

TO: Board of Education
FROM: Tom Rogers
DATE: February 20th, 2013
SUBJECT: Summary GHS Professional Learning Communities proposal

As you know, the formal proposal for implementing Professional Learning Communities was presented at the February 11th Board of Education meeting. This document is intended to be an overview of the highlights for your review prior to the Board taking action on this item at the February 25th meeting. It is my hope that you will support the work of the GHS faculty in this initiative, as I strongly believe that it will allow Geneva High School to more effectively meet the needs of all of our students. Please let me know if there are any questions.

Summary of the GHS Professional Learning Community proposal:

Geneva High School ranks among the top high schools in Illinois and we have great students, supportive parents, a devoted staff, and a community that values education. Because of our successes, however, it is sometimes difficult to feel an impetus to continually change, adapt, and improve in a proactive manner. We recognize that there are students at GHS who are not meeting academic standards and who struggle in a variety of areas. Additionally, we believe that our top performing students can achieve at even higher levels.

For the past 18 months, the GHS faculty has been engaged in an in-depth collaborative study of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and the positive effects that this could have on student achievement. As a brief overview, PLCs are highly collaborative work teams that focus on the critical questions of student learning:

1. What is it that we want all students to learn – by grade level, by course, and by unit of instruction?
2. How will we know when each student has acquired the intended knowledge and skill?
3. How will we respond when students experience initial difficulty so that we can improve learning?
4. How will we respond if students have already learned the material?

High schools have historically been departmentalized and compartmentalized with little opportunity for teachers to truly collaborate with their colleagues who teach the same courses. Such is the case at GHS. We are already maximizing the limited time we have in our current structure and are seeking to build an infrastructure that is more supportive of ongoing, continuous improvement through collaboration.

In Fall 2013, we are planning to modify our Thursday schedule and begin the day with a 50-minute PLC period for faculty to address the critical questions on an ongoing basis. Additionally, PLCs at GHS will meet the need for a unifying framework for common assessments, common core standards, and the development of a social-emotional curriculum. Essentially, PLCs will be the mechanism for GHS to “do RtI.” This spring, our plan is to provide professional development to all certified staff at GHS on the norms of collaboration, the use of data, SMART goals, effective group teaming, and team leadership/facilitation.

Each Thursday as part of our modified schedule in the fall, buses for the high school will run at the same time as they do on normal days. A variety of options will exist for all students during our PLC period. Examples of these options are listed on the reverse of this sheet.

Many of these activities already occur at Geneva High School, but at the expense of instructional class time. While class periods will be 4 minutes shorter on PLC Thursdays, the need to pull students from class for assemblies or other reasons will be minimized, effectively negating any loss of instructional time. Additionally, our existing homeroom period will be eliminated and folded into this schedule.

While not all students would be required to attend on every PLC Thursday, there would be certain students expected to attend on specific Thursdays (i.e. all freshman for freshman orientation, all sophomores for suicide prevention/awareness, all seniors for college application procedures, etc.). There are a number of non-teaching staff who will be available to supervise the areas in which students would be present. Additionally, a portion of the teaching staff (on a rotating basis) would be available to assist in the supervision of support areas requiring specific academic expertise.

This proposal is structured in such a way that it does not require any additional funding for staff, transportation, or operation.

Examples of opportunities for students during the PLC period:

Examples of Academic Opportunities for Students:

- Tutoring centers providing academic assistance in multiple subjects
- Library and/or computer lab time for research, homework, and projects
- Advanced Placement (AP) test prep/review sessions
- Acceleration and Enrichment student meetings (A & E)
- Making up tests/quizzes in a Testing Center (in lieu of missing class for test make up)
- ACT test prep sessions
- Group work areas for student projects
- Study hall
- Technology training sessions and tutorials
- Book club/Reading Circles
- Current events discussion
- Mini-courses/workshops/speakers on a variety of topics (i.e., effective study habits, time management, goal setting, etc.)

Examples of Social-Emotional Opportunities for Students:

- The PLC period will serve as a framework for a high quality social-emotional curriculum at GHS. Appropriate topics for each grade level will be selected such as:
 - Anxiety and depression
 - Bullying prevention
 - Suicide awareness/prevention
 - Internet safety
 - Substance abuse
 - Motivation
 - Freshman transition to high school
 - Senior transition to college

Examples of Other Opportunities for Students:

- College search and application information/assistance sessions
- College application essay writing assistance
- College representative meetings
- Course selection and scheduling meetings
- Mini-courses/workshops/speakers on a variety of topics
- Club meetings (run by club officers) for groups such as Student Council, NHS, and others
- Students serving disciplinary consequences in lieu of missing class
- Open gym/PE absence makeup sessions
- Vocal/Instrumental music practice (individuals or small ensembles)
- Career exploration activities, speakers, career fair
- CPR/First Aid training/certification
- Student government interaction with the student body
- Community service opportunities

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