Professional Learning Current Reality and GAPSS Review

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**Part A: Professional Learning Current Reality**

**Vision**

Technology has quickly moved into the forefront of education and is viewed as the basis for all things educational. Student technology use is essential in the classroom, but technology is also beneficial to teachers and serves to enhance their adult learning as well. According to the Standards for Professional Learning, learning communities are one of the essential 7 standards to increase educator effectiveness (Learning Forward, 2011). The vision of Lassiter High School is for students to reach excellence and climb higher. The school mission also directly correlates to the vision, in that students are to be provided with a challenging and nurturing environment that results in students that are capable, responsible, and productive members of society. Technology contributes the vast majority of the varying learning experiences students are exposed to during their high school careers. Each teacher uses technology on a daily basis and most teachers use technology in an engaging and authentic manner that encourages student learning. Examples of this use include animations, lecture videos, virtual labs, and online timelines. In addition, the school encourages creativity and innovation of all of its students and technology is used to enhance this skill among the students. Teachers at Lassiter High School believe technology is the key to student-centered learning and a majority of teachers also utilize the hand-held devices of students. The students of Lassiter high school, especially the STEM academy students, are expected to use technology on a daily basis to create and innovate. Course material gives students the freedom to choose technology that allows them to express their creativity while still fulfilling the requirements of the assignment. The embracement of technology by the teachers, administrators, and students of Lassiter high school has allowed for great strides toward reaching excellence and climbing higher which will only continue to help encourage the students to be better members of society. Technology also broadens the horizons of students outside of the walls of the school to help them prepare for college and ultimately their dream careers in the future.

**Needs Assessment**

 Administrators at Lassiter High School have a very hands-off approach to professional learning and let teachers determine which professional learning is most beneficial to them. As Knight (2007) stated, “…traditional forms of professional development are not effective and teachers do not like one-shot programs that fail to address practical concerns” (p. 2). At the beginning of each school year, teachers are requested to respond to a survey sent out by administration. This survey asks teachers to rank their comfort with various topics and how often they implement these procedures in the classroom. For example, the most recent survey asked teachers to determine their weakest and strongest instructional areas from a pre-determined list. The items to choose from included: technology integration, interdisciplinary integration, assessment methods, problem-based learning, and real world connected lessons. After the survey is completed, administrators compile and analyze the data to look for trends. If a large number of teachers feel one of these choices is a weakness, administration organizes a “lunch and learn” professional learning day for teachers to get the training and experience needed for this topic. Teachers really respond well to lunch and learn days and quote this type of professional learning as their favorite. As one teacher put it, “My schedule is so full of conferences and providing extra help to students in the morning and sports practice in the afternoon, that I rarely am able to participate in professional learning at these times. When the professional learning is offered during my lunch, I am able to attend and enjoy the development time with my peers in an undistracted environment.” Additional analysis by the administration of the data also seeks out “experts” on in-demand topics to lead brief professional learning sessions. These teachers are often easier to relate to than county leaders and are more accessible by the staff after the professional learning, for future questions when the actual implementation begins.

**Professional Learning**

 Professional learning at Lassiter High School is offered throughout the year and at varying times of day to include all staff members. In cases of high demand or mandatory training, a county member will lead a professional learning workshop for teachers. These workshops have included topics such as Synergy (the county gradebook system) and SAT strategies and the incorporation of these strategies into the classroom. These larger professional learning workshops are usually attended by all of the staff members and typically result in successful implementation. Smaller scale professional learning also occurs frequently throughout the year. These types of professional learning are typically led by a teacher in the school based on requests and in-demand topics from other teachers in the school. Administration usually organizes these professional learnings by seeking out teachers who are willing and able to present the material and offer guidance to attendees after the workshop. These teacher-led professional learning opportunities have included topics such as Gradebook assistance, flipped classroom implementation, and increasing literacy in the classroom. According to teachers, the best part about these teacher-led professional learning opportunities is that the teacher works in the same building and is easily accessible for questions that may arise during implementation. As Knight (2007) stated, “…teachers criticize training that lacks follow-up and fails to recognize their expertise” (p. 2). This is why teacher-led professional development is more effective as there is constant follow-up and teachers know each other and their abilities. Administrators also love the methods of this learning. One administrator stated, “Teachers love learning from other teachers, and the school climate has improved drastically between staff members as we’ve incorporated more teacher-led professional learning.”

**Alignment to School Improvement Goals**

The professional learning at Lassiter High School is typically teacher directed with occasional administrative direction when necessary. The teacher-driven professional learning has been beneficial and has led to consistent improvements school-wide, so this method of professional learning will continue. The school improvement goals of increasing college and career readiness as well as increasing advanced academic enrollment and SAT and EOC scores is primarily teacher-directed as well. As the school principal, Dr. Chris Richie stated, “ Teachers know what the expectations are for success in this school and most teachers seek out professional learning that will increase their classroom abilities and add to their ‘toolbox’ of tricks to use to encourage growth in students in their classrooms.” He has had great success with his hands-off approach and the school has had a steady increase in SAT, ACT, and EOC scores, and even more significant increases when these scores are compared to other schools in the county, state, and even nation. He feels his philosophy encourages teachers to seek out the professional learning they need and not be forced to waste their time participating in unnecessary professional learning. He would rather have teachers in the classroom targeting students in need of support and helping them succeed in classes they are struggling in or integrating more skill-building into instruction to help advanced students be even more successful on AP tests and other standardized tests. These targeted areas of improvement are the foundation for improving the overall success of Lassiter High School and by allowing teachers freedom of choice with professional learning opportunities, teachers are also expanding their horizons and bringing new experiences and real world connections into the classroom.

**Funding & Incentives**

 Because of restricted budget and recent loss of budget in the past, Lassiter High School only allocates very little of the budget to professional learning due to a lack of funds. Despite what seems like no money for professional learning, there are countless professional learning opportunities offered from volunteers. The county kicks off the year with a county-wide content specific professional learning day with workshops taught by fellow county teachers. Once the school year starts, any professional learning done at the school level is also done on a volunteer basis and therefore does not require any funding. As Dr. Richie stated, “The great thing about teacher-led professional learning is definitely the connection to the presenter because it is a peer and ease of access, but the lack of a need for funding is a great perk too.” When there is an “all-school” professional learning such as a lunch and learn, there are also incentives for attending. Usually there are freebies or giveaways, but what teachers like the most is the free lunch. As one teacher stated, “If I am giving up my lunch or planning period to attend a mandatory professional learning workshop, it makes me feel appreciated to get a nice meal in return.” The incentives are also beneficial to the budget in that the meals are typically donated by Lassiter parents who are members of the PTSA and enjoy being able to treat the teachers that work so hard for their students.

**Diversity**

Lassiter High School does not have as much diversity as other schools, but even so, there typically several professional learning opportunities offered that address the needs of special education students, English language learners, and students with medical needs. In the beginning of the year once teachers have their rosters, the ELL teachers hold a special professional learning session for teacher of ELL students. This professional learning discusses strategies and accommodations for students who do not speak English as their primary language. The workshop also provides time for teachers to discuss individual students and what has worked and has not worked for that student. This additional discussion time is invaluable from a professional learning standpoint, as teachers are hearing first-hand what the specific strengths and weaknesses of the students are and can use this information to help these students be more successful in forthcoming classes. The beginning of the year is also when the special education professional learning is held. This session discusses IEP and 504 accommodations of students and strategies to incorporate in the classroom to help these students with disabilities. There are also several teacher-led professional learning sessions held throughout the school year to address changes to the county policy on special education and if there are any common issues that keep arising and how to address these issues moving forward. A final form of diversity-based professional learning offered is led by the school nurse. Each year, she leads a professional learning session on epi-pen and AED use. She also holds an additional training for teachers of students with diabetes. This training discusses symptoms, helpful tips, and ways to benefit diabetic students in the classroom.

**Collaboration**

 There are a variety of collaborative teams and professional learning opportunities that exist at Lassiter high school. As Knight (2007) stated, “…meaningful conversation is becoming more and more scarce” (p. 27). While the Knight text discusses collaboration in the context of instructional coaching, the concepts still apply as collaboration makes it possible for teachers to engage reflective dialogue about teaching. The smallest teams are the content area horizontal teams. These teams meet weekly to discuss methods of data analysis based on student assessment data, strategies to increase EOC scores based on each content standard, and strengthen college and career readiness as outline based on the school strategic plan (LHS SSP, 2014). Additionally, vertical teams meet several times a year to continue the plan to strengthen college and career readiness by aligning content standards across all four years of high school. Finally, there are also AP teams and STEM teams that meet collaboratively to discuss interdisciplinary lessons and topics and ways to link the content of these courses together. The STEM team meets collaboratively six times per year to align content and develop cross-curricular lesson plans. These lesson plans are further evaluated by the STEM committee of the county and are submitted to the nationwide certification program.

**Evaluation**

Teachers are evaluated based on their teaching practice and alignment to the goals of the school strategic plan. Most of these evaluations are based on the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) and teachers are evaluated by content specific administrators. These administrators evaluate the effectiveness on teachers based on professional practice. The professional learning that teachers attend contributes to the improvement of teachers and directly impacts their instruction and student success. Administrators also evaluate the collaborative teams and whether these teams are discussing the school goals and making plans to not only meet these goals but to exceed these school goals. This feedback is a continual process as administrators visit teachers a minimum of three times each school year and use a very detailed rubric when evaluating teacher effectiveness. When teachers receive ongoing feedback, they are able to tailor their professional learning based on this feedback. Knight (2007) discusses how the importance of reflection during coaching is key, and teachers are able to reflect and take action based on the evaluation by the administrator which serves as a type of coaching (p.130). Because teachers at Lassiter High School have the option to choose their professional learning, they are able to choose the best fit professional learning that corresponds to areas of improvement based upon the TKES evaluation coaching of the administration.

**References**

Knight, J. (2007). *Instructional coaching: A partnership approach to improving instruction.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Lassiter High School. (2014). *School strategic plan.* Marietta, GA: Cobb County School District

Learning Forward. (2011). *Standards for Professional Learning.* Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

*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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| **Professional Learning Standard 1:** Aligns professional learning with needs identified through analysis of a variety of data |
| **Level 4****[ ]  Exemplary** | **Level 3****[x]  Operational** | **Level 2****[ ]  Emerging** | **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. |
| EVIDENCE: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above –Professional learning needs are determined through surveys administered at the beginning of the year. Teachers fill out the surveys based on what topics they are most comfortable with using in their classroom and what topics they would like more help using. Based on these survey results, professional learning is developed to meet the needs of teachers.  |
| RECOMMENDATIONS: It is recommended that more sponsored professional learning be held to address broad topics that concern all teachers. In addition, another survey should be administered mid-year to determine if teacher needs have changed or if more professional learning is still needed on some topics. Teachers also need to be notified of all potential workshops held outside of the school to get experience and broaden their horizons. |
| **Professional Learning Standard 2:** Establishes a culture of collaboration among administrators and staff to enhance individual and collective performance |
| **Level 4****[ ]  Exemplary** | **Level 3****[ ]  Operational** | **Level 2****[ ]  Emerging** | **Level 1****[x]  Not Evident** |
| 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. | Administrators and staff routinely collaborate to improve individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback). | Administrators and staff routinely collaborate to improve individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback). | Administrators and staff routinely collaborate to improve individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback). |
| EVIDENCE: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above – Current collaboration is very evident and helpful for teachers, but administration does not have a role or any active involvement in collaboration. The teachers do an excellent job collaborating to discuss performance, areas where more skill is needed, and areas of improvement evidenced by students. Administration does not attend or contribute to these collaborations. |
| RECOMMENDATIONS: It is recommended that administration starts playing a more active role in collaboration with teachers. Teachers need to feel as if their efforts are being acknowledged and supported by the administration and administration needs to contribute to these collaborations. With the addition of administrative collaboration, performance should also improve.  |
| **Professional Learning Standard 3:** Defines expectations for implementing professional learning |
| **Level 4****[ ]  Exemplary** | **Level 3****[ ]  Operational** | **Level 2****[x]  Emerging** | **Level 1****[ ]  Not Evident** |
| 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: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above – Administration recommends staff gain PLU’s and attend other professional development, but the expectations are not enforced. Most teachers participate, but there are a few who do not attend any professional development. As a result, the expectation is not defined by administration and staff do not seek their own professional development.  |
| RECOMMENDATIONS: It is recommended that administration set clear, consistent expectations for the attendance and implementation of professional learning. These expectations need to be regularly communicated to staff and enforced by administration.  |

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| **Professional Learning Standard 4:** Uses multiple professional learning designs to support the various learning needs of the staff |
| **Level 4****[ ]  Exemplary** | **Level 3****[ ]  Operational** | **Level 2****[x]  Emerging** | **Level 1****[ ]  Not Evident** |
| 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. | 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. | Some staff members are engaged in professional learning that makes use of more than one learning design to address their identified needs. | Staff members receive single, stand-alone professional learning events that are informational and mostly large-group presentation designs. |
| EVIDENCE: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above – Many staff members attend their own professional development, but identify their needs themselves. Very little is done in terms of multiple learning designs, but professional development is job-embedded. There is also little follow-up and coaching as a method of feedback after professional development.  |
| RECOMMENDATIONS: It is recommended that professional development needs to include multiple learning design strategies. Follow-up needs to become a key part of professional development implementation and teachers need to be provided with feedback and coaching so they feel as if they are getting the needed support to be successful in their implementation.  |

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| **Professional Learning Standard 5:** Allocates resources and establishes systems to support and sustain effective professional learning |
| **Level 4****[ ]  Exemplary** | **Level 3****[ ]  Operational** | **Level 2****[x]  Emerging** | **Level 1****[ ]  Not Evident** |
| 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. | 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. | Some resources and systems are allocated to support and sustain professional learning. | Few, if any, resources and systems are provided to support and sustain professional learning. |
| EVIDENCE: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above – Effective professional development is embraced and supported by teachers through resource systems. Model classrooms are in place for other teachers to view. Professional development takes place during lunch and/or the planning time of teachers but little monetary compensation is provided.  |
| RECOMMENDATIONS: It is recommended that administration offer stipends or some other form of monetary reimbursement for teachers that lead professional development sessions. In addition, administration should encourage teachers to attend professional development outside of school and offer to provide substitute teachers for teachers that would like to attend these sessions.  |

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| **Professional Learning Standard 6:** Monitors and evaluates the impact of professional learning on staff practices and student learning |
| **Level 4****[ ]  Exemplary** | **Level 3****[ ]  Operational** | **Level 2****[ ]  Emerging** | **Level 1****[x]  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. |
| EVIDENCE: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above - Professional development is offered consistently, but the impact is rarely, if ever, assessed. Administration does not really monitor professional development and does not check on the impact of learning on teachers. Minor evaluation does occur during TKES evaluation but the connection is not typically made between TKES evaluations and the evaluation of professional learning.  |
| RECOMMENDATIONS: It is recommended that administration communicate more frequently with staff members on an individual basis regarding professional learning and the evaluation of its impact. Staff members already evaluate the impact of student learning based on professional development, but there is no connection to the administration and their monitoring of the impact.  |

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| **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. |
| **Level 4****[ ]  Exemplary** | **Level 3****[ ]  Operational** | **Level 2****[x]  Emerging** | **Level 1****[ ]  Not Evident** |
| 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: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above – Teachers are provided the opportunity to receive training on diabetes, Epi-pen and AED operation, and seizures. In addition, there is a professional development offered for English language learners (ELL) and their teachers. Most of the health-related training is mandatory, but the ELL training is optional and there is very minimal training offered for students with special needs.  |
| RECOMMENDATIONS: It is recommended that more special education related training be offered for staff. Administration should also require professional development attendance of at least one session if that particular teacher teachers a special education student.  |