



Nov. 19 UEN Promising Practices

School Districts Celebrating Programs That Work

The Urban Education Network member districts educate nearly 40% of the students in Iowa schools, including 60.4% of Iowa's students of color, 45.1% of Iowa's students eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch, and 62.9% of Iowa non-English speaking students. At the 2014 UEN Annual Meeting, the following programs were presented by UEN school districts, showcasing best practices and creating conversations around various approaches being used to meet student needs.

The program, described as an "adult science fair," included project boards similar to those one would find in a student science fair, which helped focus the presentations and provide organizational visuals for the listeners. These presentations showcased data improvements, defined programs and practices, emphasized student benefits, and provided a conduit for great conversation among school board members, superintendents, and other district leaders and staff. Senator Herman Quirnbach, Chair, Senate Education Committee, attended the event. UEN leaders are thankful to the many school leaders, staff and students who prepared and presented information about these programs. Congratulations to each of them for their excellent work, passion for student success and collective energy on behalf of Iowa students!

Interventions and Enrichment K-12, Cedar Falls CSD, Dan Conrad, Director of Secondary Education, dan.conrad@cfschools.org and Pam Zeigler, Director of Elementary Education, pam.zeigler@cfschools.org, **Cedar Falls Promising Practice** *Getting at the third question of PLC implementation, "What are we going to do when the student's don't learn?"*

Dan Conrad and Pam Zeigler spoke at the UEN Promising Practices get together on November 19 about the Cedar Falls School District moving forward with their most recent phase of PLC (professional learning communities) implementation. In order to effectively answer one of the questions posed by PLC practice, "What are we going to do when the student's don't learn?" Cedar Falls has implemented a strategy of intervention that offers the opportunity to both develop interventions and create enrichments for students. At the secondary level, the schools have gone to a system in which every student has dedicated intervention time every day, through which students participate in various appropriate study halls (at the high school), pull out small group intervention time (at the junior high), or enrichment activities. Through this practice, the schools have seen both increased proficiency and increased advanced proficiency across grade levels. Pam Zeigler pointed out, "Our goal is not just to increase proficiency, but also to increase advanced proficiency." By engaging students in their own plan for their individualized learning time, the number of students failing classes has also decreased over the course of the year.

"We're encouraged that we've seen a huge drop in D's and F's, and we're seeing kids not fall behind in the first place." – Dan Zeigler



Iowa's Big Program, Cedar Rapids and College Community School Districts, Trace Pickering, ELSC Associate Superintendent, tpickering@cr.k12.ia.us and Randy Bauer, College Community Board President, randybauer@alliantenergy.com, **Cedar Rapids Promising Practice**, *Engaging students in their learning and their community.*

Associate Superintendent Trace Pickering from Cedar Rapids spoke Wednesday evening at the UEN Promising Practices event on how the Cedar Rapids Community School District is partnering with local business leaders to bring students the Iowa BIG (Big Ideas Group) program. Over the course of the past two years, CRCS D has created an exemplary program that engages students and business leaders in the work of contextualizing education. This off site program currently serves 70 students that earn core academic credit for working on projects ranging from creating bricks embedded with solar panels to organizing a conference focusing on the issues facing young women in and out of the classroom. Students' projects are developed either by community members or the students themselves and provide an opportunity for students to engage in contextualized and relevant learning, as Pickering noted, "[The program] empowers students to solve not only their own problems, but also problems in the community." CRCS D hopes that the project will continue to grow, and looks forward to creating even more partnerships with businesses and school districts across Iowa.

Council Bluffs Promising Practice: *Partnering to Address the Mental Health Needs of Students*, Council Bluffs Community School District, Jenny Barnett, Executive Director of Student & Family Services, jbarnett@cb-schools.org (712) 328-0423 X11347

Recognizing the mental health needs of students, lack of services, and related barriers to academic success, Council Bluffs engaged a community resource navigator position to connect students to resources in this mental health services partnership. There are four partners and no district cost to provide services. The program provides half-day services each week, during which building intervention teams process first interviews for students and parents, assessing needs and impact. During the conversation with listeners at this project table, Angela Weekly from Waterloo observed, "Centralizing services that support those in poverty reduces time spent seeking supports and increases time providing supports."

Davenport Schools Promising Practice: *Greater Achievement Plan*, Davenport Community School District, Kendahl Owoh, Ed. D. Director of Federal and State Programs, owohke@davenportschools.org and Bill Schneden, Executive Director, Davenport Schools, schnedenb@davenportschools.org

Davenport Community School District has instituted a Greater Achievement Plan (GAP) with students in grades 3-6 who are struggling readers. Each child has what Superintendent Art Tate calls a Tier Four Intervention, which is focused not only on student learning, but also on providing family support for each child. The district provides additional tutoring at school for these students, as well as four Saturday Academies for students and their families. On academy weekends, held across the city at hotels, libraries and museums, students engage in learning activities and parents spend time learning how they can better support their children's literacy development. Each academy weekend is attended by the students and their families and also Superintendent Tate and building principals as well as the tutors and those supporting students directly. Transportation and child care is provided for the families that participate in these events.



Kendahl Owoh, program director notes, “It is wonderful to be able to see how much all of these families care about their children and their development as readers.”

Des Moines Schools Promising Practice: *Standards-Referenced Grading*, Noelle Tichy, Director of Teaching and Learning, noelle.tichy@dmschools.org, Des Moines Community School District

District staffed studied grading in high school math, particularly Algebra II, in which they found that an “A” in Algebra II corresponded with a 17/18 ACT score, indicating that the grade was not representative of student mastery. Des Moines is transitioning to standards-based grading, in which mastery, not behaviors, determine the grade. The District has stipulated re-learning time and conditions under which students can continue to demonstrate mastery, although the end of the semester is the end of the learning period. Noelle Tichy, Director of Teaching and Learning, explained, “Students will have multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency, which instills hope in our students. Students and teachers are both responsible for student learning.” She explained one major challenge in the work is responding to student need. She lamented that knowing where students are and not providing support and intervention is malpractice. “Noelle also stated the clarity and instructional direction standards-based grading provides. “So many teachers told us, I am such a better teacher. I know exactly where my kids are and what my kids need.”

Dubuque Promising Practice: *Re-Engagement Center*, Dubuque Community School District, Stan Rheingans, Superintendent, srheingans@dbqschools.org, and Shirley Horstman, Director of Student Services, shorstman@dbqschools.org

www.dbqschools.org/re-engage Modeled on Project Hope, City of Boston, the Dubuque Community Schools Re-Engagement Center is a collaborative project with the City of Dubuque. Funds come from within the economic development budget and district dropout prevention resources. The community college chips in for GED services. The program serves students who have dropped out of school under the age of 21, and currently serves about 400 students a year in the program. The program started with one “Hope Peddler,” a reengagement coach, but now need a second.

Finding students after they drop out can be challenging, but Dubuque works hard to locate students through Facebook, text messages and other media and to reengage them. Since dropouts tend to hang together, according to Shirley Horstman, “if you find one, you find a bunch.” Shirley continues, “Kids were thrilled someone cared enough about them and wants to work with them.” Classes are online and happen anywhere; a coffee shop with Wifi, at McDonalds, a public library, etc. Seventy-five students have completed the program so far, with 28 diplomas and 46 obtaining GEDs. After students succeed at this program, they get hooked up with Northeast Iowa Community College’s success coach, to do an interest inventory and plan next steps. Services go beyond academic, for example helping kids get birth certificate so they can get a drivers’ license.

Iowa City Promising Practice: *Diversion Program for Students*, Iowa City Community School District, Kate Callahan, Director Student Services, callahan.kate@iccsd.k12.ia.us, and Steve Murley, Superintendent, murley.stephen@iccsd.k12.ia.us



Iowa City's Discipline Diversion Program is a community-wide effort involving school, court, police, juvenile probation, and county and community leaders with the goal of taking steps to divert students away from juvenile court involvement, with a special effort at reducing racial and ethnic disparities in juvenile justice outcomes. This program focuses on reducing disciplinary action and calls to law enforcement and early results are hopeful. Calls to law enforcement dropped from 81 in FY 2013 to 44 in FY 2014. The first incident is dealt with in school and the second incident triggers involvement in the Diversion Program. Students are given activities that give them a chance to rethink how they can handle conflict in the future. When they complete the requirements, students receive a certificate of completion and no formal charges are filed. Kate Callahan, Director of Student Services, explains the program. "This takes out the emotion and allows us to focus on the data."

Marshalltown Promising Practice: *Strengthening the Instructional Core*, Marshalltown Community School District, Susan Pecinovsky, Associate Superintendent for Student Achievement, specinovsky@marshalltown.k12.ia.us and Lisa Koester, Director HR/Student Issues, lkoester@marshalltown.k12.ia.us

Marshalltown's strategic plan includes a focus on Sheltered Instruction, common unit design, PBIS, literacy and MTSS (Multi-tiered System of Supports). The District is using strategic plan data to drive instructional changes that impact students. This first year the District has met all six target areas in ELL with more focus on improving instructional and less focus on interventions. Disciplinary incidence has dropped, evidence by a reduction from 3,291 in school suspensions in FY 2010 to 1,171 in FY 2014. Lisa Custer explained the effort to direct resources to the social and emotional areas of need as well as the cognitive. Susan Pechinovsky summed it up, "We can't intervene our way out of this problem. We have to focus on core instruction."

Lunch Enrichment Period, Muscatine Community School District, Mike McGrory, Principal, mike.mcgrory@muscatine.k12.ia.us, **Muscatine High School Promising Practice**, *Finding a step in the path to meeting their school wide goals of Adding Rigor and Reducing the number of failing students.*

Principal Mike McGrory presented on Muscatine High School's evolving practices that have been instrumental to increasing rigor and reducing student class failure. They began with two goals; 1) to add rigor back into their system, evidenced by a 50% increase in college readiness by 2016 and 2) reduce the number of failing students as evidenced by a 50% reduction in F's for freshmen students by 2016.

First, MHS increased rigor by introducing a substantial number of AP classes, as well as by providing ACT test prep supports for students. However, as McGrory noted, "Once we increased the rigor, we had to increase the supports available to them [students]." MHS has done this by re-organizing MHS's lunch cycle. McGrory and his team have been able to create a system in which students receive academic support from one of 25 content specific Lunch Success Centers, enabling students to find success in the rest of the school day. Students are assigned to an academic center by the at-risk team on a bi-weekly basis and the students stay in the center until they bring their grades up and demonstrate understanding of the content. Over the course of the year, this program has resulted in reducing overall class failure by 10% and has reduced the number of students failing below 30% by another 10%.



Ottumwa Schools Promising Practice: *Creating a Culture of Achievement*, Ottumwa Community School District, Mark Hanson, High School Principal, Mark.hanson@ottumwaschools.com 319-530-4699 (cell)

Iowa Safe and Supportive Schools (IS3): Ottumwa High School joined the Iowa Safe and Supportive Schools initiative (IS3) in 2011. Upon entry into the program, OHS scored 17/36 on the IS3 survey, indicating big problems in school climate and culture, particularly in student-to-student relationships and student-teacher relationships.

OHS has implemented many initiatives to move toward a positive climate and culture, most importantly a freshman academy and a welcome center for families new to Ottumwa. The freshman academy provides extra support and a strong connection to at least one adult at school freshman year. The welcome center first connects families to the school and then links them to community resources that will help them be successful in Ottumwa. In addition to these two priority activities, many other efforts also occur, a few of them listed below:

- A school/community council has been formed. This group has identified 10 Standards of Success that guide the work.
- The summer prior to freshman year, the two principals visit families of most incoming freshmen.
- Guided by Carol Dweck's research, teacher professional development assists educators in speaking and teaching affirmatively to help students build a growth mind set.
- OHS kicks the school year off with a block party, which is first an outdoor celebration and second an orientation for the school year. Back-to-school night three years ago had 150 attendees. This year over 1000 students and parents attended. Parents received a "Parent Syllabus" helping them understand ways they can support their children's school success.
- Coaches recruit students for extra-curricular activities, knowing that participation in extra-curriculars keeps students in school.

After three years of work, the IS3 survey has improved 7 points and achievement is up in math and reading. The graduation rate has increased 10 percentage points. "We've moved from a 79% graduation rate to an 89% graduation rate in just three years," said Mark Hansen, Ottumwa High School Principal.

Sioux City Schools Promising Practice: *From Career Academy to Wall to Wall*, Sioux City Community School District, Jim Vanderloo, Director of Secondary Education vanderjr@live.siouxcityschools.com and Kari Webb, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment webbk@live.siouxcityschools.com

Sioux City Schools has created an academy which provides a series of connected education classes and training programs. Each academy offers a career-focused sequence of high school courses that integrates core academic knowledge with technical and occupational knowledge to provide students with a pathway to postsecondary education and careers. This program triangulates K-12, Higher Education and Business Partnerships, Wall to Wall in the downtown skywalk. The academy includes an A/B rotation, between the home high school and the academy. There are four career areas: 1) Business and Marketing (Arts, Audio/Video Tech & Communications, Business Management and Administration, Finance, Information Technology, and Marketing), 2) Health Science (Certified Nurse Assistant, Pharmacy Tech, Surgical Tech), 3) Family & Consumer Science (Education Training, Hospitality and Tourism, Human Services), and 4) Industrial Technology, Engineering, and Project Lead the Way (Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources, Architecture & Construction, Law, Public Safety, Corrections & Security, Science, technology, Engineering & Math, and



Transportation, Distribution & Logistics.) “Opening doors of opportunity for all students is the goal,” according to Kari Webb. Jim Vanderloo, says it’s important to constantly ask the question, “How can we make learning most relevant by teaching content through the lens of the field students choose?”

Southeast Polk Schools Promising Practice: *College and Career Readiness*, Southeast Polk Community School District, Jo Ellen Latham, Director Curriculum and Development, joellen.latham@southeastpolk.org, and presenters David Ford, At-Risk and Counseling Coordinator, David.ford@southeastpolk.org 515-967-5533 and Stephen Pettit, High School Principal, Stephen.pettit@southeastpolk.org

Nationally, Iowa has an excellent high school graduation rate, among the top in the nation. Despite the fact that 81% of Iowa students have post-secondary intentions, only 70% of students actually enroll in a post-secondary program. Nationally 46% of all students attain a degree upon high school graduation, but in Iowa only 31% reach degree attainment. The mission of the Southeast Polk School District is to graduate students to “Be successful in college, career, and civic life.” As a result of studying the post-secondary Iowa and national data and their own data on these same indicators, and then seeing the disconnect between their mission and their data, the district is developing and implementing a plan to see that not only do graduates plan to attend post-secondary education, but that they enroll and complete post-secondary education.

The school district is focused on three areas to accomplish this goal:

1. **Academic Preparedness.** This refers to key academic content knowledge and cognitive strategies needed to succeed in doing college-level work.
2. **Academic Tenacity.** This refers to the underlying beliefs and attitudes that drive student achievement, (focused on Carol Dweck’s research).
3. **College Knowledge.** This refers to knowledge base and contextual skills that enable students to successfully access and navigate college.

Southeast Polk is pioneering this important work and has just begun their journey.

Waterloo Schools Promising Practice: *Leader in Me*, Waterloo Community School District, Mike Fisher, Principal Hoover Middle School fisherm2@waterlooschools.org and Melissa Steggall, Principal, Becker Elementary steggallm@waterlooschools.org.

During this presentation of the Leader in Me program in Waterloo, Mike Fisher Principal at Hoover Middle School, talked about the purpose of the program, which is to improve employability and citizenship skills, help students learn to work together, and ultimately create a school that kids want to go to. The program builds on Steven Covey’s Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.

Becker Elementary teachers and principal talked about the programs relationship to student learning goals, including setting a goal of 97% attendance and each classroom creating their own mission statement with students.

Melissa Steggall discussed Haddy’s research about the significant statistical impact on student learning from students assessing their own work. Students from both schools explained the impact of the program on their



educational experience. Allison talked about the skill of prioritizing, learning to “put first things first” in helping her learn to get homework done and how the program has changed her thought process. Jada talked about the impact on her outlook and sense of social responsibility, “I can make the school I attend better for the students who attend in the future.” Principal Fisher explained the theory of the program focused on engaging students in leadership, in contrast to the approach, that seems to say, “You can whip a horse to death and you’ll get there once.” Instead, each student has a job, a purpose to be at school.

Waukee Schools Promising Practice: CAPS, Waukee Community School District, Cindi McDonald, Associate Superintendent, cmcdonald@waukeeschools.org, Chris Bergman, Executive Director, CAPS, cbergman@waukeeschools.org, Peg Armstrong-Gustafson, Business Development Director, peg@tmgmanagement.com

Waukee’s CAPS program, or Center for Advanced Professional Studies, demonstrates a strong connection of study to the relevant world of work. In partnership with local business, students go to a host site with teachers and engage in industry-based curriculum.

The strands and courses are industry-driven based on economic trends with dynamic, authentic curriculum developed through partner expertise. The CAPS professional focus embeds the Iowa Core’s Universal constructs in authentic experiences. CAPS has these strands in place: Financial/insurance, Technology, Human Services, and Engineering; Bioscience & Value Added Agriculture will be added next school year.

There is specific attention paid to critical thinking, complex communication, creativity, collaboration, flexibility/adaptability productivity and accountability. There are no prerequisites or minimum requirements, with courses currently offered to students attaining junior/senior status. CAPS allows a variety of experiences within a field, as well as projects focused on a passion area. Find out more at www.waukeecaps.org

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