

Touchstone

*Newsletter of the Basic School Eastern Consortia
Housed at Virginia Tech, Falls Church, Virginia*



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A Message from the Director

Who Moved My Cheese? by Spencer Johnson is one of my favorite books. It depicts the story of four imaginary characters, the mice “Sniff” and “Scurry” and the little people, “Hem” and “Haw” and how they deal with change. Sometimes we may act like “Sniff” who sniffs out change early or “Scurry” who scurries into action. Sometimes we act like “Hem” who denies and resists change as he fears it will lead to something worse or like “Haw” who learns to adapt in time when he sees changing leads to something better! In the end the mice do better with change because they keep things simple.

Throughout my life I have been faced with change and, like the characters in the story, often fret and stew. But looking back, each change has led to something new and wonderful. The closing of an area office led to a better job as regional coordinator; the move to a new community gave new opportunities. It is in the looking back that we discover who we are and what our capabilities can be.

We in the Eastern Consortia are experiencing our “cheese” being moved. As of August 1, 2006 we will no longer be affiliated with VA Tech. The resources and funding from the university are just not there. We are busy exploring options for funding and possibilities for moving elsewhere. Whatever the outcome, the Eastern Consortia will not look the same. While this is painful to see happen, I feel confident that the ten-

ets of Ernest Boyer’s vision will still be there and our schools will still find ways to collaborate and grow. This is the very best of our heritage as “passionate practitioners,” as Kim Dockery has so aptly described us.

The words from this little book ring true for us in the Basic School movement as they do for the little mice:

*Life is no straight and easy corridor
along
which we travel free and unhampered,
but a maze of passages,
through which we must seek our way,
lost and confused, now and again
checked in a blind alley.*

*but always, if we have faith,
a door will open for us,
not perhaps one that ourselves
would ever have thought of,
but one that will ultimately
prove good for us.*

By Judith Smith

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SAVE THIS DATE!

**Summer Institute 2006
July 28-30, 2006**

**Crystal City Marriott
Arlington, VA**

Registration Begins May 1

Developing a Professional Learning Community: Teachers as Leaders

By John Quattrocchi and Barbara Syrett

In the 2002 school year PS 43 in Far Rockaway, New York provided an extension of the school day for professional development activities. Teams called cohorts were formed and each team was to identify its own areas of need and reach-out to specialists within the building to provide professional development sessions. During that year we observed the following:

- Teams were too large to function effectively (teachers, paraprofessionals and ancillary staff - average of 20 people per team)
- Universal ownership that this professional development time was valuable was inconsistent
- Lead teachers were not sufficiently trained to lead the cohorts
- Cohorts did not vertically interact with one another
- Meaningful discussion about data and instruction was inconsistent across grades
- Ownership of student performance was inconsistent.

In the summer of 2003 a team of staff members attended a conference, thanks to a grant from the Basic School Eastern Consortia, featuring Rick and Becky DuFour who presented their concept of Professional Learning Communities. The DuFours characterize a Professional Learning Community as a school that has “a shared mission, vision and values; collective inquiry; collaborative teams; an orientation to continuous improvement; and a focus on results.” Inside this community staff, members are grouped into Professional Learning Teams (PLT). The Professional Learning Team is defined

as “an ongoing group of educators who meet regularly for the purpose of increasing their own learning and development and that of their students.” This is accomplished by engaging in joint work, critical conversation, reflection and problem solving. In order to become a true Professional Learning Community, teachers need to come out from behind the closed doors of their classrooms and share knowledge, identify strengths and needs, and take ownership of student performance.

We realized that in order to become a Professional Learning Community a true change of culture, and not just one of structure, needed to take place. Teachers and other staff members had to internalize the concepts of teachers as leaders and the “team approach” to solving problems, analyzing data and taking a real ownership of student performance. Teaching has always been a profession that was conducted behind closed doors. Some teachers were successful; some were not. The concept of sharing one’s knowledge, identifying one’s strengths and needs and taking real ownership of student performance was rarely spoken about.

A number of changes had to take place in the way business was conducted in order for a true professional learning culture to be realized. First, the way monthly Faculty Conferences were conducted was changed. The ritual had been to bring the entire staff into the auditorium and speak “at” them. That time each month was given to the PLTs to meet. If there was some pressing information to im-

part, it was done over the public address system during the final few minutes of the PLT meeting so that all members of the Team could hear and process the message together.

Next, other opportunities to meet were planned throughout the day. Lunch hours were planned that were common to each grade. Teachers were now able to engage in “Lunch n’ Learn” activities. Common preparation periods were planned for the teachers on each grade. In addition, common preps were programmed for teachers new to the school so they could attend New Teacher Professional Learning Activities. Common preps were also programmed for PLT lead teachers so they could meet and discuss their challenges as Lead Teachers.

The development of our professional learning community and teacher leaders is a work in progress. Measurable and observable changes in the culture of the school have taken place. Lead Teachers plan agendas and lead discussions about norms developed by the team. A risk-free environment has been created where team discussion centers on the analysis of student data, student performance and teacher ownership of the data. PLTs also conduct curriculum planning, discuss what worked and/or didn’t work in lessons, and discuss new ideas and behavior management. Teachers arrange informal classroom visits to observe techniques and strategies other teachers use in their classrooms.

Literacy and math coaches use PLT feedback to identify areas of need and to plan professional learning op-

portunities. For example a 4th grade PLT identified a need in teaching students how to take notes. Lessons were developed and modeled in the classroom and then discussed at a PLT meeting. In math, 7th and 8th grade teachers asked for assistance from the math coach in making real life connections to the curriculum.

In addition to the rise in student performance, a centrality of language has developed around the concept of Professional Learning. Both teachers and professional developers are always looking forward to the next PLT meeting. Initially the Lead Teachers had difficulty formulating the agendas. Now they have difficulty fitting everything the team wants to discuss into the agenda. A question heard around the school is “When is the next PLT?”

References:

Boyer, Ernest, The Basic School: A Community for Learning

Eaker, Robert et. al, Getting Started: Reculturing Schools to Become Professional Learning

DuFour, Richard et al., Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement

John Quattrocchi is principal and Barbara Syrett is Professional Learning Facilitator at P.S. 43, a K-8 school in Far Rockaway, New York. John and Barbara are regular workshop presenters at the Summer Institute and have hosted Basic School visits to their school.



Summer Institute Preview

**Friday Keynote
Keil Hileman
2004 Kansas
Teacher of the Year**

Keil Hileman, the Kansas Teacher of the Year in 2004, was named one of four finalists for the 2004 National Teacher of the Year. In addition, he was selected as the first NEA Horace Mann Award winner in Kansas history. Keil is a social studies teacher at Monticello Trails Middle School in the De Soto school district.



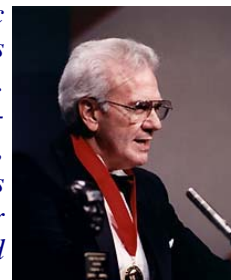
Keil’s unique teaching style is reflected in the development of a classroom museum. Starting with two Civil War bullets with which to teach history, Keil began asking students to bring other artifacts to share with the class. His classroom museum now contains 20,000 teaching artifacts. As one former student said, “He knows what would touch us. . . Everything he teaches us about the past, he connects to our lives, present and future. He makes an impact on his students.”

Keil’s classroom credo is “**Explore** your World, **Empower** Yourself and Those Around You, **Excel** in Everything You Do.” Keil is an outstanding speaker and will inspire us all with his love of teaching.



Ernest Boyer On Teacher Leaders

In the Basic School, teachers are empowered. Working together as teams, they serve as mentors to their students and have the time



and resources needed to be professionally renewed. The principal in the Basic School is lead teacher, the one who guides the institution more by inspiration than directive.

-Ernest Boyer (1995)

Grants

We continue to highlight grant opportunities for our schools. Here is a recent advertisement in the arts.

Learning in the Arts Grants: National Endowment for the Arts “Learning in the Arts Grants” Program offers funding for projects that help children and youth acquire appreciation, knowledge, and understanding of and skills in the arts. Projects must provide participatory learning and engagement of students with skilled artists, teachers, and excellent art and ensure the application of national state, or local arts education standards. Deadline: June 12, 2006

www.arts.gov/grants/apply/GAP07/LearningintheArts.html

BASIC SCHOOL EASTERN CONSORTIA MEMBERSHIP 2005-06
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CONSORTIA STAFF

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

Dr. Judith Smith
Director

Regular School Membership \$179.00
Includes

Dr. Ray Van Dyke
Associate Director

Newsletter: Five issues featuring member schools and their best practices, updates on the 13th annual Summer Institute, messages from the Director

Ms. Janet Williams
Director of Field Operations

Certificate of Membership and Member Listing Directory

Ms. Pat Broderick
Senior Advisor

Comprehensive School Membership \$795.00
\$895.00 Value - Includes all of the above PLUS

Dr. Mary Ellen Bafumo
Senior Advisor

Registration for Four People for the Fall Basic School Workshop in North Carolina

Individual Membership. \$79.00
Designed for University/Central Office Personnel
Includes Newsletter and Workshop Information

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION
BASIC SCHOOL EASTERN CONSORTIA 2005-2006

_____ OR _____
School Individual

Street Address City/State Zip Code

Principal Telephone FAX

Contact Person Telephone Email

Type of Membership:
Regular School (\$179.00) _____
Comprehensive School (\$795.00) _____
Individual (\$79.00) _____

Mail application and check payable to:
VA Tech Basic School Network
Virginia Tech Northern Virginia Center
7054 Haycock Rd., Falls Church, VA 22043



Basic School Eastern Consortia

Basic School Eastern Consortia :
Virginia Tech Northern Virginia Center
7054 Haycock Road
Falls Church, VA 22043

Phone: 703-538-8492
Fax: 538-8485
Email: jusmith8@vt.edu

"Educating students to their full potential . . ."

The 13th Annual Eastern Consortia Summer Institute

**Marriott Crystal City
Arlington, VA
July 28-30, 2006**

**Theme:
Differentiating for Diverse Learners**

Come Join Us For:

**Outstanding Keynote Speaker
Keil Hileman
2004 Kansas Teacher of the Year**

and

Many Energizing Workshops!

Thank You School Renewals

We thank the following schools for their prompt membership renewal in the Eastern Consortia.

If your school name does not appear below, be sure to send in your dues to the Eastern Consortia in order to receive the monthly newsletter and Summer Institute information.

- Alton Darby
- Berryhill
- Capshaw
- Children's Community
- Christiansburg
- Colegio Americano de Puebla
- Cornerstone Learning Community
- David Cox Road
- F.M. Kearns Primary
- Hoffman Trails
- Kipps
- Lake Seneca
- Lincoln
- Longfellow
- Mantua
- Monterey
- Morgan
- North Hamilton County
- P.S. 7
- PS 43
- P.S. 225
- P.S. 253
- Price's Fork
- Skyview
- South Side
- St. Lucie
- Summit Charter
- Westlawn

Thank you individual members: Patrick Callaghan
Steve Parson