The Aspen Institute

Chief Academic Officers’ Network

Consultation Session with Tracy Epp

May 23, 2013

Each CAO Network meeting will include a consultation session in which a network member will bring a problem of practice to the group for reflection, feedback and advice. Tracy Epp, Chief Academic Officer for the Achievement First network of schools, has graciously volunteered to share and discuss a “problem of practice.” Below is the guiding question for the consultation and background information including specific documents.

**Consultation Question:** Will the proposed structure for common teacher professional development days for 13-14 effectively build our teachers’ and school leaders’ capacity to align teaching and learning to Common Core State Standards?

**District Context**

Achievement First is a growing network of non-profit, high-performing, college-preparatory, K to 12 public charter schools in Connecticut, New York and, in 2013, Rhode Island. The mission of Achievement First is to deliver on the promise of equal educational opportunity for all of America’s children. In the 2013-14 school year, Achievement First will serve approximately 8,000 students and will grow to 38 schools over the next five years, serving more than 20,000 students at scale. The geographic spread creates unique challenges in bringing all of our teachers together on a regular basis.

The Network Support Team serves the central office functions in support of schools and is responsible for developing the strategy and content for common professional development for teachers, academic deans (i.e. assistant principals) and principals. In general, the relationship between principals and the central team is positive, our principals appreciate and ask for recommendations from the central team and we overall do not struggle with tensions that can arise from issues surrounding autonomy.

**Problem Description:**

There are three specific challenges we are facing as we finalize our 13-14 PD strategy:

- We believe our teachers and school leaders need development in understanding Common Core at the standards/assessment/curriculum level as well as at the
instructional level. However, we believe we have to prioritize. In a world of forced prioritization, what content and/or skills should we prioritize? Is this prioritization different by cohort (teacher, academic dean, principal)?

- Principals often express that it is a challenge to “translate” what teachers learn at district-level PD to what their expectations are at the campus level. What is the best way to mitigate this tension?
- Ideally, our principals would be equipped to develop their teams in understanding Common Core. However, given all that is on their plate, we believe this is a key support role that our Network teams can provide. The tradeoff is the possibility of lack of deep principal ownership or expertise in the most essential aspects of their roles. How have districts balanced this tension?

Tracy hopes the CAO network consultation session will help her think about how to create a high impact professional development structure so that teachers build the skills and knowledge needed to ensure students meet the demands of the CCSS.