

Professional Learning Topics

Although presentations and professional learning is *always customized to your school's goals and your teachers' learning needs*, the following is a sample of sessions that may be provided.

Best Practices in Instruction

Authentic Problem-Based and Project-Based Learning

PBL is short cut for two current school initiatives: project-based learning and problem-based learning. 21st century skills related to information and communication, thinking and reasoning, and personal and workplace skills demand that students develop their proficiencies in independent learning. However, students need to be encouraged to pursue unanswered questions, personal curiosities or passions. Problem based learning and project-based learning provide frameworks for such learning. Although similar, problem based and project-based learning experiences do differ. Distinctions are made between the two initiatives and the degree to which they reflect best practices for academically talented learners. How can each be framed so that they meet criteria for complexity, rigor and depth essential for gifted students and are not reduced to “plug and play”, “cut and paste” reports? Formats and templates are provided to structure an authentic learning experience for students in either problem based or project-based learning.

Increasing Your Students' Independence and Responsibility

Research on teaching and learning tells us that students become more independent and self-reliant when we change the roles of the teacher and the learner in the classroom. Student independence is increased when the role of the teacher changes from controlling to consultative and the role of the student changes from passive participant to self-guided learner. Specific classroom practices are provided to move your students to higher levels of independence and responsibility.

Breaking the Failure Cycle: Strategies to Reverse Academic Underachievement

In our classrooms, some students are in winning streaks and others are in losing streaks. What are the characteristics of winners in the school game? What are the “red flags” which may indicate a student is falling into a failure cycle? What can a teacher do to break a student's losing streak? Practical strategies and techniques for breaking the failure cycle of underachievers will be shared.

New Paradigms in Grading: Considerations for Beginning the Conversation

When asked about the next revolution in American education, many educators and school leaders will state “grading”. In this session, we will examine a process for getting the conversation on grading started in your school or district. We will explore myths, beliefs and mindsets and new paradigms in the purpose of grading. Suggested tasks and a timeline for “getting there” will be offered. We will examine the practices and policies impacted by new grading paradigms such as disaggregating attainment of learning goals from work habits, attitudes and behavior, the use of zeroes and incompletes and the “fairness” of recovery points, re-do and do-overs. Leave this session confident in facilitating conversations about grading with teachers.

Active Engagement Strategies to Get Learners Thinking, Moving and Breathing

Do your brightest students sometimes sit back while other students go at the work? Do some of your students have a hard time staying focused when learning for others takes longer than they have patience for? Are some students so anxious and stressed about their performance that they seem to be spinning out? Active engagement in body and mind may be our best instructional and affective response. This session shares practical instructional strategies that increase active engagement of students while still clearly focusing on established learning goals. Practices and connections to mindfulness and yoga and their effects on students and classrooms will be provided. Don’t have time for all this “stuff”? These strategies are “instead of” not “in addition to” the way you have approached teaching and learning in the past.

Peer and Student to Self-Feedback: Engaging Students in Defining Excellence

Research supports that descriptive feedback improves student learning. Educators become coaches as we provide students with specific information about their learning performance and how to improve. This session broadens the spectrum of feedback by sharing strategies for peer to student and student to self-feedback. Peer and student to self-feedback demands active student engagement in noticing, observing, and analyzing work and then determining next steps in improvement or refinement. Students benefit from inviting peer feedback. However, particular skills and structures are necessary for peer feedback to be effective. Strategies that enable peers to provide growth feedback are suggested. Participants will critically examine templates for self-monitoring and self-evaluation of learning used to engage students in self-talk about their learning which results in focusing their attention on evidence of learning and next steps in improving performance. As students actively engage in reflecting on the quality of work and identifying next steps for improvement, the pathways for descriptive feedback are extended beyond the teacher.

Using Advanced Graphic Organizers to Engage Students in Complex Thinking

The effects of non-linguistic representations such as graphic organizers on achievement are strong. Synthesizing the work of Kaplan, Hyerle, and Marzano, these advanced graphic organizers allow teachers to extend their use from mere information collection to more abstract applications utilizing concepts, principles and generalizations. Classroom use of these advanced graphic organizers actively engage gifted and talented students in more complex thinking and enable them to construct new mental models. Samples of classroom applications of advanced graphic organizers will be provided.

Effective Strategies for Increasing Choice and Voice of Learners

Student choice and voice clearly define many of the practices in personalizing learning. What are exemplars of these concepts in classroom implementation? How must they be defined and framed to represent authentic learning experiences for gifted students? This session shares strategies which clearly exemplify choice and voice for learners and increase their interest and passion in academics. Together, we will create an authentic choice task for your unit or series of lessons

In addition, students need to be encouraged to pursue unanswered questions, personal curiosities or passions. Both problem-based learning and project-based learning provide frameworks for such learning. However, clear distinctions must be made in order to reflect best practices for the gifted and talented learners. Attention will be paid to the ways in which these tasks relate to student voice and choice. Frameworks and criteria for designing complex and in-depth experiences which offer both voice and choice are detailed.

Teaching Creatively, Teaching for Creativity: Strategies for the Classroom

Creativity often characterizes gifted learners, however, given their “screen based” culture, they are at risk for losing some of this capacity or not fully developing it. In an already crowded curriculum, how do we find time for creativity? Teachers can provide the training and practice in creative thinking if we build it into our classrooms and integrate it into our curriculum and lessons.

Consider factors that nurture and support creative thinking, discover cues and questions, strategies and techniques as well as processes that strength and extend our students’ creative thinking. Then, try them out ourselves! Finally, to make sure creativity does not become a “Friday Funday” activity, a practical process for meaningfully and purposefully planning for

creativity as we design standards-based lessons across curriculum topics will be shared. Come find ways that creativity can be used to hook and engage the gifted learner!

Adding Complexity and Depth to Teaching for Creativity

Distinguished as one of the essential skills for the 21st century, educators of the gifted have long committed themselves to the skills of divergent thinking. However, it is time to go beyond skills into tactics that strengthen the core of creativity. This session focuses on pedagogy that encourages students to experiment, to innovate, and to explore new avenues. Such pedagogy takes students deeper into complex tasks that support rather than trivialize creativity. In addition, attention will be given to the role of collaboration, diversity, idea exchange and an ability to build on another's achievements in the creative process.

Elevating Critical Reflection, Complexity and Depth in Learning Through Interactive Journals

Although interactive journals have been in use in many classrooms, some represent "do it yourself" workbooks of low level, redundant tasks focusing on recall, practice and shallow thinking and learning. Using a model of input as teaching pages, and output as student pages, we will explore how to optimize student interactions to ensure continuous learning. Discover new ways for students to record key ideas and questions, processes and procedures, relevant data and academic vocabulary. Maximize student interaction with information in their own unique and creative ways. Critical and creative thinking strategies, templates, inquiry frames and sketching processes are provided. Implementation ideas, a journal rubric as well as implications for student assessment for learning will be shared.

Life Success: Why Grit, Character, and Curiosity Matter

Why do some students succeed and thrive in school and life and others fall seriously short of fulfilling their promise for success? Examine the influence of grit, curiosity, and character on life success. Consider how these qualities matter more than intelligence alone. Discover how moral and performance character attributes likely predict achievement and life satisfaction. Particular attention will be paid to new insights on how these attributes increase the success of students growing up in poverty. Take away strategies that specifically build these critical traits in learners.

Building Student Resiliency and Developing Focus Through Mindfulness

One in four children between 13 and 18 years of age has an anxiety disorder according to the National Institute for Mental Health. Educators of even younger learners describe the need for assisting students in mitigating the effects of stress and improving focus and concentration. Based on their affective differences, it is critical that gifted students utilize tools that enable them to navigate challenging times. Mindfulness is defined as being in the moment. Mindfulness in the form of breathing and centering, guided imagery, and visualization provides learners with school and life skills that increase their resiliency to rise above difficulties. Easy to implement mindfulness strategies that mix up the classic sit-ad-breathe methods are demonstrated. Not enough time for mindfulness in your demanding day or class period? Try a mindful moment; a two to five-minute brain break that can be done with the students in their chairs. Participants will consider how mindfulness strategies support brain growth and development, aid in bolstering academic performance through creating “ready to learn” student mindsets and result in students with more emotional control and focus.

Co-teaching: A Collaborative Approach to Meeting the Needs of All Learners

Co-teaching has emerged as a favored practice in inclusion classrooms. It holds the promise for better supporting the unique needs of all students from those who struggle in learning to those who are gifted and academically talented. This session will present seven co-teaching approaches for working together in the classroom. Practical suggestions for building trust, establishing individual and shared roles, establishing co-teaching norms as well as for effective and efficient use of co-planning time are provided.

Differentiating Instruction

Making Differentiation a Habit

The habit of differentiation becomes the way we do the work in today’s academically diverse and increasingly challenging classrooms. The habit of differentiation results in students enthusiastically engaged in learning, experiencing increasing levels of success and gaining confidence as learners. We will explore the critical elements that distinguish authentic differentiation from indiscriminate teaching tips and tricks. In applying these elements, you can be confident that the work you do in differentiation is based on a solid foundation of research based best practices in teaching and learning. Finally, we will examine the specific instructional strategies that exemplify the habit of differentiation.

Flexible Teaching Routines: Why a Single Lane Highway Doesn't Work Anymore

Routines are typical processes or procedures for teaching used repeatedly. All students move through a lesson together in a routine. However, learning differences typically appear at many points in a lesson. Where should a routine flex to offer a tiered assignment, a choice, an application or extensions opportunity? Where do gifted learners fit into the routine? We review examples of flexible teaching routines, determining the kind and purpose of differentiation at particular junctures of the lesson. A step by step process for determining when and how a teaching routine might be best flexed to differentiate a lesson is presented.

Critical Elements in a Differentiated Classroom: Tiered Assignments and Flexible Instructional Groups

Although there are multiple strategies that teachers utilize in differentiated classrooms, the most sophisticated, focused and foundational of all is the use of tiered assignments. Explore six ways to tier assignments based on specific learning needs of your students. Discover strategies to make tiered assignments “invisible” to your students. Extend your practices in managing a differentiated classroom through the use of flexible instructional grouping. Leave this session with a clear understanding that tiered assignments are not only critical but do-able in a differentiated classroom.

Tame Your Differentiated Classroom!

Teachers in academically diverse classrooms face the challenges of managing time, instruction, materials and resources, and student behavior. This session focuses on practical, go-to strategies that will help all teachers work more effectively and efficiently in differentiated classrooms. In addition, you will find ideas to better manage the challenges presented by students who need to become more responsible and independent in diverse classrooms.

Gifted and Academically Talented Learners

Differentiation for Gifted Learners: Going Beyond the Basics

Today's classroom teachers focus on differentiation to meet the needs of *all students*. However, gifted students have unique learning needs that are not addressed by differentiation strategies targeting only average, high achieving or struggling learners. How does differentiation go beyond the basics to the needs of gifted/advanced learners? This session provides participants with a framework that supports the advanced pace, sophisticated complexity and greater depth required by the gifted/advanced learners. Practical, do-able, step-by step strategies are highlighted.

Embedding GT Instructional Practices in the Classroom: An Inclusive Model that Works!

As budgets become limited, schools are shifting to more inclusive models for meeting the needs of gifted learners in the regular classroom. BYOD to self-assess your understanding of effective instructional practices for GT learners in the regular classroom. Then consider a comprehensive instructional leadership model utilizing consultation, collaboration, co-teaching and coaching. For successfully embedding best practices in the classroom and increasing the capacity and efficiency of specialists or instructional coaches working in collaboration with general education teachers, a supportive professional relationship must be established. Each element of the model is detailed and specific strategies for effective implementation are shared. Critically evaluate practices for each element and consider both strengths and limitations of the model. Examine substantive research on consultation, collaboration, co-teaching and coaching (Grigg, Kelly, Gamoran & Borman, 2012; Hertzog, 2004; Landrum, 2001; Kane & Henning, 2004) that demonstrates that classroom integration of GT instructional strategies benefits all students.

Designing Rigorous and Complex Curriculum for Gifted Learners

Differentiation for gifted and high ability learners requires teachers to use more advanced levels of complexity and difficulty along with the infusion of problem finding, concept development and creative/critical thinking. As teachers deepen components of differentiation, their role changes from director to facilitator to coach. This session demonstrates balanced strategies that move learners toward complex and advanced curricula as well as addressing the varying roles of teachers and students in the learning process. Participants are offered an easy to apply menu of teacher actions and student learning tasks that ensure high proficiency and growth for gifted and high ability learners.

Next Steps: Streamlining the Planning for Gifted Students

How can we design tasks for gifted learners in a manner that is less time consuming yet defensible, significant and sustainable? Consider the challenge: differentiate content, process, and product across readiness, interest and learning profile, while keeping in mind the needs of the gifted. With over 27 different combinations; planning can feel impossible! This interactive session demonstrates a tri-dimensional design menu. Solidly grounded in effective-practices, the menu makes it possible to streamline the design of respectful yet significant tasks for gifted students. In addition, a menu of new strategies for designing “next level” choice opportunities to differentiate content, process or product is presented. How-tos for simply and successfully designing complex and in-depth learning tasks and planning templates which are practical and easy to use by-and-with teachers are provided. Examples across grade levels and curriculum

areas are presented. Make designing differentiated tasks targeting gifted learners practical, focused and do-able!

Motivating Resistant, Reluctant Gifted Learners

Not all gifted learners are productive students. Not all are high performers who eagerly engage in learning tasks. Some gifted students establish a perplexing pattern of doing well or doing nothing. Even when personalized learning opportunities are offered, these students continue to do minimum. Collaboratively, we will consider what characterizes gifted learners who refuse to play the school game. We explore well documented research on underlying causes of low performance and distinctions between non-producers, selective producers and underachievers amongst gifted populations. Using case studies, we engage in a step by step process proven successful on diagnosing and addressing specific performance issues of secondary students. Take away a deeper understanding of underachieving gifted students and a process for increasing their engagement in and commitment to learning.

Assessment

Practical, Do-Able Assessment Strategies: A Toolkit for Teachers

In order to more systematically respond to academic diversity, teachers need tools that can effectively identify student learning needs and progress. Pre-assessment and formative assessment strategies must not only be practical, do-able, and less time consuming but also be effective in guiding instructional planning and differentiation. This session offers a “toolkit” of practical assessment strategies to enhance the educator’s ability to collect data on student learning needs and to plan for and respond to differences.

Formative Assessment Strategies: An Essential Element for Success in Academically Diverse Classrooms

Without both pre-assessment and formative assessment, teachers would not know when and how to differentiate instruction for learners. However, teachers frequently feel overwhelmed with the need to design, facilitate and then analyze formative assessment data as well as find the time to do so! This session provides “good to go” strategies for formative assessment that will not only get you the data you need to make instructional decisions but also actively engage your students in non-threatening assessments. We will also sketch out where and how we might embed formative assessment into a curriculum unit’s teaching routines to optimize your understanding of your students’ learning progress.

MORE Good to Go Assessment Strategies Including Peer and Self-Assessment

Without both pre-assessment and formative assessment, teachers would not know when and how to differentiate instruction for learners. This session broadens the spectrum of assessment by sharing strategies for peer to student and student to self-feedback. Peer and student to self-assessment demands active student engagement in noticing, observing, and analyzing work and then determining next steps in improvement or refinement. Participants will critically examine templates for self-monitoring and self-evaluation of learning used to engage students in self-talk about their learning which results in focusing their attention on evidence of learning and next steps in improving performance. This is an essential feedback loop for gifted and academically talented students. “Good to go” strategies for pre-assessment, formative assessment as well as peer and self-assessment will not only get you the data you need to make instructional decisions but also actively engage your students in non-threatening assessments.

New Paradigms in Grading: Considerations for Beginning the Conversation

When asked about the next revolution in American education, many educators and school leaders will state “grading”. In this session, we will examine a process for getting the conversation on grading started in your school or district. We will explore myths, beliefs and mindsets and new paradigms in the purpose of grading. Suggested tasks and a timeline for “getting there” will be offered. We will examine the practices and policies impacted by new grading paradigms such as disaggregating attainment of learning goals from work habits, attitudes and behavior, the use of zeroes and incompletes and the “fairness” of recovery points, re-do and do-overs. Leave this session confident in facilitating conversations about grading with teachers.

School Leadership

Leadership for Differentiated Classrooms

How do we build school-wide understanding and support for differentiated instruction? How do we provide the training and leadership for teachers essential to their success in a differentiated classroom? Explore how most effective research-based practices in education connect to the strategies for differentiating instruction and how it builds a strong case for differentiated classrooms. Discuss a solid rationale for differentiation that can be made with parents, teachers and administrators. Identify the degree to which your school or district reflects characteristics of differentiated instruction and consider next steps for your school site. Come also to share your successes and challenges in supporting and encouraging differentiated classrooms and the teachers who work in them.

Where to Go from Here: Identifying Your School's Next Steps in Differentiation

Your school has started your journey in differentiation. Now you need a road map of next steps to embed differentiation into classroom practice. In this session, you'll identify where to go next and how to get there. Work through a process for determining your status with differentiation and for identifying next steps in growth and development. End the session with an action plan ready for implementation.

Embedding GT Instructional Practices in the Classroom: Leadership Tactics

As budgets become limited, schools are shifting to more inclusive models for meeting the needs of gifted learners in the regular classroom. An instructional leadership model utilizing consultation, collaboration, co-teaching and coaching is necessary for the success of inclusive GT services. Each element of the model is described and specific leadership tactics for making it work effectively will be shared.

Professional training can provide the "what" in meeting the needs of GT in inclusive classrooms. However, to actually embed practices within the classroom requires a more comprehensive instructional leadership model. Consultation, collaboration, co-teaching and coaching are essential for successful implementation of best practices for GT learners. Each element of the model is described and specific leadership tactics for making it work effectively will be shared.

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Instructional Coaching for Embedding School Initiatives in Classroom Practice

Whether you are a teacher leader, a principal, or a professional development facilitator, we all want new strategies presented to teachers embedded into classroom practice. Coaching for success is a critical element in integrating new ideas. This session will provide specific coaching strategies that will increase the likelihood of classroom applications. A variety of tools for gathering data on classroom practices including self-assessment inventories and walk through protocols are provided. Using the data, specific plans for supporting the diverse needs of teachers are developed. We will also explore and practice the effective use of descriptive

feedback in assisting teachers in determining what they are doing well, where they are now in the development of their professional skills as well as identifying next steps in their continual growth and development.

Parent/Family Session

Supporting School Success

How can parents and significant adults provide the encouragement and necessary support critical to their children's school success in today's diverse classrooms? Learn more about your child's preferred way to learn so that you can help them "unlock" more pleasure in learning as well as become more motivated to actively commit to excellence. Leave our session with practical ideas to support your child's school success.