



School Learning Laboratory

Lincoln Elementary School Augusta Public School System

Lincoln Elementary School, one of six schools in the Augusta Public School System, has an enrollment of 240 students, 12 classroom teachers and numerous itinerant teachers who work in the building part of the time. Lincoln Elementary also houses the school system's Functional Life Skills Program K-2 and the Autism Program K-6.

The Need

The staff is a made up of half veteran (20+ years) teachers. The other half of the staff is new to the school. Several of the itinerant teachers are also new. The school principal describes the staff as a caring faculty, of each other and of the students. Teachers report that they work well together. However staff members face the challenge of finding time to get together and of identifying means for all voices to be heard. With a new teacher mentor for math, a new teacher mentor for literacy, and two new inclusion consultants there is a need for everyone to move forward from the same guiding principles.

The school needs someone to help staff discover "Who we are, how we want to be together, and what we want to do together." This is not to be seen as a new initiative, but a slowing down to refocus together to build a cohesive unit.

The Intervention

On September 27, 2005 Lincoln School chose as its SuperEd/School Learning Laboratory (SLL) project goal: "Building a Cohesive, Coherent Community with a Common Purpose, Vision, Beliefs, and Direction" and elected to work with Mary Jane McCalmon from the Maine Center for Educational Services in Auburn, ME.

PART ONE: Connecting as a professional staff. This work focused on

- o Helping the staff to build knowledge of one another professionally and personally.
- o Building understanding of the environment/context in which the school is operating – understanding the forces at work in that environment that are making their work challenging
- o Creating a learning community among staff using current research and best practice

PART TWO: Identifying our way forward. This work involved:

- o Dialogue and consensus regarding the staff vision for Lincoln in the future (our best hopes)
- o Developing a plan to move toward the preferred future based on an examination of existing structures/processes related to improvement of student achievement at Lincoln (how we do our work together)
- o Current reality of those structures (when we meet, etc)
- o Possible changes in structures/processes that would make a difference
- o Development of clear purposes for revamped structures/processes

PART THREE: Focusing in on 1-2 specific challenges for improvement. This work involved:

- o Identification of 1-2 critical areas of challenge for Lincoln School with a specific plan of action for improvement
- o Use of staff collaborations and the revamped structures/ processes to impact the critical issues



School Learning Laboratory

Lincoln Elementary School
Augusta Public School System
 (continued)

Noticeable Results

SLL Facilitator collected data about the project from conversations with the service provider, Mary Jane McCalmon, from a reflective meeting with the Lincoln staff on May 2006 and from an interview with Principal Enga Stewart.

School staff described the project with these words: meandering, communicative, thought provoking, perspective, finally, collaboration, long, investigative, insightful, a grant, a plan, and ideas.

Although Lincoln teachers felt they had always been friendly (sharing special meals together and celebrating big events in lives of staff members), many spoke about the changes that took place during the SLL project.

“We are friendly and more familiar. We are trying to get together more and share thoughts.”

“We were scattered because we were all so busy focusing on our own jobs that we didn’t take the time to get to know each other. Now we are more collaborative. We take the time to get to know each other and to work more closely with each other.”

“Now we are more like a family. We have vented, communicated, shared feelings, and worked together.”

“Now we are more of a team. We have established common vision, needs, and goals.”

Learnings

The learnings cluster around implementing and systemic work. The contracting was clear.

Implementing	Systemic Work
A clear plan produces clear results “We now have more staff development time for teachers’ needs.” “We will spend more meetings focused on building needs.”	Building a community in which members know each other, have a common vision, and can work together to solve problems takes time. “Maybe the process could be streamlined a little.” “Specialists pick up students to save classroom teachers time.”
Teachers felt empowered through looking at their needs, narrowing the focus, and developing a plan for use of release time. “We can change what we do, if we can agree on the changes.” “We know our kids, who we are, and what we need.”	Schools do not have large chunks of time to do work together. “We learned that time is our most precious resource.” “The infrequent meeting time to keep all parts connected was an obstacle.”
	Schools need support to slow down and reflect about what is important and how to collectively get where they are going. “The facilitation helped in mixing groups of staff, honoring input, turning the negative around, and in problem solving.”

The reflective staff meeting became the closure meeting because staff members were feeling the pressure of ending a school year. This statement from a Lincoln School staff member captures final thoughts about the work, “This project set us on our journey. Hopefully we will see the results next year.” of the impact on teaching and learning.