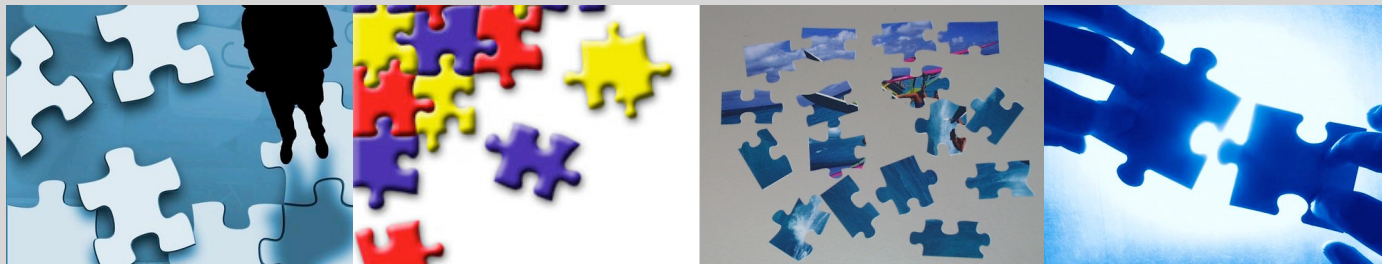


Change In Leadership Conference



Wednesday, August 20, 2008

A Conference For Us, About Us

On August 20, 2008, seventeen faculty members gathered to reflect on and discuss ideas about our schools' present and future. Four questions were posed - the answers to these questions will guide our vision and plans for our school.

What is a Change In Leadership Conference?

In early July, I was making my rounds on the various blogs I read. A gentleman by the name of Kevin Riley (from a San Diego school) had offered an idea for new principals who want to establish a culture of sharing and collaboration. His district, faithfully, runs Change In Leadership Conferences every time a new principal is hired. The premise of these conferences is to help establish the culture of collaboration while also providing new principals with clear and concise information from the faculty. This challenge is met by asking the staff to answer four very crucial questions.

You and I both know that many times new leadership is brimming with ideas and goals (I am no different) but fail to identify the desires, needs, and parameters of the very people their ideas will affect. A Change In Leadership Conference helps the new principal (and in our case a new administration) understand and be mindful of the faculty's values, wants, and concerns. I liked the idea and decided that it was time for us to conduct such a conference.

In late July I met with Dr. Louis Centolanza (Interim Director of Guidance at Northern Valley Regional Schools). He is one of my most trusted advisors and a mentor. He agreed to facilitate the conference and work with the faculty I invited to participate. The decision to select faculty members for participation was not easy. In the end, I selected members from each department and chose faculty members who represented the various levels of experience. 25 faculty members were invited, and 17 were able to attend.

You should know that one of the components of a Change In Leadership Conference is that the new principal be divorced from the proceedings (short of arranging the details). I was not part of the three-hour conference until the very end; I was invited into the room after all had been discussed and documented. This is done to

prevent the faculty from feeling intimidated and allows for a free-flow of ideas and discussion.

In the end, I was very pleased to hear the ideas, desires, and needs of the faculty. My promise to them was that I would document their answers to the questions, share it with the entire faculty, and use these answers to guide us (both faculty and administration) as we collectively and passionately pursue the mission, our vision, and our goals.

I want to thank the following faculty members for taking time out of their summer to work together on this very important process:

Rich Markert	Tony Taylor
Lori Liskiewicz	Dave Cieplicki
Maria Barnes	Hilda Luciano
Jolie Kurz	Tom Montuori
Craig Grothues	Colleen Makowsky
Carol McDonough	Genny DiTrani
Susie Eisen	Doug McQuirk
Anna Collard	Joe Materia
Kate Natoli	

Our Mission Statement

The mission of Dumont High School, as a Professional Development School, is to be a center of continuous learning for both students and staff. To achieve this goal, the school will promote a current, comprehensive and flexible curriculum that provides all members of the school community with multiple opportunities to achieve their fullest potential now and in the future.

Question Number One

What Are We Good At?

- ▶ Providing Professional Development
- ▶ We have a supportive staff
- ▶ Helping new teachers
- ▶ The observation process
- ▶ Working with and supporting district initiatives
- ▶ We have a teacher-friendly environment
- ▶ Providing independence for teachers
- ▶ We have a supportive administration
- ▶ Allow for the questioning of policies
- ▶ Curriculum development
- ▶ Making technology available
- ▶ Allowing for flexibility in the classroom
- ▶ We are always thinking forward
- ▶ Communicating with one another
- ▶ Supplies are readily available
- ▶ Parental support is strong
- ▶ Providing a secure environment
- ▶ Cleanliness is much improved
- ▶ Amount of paperwork has diminished
- ▶ Providing structural improvements (new labs, Smart Boards, etc.)
- ▶ Student involvement is high
- ▶ Our students are respectful
- ▶ Teacher presence at events and in the halls is evident
- ▶ We are a responsible staff
- ▶ We do well with what we have
- ▶ We are caring people

Question Number Two

What Will We Never Compromise As A School Community, Regardless Of Who Serves As Building Leadership?

- ▶ Based on our Mission Statement, we must provide the best possible education for our students and provide more multiple and varied opportunities to address students' interests and needs
- ▶ We must develop productive members of society. We can do this by encouraging an atmosphere which will create independent, responsible, civic minded, empathetic members of their community and society as a whole.
- ▶ We must stay current with the latest technologies and strategies in education.
- ▶ We must make technology more accessible for both teachers and students.
- ▶ We must provide opportunities for staff to participate in professional development endeavors (turnkey opportunities).
- ▶ We must work together with parents and community to help students achieve.
- ▶ Students must become independent learners/citizens and accountable for their successes and failures.
- ▶ The priority of our building must be that of an academic institution. Our second priority must be the development of trust regarding staff

and our use of current technologies to enhance both education and communication.

- ▶ We must focus on developing a love and importance of learning and develop an intrinsic appreciation of education.
- ▶ We must encourage students to take advantage of opportunities in their schedules to take additional classes.
- ▶ We must develop a more well-rounded curriculum that addresses both educational and life-skills needs (i.e. Career orientations, Service Learning).

Question Number Three

What Areas Do We Need To Focus On?

Technology

- ▶ Get a full time tech person for the high school to assist our current staff.
- ▶ Clearly define the role of technology within the school and the individual classroom (What is good and useful?).
- ▶ Technology should be used to its full potential and not used if there is no clear benefit. (i.e. paperless attendance still cannot be taken in homeroom, we should use the attendance to track tardies instead of paper shuffling)
- ▶ Wireless needs to work if we are told it works
- ▶ Parents should not be responsible for student accountability through technology (i.e. Power School for parents)
- ▶ Trust faculty with technology (i.e. emailing students, sharing documents)
- ▶ Maintaining technology - we need to maintain what we inherit or are provided (i.e. smart board projectors without bulbs, printers without cartridges, backup equipment in case of repairs)
- ▶ Expectation for student use of technology are not set high enough.
- ▶ Making sure the use of technology does not take away from the focus of the curriculum

Structure & Management Rules

- ▶ Rules need to be appropriate, enforceable, and modern for today's environment (i.e. flip flops, cell phone policy)
- ▶ Teachers need to be supported for enforcing the rules.
- ▶ Class sizes need to be smaller or must be equipped for the growing population (i.e. provide the proper furniture and enough books)

Climate & Community

- ▶ Accentuate the positive to increase staff and student motivation
- ▶ Treat us as individuals, not as a group. We are professionals, not children.
- ▶ Be a school of genuine encouragement - celebrate the good work.
- ▶ Respect the teachers' Lunch Period (i.e. no professional development when not everyone can or will make it).
- ▶ Announcements and interruptions should be limited to emergencies - especially avoid the first and last 5 minutes of every period.
- ▶ Improve the school's appearance and cleanliness.
- ▶ Pulling students out of classes for administrative needs should be limited.

Question Number Four

What Advice Do You Have For The New Principal and Administration?

- ▶Keep the dialogue authentic - tell the truth in all matters.
- ▶Increase the consistency in discipline and communication.
- ▶Create teacher friendly and faculty generated Professional Development.
- ▶Make sure professional development is meaningful and relevant.
- ▶Increase student responsibility - eliminate the multiple messages and reminders that they have broken the rules. Stop coddling them.
- ▶Cell phones need to be addressed realistically.
- ▶Introduce and explore ways to make them responsible for guiding their education (freshmen seminar, midterms).
- ▶Improve teachers' participation in the curriculum change or development process (use the curriculum committee, department meetings, and for God's sake, lose the long-term projects).
- ▶De-emphasize the culture of fear for students and emphasize on-task and on-time learning.
- ▶Keep the small community feeling alive at DHS. This makes us unique and feel connected.
- ▶Continue to encourage positive student/faculty relations.
- ▶Lookout for the struggling pupil - explore various options for them (i.e. expand the arts, expand Option 2, develop a freshmen seminar and senior seminar)