



Curriculum: A Catalyst for Change (Part One)

This E-Hint is the first of a four-part segment co-written by Sara McGinnis and Kyla Slate. Sara is the curriculum director at Sheridan County School District #1 (SCSD#1) in Wyoming. Kyla is a former consultant with the Curriculum Leadership Institute (CLI) who worked with SCSD#1 over a four-year timeframe to implement the CLI Model, a comprehensive, systemic school improvement model. Other contributors are noted within each part.

It's been said that change is the only constant. This seems especially true in education. There is always a new initiative, textbook, program, policy, or new personnel coming and going within school districts. Sometimes it is difficult to preserve continuity in the midst of these types of random and frequent changes, no matter how well intentioned they are. It's no secret that the trend in education is to do more with less, which leaves everyone asking the same questions...how and when?

The answers are elusive and districts can be immobilized by lack of vision, resources, or the training necessary to create a plan of action that generates buy-in and leads to success. All too often, when the status quo is challenged or when leaders in a district see the need for substantial changes, they are met with the kind of resistance that makes them wonder if the fight for change is worth it.

We want to assure you that positive transformation to increase student learning is always worth the struggle! It will come as no surprise that there is often hard work involved in changing anything within a school district. The surprise might be in how easy it *sounds* to do so. Sheridan County School District #1

(SCSD#1) in Wyoming and Bradley-Bourbonnais Community High School District #307 (BBCHS #307) in Illinois have found success in their systemic changes because they include representative stakeholders when determining a vision and plan, use principals as leaders for change, provide time to implement change, and build on teachers' strengths to increase capacity.

District Level: Intentional Change

Whole district reform must start with a clear vision that involves input from all stakeholders. SCSD#1 started with a steering committee comprised of district administrators, school principals, a school board trustee, teachers, and parents. This group of 23 people looked at data to analyze the current reality of the district. With the guidance of a Curriculum Leadership Institute (CLI) facilitator, many questions were asked and answered until a clear vision surfaced: *become a professional community of learners to improve student learning*. In order to achieve these goals, the decision was made to focus first on developing curriculum and creating aligned common district assessments. Once the vision was established, the steering committee built a

long range plan for creating curriculum and assessments, identifying resources that would be needed, and establishing a timeline for meeting their goals.

Although curriculum and assessment development were not new to the district, prior efforts

were disjointed; therefore, the initial analysis uncovered a need for a more systematic process to use. A CLI facilitator, highly trained in these areas, provided the step-by-step process needed to tackle the work.

