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*Posted by Shannon Focht at 2/1/2012*

Wednesday this week was an early release day for students to allow for teacher and principal collaboration. I was able to visit several groups working together at both Pullman High School and at Jefferson Elementary School.

The high school staff was fine tuning a school-wide rubric for evaluating paragraph writing. I gathered from the discussion that it will serve as a spring board for the development of a school-wide rubric for essay and research paper writing.

Comments from teachers included such things as, "the kids will have consistent expectations for writing in every class," and "it will save us instructional time because we won't have to spend time teaching so many unique expectations in every class."

Discussion could be heard about whether there needs to be a different rubric for every grade level or one rubric that sets a single expectation for the entire high school. There was discussion about adding conventions such as spelling, format, and punctuation. In addition, one group discussed adding model paragraphs so that student will have access to examples of the expectations.

At Jefferson, each grade level of teachers were together combing over assessment data for each of their students, identifying common weaknesses and strengths and making plans together to help student struggling with specific skills and concepts. One group will have a paraprofessional, assigned to one of the teachers because of a large class, work with small groups of students from their three classes that have not mastered specific skills. Another group was exploring how to better align classroom core instruction with intervention specialist time. Still another group included one of the specialist in the discussion about how best to provide extra help for individual students.

I heard teachers speak about the gap between the highest and lowest achieving students. They discussed ideas about how to make sure each student is able to make progress. The conversations were not about getting through the content, but it was about each student's learning.

These are only samples of many similar discussions I heard. It was evident that the teachers at these two schools put the time today to exceptionally

good use. Every discussion I heard was evidence that the teachers and principals are entirely focused on helping students succeed and make progress from wherever their current skill level. They were not simply discussions; plans were made for actions that are expected to improve learning and student achievement and performance.

Paul Sturm,

Superintendent