



Proposal

January 22, 2014

## **AASA Collaborative**

### **Critical Friends School/District Improvement Culture, Accountability, Sustainability**

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Dear Colleagues,

We have remarkable colleagues across the country. Our learning and growing together are rich and important professional experiences. When we work, learn and grow together as colleagues, we stand the greatest chance for school and district improvement.

Educational leaders must gain our voices as we create action for school improvement. The attached proposal is not a tirade against core curriculum, testing or other reform measures under close scrutiny today. The proposed Collaborative is meant to be an exclamation point marking a positive solution to moving sensibly ahead in this still emerging century ... no more rear view mirror solutions.

Thank you to the many exceptional educators who have helped to develop this proposal. We are encouraging and will work toward the creation of a collaborative approach to answer the questions: "How can we work together across this country to improve student learning?" and "How do we sustain improvement?"

In an era where high stakes testing and final "grades" for schools have become the norm, school superintendents and their districts are in greater need than ever to have continual improvement systems in place. The definition of school success should not be measured by standardized assessments alone. Emphasis must be on a broad array of individual, academic and systems indicators of growth. Moreover, there is an imperative need for school districts to work together, to share successes and to demonstrate the efficacy of public education as an integral part of our democracy.

Therefore, we are proposing the development of a collaborative of school districts which would work as critical friends for the purpose of continual improvement as measured by student success and systems improvement. Key components include standards and indicators, site visits, personalization through face-to-face opportunities and use of advances taking place in technology, and follow up learning connected to the Collaborative, universities, and partners.

Please read the notes in this concept paper as a draft. The next significant discussions will happen in Nashville at the AASA National Conference, on Feb. 14, from 2-3 p.m. in Music 2 in the Omni.

Please consider being involved with this nascent project. I am eager to hear from you as we are in the early stages of creating this Collaborative ... all are welcome.

Best wishes for a happy, healthy and productive new year.

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## **AASA Collaborative**

### **Critical Friends School Improvement**

### **Culture, Accountability, Sustainability**

#### **Statement of Problem:**

In an era where high stakes testing and final “grades” for schools have become the norm, school superintendents and their districts are in greater need than ever to have continual improvement systems in place. School success by any definition included benchmarks of curriculum and school performance informed by standardized tests; however, emphasis must be on a broad array of individual, academic, and systems indicators of growth. Moreover, there is an imperative need for school districts to work together, to share successes, and to demonstrate the efficacy of public education as an integral part of our democracy.

**Goal:** to develop a collaborative of school districts which would work as critical friends for the purpose of continual improvement as measured by student success and systems improvement.

This collaborative is proposed to support a district culture of broad accountability to include but not limited to high stakes testing through professional learning and systems improvements to assure sustainability.

**Vision:** to enable school systems to work together with educators from like-districts to reflect and think deeply about their impact on student learning and development; when working together with educators from like-districts they will be better able to identify and channel resources and define areas for continual improvement.

**Mission:** to establish a collaborative of schools systems which, as critical friends, would engage in a process of self-study for the purposes of continuous improvement defined by questions of import to each district and measured broadly by qualitative and quantitative evidence of success. Critical friends in the collaborative include universities and other professional organizations.



## **AASA Belief Statements**

### **I. Public Education**

Public education is the foundation of American democracy and is the primary vehicle for preparing each generation of adult citizens to become contributing members of a democratic society.

### **II. Equity and Diversity**

School leaders have a responsibility to create school cultures that recognize and value diversity.

### **III. Learning Environments**

Environments conducive to learning require that all variables that influence a student's ability to succeed should be addressed.

### **IV. Leadership**

Stable and consistent leadership by the superintendent is vital to the success of the public school system.

### **V. Student Learning and Accountability**

All public schools must provide a quality education for each student, which requires meeting high standards. A system of accountability which clearly demonstrates the level of progress attained by schools or school districts is essential to fulfilling our mission of increasing student achievement.

### **VI. Collaborative Partnerships**

Building partnerships among the many stakeholders contributes to the education and well-being of our children and therefore is the responsibility of the entire community.



## **AASA Collaborative Guiding Principles**

- I. Process
  - A. Collaboration
  - B. Critical friends
  - C. Continuous improvement
  - D. Consultancy
  - E. Dynamic and responsive
  - F. Customized
  - G. Sustainability
  - H. Standards, protocols
  - I. Self-study
- II. Values
  - A. Equity
  - B. Social justice
  - C. Social responsibility
  - D. Accountability (shared)
  - E. Family and Community Involvement
  - F. Scholarship



## **Key Standards**

### **(Public Schools for Tomorrow)**

- A. All Students are engaged in broad and rich educational experiences that promote academic achievement, nurture personal growth and talent, and prepare for effective life as citizens in our democratic society and changing world.
- B. Equal educational opportunity is the great promise of American life. Schools recognize that the strength of the U.S. democracy lies in its diversity. All children must have access to the means they need for educational success.
- C. Every classroom is staffed with an effective teacher.
- D. Schools are led by administrators and teachers who establish a meaningful and shared vision, create professional learning communities that support collaboration and mutual problem solving, and create a climate that supports exploration and change.
- E. We assess what we value. How, why, and what we assess matters.
- F. Schools engage parents as partners in the education of their children and engender support from their surrounding communities.

## **Key Indicators**

### **(Tri-State Consortium)**

- A. Indicators of Student Performance
  - a. Performance-Based Assessment
  - b. Student Metacognition in the Learning Process
  - c. Student Performance Data
- B. Indicators of Internal Support
  - a. Curriculum and Instruction
  - b. Professional Learning
  - c. Equitable Support for Student Needs
  - d. Shared Vision and Environment for Change
- C. Indicators of External Support
  - a. Parent and Community Support



## **Overview**

(Sections of the notes below are excerpted from the Tri-State Consortium website.)

School improvement dependent on a visit by a respected accreditation agency is not sufficient. Core to the proposed effort is a collaborative among like school districts and departments within those districts ... e.g., demographics, size, or performance. A critical friends approach is designed to provide insightful, professional, candid feedback which includes recommendations and follow up support. The proposed collaborative is not regionally bound; rather, through a combination of personal connections and the use of interactive technology, superintendents, principals, teachers and other educational leaders across the country can be connected.

The proposed collaborative builds on the work of the Tri-State Consortium, the ongoing learning models at universities such as the Penn Study Council, and online and interactive learning paths for professional learning. The proposed Collaborative will bring together school districts that value systems thinking as the foundation for continuous improvement. The Collaborative will assist districts in using quantitative and qualitative data to enhance student performance and to build a rigorous framework for planning, assessment and systemic change.

## **Collaboration**

Working as critical friends, members apply the principles, standards and indicators to benchmark member districts' progress in advancing teaching and learning through these components:

- Standards and protocols which would guide continual improvement

- Professional learning and training for staff; Connections to universities

- Site visits

- Follow up support ... in person and through emerging and innovative forms of technology

Consideration should be given to the creation of an AASA certification or accreditation for those districts which have successfully completed the collaborative process.

## **Consultancies**

Flexible designs for schools are a key to the success of the Collaborative. While most schools may want to use the core indicators as their areas of focus, others may want to take advantage of the critical friends' model through consultancies.

The Collaborative will organize consultancies focused on specific programs or approaches as identified and requested by the host district. These consultancy approaches may include focus areas unique to a school district or school.



## **Key Components of Collaborative:**

- **Site Visits**

Member districts will request visits by teams of "critical friends." The visits will focus on the Essential Questions developed by the host district. The Essential Questions will be developed from the guiding principles and standards of the Collaborative, and will be reviewed through the lens of the indicators. Trained educators from within the Collaborative will assess and report on district programs using "indicators" to measure the degree to which the district is utilizing multiple forms of student performance data as the basis for its planning.

- **Reports**

- The visiting team will provide responses to "Essential Questions" posed by the district to elicit the team's best thinking about issues of teaching and learning.
- The report will include commendations of the district's strengths and recommendations to suggest next steps for the district's growth. The report will include results that reflect the district's approach for each of the indicators, the degree to which the approach has been implemented, and student performance results that are attributable to that approach.
- The district's assessment report is used to prioritize and plan actions that will support further growth.

- **Follow-Up to Visits**

A subset of the original visiting team will follow up to facilitate a conversation focused on the actions taken by the district in response to the recommendations.

- **Support Systems**

The Collaborative will conduct study groups for school and district leaders, e.g., elementary school principals, middle school principals, high school principals, curriculum leaders, and superintendents. These study groups meet during the year and focus on issues relating to leadership and student learning. The Collaborative will also support topic-based study groups focused on matters of interest to member districts.

The Collaborative will hold annual member conferences with time devoted to learning with leaders in education as well as providing opportunities to share experiences with people from other member districts.

The collaborative will publish online and printed journals of activities and articles of research and practice.





- **Technology**

Regional collaboratives and consortia are often dependent on face-to-face visits for professional sharing and follow up. Although this level of personalization is important to continue, depending on proximity of school districts to one another, the great opportunity of this AASA Collaborative derives from a national point of view, with school districts from across the country working together, and with individual teachers and schools using technology to continue their learning.

Research and emerging best practices indicate that the best way to bring about this sort of work is through a blended model, including:

- **Social Media:** Online possibilities for the development of various professional groups will be set up for learning. These groups can be facilitated by university and/or school-based people. The groups will be able to use features that mimic social media such as Facebook or LinkedIn. People will be able to chat and engage asynchronously. For example:
  - General group for all participating member districts
  - Break out group for mid-size urban districts
  - Break out group for rural districts
  - Break out group for those concerned with literacy issues
  - Other groups as needs are identified
- **Virtual Conferences:** opportunities to have synchronous events that might offer:
  - Guest speakers
  - Problem solving sessions
  - Virtual visits to schools to observe best practices
  - Many possibilities to keep the relationships broadcast and still personal
- **Learning Paths:** Carefully designed training options that may or may not be considered for credit (either university or CEU). For example:
  - Examining artifacts in light of the indicators
  - Questioning strategies to elicit high level thinking



- Feedback strategies
- Building essential questions
- Many other possibilities
- **Critical Friends:** The critical friends model will need to be configured so that partnerships can be made virtually. School partnerships can be developed across the country—they do not need to be limited by region. However, people can make some choices about what they want from this experience. If they prefer a site visit, there are many possibilities. They might have a site visit within the district (one building to another); they might have a site visit from another district within a reasonable distance. Once again, uses of the right technology platform should allow people to blend and customize as they work together.
- **Resources:** The technology should be configured for sharing resources. This can offer a rich opportunity for people to not only collect artifacts but also share them. The categories for sharing might be the same as the categories in the standards. As the work grows, this should provide many rich resources for all members. Generally, this concept is referred to as a “clearing house.”
- **Reports:** Feedback reports can be communicated and can have a drop down option of public or private. The hope would be that there might be learning from an analysis of the reports over time.
- **Research:** We can build a repository of research organized according to the standards.

- **University Partners**

University partners will play a facilitative role in expanding and enriching the core work ideas as they augment and enable the primary functions of the collaborative.

University Partners may:

- Serve as a Center for AASA Collaborative activities, e.g., training, leadership development, research, connections to other universities and scholars
- Identify content and process experts to help frame the problem, analyze what’s going on, and offer possible paths of action for continuous improvement. This adds breadth to the partnership (not replacing the expertise of members of the collaborative, but extending the range of value-added services).



- Identify and procure grant resources.
- Provide research services, e.g., structure into the data gathering the ability to collect survey data on school culture or climate (especially helpful if we can amass and maintain comparative data from all consortium partners so that members can confidentially “benchmark” themselves against peers). Additionally, university partners can help structure program evaluation studies that are well done, fostering continuous improvement.
- Create ad hoc learning communities around core challenge areas (e.g., a cross-districts study group on literacy): offer for-credit courses as needed or desired by partners

- **Business and other Partner(s)**

Strategic partners will help to support the initial and long term goals of the collaborative by providing:

- Expert support of the initial design process. Special interests include technology, professional learning, and accountability
- Presence at initial meetings... to share insights and to be part of the design development
- Funding ...
  - Support follow up to February meeting at the AASA national conference
  - Support for fiscal year beginning July 1 to supplement member fees

## **Membership**

Member districts will be guided by these steps and timetable:

FIRST – learning, gaining deep understanding, and reaching consensus on the standards, indicators, and protocols

SECOND – orientation and training of site visitors and first round districts to be visited

Year one goal is to create a core of 30-50 school districts which would begin implementation of the standards and protocols.

Several site visits would be scheduled.

Year two goal is to expand membership to include 100 school districts.

Long term goal is, through AASA, to create support systems and services through the consortium to school districts across the country.

## **Calendar**

- February 12                      AASA Think Tank, NCE, Nashville



- Feb. 13 Social get together sponsored by Hobsons, NCE, Nashville
- Feb. 14 Open meeting to discuss concept paper and next steps  
2-3 p.m. Music Row 2 at the Omni hotel, NCE Nashville
- Feb. - March 15 Finalize concept paper; invite application for AASA Collaborative
- March 15 – June 30 Member districts discuss protocols, standards, indicators, and implementation; Governing board established
- July 1 – Dec. 30 Identify districts for site visits; train staff
- Jan. 1- June 30 Site Visits; Recruit second cohort of member districts

### **Funding**

Following the AASA National Conference on Education in Nashville, a pilot group of districts will be identified and charged to finalize the concept paper, including protocols and processes associated with the various components of the collaborative, e.g., site visits, reports, professional learning, technology and research. Funding is needed this spring for these activities.

The pilot districts will begin implementation of the collaborative during the 2014-15 school year. Each district will pay a nominal fee for membership (estimated \$5-10,000/district). The pilot districts will have access to the online learning paths to be developed, to training of educators involved with site visits, to all associated publications and research, to an annual conference of the collaborative districts, and to the possibility of a site visit.

Sustainability and independence for the Collaborative after the February meeting will be dependent on four sources of revenue:

1. Annual membership fees
2. Fees for services
3. Partner funding
4. Grants

### **Governance/Board**

It is proposed that a national leadership board be established to govern the AASA Collaborative. Initial membership will comprise the following:

- Member Superintendents
- University faculty/administration
- Partners



Thank you to the many colleagues who have contributed to the development of this concept.

Attended the first AASA Collaborative meeting on January 5, 6, 2014, at George Mason University:

Scott Bauer, George Mason University

Todd Bloom, Chief Academic Officer, Hobsons

Marty Brooks, Director of Tri-State Consortium

John Brown, Director of Curriculum, Alexandria

Jeff Colosimo, President / CEO, Eduplanet21

Julie Hance, Director, Corporate and Strategic Alliances, AASA

Jere Hochman, Superintendent, Bedford, NY

GwenCarol Holmes, Chief Academic Officer, Alexandria

Bena Kallick, Author

Mike Kuchar, Superintendent, Bergenfield, NJ

Marya Levenson, Brandeis University

Bill Lupini, Superintendent, Brookline, MA

James Minichello, Director of Public Information, AASA

Helen Morris, past board member, Alexandria

Fran Prolman, Education Consultant, VA

Rob Smith, George Mason University

Harris Sokoloff, University of Pennsylvania

Mort Sherman, AASA Superintendent in Residence



Accepted invitation to be part of discussion (did not make it for the January meeting or are waiting to see if this concept might be a good fit for their district):

Dave Benson, Superintendent, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Paul Ash, Superintendent, Lexington, MA

Bernard Taylor, Superintendent, East Baton Rouge, LA

Tom Trigg, Superintendent, Blue Valley Schools, Overland Park, KS

Sue Zuvalec, Superintendent, Farmington, MI

Janet Robinson, Superintendent, Stratford, CT

Steve Wilkins, COO, DeKalb County, GA

Nola Wellman, Superintendent, Eanes, TX

J.T. Coopman, Indiana AASA Chief State Exec

Steve Webb, Superintendent, Vancouver, WA

Judith Johnson, Superintendent, Mount Vernon, NY

Lisa Mulhill, Asst Supt, NY

Tom Rogers, BOCES, NY

Mike McGill, Superintendent, Scarsdale, NY

Ken Mitchell, Superintendent, South Orangetown, NY

Carmen Rains, C & I, Clark-Pleasant Community School Corporation, Johnson County, IN

Ed Joseph, Hobsons

Steve Worth, President, Plexus Consulting Group

Special thanks:

Marty Brooks, Executive Director, Tri-State Consortium

Dan Domenech, Executive Director, AASA

Mark Ginsberg, Dean, George Mason University

**Hobsons, our partner:** <http://www.hobsons.com/>