

Dear Cambridge Public Schools Community:

As you know, the HET Instructional Task Force has been meeting since March to review our current coaching model, research best practices in coaching, and determine the best course forward to ensure that our model is a high leverage strategy in improving student outcomes. Below is a culmination of the themes identified in our work, as well as research that has informed our learning.

PREFACE

This High Expertise Teaching (H.E.T.) Instructional Task Force was formed in 2014 to shepherd the long-term goals of the HET Project. Their first task was to respond to the “Instructional Coaching Review” report submitted by MAK Mitchell in 2014. The job of this task force, using the report as one source of input, is “To identify and recommend to the Superintendent for consideration, a viable and sustainable model of instructional support for teachers that will continuously develop *capacity for skillful practice*.” The plan to implement the final recommendations will be designed in detail during the 2015-16 school year by this H.E.T. Task Force and will be implemented during the 2016-17 school year. No changes to the coaching structure will be made in the 2015-16 school year.

Minutes of the first four working sessions of the HET Task Force on the coaching structure have been posted on the CPS website

http://www.cpsd.us/departments/office_of_elementary_education/het_instructional_task_force

At the final all-day session of the Task Force on July 6th, 2015, the following themes were solidified.

THEME 1

Though we have had five highly productive working sessions over this spring and summer of 2015, the 24-member H.E.T. Task Force unanimously wants teacher reflection and input on its recommendations to the Superintendent before submitting a final set of recommendations. Therefore in the fall of 2015, a team from the Task Force will visit every school for a focus group to hear teacher views about how coaching can be shaped to have maximum positive contribution to teacher growth and student learning.

THEME 2

When you change one element of a complex human system, the change inevitably affects other people, other roles, and other subsystems. Changing the roles and expectations for coaches has ripple effects and implications for the roles of the curriculum coordinators, the evaluation of principals, the schedules of schools, foci of system-wide PD, the use of district assessments, the way teachers use time in common planning time meetings, and more. Therefore this plan is going to be made

with a coordinated look at the whole system, not just a narrow view of one committee on good coaching. That means go slow, be thorough, talk to everyone, look ahead to what resources are needed not just now but in the future, make lots of revisions, and build in evaluation and constant improvement to the plan that will be launched in 16-17.

THEME 3

Working to strengthen Adult Professional Culture in every school and team is an essential surrounding condition not only for the effectiveness of the CPS Coaching program, but of school effectiveness for children overall. Therefore the coaching plan to be implemented in 16-17 will contain steps and assessment at all levels of the district for all players involved in pursuing this vital task. (See Appendix B on Adult Professional Culture.)

THEME 4

Common planning time meetings of teachers who teach the same content at all levels is a necessary structural condition for improving student learning. So we need to create that for every teacher. Working to produce high-functioning teams of this kind must be major focus of how coaches use their time in the new plan (see Appendix D).

THEME 5

Instructional coaching is a pivotal and also very complex job. (See Appendix A.) This is an opportunity for CPS to build a system-wide, sustainable, sequenced, ever more sophisticated training and feedback mechanism for coaches on their skills. Therefore we will build on the in-house expertise of coaches and coordinators who are expert individually at the skills in Appendix A. We can create our own in-house CPS training program for coaches that is framed as “multi-year career development,” not just an event called “coach training.” A design process for this training program will be part of next year’s work.

We look forward to visiting in your school this fall.

H.E.T. Instructional Task Force

APPENDIX A

SKILLS COACHES NEED TO ACQUIRE OVER A CAREER PATH

1. Expert observation skills for picking up...

- Presence
- Absence
- Missed opportunities

...for a large range of teaching and learning behaviors, especially the Big Rocks of High-Expertise Teaching (See Appendix C)

2. Common language and concept system to talking about teaching and learning.

3. Data gathering skills & techniques

- literal note-taking
- positioning in the room and places to move
- artifacts to notice and interpret
- questions to ask students
- assessing congruence and impact of tasks and learning experiences students do

4. Diagnostic Skill

“Of all the things I saw, in the interests of the students, what are the most important to focus on with the teacher?”

5. Differential Conferencing Skill

Four Styles:

- Non-Directive
- Collaborative
- Directive-Informational
- Directive

What are the skills for each type? How does one decide which to use? What do they look and sound like?

6. Developing a partnership with the principal to build an adult culture of non-defensive self-examination of teaching practice in relation to student results.

- Specify the principal’s role in setting expectations for coaches and teachers
- Specify the Central Office supervisors expectations for principals re: coaching role
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7. Range of specific communications skills

- listening
- relationship building
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8. Skills to assist teams to plan rigorous units and individual lessons with frequent formative assessments

- capacity to analyze content for hierarchy of concepts, points of difficulty, and misconceptions.
- Capacity to identify worthwhile objectives and ensure students understand them.

9. Skills to assist teams to analyze data at a granular level and do error analysis of student work

- facile with use of protocols
- skilled at crucial conversations and using feedback (data driven) to have these conversations
- skilled at facilitating meetings to make it safe to be vulnerable in front of one another.

10. Skills to assist teams to plan re-teaching for students who need it with differentiated lesson design.

11. Skills at building trust and norms of strong Adult Professional Culture.

APPENDIX B

ADULT PROFESSIONAL CULTURE

There is no sustainable improvement in student results and no elimination of the achievement gap until leaders and teachers succeed in making strong the norms of behavior between adults listed below. This assertion is supported solidly by the research in the bibliography attached.

Many other elements of school practice count, and count heavily (good curriculum; community support; resources; school structures like induction and teacher leadership and common planning time; and others.) But no matter how well these important areas are structured, they will not accomplish on their own what we need for students unless the adults act as profiled below.

Only leaders can make this so. And it has to start from the top.

“School culture” has many meanings. The meaning we focus on here is the culture for the adults, not the students, because the professional relationships of the adults have a tremendous bearing on what life is like for students. The adult culture is the main shaper of the school’s capacity as an organization to learn and improve its results for students. (See bibliography)

Literature on adult culture in schools legitimately considers many dimensions of “the way we do things around here,” including stories and story-tellers, heroes and villains of the past, traditions and celebrations that people look forward to (or dread,) and the degree to which there is celebration, community, and opportunities for human contact with one another. But in our work at RBT we have found certain observable norms of interaction between adults to be central to the culture of a school that gets results for students. Those are the ones we will describe below.

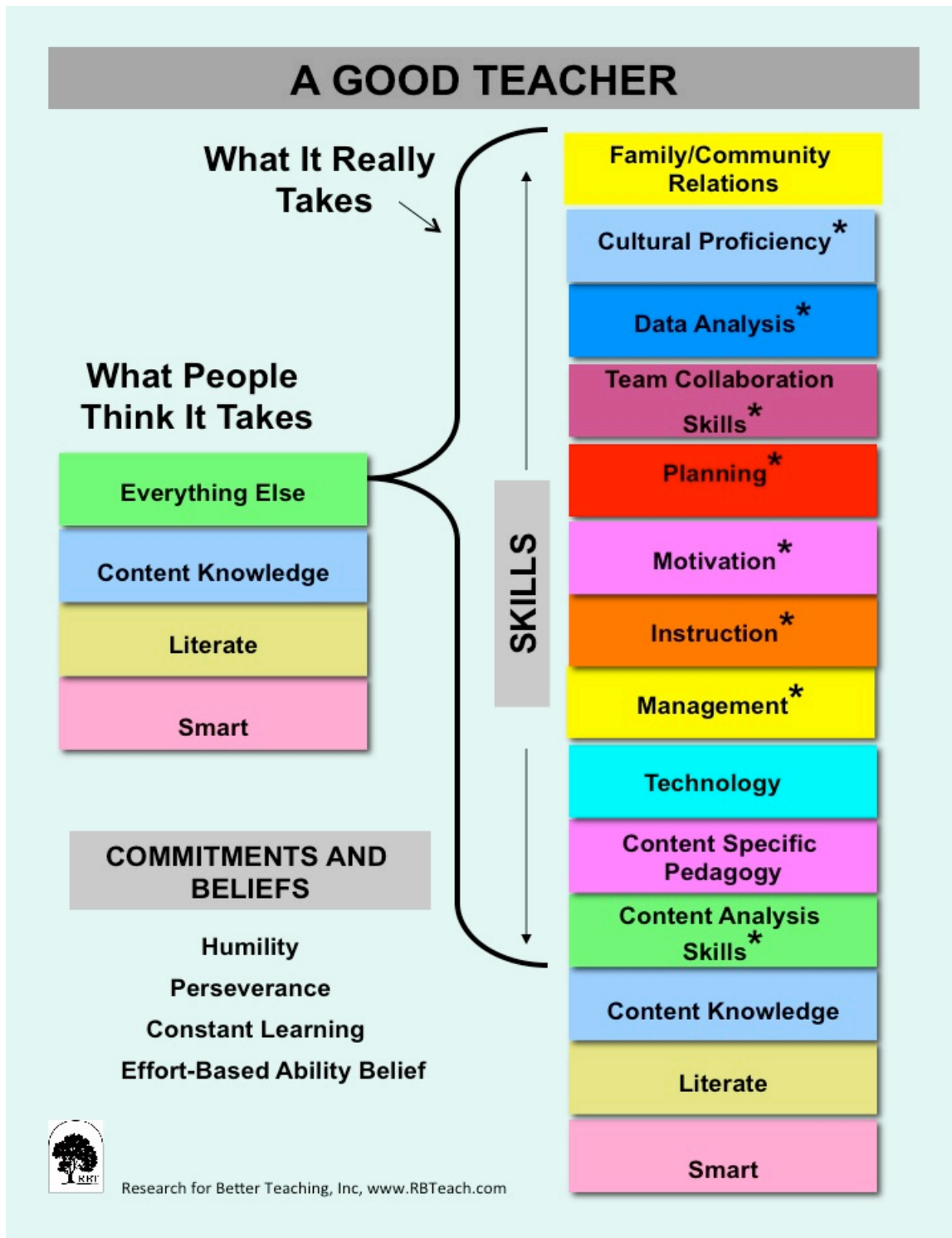
Appreciation and recognition for example, is certainly important in any organization’s “culture.” But it is not as central as the regular behavioral norm of “examining student work together non-defensively and deciding how to re-teach what some students didn’t get the first time we taught it.”

Observable Features of a Strong Adult Professional Culture

1. Safety to take risks, be vulnerable in front of colleagues
2. Non-defensive self-examination of teaching practice in relation to student results
3. Constant use of data to re-focus teaching
4. Frequent teaching in the presence of other adults (Public Teaching)
5. Constant learning about High-Expertise Teaching
6. Deep collaboration and deliberate design for interdependent work and joint responsibility for student results
7. Commitment to implement “Smart is something you can get” in classroom practice, class structures, and school policies and procedures
8. Urgency and press to do better for our low-performing students
9. Honest, open communication and ability to have difficult conversations
10. Appreciation and recognition
11. Demanding and high standards for teaching expertise for all teachers
12. Clarity and Legitimacy in decision-making

APPENDIX C

THE SIZE AND RANGE OF TEACHER KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL IN ALL ITS COMPLEXITY



THE BIG ROCKS OF HIGH EXPERTISE TEACHING (H.E.T. Project)

1. Content Analysis: Digging deeply into content for rigorous planning, leading to objectives and criteria for success being on-target and clear to students
2. Error analysis of student work to deliver re-teaching to those who need it [Data]
3. Feedback: frequent, timely, non-judgmental, and useful.
4. Making Students' Thinking Visible
5. Using a variety of cognitive strategies matched to content and students
6. Communicating 3 critical messages re: effort-based ability
7. Making students feel known and value: Cultural Proficiency and Personal Relationship Building
8. Building a classroom climate of community, risk-taking, and ownership
9. High volume of student reading/writing and explicit embedded literacy instruction
10. Direct vocabulary instruction and practice

Skills pertaining to Planning

1. High Expertise Teachers **dig deeply into their content as they are planning** lessons. Thus they identify the most worthwhile learning targets in the materials and make sure the students know what they are. They also make sure the learning experiences the students do are logically aligned with the learning targets (objectives) and that the assessment will give good data about student mastery. The hierarchy of concepts within the content are outlined. Student misconceptions and points of difficulty are anticipated and provided for in the lesson because the teacher did the student tasks him/herself.
2. High expertise teachers know how to study student work, all the way from standardized tests to work samples from yesterday's class. They can analyze student errors and identify gaps in student learning. Thus skillful **error analysis** **leads directly to re-teaching** for those students who didn't get it the first time around.
3. High Expertise Teachers arrange for a constant **flow of feedback to students** on their performance. The feedback is non-judgmental and keyed to specific criteria the students are clear about. Thus the students can self-evaluate and use

techniques they have been taught to set effective goals and plans of action to improve.

Skills Pertaining to Instruction

4. High Expertise Teachers **make students' thinking visible** during class interaction by using a constellation of interactive skills. Thus there is a high degree of student talk both with the teacher and with one another about the content at a high level of thinking. The students are active thinkers with the content and the teacher gets a constant reading on who understands and who doesn't. In turn, the students are required to become good listeners to one another and be active processors of information.
5. High Expertise Teachers have a **repertoire of research-based cognitive strategies** like visual imagery and modeling thinking aloud. These strategies, chosen to match the students, the curriculum and the content, make concepts and ideas clear and accessible to students. Thus when content needs re-teaching for students who didn't get it the first time around, the teacher has alternative approaches to use. They check thoroughly for understanding and get students engaged in activating and summarizing strategies.

Skills Pertaining to Motivation

6. High Expertise Teachers convince students to believe in **"effort based ability."** Thus they consistently send the messages: **"What we're doing is important; You can do it; and I won't give up on you" (tenacity and perseverance.)** These messages are sent through daily interactive teacher behavior, through class structures and routines, and through policies and procedures. These teachers take it upon themselves to teach the students explicitly *how* to exert effective effort.
7. High Expertise Teachers make **students feel known and valued.** Thus they know about the students' life and culture and show an interest in their activities and success. The unrelenting tenacity and high-expectations of teachers with low-performing students also becomes evidence to the student that the teacher thinks they are worthwhile. *Cultural Proficiency* becomes an important skill set, because understanding and valuing students' family values, cultural heritage, and norms of behavior become important to making instruction appropriate as well as making individuals be authentically known and respected.
8. High Expertise Teachers create a **climate of community, risk-taking, and ownership** among all their students. Thus the students know each other as people and have been taught the skills to cooperate. The students feel safe to make mistakes and view errors as feedback, not judgments; thus they take academic risks and challenge themselves to do hard work. And the students have voice and ownership in constructing the "rules of the classroom game."

Skills Pertaining to Literacy

9. High Expertise Teachers make ***literacy*** an embedded priority. Thus regardless of their subject or academic discipline, they ensure a high volume of quality reading and writing about their content, and they scaffold the students' entry into text. Of particular importance, they are assiduous at facilitating "literate conversations" (Allington 2011) about the text.

10. High Expertise Teachers become committed and proficient in **vocabulary instruction**. Regardless of their academic discipline, they understand that the words and the concepts they represent are intimately related and indispensable to student learning.

APPENDIX D

LEVELS OF SOPHISTICATION OF COMMON PLANNING TIME (CPT) ACTIVITIES.

LEVEL 0

- CPT meetings are scheduled, but teachers do not always show up or show up on time.
- There are no written agendas, established group norms, or student work on the table for examination.
- Conversation is about children, upcoming events like field trips, testing, etc., but rarely about the specifics of how to teach something or teach it better.
- There is occasional sharing of worksheets and activity ideas.

LEVEL 1

- Teachers meet consistently 1-3 times a week.
 - There is a written Agenda and next steps recorded after each CPT meeting.
 - There are established CPT norms, but not necessarily close facilitation to ensure they are followed.
 - Student work is sometimes on the table at meetings.
 - There is discussion about student difficulties and what to do about them
 - There is sharing of activities, strategies, worksheets.
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LEVEL 2

- There is a written agenda, facilitator, and next steps identified and recorded at each meeting.
- Group norms are honored and practiced
- The team has created common assessments for major benchmarks, and agrees on implementation and scoring processes. (These could be end-of-course tests, quarterly assessments, interim-assessments.)
- The CPT team establishes SMART¹ goals for their students.
- Administrators occasionally attend.

LEVEL 3

- Team members make up common quizzes or formative assessments to find out how students are doing and identify problems and gaps in student understanding. They bring these back, analyze results and do error analysis together.
- Team members design units together.
- Team members establish reliability on scoring common assessments, at what to call a 1, 2, 3, or 4.
- The team revisits and decides to re-teach key concepts, inventing *new* re-teaching strategies developed in detail for concepts or skills students are struggling with.

¹ **Specific:** Who? What? Where? **Measurable:** How will the goal be measured? **Attainable:** Is the goal realistic, yet challenging? **Results-oriented:** Is the goal consistent with other goals established and fits with your immediate and long-range plans? **Time-bound:** Is it trackable and allows for monitoring of progress?

- Team members disaggregate data on an assessment they gave in common and pool data on which students did well and which didn't. Then the team regroups students across our sections to re-teach.
- Discourse is focused on evidence and teachers are beginning to question one another's ideas and practices.
- Team members practice actually doing the re-teaching strategies with one another.
- Team members decide in common which re-teaching strategies to try and compare results at the next meeting.
- Administrators attend on occasion and participate as peers.

LEVEL 4

[Levels 4 and 5 include all the positive elements of Level 3 and add on the following..]

- Team members dig into concepts and sub-concepts of what they are teaching to get clearer on the relationships of concepts and sub-concepts and on what student confusions, misconceptions and necessary prior knowledge might be.
- The group plans lessons together in *depth and detail*, including doing the activity they are asking students to do. All materials are brought to the meeting.
- Administrators attend regularly and assist in arranging inter-visitations among teaches in the CPT group.

LEVEL 5

- Team members visit each others' classrooms regularly to do focused peer observation for one another. They collect data in service of a question one of us wants answered (evidence of student learning...etc.) There is skillful debriefing of the observation and planning of next steps.
- Teaching becomes public with teachers visiting each others' classrooms regularly and providing critical feedback and suggestions.

- Teachers work collaboratively with administrators to develop individual and collective professional learning goals and design support for achieving them.