

Franklin County Schools



To: Board of Education
From: Dr. Bert L'Homme
C: Principals, Leadership Team, C-I Staff
Subject: Early Release Days
Date: May 23, 2005

This past school year, we initiated a curriculum reform effort that began by laying the foundation for achieving our three overarching goals: 1) All children reading, writing, and doing math at least at grade level, at least by third grade; 2) Closing the achievement gap between African-American and Latino students and their white counterparts; and, 3) Ensuring safe and orderly schools.

Key to this effort is the implementation of the "Working On the Work" (WOW) program that focuses on teachers constructing curriculum that students choose to engage in. It's not about working on teachers or students; it's about high expectations for an excellent product from every student. Working On the Work is about student work that addresses twelve standards of excellence. When teachers strive to achieve these standards, students engage in productive school work resulting in increased student achievement. Quite frankly, students do not learn from work they do not engage in.

WOW is the "what." The "how" is "Whole Faculty Study Groups" (WFSG). Beginning last January, every certified teacher participated in a small workgroup of six or less. In an already busy week, they met at least two times each month to examine data, identify strengths and weaknesses, develop instructional plans, monitor plans and continually re-tool as new data was identified.

The beauty of Whole Faculty Study Groups is that this critical process of staff development and curriculum planning occurs where it's most effective – with the teachers. No matter how hard administrators try, how diligently they work, or how good they are, administrators don't teach children. Our teachers teach children and they require quality time to thoroughly carry out this curriculum improvement process.

At the June board meeting, I will propose that FCS institute eight (8) early release days for the 2005/06 school year. The early release time will be specifically and solely reserved for Whole Faculty Study Groups. Two weeks ago, I met with the Teacher Advisory Council and our principals to review our experience with Whole Faculty Study Groups. There was one consistent request – teachers and principals requested early release days for study groups. Groups will meet for the purpose of completing the work of ensuring that we meet the academic needs of every student.

It's important to note that several schools each year ask for early release days. This year, instead of early release on various days by individual schools, the request is for a system wide schedule of early release days to support the work of Whole Faculty Study Groups.

If approved by the Board of Education, we will plan one early release day during the following months: September, October, November, January, February, March, April, and May. Should you have any questions between now and the June meeting, please do not hesitate to call principals, the leadership team, or me.

Thank you for considering this proposal.