

Professional Learning Current Reality

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The administration at Alcova Elementary School has been very focused on technology use for the past two or three years. More and more teachers have been getting on board with integrating technology in their classrooms, and as a result, more professional learning time has been dedicated to supporting these teachers in their technology endeavors. In addition to technology, Alcova's professional development plan over the past several years has covered current Gwinnett County initiatives such as Formative Instructional Practices, number talks, and close reading.

Vision

According to Dr. Todd Langley, the principal of Alcova Elementary School, the vision for technology use with students is for it to be a tool for engagement. In addition, students need to develop a solid understanding of the various technologies out there and the ways that they can make everyday life easier (T. Langley, personal communication, June 16, 2016). Alcova has recently begun implementing STEM and PBL (project based learning) with students, and technology has been a big part of those two initiatives. The engagement level that these activities have brought to students is incredible, and students do not really realize that they are learning because they are enjoying what they are doing so much.

Learning outcomes at Alcova revolve around literacy and numeracy proficiency. As a result, all professional learning done at Alcova is presented with the purpose of supporting literacy and numeracy in the classroom. For example, the close reading professional learning that has been done over the past several years has supported literacy instruction in kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms. In addition, technology professional learning is taught for the purpose of teachers coming up with new, innovative ways to teach their students. The goal is not only for the technology to support Alcova's learning outcomes but also for it to support deeper

technology literacy within students. As Dr. Langley mentioned, teachers should want their students to understand all of the amazing ways that technology can make life easier. Plus, in this day and age, technology literacy is a very important skill to have.

Many groups of people are benefiting from the use of technology that is going on at Alcovia. First and foremost, the students benefit. They are more engaged in their learning, and they are learning so many important life skills that they will be able to carry with them forever. Teachers and administrators also benefit because of the collaboration that it can promote between colleagues and because of the way it can transform teaching practices.

Needs Assessment

According to Dr. Langley, professional learning needs are identified at Alcovia in a variety of ways. First, the administrative team looks at local, district, and state data points on district assessments to look at trends and needs for students and teachers. In addition, survey data and knowledge of the county, school, and state initiatives are utilized to lead teachers so that they are ahead of the curve (T. Langley, personal communication, June 16, 2016).

Alcovia is very data-driven. All students take district developed assessments (DDAs) in math and literacy and some grade levels also take these DDAs in social studies and science. Teachers then meet during professional learning to discuss the data and determine what their instruction needs to focus on based on how their students did on these assessments. A group of teachers also meets with administration over the summer to go over the test scores specifically from the Georgia Milestone for the purpose of determining what professional learning should focus on for the following year.

In addition, the administrative team meets with other instructional coaches and the LSTC (local school technology coordinator) to discuss what the teachers need. Since the instructional

coaches and the LSTC work so closely with the teachers, they have a very good perspective on what the teachers want and need in their professional learning. These meetings happen once per quarter, and then the administrative team creates a syllabus of the professional learning activities scheduled for the quarter. However, it is very fluid just in case something needs to be changed or added as the needs arise.

Professional Learning

Professional learning is provided in many forms at Alcova. Some meetings just focus on data and give teachers time to use the data to inform their instruction and plan lessons for the future with the purpose of reviewing standards that their students are still struggling with. Once per quarter, teachers are given a half-day sub, and these data meetings go on for an entire half of a school day.

Alcova's professional learning days are Tuesdays and Thursdays. Tuesdays are designated for some type of learning to take place in the form of topics such as math, literacy, or technology. Thursdays are dedicated to grade level collaborative planning. This means that the grade chair and the curriculum chair lead the meetings with the goal being teachers working collaboratively as they plan for their units of instruction. During these Thursday meetings, teachers also work together to create common assessments. Finally, once a month on Mondays, the staff stays after school to participate in a writing staff development.

Lab classrooms are also a big part of professional learning that has been going on at Alcova for the past three years now. A lab classroom is basically a peer observation, in which members of a grade level observe their peer actually teaching the strategies they have been working on in other professional development meetings. Once the teaching part is over, the entire grade level gathers together to debrief. This has been a great way for teachers to really

work together and see the strategies that they have been learning about put into action. This makes lab classrooms a great follow-up to any professional development class.

Other professional learning that has happened at Alcova has been in the form of book studies and workshops. The LSTCs have also held some optional technology “how-to” sessions after school. Finally, new teachers go through a workshop during their first year at Alcova, and teacher mentors are a big part of that process. Teacher mentors are also assigned to teachers who are struggling with either teaching the content or managing their students.

There is also a good amount of follow-up support provided after a professional learning session for the purpose of helping teachers master new strategies and content and integrate them into their classroom practice. Alcova has instructional coaches in math and literacy, a full time LSTC, and a half time LSTC. In addition, the county provides an eCLASS instructional specialist that rotates between several Gwinnett County Schools (T. Langley, personal communication, June 16, 2016).

This past school year, Alcova had a literacy coach and a math coach. Both of these instructional coaches were available to work with teachers in their classrooms or during collaborative planning. In addition, they taught several of the professional developments that happened on Tuesdays. The LSTCs and the eCLASS instructional specialist also provided a lot of follow-up after professional development days. They went into teacher’s classrooms and worked with them on using technology with students. In addition, they held optional after school help sessions, and they met with any grade level that needed additional support.

Alignment to School Improvement Goals

According to Dr. Langley, Alcova has an alignment between the school improvement goals and data received from testing. Then, these school improvement goals plus the data drive

the professional learning goals (T. Langley, personal communication, June 16, 2016). Alcova has two school improvement goals that cover math and literacy. The first goal states that “The Dacula Cluster will work in concert to develop within students a deep conceptual understanding of mathematical concepts and applications to meet or exceed annual targets measured on District Assessments/Student Performance Goals. Schools will employ strategies developed by our cluster's vertical team and the implementation of local professional development and high yield instructional strategies. All students in the Dacula cluster will score proficient on the end of year milestone assessments in mathematics grades 3-5.” There are so many professional development meetings that are geared toward math. As previously mentioned, Alcova has a math coach who leads these meetings and who is also available to coach teachers in their classrooms or in a one-on-one setting. In addition, many technology meetings are geared toward using technology for math instruction. Finally, Alcova has had Greg Tang come out to the school multiple times and do workshops and also work with teachers in their classrooms for the purpose of assisting them in their math teaching practices.

The second goal states that “Working collaboratively, the Dacula Cluster will increase literacy achievement for all students (K-12) to meet or exceed annual targets on the Georgia Milestones. Schools will implement high yield strategies identified by the cluster vertical team and through local professional development.” As previously mentioned, Alcova has a literacy coach who has led professional development and who has also worked with teachers in their classrooms. Many technology meetings are geared toward using technology for literacy instruction. This past year, Alcova invited Lola Schaefer to come out and lead a two-day writing staff development on writing instruction for teachers. As a result, the majority of professional development activities done at Alcova are done with either math or literacy instruction in mind.

Funding and Incentives

According to Dr. Langley, funding for professional development is provided in several ways. First, the county allocates professional learning funds for each school. Then, Alcova can supplement those funds with a combination of local funds and Title I funds. Alcova's estimated Title I budget is \$30,000, and the official professional learning budget from both the county and local funds is \$30,000 (T. Langley, personal communication, June 16, 2016).

Diversity

Professional learning focusing on diversity is still an area needing improvement at Alcova according to Dr. Langley (T. Langley, personal communication, June 16, 2016). Alcova has two ESOL teachers, and they have led professional development a couple times for the purpose of helping teachers come up with strategies for how to teach their ESOL students. In addition, all of the special education teachers have a meeting every Wednesday morning, but no general education teachers are there. Special education teachers have never led staff development meetings before, but the hope is for that to change for this coming school year. However, special education teachers do participate in the collaborative planning meetings that happen every Thursday and usually another day after school, and they are able to provide lots of great teaching strategies that all teachers can apply.

Collaboration

Alcova has a wide variety of teams that teachers have the option of participating in. There is a leadership team, a literacy team, and a numeracy team. For the 2016-2017 school year, two new teams will be starting – a vertical technology team and a PBIS team (positive behavior interventions and supports). The many purposes of these teams include bringing concerns to the table, developing school-wide plans for improvement, and telling the “story” of Alcova (T.

Langley, personal communication, June 16, 2016). These teams, especially the literacy team and numeracy team, assist in leading professional development that focus on literacy and math instruction. This coming year, members of the technology team will assist in planning good professional development specific to their grade level.

Evaluation

The impact of professional learning on teacher practice and student learning is evaluated using the GTES evaluation process (Gwinnett Teacher Effectiveness System) (T. Langley, personal communication, June 16, 2016). When administrators come in to observe teachers, they look specifically for strategies that have been taught in professional development meetings. In addition, Alcova has begun using data notebooks extensively from kindergarten all the way to fifth grade. Students put work samples and test score graphs in these data notebooks so that they can lead conferences with their parents and explain to them how their learning has improved throughout the year. This is an excellent way to show how student learning has been impacted.

The LSTCs have especially seen how the technology professional learning has impacted teacher practice and student learning. This past school year, many teachers were won over to technology, and as a result, they incorporated it into their classrooms consistently. Students loved the extra technology that has been utilized this year, and their engagement levels have soared.

All in all, Alcova has a very solid professional development plan. There are some areas to improve in, and the hope is that that process will begin immediately when the brand new school year starts.

Georgia School Performance Standards

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The means by which teachers, administrators, and other staff acquire, enhance, and refine the knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions necessary to create and support high levels of learning for all students

Professional Learning Standard 1: Aligns professional learning with needs identified through analysis of a variety of data			
<input type="checkbox"/> Level 4 Exemplary	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Level 3 Operational	<input type="checkbox"/> Level 2 Emerging	<input type="checkbox"/> Level 1 Not Evident
Professional learning needs are identified and differentiated through a collaborative analysis process using a variety of data (e.g., student achievement data, examination of student work, process data, teacher and leader effectiveness data, action research data, perception data from students, staff, and families). Ongoing support is provided through differentiated professional learning.	Professional learning needs are identified through a collaborative analysis process using a variety of data (e.g., student achievement data, examination of student work, process data, teacher and leader effectiveness data, action research data, perception data from students, staff, and families).	Professional learning needs are identified using limited sources of data.	Professional learning needs are identified using little or no data.
<p>EVIDENCE: Dr. Langley states that “We utilize our local, district and state data points to look at trends and needs for our students and teachers. We also utilize survey data and knowledge of county, school and state initiatives to lead our teachers to be ahead of the curve.”</p>			
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS: I would recommend that Alcovia have differentiated professional learning. Currently, all teachers are receiving the same exact thing, when in reality, some teachers are way ahead of the game in some areas. Since usually a team of people lead each professional development meeting, each person who is leading could be teaching something different, and then teachers could attend the “session” that would be the most beneficial to them.</p>			

Georgia School Performance Standards

Professional Learning Standard 2: Establishes a culture of collaboration among administrators and staff to enhance individual and collective performance			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Level 4 Exemplary	<input type="checkbox"/> Level 3 Operational	<input type="checkbox"/> Level 2 Emerging	<input type="checkbox"/> Level 1 Not Evident
<p>Administrators and staff, as a foundational practice, consistently collaborate to support leadership and personal accountability and to enhance individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback). Teachers conduct action research and assume ownership of professional learning processes.</p>	<p>Administrators and staff routinely collaborate to improve individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback).</p>	<p>Administrators and staff routinely collaborate to improve individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback).</p>	<p>Administrators and staff routinely collaborate to improve individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback).</p>
<p>EVIDENCE: Alcova has a variety of teams that meet on a fairly regular basis including the Leadership team, Literacy team, Numeracy team, PBIS team, and vertical technology team. These teams collaborate together and then take information back to their grade levels. Many topics are discussed at these meetings, and one major topic is professional learning needs. Grade level representatives are able to make recommendations to the team leader about what their grade level needs regarding professional learning opportunities.</p>			
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS: I would recommend that the leadership team meet more. The literacy and numeracy teams have met on a very regular basis, but the leadership team (consisting of the grade chairs and the administrative team) rarely meets throughout the school year. More regular meetings would give the administration a better picture of how each grade level is doing and what they need to be more successful.</p>			

Georgia School Performance Standards

Professional Learning Standard 3: Defines expectations for implementing professional learning			
<input type="checkbox"/> Level 4 Exemplary	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Level 3 Operational	<input type="checkbox"/> Level 2 Emerging	<input type="checkbox"/> Level 1 Not Evident
<p>Administrators, teacher leaders, or both consistently define expectations for the implementation of professional learning, including details regarding the stages of implementation and how monitoring will occur as implementation progresses.</p>	<p>Administrators, teacher leaders, or both regularly define expectations for the implementation of professional learning.</p>	<p>Administrators, teacher leaders, or both occasionally define expectations for the implementation of professional learning.</p>	<p>Administrators, teacher leaders, or both rarely, if ever, define expectations for the implementation of professional learning.</p>
<p>EVIDENCE: The GTES evaluation process and data notebooks really help teachers implement what they have learned in professional learning. Administrators look for the teaching strategies learned in professional learning during their observations, and teachers make sure their students show mastery of literacy and numeracy in their data notebooks.</p>			
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS: In talking with teachers, they would like more guidance on how to create an effective data notebook with their students. This past year, creating data notebooks was basically just added on to everything else the teachers were expected to do, but there was not a lot of training in how to do it.</p>			

Georgia School Performance Standards

Professional Learning Standard 4: Uses multiple professional learning designs to support the various learning needs of the staff			
<input type="checkbox"/> Level 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Exemplary	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Level 3 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Operational	<input type="checkbox"/> Level 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Emerging	<input type="checkbox"/> Level 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Evident
<p>Staff members actively participate in job-embedded professional learning that engages collaborative teams in a variety of appropriate learning designs (e.g., collaborative lesson study, analysis of student work, problem solving sessions, curriculum development, coursework, action research, classroom observations, online networks). Professional learning includes extensive follow-up with descriptive feedback and coaching.</p>	<p>Staff members actively participate in professional learning, most of which is job-embedded, which includes multiple designs (e.g., collaborative lesson study, analysis of student work, problem-solving sessions, curriculum development, coursework, action research, classroom observations, online networks) to support their various learning needs. Professional learning includes follow-up with feedback and coaching.</p>	<p>Some staff members are engaged in professional learning that makes use of more than one learning design to address their identified needs.</p>	<p>Staff members receive single, stand-alone professional learning events that are informational and mostly large-group presentation designs.</p>
<p>EVIDENCE: There is a wide variety of professional learning at Alcova. According to Dr. Langley, “We have collaborative planning that includes: data work, examining student work, lesson planning and collaborative discussions. We utilize lab classrooms (peer observations) to bring our strategies to real life situations for our teachers. We have completed book studies and workshops. Mentors are part of much of the new teacher process and remediation process for teachers.”</p>			
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS: I would recommend for there to be some type of survey after each professional development meeting to determine if it was useful and practical for the teachers.</p>			

Georgia School Performance Standards

Professional Learning Standard 5: Allocates resources and establishes systems to support and sustain effective professional learning			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Level 4 Exemplary	<input type="checkbox"/> Level 3 Operational	<input type="checkbox"/> Level 2 Emerging	<input type="checkbox"/> Level 1 Not Evident
<p>Extensive resources (e.g., substitute teachers, materials, handouts, tools, stipends, facilitators, technology) and systems (e.g., conducive schedules, adequate collaborative time, model classrooms) are allocated to support and sustain effective professional learning. Opportunities to practice skills, receive follow-up, feedback, and coaching are provided to support the effectiveness of professional learning.</p>	<p>Adequate resources (e.g., substitute teachers, materials, handouts, tools, stipends, facilitators, technology) and systems (e.g., conducive schedules, adequate collaborative time, model classrooms) are in place to support and sustain professional learning.</p>	<p>Some resources and systems are allocated to support and sustain professional learning.</p>	<p>Few, if any, resources and systems are provided to support and sustain professional learning.</p>
<p>EVIDENCE: Alcova has everything that is listed in the Exemplary category – opportunities for substitute teachers so teachers can go visit other classrooms, several coaches to support teachers during professional learning and to follow-up and assist as needed, collaborative planning time every Thursday, etc.</p>			
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS: I would recommend doing the lab classrooms vertically – so that kindergarten teachers can observe a 1st grade class, 1st grade teachers can observe a 2nd grade class, and so on. That way teachers are more aware of what goes on in the grade level after theirs.</p>			

Georgia School Performance Standards

Professional Learning Standard 6: Monitors and evaluates the impact of professional learning on staff practices and student learning			
<input type="checkbox"/> Level 4 Exemplary	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Level 3 Operational	<input type="checkbox"/> Level 2 Emerging	<input type="checkbox"/> Level 1 Not Evident
Monitoring and evaluating the impact of professional learning on staff practices and increases in student learning occurs extensively. Evaluation results are used to identify and implement processes to extend student learning.	Monitoring and evaluating the impact of professional learning on staff practices and student learning occurs routinely.	Monitoring and evaluating the impact of professional learning on staff practices occurs sporadically.	Monitoring and evaluating the impact of professional learning on staff practices occurs rarely, if ever.
<p>EVIDENCE: The administrative team conducts evaluations on each teacher multiple times per year. During these evaluations, they look for the professional learning strategies discussed in the meetings.</p>			
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS: I would recommend that teachers get more time to absorb and implement what they are currently learning in professional development instead of constantly learning brand new things/strategies.</p>			

Georgia School Performance Standards

KSU ITEC Professional Learning Standard: Professional learning reinforces educators’ understanding and use of strategies for promoting equity and high expectations for all students, application of research-based teaching strategies and assessment processes, and involvement of families and other stakeholders in promoting student learning.

<input type="checkbox"/> Level 4 Exemplary	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Level 3 Operational	<input type="checkbox"/> Level 2 Emerging	<input type="checkbox"/> Level 1 Not Evident
<p>Classroom practices (e.g., considering interests, backgrounds, strengths, and preferences to provide meaningful, relevant lessons and assess student progress, differentiating instruction, and nurturing student capacity for self-management) of all teachers reflect an emotionally and physically safe environment where respect and appreciation for a diverse population is evident. There are high achievement expectations for all students and teachers. The principal and other leaders provide professional learning for teachers lacking understanding of the impact that attitudes regarding race, disabilities, background, culture, high expectations, and social class of both students and teachers have on the teaching and learning process.</p>	<p>Classroom practices of most teachers reflect skill in communicating high expectations for each student and adjusting classroom activities to meet student needs. Respect for students’ cultures and life experiences is evident through the emotionally and physically safe learning environment where students of diverse backgrounds and experiences are taught the school code of conduct (customs) to help them be successful in the school context.</p>	<p>Classroom practices of some teachers reflect evidence of teachers’ training in understanding the impact that attitudes regarding race, disabilities, background, culture, high expectations, and social class of both students and teachers have on the teaching and learning process.</p>	<p>Classroom practices reflect little or no evidence of teachers’ training in understanding the impact that attitudes regarding race, disabilities, background, culture, high expectations, and social class of both students and teachers have on the teaching and learning process.</p>
<p>EVIDENCE: This past year, Alcova held an International Night which celebrated all of the cultures and countries that are represented at Alcova. In addition, the 5th grade teachers do an international fair every year in which parents are invited to bring in food or artifacts related to their home country.</p>			
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS: I would recommend that there be more professional learning offered to assist teachers in meeting the needs of ALL students.</p>			