drive, Google Doc, learning walks, cross-building visitations, etc).
- Through experimentation and innovation in the social studies classroom is evident, the District should continue its focus on the development of common understanding as they relate to critical thinking skills, independent practice, collaboration, and global citizenship.
- Provide specific professional development, collaborative opportunities and peer to peer observation for staff across all levels in the planning for, implementation, and assessment of authentic social studies habits of mind, critical thinking skills, and learning activities.

Next Steps

We will be planning summer work that will:

- Begin our efforts to align our curriculum with the new K-12 Social Studies Standards with a particular focus on the social studies practices;
- Enable us to develop a continuum that develops academic and domain specific vocabulary;
- Allows us to answer the question, “What does critical thinking, independent practice and global citizenship look like in Ardsley?”
- Focus on using student work as a primary data source;
- Provide a structure to analyzing student work, assigned tasks, and assessment rubrics;
- Establish a steering committee and set goals for the 2016-17 school year.