

Standard 4: Content Knowledge Instruction

Reflective Essay

Understanding core elements of each content area is an important part of effective leadership. I believe that competency in this area reflects on the preparation and professional renewal of an administrator. While I might not know the minute details of each content area, it is important that I communicate frequently with teachers, listen attentively, and ask questions about what they do and how they need support. This approach, along with a working knowledge of an array of instructional pedagogy, can help me equip teachers with strategies to be more successful in their efforts.

Another essential part of content knowledge comes with understanding how to assess student learning and modify instruction based on this data (McREL, 2000). It is especially important for school leaders to be able to model this for staff, resulting in demystifying a part of good instruction that baffles many teachers. When faced with test data, teachers may notice patterns in student performance. However, they may or may not have a solid understanding of how to evaluate their instruction and plan an alternative approach to teaching that meets student needs. In his book on professional learning communities, Rick DeFour (1998) proposes several critical questions related to ensuring that students learn. These questions succinctly focus this approach:

- What do you want the kids to know?
- How do you know that they know it?
- What will you do if they don't?

These questions can be very helpful to administrators trying to lead a group or an individual through the process of refining their teaching and instructional delivery.

Course content will also shape this approach. It can assist teachers in thinking very specifically about how to present concepts so that all students learn. Two of my recent professional products involve examining content knowledge and how to integrate specific content into other subjects.

Related Artifacts

Student performance on state assessments is on the forefront of staff meeting agendas and professional collaboration efforts. Our school staff has invested considerable time into understanding the nature of assessment and how to integrate core class concepts into other courses with the goal of improving student performance. One example of this is in the area of math (artifact – Math in CTE). My department has worked collaboratively to understand essential math content and its connection or integration with the technology courses offered. I took a leadership role in this process by consulting with the math department and reviewing and presenting the state math content standards to my peers. We then integrated these into current CTE coursework.

Another recent effort into understanding and applying content to instruction relates to strategies for strong CSAP performance. I assumed a leadership role within the elective departments (e.g. business and technology, arts, foreign language, etc.). Our role was to present viable strategies to the full staff regarding how we could support the CSAP preparation efforts (artifact – Quest for the Test). We used a process similar to what I describe above. We gathered information about content standards, student data on past CSAP performance, and surveyed current strategies or interventions to address weaknesses in student learning. The result was a Power Point presentation with a video

introduction to the staff that considered core concepts and challenged staff to consider strategies and collaborative efforts that can improve student achievement.

References

- Dufour, Richard, & Eaker, Robert E. (1998). Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement.
- McREL. (2000). What Works in Classroom Instruction. Aurora: McREL.