



## **Canal Winchester: Re-Envisioning Professional Development**

Canal Winchester Local Schools is a moderately sized district serving about 3,500 children living in Franklin and Fairfield counties. Like all Ohio districts, Canal Winchester is continuously looking for ways to increase effectiveness and decrease ongoing operational costs. This is especially critical when it comes to providing high quality professional development for the 200+ administrators and teachers across the district. Over the last several years, Canal Winchester has begun restructuring staff professional development to create a more engaging, needs focused system of providing ongoing training for staff – without breaking the bank. District leadership and partners are now engaging staff to co-create face to face and blended professional development aligned to teacher needs and district goals.

### **Phase One: Aligning Leadership**

Like many districts, Canal Winchester often used district professional development days for ‘one and done’ events where the district brought in experts to ignite excitement about research based practices or allowed building leaders to create training with little guidance or connection across buildings. District leadership also used the time for ‘sit and get’ training as they rolled out new initiatives. However, none of these approaches aligned with current instructional design best practices and administrators and teachers felt the approach was, at best, fractured. As the district has grown, budgets have been cut and accountability has increased. Canal Winchester’s leadership team began examining internal practices with the goal of getting more ‘bang for their buck’. This led Canal Winchester to completely re-envision the use

of time for district-wide professional development, ultimately creating a three phase approach which engaged teachers and leaders in designing and implementing high quality face to face and blended professional development directly aligned to teachers identified needs and aligned to the district’s goals. Over the last three years, Superintendent Jim Sotlar and his leadership team identified Daggett’s



Rigor, Relevance and Relationships Framework as the foundation upon which all instructional practices should be built. Other practices such as STEM/STEAM for all, Project Based Learning, design thinking, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and blended learning were all viewed as strategies through which teachers could implement the framework.





## Phase Two: Engaging Teachers as Leaders

Once leaders had the same understanding, Canal Winchester principals created PD Planning Teams in each building and identified core professional development partners to facilitate Train the Trainer workshops aligned to district goals. Canal Winchester now partners with EnvisionEdPlus for this work.

EnvisionEdPlus, a central Ohio based innovation partner, was founded to drive conversations about educational reform to a new level, and ultimately re-envision education. EnvisionEdPlus and Canal Winchester believe that if we want all children to have the skills they need to be healthy and successful contributors in the 21st century world, we must teach them to think. To do this, we must re-invent the educational experiences



children have every day - and keep adapting the systems to address new needs and integrate new technologies. In order for this to occur, Canal Winchester must engage teachers as leaders and give them a significant voice in identifying how, when and where professional learning occurs. Canal Winchester's Curriculum Director works closely with EnvisionEdPlus to scaffold professional development sessions to create a cadre of PD experts ready, willing and able to share best practices.

Approximately one month before each release day, EnvisionEdPlus meets with building PD Planning Teams in 3-hour blocks. EnvisionEdPlus provides the identified training in a 90-minute session and then offers technical assistance to each building's PD Planning Team as they design the 3-hour training they



will later facilitate at their schools. Middle and high school planning teams meet in the morning and elementary building planning teams meet in the afternoon so they can share ideas and resources across grade bands. While content and messaging is consistent across the district, this process allows principals and teachers to determine how the training will be presented so that it meets the specific needs of the individuals who work within their schools. It also provides each building with in-house experts

who practice the skills in advance, within their own classrooms, and then are better able to troubleshoot problems as their colleagues experience them later. Finally, this is extremely cost effective because the district only incurs the cost of a single trainer for one day as opposed to bringing multiple trainers to the





site so that each building has their own training. School staff report this new method of training is significantly more engaging and that they feel a greater sense of comfort when implementing new strategies because they see immediate buy in from other staff. Building leaders have also been strategic in identifying PD planning team members to avoid ‘innovation overload’ and rotate membership annually so experts are not always the same few staff members.

### **Phase Three: Staff Designed Blended Professional Development**

Canal Winchester received a Round Two Straight A Grant last year and through this process has begun working with a new partner, Dynamix, to create a scalable, replicable and sustainable process for offering district-wide professional development at minimal ongoing costs. EnvisionEdPlus work deeply with a Core Innovation Team from each K-5 building - Indian Trail (K2) and Winchester Trail (3-5). Core Innovation

Team members (two teachers from every grade level) meet twice a month during and after school for ongoing professional development. Teacher learning has been focused on: imbedding 21<sup>st</sup> century skill development in daily instruction, creating design challenges to teach children critical thinking and problem solving skills, implementing PBL units to offer deeper learning experiences for young children and more effectively utilizing space and technology to improve student engagement



and learning. Core Innovation Team members created, tested and refined lessons and units throughout this year building their internal capacity to implement these strategies within their own classrooms. Teachers also engaged in online professional development created by Dynamix so they developed a feel for how it has been done in the past and the benefits/drawbacks to this type of learning. Dynamix then began teaching Core Innovation Team members how to create blended professional development courses that will become part of the district’s ongoing professional development beginning in Fall 2015. Teachers are so excited they are also creating blended learning units and lessons for their classrooms.

### **Phase Four: Growing and Sustaining Staff Directed & Personalized Professional Development**

Effective communication and collaborative planning are essential components for growing and sustaining this work. Canal Winchester’s leadership team avoids innovation overload by regularly offering leadership roles to a variety of teachers – not just the same ‘early adopters’ all the time. Being a member of the





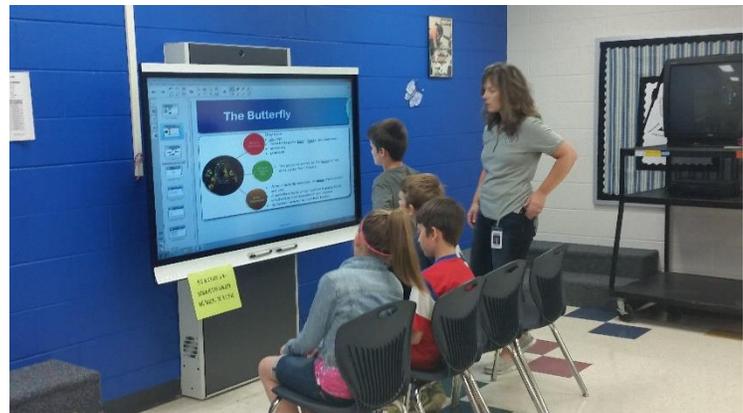
building PD Planning Team is not a life sentence. Membership shifts a little each year to gain new ideas, but keeps continuity and a strong team feeling.



Curriculum staff and EnvisionEdPlus meet following each District Professional Development Day to reflect on the work and plan for the next session. This provides EnvisionEdPlus direct feedback on how the PD was implemented and what teachers and administrators identified as strengths and next steps. The Canal Winchester Education Association President recently referred to this system of professional development as ‘by far the most engaging and effective professional learning I have experienced in years’.

This winter, the district is offering small stipends to members of the PD Planning Team to pilot the online professional development created in partnership with Dynamix. Once teachers provide feedback after completing the modules, the Core Innovation Team (the designers) will refine the modules and prepare them for implementation. This online learning will then become a key part of the Canal Winchester on-boarding process for new faculty, providing a personalized and low cost way for the district to ensure all new staff (1<sup>st</sup> year teachers and 1<sup>st</sup> year in district) become familiar with Canal Winchester’s culture and expectation of innovative instructional practices.

As Canal Winchester has deepened district-wide efforts to re-envision professional development, teachers are becoming significantly more comfortable with the concept of personalized learning pathways and competency based education. This mind shift has now brought teachers and leaders working together to truly re-envision education for all learners – adults and children. Instead of ‘sit and get’ learning where everyone does the same thing at the same time, Canal Winchester culture is now focused on ‘what if?’, ‘how can we?’ and ‘let’s try!’





**Canal Winchester**

L O C A L   S C H O O L S

*Empowering All Students For Success*

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