

NC DPI
School & District Spotlight 10-1-15
Thomasville City School District

Martin: **Maria Pitre Martin**
Mitchell: **Ceretha Mitchell**
Buck: **Jennifer Buck**

[MUSIC]

Martin: Hello, I'm Maria Pitre-Martin and I'm the superintendent of schools here in Thomasville City.

Mitchell: I'm Ceretha Mitchell and I'm the chief academic officer.

Buck: And I'm Jennifer Buck. I'm the coordinator of instructional technology.

Martin: In August of 2013, Thomasville City Schools started a journey and was that journey was one that really involved having a laser-like focus on classroom instruction. And very often, we have had discussions here in Thomasville about what does that does to have a laser-like focus on classroom instruction. And so, one of the things that we determined that would define that is really understanding what students should know and be able to do per the North Carolina standard course of study.

How do we know that students have learned that content? And then, when are going to assess and provide remediation to students who have not received that content? And so, much of what you will hear today really drives home how do you get to laser-like instruction? How do you focus on the content? How do you select resources that are aligned to the standard course of study? And how do you provide assessments that give us really good data to inform instruction?

Mitchell: In the fall of 2013, Thomasville City Schools' instructional coaches came together around the table to discuss best practices in education. We determined that there were seven critical questions that needed to be addressed when looking at curriculum in Thomasville City Schools. So, those seven critical questions included questions concerning the standard course of study, what we're teaching, when we're teaching, how we're teaching, and how we are assessing. And then, what do we do next in terms of remediation or acceleration for Thomasville City School students?

Buck: It became very clear to us that Schoolnet would be a wonderful resource to help us do this particular work. So, we actually worked with our team to help create some of these different components as far as giving our students a guaranteed curriculum. We wanted to be sure to use the Schoolnet instructional resources as a framework. This really was more than just curriculum mapping, but what we started with is because we know the Schoolnet resources were already vetted, and of quality material. We used those with our teachers, and had a lot of professional development around that.

We also then worked to include the Schoolnet assessments in using common assessments with our common grade levels, and common departments, and common courses. With the Schoolnet assessments, that was able to give us the data that we needed; being able to use that data dashboard and launch all types of analysis and reporting features. We were able to be able to help answer those seven critical questions.

What we did with school net is try to look at this from a standpoint of aligning the instructional resources with the assessments. In our district, we jumped in with the instructional resources first, as you'll see referenced in the gear picture here. The instructional resources and the assessments work hand-in-hand. And with those assessment items, what we were doing is answering that question about how we know that the students are meeting the standards, and what do we need to do for remediation as far as that's concerned?

So, when we look at the instruction resources, we had district strat—staff reviewing the content. Our teachers were really immersed in a lot of PD around these resources. It was not just information for the teachers, to just say, “Go log in, and check it out, and see what you think.” There was a lot of PD based around it. There were instructional focus calendars created, files had been uploaded to the Curriculum Manager, and so that's kind of how we started with the instructional resources component.

When we started looking at the Schoolnet assessments, we were able to use them for a variety of reason. We used them for common assessments within grade levels. We also used them for benchmarking, as well as class room assessment items. Our first jump in really was with ScanIt, and that's a great entry point into using the assessments in—within Schoolnet. You can use plain paper bubble sheets, do an answer key only, and you still get the robust reporting that the dashboard offers, and all of the analysis with reporting features. We used the online assessments, as well as the ScanIt bubble sheets, for benchmarking and so forth. And those have been greatly successful.

Mitchell: As a result of the seven critical questions, Thomasville City School staff brought together all teacher groups in different subject areas, and departments, and grade levels, over the course of a year to develop what we call instructional focus calendars. These instructional focus calendars are developed around the seven critical questions that we deemed as important in Thomasville City Schools.

Buck: Getting started with Schoolnet assessments was very painless, actually. With going and getting started with using ScanIt. ScanIt was an easy program to get downloaded onto a computer, right there in the Schoolnet dashboard; and being able to use plain paper, not having to purchase separate Scantron sheets, and being able to add the data into Schoolnet as far as just putting an answer key only.

We were able to use of the same assessments that teachers were comfortable with. And this was actually a very easy way that we found to get started in using the Schoolnet assessments. There was level—lot of levels of assessments using classroom assessments, and we've actually, we're really excited about doing some co-authoring assessments with some of the newest features. We are also using them for common assessments.

Student and teachers have had very positive experiences with utilizing the online assessment component, Schoolnet. We actually were able to complete our benchmarks online this spring. And we were very successful. The students were able to know their results immediately. Teachers were able to track their students' progress on the dashboard. And we were able to get reporting for lots of different individuals and stakeholders in the school as far as those assessments are concerned.

Looking at the different reports, and the data collection, opportunities that Schoolnet gives us, we can analyze the data at the classroom level. Our instructional coaches have got access to this data so that they help formulate, and provide support for instruction. Our school administrators, and even district administrators, are able to look at the data analysis piece, and be able to react to it positive, and move forward with the instruction in the classroom.

Mitchell: So next, we look at the Standards Mastery reports in small groups throughout the district. A lot of times the small groups consist of grade levels; sometimes, department levels. We also have some grade levels that are larger than others, so we have the groups split into different pods. So, during this time as PLC work [ph], we bring the teachers together to discuss the master report, and look at students' progress toward goals individually, and then determine needs and remediation, or enrichment, in opportunities for future work.

We have several different templates that we use with our teachers over the course of this past year. And we have modified and changed the templates to meet our needs. We make sure we first look at the data, we analyze, you know, are there any patterns of misunderstandings for students, any questions that all of our students may be missing. What can we celebrate? What are students understanding? And then, we take the information, and that drives our next steps and instruction.

The monitoring piece is crucial, and all the effort we put forth as a school district. The Instructional Excellence Inventories are opportunities developed by the vision of our superintendent, where essential [ph] office staff, along with

principals and other coaches, come together four times a year per site to do full-day visits. During each full-day visit, there's an hour and half, what we call data dive [ph], where the instructional team develops their database from their benchmarks, their common formative assessments, and any other assessments work [ph]—worthy of sharing toward progress for students.

And we look at the patterns of improvement, the patterns of celebrations that we can celebrate as a team. We look at patterns from school to school. And then, we can determine next steps as a district for instructional needs. The Instructional Excellence Inventories have been very helpful, have been beneficial, and it is an ongoing PD opportunity for all of our staff.

We're really excited about next year, moving forward with Schoolnet, and exploring all the new resources that are continuously being added. We have set aside some time at the end of this school year to really look deeper into each content area with our teachers, and also revise our instructional focus calendars.

Buck: And to play off of that, if we [ph] actively involve teachers even more in some of the features that Schoolnet has to offer, like being able to leverage the grouping options, and being able to assign materials to students for specific standards remediation. So, we're really excited about moving forward with more with the Curriculum Manager piece, as well as spreading that online options testing more towards our 6-12 environment.

Blooper Outtake:

Can I do the piece, I told you [ph]? [LAUGHTER] We were using the Schoolnet online system for getting teachers and students acquainted with more of—this one's a bust. [LAUGHTER]

[OVERLAPPING—INDISCERNIBLE]

Mitchell: Because when you started talking, I went [MAKES NOISE]. Going to say, you got to start that one over [ph].

[MUSIC]

[END RECORDING]