



PROJECT FOR SCHOOL INNOVATION

PSI NET: SUMMER NEWSLETTER

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Summer Greetings,

When I recently asked my mother, a retired NYC school teacher, what characterized the "best" and "worst" principals she ever worked with, her thoughtful reply served as a confirmation to the successes and struggles we hear about so often in the work PSI does with both teachers and principals.

She told me the "best" principal from her experience was the one that visited classrooms, observed and gave feedback, and really got to know the teachers and the students through conversation and planning time.

Her experience of the "worst" was of a principal who pretty much stayed in their administrative cloister and who commented that they "had a good school because of all the good teachers" - without ever really having much contact (with teachers or students).

This reinforced for me what so many of you share in the PSI network; the value of teachers and school leaders who focus together on providing the best possible opportunity for each student to achieve academically through critical and honest assessment, discussion and planning cultivates an optimum educational experience. Given these circumstances, schools become an environment for both professional growth and student success.

Thanks mom, for the insight and reminder. Thanks to you all for continuing to share with one another through PSI. Please make sure to read about all of the continuing opportunities for professional development and dissemination: SNIP VIII -Boston and Southeast, SNIP Alumni cohort, Fall Learning Exchange and our Summer Book Sale.

Have a wonderful summer break!
- Ruth

Support and Study Groups

We convene action-research groups for principals and teachers to examine common challenges and share strategies for success.

Support Network for Innovative Principals

To date, PSI through the Support Network for Innovative Principals - SNIP, has brought together seven cohorts of public district, charter and pilot principals to meet monthly during the academic year to share their successes and challenges. Over 72 principals from 13+ districts have offered one another advice and support, as they hone their critical listening skills and examine their own leadership strengths and weaknesses. SNIP has been described as unique and extremely valuable by past participants because it allows a level of trust and introspection that gets ignored by most other professional development opportunities. We urge principals who are ready to really look at themselves, their core values and their own leadership style to join us in 2009-10. Are you ready to learn about yourself as you become a more aware and confident leader.

Boston Cohort - Start date of October 21, 2009 - Downtown Boston location (Post Office Square)

Southeastern MA - Location TBA: We look forward to offering the benefits of SNIP to principals who live or work in the South Eastern area of MA.

Alumni Cohort - Registration now open to all SNIP Alumni Cohort I - VII: Our Alumni Cohort will engage past SNIP participants in reconnecting as they deepen their reflection, analysis and skill building around mindful school leadership. As with our other SNIP cohorts the case study method will be used as will small group dialogue and individual reflection which will give participants the opportunity to connect their practice to their principles while discovering even more about their leadership style.

We are pleased to welcome the SHIPPY foundation as one of our

supporters of SNIP for 2009 - 2010

If you are interested in joining our SNIP program in 2009 - 2010 please
visit

[http://www.psinnovation.org/what we do/support and study groups/snip](http://www.psinnovation.org/what_we_do/support_and_study_groups/snip)

Collaborations

We partner with other organizations to facilitate projects that support educators in sharing their strengths and expertise.

Drop Out Prevention

Counting What Counts

Through funding from AT&T this year, PSI has been fortunate to continue its work with the At-Risk consortium, Counting What Counts. The three urban schools that serve at-risk high school youth; Boston Day & Evening Academy, Lowell Middlesex Academy and Academy of Strategic Learning, along with Professor Mike Nakkula of U Penn, have collaborated to administer one more year of their specially designed Student Questionnaire to a total of more than 350 students.

This year, we've been able to go even deeper in telling the story about what supports and services make a real difference to these students remaining in and completing high school by completing a select number of student interviews. Most importantly, the group has developed a user-friendly tracking tool that was piloted at the end of this school year with the goal of providing further student data for correlation which will ultimately give us a more complete picture of school services and their impact on students' success. This Student Questionnaire together with the refined Tracking Tool will be shared more broadly in order to enable other schools with similar student populations to be able to serve their students most effectively. With this tool, schools will be able to gauge progress in not only academics, but in critical social, career and life skills which are essential to students' long term success. Click [here](#) to learn more!

Keeping the Promise

We've completed our involvement in the final and third year of Keeping the Promise, KTP, a three-year U.S. Department of Education grant awarded to the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association (MCPSA).

Over the course of Keeping the Promise, we have worked with some of the highest performing public charter schools in Massachusetts that serve high need, low income populations including Boston Collegiate, Community Day, Academy of the Pacific Rim, MATCH, and Roxbury Preparatory -- to assist them in identifying what makes them successful so they can serve as national models for dissemination and replication.

Our collaboration with Massachusetts Center for Charter Public School Excellence and Community Partners Initiative allowed us to leverage the strengths of PSI by bringing together charter and district schools to learn and share successful practices. Highlights from this final phase of the project include the fall and spring forum and spring study tours that interestingly brought together district, charter and charter applicants on the same study tours, exchanging ideas, concerns and common challenges - bridging the sometimes tense divides that exist among educators from different sectors.

These were most inspiring because they encouraged a diverse group of educators to share openly, honestly and give one another helpful, critical feedback with which to refine their school plan and implementation strategy. We are so proud to have been a part of this great project and look forward to our continued work with new districts and strengthening our existing relationships with the charter host schools involved.

The research and findings of Keeping the Promise has been compiled into the documentary, "Beating the Odds" which recently had its Boston premier! The documentary highlights interviews with students, teachers and school leaders. Act fast to receive your [free copy!](#) use with educator teams as they adapt other successful school practices for their own school use. Katherine K. Merseeth also draws on the findings of Keeping the Promise in her new book, *Inside Urban Charter Schools*.

For more information

http://psinnovation.org/what_we_do/collaboration/keeping_the_promise

Dissemination

We publish teacher-authored guidebooks and train educators to coach their peers through workshops and consultations in order to share effective practices within and between charter and district schools.

SAVE THE DATE

Learning Exchange Conference

8:30 AM - 3:00 PM

@ Wheelock College

Teacher-led peer workshops on effective:

- Curriculum and Instruction
- School-wide practice

-Professional Development

*Principal retreat for "SNIP" alumni only!
Watch for details and registration forms on our
[website](#) by late August*

SUMMER BOOK SALE

Throughout the summer we will be offering select PSI books from our ***By Teachers for Teachers*** and ***Wisdom of Educators*** series at half price (\$20.00+Shipping) * For more information on our books and ordering information, please visit our [website](#).

*Sale price available June - August only on books in stock.

Inquiring Minds

We recently asked teachers:

How has your learning style impacted your teaching?

They said:

"I am an auditory learner, which definitely influences my teaching. In class, students remember songs that use their vocabulary words, tell stories about fractions, and discuss and ask questions about literature. My class is one continuous conversation, because speech is the best way I know to both learn and convey ideas."

"I don't think I teach according to how I learn. I usually try to find out what the students do best and take steps to get them engaged in the material. Content can shift depending on the response. The process is attempting to shift the

methods to best accommodate the various styles of students' learning."

"Needing to understand every little thing fundamentally, allowed greater understanding of the bigger picture, larger concepts, and things yet to have been proven. I've been able to explain any concept thus far to any style learner because of this."

PSI Net Profile

Interview with Comcast Leadership Award Winner, Sean Shirley Davidson,
Dean of Middle School - Neighborhood House Charter School, Dorchester,
MA

Neighborhood House is piloting a collaborative 3 year program of service and training by hosting a City Year team

Comcast Leadership Awards 2009

The Comcast Leadership Award, is bestowed annually upon five nominated City Year alumni. Recipients of the award continue to embody the values of City Year: innovation, teamwork, responsibility, diversity, respect for others, leadership, innovation and personal growth. Click [here](#) to learn more about the City Year / Americorps program of "putting idealism to work".



Q: What impact did having been a CY alum yourself have on your current experience as an educator and administrator?

Sean: *As a CY alum, I was able to have empathy for how hard it is to be a corps member; it's hard work, minimal pay and lots of hours. I could relate*

to the intensity of the experience overall and therefore had a profound and truer sense of the work they do.

Q: What 3 - 5 tips would you have for other educators wanting to collaborate with an external organization such as CY?

1) TRAINING, TRAINING, TRAINING! Lots of training to get them oriented and equipped to succeed.

2) Assume nothing

3) Start at the ground level and work your way up; educate them on the big picture like Mission, Vision, Core Principles and Systems of your organization, then move into the actual details and goal of the work at hand. By doing this in phases, the specifics of their work become framed within the larger mission of the organization.

4) Make them a part of the general staff as much as possible; invite them to meetings where appropriate, engage them in professional development time with everyone else - and include them in the fun stuff as well i.e. holiday parties, celebrations.

5) Make sure there is a point person for each partner - for the school and the external organization, so that everyone knows who the main contact person is and communication is efficient and clear as possible. The two point people should have a standing meeting to ensure information is exchanged and planning and implementation are seamless.

Q: What were some intended outcomes form this collaboration and some unintended outcomes?

Intended Outcome: CY was at Neighborhood House to help support the academic achievement and the social / emotional growth of students.

Unexpected outcome: It turned out to be an even greater benefit than expected to have CY in the building because it meant not only enrichment opportunities for all students but it also meant that teachers had more time available to work with lower achieving students and to offer student academic support that had previously been a challenge, time wise. It meant that we were able to provide targeted, enrichment and support for students with low foundations.

Ultimately, City Year's contribution helped us to better differentiate instruction across the grades - something we did not originally anticipate as an expected benefit.

While City Year corps members are most known for their success in working with grades 3-5, we recognized that their work with our middle schoolers, in particular, was beneficial. They were able to serve as role models who were young and cool and in college, they were able to forge strong relationships and positively influence the students' behavior and academics, and ultimately their ability to make positive choices.

PSI Staff Update

Matthew Wilka

PSI Alumnus Matthew Wilka recently concluded a Fulbright Fellowship in Ecuador, where he served as a consultant to a 25,000 student alternative public school system. Working with his fiancée, Jen, Matthew analyzed the system's organization, resource alignment, and external relations through school visits and over 300 stakeholder interviews to support a redesign of the network's leadership structure and program delivery system. Matthew also found time to watch the sun rise from the summit of a 20,000 foot mountain, bask with tortoises in the Galapagos, and eat enough memorable foods to last a lifetime.



Elizabeth Sambuco

PSI welcomes Elizabeth Sambuco as our summer web/marketing assistant! Elizabeth graduated from Simmons College this past May, earning a degree in Public Relations and Marketing Communications. As prior Vice President of the Simmons Marketing Association and avid member of Public Relations Student Society of America, Elizabeth is looking forward to furthering her communication skills and assisting PSI in their marketing efforts.

Best wishes for a great summer break!