THE EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE: FROM CURRICULUM TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITIES

The Center for Catholic Education, in partnership with the Archdiocese of Cincinnati Catholic School Office, recently hosted the seventh deanery-wide professional development day since launching the Excellence Initiative in fall 2008. On March 9, 2012, approximately 450 educators gathered at the Presidential Banquet Center in Kettering to hear and to participate with Tom Many, Ed.D. as he engaged them in a process that can lead to the development and utilization of a coherent system of assessment based on a viable curriculum, enhance their skills in data analysis, and allow them to realize the effectiveness of professional learning communities.

In order to set the framework for the day, Dr. Many spoke of the need for a guaranteed and viable curriculum to raise the level of student achievement in our schools. A guaranteed and viable curriculum is one that identifies concepts and skills embedded in academic standards that are essential for all students to have. No matter who teaches a given course or grade, these targeted topics should be adequately addressed. A limited number of learning targets should be identified so that teachers have time available to teach them within the school year.

Key to promoting a guaranteed and viable curriculum is having teachers work together to identify concepts and skills embedded in each standard, to look inward to identify what is actually taught in the classroom, and to reconcile differences between these two areas. It is critical that teachers also collaborate to create common assessments that will measure student progress in learning the target concepts as agreed upon by the team. There are many ways to assess student learning, but Dr. Many spoke of the common formative assessment as a high quality measure that promotes improved student achievement. This type of assessment, created through the collaboration of all teachers of a subject or grade, ensures that students who experience difficulty receive additional time and support as well as additional opportunities to demonstrate their learning. In creating common formative assessments, teachers are required to reflect upon and examine their own practice.

It is not just whether a school administers assessments but what it does with assessment results that make a difference. As an assessment system becomes accepted, educators are encouraged to enhance their skills in data analysis. Working in teams, teachers are encouraged to collect and chart data, identify proficiency levels, and analyze strengths and obstacles to student learning. Effective data analysis leads to targeted instruction, established goals, selected instructional strategies, and ultimately to improved student achievement.

Dr. Many provided numerous useful tips and organizational outlines for teachers to take away at the end of the day. He provided ample opportunity for discussion among colleagues throughout his presentation so teachers and principals could discuss key points and formulate a plan for how they could better serve their students through the implementation of protocols for professional learning communities and/or faculty meetings.

Dr. Many works with teachers, administrators, school boards, parents, and other education stakeholders on implementation and change.

Dr. Tom Many converses with a teacher during one of several group discussion opportunities

Continued on p.4
Another program was added this school year to the already long list of services provided to schools served by UCDRC. Principal of Immaculate Conception School, Mrs. Karyn Hecker, expressed the concerns of Hispanic parents who, because of language differences, were having difficulty helping their children with homework. Other parents had also approached Mrs. Hecker seeking academic assistance for children in need of extra support but who do not qualify for special services. UCDRC Family Advocate, Michelle Sherman, swiftly moved into action and developed an after school program for ICS students who would like to take advantage of academic support. Sessions meet Monday through Thursday immediately after school for 45 minutes and are staffed entirely by volunteers. There are 3 components to the after school program:

The Spanish Club: ICS has a growing Hispanic population, therefore many non-Spanish speaking children attending ICS have expressed an interest in learning to speak the language. Mrs. Rosie Osnaya, who is Hispanic and an ICS mother, volunteered to teach Spanish to these students.

The Latin Club: Retired Dayton Public School teacher and member of Immaculate Conception Parish, Dr. Remick, contacted Michelle with an offer to start a Latin club. He advocated that Latin helps students develop strong English/grammar/spelling skills. Due to the interest of ICS students, the Latin Club was born.

The Homework Club: Responding to parental requests, this club not only provides homework assistance but also offers tutoring to students needing additional help with schoolwork. It is staffed by University of Dayton students and Immaculate Conception parishioners. A nice outcome has been that ICS students often stay after school to help classmates with schoolwork. Students have taken an active interest in helping each other to learn.

In Gratitude...

As remembered by Jacinta Mergler, Director of Lalanne

On March 7, 2012 our beloved friend, William Joseph Kiefer, passed into new life. He was 86 years young! A graduate of the University of Dayton, Bill was a writer, librarian, educator, Marianist Affiliate, dedicated husband and one of Lalanne’s biggest supporters. His generosity was much more than financial. Bill recognized the Marianist spirit of Lalanne. He appreciated our vision - beginning teachers living in small faith communities with a common mission of serving God through teaching in under-resourced Catholic schools. As an educator, Bill knew the struggles of beginning teaching so early in August, as Lalanne teachers began their first days of school, Bill remembered each teacher and school in his prayers and rosaries. He took special interest in the program almost from the beginning. He knew the value of sharing and talking about our Catholic faith with others.

Whenever I made a trip downtown to St. Mark’s Bookshop, Bill’s store, he would point out two or three new books that we might consider using with the Lalanne teachers. On one visit, he gave me a brand new popcorn popper that he had been given as a gift. “I haven’t been able to eat popcorn for some time,” he said, “but I bet those teachers would like some while they grade their papers.” Another time he gave us a box of statues and crucifixes to give to the teachers for their classrooms or community prayer spaces. Whenever I saw him or spoke with him, Bill wanted to know how things were going in Lalanne.

Bill was a great storyteller. We were looking forward to having him come to campus this summer to meet with the Lalanne teachers and share stories from his early teaching days as well as stories about Father Jean Baptiste Lalanne, one of the first Marianists, whom he was researching for a book he planned to write. Now, hopefully, Bill is interviewing Father Lalanne in person! The Lalanne program has lost a great benefactor, but we are thankful for the time we had with him. May he rest in peace.
The Urban Child Development Resource Center is thrilled to be the recipient of a gift from the University of Dayton chapter of the Beta Theta Pi Fraternity. The values-based social fraternity hosted a fundraising dinner on March 20 and, at the suggestion of their advisor, Fr. Joe Tedesco, they donated the proceeds of $277.81 to UCDRC.

Professional Learning Community for Art Teachers

With two meetings under their belt, Miami Valley Catholic school art teachers are expressing much enthusiasm for their fledgling Professional Learning Community (PLC). Karen Henry of St. Charles School welcomed 11 art specialists to her classroom on February 9. Teachers viewed student artwork, toured the display and learning spaces, and shared lesson plans with the theme of architecture. "I loved meeting to share the lesson plan ideas, seeing how the room was arranged, and looking at student art, especially the toned paper drawings," said Mimi Martin of Mary Queen of Peace. Joanne VonSossan of St. Peter School agreed. "I enjoyed sharing with other art teachers various things about teaching art. Since we are the only art teacher in the building, there is no one else who has our specific problems, concerns, etc. It was nice to hear that everyone has similar issues and good to hear how other people deal with them. I think that is the thing that would be most beneficial – a feeling of not being alone. Hopefully it will generate ideas for everyone to share, energize us as we share our thoughts and techniques that work or don’t work, and provide other art people to talk with." The second meeting was hosted by Monica Meyer of Ascension School on March 8. Classroom management techniques, time saving tips, and sculpture lesson plans were discussed.

The Art PLC sprouted roots during art curriculum mapping meetings at the University of Dayton. Art teachers found an easy connection with one another and kept requesting additional opportunities to continue work on the core map. "We had tremendous encouragement and support to form a PLC from Susan Ferguson, Gina Lloyd and Sherry Gabert and the process of building a foundation is proving to be very natural," reports Karen Bender of John XXIII School. "It’s very reassuring to know that I finally have a group of teachers who I can collaborate with. Imagine the possibilities!" Maria Cleary from Holy Angels expressed what many art teachers feel: "I feel this PLC is beneficial because we all have very similar experiences and requirements as art teachers in Catholic schools. I feel the information I receive is very helpful and relates directly to my classroom experiences. It not only helps to alleviate the isolation that happens when you are the lone art teacher in a building, but provides a vehicle for inspiration."

The next Art PLC meeting is scheduled for May 3rd.
He is a former superintendent of Kildeer Countryside Community Consolidated School District 96 in Buffalo Grove, Illinois. Adding to his 20 years of experience as a superintendent, Dr. Many has also served as a classroom teacher, learning center director, curriculum supervisor, principal, and assistant superintendent. He is dedicated to promoting the Professional Learning Communities at Work™ process which promotes teacher collaboration for high performance teaching and improved student learning. He came to us through the Solution Tree network, a community of professionals, experts, and authors committed to best practice and effective professional development for teachers and school administrators.

The Excellence Initiative, resourced by a local philanthropist, encourages professional learning communities for Catholic educators through which curriculum, instruction, and assessment are planned, scrutinized, evaluated and reinvigorated. To date, all of these topics have been presented in various forms since its inception in fall 2008.