

Curriculum and Professional Development

Ron Keller

College of Education, Grand Canyon University

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Instructor: Dr. Sonja Rice

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Orinda Intermediate School's needs assessment and continuous improvement plan is addressed in a report called The Single School Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) that was approved by the District Governing Board on November 14, 2022. Among the areas targeted for improvement in the plan was an increase in the number of students who meet or exceed CAASPP scores in Math, ELA, and Science. The objective was the first of three overarching goals set out in the SPSA which directed the school to "ensure universal access to quality education, high academic standards, opportunities to learn, and appropriate supports" in order to achieve high levels of academic success.

The improvement was deemed imperative when standardized tests revealed the students' performance in grades 6-8 had dropped 6% year-over-year in math and science. School leaders attributed some of the decline with math and science to a lack of coordination between teachers in the math and science departments. Lessons often did not align with state standards, and, in the case of science classes, the focus was placed on topics that appealed specifically to the teacher teaching the class.

The goal was to reemphasize the import of PLCs in our math department, encouraging teachers to reevaluate lessons, using only those that aligned with state standards and streamline curriculum so that all sixth, seventh, and eight graders could be assured of receiving a unified instruction no matter which math teacher they were assigned. In addition, Math TOSAs (Teachers On Special Assignment) were redirected to OIS to address any lapses in learning.

At the same time a similar focus was placed on OIS science teachers. Instead of teaching to their "specialties," (biology, earth science, chemistry, physics, et. al) they were asked to develop comprehensive curriculum that touched each the subject in a uniform way. That realignment has happened as math and science teachers now seem to work closely

coordinating scope and sequence during PLC days. My principal mentor says since these plans were formally enacted only last year it is too early to measure success, which according to the SPSA will be tracked by improvements in CAASPP (California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress) in Math and ELA and CAST for science which will be given in the Spring.

A second goal being addressed by the SPSA is the social, emotional, and physical health needs – including fostering inclusive environments – of all our students. One way these concerns are being addressed by a physical building on campus. The school’s new student services center will be devoted to a student wellness center. The center is slated to open by early next year. In the meantime, the school’s administration has divided teachers up in several committees including one involving grading equity, restorative justice, and another that studies ways to aid in the acceptance of diverse groups on campus. The diversity and equity group is restarting a student club that will plan events, invite speakers, host assemblies, etc., where students can further the cause of equality and justice on campus and in our community.

The final goal in the SPSA report is to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers. The administration has moved aggressively to fill full-time openings in the math and science departments. It hasn’t been as successful in scheduling outside professional development days for teachers. Also, it has dealt with the inability to hire a campus supervisor by requesting teachers step into the role by taking on duties before school, and brunch and lunch, and at the end of the day during busy duty. The success of these actions is hard to measure but my mentor principal says he has heard many teachers remark about the unity that seems to be building on campus, so he has taken that to be a good sign.

References

SPSA OIS. (2022-23). Orinda Intermediate School. Retrieved on September 20, 2023 from <https://tinyurl.com/3jkfnd3k>.