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Alaska School SPOTLIGHT

Yukon Flats School District

April 2023

Yukon Flats School District (YFSD) is on a journey of school improvement. This year has been strategic and intentional in looking at curriculum and professional development with some very exciting results. To kick off a great new school year YFSD was proud to host Dr. Heidi Beverine-Curry for 2 days in August at the district 2022 Pre-Service held in Fairbanks. Dr. Heidi Beverine-Curry is a Co-founder and Vice President of Professional Development for The Reading League, where she designs, supervises, and delivers educator learning opportunities and is a champion for evidence-aligned literacy instruction. Last spring, she presented a keynote at “The Science of Reading: A Defining Movement” at the 2022 Alaska Science of Reading Symposium.

As a result of Dr. Heidi Beverine’s presentation to all YFSD educators, Jimmie O’Quinn, a primary teacher at Fort Yukon School, and Darlene Christian, a paraprofessional from John Fredson School, are completing the extensive LETERS training that began at the beginning of the year. Both will teach summer school in their respective locations. Yukon Flats has been working to be creative with time and resources by using school space and volunteers to implement out of school programming. Their cook, Marlayna Ransom, and cook assistant, Tamia Galvin, have volunteered to create an after-school program to help students with their work. There are also teachers and paras throughout the district who tutor at least two afternoons each week. Saturday tutoring is also available at each location. WOW!

In January, Yukon Flats’ educators (superintendent, principals, teachers, paraprofessionals) ALL attended the 2023 Alaska RTI Conference. This numbered about 30 participants, showing great commitment to school improvement. In speaking with Yukon Flats educators at the RTI Conference, their excitement and passion for their students’ education and success was evident. They attended many sessions and provided feedback to their Superintendent about their take aways and implementations.

Leader Tamika Galvin worked to compile information from colleagues across the Yukon Flats School District, as well as describe their experience taking their district educators to the 2023 RTI Conference.



“Yukon Flats School District is excited to share what’s happening in our district and how we are progressing. With great leadership throughout our district, we are driven to continue our learning so that we may stay abreast of best practices and always do what is best for our scholars. Our district is growing and dedicated to the success of every scholar. So much so, we took around 30 staff members (nearly 100% of staff) to the 2023 RTI/MTSS conference to enhance our practice and learn additional concepts that have been researched, particularly in math and reading. Amongst the learning that occurred, there were some identified changes that were immediately modified so that implementation and growth could begin. Some areas that were identified or reviewed were attendance, math, reading, and collaboration.

After returning from the conference, district leaders and their teams discussed what they learned and the takeaways. Throughout the district, attendance was one of the identified areas that needed to improve. It has been said and notably true that if children are not at school, learning is not as impactful or happening. During our heaviest COVID season, one of our principals noticed a significant academic drop in first and second graders. This increased the chances of the scholars having low performance on the standardized third-grade test. With practices in place and the use of the curriculum with fidelity, situations like this have been reduced now, as the conference confirmed that some of the practices that our district has in place are directly in line with student growth and success.

While attendance is vital to students’ academic success, many of our staff found credible information in the “Come one, come all: Building a Culture of Attendance” session with Tricia Skyles. This session was reflective for school leaders and staff which gave an urgent push to create a culture of attendance in each school after their return from the conference. This was a huge win for our district because attendance has been one of our top priorities. With our district being together and hearing the same message, our immediate actions have helped to start resolving some of our attendance issues as we move forward in the mindset of supporting scholars and families as well as identifying obstacles that could be the reason for attendance issues. To say it best, our attendance is receiving the attention and correction it needs to move our district forward as a whole.

In the same manner, we also gathered a collective vision for our math and reading curriculum, HMH. With a heavy focus on implementation and support, the conference provided resources, knowledge, and other supports that could help us ensure all scholars are on track or above. Some of the changes that were readily implemented included having better use of Paras (teacher assistants) and how their role can be better served. The conference made recommendations that many of our staff have already

begun to do. Some of the takeaways were from the Alaska Reads Act, which caused a huge focus in our PLC groups. The two priorities that are key following the conference are attendance and developing scholars' reading and math skills. Although these three areas are not unique to schools alike, they are areas that our district has strived to improve in, hence why we felt strongly about bringing our district to gain additional skills.

Now that we have settled back into our schools, we have taken a unique approach to elevate our scholars. Our scholars can feel successful by being placed in intervention classes that will support them where they are in math and reading. The recommended benchmark assessment time frame will allow staff to review the student's data and make effective changes as necessary. Like most schools, there is always a need or want for more staff; however, when we identified key people we have in our buildings that help take on the challenge of providing additional support in math and reading, or become a part of the attendance committee, we began to produce scholars that are performing on their academic level, more importantly, able to become change agents in their community, as well as globally.

We are still on fire from attending the RTI/MTSS conference and will continue to modify and enhance our practice so that all scholars can receive equitable and high-level learning. Our children are our future! The conference helped us to sharpen our tools, keep our scholars as the focus, and remember that "Together we can do all things" here at Yukon Flats School District.

As a component of the work toward school improvement, Yukon Flats School District has also been intentional about working toward understanding of and compliance with the Alaska Reads Act. Here is what District Reading Specialist, Matthew Stark, explained about this work.

"The first step in becoming compliant in the Alaska Reads Act was to make sure our core curriculum aligned with the Science of Reading. We needed to make sure we had intervention programs that were aligned to the Science of Reading and the Alaska Reading Playbook. Making sure we had a program for Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Vocabulary, Comprehension, and Fluency. These two steps helped us to make sure we follow this part of the Reads Act and District Reading Plan. I used the District Reading Plan Template provided by DEED as guidance to create the needed documents and steps for our MTSS programs to meet the requirements of the Alaska Reads Act. The first step was to outline a flowchart for the MTSS process. This allows us to make sure to hit all the timelines for testing and meeting with parents as required in the Reads Act. Next, I created all the parent letters and the

Individual Reading Intervention Plan to be used next year. I filled out the District Read Plan Template. I also meet with Susan McKenzie and Kristi Graber at DEED to go over the documents/processes and get feedback. Then the documents and process were revised. We currently have the documents out for comments by our Elementary Teachers. We chose to use mCLASS by Amplify as district screener and notified them of training dates.”

Dr. Debbe Lancaster, Superintendent of YFSD, adds that using the HMH curriculum with fidelity has been a game changer for Tier 1 core instruction. Mr. Stark also added that UFLI Foundations, Six Mix Solution, Vocabulary Surge, and Heggerty are utilized for Tier 2 interventions. Tier 3 uses 180/System 44 and Sylvian for after school tutoring.

Leader Mr. Mark B. Green, Sr. of Arctic Village School provides us a snapshot of challenges and solutions.

“On becoming the instructional leader for Arctic Village School 4 years ago, we faced several issues affecting student achievement. Faculty turnover/lack of teachers, poor student attendance, lack of parent involvement and not having a set reading and math program were major issues. These issues clearly affected student achievement across the board. Seeking qualified, motivated, and dedicated teachers that will stay a while is a challenge in Arctic Village, as well as in other village schools in Alaska. This was the first thing the District and I had to solve. We hired some incredible teachers over the initial 2 years of my tenure, who have stayed and are diligently and positively affecting student growth. Teacher stability is key in the success of students’ growth and achievement.

The next thing we tackled was our overall attendance percentage which was below 65% four years ago and we completed last year around 86%. As a team we informed the community, parents and students about our poor attendance rate and we challenged them to raise this percentage to 90%. Hence the “Show Up!” part of our motto came into being.

We provide in school activities, after school activities, even half-day of tutorial service on Saturday, parent quarterly dinners, holiday activities etc. These activities helped in getting students and parents back involved and engaged in the academic process.

Finally, we adopted HMH reading and math program throughout the district. This program helped teachers to focus on student needs and it engages. As icing on the cake, we were fortunate to be awarded a grant as a district, which we purchased a vehicle to be used as a bus to pick students up daily and the use of the SYLVAN program, which is used as our supplemental academic program during and after school.

Daily, we have a focused meeting before classes start to motivate and inform students and teachers concerning events of the day and week. This is our "Show Out!" portion of our motto kicking in. Students and teachers challenge each other to be present and do their best daily. Learning and teaching are taking place. As a result of our efforts, for the first time we had 15 students to show major growth from low average growth to exceed average growth and some even moved to high growth on the MAP assessment.

We are proud of our students and staff! Moving students to be on and exceed grade level is our focus, we are heading in the right direction.

Who are we? Warriors! What do we do? Show Up! Show Out!

