Current Reality and GAPSS for Wheeler High School

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Wheeler High School is a 9-12 public high school located in Marietta, Georgia and is a part of the Cobb County School System. The school has been in operation since 1965 and serves approximately 2100 students. According to Wheelers website, 81% of graduates go onto college with 74% of those students attend a four year college or university (Wheeler, 2017).

Wheeler High School has been driven it's vision of, "Inspiring a community with a passion for learning" (Wheeler, 2016). It is that vision that remains the focus for Wheeler High School. Along with offering a traditional grades 9-12 high school experience, Wheeler also offers The Center For Advanced Studies Magnet Program. The magnet program is a well regarded program, both in the county and the state. The program is part of the National Consortium of Science, Math and Technology Magnet Schools and according to their website, "The magnet offers an intimate, challenging education for like-minded peers" (Wheeler, 2016). The magnet program brings in the best and brightest from throughout Cobb County.

Wheeler has worked hard to prepare its staff and students for the digital age. Wheeler has multiple computer labs throughout the building and a Distance Learning Lab as well. The magnet building offers in-depth classes in coding and app development. These classes utilize a variety of digital age tools such as laptops, Chromebooks and both Android and Apple tablets. Along with the availability of digital age tools it is an expectation that all of the teachers create and maintain blogs or websites. Teachers are also as expected to work collaboratively using Office 365 and county email service. Grading is required to be summitted using Synergy online grading system. The system is monitored by administration and the use of the system is both a school and county requirement. Along with grading, teachers are also required to create and administer online formative and summative assessments using the Cobb Teaching and Learning System, and the Flexible Formative Assessment System (FFAS).

**Strategic Plan**

 Wheeler's professional learning plan has been incorporated into its strategic plan. The strategic plan and professional learning plan work together to address the schools vision of, "Inspiring a Community with a Passion for Learning" (Wheeler, 2017). In order to help address the needs of professional learning and fulfil their vision for all students, the school has teamed up with county to become a Cohort 3 school. As a Cohort 3 school, Wheeler will receive a Technology Training/Integration Specialist (TTIS) for the 2016-17 school year, to help support professional development. As part of the program the staff receives in-house training and support for the new Flexible Formative Assessment School (FFAS) and the Cobb Teaching and Learning System (CTLS). These systems address the goals laid out in the professional development section of the plan to, "Ensure that teachers are highly trained in the standards, learning engagement strategies, formative assessments, and student progress monitoring." (Wheeler, 2016).

**Vision and Current Reality**

To date, Wheeler High School does not have an official technology vision or professional learning plan, but instead relies upon the 11 part Cobb County Vision (CCSD, 2011) and their own, Wheeler Strategic Plan (Wheeler, 2016). Although the school does not posses a formal vision for technology, Dr. Giles the principal of Wheeler, does have a vision for the direction and role technology has to play at Wheeler High School. According to Dr. Giles, he would like to, "grow the number of opportunities for students to have hands on experience with technology" (Dr. Giles, personal communication, January 27, 2017). Dr. Giles concern with instructional technology is that, it is often seen as replacement or sideshow for quality instruction. He believes that, "'technology doesn’t engage, it leads towards engagement" (Dr. Giles, personal communication, January 27, 2017).. These beliefs had led his school to bringing in new forms of technology and offer additional trainings to teachers, to help prepare them for the digital age classroom. Part of his vision for technology includes the deemphasis of computer labs and the use of more wireless handheld devices, as a way to bring technology into the hands of the students. Dr. Giles believes that best way to make this vision become a reality, is to incorporate the vision into the school strategic plan and utilize support from the district and community. Although Dr. Giles has admitted that getting everyone onboard to support his vision for technology he believes that most stakeholders share his ideals.

**Forms of Professional Learning**

Wheeler High School has embraced the Professional Learning Community (PLC) concept within the 2016-17 Strategic Plan's section on professional development, as a way to increase teacher effectiveness in the classroom. These programs allow for teachers to regularly receive professional development, that is targeted to their specific content area needs. Wheeler's plan for professional development intentionally focuses on addressing the needs of the PLCs. The teems meets once a week and uses both summative and formative assessments to plan and drive instruction. The meetings follow the data team model with the administrator and local TTIS offering support. The teams review the data from previous assessments and use that data to locate gaps in student learning and develop plans for remediation. The PLCs identify issues that exist and make recommendations for additional training based on needs that arise within the meeting.

As a Cobb County Cohort 3 school, Wheeler received a Technology/Training Integration Specialist (TTIS) to aid in staff training and development. The TTIS works closely with the administration and teachers to offer large and small group professional development trainings. The TTIS trains the staff on my new county initiatives such as the Flexible Formative Assessment System (FFAS) and the Cobb Teaching and Learning System (CTLS). These programs were designed to create a collaborative assessment system where teachers can create, share and review data using an online system. It is the role of the TTIS to equip the staff with the skills required to properly utilize this system. The TTIS also offers staff training on county supported instructional tools and strategies. These trainings are followed up by constant communications and small group sessions. The TTIS also makes certain to collaborate with the PLC and administration to provide follow-up training opportunities to the staff.

Along with training sessions offered by the local TTIS and PLC, Wheeler also has a setup mandatory large group training sessions. These training sessions are offered by a variety of different staff and county members. Mandatory training session are intentionally created to support the school's strategic plan and includes such topics as Lexile Levels, engaging learning strategies and differentiation in the classroom. The county also offers staff required trainings on new tools and resources including the support of rollout initiatives such as CTLS Phase II and creating constructed responses. Most all training session both mandatory and optional include feedback surveys. The feedback from these surveys is shared with administration and county staff to determine future trainings and enhance current training opportunities.

New teachers to Wheeler also receive a comprehensive training program that includes mentorship for new teachers. The teachers are assigned a veteran teacher that they work alongside. The mentors receive basic coaching training and offer constructive formal and informal feedback.

Wheeler's requirement for professional development, does present a strain on staff at times. Although, the teachers can choose their own time to attend training, their attendance is not optional. Requiring teachers to attend training can cause stress because, according to Knight (2007), “Teachers should have choice regarding what and how they learn (pg. 41).” In an attempt to remedy this concern, Wheeler does offer optional training sessions as a way of offering choice to the staff.

**Identifying Professional Development Needs**

Wheeler High School focuses on offering staff development training that is targeted at the specific needs of the staff. Dr. Giles was very proud of the efforts that was taken by his staff of offer relevant training sessions. The administration uses needs assessment surveys to collect voluntary teacher data to drive further staff development. The data that is collected from surveys is combined with the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES), to create training that is targeted at the specific needs of the individual teacher, content area and PLC. Along with targeting professional development programs, Wheeler also requires staff member to attend and participate in district professional development initiatives. These programs are created at the district level and are delivered to the school by county staff.

Professional learning is aligned to the school's school improvement goals within the school strategic plan. Some of the school's strategic goals include using Read 180 to increase students reading on level, offering math support classes and increasing the school graduation rate (Wheeler High School, 2016). The goals within the school strategic plan drive the professional developments offered at the school. The use of the plan along with PLC and county feedback have helped to create the professional development plan for the school.

**Funding**

Funding is always an issue at public schools and Wheeler High School is no exception. Since PLCs are conducted during the normal work day, no additional funding is required. The teachers do receive additional training from administration and district staff on the PLC and Data Team models. The funding for these trainings are paid for through county funds. Along with PLC funding, Cohort 3 funding along with the TTIS are paid for through the county and SPLOST IV funds. Local funds are also used to pay for additional training opportunities such as, educational conventions in Chicago and Phoenix. These funds are available through the request of the PLCs and administrative staff.

**Incentives**

The school does not offer incentives for attending training sessions. The administrative staff however, does believe in recognizing and rewarding exemplary use of best practices through professional development in the classroom. The administration acknowledges excellence by offering rewards for teacher accomplishments such as, teacher of the month and professional practice of the month. Along with receiving schoolwide recognition, the recipients also receive gift cards. These rewards have received a positive reaction from the staff and increased moral and interest in professional development.

**Professional Development and Special Needs**

Professional development is available for special needs teachers. The ESOL and Special Education training is available through the departments and funding comes from school and county funds. The training for assisting students with special needs is offered from Special Education Department and the administration. The school offers inclusion classrooms that supply a special education teacher who work closely with the general education. Special education teachers also offer support in PLC meetings and additional training. The local TTIS also offers professional development in technology tools that help the department and classroom function more effectively and best accommodate the individual needs of the students.

**Evaluation**

The effectiveness of professional development opportunities offered at Wheeler High School can be measured in many different ways. Administrative walkthroughs and PLC meetings offer a great way for administration to see first hand a teacher's professional development. Submitted teacher lesson plans and blogs also give leadership the opportunity to look at the professional growth of educators. Dr. Giles does admit that his staff completes more than the required staff walk-throughs (personal communication, January 27, 2017). He also admits that professional development opportunities and walkthroughs really don't change an educators professional growth, it has to come from within and nowhere else (personal communication, January 27, 2017).

**Conclusion**

Wheeler High School under the leadership of Dr. Giles has made great strives creating a vision that encompasses learning and growth for all stakeholders. Wheeler has continued to gather support from the county and the community to continue to strive for excellence. Wheeler is working hard to live up to it's vision of, "Inspiring a Community with a Passion for Learning" (Wheeler 2016).

Works Cited:

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*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

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| **Professional Learning Standard 1:** Aligns professional learning with needs identified through analysis of a variety of data |
| **Level 4**[ ]  **Exemplary** | **Level 3**[x]  **Operational**  | **Level 2**[ ]  **Emerging** | **Level 1**[ ]  **Not Evident** |
| 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. | **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).** | Professional learning needs are identified using limited sources of data. | Professional learning needs are identified using little or no data. |
| EVIDENCE: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above –The school has performed survey and collected data from TKES and data team meetings to determine the need for professional learning. The school works closely with the county and support personnel to deliver quality instruction through PLCs to create professional developments that are target at teacher and content area needs.Sample Needs Assessment survey by the Instructional Technology Department and TTIS;<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=-x3OL5-ROEmquMR_D8kYLWi2Gjs-GIdCnF1LJdCnxllUQVRBM1BPTTlZR0tJVTg4VVpGM0ExSEdUNi4u> |
| RECOMMENDATIONS: Additional needs assessments are required to properly identify the needs of individual teachers. Constant cooperation with district and school support staff is required to continue professional development. Administration should offer training that is targeted to the needs of teachers by working with PLC and district staff. |

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| **Professional Learning Standard 2:** Establishes a culture of collaboration among administrators and staff to enhance individual and collective performance |
| **Level 4**[ ]  **Exemplary** | **Level 3**[x]  **Operational**  | **Level 2**[ ]  **Emerging** | **Level 1**[ ]  **Not Evident** |
| 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. | **Administrators and staff routinely collaborate to improve individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback).** | Administrators and staff routinely collaborate to improve individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback). | Administrators and staff routinely collaborate to improve individual and collective performance (e.g., construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, provide feedback). |
| EVIDENCE: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above –Teachers and administrators meet regularly for PLC meetings to work collaboratively. The Flexible Formative Assessment System (FFAS) along with the Cobb Teaching and Learning System (CTLS) allow teachers to create collaborative assessments based on standards. The staff also has access to the full suite of Office 365 tools that allow them to work collaboratively, share and edit documents, along with training from the local TTIS. Trainings offered by the TTIS include;* IRespond Refresher – FFAS/CTLS Training – August 9, 2016
* Test Builder - FFAS/CTLS Training- September 6, 2016
* OneNote Notebook – Instructional Technology: Office 365 – September 13, 2016
* Student Performance Tools - FFAS/CTLS - September 20, 2016
* Sound Assessment Practices - FFAS/CTLS - October 25, 2016
* Panopto – Instructional Technology: Video Editing – November 1, 2016
* Item Builder - FFAS/CTLS Trainng – November 8, 2016
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| RECOMMENDATIONS: Teachers should continue to work together in PLCs with administration and district support staff. Teachers should also, utilizing the local TTIS during PLC meetings to help use collaborative tools their full potential. |

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| **Professional Learning Standard 3:** Defines expectations for implementing professional learning |
| **Level 4**[ ]  **Exemplary** | **Level 3**[ ]  **Operational** | **Level 2**[x]  **Emerging**  | **Level 1**[ ]  **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.  |
| EVIDENCE: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above –Although the staff does regularly attend training meetings, they are often confused about the application and usefulness of their professional development meetings. Professional developments are often emailed out with the staff required to attend. The purpose of professional development meetings needs to be clearly defined for the staff to see the value the training sessions offer. |
| RECOMMENDATIONS:A clear explanation of the professional development training opportunities needs to offered to the staff. Teachers need to see and understand how new professional development is beneficial and effective (Learning Forward, 2011). Along with email reminders, additional materials should be given to the staff to support the goal of the training. Along with support, all meetings should begin with an explanation of the intention of the training and its benefits to the students performance. |

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| **Professional Learning Standard 4:** Uses multiple professional learning designs to support the various learning needs of the staff |
| **Level 4**[ ]  **Exemplary** | **Level 3**[x]  **Operational**  | **Level 2**[ ]  **Emerging** | **Level 1**[ ]  **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. |
| EVIDENCE: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above –Wheeler High School utilizes collaborative lesson studies, curriculum development, classroom observations, PLC and Data Team models to drive professional learning. The school provides training on the effective implementation of these and supports them with constant monitoring and feedback. Wheeler uses their talent on hand to provide training opportunities using staff members as trainers.  |
| RECOMMENDATIONS:Wheeler should continue its commitment to professional development and utilize district support to increase the effectiveness of the professional learning. The PLCs should also work closely with the TTIS to create professional development opportunities that are tailored the individual learning need of the committee. Examples of trainings offered in PLC meetings include;* Test Builder & Item Builder Training – English Department: American Literature – December 7, 2016
* Test Builder & Item Builder Training - Social Studies Department – February 8, 2017
* Test Builder & Item Builder Training - Social Studies Department – February 9, 2017
* Microsoft Sway: Office 365 – English Department: American Literature – February 16, 2017
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| **Professional Learning Standard 5:** Allocates resources and establishes systems to support and sustain effective professional learning |
| **Level 4**[ ]  **Exemplary** | **Level 3**[x]  **Operational**  | **Level 2**[ ]  **Emerging** | **Level 1**[ ]  **Not Evident** |
| 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: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above –Wheeler does an excellent job at supporting resources for teachers and encourages professional development. The school has used local funds to send teachers to conventions that further their professional development. Wheeler also rewards professional development by creating incentives for teachers that exemplify professional excellence. The school offers gift cards as a way to recognize staff accomplishment. The school has brought In a county TTIS and allocated resources to aid the further growth of staff development and teacher recognition. An example of county recognition through the Cobb County Instructional Technology Department include;Teacher Highlights: <http://www.cobblearning.net/intechteacherhighlights/> |
| RECOMMENDATIONS:Wheeler should continue to fund teacher development and work closely with district personnel to create a positive staff development atmosphere. The school should consider devoting more funds and attention towards endorsing teacher achievement and allocating additional resources. Teacher incentives and money for sustained professional development would greatly improve staff development. |

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| **Professional Learning Standard 6:** Monitors and evaluates the impact of professional learning on staff practices and student learning |
| **Level 4**[x]  **Exemplary**  | **Level 3**[ ]  **Operational** | **Level 2**[ ]  **Emerging** | **Level 1**[ ]  **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: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above –Wheeler utilizes the TKES assessment to routinely observer and monitor teacher performance. Systems such as the Flexible Formative Assessment System (FFAS) allow administrators to track student achievement of routine formative and summative assessments. The PLC meetings allow the school and administration to work directly with issues of concern, and address professional learning needs.  |
| RECOMMENDATIONS:Regular surveys using Excel Survey or Microsoft Forms should be created to maintain up to date needs assessments of the staff. Frequent teacher walkthroughs along with continued development of professional learning programs would greatly improve staff practices and student learning. |

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| **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. |
| **Level 4**[ ]  **Exemplary** | **Level 3**[x]  **Operational**  | **Level 2**[ ]  **Emerging** | **Level 1**[ ]  **Not Evident** |
| 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.  | **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.** | 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.  | 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.  |
| EVIDENCE: In the space below, provide detailed evidence supporting your rating above –Wheeler has done a great job at reaching out to the community and getting the full support of all stakeholders. Wheeler has tried hard to promote equity and high expectations for all students. The school closely monitors the school climate surveys and community feedback to make certain that everyone feels apart of the Wheeler community. The school has reaches out to the community and highlights equity and diversity by holding multicultural presentations. An example of community outreach can be seen in the Wheeler High School Humanitarian of the year awards. The awards are given to community members, staff and students that exemplify the humanitarian traits of Dr. Martin Luther King. An example of the humanitarian of year award can be found using the link below; * Martin Luther King Jr. Humanitarian of the Year Award <http://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0c4fa8a722a5fa7-martin>

Teachers also work closely with inclusion teachers to make certain that lesson are differentiated to include the needs of all learners. different learning levels and address the needs of diverse learners thought the use of assisted technology. Teachers receive additional training to support the needs of a diverse classroom. Experts within the school have presented on the topic of differentiation. An example of local staff promoting equity can be found in the following training; * Flexible Grouping (Differentiation Process and Product) - w/ Pam McCabe and Sara Keitzman – January 31, 2017
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| RECOMMENDATIONS:Wheeler is a diverse school that offers professional development for a diverse 21st century digital age classroom. The school could offer more programs that enhance diversity in classroom. Along with classes Wheeler could do more to motivate and encourage stakeholders to become active participants in the educational community. Using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter would bring in more community involvement. |