

GAPPS Review Part A

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**Vision**

In June of 2014, the administration of Buford City Schools established a Digital Leadership Academy, or DLA, with the primary vision of “creating a viable network of proficient digital leaders in every school committed to transforming instruction and learning through the use of technology” (BCSS DLA Draft, 2014). One stated goal of the BCS Digital Learning Academy is to “create a visionary technology plan for Buford City Schools” (BCSS DLA Draft, 2014). At Buford Elementary School, the vision for the technology department parallels the system-wide goal of full implementation of a 1:1 initiative by January 2015. The administration has made great strides in the implementation of this initiative. For instance, in the spring of 2013, Lock Step Technology Group was brought into assess the infrastructure needs of Buford City Schools. The audit process indicated a number of needed infrastructure upgrades including but not limited to server virtualization, switch upgrades, and additional wireless arrays; these key infrastructure elements were addressed promptly and have already been implemented within the system. Currently, the Buford City School system is in the early stages of implementing a mobile device management system in order to effectively deploy software to the student hardware within the system; all of these elements are due to align in the early part of 2015. Buford City Schools’ aspiration and intent is to have a mobile device in every child’s hand. At Buford Elementary School, Principal Melanie Reed is supportive of this transition. However, she insists that the intention of the teacher should be to use the devices as a tool and not as a substitute for the teacher. She goes on to add, “1:1 shouldn’t take away from one on one” (M. Reed, personal communication, September 2014). Mrs. Reed further asserts that students need to learn communication skills and have human and social

interactions. She sees the 1:1 initiative as a success if it can enhance communication between student and teacher, strengthen instruction, and help close the achievement gap (M. Reed, personal communication, September 2014).

### **Needs Assessment**

In the summer of 2013, the administration of Buford City Schools decided to consolidate personnel surveys such as the Standards Assessment Inventory into one cohesive survey to cut down on survey overlap. This was primarily due to concerns of personnel being oversaturated with surveys. Previously, the system required the Standards Assessment Inventory and the Georgia School Personnel Survey to inform our School Climate Star Rating, and this led to the creation of a system-generated Teacher Needs Assessment Survey. Since the 2013-2014 school year, the administration at Buford City Schools has made a conscious effort to reduce the number of surveys administered and also to refine the surveys delivered to personnel. Administration opted to self-produce an annual Teacher Needs Assessment Survey and a Paraprofessional Needs Assessment Survey. The data generated from the Teacher Needs Assessment Survey is used to inform technology purchases, technology needs, and professional development needs. Buford City Schools' administration convene annually for a leadership retreat at which the direction and focus of professional development is determined for the upcoming school year. The focus on professional learning for the 2014-2015 school year targets the following key areas: technology leadership, mentoring, successful implementation of the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System, providing accelerated content in ELA and Mathematics, and furthering the "Georgia Road to College" initiative.

## Professional Learning

Professional learning needs at Buford City Schools are identified by a system generated Teacher Needs Assessment Survey and a Paraprofessional Teacher Needs Assessment Survey. Results from these system wide surveys inform the direction of future professional development within the system. According to Mrs. Reed, administrators meet monthly to discuss system wide professional development opportunities. These Continuous School Improvement meetings, or CSI meetings, provide the administration with an opportunity to report on the successes and failures of professional development within the Buford City School system. Principals are required to deliver Department Reports on any professional learning sessions that occurred during the previous month (M. Reed, personal communication, September 2014).

Many forms and types of professional learning are offered at Buford Elementary School. “Administration and team leaders ensure that ongoing learning and continuous improvement take place. Opportunities for staff members are planned, provided and documented to include professional learning collaborative team meetings, peer observations, walkthroughs, surveys, book studies, mentoring, etc.” (BES SIP, 2014 p. 17). Collaborative lesson planning occurs regularly in the form of vertical team planning sessions. In 2014, BES participated in a system wide book study of *From Rage to Hope: Strategies for Reclaiming Black & Hispanic Students* by Crystal Kuykendall. Not only did this professional learning help the faculty to better serve our “approximately 630 kindergarten and first grade students who come from culturally and economically diverse backgrounds” and to target our 12% Black population and 32% Hispanic population, it also improved the collective Culturally Responsive Pedagogy of the faculty (BES SIP, 2014 p. 3). In addition to

rich professional development opportunities, teachers have access to a variety of technology focused professional development. Within the last year, teachers have had instruction on the use of various Web 2.0 tools (e.g. Nearpod) in the classroom, continuous interactive whiteboard support and professional development, Gmail transition sessions, Weebly sessions, Renaissance Learning strategies, and iOS strategies. Teachers and paraprofessionals have ongoing access to many different technologically focused learning opportunities—both optional and mandatory—on scheduled early release days and throughout the school year. Follow-up support is provided to teachers if additional help is needed for implementing new technology tools. This support may take many forms including the following: email, individual follow-up sessions, and additional online resources found employee resources area of the school webpage.

### **Alignment to School Improvement Goals**

Alignment of professional development opportunities to achieve school improvement goals is evident at BES. “Software programs, including RAZ KIDS, Reading A-Z, BrainPop Jr., Tumblebooks, IXL Math, and Samson’s classroom are being purchased to help differentiate instruction among all students” (BES SIP, 2014 p. 12). With the implementation of these new programs, personnel are provided with continuous access to professional development. Recently, BES implemented the RAZ KIDS reading software for the first grade students. Teachers and paraprofessionals were provided with an hour-long session on the proper usage and implementation of the software. Buford City Schools is also in the implementation process of the new Teacher Keys Effectiveness System, or TKES. Administration and team leaders will use data from TKES self-assessments to inform future professional development needs or target areas. “Ongoing differentiated professional

learning opportunities are provided to all teachers and paraprofessionals” (BES SIP, 2014 p. 18). The recent attendance of the WGA RESA IT conference by two first grade team members is evidence that the administration continuously seeks out relevant professional development to educate and support classroom teachers. Many professional development opportunities are provided to all school personnel in an attempt to close the achievement gap and target all students’ continuing needs.

### **Funding & Incentives**

BES serves approximately 630 kindergarten and first grade students, 51% of which qualify for free- and reduced-lunch, thus qualifying BES as a Title 1 school (BES School Profile, 2014 p.3). “In addition to receiving funds from our Central Office, BES’ Title 1 status allows for the receipt of additional funds that can be used toward professional development. Additional planning and professional development is utilized to target and plan specific lessons to low performing students” (M. Reed, personal communication, September 2014). The estimated funding for 2014-2015 professional learning at BES is approximately \$16,000 (BES SIP, 2014 p. 18). Additionally, personnel at BES have incentives in place to ensure success and motivate the faculty to participate in relevant professional learning opportunities. Reed states that incentives for employees are continuous learning, personal growth as an educator, professional learning units or credits for re-certification with the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, and a positive reflection on annual end of the year evaluations (M. Reed, personal communication, September 2014).

**Diversity**

In the past year alone, the administration at BES has implemented multiple professional development strategies to address a number of the diverse student needs. Of particular significance was a recent training on Autism Spectrum Disorder. A specialist was brought in to educate personnel on best practices in identifying and working with students with Autism Spectrum Disorder; a follow-up session is planned for the 2014-2015 school year. In addition to addressing our special education needs, the administration at BES also provides rich professional development opportunities targeting ESOL/ELL learners. The ESOL team regularly attends conferences pertinent to their area of specialty. On a quarterly basis, the ESOL team holds both mandatory and optional professional development sessions regarding re-delivery strategies for teachers to take to their classroom to better interactions with ESOL/ELL learners. To address the needs of our lower socioeconomic population, the administration held a book study addressing poverty in our school system. This book study opened a dialogue with educators about better identifying the needs of students who are below the poverty line. Regular monthly administrative meetings with the system curriculum director also ensure our students' diverse needs are addressed and that our teachers are properly educated on how to address those needs. Continuous and diverse professional learning opportunities are provided to the faculty of BES in order to target the various different subsets of the student population.

**Collaboration**

Teachers at BES participate in a number of collaborative school-wide professional learning teams. As indicated in the BES SIP, "Collaborative planning will take place among all teachers" and "vertical team meetings will take place quarterly to ensure continuity

among the grade levels in each subject area and to prepare students for growing levels of standards mastery” (BES SIP, 2014 p. 11). At BES, weekly grade level team meetings are held, with the primary focus of bolstering student achievement. According to Mrs. Reed, “within the last ten years at BES, we have made a conscious shift to collaborative planning” (M. Reed, personal communication, September 2014). These collaborative sessions are meant for team members to collaborate, share ideas, share exemplars, share handwriting samples, and assess the overall effectiveness of lesson plans and curriculum. In addition, vertical team meetings are held on a regular basis. The primary duty of the vertical teams is to focus on the different content areas within the curriculum. Vertical teams are composed of a cross section of the personnel at BES, thus allowing for many perspectives to converge on the task of refining a particular content area.

### **Evaluation**

Teachers at BES are consistently and continuously evaluated throughout the school year. Administrators conduct multiple walk-throughs and observations throughout the year to assess the effectiveness of educators at BES, and the newly implemented TKES ensures that educators are held to high standards. Additionally, faculty are required to take a yearly self-assessment designed to foster growth in a number of pedagogical areas. Student performance is measured using the nationally normed Common Core based Early Literacy, STAR Reading, and STAR Math tests (BES SIP, 2014 p. 8). Further, the administration conducts quarterly professional learning sessions to analyze this benchmark data; these data provide the administration with evidence that continuous professional learning is being translated into practice.



### References

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