

PDS Study Group Inquiry Project Proposal Central Middle School of Science, Anchorage School District

Focus of Inquiry

Central Middle School is in our third year of being a Professional Development School. Collegial conversations and our three prior study groups have helped us build a vibrant collegial relationship and atmosphere, and helped us toward developing a common purpose and language to talk about teaching and learning. Last year six teachers participated in a study group on Brain research that was funded using the discretionary PDS funds provided by APTE. These funds were also used to send two teachers who led the study group to the national Brain Research Conference. At the school's inservice at the beginning of this year the teachers from the study group presented to the staff on their learning and implementation projects from that study group. The session was well received and comments from the staff indicated that it was one of the best professional development sessions the school had ever conducted. This year when the PDS Leadership Team administered a Study Group Interest Survey the results indicated that continued study of Brain Research was of great interest for a number of teachers. We are excited by the high interest level of this topic and the opportunity another study group would offer to continue and expand our inquiry into brain research. The study group would focus on the following questions:

1. What does brain research suggest about teaching middle school students?
2. How can I (we) teach with "the brain in mind?"

Relationship of Inquiry to School Improvement

Central Middle School has a PDS Leadership Team that helps guide and inform school improvement. This team includes the principal, assistant principal, university faculty-in-residence, the school/university liaison, and 14 teachers—seven of whom are current or past mentor teachers and all of whom have completed or are completing the university sponsored professional development course on mentoring. At the end of last school year, the planning team developed an improvement plan including professional development ideas for the school. Focus areas this year include literacy, specifically the use of CRISS strategies and a grant supported professional development strand on CALLA, infusing of technology into CORE areas, and enhanced use of "best practices" in teaching in order to improve learning for all students.

As noted, the topic of this proposed study group is directly related to the valuable learning that occurred in a previous study group. Many of the teachers from that group, as well as teachers new to the topic, want to explore the implications of brain research for developing 'best practices' and enhancing learning for all students. Further, we want to use this study group to continue infusing a peer coaching structure with teacher inquiry in order to support implementation. The study group will provide the participating teachers an opportunity to further develop expertise in translating research into practice and to continue to foster our school-based collegiality, critical reflection, and shared vision of practice. Further, by continuing to incorporate the peer coaching structure this group will be able to share the benefits and challenges of this type of professional development with their colleagues. At the end of the year, the study group will report the lessons learned from their inquiry to the rest of the faculty. This will include issues of peer coaching as a model for professional development.

Plan of Inquiry

The purpose of our study group is to examine issues of brain research and support each other in implementing strategies derived from this research in classrooms. To do this, members will engage in regular dialogue about shared readings on the topic, collaborate on lesson development and classroom management strategies using brain research, provide collegial feedback, and engage in shared reflection on implementation. The group will begin in January and set a meeting schedule to facilitate approximately 15 hours of professional development time. Between meetings of the study group, participants will complete the readings, engage in peer coaching sessions, and collect artifacts from their practice. At the sessions, teachers will discuss the readings, share their lessons or other implementation

