

Introduction

Between April 4th and 5th, 2012, a group of AISD teacher leaders participated in a virtual dialogue with the Superintendent and other central office administrators. The Net-Talk is an online forum in which participants can voice their opinions through submitting an idea, voting on existing ideas (“vote up” if they support the idea or “vote down” if they don’t), or adding comments under each idea¹. This year’s staff Net-Talk focused on three overarching topics: 1) professional development, 2) SchoolNet, and 3) campus climate survey. The content of all ideas and comments was reviewed, and results for the most popular ones (i.e., ideas that received the most comments) were analyzed. The following report presents a summary of the most popular topics.

Table 1. Total number of votes and comments received within each topic

	Total Votes	Vote Up	Vote Down	Comments
Professional Development	67	65	2	87
SchoolNet	14	11	3	26
Campus climate survey	17	17	0	11

Professional Development

The most discussed topic in the 2011-2012 staff Net-Talk was professional development. Various ideas and comments relevant to professional development (PD) in AISD were submitted by teachers and central office administrators. Table 2 presents the most commonly discussed PD ideas in terms of number of comments received.

Table 2. Number of votes and comments for the most popular professional development ideas

	Total Votes	Vote Up	Vote Down	Comments
<i>Most commonly discussed ideas</i>				
PD targeted towards the needs of each campus.	9	8	1	15
Best time for PD	1	1	0	13
PD focused on how a learning brain works	7	7	0	11
Online PD experience	0	0	0	11
Pinterest and Professional Development	17	16	1	9

PD targeted towards the needs of each campus

As one teacher suggested, while district-wide professional development has been valuable, differentiated PD based on each campus’ needs would be more meaningful, timely, and useful. This idea received plenty of support and numerous teachers also pointed out that PD is most effective when it

I believe that professional development should be primarily offered at the campus level so it can be targeted and differentiated for the needs of each campus [...] District level professional development that is required for all teachers should be limited to learning new systems that are district-wide.

is lead by a colleague rather than a district administrator. A participant agreed stating that: “At Travis HS we have found that when the teachers develop the professional development at the campus level it is more organic and tailored to the needs and realities of our campus. When professional development came from third parties it was generic, ineffective, and often redundant information.”

¹Ideas represent themes relevant to each topic.

Best time for PD

According to a majority of teachers, the best time for PD is during the summer or fall because they are “fresh and excited and ready to implement new ideas.” When asked about a best time during the work week to have PD, teachers’ opinions were mixed. Some suggested having PD after school or on Saturdays, yet others mentioned that during the district staff development days would be best.

PD focused on how a learning brain works

Staff and teachers reflected on the importance of understanding how a students’ (young or adult) brain works in order to help teachers and PD facilitators plan effective instruction. This idea lead teachers to begin a discussion, and voice their concerns, over the different types of testing formats (paper or computer) and how they may significantly influence student’s performance.

Online PD

When asked about their best online PD experience, most teachers expressed their satisfaction and ease with the delivery method. Teachers shared the various online sites they use as resources to learn about different topics (ranging from software to quality teaching or any other topic related to education). Some teachers pointed out the importance of using and being proficient with online PD tools to effectively teach students how to access these resources and evaluate their validity.

Aspects I find most useful about online PD:

- Student samples
- Quality video with “teacher moves” and reflection from inception of ideas to practice, student commentary
- Downloadables: Rubrics, handouts, plans
- Guiding questions to make you think as you work or view videos
- Clear objectives that match our standards
- Collaboration Platforms for sharing ideas, asking questions

Pinterest and Professional Development

One participant suggested using *Pinterest*, an online tool which allows users to share images in a virtual “board”, as a platform for PD. Various participants were excited about the idea of sharing classroom projects, course photos, or lessons and felt that creating different subject area “boards” by grade level would be most helpful. Some teachers indicated having already used Pinterest and felt that it: “would be a great way to support each other with innovative and creative ideas.” In general, teachers agreed that *Pinterest* would help them enrich their lessons and profession.

SchoolNet

The second most discussed topic was SchoolNet which is a data-driven software designed to align student assessment, curriculum and instruction, and enable targeted instruction for every student. Table 4 depicts the most popular ideas received in this category.

Table 4. Number of votes and comments for the most popular SchoolNet ideas

<i>Most commonly discussed ideas</i>	Total Votes	Vote Up	Vote Down	Comments
SchoolNet and report templates	9	8	1	10
Online testing	5	3	2	8
SchoolNet PD	0	0	0	6

SchoolNet and report templates

Numerous participants explained that the reports option available in SchoolNet did not meet their needs, in addition some participants were frustrated with building custom reports. One teacher pointed out that building custom reports was time consuming and suggested that, since numerous teachers within a campus build the same reports over and over, it would be beneficial to have an option to save reports in a same campus folder. This teacher felt that: "I think that if SchoolNet were truly more collaborative in design, we would be able to help each other so much more [...] If the reports were shared on a campus "board" with a platform for discussion [...] we could save everyone a lot of frustration and time."

Online testing

Some teachers expressed their concerns with the SchoolNet online testing feature and shared questions related to this feature and to online testing in general. Some of the most prevalent concerns were: 1) students' inability to eliminate answers, 2) lack of scratch paper to do "deep thinking" especially in math and science, and 3) accommodating struggling readers and elementary school students. During the discussion, several central office administrators intervened and explained SchoolNet's online testing capacities.

SchoolNet PD

Some participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the SchoolNet training they received. The most prevailing reasons were: 1) training mostly focused on core area teachers, 2) experiencing technological problems during training, 3) scheduling problems. One teacher requested future SchoolNet training that would focus on report building.

Campus Climate Survey

The third most prevalent theme was Campus Climate Survey; however, postings under this category did not necessarily address the 2011 staff climate survey (TELL AISD Staff Climate Survey). Participants discussed campus and district climate in general. Table 3 presents the most popular ideas.

Table 3. Number of votes and comments for the most popular campus climate survey ideas

	Total Votes	Vote Up	Vote Down	Comments
<i>Most commonly discussed ideas</i>				
Campus climate	5	5	0	8
District level climate survey	9	9	0	2

Campus climate

To improve campus climate, one participant suggested holding monthly faculty meetings in every campus in which school staff could discuss challenges and successes. All teachers who commented on this idea agreed and expressed their interest in being able to voice their concerns. One participant pointed out that campus faculty meetings would be beneficial to foster collaboration and unite school staff.

"I think that [district-level climate] is an important component to consider as we look at how to improve our schools and district as a whole."

District level climate survey

One participant felt that the 2011 TELL AISD staff climate survey had not addressed district-level climate. Even though this idea did not receive many comments from other teachers it did receive numerous positive votes.

Appendix

Appendix A. All staff Net-Talk ideas within each topic

Topics	Total Votes	Vote Up	Vote Down	Comments
<i>Professional Development</i>				
PD targeted towards the needs of each campus.	9	8	1	15
Best time for PD	1	1	0	13
PD focused on how a learning brain works	7	7	0	11
Online PD experience	0	0	0	11
<i>Pinterest</i> and Professional Development	17	16	1	9
Identifying target trainings	13	13	0	6
Understanding by Design	8	8	0	6
Technology training	0	0	0	5
TIP training mid-year	5	5	0	4
IdeaScale for campuses	6	6	0	3
Feedback on teaching	0	0	0	3
Common planning times	1	1	0	1
<i>SchoolNet</i>				
SchoolNet and report templates	9	8	1	10
Online testing	5	3	2	8
SchoolNet PD	0	0	0	6
SchoolNet item bank	0	0	0	2
<i>Campus Climate Survey</i>				
Campus climate	5	5	0	8
District level climate survey	9	9	0	2
School climate and the 5 tenets	2	2	0	1
District climate—team spirit	1	1	0	0
Behavior management support	0	0	0	0

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