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### Professional Development-Key to Retention of Rural Principals?

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# Professional Development-Key to Retention of Rural Principals?

## **Abstract**

Building principals wear many hats, not the least of which is instructional leader. Leading curriculum, instruction and school improvement efforts can be overwhelming to leaders who must also tend to the management and operational demands of the job. Rural leaders are often expected to assume even greater responsibilities with considerably less support. Although expected to design and provide professional development for others, insufficient time and funding often prevent the leader from engaging in his/her own learning and growth.

This article describes the efforts of one university to provide relevant, low-or-no-cost professional development opportunities as a service to building leaders and the schools they serve, to provide networking opportunities to reduce isolation and burnout among rural leaders, and to provide a structure for school and district teams to collaborate with one another about best practices for school improvement.

## **Introduction**

Building principals wear many hats, not the least of which is instructional leader. Leading curriculum, instruction and school improvement efforts can be overwhelming to leaders who must also tend to the management and operational demands of the job. Although expected to design and provide professional development for others, insufficient time and funding often prevent the leader from engaging in his/her own learning and growth. This problem is amplified for the rural principal, who often is also responsible for classroom teaching and other duties without the support personnel, access to job-alike peers, or structures present in larger schools.

This article describes the efforts of one university to support rural principals by providing relevant, low-or-no-cost professional development opportunities as well as a structure for school and district teams to network with others and to collaborate with one another about best practices for school improvement.

## **The Rural Principal**

According to Rural School and Community Trust, 46 percent of the schools in Kansas are identified as rural by the U.S. Census Bureau, serving about 23% of the state's K-12 student population. Nearly two-thirds of these districts — 66% — are considered small rural districts with enrollments below the national median for rural school districts. Other states in the region report similar demographics. In Arkansas, for example, almost 45% of schools are considered rural, serving almost one-third of the state's students. In Missouri, about 44% of schools and 65 percent of districts fall into this category. Oklahoma has the highest percentage of rural schools (52%) and districts (68.6%) (Showalter, Daniel, Hartman, S.L., Johnson, J., & Klein, B. (2019). Harmon and Schafft (2009) report nationwide statistics:

Almost 8,000 or more than half (56 percent) of all operating public school districts in the US are located in rural areas. These districts include approximately one-third (31 percent) of the nation's public schools and more than one-fifth (21 percent) of the total US student population. Over 10 million students are served by rural schools” (p. 6)

Latterman and Steffes (2017) reported a nationwide turnover rate of 20 percent for rural school principals. They further asserted that because principals in rural districts are expected to serve many roles in a small community, they, “become over-extended, causing them to resign and discouraging teachers from seeking principal roles” (p. 3). Preston et al (2013) warned, “. . . recruiting and retaining of quality rural principals is a grave challenge commonly faced by many school districts” (p.4). In addition, rural principals tend to have fewer administrative support personnel such as assistant principals and curriculum specialists (Preston et al, 2013). Two key concerns emerging from the literature regarding rural leaders are isolation from peers and the lack

of time/availability of professional development (Beausaert, Froehlich, Devos & Riley, 2016; Howard & Mallory, 2008; Stephenson & Bauer, 2010; Tomic & Tomic, 2008).

While the school improvement process is fundamental to student success, the added responsibilities and increased expectation of the building principal surrounding teacher improvement and student learning have led to burnout and high principal turnover rates (Pijanowski, Hewitt, & Brady, 2009; Reid, 2021). Along with the challenges of increased accountability, building leaders still face the challenges of teacher support, interactions with staff, students, and parents, as well as community involvement-all leading to added stress and influence retention problems and turnover among building leaders (Farley-Ripple, Raffel, & Welch, 2012).

In a study by Reid (2021), “eight of 10 principals in this study said they would likely leave the profession prior to retirement age. The principals gave a variety of reasons for this, mostly related to evolving time and job-related demands and expectations of the school principal.” Principal isolation negatively impacts his/her ability to serve as instructional leader (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). Those who report lower feelings of isolation are less likely to suffer from burnout (Stephenson and Bauer, 2010: Tomic and Tomic, 2008). Similarly, Beausaert et al (2016) stated, “We found that when principals lack or lose social support from colleagues, they will be more likely to burnout over time” (p. 359). In a study of rural principals in Australia, Lock et al (2012) reported that principals suffered, “the loneliness of being a leader due to a lack of peer interaction during which challenges of their position could be discussed with colleagues” (p. 9). Martin (2019) conducted a survey of Kansas school district superintendents regarding the quality and availability of building administrators, reporting, “Those who responded viewed the development of future administrators as important to

addressing the current shortage. Over 65% of Superintendent respondents indicated they were “somewhat concerned” to “extremely concerned” about the availability of qualified candidates for building leadership positions” (p. 14). Martin further found:

Between January and August 2018, the Kansas Education Employment Board had 517 postings for building administrators. Many Kansas school districts are in rural areas, which contributes to the difficulty of finding and attracting qualified applicants.

Latterman and Steffes (2017) reported a nationwide turnover rate of 20 percent for rural school principals. They further asserted that because principals in rural districts are expected to wear many hats in a small community, they “become over-extended, causing them to resign and discouraging teachers from seeking principal roles” (p. 3). Latterman and Steffes suggest that rural succession planning strategies could include “grow your own” programs in which educators from within the district are identified and paired with experienced principals to create a “rural residency” (p. 3) that will more realistically prepare principals for the challenges faced by administrators in rural environments (p. 3).

### **Professional Development and The Principal’s Role in School Improvement**

The role of the building principal has evolved throughout the years. With the creation of the 2002 “No Child Left Behind Act” and the more recent 2015 creation of the “Every Student Succeeds Act” building principals have become fundamentally responsible for the educational improvement and advancement of every student, making principals fundamentally important to the school improvement process (Peck, et al., 2013). Many rural principals feel ill-prepared to lead professional development in their schools, and often lack access to resources and peer support for these efforts. Wood et al (2013), pointed to importance of instructional leadership to school reform, stating, “Another area presenting significant need in rural regions is professional

learning for leaders . . . principals can only provide this type of leadership if they themselves have received the appropriate training” (p. 2).

Many states are moving to different school improvement accreditation systems that further increase the workload on building principals. The job of a principal is time-consuming, with the result that often professional development is placed on the back burner due to lack of time. The challenge administrators face as they take on the numerous daily roles of a principal is, where do they find the time to expand their professional network? The priority needs to be placed on professional development opportunities that improve school leadership practices designed around the focus on the challenges that . . . principals face on a daily basis (Ng and Szeto, 2016).

Professional Development (PD) is essential to improving teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement” (Learning Forward, 2010). However, Wei et al. (2009) state that, “. . . professional learning in its current state is poorly conceived and deeply flawed” (p. 2). One problem may be that many programs still utilize the workshop model. Workshop-style professional development often takes the form of individual staff members attending unrelated "Sit and get" one-day events, with the result that these programs tend to be fragmented and disconnected and do not allow for deep, collaborative learning (Acevedo, 2014; Balan et al., 2011). Another flaw of some professional development programs is the lack of training for and active involvement of the building principal. Louie, B.Y, et al (2019) emphasized the need for building leaders to have the necessary knowledge base to make informed decisions and support their teachers.

There are conflicting views about whether professional development should take place at the district level or at the school level. School-level professional development allows the principal to design how the individual school will implement new programs. However, principals

become frustrated when they are tasked with providing professional development when the outcomes and resources are not adequately communicated from the district level. This lack of communication from the district leads to increased stress levels on the building level administration. Utilizing professional development for principals in which they can communicate with other district administrators and create a plan, with individualized implementation strategies per building has been found to be an effective form of professional development not only for principals, but also in their ability to provide professional development to their faculty (Cothorn, 2014). Rural principals generally lack such access to other administrators.

### **Barriers to Principals' Professional Development**

Donaldson (2013) found that principals often see the culture of their school as a barrier to school improvement, when in fact, it is they who are in the best position to create the conditions to change the culture.

Superintendent perceptions are another barrier that administrators are facing as they attempt to grow their professional knowledge. 'When asked about how often principals should meet for professional development, the superintendent indicated while he believed in professional development and working with the principals, he very much believed principals should be on their campus' (Cothorn, 2014, p. 121).

Outside of taking time for their own learning, principals often face themselves (and their assumptions) as their own barrier to professional learning. In order to grow and to lead change within schools, principals must be willing to collaborate with others, challenge their own assumptions and learn to frame and ask open-ended questions and to truly listen to those who question the status quo.

In their study of principal engagement in the professional development process, Koonce et al (2019) found:

Two overarching barriers to effective professional development mentioned by all 20 interview participants were time and money. Additional barriers that were common among principals included substitute teacher availability and costs, parents and other stakeholder groups, student needs, lack of confidence or competence among teachers and administrators, school culture and climate, and a lack of communication and organization (pp 12/25 online doi).

Additional barriers identified by principals included logistics, cost, time, relevance, and, in rural districts, a lack of access to peers (Moore & Kochan, 2013; Donaldson, 2013).

Principals are expected to be “experts” in multiple areas (curriculum, instruction, assessment, operations, and human resources, to name a few), often with very little support. Professional development can be seen as a tool to combat the problem of administrator burnout and turnover.

Various learning theories must be considered in planning for professional development. For the purposes of this case study, Distributed Leadership Theory was utilized. Educators need the opportunity to collaborate with other educators, to draw on their personal experiences, and to make connections between theory and application. Lindeman (2011) added that, “experience is the adult-learners’ textbook” (p. 10). Cortez-Jiminez (2012) points to concerns about the deficiencies in principal preparation and the general lack of quality professional development for school leaders. In a study of rural California administrators, she found that 90% of administrators reported a need for more staff development in order to meet the expectations of their role, adding:



Administrators may need specific staff development opportunities that will allow them to implement and reflect rather than just knowing about them. The findings also reflect a lack of time spent on these specific strategies as outlined by the research. This was true for all administrators, regardless of their educational background and experience on the job. Administrators may need further assistance in managing and balancing their time to put more effort in implementing strategies that the research has pointed out to increase student achievement. Additionally, administrators reported to doing it all and wearing many hats. Does this imply that rural school administrators need more training on distributed leadership and empowering teachers? (Cortez-Jiminez, 2012, p. 113).

The added stresses and accountability for continuous school improvement have made it ever more important for principals to participate in effective professional development and to collaborate with other leaders. The principal's vital role in school improvement has been well-established in the literature: (Darling-Hammond et al, 2010; DuFour et al, 2010; Marzano et al, 2005; Robinson et. al, 2008). Wood et al (2013), stated, "Another area presenting significant need in rural regions is professional learning for leaders . . . principals can only provide this type of leadership if they themselves have received the appropriate training" (p. 2). While rural principals acknowledge their responsibility and accountability as instructional leaders, administrative and managerial tasks often pull them away from focusing on school improvement. Starr & White, (2008), found:

In order to best service their schools and to help themselves, small rural principals are turning to each other and their communities for support and collaboration in conducting their complex roles . . . Many people play an important part in running small rural schools in which leadership is increasingly viewed as a collective community

responsibility in an environment of diminishing and more tightly controlled resources. . .

Small rural principals have to be cognizant of, and diplomatic in using, localized formal and informal power structures to get things done” (p. 10).

A meta-analysis conducted by Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) shows that five instructional leadership behaviors have a potent impact on student learning, including promoting and participating in teacher learning. These themes suggest interaction between principals and their fellow educators within the building is vital to the quality and effectiveness of the school and that principal isolation may have a severe impact on leaders’ abilities to serve as instructional leaders.

This style of distributive leadership (also known as democratic leadership or participative leadership) has shown effectiveness in school turnaround or school improvement. In a case study by Bennett (2012), “feelings of personal responsibility for improving the lives of children and involvement in team collaboration processes culminated in a common perspective” (p. 447). The democratic leadership style promotes more inclusion and lightens the overwhelming load building principals currently carry (Bennett, 2012; Brown et. al., 2019; Furman, 2004). In discussing the large work load building principals face Brown et. al. (2019) states, “In the context of expectation of school leaders, it is reasonable to suggest that this is an enormous task for one person to accomplish on his or her own” (p. 459).

Utilizing a distributive leadership approach does not only lighten the load of a building principal, it is a more sustainable model for school improvement. Leadership is not something done by one person, but more importantly by an organization as whole (Brown et. al. 2019; Harris, 2009). To further this point Ancona et al. (2007) claims, “it’s time to end the myth of the

complete leader; the flawless person at the top who's got it all figured out. In fact, the sooner leaders stop trying to be all things to all people, the better off their organization will be" (p.92).

School districts need to take a more systemic approach to professional development, encouraging administrators to incorporate research-based best practices and to collaborate with teachers and fellow administrators in developing relevant, effective experiences. Effective PD programs must include collaboration with teachers, allowing them to implement strategies and address questions and concerns (Darling-Hammond & McLoughlin, 2011). To truly improve schools, principals must establish a culture of learning (Lindstrom & Speck, 2004).

### **The role of collaborative teams in education**

Collaboration is key to creating buy-in and true engagement in the professional development process. Glickman et al. (2010) emphasize that that all school and district stakeholders should have a say in creating professional development goals for their district. Helsing et al; 2008 explained:

Since the necessary knowledge for solving an adaptive problem does not exist, individual leaders should not see themselves as the ones who can or should deliver effective solutions to these problems for others. Additionally, because there are no easy solutions, these leaders must widely share responsibility for fully understanding the problems and experiment with others . . . to find solutions." (p. 439)

Many et al. (2019) observed that schools with high-performing teams valued collaboration, collective exploration, and group-generated solutions and the belief that, "No one person has all the answers, but by working through a process of collective inquiry together, we create better solutions to new challenges than we can by thinking and working alone" (p. 17). Snell & Janney (2005) found:

- Shared decision-making appears to yield better decisions and results.
- Both teachers and administrators appear to be motivated by the advantages of shared decision-making.
- Collaborative teaming is reported to enhance teachers' satisfaction with their jobs; they enjoy the regular exchange of resources and expertise, the sense of belonging, the freedom from isolation, and the intellectual stimulation.
- When team members have been instrumental in forming a plan, they report that they are more committed to the plan's implementation and success.
- Effective communication and the ability to work cooperatively with others are viewed as essential abilities for being effective in most jobs today (p. 15).

Collaboration must be a genuine sharing of ideas among professionals who can voice their opinions, concerns and frustrations (Gabriel et al., 2011). DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Many (2010) stated, “. . .the key to improved learning for students is continuous job-embedded learning for educators” (p. 11). Acevedo (2014) concluded, “Collaboration within schools is an essential characteristic of effective job-embedded PD as it creates a healthy school culture, encourages positive change and student learning” (p. 48).

### **Methodology**

School administrators are telling us what they need to succeed. The challenge is, how do we remove the barriers of time and added responsibilities administrators face on a daily basis to provide them meaningful and actionable professional development? How do we provide a structure in which principals can network with and learn from peers and collaborate with teams to combat isolation and burnout and promote school improvement through distributed leadership?

In order to address the problem identified, an Advisory Council focus group consisting of area superintendents, principals and teacher leaders met with university personnel to discuss possible ways the university could assist rural principals with opportunities for relevant professional development and networking with peers. The Council identified the mission statement and objectives for the project, and solicited input from area leaders about key topics of interest. Emails were sent to superintendents and principals from the four contiguous states to confirm the need, relevance, and potential interest in attending the forum. Following each Forum, participants were asked to respond to a survey (Appendix C), and responses were used to assess the value of the content to participants, to make modifications to the format of the Forum and to select topics for future Forums.

### **Forum-Background and Description**

Pittsburg State University (PSU) is located in the southeast corner of Kansas, frequently referred to as the “four-state area,” because of its proximity to Kansas, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Missouri (KAMO). Part of the mission of the PSU College of Education is to provide services and resources to area school districts. In the initial invitation to principals (Morton, 2017, personal communication) the purpose was described as follows:

Pittsburg State University in partnership with the 4-State Communities is working to provide a Principal’s Forum that will provide a comprehensive professional learning process to help principals-new, experienced, and aspiring candidates-develop and sustain the skills that are proven to have a positive effect in building leadership excellence.

Relative to teachers and superintendents, however, principals are not receiving the ongoing, continuous support that they need to keep their skills sharp. KAMO Principals’

Forum will provide the support they most urgently need through a comprehensive, ongoing program of professional development targeted to their key needs (p. 1).

KAMO began as the brainchild of one of the University's leadership faculty, seeing a need for more professional development for the region's building administrators, many of whom practiced in small rural districts with limited access to other building leaders. Leadership faculty presented the idea to the program's Leadership Studies Advisory Committee, made up of superintendents and building principals strategically selected from representative school districts in the region (October 19, 2016 agenda, Appendix A). The Advisory Council assisted with developing the mission statement for the event:

*The mission of KAMO is to collaborate with partner K-12 schools in developing mutually beneficial professional development opportunities to prepare, evaluate, support, and retain high-quality educational leaders. The vision of KAMO is to support the development of leadership capacity in K-12 partner schools through research and professional development activities.*

Each annual theme was developed by the advisory council and then refined and focused by the leadership team at PSU. Topics and themes were selected to meet the current professional development needs of schools in the four-state area. These themes focused on current problems of practice within the local school systems or current initiatives and mandates coming down from the state departments of education.

In order to circumvent the two biggest barriers to participation, time and funding, the original concept was to provide professional development to building principals at no cost to the district, on timely topics identified as needed. A two-day, half-day format (afternoon session Day 1, evening networking reception, morning session Day 2) was initially implemented to allow

administrators to travel without additional days away from the building (for those coming from greater distances), or two allow others to have a presence in their buildings each of those days (combats the barrier of time away from the building). The purpose of the evening session was to allow administrators time to process, discuss and collaborate about the topics, as well as provide opportunities for professional networking and collegiality (to combat burnout). Due to PSU's close proximity and professional relationships with many schools in the four-state area, this format would allow building administrators the opportunity to travel in close proximity to their school districts while still gaining meaningful professional development. The importance of close proximity allowed administrators to still remain in contact with their school district in handling any day to day issues that arise within the school.

Funding initially was secured through grant funds, and contributions from PSU colleges and programs. Additionally, low or no-cost keynote speakers and facilitators were secured (years 1 and two). In years three and four, sponsorships were solicited as funding became scarcer. In year four, it became necessary to charge a nominal fee (covering the cost of meals and refreshments for the conference).

Based on feedback from participants and the Leadership Advisory Council, the timing and format of the conference evolved over the years, moving to a spring date (to avoid activities and assessment seasons) and a full-day, one-day format. The intended audience grew to include superintendents (key decision-makers) and teacher leaders, to increase the opportunity for collaboration and the likelihood that concepts and initiatives conceived in the conference could be put into action in their respective buildings. The addition of superintendents and teacher leaders also fell in line with local changes in state department of education policy with the

creation of district and building leadership teams. Districts and buildings were now utilizing the KAMO Conference as professional development for their teams.

### **Description of Forums from Beginning to Present**

The initial “KAMO” Conference was held April 12-13, 2017, with an attendance of 60 superintendents/principals from four states with a budget of approximately \$3000.00 (primarily for food and speaker travel expenses). The topic was *Mental Health* (see Appendix B, KAMO Agendas). Topics were facilitated by local mental health experts. The original design included an overnight stay with a networking dinner event. Other costs were partially defrayed through limited sponsorships. Participant evaluation (see Appendix C) themes included appreciation for the timely topic and opportunity for professional development, collaboration and networking opportunities with other building leaders. One participant wrote, “Great idea/concept, [area] needs more opportunities for professional growth and collaboration.” Another expressed appreciation for the “support and networking opportunities.” Comments responding to the question about the perceived strengths of the event included, “I think that the biggest strength is the ability to connect with other principals.” Another wrote, “I loved how intimate the forum was. I loved that it was designed for principals.” and, “Great networking, collaboration opportunities.” Regarding the topic, comments included, “Relevant topic that you could apply quickly, and, “Liked having a single focus an important topic like mental health.”

Suggestions for improvements included changing the timing of the conference (due to assessments and athletic conflicts) and moving to a one-day format (two days out of the building was difficult for administrators). Several participants expressed the desire for more time talking with peers. Participants were also given the opportunity to suggest topics for future Forums. The Leadership Studies Advisory Council annually reviewed participant feedback and suggestions



and assisted with selecting the annual conference theme, suggested speakers and other modifications to the conference.

In 2018, January 17-18, 87 registered attendees (a 45% increase) represented a broader audience (based on feedback from 2017), including 51 principals, 32 teacher leaders, and four superintendents. The increased budget (just under \$8500) reflected a speaker fee (\$4000) and additional food and supplies to accommodate the increased number of participants. The topic, *Enhanced Leadership*, was keynoted and facilitated by Dr. Steven W. Anderson (see agenda, Appendix B). Grant funds were also used to purchase a copy of one of Dr. Anderson's books for each participant to add to his/her professional library. Administrative attendees received, *The Tech Savvy Administrator*, and teacher leaders were given a copy of *The Relevant Educator*. The two-day format was maintained, with a networking reception and attendance at a university athletic event was planned. The evening activities were very poorly attended. This, together with participant feedback, resulted in the move to a one-day format for the Forum in subsequent years. A huge snowstorm prevented some of the registered participants from traveling, and also resulted in a date change for subsequent years. Again, the Forum speaker and topics seemed to resonate with attendees, who responded to the evaluation form with comments such as, "Very well-versed presenter. Built in time to work in groups and talk together," and, ". It gave me ideas to help support myself and staff." Another said, "I really enjoyed this forum! It was applicable and easy to take action when I returned to my building. I am already putting what I have learned to use!"

Due to increasing fiscal restraints, the Leadership Studies program faculty collaborated with that of the Educational Technology program to mesh what had previously been two events: The KAMO Forum and an Educational Technology forum. The February 27, 2019 Forum was

titled, *Next Generation Leadership*, and focused on educational reform and innovation. The one-day forum was keynoted by Dr. George Philhower, who was recommended by several Advisory Board members who had previously heard him speak. A hugely popular segment of the day was a panel of Education Commissioners from each of the four (KAMO) states (one had a conflict and was unable to attend at the last minute) who gave a brief summary of the reform/innovation efforts underway in their states and then participated in a Q & A with attendees. Another new feature was the inclusion of 64 high school students who were enrolled in a “Future Educator” course/career pathway. In total, there were 125 registered attendees, representing all four states and 39 different school districts. Although the number of attendees increased again, the budget was actually reduced (\$6500). Speaker fees/costs remained constant (\$4000), but other costs (food, etc.) were decreased by moving to a one-day format. Additional sponsors were also recruited to assist with costs and to help ensure sustainability of the event. Again, the participants connected with the topic. As one participant put it, “[Topics] were relevant with the issues we are currently seeing in our schools and community. Strengths were definitely compelling and inspiring speakers.” Participants also responded positively to the broadened range of stakeholders included. Two representative comments were, “Valuable information, perspectives from the younger generation,” and “Enjoyed the interaction with the variety of guests present.”

*Cultivating School Connections* was the theme of the February 26, 2020 Forum. Dr. X, a high school principal from the region, was the keynote speaker. Attendees also interacted with a panel representing #ZeroReasonsWhy, an organization dedicated to reducing teen suicide. Another addition was the option for continuing education credit. Due to decreases in funding availability, sponsorships were actively recruited, and a nominal fee was charged to participants to cover some of the meal costs (\$50 for individuals, \$100 for a team of three from the same

school). The budget for the day was just over \$6300, with about two-thirds of the cost covered through registrations and sponsorships (University cost was just over \$2700). The audience included 227 participants, including practitioners (administrators and teachers), high school future educators, and university student teachers and pre-service teachers. Participant comments included, “Quick, but meaningful PD. Our heads “know” a lot about teaching, but our hearts need reminding. [Speaker] reminded my heart that I must have a hope and believe in my students and fellow staff members.”

### **Conclusions and Next Steps**

The design of the PSU model for building principals has helped eliminate the barriers that principals face in their own professional development. The university has worked to create a one-day format in close proximity to four-state principals allowing minimal travel time, only one day away from the building, and the opportunity to be close enough for building principals to remain in contact with their buildings should an issue or need arise.

Collaboration and adaptation have been key to the Forums’ success. Through consultation with the Advisory Board, feedback from participants, and partnerships with other departments and business sponsors, the content, design, and attendance at the Forum has evolved. The utilization of the advisement committee has allowed the university to provide topics of relevance and meaning for current best practices for building administrators. The utilization of the committee allows the focus to remain on the needs of current area schools. Most often professional development is devised around national issues or trends that may not be relevant to area school districts. Focusing on the needs of mostly rural schools within the four-state area provides a more meaningful experience for building principals and allows them to immediately begin utilizing information learned. Through this professional development model, the

university seeks to not only provide quality professional development but to also help combat the high turnover ratio in rural schools by eliminating burnout and the sense of isolation building principals often face.

Survey responses and anecdotal comments from participants have been extremely positive for all of the forums. Prominent themes that emerged were the value of networking with peers (“I think that the biggest strength is the ability to connect with other principals”) and relevant content (“These topics were needed to boost morale and offer solutions”).

Shortly after the 2020 Forum, PSU and the rest of the nation were faced with the global pandemic, COVID -19. The decision was made to suspend the KAMO conference for the spring of 2021, with the hope of resuming the conference in 2022. The Leadership Studies Advisory Committee will meet this summer to assess the feasibility of and plan for the 2022 conference. Funding sources will need to be researched, as the pandemic has also negatively impacted available resources.

## **Appendices**

Appendix A: Leadership Advisory Council Agendas

Appendix B: Forum Agendas

Appendix C: Forum Evaluation Form

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Pittsburg State University  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Teaching and Leadership  
201 Hughes Hall  
1701 South Broadway  
Pittsburg, KS 66762-7520  
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Pittstate Principal's Forum...KAMO! (Kansas, Arkansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma)

October 4, 2016

Dear Leadership Team,

We are excited that you have accepted the challenge of the initial creation of our First Principal Forum to be held at PSU this spring. This Forum will provide high quality professional development for our principals in the four state region.


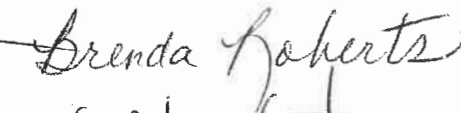
This first forum leadership team meeting will occur on October 19, 2016 at our Newly updated Student Union. We will provide a brunch to start off our meeting at 9:30 am. We will also plan to have a meal around noon and then send you back home at 2 pm.

This first meeting will be to establish goals and a plan for the future of this annual forum and we are extremely happy that you will be here to help guide this process.

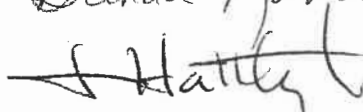

We will be sending you parking permits and an agenda for this first meeting sometime next week.

Thank you again for taking time out of your busy schedules to partner with us in this New adventure!

Sincerely,

Dr. Robert J. Morton  
Dr. Brenda Roberts  
Dr. Jim Hattabaugh  
Dr. Chris Christman



# *Pittsburg State University*

## *College of Education*

### *Department of Teaching and Leadership*

**October 19, 2016**

**Overman Student Center; Meadowlark Room**

#### **Agenda for PSU / KAMO Principal's Forum**

9:30 a.m. – Continental Breakfast

Welcome – Dr. Alice Sagehorn

Introductions of Leadership Team

Overview of Principals Forum – Dr. Morton

- To provide quality professional development for our principals in the four state region. (Handout)
- Annual forum beginning Spring 2017

#### Topics for Discussion

- Establish the Process
- Advise and insight on the key topics principals need for success
- Cutting edge trends
- Urgent issues
- Structure of forum

#### Next Steps

- Establish timeline
- Continued planning for forum design

#### ***Interim-Dean***

Dr. Jan Smith  
jsmith@pittstate.edu

#### ***Chairperson***

Dr. Alice Sagehorn  
asagehorn@pittstate.edu

#### ***Leadership Studies Faculty***

Dr. Chris Christman  
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Dr. Jim Hattabaugh  
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Dr. Robert Morton  
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Dr. Brenda Roberts  
broberts@pittstate.edu



# *Pittsburg State University*

## *College of Education*

### *Department of Teaching and Leadership*

**June 6, 2018 316 Hughes Hall**

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#### ***Leadership Studies Faculty***

Dr. Shelly Martin  
drmartin@pittstate.edu

Dr. Robert Morton  
rmorton@pittstate.edu

### **Educational Leadership Forum Advisory Council**

#### Welcome

#### Introductions of Leadership Advisory Council

#### Overview of Educational Leadership Forum – Dr. Morton

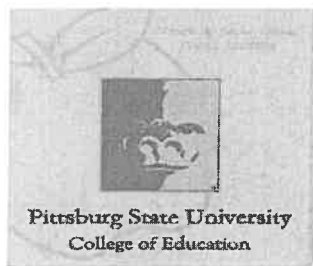
- To provide quality professional development for educational leaders in the four state region.
- Debrief: April 12-13, 2017 Mental Health First Aid  
January 17-18, 2018 Enhanced Leadership

#### Planning for 2019

- Tentative dates – February 27-28, 2019
- Points of Discussion:
  - 1-day vs 2-days
  - Topic
  - Speakers
- Attendees – Kansas, Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma

#### Next Steps

- Establish timeline
- Marketing strategies for conference / Erica Martin



# *Pittsburg State University*

## *College of Education*

### *Department of Teaching and Leadership*

**June 11, 2019 126 Hughes Hall**

#### **Educational Leadership Forum Advisory Council**

##### ***Dean***

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Dr. Shelly Martin  
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Dr. Robert Morton  
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Dr. Brenda Roberts  
broberts@pittstate.edu

#### Welcome

#### Introductions of Leadership Advisory Council

#### Overview of Educational Leadership Forum – Dr. Roberts

- To provide quality professional development for educational leaders in the four state region.
- Debrief: April 12-13, 2017 Mental Health First Aid  
January 17-18, 2018 Enhanced Leadership  
February 27, 2019 Next Generation Leadership

#### Planning for 2020

- Tentative date – February 26, 2020
- Points of Discussion:
  - Topic
  - Speakers
  - Conference Fee
- Attendees – Kansas, Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma
  - Student educators

#### Next Steps

- Establish timeline
- Marketing strategies for conference / Erica Martin



***Pittsburg State University***  
***College of Education***  
***Department of Teaching and Leadership***

**K A M O**  
**Kansas-Arkansas-Missouri-Oklahoma**  
**Principals' Forum**

**Wednesday, April 12, 2017**

**10:30 A.M. Registration – Overman Student Center/Crimson & Gold Ballroom A/2<sup>nd</sup> level**

**11:00 PSU WELCOME**

**Introductions and Announcements**

**Leadership Team**

**NOON**

**LUNCH (provided)**

**1:00** *Mental Health First Aide Presentation*

**Guest Presenters:** *Beth Yoder Stein, Wyandotte Center for Community Behavioral Healthcare, Inc.; and, Lisa Garcia, KCKPS Director of Student Services*

**4:00** *Closing Announcements and Summary*

**Leadership Team**

**5:00 to ?** *BBQ gathering and get together at Stadium/ East Shelter*

**Thursday, April 13, 2017**

**8:00 A.M. Breakfast – Overman Student Center/Crimson & Gold Ballroom A/2<sup>nd</sup> level**

**8:50 WELCOME -- Dr. Pawan Kahol, Dean, Graduate & Continuing Studies**

**9:00** *Working with Staff...Mental Health*

**Guest Presenter:** *Michael Berblinger, Superintendent, Buhler (KS) School District*

**10:00** *Break*

**10:15** *Group Discussions:* **Leadership Team**  
*Mental Health, Staff Support; Future topics related to KAMO Principals' Forum*

**11:00 Adjourn/ Safe Travels!!**



***Pittsburg State University  
College of Education  
Department of Teaching and Leadership***

**KAMO Leadership Forum**

**#EnhanceTL**

**Wednesday, January 17, 2018**

**10:30 A.M. Registration – OSC/C & G Ballroom A/2<sup>nd</sup> level**

**11:00 PSU WELCOME – Dr. James Truelove, Dean, College of Education**

**Introductions and Announcements**

**Leadership Team**

**Forum Facilitator: Steven W. Anderson** *is a learner, blogger, speaker, educational evangelist, author and Dad. As a former teacher and Director of Instructional Technology (and best known as @web20classroom) he is highly sought after for his expertise in educational technology integration and using social media for learning. Steven presents at educational conferences worldwide and is also responsible in helping create #edchat, the most popular educational hashtag on Twitter. Steven has been recognized with the the 2009 and 2011 Edublogs Twitterer of the Year Award, a Microsoft Heroes of Education award, along with a 2013 Bammy Award, recognized worldwide as the Educational Emmy.*

**NOON**

**LUNCH (provided)**

**1:00** *Enhanced Leadership*

**4:00** *Closing Announcements*

**Leadership Team**

**5:00 -7:00** *Networking Reception/ Bicknell Family Center for the Arts/Dean - VIP Room*

**Gorilla Basketball vs. Emporia State / Women play @ 5:30 / Men @ 7:30pm**

- Discounted tickets are available for Forum attendees. Tickets can be purchased at the west Weede ticket booth 1 hour prior to the game pending availability. Remember to mention you are attending the KAMO Leadership Forum to receive ticket discount.

# KAMO LEADERSHIP FORUM



**Next Generation Leadership**

**February 27, 2019**

## Snapshot of the Day

Welcome to the 2019 KAMO Leadership Forum with a focus on Next Generation Leadership.

9:00 Welcome and Introductions

Dr. Steve Scott, PSU President

Dr. Robert Morton, Teaching & Leadership

9:15 Innovation Conversations

Dr. George Philhower, Assistant Superintendent, Western Wayne Schools

11:00 State Commissioner Panel

Dr. Randy Watson, Kansas Commissioner of Education

Johnny Key, Arkansas Department of Education Commissioner

Dr. Margie Vandeven, Missouri Commissioner of Education

12:00 Lunch & Leaders

Dr. James Truelove, Dean, PSU College of Education

Lunch provided by Sodexo

1:00 Innovation and Leadership Conversations

Dr. George Philhower, Assistant Superintendent, Western Wayne Schools

3:15 Closing Remarks



Dr. George Philhower, has been an administrator at Western Wayne Schools (Indiana) for 10 years, and prior to that he was a special education teacher. George is passionate about inspiring educators to transform their schools into future-focused, learner-centered learning environments where all students can find success. He is excited about sharing the steps being taken throughout his school district to become this type of place and is eager to learn with those who are hoping to do the same.

### WIFI Login

Username = KAMO

Password = Pittstate1!

### Social Media Connection

#KAMO19



**Dr. Randy Watson**

Kansas

Commissioner of  
Education



**Johnny Key**

Arkansas

Department of Education  
Commissioner



**Dr. Margie Vandeven**

Missouri

Commissioner of  
Education

### Commissioner Panel

**(11:00-12:00)**

- Sharing visions
- Fielding questions
- Having conversations
- Making connections
- Listening intently

Featured State Commissioner of Education Panel



# KAMO LEADERSHIP FORUM



**Cultivating School Connections**

**February 26, 2020**

## Snapshot of the Day

Welcome to the 2020 KAMO Leadership Forum with a focus on Cultivating School Connections.

9:00 Welcome and Introductions  
Dr. Steve Scott, PSU President

9:15 Student Connections  
Dr. Cynthia "Mama J" Johnson

10:45 Break

11:00 Zero Reasons Why Panel Presentation  
Todd White, Blue Valley School District Superintendent  
Tim DeWeese, Johnson County Mental Health Director

12:00 Lunch & Leaders  
Dr. James Truelove, Dean, PSU College of Education

1:00 Student Connections, Part 2  
Dr. Cynthia "Mama J" Johnson

3:15 Closing Remarks



Dr. Cynthia "Mama J" Johnson is an educator, speaker, and author who is living proof that nothing is impossible if you try. Years ago, her future appeared bleak, but she kept the faith and has turned what seemed to be insurmountable odds into unbelievable outcomes. Today, Mama J, a name given to her by students at the beginning of her career, is known as a "Woman with a Message of Hope." She has dedicated her life to connecting, helping, transforming, and empowering students during the past 32+ years.

### WIFI Login

Username = KAMO20  
Password = Pittstate1!

### Social Media Connection

#KAMO20

## #ZEROREASONS WHY

**Listen to people and  
listen to their stories. You  
don't have to accept their  
stories, but you have to  
respect them.**

- AGGIE, SHAWNTE MISSION



The #ZeroReasonsWhy Campaign formed the Johnson County Teen Council to address teen suicide prevention strategies in an effort to strengthen the voices of teens and share their unique insights. "It has become increasingly clear since we launched the #ZeroReasonsWhy Campaign...we need to listen to the teens in order to disrupt this preventable epidemic," said Spring Hill Superintendent Dr. Wayne Burke.

The campaign revolves around three pillars:

1. Remove the Stigma
2. Build Community Support
3. Commit to Education

Appendix C  
KAMO Evaluation Form

# 2020 KAMO Leadership Forum Evaluation

Thank you for being a part of the 2020 KAMO Leadership Forum. We appreciate you completing this short evaluation form.

\* Required

1. Did the date and timing of the Leadership Forum work for your schedule? Please provide suggestions for change. \*

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2. How did the topics and presenters provide relevant content to your role as a school leader? \*

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3. What topics would you suggest for future forums?

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4. Share the strengths and challenges for this Leadership Forum. \*

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5. Please provide feedback regarding the registration process. \*

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6. Please share other information for improving this Leadership Forum. \*

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