

STAFF DEVELOPMENT NEWSLETTER

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You never fail until you stop trying. Albert Einstein

Our Seward motto, Every Student, Every Day, A Success, implies that we meet the needs of our individual students every day. In order to do this, differentiation is key to our success. Differentiation is not a new term in education but it is one that is getting a lot of attention at Seward Public Schools the last three years. Each building has one or more action plans that align to differentiation and meeting the needs of our individual students. The district grant, we received this year, allowed us to bring in Dr. Diane Heacox and provide each building with grade level specific books. Tomlinson and Strickland state, “this book is a learning tool, not a teaching tool.” PLCs and action teams continue to build upon our current understanding of differentiation but it is not until we try something new in our classrooms that we may see different results from this not so new concept. “If, as teachers, we increase our understanding of who we teach and *what* we teach, we are much more likely to be able to be flexible in *how* we teach” stated Tomlinson and Strickland.

Tomlinson and Strickland identify “differentiated instruction refers to a systematic approach to planning curriculum and instruction for academically diverse learners.” Being able to differentiate means really getting to know your students on a deeper level. Once teachers know their students on a deeper level, there are different ways they can differentiate. Teachers can choose to differentiate content, process or product. Tomlinson and Strickland define content, process and product as; 1.) “Content refers either to what a student should come to know, understand, and be able to do as the result of a segment of study, or to how the student will gain access to that knowledge, understanding, and skill.” 2.) “Process is a synonym for activities.” 3.) “Products provide evidence of what a student has come to know, understand, and be able to do over an extended period of learning.” When differentiating content, process and product the teacher needs to consider, students readiness, interest, and learning profile. This is where getting to know your students on a deeper level comes into play. Only when you truly know your students will you know their readiness, interest and learning profile.

Through our reflective conversations in PLCs and action team work, our hope for you as a teacher is that you feel stretched when trying something new in your classroom. Use PLCs and action team work time to learn more about differentiation, reflect on how you are differentiating, and plan how to use new ideas and strategies in order to meet all your students different learning needs.

The school district of Seward, in cooperation with parents and community, affirms that all students will have the skills to become productive and contributing members of a global community. The district is committed to the development of each student academically, emotionally, socially and physically.

