**How After School can Support Common Core Implementation - April 26, 2016**

Presenters:

Dr. Kenneth Anthony, *Director of Professional Development and Research*

Michelle Doucette Cunningham, *Executive Director Connecticut After-School Network*

Todd Verdi*, Principal Slade Middle School New Britain*

Jon Romeo, *Macdonough Elementary School Middletown*

The Connecticut After-School Network is a private non-profit organization, one of 50 in United States. The Network provides support and training to after school programs (from small Mom & Pop programs to entire district programs). The Network is 27 years old.

Ken began the presentation with a description of his role, which includes research into school-after school alignment i.e., building complementary systems. The focus is on what students need and best practices such as linking after school with the common core

* He discussed four areas of student need through after-school programs: attendance/behavioral outcomes, social/emotional outcomes, social engagement, and academic outcomes/alignment. They are exploring tools that schools are currently using for social/emotional outcomes which might also be valuable in the after school program.
* From a meta-analysis of after school programs, the research shows that sequenced, active, focused, explicit programs (acronym SAFE) have better outcomes in attendance, behavior, and coursework. If a program is high quality (SAFE), it results in positive outcomes even if the after-school program is not explicitly looking at academics. There is a strong difference in social and emotional outcomes between schools with SAFE elements and those without. Students who attend SAFE programs, over a two-year period, demonstrated greater student engagement, better work habits, task persistence, and improved attendance.
* After school programs impact academic outcomes in direct relationship to the frequency of attendance. When elementary and middle school students attend after school programs at least four days a week, the achievement gap is narrowed within three years and eliminated after five years. This speaks to the need to build long term relationships, which keeps students coming back
* The partnership between the school and the after school program is an essential element for success. Joint professional development between both programs, centered around academics and behavior management, is essential to promote alignment. Researcher Tracey Bennett found an increase in test scores on standardized testing where programs reported alignment (e.g., deeper conversations around standards and sense of partnership) in a study with a large sample size. A strong partnership helps programs to address misalignment, informal structures and opportunities, administrative support, program elements, and barriers. It also builds confidence and trust between the teachers and the after-school staff.
* A study by the Harvard Research Project of family engagement shows that higher student participation in after-school programs occur when families are involved. This points to the need to continue to find meaningful ways to involve families to foster greater connectedness to the school.
* The connection between after school programs and implementation of the common core is an area currently receiving attention. When teachers form a partnership with after school staff, the result is that after school programs can use their strengths (e.g. inquiry-based activities, project-based learning) to better align with school academics. This offers "stealth learning" opportunities of the common core. The presenters recommended the *Literacy Strategies Guidebook*, which is available for download) on the Network web site. They suggest that after school staff ask teachers what they are currently working on. They pointed to the New Britain summer program in speaking and listening as an excellent example of this approach.
* Principals have an important role in building a culture and climate that welcomes after school a part of their community. Lanya Samuelson describes the principal as visionary, liaison and supporter of the after school program. Principal connectedness makes a difference to the quality of the program. Simply extending the school day has not proven to be effective. Principals can make or break the perception of the school staff with teachers and staff.

Michelle introduced principals Jon Romeo and Todd Verdi and asked them to describe how they have implemented programs at their respective schools. Jon Romeo spoke about his program at Macdonough School in Middletown. A high percentage of the approximately 200 students at Macdonough School is impacted by poverty. His program has a Program Coordinator with whom he has daily contact. The Program Coordinator has daily contact with the staff through her work with students during recess. School interventionists fill a number of roles in the after school program. At Macdonough, the after-school program supports student learning by building background knowledge and providing homework support. Wesleyan University offers another strong component: college students help with science experiments or playing sports during recess. Macdonough School has opened up funding possibilities by co-writing grant applications with the Middlesex YMCA, which provides funding for its after school program.

Todd Verdi spoke about his program at Slade Middle School in New Britain. Of the 800 students, 100% meet poverty guidelines. Todd is working to create a compatible system for the after school program. Currently the program consists of sports inter-murals, intramurals and enrichment. There is staff buy-in but lacks a clear understanding between the school and the supporting organizations. He is working on building compatibility between the programs and the school’s academics by fostering understanding of the frameworks. After school programming includes sports, enrichment, academics but he is questioning, “What about college and career readiness?” The overall scope of the program and the outcomes will become the conversation this year. His goal is to get the after school program staff into the school. Co-writing the grants with the community agencies is a future step. It is important to help get the organizations involved in the daily structure of the school. Todd is looking into establishing off-campus sites, near low-income housing, to house satellite programs. This would enable the programs to teach families the skills to help their students. He wants to provide dinner at the sites as he already is at the school.

Michele responded to a number of questions from participants:

* In response to a question about funding, Michele discussed the role of the Network. Michele stated that one of the roles of the Network is to get funding from the state and private funding. Michele also stated that parent fees are also a source of funding. One of the roles of the Network is to advocate for funding from the state.
* Regarding training opportunities, Michele shared that training is nominal ($50 per person for membership to Network, with discounts for training) from the Connecticut After School Network. There are several modes of professional development, such as academic, social/emotional, etc. Ken describes their organization as primarily a training network and referred participants to the Network website for a list 70-80 offerings. CLASP (Coaching and Learning for Afterschool Professionals) offers four sessions on intentional programming. There are cohorts for specific areas of interest and speakers from their national organization for leadership development. The Network offers one-time consultation to assist programs. Support can include facilitating a conversation between partners or systems work. An assessment tool is available to evaluate the components.
* In response to a question about the tools for assessing after school programs, Todd mentioned that New Britain is integrating A+ System (also called After School 21) with Power School to monitor progress. Michele mentioned that use of the After School 21 is a requirement of the Connecticut grant. The APT tool is a qualitative self-assessment measure with a pre and post components. Todd uses the BESS assessment for social emotional learning as a universal screen and for monitoring. He administers a separate after school survey derived from the Safes Schools Climate plan.
* Ken and Michele recommended two books, *The Principal's Guide to After School Programs* and *Expanding Minds and Opportunities*: *Leveraging the Power of After School Programs* (about $20).