Foothills Education Charter High School
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
July 2018

Staff, Friends, and Supporters of Foothills Education Charter High School:

Please note that the title of this monthly newsletter has changed from "Implementation Grant News" to "Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment." The implementation grant has officially ended, but the important work of continuous improvement continues.

Ah, summer, time to step back and take it easy... but not so much for the hard-working folks at Foothills. The month of July has featured two opportunities for sustained, focused, and productive work: the GAEL Conference (Georgia Association of Educational Leaders) at Jekyll Island, and the Strategic Planning Retreat at Lake Lanier. At both sessions, Foothills Superintendent, Dr. Sherrie Gibney-Sherman reminded everyone about the history and purpose of Foothills, and the need to continue to be 1) focused on improving instructional delivery, based on data, 2) determined to find and apply the best possible resources to support the work, and 3) committed to delivering the best possible instructional practices. Dr. Gibney-Sherman also shared the exciting news - repeated several times during both conferences - that End of Course Test (EOC) scores for Foothills students have shown consistent, continual growth in all areas - a real affirmation of all of the hard work being done for students.

GAEL Conference, Jekyll Island - Accountability and Using Assessment to Make a Difference

The GAEL Conference session was chaired by **Russ Cook**, Public Service Assistant, Carl Vinson Institute of Government

Cowen Harter, District Effectiveness Specialist at West Georgia RESA led off the presentations with a focus on "Understanding the CCRPI and How Our Shared Model is Measured." Key elements of Harter's presentation included:
1) Understanding the changes in the new, ESSA-era CCRPI. Harter shared a CCRPI score predictor chart with the group.
2) The importance of understanding and using learning targets as a foundation for improved teaching and learning.

3) Formative assessment as a "game-changer". Harter shared two innovative tools: a) Formative Assessment Analysis tool, to evaluate specific, individual student needs, and b) Formative Assessment Data Protocol, to determine how well assessments/questions match the standard, and to improve the focus and rigor of instruction.

The second set of presentations at GAEL featured **Brittan Ayers** and **Dale Simpson**, from Foothills, and **Joe Cash** and **Jennifer Glover**, from the Mountain Education Charter High School.

Brittan Ayers recounted the work that was done for the past year as part of the just-completed Implementation Grant, including;
- Strategic planning retreats during the year
- Impact checks at all sites
- New algebra readiness course to fill learning gaps prior to taking algebra
- Change in course sequencing
- Data teams, to comb through test scores and overall performance of the past two years
- Curriculum teams to review GradPoint curriculum and assessment, aligning more closely to standards and the EOC, eliminating redundant or unnecessary items and filling gaps, and updating test items.
- Instructional coaches - on the ground working directly with teachers
- "Assesslets" from the Georgia Assessment Center

The group learned that "Quality charter school authorizers establish standards for school performance that are clear, quantifiable, rigorous, and attainable. The SCSC (State Charter School Commission) Performance Framework includes academic, financial, and organizational performance measures that establish expectations, guide practice, assess progress, and inform decision making over the course of the charter term and at renewal or revocation.

The three areas of performance covered by the frameworks—academic achievement, financial management, and organizational compliance— correspond directly with the three components of a strong charter school application and are the three areas on which a charter school's performance should be evaluated. In each of the three areas, the framework asks a fundamental question:

1. Academic Performance: Is the educational program offering students a better educational opportunity than they would otherwise receive at a traditional

public school?
   2. Financial Performance: Is the school financially viable?
   3. Organizational Performance: Is the organization effective, compliant, and well run?"
(https://scsc.georgia.gov/sites/scsc.georgia.gov/files/related_files/site_page/SCSC_Comprehensive_Performance_Framework_Overview_Approved.pdf).

Dale Simpson reviewed the Academic Performance area of the Framework, highlighting the five ways the Foothills can demonstrate the ability to meet targets: CCRPI Achievement, CCRPI Growth, CCRPI Single Scores, Value Added Measures, and Beating the Odds. Of these, Simpson stated that student growth is the most significant for Foothills to focus on.

Jeff Barker from the Georgia Center for Assessment concluded the session with this guiding question: What would it take to achieve student learning increases in every subject area and with every student? Barker went on to emphasize the importance of having a common understanding within our schools about the purpose and expectations of assessment. For the EOCs, and all assessments formal and informal, he stated, teachers need to be aware of the purpose of the assessments, how they were developed, and how they will be used. Similarly, teachers need to understand the differences between reliability and validity, and rigor and difficulty.

Strategic Planning Retreat, Lake Lanier

Dr. Gibney-Sherman kicked off the retreat by recounting the remarkable growth and progress of Foothills over the past two years. "The model is working and being replicated all over the state," she noted, adding that Foothills is now serving more than 1800 students, with 233 graduates to date this year, and a total of 538 graduates since the school's inception.

Allen McCannon shared with the group that he will be overseeing the most recent addition to the Foothills world, the National Guard's Youth Challenge Program, with academies located in Fort Stewart, Fort Gordon, and Milledgeville.

Brittan Ayers next presented the main focus of the retreat, the **Foothills Continuous Improvement Process, comprised of the Strategic Plan, the District Improvement Plan, and Data Analysis**.

Click Foothills Strategic Plan to view the complete plan, which covers in details the areas of Coherent Instruction, Professional Capacity, Supportive Learning Environment, Family and Community Engagement, and Effective Leadership.

The District Improvement Plan specifically targets two goals:
1) Increase student performance on the Georgia Milestones to the state performance target in each area;
2) Increase the number of students meeting high school graduation requirements and completing the Foothills postsecondary transition plan.

Finally, after looking at systemwide and site-specific data, Foothills staff spent the next two days working on the following:
- Examining the progress of current plans by participating in data review and analysis
- Identifying needs and root causes
- Collaborating about interventions that have worked well at each site (and those which did not work as well as planned)
- Selecting interventions for 2018-2019
- Updating 2018-2019 Site Plans

At the conclusion of this work, Site Plans will be used to update District Improvement Plan, and the District Improvement Plan will be used to update Strategic Plan.

At the end of several intensely focused workdays, Foothills administrators and site directors departed for their various corners of the state, feeling energized and more ready than ever to take on the challenge of successfully reaching every Foothills student.

See you next month with the August update.

Regards,
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