

Professional Learning Current Reality and GSAPS

Wayne Langford

PL & Technology Innovation

Kennesaw State University

*Vision*

### ***McConnell Middle School Vision Statement***

*J.P. McConnell Middle School will be a world-class school where students acquire the knowledge and skills to not only be successful as they continue their education at the secondary level but also be responsible citizens in society.*

### ***McConnell Middle School Mission***

*The mission of J.P. McConnell Middle School is to provide a positive, stimulating, safe environment, which focuses on learning, the application of knowledge, and the acquisition of lifelong skills.*

### ***McConnell Middle School Commitments***

- *We will be a cohesive family striving toward one goal - student achievement/success.*
- *We will establish trust and collaboration among all students, parents, staff and community members.*
- *We will provide a safe, positive environment with consistent and effective student management.*
- *Students will be engaged in creative, authentic problem solving and use innovative technology across all content areas.*
- *We will ensure that all children reach their learning potential.*

### ***McConnell Middle School Technology Vision Statement***

*McConnell Middle School will be a school where technology is seamlessly integrated into every aspect of school business. We shall strive for solutions which are woven so tightly into the fabric of learning that the technology itself is largely invisible. All course content will be*

*well organized and made available online through D2L and/or Google Classroom to the extent that a student would be able to keep up with coursework even if physical attendance was not possible. Teachers will instruct, assess and grade students using appropriate technology which has been custom tailored by and for the teachers themselves rather than settle for off-the-shelf solutions. The expectations for staff and for the technology they use, shall be of the highest order.*

---

The technology vision statement for McConnell Middle School declares that the school shall strive for a seamless integration of technology into the learning process. The goal is to have technology integrated so tightly into the learning process that it essentially disappears. This may sound a little Quixotic but it is a philosophy directly borrowed from the best practices in application and interface design and the statement serves to further underscore the principal's mandate that technology must always serve learning. While this vision is certainly not the current reality, that ideal is used to weigh all decisions made by the technology department and to judge purchases, suggested tools and initiatives. Perhaps, the more realistic goal is that technology should demonstrably increase student performance. As with all departments at McConnell Middle School, all work is expected to either be focused on teaching or on supporting teachers. Any other use of technology is superfluous and ultimately runs counter to the school's vision statement. Indeed, technology is only mentioned in the Professional Learning Plan twice and even then only where it satisfies one of those two goals.

One of the technology coordinator's primary initiatives for the current school year is to work with teachers and students to significantly reduce wasted instructional time that students spend finding online resources in their D2L classes, logging into computers or the network,

getting logged into external resources and keeping track of assignments. The plan is to accomplish this by training teachers to always provide direct links to their assignment content in D2L from their homework calendars, teaching students and parents how to subscribe to those homework calendars and moving away from Windows-based devices that require a lengthy boot and login process. Teachers are also being actively encouraged to avoid external websites that do not leverage SOS (Single Sign On) through their student's GAFE (Google Apps For Education) accounts. The goal is to weed out the use of web 2.0 tools that interrupt the learning momentum during instructional time or at home. The expectation is that the technology should just work and get out of the way. When this is not the experience of a student or teacher at McConnell Middle School, that expectation insures that the technology department will hear about the problem quickly.

For example, one of the takeaways from student surveys last year was that students get frustrated when assignments, assessments and content are separated by too many clicks. Some students stated that they spend as much time searching for their assignments and decoding the expectations as they do completing the actual work. By working with those teachers, who tend to have more domain mastery than their students, I hope to help teachers refine their online content this year and to focus on what outcome is really desired for learners. We have worked hard on getting teachers to link courses, content and homework so that students have more time for content. It is my hope that by also helping teachers to learn to temporarily suspend the prior knowledge and the cognitive schema this experience has granted them, they can better understand what students really need from them to process the core of the lesson and insure it is accessible. As Cook pointed out "If there are few schemas available to process the information,

which is a typical scenario for novices, working memory is more likely to be overloaded.”

(Cook, 2006)

### **Needs Assessment**

Data is always a component of decisions made on the direction of staff development. The Local School Improvement Team and the administrator in charge of staff development look at survey results, test scores, local initiatives and other local school data at the end of each year and then balance those results against county, state and federal initiatives to arrive at a plan for the coming year. This has resulted in the implementation of successful programs such as FIP (Formative Instructional Practices) training, Balanced Numeracy and Quality + teaching strategies.

The technology department has a similar process for needs analysis. They use surveys to allow teachers and students to communicate both where they currently are as well as where they wish to go in the coming year. They use observational data, usage statistics and student performance data to determine the success or failure of pilots and to formulate a budget and make purchasing decisions for the coming year. There is also a discretionary component based on the principal and technology coordinator's shared, long-term vision. This has been the process which has resulted in last year's successful NearPod pilot, Google Expeditions as well as our now long-standing Khan Academy, GAFE, flipping, BYOD and All In Learning adoptions.

### **Professional Learning**

McConnell Middle School uses a mix of large-scale professional development, online coursework, mentoring, workshops, peer observations and coaching to implement professional

learning. All of this work has a collaborative component. Even coaching is approached as a collaborative process as most work is driven by the teacher's desired outcome and merely supported by the coach.

The technology department moved exclusively to a coaching model for technology training a few years ago. While some large-group professional development is still required, for example, at the start of the year, it is only used where time is tight and a single focused outcome is expected. Anything broader is pursued with small groups of stakeholders with a specific, shared requirement.

McConnell Middle has offered several online professional development courses over the last year. These courses included intermediate Excel, Google Apps and D2L integration, beginning Class Flipping, a NearPod pilot and many others. Formal offerings are based primarily on survey data asking faculty and staff what applications they feel would most contribute to their professional growth. Informal training occurs more often and usually involves minor troubleshooting of simple questions. Coaching might cover anything a staff member can dream up and may result in one or two short sessions or a month-long commitment.

Coaching is available (as time allows) for every staff member. All training that the technology department designs have an online support component that allows staff to review any and all content, assess weaknesses and even practice some skills.

Administration sees to it that the actions of all departments are driven by the school improvement plan. Department heads are conditioned to ask how each action will impact the school's bottom line. That bottom line is, of course, student achievement and the other goals articulated in the SIP or School Improvement Plan.

There is a budget for some outside training and turn-key training packages are occasionally purchased for large scale staff-wide initiatives. Funding comes from the county for most mandated training, grants and the state. We will sometimes self-fund training which can not be adequately designed in-house such as our initial D2L training several years ago. There have also been grants written in the past for very specific programs which are large enough in scope to require extraordinary arrangements.

To keep staff focused on achievement and seeking opportunities to expand their skill sets, we recognize four outstanding teachers at every faculty meeting as well as the Principal's award for any faculty or staff member who went above and beyond the call of duty to enhance learning. Administrative observations and walkthroughs are used as indicators of outstanding practice and each administrator is expected to choose one teacher for each meeting. There is also a small gift card and a school "medal" that goes with this award.

We use a mentor program for special needs populations as well as targeted programs such as our reading strategies. In spite of a significant special needs population, there is not a great deal of verbiage targeted at special needs programs. This is clearly an area where more needs to be done.

Teachers are encouraged but not required to coordinate the creation and evaluation of their required, personal RBES (Results Based Evaluation System) by curriculum area or department. However, large-scale professional development is not typically encouraged for reasons already stated.

Classroom observations and evaluations are heavily used by all administrative staff to determine desired changes in classroom practice. Other metrics include tracked resource usage,

statistics, test scores and student and staff survey results. These measures allow the administrators to see whether the professional learning is translating into classroom practice.

Testing for improvements in student learning and its correlation to implementation of that professional learning is the domain of the data team which currently exists as a subset of the school improvement team namely the technology coordinator and principal.

**References**

Cook, M. P. (2006). Visual representations in science education: The influence of prior knowledge and cognitive load theory on instructional design principles. *Science education*,90(6), 1073-1091.

**PART B. GSAPS REVIEW**

***PROFESSIONAL LEARNING***

The means by which teachers, administrators, and other staff acquire, enhance, and refine the knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions necessary to create and support high levels of learning for all students

<b>Professional Learning Standard 1:</b> Aligns professional learning with needs identified through analysis of a variety of data			
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Level 4</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Exemplary</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Level 3</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Operational</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Level 2</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Emerging</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Level 1</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Not Evident</p>

<p>Professional learning needs are identified and differentiated through a collaborative analysis process using a variety of data (e.g., student achievement data, examination of student work, process data, teacher and leader effectiveness data, action research data, perception data from students, staff, and families). Ongoing support is provided through differentiated professional learning.</p>	<p>Professional learning needs are identified through a collaborative analysis process using a variety of data (e.g., student achievement data, examination of student work, process data, teacher and leader effectiveness data, action research data, perception data from students, staff, and families).</p>	<p>Professional learning needs are identified using limited sources of data.</p>	<p>Professional learning needs are identified using little or no data.</p>
---	--	--	--

**EVIDENCE:**

Each department at McConnell Middle School spends a great deal going over data collected from perception surveys, test scores and various sources determined to be diagnostic for their unique domain. For example, the technology department leverages all of the usual data points employed by all departments including stakeholder surveys, student scores, formal and informal classroom observations. However, our department also includes usage statistics for the portal (D2L), GAFE (Google Apps), computer labs, and supplemental resources checked out through the media center to not only determine trends but also to address areas where usage does not align with the school vision and other deficiencies. One example of this occurred two years ago when a significant number of teachers responded to a perception survey that there was not enough access to technology even though usage statistics did not show a bottleneck in supply or availability of any resource other than a couple of points during testing where all seven computer labs were booked. After drilling down and combining data from observations, we realized that we needed more robust training on PBL, stations and other collaborative forms of learning management to help teachers see that the supplemental devices provided to all of them combined with the BYOD network provided a ready resource and that strict one-to-one device ratios of computers to students were neither required nor advisable in most cases. Part of this training involved teaming teachers together who were strong at collaborative work with reluctant teachers and then allowing adequate time for modeling and co-planning as well as capturing many of the lessons on video to enable future sharing for new staff who need help.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

This year it has been recommended that the principal's PAC (Principal Advisory Committee) student team take a more active role in technology planning and create a survey instrument for their fellow students to address topics of greatest interest to students. We are also looking for more ways to

involve parents in decision making.

**Professional Learning Standard 2:** Establishes a culture of collaboration among administrators and staff to enhance individual and collective performance

<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Exemplary</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Operational</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Emerging</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Not Evident</b>
<p>Administrators and staff, as a foundational practice, consistently collaborate to support leadership and personal accountability and to enhance individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback). Teachers conduct action research and assume ownership of professional learning processes.</p>	<p>Administrators and staff routinely collaborate to improve individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback).</p>	<p>Administrators and staff routinely collaborate to improve individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback).</p>	<p>Administrators and staff routinely collaborate to improve individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback).</p>

**EVIDENCE:** Every staff member at McConnell Middle School is expected to complete a personal, results-based evaluation each year. There must also be at least one data component to this self evaluation. Every staff member must also meet several times a year with their supervisor to discuss the path they are on and where they are along that path. Data is used by leadership to find specific departments that need improvement along with those who are exemplary.

For example, if my department determines through observation or other metrics that a group or even individual teachers would benefit from technology coaching, we would first pull all existing RBES for those staff members to see where the staff feel they currently are and then arrange for some informal classroom observations before pursuing a coaching arrangement with the staff member(s). In our experience, the teacher must take ownership of the training and the process for change to occur. Once the coaching relationship is established, feedback becomes easier and working on the refinement of skills becomes a true possibility.

For example, last year I was concerned about a disconnect between some student scores and their evaluation (grades) by two of our special education instructors. After observing the students and looking at supplemental files and past AT (assistive technology) consults, we determined that this was not the fault of the teachers but that several students were not being appropriately served by the devices assigned to them by the county’s AT team. We suggested changes in the input method used with the devices (voice typing rather than using the physical keyboard) for all assignments. This simple change resulted in a significant increase in writing output and quality for the students.

RECOMMENDATIONS:  
We are going to try to continue to live up to our past.

<b>Professional Learning Standard 3:</b> Defines expectations for implementing professional learning			
<b>Level 4</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Exemplary	<b>Level 3</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Operational	<b>Level 2</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Emerging	<b>Level 1</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Not Evident
Administrators, teacher leaders, or both consistently define expectations for the implementation of professional learning, including details regarding the stages of implementation and how monitoring will occur as implementation progresses.	Administrators, teacher leaders, or both regularly define expectations for the implementation of professional learning.	Administrators, teacher leaders, or both occasionally define expectations for the implementation of professional learning.	Administrators, teacher leaders, or both rarely, if ever, define expectations for the implementation of professional learning.
<p>EVIDENCE: I put an immediate end to large-scale PD during my first meeting with the staff and replaced it with focused, small-group sessions with clearly stated goals which quickly evolved into coaching sessions. Because this was an excellent school filled with excellent teachers, my initial expectations for learning were simple: I did not intend to repeat the same training over and over again. If a small group of staff members needed extra help, there was no reason to run everyone back through the training again. I could visit the handful of teachers whenever it was convenient for them to meet in their classrooms because my days would not be filled with large-scale PD. One example of this redefinition in expectations is that evaluations of teacher websites, homework calendars and D2L course content are now a component of every teacher’s walk through. This is just one example of the technology department’s expectations becoming admin’s expectations. This has led to each department beginning to prioritize the practices that they consider non negotiables.</p>			
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS: Raising the expectations for professional development outcomes was among the top priorities I had when I took this position at this school. The school had a history of too many initiatives and far too many required, large-scale, professional development meetings for the staff. The result was a stressed although excellent staff with a school morale which was trending dangerously downward. There was also very little evidence anyone could present to suggest that all of this PD was generating any school improvement or changing anyone’s practice. In fact, there was very little accountability built into the PD they were implementing although the sheer numbers certainly looked impressive on paper.</p>			

<b>Professional Learning Standard 4:</b> Uses multiple professional learning designs to support the various learning needs of the staff			
Level 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Exemplary	Level 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Operational	Level 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Emerging	Level 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Evident
Staff members actively participate in job-embedded professional learning that engages collaborative teams in a variety of appropriate learning designs (e.g., collaborative lesson study, analysis of student work, problem solving sessions, curriculum development, coursework, action research, classroom observations, online networks). Professional learning includes extensive follow-up with descriptive feedback and coaching.	Staff members actively participate in professional learning, most of which is job-embedded, which includes multiple designs (e.g., collaborative lesson study, analysis of student work, problem-solving sessions, curriculum development, coursework, action research, classroom observations, online networks) to support their various learning needs. Professional learning includes follow-up with feedback and coaching.	Some staff members are engaged in professional learning that makes use of more than one learning design to address their identified needs.	Staff members receive single, stand-alone professional learning events that are informational and mostly large-group presentation designs.
<p><b>EVIDENCE:</b> In addition to retiring most large-scale, one-size-fits-all, professional development, one of my early changes to training was to move to an online, just-in-time, delivery model. There are some training topics that can still fit into a mass delivered training. When I came here there were gradebook and other sorts of training sessions that is was determined that all teachers needed held in a large lab for thirty-five teachers at a time. Unfortunately, these sessions were usually set up during pre-planning each year. Teachers leave the training frazzled and in a desperate hurry to get back to physically setting up their classrooms. They would not put into practice any of what they learned for at least a week. By the time they needed that material, close to half of them had forgotten everything.</p> <p>I did away with as much of these beginning of the year training sessions as I could and replaced them with online videos and materials that would wait quietly until the staff member actually needed the training. And when that time comes, they are just a click away. This was so successful with staff that I have continued to look for more and more ways to shorten the distance between a staff member, parent or student discovering a need for training and finding the correct resource.</p>			

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

I hope we can continue to diversify our offerings and the delivery medium. This year we are experimenting with more video and modeling to try and give staff members a way to see other teachers use best practices in an actual classroom setting as well as give staff a chance to see themselves using their new skills.

**Professional Learning Standard 5:** Allocates resources and establishes systems to support and sustain effective professional learning

<b>Level 4</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Exemplary</b>	<b>Level 3</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Operational</b>	<b>Level 2</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Emerging</b>	<b>Level 1</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Not Evident</b>
Extensive resources (e.g., substitute teachers, materials, handouts, tools, stipends, facilitators, technology) and systems (e.g., conducive schedules, adequate collaborative time, model classrooms) are allocated to support and sustain effective professional learning. Opportunities to practice skills, receive follow-up, feedback, and coaching are provided to support the effectiveness of professional learning.	Adequate resources (e.g., substitute teachers, materials, handouts, tools, stipends, facilitators, technology) and systems (e.g., conducive schedules, adequate collaborative time, model classrooms) are in place to support and sustain professional learning.	Some resources and systems are allocated to support and sustain professional learning.	Few, if any, resources and systems are provided to support and sustain professional learning.

**EVIDENCE:**

Teachers participate in at least one vertical team, curriculum, grade-level, focus groups on a monthly basis and the school always pays for substitute teachers. The reason is partly to make sure the staff can apply his or herself to the training or meeting and partly so that higher expectations can be set for the outcome. The principal is not shy about reminding teachers how much money is being spent to enable them a half or even full day to give themselves to this event.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

One tradition that McConnell Middle School has a well-deserved reputation for is spending money. When we jump into anything, we do it with an open checkbook. There are a few reasons for this. One is that the school was opened by a visionary principal who knew that money was a tool that could make a real difference if applied carefully. This set up a certain expectation in the community.

MMS needs to always be just a little nicer than the next school, a little cleaner than the next school and definitely needs better tech than the next school. This makes the PTA very generous, the local foundations more philanthropic and the community more supportive of any program we undertake. Of course, this means we have a responsibility to be good stewards of that trust and of their money.

**Professional Learning Standard 6:** Monitors and evaluates the impact of professional learning on staff practices and student learning

Level 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Exemplary	Level 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Operational	Level 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Emerging	Level 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Evident
Monitoring and evaluating the impact of professional learning on staff practices and increases in student learning occurs extensively. Evaluation results are used to identify and implement processes to extend student learning.	Monitoring and evaluating the impact of professional learning on staff practices and student learning occurs routinely.	Monitoring and evaluating the impact of professional learning on staff practices occurs sporadically.	Monitoring and evaluating the impact of professional learning on staff practices occurs rarely, if ever.

**EVIDENCE:**

At this point my department certainly uses data to inform and modify our training. We also use observations to keep up with the levels of adoption and changes in practice. Also, the principal and myself do a good deal of data mining. However, overall professional learning tends to only receive perfunctory evaluations. There will be surveys and at least one assessment, however, there are not likely to be long-range follow ups. Part of this is due to the AP in charge of professional learning has a lot of responsibilities and the county accountability model encourages doing the minimum.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

One of the biggest areas for improvement my department found last year was the general lack of data mining being done at the departmental level. It was my recommendation that we look at forming data teams this year to disperse the adoption of data-driven techniques at all levels in the building.

**KSU ITEC Professional Learning Standard:** Professional learning reinforces educators’ understanding and use of strategies for promoting equity and high expectations for all students, application of research-based teaching strategies and assessment processes, and involvement of families and other stakeholders in promoting student learning.

<p><b>Level 4</b>  <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Exemplary</b></p>	<p><b>Level 3</b>  <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Operational</b></p>	<p><b>Level 2</b>  <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Emerging</b></p>	<p><b>Level 1</b>  <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Not Evident</b></p>
<p>Classroom practices (e.g., considering interests, backgrounds, strengths, and preferences to provide meaningful, relevant lessons and assess student progress, differentiating instruction, and nurturing student capacity for self-management) of all teachers reflect an emotionally and physically safe environment where respect and appreciation for a diverse population is evident. There are high achievement expectations for all students and teachers. The principal and other leaders provide professional learning for teachers lacking understanding of the impact that attitudes regarding race, disabilities, background, culture, high expectations, and social class of both students and teachers have on the teaching and learning process.</p>	<p>Classroom practices of most teachers reflect skill in communicating high expectations for each student and adjusting classroom activities to meet student needs. Respect for students' cultures and life experiences is evident through the emotionally and physically safe learning environment where students of diverse backgrounds and experiences are taught the school code of conduct (customs) to help them be successful in the school context.</p>	<p>Classroom practices of some teachers reflect evidence of teachers' training in understanding the impact that attitudes regarding race, disabilities, background, culture, high expectations, and social class of both students and teachers have on the teaching and learning process.</p>	<p>Classroom practices reflect little or no evidence of teachers' training in understanding the impact that attitudes regarding race, disabilities, background, culture, high expectations, and social class of both students and teachers have on the teaching and learning process.</p>
<p><b>EVIDENCE:</b>                  Much of what we do at the local school level is to build processes that encourage cultural sensitivity. This means that, while a teacher may bring a pre-existing bias into the building, that bias will run counter to their own self-interest when it comes to carrying out their duties and responsibilities. For example, the school radically modified the referral process three years ago to focus on modeling and positive recognition to deal with discipline referral numbers that clearly over-represented our minority population.</p>			
<p><b>RECOMMENDATIONS:</b>                  Gwinnett county has been pretty proactive about diversity training as far back as I can remember. It was recognized as a necessity for a large and rapidly growing, suburban school system by the superintendent I was hired under. My second year of working in this system saw school-wide training on diversity and cultural sensitivity. That is not to say that there was not plenty of good reasons to undertake this training. This is also not to say that there is not plenty of work left to do.</p>			