3-8 ELA Module Implementation Case Study #1

Creekside School District is a small, rural school district in New York State. Many of the teachers at Creekside grew up in the town and have worked for their entire careers at the school. They are members of the community and see and socialize with their students and parents not only at school but at sporting events, church, and in the grocery store.

Creekside’s teachers work hard and make the absolute best of the resources they have. Prior to the release of the modules, they had made some attempts to align their curriculum to the Common Core Standards and to shift their instructional practices, but they were doing it largely on their own. Privately, many of the teachers were concerned that they weren’t moving in the right direction, or quickly enough, but used to feeling kind of “on their own,” they didn’t speak of it to each other.

Although Creekside has a stable teaching staff, it has had many leadership turnovers in recent years. The Superintendent, who did not teach or lead in the district prior to taking on the Superintendency, has been there for two years. The principal of the K-8 building, who was a teacher in that same school, has been in the leadership role for one year.

When the 3-5 modules were released, many Creekside teachers were interested in them. The Superintendent and Principal, relieved by the teachers’ interest, supplied the modules materials and books for students. The teachers dug in, and despite issues with time, felt their students were gaining a lot from module lessons. Their enthusiasm was catching and the middle school ELA teachers also asked to teach the modules after the 2013 ELA assessment. They too noticed the difference in their students’ learning.

The K-8 Principal and Superintendent entered this year thinking that teachers and kids would be settling in to the new year with a direction everyone was feeling good about. Teachers were encouraged to get together over the summer and make implementation plans, which some did. However, two Creekside teachers returned from summer break with concerns. One, the 8th grade ELA teacher, returned to school really concerned that her students would not have time for the powerful *Tom Sawyer* unit that she had taught in the past. Another, an elementary school teacher, is growing increasingly agitated about time and feeling that she cannot get her daily schedule organized. Other teachers seem not to have these concerns. In private conversation with the Principal, the 7th grade ELA teacher told the principal, “Don’t worry about what [the 8th grade teacher] is complaining about. She always complains when she doesn’t get her way. It really makes the whole department irritated.” Other teachers are seen rolling their eyes when the elementary teacher brings up, yet again, that there is no way to teach the modules and all the other stuff there is to do. There’s a sense of growing discontent and discouragement, even among the teachers who are feeling good about module implementation. One teacher was overheard saying to another in the faculty lounge – “Another thing heading off the rails, another change, and another unsustained initiative. This will probably be the thing that drives our new principal out and we will start over…again. I’m just really tired.” When the teachers meet together as a group, they are collegial. They never discuss any concerns or problems they are having, but simply nod and smile as if everything is ok.

The Principal and Superintendent have talked and both are concerned that the teachers are not working together to solve these issues. Neither feels like they know what to say or do.

**Brainstorm:**

* What *are* the cultural and implementation issues that need attention in this school/district?
* How would you build a more positive, change-focused culture in this school/district?