It’s no secret that schools, and school districts, can sometimes suffer from “initiative fatigue”. That feeling that we are constantly being asked to work on another new thing, incorporate another new practice, respond to another new pressure … this can be overwhelming. Worse than that, it can lead us to feel that we never have the chance to get good at any one thing, or that we have lost our professional autonomy, or that “they” (whoever “they” are) think that “we” (whoever “we” may be) don’t know what’s best for kids. Sometimes it feels like there are just too many things to think about. It’s no wonder that so many well-intentioned and important initiatives fall by the wayside.

Sometimes, however, the problem isn’t too many initiatives. Sometimes, the problem is that we fail to see how all of the work we are doing is part of the same overarching initiative.

Much of this edition of this newsletter is devoted to sharing back results from the grading surveys conducted on Superintendent’s Conference Day. All nine buildings devoted at least a portion of that day to discussions about grading practices. “But wait”, you might have been thinking, “I thought we were working on PLCs. I thought THAT was our initiative right now.” It is, and so is working on our grading practices, and continuing to expand our understanding of the social emotional learning needs of our students, and our work on inclusivity. And yes, those are a lot of things to think about, but they all part of the same work of being a professional learning community.

Developing strong professional learning communities starts with having a positive school climate; one where there is the necessary trust and respect for deep collaboration to take place. A positive school climate not only fosters meaningful collaboration among the adults in the building, it also fosters meaningful collaboration between adults and students, and between students with each other. In order for real collaboration to take place, all participants in the school community need to feel respected, safe, and that they have an important role to play in the collaborative process not “in spite of” their differences, but because of their differences. In a collaborative culture, we take responsibility for making sure that everyone’s voice is heard, so that together we can make the best decisions for our learning community. In a collaborative culture, we have the ability to engage in the important work of guaranteeing that ALL students achieve high levels of learning, because we are able and willing to have tough conversations, examine our practices (including our grading practices) in light of what makes the most positive impact on student learning, and support our colleagues when the work is hard. In a collaborative culture we do these things because we know that together we can make a difference.

So, yes, there are a lot of things to think about. But that is because becoming a strong professional learning community is hard, complicated, and messy work. It is also the very best and most important work we can be engaged in to ensure success for all students.

Until next time... Melanie
**Elementary Reporting Survey**

On Superintendent’s Conference Day, or shortly thereafter, elementary staff members had the opportunity to weigh in on a series of questions regarding effective practices for reporting student progress at the elementary level. We want to thank all of you, the 153 teachers and 73 paraprofessionals, who took the time to complete the survey! Many people contributed thoughtful feedback and constructive suggestions regarding an update to our current elementary report card.

The data from this survey has been shared with members of ILC, as well as the Elementary Report Card committee. Both groups went through a collaborative inquiry process with the data in an attempt to review all of the feedback in a systematic and unbiased way. The results of that process with both groups proved what we already know: our current report card/reporting system is not working as effectively as we would like AND there are no easy solutions or clear paths forward! There were, however, a few common themes that emerged that will help to inform next steps. Those themes included the following:

- The majority of respondents felt that having a report card that “looks different” at different grade levels (i.e. primary vs. intermediate) as well as looking different for special areas would be best practice.

- We need to do a better job making the standards on the report card clearer and more meaningful for both teachers and parents.

- When asked about reporting against end-of-year benchmarks versus end-of-marking period benchmarks, many teachers commented that it would be beneficial to be able to report against both.

- There is some interest in using a continuum to report academic progress at some grade levels.

- The ability for teachers to write comments on the report card is highly valued.

- Only 3% of all respondents felt that the format of our current report card is working well.

The Report Card committee will be meeting again in early December. A focus of their work at that time will be to consider how to involve additional stakeholders, including teachers and parents, in the process for moving forward with recommending changes to our elementary reporting system. Please note that the committee members may be reaching back out to you for additional input via surveys, focus groups, or other methods, as their work progresses. Thank you, in advance, for your cooperation and contributions to this work!

**Instructional Leadership Council update**

Several years ago at ILC, we developed documents that describe the characteristics, thinking skills, and habits of mind that we want all Pittsford students to have the opportunity to develop over their time in our classrooms. Those skills - **Critical Thinking & Problem Solving, Creativity & Innovation, Research & Information Fluency, Communication & Collaboration, and Social Emotional Intelligence** - we called our **Next Generation Skills**. The documents created at that time have helped us, as a district, take critical look at some of our structures as we’ve continued to work towards achieving the promise of our Strategic Initiative.

This fall, the members of ILC have taken another critical look at those documents to determine the degree to which, in their current state, they can be useful to teams of writers as they work to embed aspects of the Next Generation Skills into district curriculum and assessment documents. We’ve also considered the usefulness of the documents for individual teachers looking to more explicitly embed one or more of these skills into lessons and provide effective feedback to students relative to their skill development, as well as for students to use as a self-reflection tool.

A subcommittee has now been formed to move our current Next Generation documents into a format that will be more useful for curriculum writers, teachers, and students. The skills themselves won’t change, but our ability to effectively embed and grow these skills in our work with students, K-12, across all disciplines, will. We look forward to this next, critical, step in our journey.
Secondary Grading Survey

The response rate to the secondary grading survey that was administered on Superintendent’s Conference Day was outstanding. Forty paraprofessionals and 281 teachers completed the survey. This represents a response rate of 87% of our secondary teaching staff. A significant number of survey respondents took the time to provide constructive and thoughtful comments, demonstrating the seriousness with which they took this opportunity to share their views about the implementation of our Grading Philosophy.

The Instructional Leadership Council and the Secondary Academic Council have reviewed the data and here are some of the trends that emerged from a review of the results:

- **83.7% of our teachers are committed or fully committed** to the grading philosophy; only 1.4% stated that they were opposed to the philosophy.

- **219 teachers** took the time to describe changes they had personally made to their grading practices which they felt had yielded positive results for students.

- A large majority of teachers support the **elimination of extra-credit** and a majority support the elimination of giving zeroes for work not completed rather than requiring the work to be done.

- **74.4% of our teachers** were supportive of, or open to learning more about the idea of, moving away from the 0-100 grading scale in favor of a 1-5 scale.

- There was also **majority support** for each of the following practices:
  - teachers using their professional judgement rather than relying solely on a mathematical calculation to determine a student's grade;
  - teachers within the same department or teaching the same course adhering to the same set of grading practices;
  - reporting student learning behaviors separate from academic mastery;
  - allowing students, within teacher established parameters, to have multiple chances to demonstrate mastery.

Each of the practices called out above are supported by the research done by educators like Tom Guskey, Rick Wromeli, Robert Marzano, Ken O’Connor and others. **The devil, of course, is in the details** as many of your comments on the survey point out. Clearly defining what we mean by “extra credit”; how to handle situations when a student does not complete an assignment after multiple reminders; finding ways to report on student learning behaviors that are meaningful without being burdensome to teachers; these are just a few examples of the many important next-step conversations that need to be had.

Of significant importance, as well, is **educating our parent community** about grading practices that are meaningful, accurate, consistent, and supportive of learning.

In the upcoming weeks principals and standards leaders will have the opportunity to share building-level and department-specific data with staff. ILC and SAC will take all of the feedback and begin to move forward on some of the “next step” items in order to bring about clarity and consistency in the implementation of the district’s grading philosophy.

A huge **thank you** to all of the secondary staff for their participation in this important survey work!
The time I spend in classrooms is most certainly my favorite part of my job. Whether doing building visits with standards leaders to see the curriculum unfolding across the district, participating in special events, or just dropping by to say hello, there is nothing that keeps me more grounded in the purpose of our collective work than spending time with teachers, staff, and students. Thank you for always welcoming me to be part of your work, and for all that you do to make each day special for our students.

Out and About in our Schools...