



# School Learning Laboratory

## MSAD#44

**Crescent Park Elementary School – Bethel, ME**

**Woodstock Elementary School – Bryant Pond, ME**

**Andover Elementary School – Andover, ME**

SAD #44 is located in western Maine and operates five schools and serves an equal number of rural communities in Oxford County. The district's three elementary schools engaged in the SuperEd/School Learning Laboratory were: Andover Elementary School, a K-5 school with 51 students; Woodstock School, a K-5 school with 104 students; and Crescent Park School, a K-5 school with 322 students.

### **The Need**

On March 18, 2004 the SAD#44 SLL Team met and agreed upon the following need: "To Build a Replicable Professional Development (PD) Model for K-5". The district allots one day per year for professional development, so finding additional time within the school year and using it creatively was a serious design challenge. After two chartering meetings the team decided to use Math as the content for this work. Teachers indicated that they felt comfortable with instructing reading content but much less prepared for teaching math. They were "hungry" for a math workshop to "learn the language of math." MSAD#44 contracted with SuperEd Member, the Maine Mathematics and Science Alliance (MMSA), to provide services.

At the third chartering meeting new people from SLL and the district were involved for the final action planning stage. These people would play key roles in subsequent phases of the project beginning with implementation in the fall: the new curriculum coordinator, chair of the math curriculum committee, a new SLL facilitator, and the MMSA math consultant. During the summer, administration changed at Crescent Park School with a new building principal hired at the end of July.

### **The Intervention**

Since assessment was a district focus, the team agreed to work with local math assessments as a vehicle of looking deeper into the teaching of related math concepts, hoping that this would stimulate teachers' interest and knowledge acquisition. Teachers were released from their classrooms in teams of combined grade levels (K-1, 2-3, and 4-5).

#### **Kick-off Meeting with Staff- August 31, 2004**

The format of this session changed dramatically due to a misunderstanding and lack of communication among the planners. The math consultant was not available to design and facilitate a half-day workshop, so the curriculum coordinator and SLL facilitator gave a brief overview of the project.

#### **First Session- November 16, 2004**

The MMSA math consultant met with fourth and fifth grade teachers. Informal data offered after the workshop suggested the process and results did not match the desired outcomes of the SLL Project. A mid-year review was held to determine what was working or not working and what changes should be made. As a result of this meeting, the SAD#44 SLL Team decided to ask the consultant to focus more on the teaching (instruction) of math concepts and less on math assessment.

#### **Second Session-January 27, 2005**

On this day, the math consultant met with the second and third grade teachers. The process was somewhat more aligned and teachers walked away with more confidence and practical ideas. The consultant also highlighted the practice of giving more opportunities for students to demonstrate on district assessments what they know and can do.

#### **Third Session-March 2, 2005**

The third session, to be held for kindergarten and grade one teachers, was cancelled due to a storm warning. The workshop was rescheduled for April 26. This date was also cancelled due to the high staff absence rate. The math



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consultant offered a September date, but before a commitment was made, the date was rescinded and different date proposed.

On September 2, 2005 SAD#44 terminated the MMSA contract.

### Noticeable Results and Learnings

Data about the project was collected from a focus group of eight teachers who had met with the math consultant. Additional data was collected in September 2005 during interviews with two administrators and the MMSA consultant. The data collected confirmed confusion from the beginning about the goal of the project, why it was being undertaken, and who was leading the work. The SLL Team met to reflect on this data at the end of the month.

While the process was turbulent and fraught with misunderstanding, the SLL Team was able to identify a set of important learnings about working with external service providers. These fell within three broad categories below:

Contracting	Implementing	Systemic Work
When designing a project, be clear about what is needed/wanted.	This was not a priority on the list of all we had to do in our schools.	There needs to be a clear leader or key person in charge
Be clear in communicating to staff and consultant/service provider what the expectations are. Our contracting was not clear.	Beginnings are critical and all staff members need information about the purpose and the expectations.	This was not a project, just three days of a consultant coming in with no other follow-up.
In the contracting phase, all key people need to be involved - the math coordinator entered at the last contracting meeting.	The project actually mirrored the confusing year for us, with new administrators, new staff, transitions, and all the assessment frenzy.	The members of the team need to be consistent and need to stay connected throughout.
		There was no process for collecting data from grade levels or schools in between meetings with the consultant.
		The structure of having a content expert facilitating workshops for small groups of teachers with released time does work, if additional follow-up is planned internally.

All agreed the closure meeting was very beneficial and that the team members would carry these learnings into other initiatives. The team planned to continue meeting and look for funds to keep this fledgling professional development model going.