

MSAD 53 Board Report for March 7, 2011

Sandy Nevens, Principal
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NECAP Tests and CIPS:

As administrators shared with the Board before vacation, we have the results from the 2009-2010 NECAP Tests, and we recognize where we did well and where we did not improve as much as we had hoped. We still are eagerly awaiting word from Augusta on what these scores will determine in terms of our CIPS Status for the coming school year. Because last year's NECAP Testing results for Warsaw showed improvement that placed us in Safe Harbor we set the goal this year that our school: would meet AYP and thus no longer be on the "CIPS List." Although I believe all of us in MSAD 53, administrators, Board Members, Teachers, Parents, and Students, want to reach our goal of showing enough improvement to be "off the list", the CIPS School designation has been helpful to us financially and in terms of staff development, as is mandated by the state. If we do not reach our goal of being free of CIPS status, because we were a CIPS Safe Harbor School, we will return to our status as a CIPS school *without penalty* We will receive aid from the state and be responsible for our CIPS Plan as we were this year.

Recently, our CIPS Consultant, Fran Farr, has informed us that if we do make AYP, we will not have her services next year and will not be required by the state to meet as a CIPS Team. This will be a double edged sword as CIPS funding has clearly helped Warsaw a great deal, and yet it will mean that we have improved in math and shown that when we work together as a school we can achieve a great deal. Although I certainly will note this at a later date, I want to officially state that Fran Farr has been extremely helpful to me as the principal and to our CIPS Team as well. She has been available and helpful to us at Warsaw, and I trust at Vickery as well. In her meeting with us last week Fran mentioned that our CIPS Plan was being shared with other schools in Maine because the State CIPS folks think that we have a very good plan. Thank you, Fran, Anne Miller, and the entire CIPS Warsaw Team for the work we have accomplished!

The obvious benefit of having state funds to improve our school needs no explanation, but the specific benefits that we have reaped, some with funding programs and outside experts, and others with our own hands, have allowed staff and administrators to focus more on data that informs instruction, on formative assessment, on outside consultants in math and Best Practices, and on programs that will help us to continue to use data to inform instruction.

Workshop days have been spent on Formative Assessment, Skills Blocks, Data gathering and implementation, Math Curriculum and Best Practices, and more. Almost every workshop day and most staff meetings have had a CIPS Data component imbedded in the work we are doing. I bow to my CIPS Data teachers Lori Stevens, Darlene Ulrickson, and Kayla Brown whose energy and commitment have been key in involving staff in the work we must do to utilize data to improve instruction and learning.

CIPS Team Gathering at UMaine in Orono (February 17)

We have been helped by attendance at the mandatory CIPS Meetings where we work with state consultants and peers sharing our successes and quandaries, comparing notes, and adding to our repertoire of strategies, resources, and new learning. Formative Assessment, for example, has been in use for many years, but it was our CIPS designation that brought George Tucker, a guru of Formative Assessment, to a Warsaw staff development day last year. Formative Assessment is now part of our vocabulary and strategies in improving student learning.

CIPS Team representatives from Warsaw and Vickery attended a CIPS Data follow-up meeting at UMaine in Orono on February 17th with other CIPS schools. The day was spent sharing with other schools and state consultants the work each school has accomplished and working on strategies to ensure that all teachers are using Best Practices and utilizing Data to inform instruction. It was a productive day as we focused on the need to ensure that all teachers utilize data to inform instruction and that we must view every child as having her/his own unique needs, strengths, and strategies that we must recognize, address, and hone.

CIPS Principals Networking Series

I am attending a CIPS Principals Meeting this week on March 3 in Waterville that will focus on M on the Common Core of Learning.

Students of the Month Lunch

I guess it has been a busy winter as we had a Student of the Month Lunch last week to recognize students from each team for the past three months! Normally, of course, we celebrate one month at a time! Mr. Jacques's classroom was jam packed with pizza eaters. Each student was asked to write a thank you to a teacher who made a difference in her/his year at Warsaw as part of the celebration, and I placed each student's note to a teacher in the teacher's mailbox after the pizza was consumed.

Focus: Ann Pike, Consultant at Warsaw

In the past three years we have had a consultant work with our math teachers. For two years, a consultant worked with us on the Connected Math Program (CMP), helping us to align our curriculum for all four grades with the book. The work that Megan Southworth did, especially in her first year with us was very helpful as we focused on what we taught at each grade and throughout each grade and why, then looked at how the CMP books were and should be aligned with the curriculum.

This year Anne Miller and I asked Ann Pike, consultant from Syntiro, to work with us at Warsaw, again focused on math, but with an approach that was different from Ms. Southworth in several ways. Although both share the same goal of supporting our math teachers and helping them to reflect upon their teaching strategies and goals in math instruction, Ms. Pike has targeted and impacted Warsaw teachers with her focus on Best Practices in the classroom. Not only is she interested in *what* we teach, but *how* and *why*, with what level of *engagement of students* and with *what teaching strategies*.

Ann has been meeting with us monthly after school for two hours since the start of the school year, and her focus has been on getting us to reflect upon our instruction, our goals, and our results by working with us on teaching strategies, reflective practice, and learning styles. But she also understands that successful teachers are learners too, and she has worked with teachers to reflect upon their own teaching. Her meetings with math teachers each month for two hours after school are always well planned, thought provoking, and relevant. She has also implemented one of the roles for the job that Anne Miller and I had agreed was essential to the position: observing individual teachers in the classrooms and giving them feedback about their math instruction in those classes.

Ms. Pike has several strengths as a consultant: she does her homework: (on the school, on the staff, on the school community, on the curriculum, and on the culture of the school). For example, the last class we had before vacation had a FISH Philosophy theme: she had found FISH philosophy posters, cards, quotations, and even tablecloths to welcome us to the room for our time with her. She understands that teachers are tired at the end of the day and need sustenance: brownies, cookies, coffee, and waters are there for us. Ms. Pike is bright, articulate, creative, and perceptive. Ann listens, watches and then acts. Ann Pike wanted to learn our “culture” as a staff, and she then designed her approach with us in mind: what our needs and strengths were, who we are as a school, and what defines us as a school.

Did you know?

We are a CIPS School in Math (Yes, you know that!) We have over the past three years added six new teachers out of nine classroom or math Title I teachers to the Warsaw staff: Math Interventionist, Judd Thompson; Title I Math Instructor, Shawn Hennessey; Grades 5 and 6 Math Teacher, Kayla Brown; Grades 5 and 6 math teacher, Jenn Saucier; Grades 7 and 8 math teacher, Darlene Ulrickson; and Grades 7 and 8 math teacher, Lindsay Bolduc. Sixty-seven percent of our math instructors are new to us in the past three years, and we are also introducing the new Saxon Math program to our students this year! But change can be good! I have faith in the teachers we have hired, and each has shown energy and expertise in meeting the needs of Title I students, Algebra students, Saxon math students, and CMP students! Our testing scores in math improved last year, and we continue to show growth.

Tinker, But Don't Sink 'er!

Sometimes when times are tough--- when our math scores are low, for example --- schools make major changes to their staff, curriculum, or both, as a result of their initiative to improve scores, and sometimes major change is needed to right the ship. I am proud of the changes that this staff has engineered and implemented to improve student learning and, ultimately, student test scores. In the past three years we have realigned our CMP Math curriculum, introduced Saxon Math to Grades 5 and 6, created and improved our Skills Blocks, adopted Best Practices in Math, in teaming, and in Skills Blocks, and more. We have improved our math curriculum, our student scores in math, and our interventions to help those who struggle in math.

Teaming at Warsaw: Best Practice Recognition

I was asked to comment online about Warsaw Teaming by Jill Spencer, a Literacy and Best Practices Consultant. She has asked permission to post the entry on Teaming at Warsaw that I have shared with her. Her enthusiasm stems from her recognition that Warsaw Middle School

has had a history of strong middle school practices that allow teachers to focus on academic and developmental needs of our students, The following is the piece I wrote for her web site entry: I share it with the Board as well because Warsaw has been recognized for our teaming, advisory, FISH Philosophy, use of technology, and interdisciplinary curriculum.

From Jill Spencer's Blog:

Recently I asked middle level colleagues to comment on teaming from their perspectives. This post was written by Sandy Nevens, principal of Warsaw Middle School (Pittsfield, Maine), a New England League of Middle Schools' Spotlight School. Sandy is also the president of the Maine Association for Middle Level Education (MAMLE).

*My fondest memories of team teaching take me back to my work on a five core teacher plus allied arts interdisciplinary team. The units we developed and the collaboration led to our reaching far beyond the curriculum. In my many years in the classroom, however, I have one regret: that I never taught with another teacher on a two-person team. Having read *The Power of Two* and the works of Mark Springer, Gert Nesin, John Lounsbury, and many others, I recognized that power of two or three person teams. In my work as an administrator at Auburn Middle School, I was able to see for the first time, the power of two and three as we had one two and three two person teams during my time there. These small teams were new to the school as well, and they and I experienced the joys and mysteries of exploring small teams. One team also piloted Expeditionary Learning and the democratic classroom. I "got" the advantages of teacher to student ratios, teacher collaboration, and, most important, the stronger bond between teacher and student when you have fewer students and have them for a large chunk of time.*

My last four plus years at Warsaw Middle School have given me an even closer look at small teaming. Warsaw Middle School in Pittsfield, Maine has ten plus years of experience with two or three person teams. Warsaw is a 5-8 middle school that began as a middle school with two large interdisciplinary teams, but our present model of two or three person teacher teams has been in place for eight plus years now. Several factors make the small teams especially successful as a model at Warsaw: all four grades 5/6 teams are two person teams; all four teams teach the four core subjects; and all four teams keep their students for two years. Each grade 5 and 6 teacher teaches either language arts and social studies or math and science. Of course, teachers often co-teach a unit and may also teach or co-teach a unit or lessons that may be in the partner teacher's domain, and this is the case with 7 & 8 teams as well.

In Grades 7 & 8 there are three teams, two three-person teams and one two

person team. In each three-person team one person teaches all math, and one person teaches language arts. Social studies is taught on one three person team by one teacher, and teaching science is shared by the team; on the other three person team one teacher teaches science, and social studies is shared between two of the teachers. On the two-person team for Grades 7 & 8 one teacher teaches math and science and the second teacher teaches language arts and social studies. It should be noted that all teams are engaged in units throughout the year that may blur the lines between the subjects taught and by whom!

The 7th & 8th grades teams also keep the same students for both grades 7 & 8 (looping).

There is a method to our madness, of course. Warsaw teachers have a solid background in and understanding of the developmental needs of young adolescents. The transition from child to adult begins and moves along in these four years, and students benefit from knowing their teachers. In four years at Warsaw a student will have only four or five core subject teachers. The academic and interpersonal benefits are clear when students begin two of their four years here knowing their teachers well, and their teachers knowing how they learn without having to begin the second year at square one.

I imagine some schools may have an advisory program that is also within teams; however, Warsaw Advisory (called FISH Groups after the Fish Philosophy) calls for all Allied Arts and Core teachers to have a Fish Group of 11-12 students from all four grades. Eighth graders are in the group with fifth graders, as well as sixth and seventh. These groups are not grouped according to teams at all. It is possible that a teacher may have a FISH group with no one on it on his or her academic team! This configuration we believe serves two goals: to have one adult serve as advisor to each student for all four year, and to have students mingle with older and younger students, thus creating less of a barrier between ages.

Parent-teacher meetings are either with the academic team or individual teachers, and we schedule time for conferences in the fall and by appointment.

We also have a unique approach to our student portfolios in that they are kept in each student's FISH Group classroom, and students spend the year collecting work for their portfolios from all of their classes. Students are given time occasionally to add to and organize their portfolio work. In the spring parents sign up for a time to have their child share her/his portfolio with them. This portfolio sharing is conducted with the FISH Group Advisor in the room, but it is the student who does all the talking.

Teaming at Warsaw is about relationships: teacher to student and student to student!

The Blog above on Teaming was written over the vacation and published by Jill Spencer. Teaming and FISH Groups are two of the practices at Warsaw that visiting teachers to our school marvel at, as we are a school that has maintained a successful advisory program and teaming throughout the years. Both practices help define who we are as a school.

***Sandy Nevens, Principal
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