Feedback and Assessment at Winder-Barrow Middle School

Prepared by: Erica C. Boswell

Prepared for: Dr. Jennifer Wood
Principal, Winder-Barrow Middle School

April 11, 2011

Executive Summary

Barrow County Schools has consistently been focused on ways to improve student achievement. There have been many programs and ideas tried in the schools with the hopes of increasing student test scores and improving community perception of the Barrow County school system. One program that Barrow County implemented for the 2010-2011 school year is the focus on Feedback-Differentiation-Assessment (F-D-A) as three tools to shape the classroom. Each school within the county was charged with the task of implementing the F-D-A initiative into the classroom and was responsible for providing professional development to the teachers. In order to ascertain how the teachers at Winder-Barrow Middle School are utilizing feedback and assessment, they were provided with an initial survey (Appendix A) to complete and asked to participate in a focus group interview (Appendix B). The data collected from these two tools are intended to answer the following questions:

1. Are the principal, school, and county seeing the desired results through the implementation of feedback and assessment?

2. Are teachers utilizing feedback and assessment as a way to guide their instruction?

3. Would the teachers like to see additional support from administration in how to use feedback and assessment in the classroom?

After conducting the initial survey and focus group, the data was collected. The evaluator found that the teachers are utilizing feedback and assessment in the classroom. However, they feel that they are not receiving adequate professional development and support from the administration. After the evaluation was complete and the results analyzed, recommendations were made to the client regarding ways to improve professional development for the 2011-2012 school year. Among these recommendations are:

- Provide online (or an integration of online and face-to-face) options for teachers who would like to participate in this way

- Utilize content and grade level meetings for professional development opportunities

- Have a way for teachers to become aware of the great things going on in other classrooms – what kind of assessment or feedback tools are other teachers using? Who is doing something cool in their classroom?

- Provide more awareness of how the three F-D-A components work together and meld as one

Feedback and Assessment at Winder-Barrow Middle School

Introduction

In this world where testing is king, schools are always trying to find creative ways to increase student achievement. The Barrow County School (BCS) System is no different. This year, BCS hired a new superintendent, and she brought a new innovation with her. This program charges teachers with focusing their classrooms around feedback, differentiation, and assessment (F-D-A). At principals meetings, the superintendent often reviews the following materials, all distributed by the Georgia Department of Education: *School Keys* (2007), *GAPSS Analysis* (2007), and an *Implementation Resource* (2007). Each of these manuals contains tabbed sections that include information about feedback, differentiation, and assessment. These resources serve as the backbone to the F-D-A initiative. This evaluation is focused around the implementation of feedback and assessment. Through the completion of the evaluation project, the evaluator chose to investigate whether or not teachers are utilizing feedback and assessment in their classroom and whether the use of feedback and assessment are improving student achievement.

Prior to the evaluation plan, creation of evaluation questions, or the collection of any data, a literature review was completed to ascertain the current trends and research regarding feedback and assessment and how they are used in the classroom. There are many studies that tout the benefits of using feedback and assessment in the classroom to raise student achievement. Perera, Mohamadou, and Kaur (2008) credit feedback as being "essential [for] guid[ing] students towards expected performance goals" (p. 185). As much as teachers want to help students succeed at self-assessment, "accurate self-assessment may be an unrealistic goal" (Sargeant, Mann, & VanDer Vleuten, 2008, p. 47). Teachers have to help students learn to self-assess. Fluckiger, Tixier y Vigil, Pasco, and Danielson (2010) researched the use of student-centered feedback. They used four strategies which would allow students the opportunity to learn from the feedback given. Each of the four methods, "three color [quizzes] with feedback on the process, product, and progress; midterm student conferencing; shared revision of student generated questions and statements; and timely feedback using collaborative assignment blogs" (Fluckiger, et al., 2010), provide the student with specific feedback to help enhance his or her understanding and learning. Each of these four strategies "provide[d] scaffolding for [the] learners

... and involve[d] students as partners in assessment" (Fluckiger, et al., 2010) and resulted in an increase in student achievement.

Going hand-in-hand with feedback, assessment is an additional critical component in helping to raise student achievement. However, merely giving an assessment is not enough – the results of both summative and formative assessments should be considered to gauge student learning and understanding. Additionally, these results should be utilized when lesson planning (Feldman, 2010). Many school systems, BCS included, have implemented benchmark and standards-based assessment, as promoted through the *Implementation Resource* published by the Georgia Department of Education (2007, p. 33), as a way to "align and adjust instruction to maximize student achievement." The *Implementation Resource* (2007) goes on to state that, through the analysis of the "summative data for [the] students, performance targets are … established to address student needs and desired outcomes" (p. 34).

Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide my client with information to help identify whether the implementation of the feedback and assessment components of the county's F-D-A initiative have been successful at Winder-Barrow Middle School. When used correctly, feedback and assessment should "provide scaffolding for learners [and] inform instruction" ((Fluckiger, et al., 2010, p. 136). When providing students with feedback, it is critical to help students use "the responses of others … to inform" themselves of what areas to improve in order to meet predetermined standards (Sargeant, Mann, & VanDer Vleuten, 2008, p. 47). Through the collection of data, the evaluator is able to provide evidence to the client with the ways in which teachers are utilizing feedback and assessment in the classroom and whether they are seeing improvements in student achievement. There are many resources which document "the usefulness of teacher feedback on improving … skills (Perera, Mohamadou, & Kaur, 2008, p. 185). Additionally, recommendations are available to the client based on the data collected. This evaluation is formative in nature and has provided the client with an initial snapshot of how well teachers have embraced F-D-A in its first year of implementation. After viewing the results of the evaluation, the client will be able to ascertain how well teachers are using feedback and assessment as tools for guiding the instruction.

Evaluation Questions

1. Are the principal, school, and county seeing the desired results through the implementation of feedback and assessment?

2. Are teachers utilizing feedback and assessment as a way to guide their instruction?

3. Would the teachers like to see additional support from administration in how to use feedback and assessment in the classroom?

Methods

Participants

40 of the 50 certified teachers at Winder-Barrow Middle School participated in the initial survey. This included teachers from sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, as well as teachers from the connections and special education departments. Since the survey was conducted in an anonymous format in order to encourage honest participation, there are no additional specifics in terms of the demographics of these teachers. However, eight teachers, 1 male and four female, elected to further participate in the focus group.. The following is the demographic makeup of the focus group:

Grade level taught:
- Sixth grade: 2
- Seventh grade: 1
- Eighth grade: 3
- All three grades: 2

Number of years experience:
- 1-10 years: 5
- 11-20 years: 2
- 21+ years: 1

Content Taught*:
- English/Language Arts: 3
- Science: 2
- Math: 1
- Social Studies: 2
- All Contents: 1

Age:
- 20-29: 1
- 30-39: 2
- 40-49: 4
- 50+: 1

*Since teachers were permitted to identify more than one content, totals add to more than eight.

Design and Procedures

The following activities were used to help answer the evaluation questions:

- Since Ashley Bailey and I are colleagues at the same school, we chose to combine our questionnaire and focus group questions in order to alleviate stress on the other faculty members. Rather than asking them to complete two questionnaires and/or participate in two focus group settings, we chose to create a questionnaire that was comprised of questions from both of our

areas of focus. This worked extremely well as we were focusing on differing parts of the same countywide initiative.

- The participants completed an initial questionnaire (Appendix A) that was both qualitative and quantitative in nature. The survey was created utilizing the evaluation questions stated above.

- The final question in the survey asked the participants whether or not they would be interested in participating in a focus group. Teachers who responded positively to the focus group were invited to attend the session after school. Teachers were asked questions (Appendix B) in order to gather qualitative data regarding the implementation of feedback and assessment in their classrooms.

Instruments

- *Qualitative and Quantitative Survey:* The evaluator created a survey (Appendix A) through GoogleDocs that allowed her to gather both qualitative and quantitative in nature. The survey was created using the evaluation questions as a guide.

- *Focus Group Interview:* The evaluator reviewed and analyzed the survey data in order to create questions to be used with the focus group (Appendix B). The evaluator worked with Ashley Bailey to conduct the focus group, asking questions and taking notes on the opinions and feedback of the focus group members.

The following table outlines the way in which the instruments provided the data that enabled the evaluator to answer the evaluation questions:

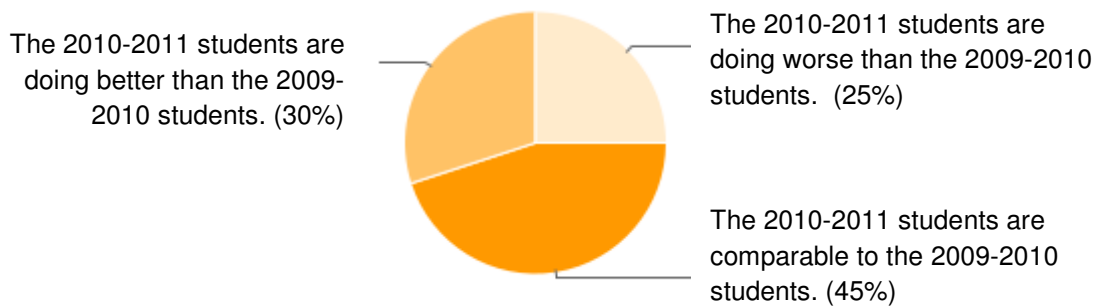| Primary Evaluation Questions:	
Are the principal, school, and county seeing the desired results through the implementation of feedback and assessment?	Survey question 8
Are teachers utilizing feedback and assessment as a way to guide their instruction?	Survey questions 4 and 5
Would the teachers like to see additional support from administration in how to use feedback and assessment in the classroom?	Survey questions 1, 3, and 9 Focus group questions 1 and 5

Summary of Key Findings

Evaluation Question 1: Are the principal, school, and county seeing the desired results through the implementation of feedback and assessment?

Key Findings: This is a difficult question to answer. The primary indicator for student achievement and results is the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), which was taken April 4-11. The relative success of the F-D-A initiative will not be entirely evident until the scores are returned. However, one piece of evidence of the success of the F-D-A is the scores from the 8th Grade Writing Test. According to the press release from Barrow County Schools (2011), "90% of Barrow 8th Graders met or exceeded standards on the assessment, an increase of 3% from 2010. Statewide, 83% of 8th Graders met or exceeded on the test, a score Barrow students surpassed." Additionally, Winder-Barrow Middle School's scores dramatically increased, from an 83% pass rate in 2010 to a 93% pass rate in 2011 (Barrow County Schools, 2011). One thing that changed at Winder-Barrow Middle School was the implementation of the F-D-A initiative. Using feedback and assessment to focus on student learning "[creates] a climate that maximizes student accomplishment (Fluckiger, et al., 2010, p. 136). More information regarding the effectiveness of F-D-A on student achievement will be available as CRCT scores are available.

The F-D-A initiative focuses on the link between feedback, differentiation, and assessment. "The potential of formative assessment to support improved student achievement has been a major focus of research" (Bryant, D. and Carless, D., 2009, p. 3). In terms of the data collected through the use of the survey (Table A), 45% of teachers polled indicated that the 2010-2011 students are performing at a comparable level to the 2009-2010 students. 30% perceive that their students are doing better this year, and 25% perceive that their students are doing worse. I find it interesting that the largest amount of teachers polled indicated that student performance has remained somewhat consistent; however, nearly equal parts of the remaining teachers indicated that they felt that student performance had increased and decreased.

Table A: "How would you rate the knowledge of your current students as compared to students in previous years?"

The 2010-2011 students are doing better than the 2009-2010 students. (30%)

The 2010-2011 students are doing worse than the 2009-2010 students. (25%)

The 2010-2011 students are comparable to the 2009-2010 students. (45%)

Evaluation Question 2: Are teachers utilizing feedback and assessment as a way to guide their instruction?

Key Findings: The overall consensus from the focus group was that the teachers feel like they are beginning to use the feedback and assessment strategies that they have been taught throughout the year. Due to the fact that the majority of the professional development for the 2010-2011 school year has been focused around feedback and assessment, the faculty members of Winder-Barrow Middle School have been provided with many strategies for improving student achievement through the use of feedback and assessment, both formative and summative. The data in Tables B and C clearly demonstrate the comfort level of the faculty in regards to the implementation of feedback and assessment. There are many "factors that influence assessment … including the nature of the performance and domains being assessed, clarity of assessment criteria, [and the] amount and quality of direction and feedback provided" (Sargeant, Mann, & VanDer Vleuten, 2008, p. 48). One of the key components to the utilization of a new instructional program is the comfort level of the teachers when implementing the strategies in place. When asked about their use of feedback and assessment, the faculty responded in an overwhelmingly positive manner. When asked about the regularity of the use of assessment to drive classroom instruction, 86% of the teachers surveyed state that they use assessment results on an almost daily basis to direct their instruction. Upon viewing the results in a table format (Table B), it is apparent that the teachers are confident when using assessment as a tool for driving classroom instruction.

Additionally, the teachers seem to be quite comfortable providing their students with individual feedback. "Traditional tactics [when providing feedback] include handwritten comments on students' assessed work

… which are returned back to the students" (Hatziapostolo, T. & Paraskakis, I, 2010, p.111). Teachers

are utilizing traditional as well as more creative ways of providing feedback to their students. As with

assessment, there have been multiple professional development learning opportunities for the teachers

regarding feedback. When teachers are assessing their success in providing feedback, "one of the key

issues is the ability to provide feedback that is useful to the individual learner" (Perera, Mohamadou, &

Kaur, 2008, p. 186). In order to help teachers practice giving feedback, they were given the chance to

walk through and provide feedback to other teachers – much in the same manner as the walkthrough

teams in the county. This was an opportunity for teachers to utilize the "Glow-Grow-Next Step" framework

provided by the county. The "Glow" step is where the teacher highlights a high point of the student's work.

The "Grow" and "Next Step" components go hand-in-hand; teachers provide a suggestion for

improvement (grow) and how the student can go about achieving it (next step). This framework has

provided teachers with the confidence needed to provide students with feedback on a regular basis, as

indicated in Table C. 83% of the teachers provide feedback to their students on an almost daily basis.

The responses from the focus group indicated that teachers feel much more comfortable with the

feedback and assessment components of the F-D-A initiative, while they do not feel as comfortable with

effectively using differentiation in the classroom.

Table B: "How often have you used assessment as a way to drive your classroom instruction?"	Table C: "How often do you give individualized feedback to students?"
Almost never Almost always	Hardly ever Daily
1: 0 participants (0%) 4: 19 participants (48%) 2: 2 participants (5%) 5: 15 participants (38%) 3: 4 participants (10%)	1: 0 participants (0%) 4: 16 participants (40%) 2: 1 participant (3%) 5: 17 participants (43%) 3: 6 participants (15%)

Evaluation Question 3: Would the teachers like to see additional support from administration in how to use feedback and assessment in the classroom?

Key Findings: The teachers were asked through the survey their perception of administrative support in terms of implementing feedback (Table D) and assessment (Table E). The feeling of support seems to be mixed. In regards to the support in the implementation of feedback, 40% of the participants feel that they are able to begin using the strategies, where 51% feel even more confident. However, in the support for assessment, the responses were more spread across the five choices. 13% of the teachers surveyed reported that they feel little support on a day-to-day basis. The remaining responses were fairly evenly spread out, with 28% of the teachers feeling that they are able to begin using the strategies, 35% feel that they are able to utilize the strategies effectively, and 25% found themselves somewhere in between these two response choices.   The responses given indicate that the teachers are at a beginning level in terms of their comfort level with the implementation of assessment and feedback. The faculty also seems to indicate that they would appreciate some additional support from the administration in order to feel fully confident at implementing feedback and assessment.

The focus group had quite a bit to say about ways that the administration could provide support for the teachers by way of professional development. When asked about ways that they would like to receive professional development, there were a variety of answers. Two of the teachers indicated that they would appreciate some online learning opportunities utilizing Wikispaces or another online forum, one of the teachers seemed opposed to this option, and the remaining four teachers would like to see a mixture of face-to-face and online learning opportunities. The main thing that the teachers responded with was a desire to have professional development that related to their content or grade level. They appreciated professional development chances where they could discuss implementation ideas with their professional learning communities (teachers who teach the same content). Additionally, the teachers indicated a desire to continue using grade level or content meetings as a place for holding professional development, appreciating the smaller group discussions. An additional idea that was provided by the focus group was the ability to see other teachers in action. The teachers felt that there were a lot of great things going on in the school and would appreciate the opportunity to see how feedback and assessment are being used by the other teachers. One additional component that the teachers felt was missing from

the professional development for the 2010-2011 school year was the discussion of how the three

components of the F-D-A initiative work together. The focus group members would appreciate some

guidance in how the three rely on each other to have a successful classroom.

Table D: "How would you rate the administration's support in the implementation of feedback?"
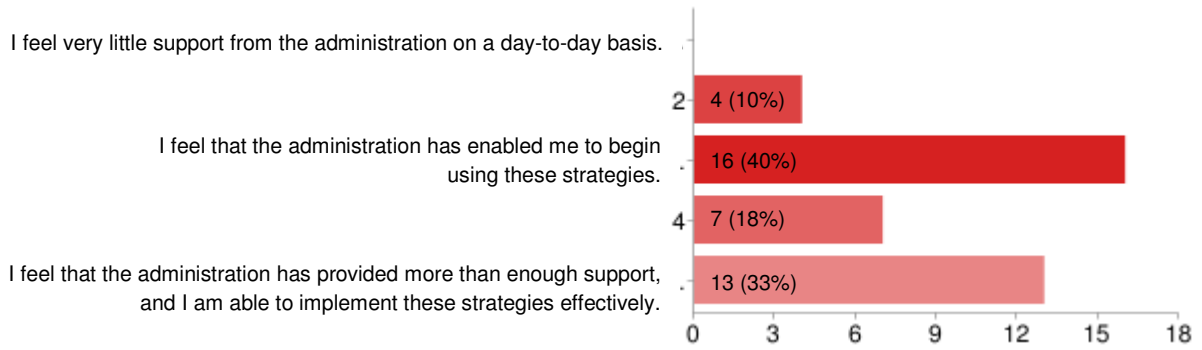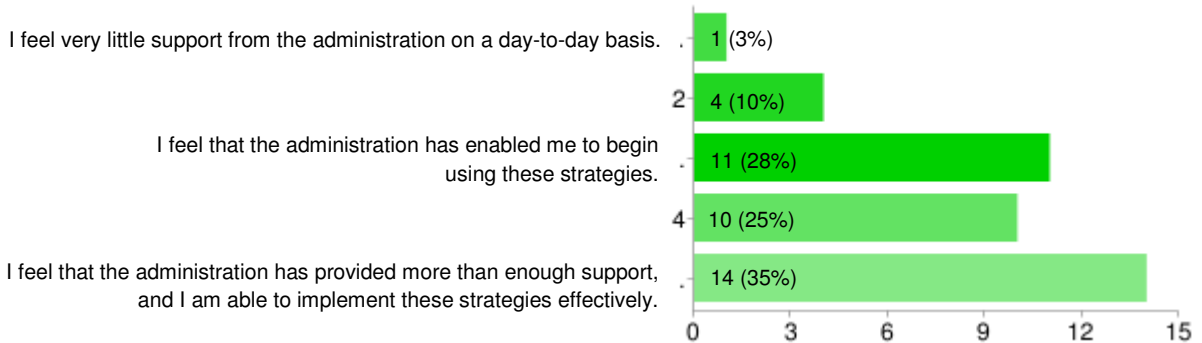

Table E: "How would you rate the administration's support in the implementation of assessment?"

Recommendations and Conclusions

        The implementation of the F-D-A initiative has been only one of many changes at Winder-Barrow

Middle School (and in Barrow County Schools) for the 2010-2011 school year. However, the

implementation of a program is only as successful as the support provided to the teachers. In order for a

program to produce the desired results, the faculty members must feel that they have been given the

tools and resources needed to successfully bring the program into the classroom. Overall, the teachers

feel fairly confident about the implementation of feedback and assessment in the classroom. Teachers

are utilizing "[f]ormative feedback [as an] instrumental [tool] in the learning experience of a student"

(Hatziapostolo, T. & Paraskakis, I, 2010, p.111). Additionally, "[f]ormative assessment seeks to inform

instruction and help students use the results to enhance their own learning" (Fluckiger, et al., 2010, p. 136). Teachers are utilizing feedback and assessment as a way to "identify learning goals and use these as the basis for … assessment" (Feldman, 2010, p. 234).

However, the one area of weakness that the faculty expressed was in the area of administrative support. As indicated in the results above, the teachers surveyed expressed a desire to receive more support from the administration in how to effectively use feedback and assessment in the classroom to increase student achievement. There were successes, challenges, and lasting impressions noted throughout the investigation and evaluation of the F-D-A initiative. One overwhelming success regarding feedback and assessment is the fact that the teachers seem to be using feedback and assessment regularly in their classrooms. The program cannot be a success if teachers are not using it. As Winder-Barrow Middle School teachers are consistently using feedback and assessment, this is a sign that the school is moving in the right direction when it comes to making changes to improve student achievement. The use of the F-D-A initiative is to help students achieve and learn. This learning partially "depends on how effectively a [the] learner assimilates and accepts the feedback" (Perera, Mohamadou, & Kaur, 2008, p. 185). A challenge that has been experienced is the lack of professional development support that some teachers are feeling in regards to feedback and assessment. Going hand-in-hand, a lasting impression from the evaluation would be that the faculty is willing and ready to utilize feedback and assessment; however, they are feeling a lack of professional development providing them with the support needed to effectively use feedback and assessment in the classroom.

The evaluator collected the following suggestions from the teachers in the focus group regarding ways to improve professional development for the 2011-2012 school year:

- Provide online (or an integration of online and face-to-face) options for teachers who would like to participate in this way
- Utilize content and grade level meetings for professional development opportunities
- Allow teachers the chance to work with their content teams to develop content-specific strategies
- Continue utilizing the book study as a method for providing professional development and for helping teachers to stay aware of current trends in education

- Have a way for teachers to become aware of the great things going on in other classrooms – what kind of assessment or feedback tools are other teachers using? Who is doing something cool in their classroom?

- Provide more awareness of how the three F-D-A components work together and meld as one

If these recommendations are taken into consideration for the 2011-2012 school year, the data supports the conclusion that the implementation of the feedback and assessment components of F-D-A could continue to be extremely successful.

References

Barrow County Schools (2011). Barrow county students continue to excel on 8th grade writing [Press

  release]. Retrieved from http://www.barrow.k12.ga.us/PR/2011_8th_Grade_Writing_Test_Press_

  Release.pdf

Bryant, D., & Carless, D. (2009). Peer assessment in a test-dominated setting: Empowering, boring, or

  facilitating examination procedures? *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 9, 3-15.

  Retrieved from Eric (at EBSCOhost).

Feldman, E. (2010). Benchmarks curricular planning and assessment framework: Utilizing standards

  without introducing standardization. *Early Childhood Education*, 38, 233-242. Retrieved from Eric

  (at EBSCOhost).

Fluckiger, J., Tixier y Vigil, Y., Pasco, R., & Danielson, K. (2010). Formative feedback: Involving students

  as partners in assessment to enhance learning. *College Teaching*, 58, 136-140. Retrieved from

  Eric (at EBSCOhost).

Georgia Department of Education. (2007). *GAPSS analysis: Georgia assessment of*

  performance on school standards: Closing the gap. Atlanta, GA: School Improvement Services.

Georgia Department of Education. (2007). *Implementation resource: Building capacity*

  through best practices. Atlanta, GA: School Improvement Services.

Georgia Department of Education. (2007). *School keys: Unlocking excellence through*

  the Georgia school standards. Atlanta, GA: School Improvement Services.

Hatziapostolou, T & Paraskakis, I. (2010) Enhancing the impact of formative feedback on student learning

  through an online feedback system. *Electronic Journal of e-Learning,* 8(2), 111 – 122. Retrieved

  from Eric (at EBSCOhost).

Perera, J., Mohamadou, G., & Kaur, S. (2008). The use of objective structured self-assessment and peer-

  feedback (OSSP) for learning communication skills: evaluation using a controlled trial. *Advances*

  in Health Science Education, 15, 185-193.

Sargeant, J., Mann., K., & VanDer Vleuten, C. (2008). "Directed" self-assessment: Practice and feedback

  within a social context. *Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions*, 28(1), 47-54.

  Retrieved from Eric (at EBSCOhost).

Appendix

Appendix A

Feedback - Differentiation - Assessment

This year, Barrow County Schools has implemented an initiative targeting Feedback - Differentiation - Assessment as ways to increase student achievement. Ashley Bailey and Erica Boswell are working to evaluate this initiative as a component of their Program Evaluation Course at the University of West Georgia. Please fill out the following survey about the FDA initiative. All responses will be kept anonymous. Thank you ahead of time for your participation.

* Required

How would you rate the quality of the Professional Development provided this year in the area of Feedback? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Poor	◉	◉	◉	◉	◉	Excellent

How would you rate the quality of the Professional Development provided this year in the area of Differentiation? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Poor	◉	◉	◉	◉	◉	Excellent

How would you rate the quality of the Professional Development provided this year in the area of Assessment? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Poor	◉	◉	◉	◉	◉	Excellent

How often have you used assessment as a way to drive your classroom instruction? *
(Have you used your assessments (formative or summative) as ways to change possible instruction?)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Almost never	◉	◉	◉	◉	◉	Almost always

How often do you give individualized feedback to students? *
(either written or verbal)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Hardly ever	◉	◉	◉	◉	◉	Daily

How often are your lessons differentiated to meet different learning needs? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Hardly ever	◉	◉	◉	◉	◉	Daily

Has your knowledge of differentiation been evident in student learning? *
(Please answer this question based on the Professional Development opportunities provided this year.)

◉ Yes
◉ No
◉ Unsure
◉ I have not implemented differentiation strategies in my classroom.

How would you rate the knowledge of your current students as compared to students in previous years? *

○ Comparable

○ This year's students are doing better.

○ This year's students are doing worse.

How would you rate the administration's support in the implementation of the following strategies? *

	I feel very little support from the administration on a day-to-day basis.	2	I feel that the administration has enabled me to begin using these strategies.	4	I feel that the administration has provided more than enough support and am able to implement these strategies effectively.
Feedback	○	○	○	○	○
Differentiation	○	○	○	○	○
Assessment	○	○	○	○	○

Please describe any challenges that you face when implementing differentiation.

Would you be interested in participating in a focus group regarding the implementation of FDA? *

We will meet with the focus group for approximately an hour one afternoon to gather additional qualitative data. (Snacks will be provided!)

○ Yes

○ No

Continue »

Powered by Google Docs

Survey can be accessed at the following site:
https://spreadsheets.google.com/viewform?hl=en&pli=1&formkey=dGdUdEZLU1d2RXdHT0h3YUl6SG54UUE6MQ#gid=0

Appendix B

Focus Group Questions

- How would you like to receive your professional development on F-D-A in the future?

- What could be done to improve the professional development in the area of differentiation?

- What could the administration provide you with to help you better implement differentiation in the classroom?

- How do you measure differentiation when looking at student learning and understanding?

- How could the administration extend the support provided in all areas of F-D-A in order for

  teachers to utilize them better next year?