Professional Learning Current Reality and GSAPS

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Vision

The vision of Chestnut Log Middle School is to ensure a safe, nurturing, and positive learning environment where all students have the opportunity to succeed (Chestnut Log Middle School, 2017). The school aims to meet the developmental needs of diverse learners and challenge students to develop lifelong learning skills (Chestnut Log Middle School, 2017). The Learning Forward Organizations states that, “for teachers and school and district leaders to be as effective as possible, they continually expand their knowledge and skills to implement the best educational practices. Educators learn to help students learn at the highest levels. Professional development is the only strategy school systems have to strengthen educators’ performance levels. Professional development is also the only way educators can learn so that they are able to better their performance and raise student achievement (Mizell, 2010).”

Technology plays a pivotal role in preparing our students to be successful members of society who will be equipped with technology skills for a constantly changing world. The goals aligned with this include striving to ascertain, acquire and provide suitable technology to support a stimulating, wide-ranging, instructional program for all learners. Providing quality technology training and support to the teachers and staff in order to support and enhance the learning process is essential. Technology must be integrated into teaching and learning practices in order to support the needs of 21st Century Learners.

The faculty at Chestnut Log must stay abreast of current data driven methods that improve student learning. The assistant principal at Chestnut Log Middle School, Ms. Sims, stated “Technology should be a part of the teaching and learning process every day.” The use of technology differs from classroom to classroom and is used more for certain content areas than others. There is an initiative to change the way technology is being used and classes are being
taught. Ms. Sims indicated that “Teachers are required to use some type of technology in each lesson but as we move forward we hope to make it so that the use of technology is not just turning on a projector.” Including more technology and allowing more student use of technology is a way to actively engage students in learning. This shift from using the basics of technology to thorough implementation and advanced student technology use will take time and significant professional learning.

**Needs Assessment**

Identifying the needs for professional development are primarily achieved through peer and administrative observations of practices that are being used in the classroom. Student data is also utilized to see where learning gaps may be occurring as well as discussions through content and grade level meetings. All of these contribute to recommendations that would be beneficial for professional learning at the school level. There are other learning needs that are suggested through the county level instructional coaches. This often comes from current research based educational trends and directly relates to goals that have been established by the directors at county office.

**Professional Learning**

The school conducts regular professional learning in classroom management, differentiation, learning management systems, various assessment tools, and ways to incorporate technology in student learning. These courses have been taught by staff from county office, Chestnut Log faculty, and training specialists from various education companies. Recently the
focus has been on research based, data driven best practices and how to incorporate technology for student use in lessons.

Some of the most well received sessions have been on effectively setting up Infinite Campus gradebooks and utilizing Engrade for online assessments. These are two programs that are widely used throughout the county and much of the mandatory professional learning has been related to the use of these programs. Within Infinite Campus it is an absolute necessity to have the online gradebook set up correctly because parents and students have access to see their current grades. By having sessions that will walk the teachers through the process of setting up grade categories and assignments it alleviates mistakes and helps the teachers gain confidence in using the program. Engrade was also implemented at the middle school level as not only a learning management system but it also serves as the primary way that the common district assessments are given. It was essential that all teachers know how to use the system so that these assessments can be administered after each unit of study is completed throughout the school year.

After professional development has been delivered to the Chestnut Log faculty the leadership team and administrators conduct peer observations and evaluations on how the training is being used by the teacher. Administrators will reflect any issues on TKES evaluations and hold conferences with teachers who may still be struggling after the training. Through these observations it can be determined if additional training is required for individual teachers or school wide in an effort to make sure that the needs of everyone can be met.

Alignment
Professional learning is aligned to the school improvement goals through a focus on achievement for both students and teachers. Ms. Sims states, “In an effort for greater student achievement it is necessary for teachers to continue to learn new techniques so that effective learning can take place.” The data gathered through peer observations, TKES evaluations, staff feedback, and Milestone testing helps to determine the types of professional learning that is needed. Two main goals listed in the school improvement plan are increasing the proficiency scores on the Georgia Milestone test and incorporating professional learning sessions on higher order thinking skills. These goals are complementary by having teachers learning more ways to incorporate higher order thinking skills it will help students to perform better on state wide assessments. The aim of all professional learning at Chestnut Log is to improve the quality of lessons that teachers provide and enrich the learning experience for students.

Funding & Incentives

Professional Learning at Chestnut Log is funded through a variety of sources. According to Ms. Sims, “professional learning is funded through school budget funds and at times the county office will provide additional training at no cost to the school. We have also used Title I money to fund training.” Typically the instructional programs such as Infinite Campus, Engrade, MyOn, and AimsWeb include county wide training from a representative of that company, an instructional technology specialist, or a county level department coordinator. There are times that the county pays for the training but the school is still responsible for covering the cost of a substitute teacher in order for classroom teachers to attend. This is approximately $70 per teacher per day and is covered under the local school budget for professional learning. This can become expensive to send multiple teachers out of the building for training which is why the
county encourages “Train the Trainer” sessions. Under this method only one person from each school would attend the county wide training and then redeliver the lesson to the school staff. By using a media specialist or an instructional lead teacher who does not require a substitute as the trainer it can be a further way to reduce the costs associated with professional learning.

Ms. Sims stated that “most times professional learning is mandatory so there aren’t many incentives.” Another contributing factor is limited funds available at the school level which can make it difficult to finance large scale incentives for professional learning. Instead teachers who show initiative to attend additional professional learning or who have shown great gains in achievement from their students are recognized publicly at faculty meetings in an effort to build a positive environment and to inspire others to continue their professional development. Teachers that show consistent use of new techniques and technology are often times rewarded with additional access to technology equipment or resources for their classroom.

**Diversity**

Chestnut Log has a wide range of students from a variety of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. There is a high number of students who receive special education services as well as a significant number of students who are English language learners. Significant efforts have been made to train teachers in differentiation and cultural diversity. Ms. Sims states that Chestnut Log “regularly holds special education training.” She also mentioned that this school year the first training was held for teachers on effective practices when teaching students who are English language learners. It is important for teachers to be aware of the challenges their students face in the classroom and at home. It is necessary for educators to be respectful and
considerate of the hardship and struggles that are often contributing to the performance of a student.

**Collaboration**

Chestnut Log implements two types of collaborative learning communities for teachers. One community is based on the grade level the teacher is in and the other is based on the content area that is taught. Each group meets once a week to discuss student performance through common district assessment data, discipline and classroom management issues and to plan effective lessons together. This is also a time when teachers share new tools or research based strategies that they have discovered. The content area and grade level leaders compile a report of items and concerns discussed which is then presented to the administration team during weekly leadership meetings.

**Evaluation**

The impact of professional learning is evaluated through peer and administrative observations both on an informal and formal level. According to Ms. Sims, this evaluation method is preferred in order to “ensure that the practices taught in professional learning sessions are in place in the classroom and being used appropriately.” The administrative teams use TKES to evaluate how teachers are implementing professional learning in the classroom. The TKES is made up of numerous walk-throughs, informal and formal evaluations. The process provides feedback to teachers along with a formal evaluation which will indicate both positive aspects and areas that may need improvement through additional professional development.
References

Chestnut Log Middle School Improvement Plan, 2016


Sims, M., personal communication, January, 2017
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

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<th>Professional Learning Standard 1: Aligns professional learning with needs identified through analysis of a variety of data</th>
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<td>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.</td>
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**EVIDENCE:** “Professional learning at Chestnut Log occurs in grade level meetings, small groups, and on an individual basis.” (M. Sims, personal communication, January 2017).

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** It is recommended that allocations should be continued to ensure that resources are available for teachers to participate in learning throughout the school year. It is also recommended that the school improvement goals continue to be aligned with professional learning.
### Georgia School Performance Standards

**Professional Learning Standard 2:** Establishes a culture of collaboration among administrators and staff to enhance individual and collective performance

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- **Level 4 (Exemplary)**
  - 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.

- **Level 3 (Operational)**
  - Administrators and staff routinely collaborate to improve individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback).

- **Level 2 (Emerging)**
  - Administrators and staff routinely collaborate to improve individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback).

- **Level 1 (Not Evident)**
  - Administrators and staff routinely collaborate to improve individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback).

**EVIDENCE:** "Learning needs are determined through open discussion in grade level meetings and leadership meetings." (M. Sims, personal communication, January 2017).

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** The recommendation would be to continue encouraging all stakeholders to work collaboratively to build a strong learning community that will support teachers and improve student learning.
## Professional Learning Standard 3: Defines expectations for implementing professional learning

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**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.**

**Administrators, teacher leaders, or both regularly define expectations for the implementation of professional learning.**

**Administrators, teacher leaders, or both occasionally define expectations for the implementation of professional learning.**

**Administrators, teacher leaders, or both rarely, if ever, define expectations for the implementation of professional learning.**

**EVIDENCE:** Administrators will ask that teachers attend professional learning often at the request of county office. For the county office mandated training there is a clear plan of expectations followed by an evaluation of the session. Ms. Sims stated that the professional learning that occurs at the school is less structured with little to no expectations or evaluation of the course. (M. Sims, personal communication, January 2017).

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** The recommendation would be to develop a plan for evaluating learner outcomes through a standard procedure and to maintain records of feedback. Regular meetings of the leadership team and administrative team are recommended to ensure that professional learning experiences are designed to meet the needs of teachers as they work toward the goals stated in the school improvement plan.
## Professional Learning Standard 4: Uses multiple professional learning designs to support the various learning needs of the staff

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- **Level 3 (Operational)**: 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.

- **Level 2 (Emerging)**: Some staff members are engaged in professional learning that makes use of more than one learning design to address their identified needs. Professional learning includes follow-up with feedback and coaching.

- **Level 1 (Not Evident)**: Staff members receive single, stand-alone professional learning events that are informational and mostly large-group presentation designs.

**EVIDENCE:** Ms. Sims stated that this year all staff members, both classified and certified, participated in professional learning. It was stated that all staff attended training on ways to interact with ESOL students. There were also trainings held on implementing Engrade for administering all common district assessments. There have also been numerous content area trainings held at county office that teachers have attended. Individualized learning has taken place in grade and content level meetings when the need arises. (M. Sims, personal communication, January 2017).

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** Professional learning should be scheduled using different formats. This could include coaching opportunities, online training, peer walkthroughs, action research, group book studies, or courses offered a local universities.
## Georgia School Performance Standards

### Professional Learning Standard 5: Allocates resources and establishes systems to support and sustain effective professional learning

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- **Level 4 (Exemplary)**: 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.

- **Level 3 (Operational)**: 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.

- **Level 2 (Emerging)**: Some resources and systems are allocated to support and sustain professional learning.

- **Level 1 (Not Evident)**: Few, if any, resources and systems are provided to support and sustain professional learning.

### Evidence:

Professional learning is funded through school budget funds or provided through training paid by county office. Ms. Sims also stated that Title I money has been used in the past to fund training. The funding covers the cost of attending the training as well as the cost to pay for substitutes that classroom teachers would need. There are also times that teachers and administrators will attend courses offered through Metro RESA. There are several teachers who are enrolled in the gifted endorsement program that is offered through the county office and meets once a week in the evening. There is also one technology specialist employed by the county that offers technology training for schools upon request. (M. Sims, personal communication, January 2017).

### Recommendations:

It is recommended that additional technology specialist be employed at the county level. Having just one for a school system this large is insufficient. These technology specialist would be able to dedicate more time to professional learning as well as follow up with individual teachers upon implementation.
Professional Learning Standard 6: Monitors and evaluates the impact of professional learning on staff practices and student learning

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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.

**EVIDENCE:** “We do peer observations and administrative observations to ensure that the practices are in place in the classroom. We also look at student data to see where any gaps are occurring.” (M. Sims, personal communication, January 2017). Some of the professional learning is evaluated through these observations but others may not be. Grade level and content level meetings also take place to discuss training or finding from recent professional development. It is unclear if either of these types of monitoring is making an impact on professional learning or whether it is impacting student achievement.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** It is recommended that opportunities for learning feedback and suggestions be more consistently implemented. Teachers will have a more vested interest in professional learning when it is something that they feel they can truly benefit from. Allowing teachers to design and plan learning opportunities along with a chance to evaluate the outcome of the training will be beneficial.
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.

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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.

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.

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.

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.

**EVIDENCE:** “We regularly have special education training. This is the first year we have had any training offered for teaching ESOL students.” (M. Sims, personal communication, January 2017). Differentiation instruction is the main focus of most training.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** It is recommended that a continued effort be placed on professional learning for special education and English language learners. Special education staff at the county office should increase involvement in leading a variety of small group sessions to help teachers feel more comfortable with modifying lessons and differentiation.