One Team. One Mission. One Rock Hill.

TEACHER LISTEN & LEARN

NOVEMBER 16, 2018
CENTRAL OFFICE

ROCK HILL
Schools

Dear Rock Hill Team,

As you enjoy time away from your classrooms this week to be with friends and family for the Thanksgiving holiday, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Rock Hill Schools employees for the work you do each and every day to benefit students in our community. It has been a joy to observe the level of student engagement during my visits to each school, and I continue to be impressed by the outstanding educators in our school district. Over the next few weeks, I will be visiting all schools and look forward to the opportunity to meet with you and say thank you for your commitment to improving all students in our district.

Our Focus Five for the 2018-19 year will serve as the foundation for our work, and will be embedded into our continuous improvement efforts, our Strategic Plan, and our district's AdvancED accreditation.

Rock Hill's Focus Five
Safety & Security
Recruitment & Retention
Student Achievement
Organizational Culture & Effectiveness
Communication with All Stakeholders

Aligned with the focus on communication and as an essential part of my entry plan as superintendent, I am hosting monthly Listen & Learn sessions with teachers representing each school in our district. We have held three sessions, and I have enjoyed being able to hear from our teachers about successes and areas for continued growth for our district, as well as share important information about what is taking place across our district. In our third session earlier this month, we focused on exceptional student education and worked with teachers to develop strategies to address questions and concerns. Responses to their questions can be found on the following pages. These responses are not all-inclusive, and we would certainly welcome the opportunity to further discuss these questions and other relevant topics in more detail within specific levels and school settings.

Our schools and district will benefit from this open dialog regarding the needs that exist for our students, staff, and organization overall. District leaders and I look forward to continuing this Listen & Learn series each month throughout the year, meeting with representatives chosen by the principals of each school. Please continue to submit questions to your school's representatives. Our next Teacher Listen and Learn session with teachers will take place on Friday, December 14 with questions due to your teacher representative by Friday, December 7.

Working together as One Team on One Mission for One Rock Hill, we will move our district forward to be the best in our state!

Sincerely,
Bill Cook

In our district we have an autism program at middle and high school levels. In every school, there are students with autism that need more services and support than can be provided by resource teachers alone. We need an elementary autism program again. We had a program for many years that was very effective, can we look at creating a program again at the elementary level for the autism students that no longer have direct ASD support from ASD itinerant teachers or assistants?

There are a variety of options for our students with autism spectrum disorders. For the most part, our students with ASD have average or above average intelligence and must be immersed in the general education curriculum. It is no longer the responsibility of one ESE teacher, as in the past, to offer "ASD" services. It is now the responsibility of everyone that works with our children with ASD (as well as all other categories under IDEA) to learn strategies and interventions to assist our children with ASD to access the general curriculum with accommodations and supports. We do have a middle school program and high school program, Learning Connections, that will serve students with ASD that also exhibit high anxiety, depression and other "co-morbid" diagnosis that are successful in the general education classroom with supports from a "flipped-model" program. This type of program can be looked at in the elementary level as well. Our Behavior Management Assistants are also receiving training in strategies and interventions to work effectively with our students that exhibit unique behaviors that may impact the learning process. These strategies should also be taught to general education and special education staff, including administrators at the building level.

What are we doing to make sure that we are retaining special education teachers? How can we ensure they have the supports they need so that they may properly address the needs of students (social, emotional, behavioral and academic)?

The special education staff, including ESE Teachers, teacher assistants, school psychologists, speech pathologists, OT's, PT's, etc. are vital educators offering support and direct instruction for our students with disabilities. To start, ESE provides monthly training in areas of compliance, assistive technology, specialized reading programs such as Lindamood-Bell and IReady Math programs as well as monthly PLC's to work with their colleagues working in similar areas of instruction. This year, the ESE Department has an added layer of supports for ESE teachers as well as general education teachers that involved ESE Itinerant staff assigned to specific schools. Behavior Management Assistants are assigned to every elementary school, including CCDC, to assist all staff with students in crisis. ESE Teachers that have students with disabilities with significant and multiple challenges have an ESE itinerant specialist that works specifically with the UNIQUE Pathways 1,2 & 3 Programming, students and is able to observe in the classrooms to recommend strategies useful for this challenging population. This year, 2018-2019, every Unique Pathways classroom has at least 2 teacher assistants. This addition of an extra teacher assistant was done to provide additional support to these classes.

Why are there disproportionate class size numbers...same grade at one school has 18 and another has 27?

Schools are given teacher positions based on enrollment using the district class size ratios. Individual principals can make decisions on how to use those positions to best meet the needs to their building. I encourage you to speak to your principal to better understand their reasoning behind the class size numbers in your school.

When will the district get upgrades to the Front Row systems? Most of our school mics will not recharge because the cords are bad, but cannot be replaced because they are outdated systems.

We will order replacement mics; please enter a tech request to request a replacement.

Why are teachers not allowed to give grammar grades within student writing grades? They will be assessed on SC Ready, so why can we not have one grammar grade per quarter?

The decision was made that the writing grade should represent the student as a writer.
It was decided that assignments which graded isolated writing components (introductions, conclusions, organization, elaboration, grammar, conventions, etc.) would be put in the Formative Grade Book, and authentic pieces of completed writing would be reported in the Summative Grade Book. These could include on-demand performance assessments or final drafts of writing completed over time during writing workshop. Here is a link to a video created by the District Literacy Coaches to help explain the rationale behind the decision https://vimeo.com/248350997. In addition, it is important to note that this video was shared during a Monthly Literacy Coaches' meeting last year to help facilitate conversations at the school level. Please touch base with your school level Literacy Coach for additional information as needed.

What are the next steps in ensuring that special education resource classrooms have the technology needed to support student learning? We have an online program called iReady this year that every student is supposed to be using for certain time frames out of each week. In order to do that effectively having enough technology is important but many teachers in the district are having difficulties in obtaining the technology needed or enough technology in general to accommodate for their groupings. Special education resource teachers should be allocated a certain number of tablets to use at their discretion within their academic groups as well as for this program specifically without having to figure out how to borrow technology from within their school.

Dr. Turner and Mr. John James are working together to identify the schools and grade levels that will need specific tablets that work best with the iReady Program.

What is being done about sub shortages?

Recruiting and retaining our subs is just as important as recruiting and retaining our other employees. Kelly has classes every week to train and onboard new subs. They also follow up on every resume and referral submitted. Kelly runs a continuous ad online, and rotates a supplemental monthly ad in the local papers. As an incentive, Kelly pays a $75 referral fee and they also have other incentives that allow subs to enter into a $500 drawing periodically during the year. If you know of a person that would be a good sub, please have them to contact the personnel office or Kelly services directly.

As a district do we feel PLCs are effective in the way they are being used in Rock Hill Schools? Is there room for growth in how we run PLCs in our district?

The PLC philosophy is one that our district promotes and supports; however, the actual implementation of the PLC model which includes management, expectations, structure, etc. is executed on a school level. Naturally, some Collaborative Teams are more effective in certain areas than others; this varies from school to school and from team to team. The teams and their school leaders should be able to assess and address the strengths and weaknesses of each team and of the school as a PLC while accessing district resources and support. Of course, there is room for growth in this area, and suggestions for how to do so are always appreciated.

This year classrooms in our school are not being cleaned regularly. Each morning, teachers come in to floors that have not been swept and sometimes trash left in the trash cans overnight or over the weekend. Desks are not being cleaned regularly either. I know there has been turn over with the cleaning service group, but what can be done to ensure our buildings are clean? If buildings are not clean, we are increasing the risk for sickness among both students and staff, thus leading to the need of more substitutes in the building and less instructional time for students.

The district is working closely with district custodians as well as our contracted custodians to make sure that our buildings are clean. Recently, the Budd Group has a new night lead at SPHS and are in the process of hiring new employees while offering a higher hourly wage. When staff has concerns about cleaning, please enter a work order so we can track your concerns.

Technology is a big deal for our schools. With the increase in devices for our students has come a decrease in the copies allowed for teacher use. The problem is often student devices do not work properly, even after being "fixed" in our laptop shops. Then teachers are forced to provide last minute copies to students that do not have access online, thus causing a loss of instructional time and a loss of needed copies. What can we do to make sure that student devices are working properly more often?

We have seen instances where laptops will exhibit an issue but our repair company (Riverside Technology) can't duplicate the issue. The teacher should submit a tech request stating the issue that the student is having so that the tech can follow up on the issue. If the teacher feels that the issue is not getting the attention that it deserves, the teacher should contact Keith Faircloth (kfaircloth@rhmail.org) in the Technology Department to get it resolved.

On that same note, the WiFi seems to be very inconsistent so when teachers plan lessons and upload material to Canvas for student access, we often last minute find that the wifi is not working and have to quickly adjust our lesson or make copies of materials for students. What is the district doing to ensure the wifi allows for consistent access for our students and teachers?

Laptops will try to hang on to their connection to a wireless access point even if there is one much closer. This can cause the data traffic to be inconsistent. Turning off the Wifi connection on the laptop and then back on can resolve this particular issue. If that does not correct the problem, have the school tech visit the classroom in order to document the details (such as how many laptops are having the issue, are there students in surrounding classrooms having the same problem, do the devices connected to the network via a ethernet cable experiencing sluggishness with the Internet). Being able to examine the glitch while it is happening helps to determine what the culprit is. Causes range from an issue with the access point, an excess of network traffic at the school, Comporium problem, etc.)

Also, addressing the need for copies. Students like having paper to write on for tests and quizzes, especially in the math classroom. I realize that teachers have access to the district print shop, but as of late there have been requirements for the amount of copies that can be sent there. What is that requirement? Also, best practice states that teachers should be able to monitor and adjust lessons, quizzes, and tests based on student need. Not to mention, trying to provide the necessary materials for RTI lessons within our classrooms. If teachers must send items to be printed to the Print Shop 5 days ahead of time to ensure they are back on time, how are teachers able to monitor and adjust based on student need?

While one-to-one technology used in our Modern Learning Environment typically means less reliance on paper, we recognize that the need for copies remains. Our goal is to fully support all teachers with materials needed. Use of the Print Center is encouraged for larger print jobs because of better quality and reduced cost. New, higher resolution machines at our Operations Print Center produce a better image at one third the cost of school-based multi-function devices (MFD's). There is no mandatory minimum number of pages to order from the Print Center. For your convenience, and our responsiveness to you, we do suggest a minimum order size of 30 pages. To control cost and preserve our MFD fleet, we also strongly recommend using the Print Center for all orders over 100 pages. No order for the Print Center, however, will be rejected. This year our Print Center has an improved digital storefront for ordering copies, and a dedicated delivery service which allows orders to be filled and delivered to you in less than two days. "Rush" jobs (determined by the teacher) can be fulfilled on the same day if ordered before 9:30 am (otherwise, next day). In cases of "near-real-time" changes to certain worksheets based on monitored need, the use of the school-based MFD's (with instant turn-around) is recommended. As we continue to pursue the digital transformation, adjustment of lessons, quizzes and tests can be done online and in real-time, with no added cost for copies.

With unfilled positions for teachers and more absences among teachers for both personal reasons and professional development, we are seeing a lack of substitutes to fill in for our teachers. Teachers are being asked to fill in for these absences during our planning periods. For September and October, a large number of teachers noted that they had planning interruptions virtually every week to fill sub positions. That combined with our regular duties to attend IEP meetings and PD, has left many teachers with an inadequate amount of planning time, leading to teachers not being prepared to their best for instructional time. ON top of all that, there appears to be a financial incentive for the district and school to continue calling on us in this way – not that they consciously do that, but there is an apparent conflict. Does the district have a plan for dealing with this in the future? Can teachers be paid for their time "subbing" since we now have to spend our time outside of school doing our planning?

We are monitoring our substitute fill rate and recognize that their have been some challenges filling all of our vacancies. We are working with Kelly services to recruit and retain more substitutes.   The district does not benefit any financial gain for using teachers when substitutes are not available. At this time, there are no plans to pay teachers for subbing during their planning periods. We will continue monitor this situation.

My coworkers currently wonder if there will be a time where the district may readdress the number of students to teacher ratio?

 The current ratios used by the district are under the state required ratios. At this time, there are no plans to readdress our teacher student ratio.

When will rezoning be addressed?

Whether or not a district conducts rezoning is a decision made by the school board. A need to rezone would have to be identified such as a school being over capacity, or a need to populate a new school. At this time there is not a plan to rezone.

More and more of my "resource" students are low in all academic areas and generally, do not have a specific learning disability. My students are not "typical" resource students. When they come to me they are so far behind but not cognitively low enough to be served in a self-contained setting.What is your plan to implement a district-wide RTI system so that we can begin to fill gaps starting in Kindergarten? I think it would be beneficial for all the general education teachers in the district to have simple progress monitoring tools and interventions that are the same across schools. When implemented properly, we could prevent the over-identification of students that qualify for special education services through a resource setting, and save resource for students that didn't just miss concepts in the general education classroom but truly have a specific learning disability.

Our system is working right now to expand RTI efforts by making sure we consider a universal screening process and look at supporting the tiers of instruction in a more robust approach. In addition, we are working with the state of South Carolina to be identified as a district that will implement Multi-Tier Systems of Support, which is an instructional framework that includes universal screening of all students, multiple tiers of instruction and support services, and an integrated data collection and assessment system to inform decisions at each tier of instruction. We recognize the need to offer this support for all classrooms.

Caseloads for Resource are steadily increasing. It's difficult to effectively serve each student. What are the requirements for a school to receive additional ESE staff or increase a part-time ESE teacher's hours?

The state of South Carolina uses a straight "headcount" approach to assigning caseloads to our ESE Resource teachers. The caseload is 33 students to one special education /resource teacher. There are different headcount caseload numbers for a variety of self-contained classes. However, if there are more than one teacher assistant in the self-contained classes, the amount of students can almost double.   In Rock Hill Schools, for our resource teachers and their caseloads, we use a formula that incorporates both straight headcount and the total number of service minutes of the schools resource students to determine the number of ESE teachers required at each elementary school. That is why one school could have 1 ESE Teacher serving 28 ESE students with very low service minutes (include consultative services) and another elementary school with 28 resource students that have close to 3 hours per each student, each day, which may require 1.5 ESE Resource teachers. Dr. Turner, Mr. Kosko and Dr. Campbell review the numbers throughout the school year, specifically in August (before school starts), at the 45th day, and in January of the second semester. As students transfer in, exit the school system and move from school to school, the ESE Office staff will alert Dr. Turner and Mr. Kosko if there are significant changes in caseload at each school.

As the PBIS initiative continues, what training will be provided to help scaffold our individual schools as they continue this journey?

Since 2016, PBIS training has been provided during the summer, for a District-wide day of training for each school and their PBIS teams. During the school year, there are quarterly trainings for the PBIS school chairperson and other PBIS team members. The PBIS school chairperson and the PBIS teams have had the charge to bring new strategies, recommended interventions and other ideas on incentives and reinforcers for students and staff throughout the school year. There are a variety of websites (PBIS.org) to assist the team such as well as other staff members. PBIS school teams should be meeting throughout the month, some weekly, others once a month to review the schools' discipline data on Tableau (updated monthly) along with student attendance and academic data to determine who will need support. This data should be shared with faculty and staff to determine what changes. Other assessment methods the school should utilize is the Team Implementation Checklist. There should be a celebration of success as well as time to solicit feedback for areas in need of improvement. This is done through the School Assessment Survey, that the PBIS team will send out in a few weeks. Dr. Turner is always available to come out and meet with the PBIS team to offer training as well as the entire school staff. The next PBIS Chairperson's training is December 13, 2018.

We have identified kids who are bullying others. We have worked with them, provided mentors and other support, and followed school discipline procedures, etc, but their hateful, disrespectful words and actions continue to upset peers, and subsequently disrupt classroom learning. Are there any motivational speakers, doctors, counselors or therapists that are experts in this area who can work with these students? Or perhaps they can arm staff with more effective ways to deal with the bullies?

Part of the underlying problems are rooted in mental health issues of our students. The ACE's training, 321 Insights online programs, various book studies and PBIS work together to arm the staff with more effective ways to deal with bullies and other significant behavior challenges.

How can we retain special education teachers, who want to spend more time with students and building relationships? I am concerned about caseloads versus workload. We seem to be looking more at the raw number of students rather than student needs and service minutes. There is not enough time during the contracted workday to complete required paperwork, accountability measures, and billing Medicaid. What if we were able to calculate service minutes the same way as speech does, by the month, which would leave us with days to do paperwork.

Currently we do use a staffing formula for special education teacher that looks at the workload and not the simply the caseload. Our formula takes into account service minutes for each child rather than a head count. Federal/state paperwork, accountability measures, and billing medicaid are part of the general responsibilities for all special education staff. Although calculation for services minutes can vary, the documentation would have to vary when not following the school's schedule. This, in turn, creates additional paperwork.

How can ESE support our new special education teachers? We have more 'professional development' about logistics of programs and resources than about best teaching practices for students.

Starting in the 2017-2018 school year, ESE trained and implemented a scientifically-based reading methodology (Lindamood-Bell). In 2018-2019, expansion of Lindamood -Bell and introduction of IReady Math continued the focus on professional development about best teaching practices for students.

As a middle level Language Arts teacher, I am struggling to make the workshop model work in a 65 minute class period. I know some districts have 90 minute blocks for math and ELA or have ELA divided into two classes (a reading class and an ELA class). Is that something we could consider in the middle schools?

We appreciate your focus on the workshop model and encourage you to keep using it to engage student thinking and quality skill development. With implementation of Read to Succeed in 2014, the district actually increased middle school core time from the former minimum of 60 minutes. At this point we have not discussed implementing the block schedule in middle schools, but we understand it is not necessarily ideal to have less than 90 minutes for workshop. That said, it is possible and we also need to keep in mind that all components of the workshop model do not have to occur in one day's instruction. Teachers may certainly plan for the model in 2-day lessons or over a week's time. The key to the workshop model is to plan intentionally for it. This means knowing the learning targets for the unit of study and mapping out lessons using a calendar so that everyday is meaningful. It sounds as though you are on the right track.

Is there consideration of bringing back late start days to allow for teachers to have adequate time to work not only in PLCs, but also in vertical teams?

A survey developed to gather input for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school year calendars addresses this exact question. While no change will be implemented for the 2019-2020 school year, we are actively evaluating the possibility of included late start of early release days as part of future calendars.

What is iReady and will it be provided to secondary schools for students to access?

iReady is an adaptive diagnostic assessment that pinpoints students needs down to the sub-skill level. IReady is administered to students that scored below a below standard Reading and/or Math EOG and to students without current testing data. iReady Diagnostic has been determined as one way we may enhance core instruction and provide intervention supports to close gaps for students. IReady provides detailed reports that pinpoint student abilities and areas of need down to the sub-skill level. Reports assist the teacher in creating a detailed action plan for differentiating instruction to best meet the needs of each student. Currently, the school system is piloting this in elementary. Future implementation will be based upon the data collected in the pilot.

What measures are being taken to recruit new teachers and to maintain current teachers?

The district is continuously evaluating our recruitment and retention plan. One of the strategies implemented last year for teacher retention was our Learning to Rock orientation for all new certified teachers in the district.   We hired an additional .5 teacher support specialist to support our first year teachers in addition to assigning each first year teacher a mentor.

Last year, we administered our first job satisfaction survey.   Data from that survey will be used to guide school and district leaders in retention efforts. Each school has been asked to consider having a retention and recruitment team that will work all year on school specific retention and recruitment strategies. If you are interested on serving on that team, please let your administrator know. Dr. Campbell also has a district retention and recruitment committee if you have interested or have suggestions for that team, please reach out to her.

Why does everyone in the school have a laptop except for teacher assistants? Every child in the school has one, even the special education students. We are all expected to keep up with school emails and do our safe school training yet the district doesn't make it easy on us to do that. We either have to do the test on our own personal phones or wait until we get home. When the teacher is out of the classroom we have no way of checking on what may be going on in our school or the district. Why are the teacher assistants not valued when it comes to this?

Teacher assistants are greatly valued. This is a budgeting issue, and if funds are available that all teacher assistants in the district can be provided with a laptop, then this will be considered. This question does bring some valid concerns regarding district expectations and access to technology devices. This will be discussed.

What can we do to improve student placements? There are many students who are in the ESE program that do not have the most appropriate setting, but what they truly need is not really available.

It is important to remember that special education is not a place. Many schools are looking at creative options, sharing minutes for serving students, using multiple "places" in the school to offer appropriate services in light of their unique circumstances. All schools can offer FAPE in the least restrictive environment.

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When do teachers get work days (every teacher day is filled with meetings)?

There are five work days built into the calendar. These days are for school level work or individual teacher work. How the days are scheduled/used is determined by the building level administrator.

What is the policy on administrators attending field trips?

Administrators may attend field trips as an additional chaperone, however, one administrator should remain on campus if the other is attending a field study.

How are the parent/ student inventory surveys looking?

We have met our goal of at least 20% of parents participating and at least 40% of students participating. Also, we have at least 58-60% of staff responding, which is a good rate. Schools and the district are currently analyzing the data.

NEXT TEACHER LISTEN & LEARN FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14

SUBMIT QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS TO YOUR SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVE

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