

Mastery Education Committee Meeting Update

July 23-24, 2015 meeting

While the first meeting of the Mastery Education Committee was focused on developing a common understanding among committee members and the education community, the second meeting involved working and accomplishing specific goals. The goals could be arranged into three broad categories: communications, incubator program, and roadblocks or challenges.

Communications

The committee developed a rough communication plan and needs list. They also agreed to assist in the development and serve as reviewers for all of the documents.

The first priority is to develop the website; which is accessible and contains resources for the general public, schools/districts, and incubator schools to use. Using the questions the committee generated at the previous meeting, they generated a Frequently Asked Questions and Answers document. The questions are from the committee and also from other states' resources. The questions have been adapted to fit Idaho's education system. It will be ready to post on the website next week. Additional resources will be the studies and reports the committee have found useful and relevant to Idaho. Once the incubator application materials are developed they will be posted on the website. The long term plan is to have incubator schools sharing materials on the website as well.

The communication needs also include collateral documents for use when talking to school districts and community. Those documents may include a single page brochure, a multipage in-depth document, and an adaptable presentation. We meet with the SDE communications team to open the conversation and develop a time line for materials development. The plan is to begin working on the documents and hopefully have drafts ready by September 1. The presentation will be sooner; there have already been requests for it.

The committee decided they would like to illustrate "Idaho Bright Spots" in the media, documentation, and website. Those bright spots would be schools, districts, and teachers that are already implementing mastery education. This aspect of the communications plan will begin once school is in session.

The committee felt the superintendents' webinar would be an appropriate method for starting the conversation of mastery education at the district level. Finally, the committee agreed to look for opportunities to present mastery education to stakeholder and community groups. One example of this, is presenting at the ISBA conference. The presentation has been accepted and we have asked to present as often as possible.

Incubator program

The discussion of the incubator program followed three paths: logistics, timing, and funding. The committee felt it is important that the incubator program be open to all grade levels. Additionally, we decided it could be an individual school in a district or the whole district. We

also felt it was important to have an opportunity for individual teachers to apply to participate and possibly connect with schools or districts in their region that are selected. The thinking behind this is a single teacher may turn into a team the next year and a whole school in the future. The committee felt very strongly that all regions of the state, all sizes of schools/districts, all types of schools, and all levels of readiness/implementation needed to be considered for the program. A review of the draft application was conducted during the meeting. The application was created based on their comments from the previous meeting. They decided it was too involved and needed to be reworked so that it was more of narrative and less question and answer. As part of the application process they felt it was important to hold a webinar or meeting related to the application process and how to complete the application. This will be held in October. The committee also felt having a Letter of Intent to apply would provide valuable information for the review process and also the legislature. We would be able to determine the interest and readiness level based on those letters. The plan is to have the letter due in November. The application would be due early December or January.

The funding request for the incubator program was a sub goal that was accomplished. The schools and districts currently pursuing mastery education discussed their budgets for the implementation of their programs. They explained how they arrived at the figures and what the amounts included. The average cost was approximately \$50,000 per school in the initial stages. Based on the figure the committee determined a request to the legislature of \$1.2 M was appropriate for FY17. That amount would fund 20 incubator programs, provide money for the SDE to implement and coordinator the program, and provide small “grants” to individual teachers implementing mastery education. The consensus of the committee is that funds for the schools/districts and teachers should be provided to them to implement the program they described in their application. As determined in the previous meeting, there should not be one provider or implementation model prescribed by the SDE.

Roadblocks and challenges

The roadblocks and challenges discussion was very interesting. What one group (teachers, superintendent/administrators, and other personnel) felt was a roadblock another group felt was a challenge. Overall there was consensus on the roadblocks. They include: funding, graduation requirements, and accountability. With all three there are policy implications and issues that will need to be addressed if/when mastery education is implemented on a large scale. In the meantime the recommendation of the committee is to allow schools/districts to request waivers for roadblocks/challenges their school or program identifies. The waiver request would be included in the application and require specific justification for the need.

The funding concern related to average daily attendance and reporting which is essentially seat time and mastery education doesn't align to this. The concern is less about the amount of funding and more about how that amount is determined. As mastery education is implemented and students advance at different rates the funding challenges could intensify. This roadblock is a larger issue than the master education committee can tackle.

The second road block is related to graduation requirements. The current requirements are based on seat time: one credit for 60 hours of instruction and passing the class. The credit

does not guarantee the students' proficiency in the subject. Students in a mastery system are assessed on their knowledge of standards. The standards may or may not be grouped into specific courses: English 10 or US History; instead they are arranged over a continuum. The students may be exposed to all of the English 10, 11, 12 standards over the course of three years, but not in the same order as the courses. This concern relates to both the reporting of credit requirements. Much of the reporting concern related to transcripts and awarding credit can be worked through as a temporary fix, but long term there should be a review of graduation requirements and how those requirements can be represented related to mastery. Additional graduation requirement roadblocks related to grade level specific requirements. Two examples include: taking the SAT as an 11th grade student or a senior project. If the school doesn't have strict grade levels and traditional advancement, this creates issues with meeting the requirements.

The last roadblock relates to accountability, both assessment/student accountability and reporting accountability. In a mastery program students may be at different levels for each subject. If a student is designated as a 4th grader based on age, but is performing at a 6th grade level in math and a 3rd grade level in English language arts, does that student take the 4th grade state assessment or the assessments for his/her academic level? While the teacher could address that with the student, what impact does that have on the school proficiency rate? The second issue relates to reporting. Is that student reported as a 4th grader or something else? Reporting becomes a bigger issue when the ISEE system is considered. Students in mastery systems generally are reported in grade bands and move fluidly between classes and teachers. At the high school level students are enrolled in general courses that do not have set times and entry/exit dates; they may advance at different rates; learning frequently occurs outside the typical classroom; and teachers may serve different roles. All of these factors lead to challenges with reporting in the ISEE system. This will be something the SDE will need to review and determine solutions. The committee is certain other roadblocks and challenges will be more apparent when the incubator system is implemented.

Next steps

The committee developed a number of next steps to be implemented in the coming months. The two areas of focus are communications and the incubator program. It will be important to get the word out, assess the interest of the schools/districts, and have the application process in place before the legislature convenes in January.