



A Community of Learners

Informational Memo: August 25, 2015 Teacher Institute Day

TO: School Board
Trisha Kocanda, *Superintendent*

FROM: Dr. Alison Hawley, *Director of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment*

September 29, 2015

Overview & Background

The August Institute Day is an essential element for creating a positive start to the school year by welcoming new and returning staff and framing the vision for the work that will be conducted over the course of the school year. This year's Opening Day theme was entitled, "*Welcome Back to Campus*" a vehicle to introduce Winnetka University, the District's professional learning system. It also provided Superintendent Kocanda with the opportunity to reflect on our progress toward the creation of a shared District vision, and to once again extend the challenge to staff to innovate by "developing new ideas and to create significant, positive change for students." It is imperative for the District to provide a forward thinking learning environment that is critical to ensuring our students are future ready.

Description of Event

The program began with the introduction of new staff members and a short video of the new members of the administrative team. Introductions were followed by a presentation given by the Winnetka University Committee, a recap of the Summer Institute conducted the previous June, and Superintendent Kocanda's address to the staff.

Superintendent Kocanda introduced the Winnetka University Committee and reinforced the importance of supporting the District's engagement in continuous professional learning, citing the "power of collaborative practice," the need to link all professional learning to classrooms, and the critical importance of utilizing student data to make instructional decisions.

In the presentation to the staff, the Winnetka University Committee unveiled its plans for the 2015-2016 school year. Course offerings will be tailored to support District goals and initiatives by tapping into existing teacher expertise and forging partnerships with outside organizations. Full implementation will require a multi-year rollout to create a comprehensive course catalogue for all content areas, however, select online courses will commence this fall. The Winnetka University Committee will put out a call for proposals in September for Spring class offerings, as well as build a course catalogue for the 2016-2017 academic year.

Superintendent Kocanda then shared a video highlighting the Winnetka Summer Institute conducted the previous June, facilitated by Grant Lichtman, a nationally recognized thought leader in design thinking and innovation. Each of the five buildings was challenged to engage in innovative problem-solving utilizing a design thinking protocol. The goal was to identify a problem that needed to be solved, or an element of practice that would benefit from a newer, more innovative approach. Elements of practice targeted for innovation included the enhanced use of Crow Island Woods for science and outdoor education, and a redesign of the Washburne cafeteria to make it a more inclusive, inviting space for students. By the end of the two-day Institute, each building had created a prototype to address the defined school-based problem or need. Each school will continue work on their designs during the 2015-2016 school year following a defined timeline, with the commitment to implement the solution by 2016-2017.

Finally, Superintendent Kocanda reaffirmed her commitment to a shared vision and highlighted the “Big Five” areas of strategic focus for the District: Kindergarten Extended Day Feasibility Study, the Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics (STEAM) pilot initiative, Winnetka University, and the Math and Reading implementations. The Big Five are strategic themes that emerged from the research Superintendent Kocanda conducted and focus groups she facilitated with a range of District and community stakeholders. Sharing a draft vision statement collaboratively written by District staff, parents, and community members, Superintendent Kocanda, spoke of her intention to return to the stakeholder groups to refine the draft vision and present to the School Board this winter.

After the short program, staff members returned to their respective buildings to engage in building-level staff meetings. Staff was sent an Opening Day evaluation survey via Survey Monkey to elicit feedback regarding their experience. Please note that we are required by the Illinois State Board of Education to ask the specific questions on the evaluation. Of the 178 respondents, 78% strongly agreed or agreed, “This activity increased my knowledge and skills in my areas of certification, endorsement, or teaching assignment;” 95% strongly agreed or agreed, “It was clear that the activity was presented

by persons with education and experience in the subject matter;" 95% strongly agreed or agreed, "The material was presented in an organized and easily understood manner;" and 65% strongly agreed or agreed, "This activity included discussion, critique, or application of what was presented, observed, learned, or demonstrated."