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Suite 110  
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**TO:** Dr. Nikolai Vitti  
**FROM:** Jacksonville Public Education Fund, on behalf of Teacher Roundtable  
Steering Committee and Participants  
**DATE:** July 15, 2016  
**RE:** Results from the Spring Teacher Roundtable, Instructional Autonomy

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The Jacksonville Public Education Fund has supported teacher leadership in many ways ranging from highlighting the best teachers through the EDDY Awards to involving teachers in ONE by ONE conversation to mobilize community action to funding innovation grants and much more. Teachers connected to this work have asked the organization to provide a safe space to have deeper conversations about critical issues facing educators.

This gave birth to the Teacher Roundtable, which elevates the voices of teachers in community and district discussions about improving public education, supports teachers in being their own advocates and connects teacher leaders to the community through speaking engagements and other opportunities. This initiative is teacher-led by a Steering Committee composed of several current and former teachers of the year. The events are open to all public school teachers in Duval County.

The Teacher Roundtable selects two topics per year, with a fall and spring series of events. The spring series of the Teacher Roundtable focused on Instructional Autonomy, a topic that is important to teachers locally but also across the country.

#### **Moving from Conversation to Action**

To tackle the issue of Instructional Autonomy, teachers in the Teacher Roundtable held two robust conversations in the spring. First teachers brainstormed key issues revolving around instructional autonomy and then prioritized these ideas and turned them into belief statements and action steps. The summaries from these discussions are attached.

The teachers identified four key areas for improvement and related action steps. These actions can impact



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how instructional autonomy is viewed, utilized and supported in our classrooms.

### **Differentiate for teachers**

Just as teachers value the power of differentiation for our students' learning, so should the district value the power of differentiation in helping teachers — specific to discipline, grade-level, experience, efficacy, needs.

We believe the lack of differentiation is a barrier to instructional autonomy because a one-size fits all approach to professional development and coaching is not working.

### **Actions:**

- Train coaches on differentiated coaching - assessing teacher/school needs and modes of coaching.
  - As reflected in a 2013 report from the Center for Public Education, *Effective professional development in an Era of High Stakes Accountability*, professional development should distinguish teachers' dual roles as both technicians and intellectuals — each demanding a unique professional development interaction with the teacher.
- Increase the number of smaller, more specialized professional development sessions that are focused on specific grade-levels, disciplines, experience levels, etc.
- Train school administration on differentiation among faculty, how to support instructional autonomy and/or paths to instructional autonomy.
- Tap into the growing pool of teacher leaders as a means to accomplish teacher-to-teacher mentoring/support/professional development.
- As the district moves to a more school-based approach to professional development, the existing policies, procedures, and paperworks should be revised to facilitate differentiated/self-selected professional development.

### **Foster better culture/community among teachers and staff within each school**

Just as we ask students to take ownership of their learning, we should create a school culture at every school that promotes teachers taking ownership of their own teaching and professional growth. We believe that the right balance of instructional autonomy — that holds teachers to high standards but also gives them the freedom to best meet their students' needs — goes hand-in-hand with trust and collaboration. We believe that this culture of trust should be an explicit goal of all interactions between district representatives, building administrators and classroom teachers.



**Actions:**

- Explore implementing professional development that is designed to build trust and team building among all school faculty, staff and administration.
  - Research existing student-focused “Challenge Day” events as a source of inspiration.
  - Integrate professional development or a PLC focused on professionalism, social behavior, emotional intelligence, building collegiality.
- Increase teacher-to-teacher professional development opportunities.
- Make instructional autonomy an explicit goal of school-based PLC’s in order to foster innovation and teacher leadership.

**Improve the relationship between the district and the classroom**

We believe the district/teacher relationship is a powerful one that works best when it is built on trust, not fear. Many barriers to instructional autonomy surface within the dynamics of the district-school-classroom relationship. The first step in this process will be to improve the relationship between district administrators, specialists and coaches, building level coaches and classroom teachers. With instructional autonomy being highly valued, the coach/teacher relationship should be created from the start as an inherently supportive partnership.

**Actions:**

- Restructure the recruitment of instructional coaches and specialists, doing whatever it takes (including supplements or pay benefits) to ensure these roles are being filled by highly qualified individuals and subject area experts.
- Provide better training for instructional coaches (building and district level) on how to meet the specific needs of their school(s) and teachers - how to differentiate and prioritize their coaching.
- The district should be more explicit and timely in communication to teachers and staff about the roll out of professional development, curriculum guides, and the roles of building level and regional level coaches.

**Improve Curriculum Guides**

We believe the Curriculum Guide is the foundation for what is to be taught; however, teachers should have the



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ability to work in concert with colleagues and administrators to modify and differentiate to maximize student learning. In addition, significant improvements to Curriculum Guides are needed to make them more usable in the 2016-2017 school year.

**Actions:**

- Have hard copies of the curriculum guides available by August 1 (including as much information as possible regarding assessments).
- Make the curriculum guides easier to find and download.
- Explore the possibility of making guides, materials, and resources on-line at the beginning of summer so teachers can study and prepare over the summer.
- Create a foreword that explains the intention and goal of each Curriculum Guide to boost understanding and in turn increase opportunities for instructional autonomy.
- Enhance the use of teacher leaders to review, create, and provide feedback for all curriculum guides.

**Next Steps**

Through the Teacher Roundtable conversations and action planning, it became apparent that participants wanted to share these ideas and ask these critical questions to the other stakeholders in the district. This month, a select group of the Teacher Roundtable participants will meet with Dr. Nikolai Vitti, Superintendent of Duval County Public Schools, to share ideas and ask questions regarding instructional autonomy.

With a better understanding of priorities public school teachers share, it is our hope that local leaders will see these ideas and the Teacher Roundtable as a resource as they work together to bring about improvements to our public schools with a goal of ensuring that all students and teachers meet their full potential. The Teacher Roundtable Steering Committee and Jacksonville Public Education Fund staff would welcome any opportunity to meet to share more findings or discuss opportunities for next steps. Teachers in this movement would be happy to be considered as a resource for focus groups or any other teacher feedback mechanism that the district is considering.

Our hope is that this is the beginning of a broader conversation about how to utilize, nurture and support instructional autonomy in the classroom, not only to increase student learning and well-being, but to retain and recruit the best teachers and leaders.



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For more information about the Teacher Roundtable, including past memos, visit [jaxpef.org/TeacherRoundtable](http://jaxpef.org/TeacherRoundtable). In exit surveys of Teacher Roundtable participants, more than 85 percent say that participating makes them more likely to want to stay in the classroom.

The Teacher Roundtable Participants and Steering Committee, along with the staff and board of Jacksonville Public Education Fund, would like to commend you for your efforts to engage public school teachers around this important work. We offer our support in anyway possible to continue building on this positive relationship between the school district and its outstanding teachers.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts on this report.

**Attachments:**

Teacher Roundtable Conversation Summary from May 7 (part A)

Teacher Roundtable prioritized action areas and specific ideas from May 7

Teacher Roundtable action meeting notes from June 11, 2016 (part B)



## Teacher Roundtable Instructional Autonomy, Part A – May 2016 Conversation Summary

### 1. What is the ideal version of instructional autonomy and what does it look like ?

#### Table 1 –

Freedom of what to teach / Freedom of how to teach it

Guide – district does not tell you when (time) to teach it

Flexible – what to teach... differentiate for class students, not for district

CG is ready for teachers well before the timeframe

Flexibility to structure pacing in lesson

Compacting gifted and non-gifted

Appreciate different teaching styles

Kids having a say in how they learn

Trust that the teachers understand the needs of the students and the community

#### Table 2 –

Teacher skill/knowledge

Meeting the needs of the students

Tailor resources

Tweak order/ implementation

\* have all materials at the beginning of the year

Flexible time / opportunities for remediation

No CG

Understanding that all teachers are not the same

Some need more support and training

Most are highly proficient

Differentiated teaching

Because not all teachers are the same – new vs. experienced

LISTEN to what the teachers know

LISTEN to what the teachers need in order to be effective

Differentiated training

Teacher-to-teacher conversations

Recognize teachers are professionals

#### Table 3 –

Owning your lessons to meet the needs of students

Curriculum Guide is a GUIDE

SUGGESTED activities

Accountability for teacher for quality of instruction

Autonomy before creativity

New teachers need structure Ⓢ Ⓣ experienced teachers need flexibility

Accountability by data, peers, administration



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Teachers EARN the freedom

## 2. Barriers that limit your instructional autonomy...

### Table 3 -

Administration perception on the CGs and CAST and knowledge of administration  
Poor CGs, lack of availability of CG  
Lack of time for planning  
Content knowledge  
Training and PD  
Lack of trust/ micromanagement  
Testing drives instruction  
School grades  
"school culture"

### Table 2 -

District mandates  
    Top down pressure  
    Classroom visits  
    Core subjects vs. music  
Time  
    CG pacing  
    Remediate  
    Testing grades  
    A-B schedules  
    Proctoring  
School Culture / Leadership  
    Turn around  
Material delivery  
    Not available at beginning of the year  
    Modules  
    Teachers Ed./ Resources  
Computer-based everything  
    Lack of computers  
    Computer skills  
When/How practice  
FSA  
    No creativity  
    Timing  
    Testing calendars  
Equity resources / autonomy  
    Title 1 – extra personnel "stuff"  
        Turnaround  
    A/B schools – no extra personnel or stuff



More autonomy?

HS – Core subject vs electives

**Table 1 –**

Timeframe

Placement of teachers in and out of field

Switching teachers

Testing schedules

Lack of communication

Give clear instruction before school starts

CAST – fear of getting fired / CAST effected

Meeting requirement for performance pay (developing vs. needs improvement)

Taking into consideration...

Assembly, fire drills, bomb threats, death, testing, poverty, absences/tardies, wave dismissal, A/B days, early dismissals, fieldtrips, etc...

Honor PD for teachers as PDE during testing

Organic PD/PLC

**3. What needs to happen in order to strengthen your Instructional Autonomy?**

**Table 1 –**

Constructive criticism

Curriculum Guide on time

More reading specialist / proven coaches to help with CG (veteran teachers)

Watch out for yips – focus on how to improve

More frequent, informal observations to help in CAST needs

If district wants a certain teaching model used, then model that for teachers

Consistent across the board, not just specific schools

Communication!

Groups of teachers (by subject/grade) meet

**Table 2-**

Recognize that not all teachers are the same

Student home life barriers – ex. mobility, starting point, low performance, no support

District should support, not punitive

District needs to understand their schools...

Environments

Poverty

School grade is not an indicator of the school and what has happened all year

GOOD teachers teach in F schools

Autonomy is earned

Evaluation tool – not the same throughout the state / counties

No interventionist in the school

**Table 3 -**

The district should differentiate their support for schools

Teacher level





- Equity of resources
- Equity of support
- The districts should define autonomy (101 – value its power and effect on instruction)
- Provide focus groups for teacher input/suggestion for curriculum
- Teachers finding solutions
- Teacher generated resources
  - Bank of lessons (culture)
  - Resources for differentiation
  - Activities

**4. Who needs to hear this message and how should they hear it?**

**Table 1 –**

Vitti  
Specialist who make CG  
Specialists' bosses  
Principals  
People in the Chain of Command  
FLDOE  
Governor

**Table 2 –**

WHO?

Academic services

- Directors
- Specialists/ coaches

Principals  
School Board/ Superintendent Vitti  
Community (Funding)

- Mayor
- City Council

PTA

HOW?

Change mindset  
Open

**Table 3 –**

WHO?

FLDOE  
School Board  
Community  
District  
Region Superintendent / DTO  
Administrators (conferences at beginning of year)



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Teachers (Dept Chairs, TEACH Conference)  
DTU

HOW?

Share information in conferences  
Provide PD on Autonomy



## Teacher Roundtable Instructional Autonomy Action Areas & Ideas

### 1. Differentiate for Teachers

...based on results, expectations, experience, knowledge-base and disposition

**Data:**

Flexible—what to teach... differentiate for class students, not for district

Appreciate different teaching styles

Teacher skill/knowledge

Understanding that all teachers are not the same

Some need more support and training

Most are highly proficient

Differentiated teaching

Because not all teachers are the same—new vs. experienced

New teachers need structure Ⓢ Ⓣ experienced teachers need flexibility

Accountability by data, peers, administration

Teachers EARN the autonomy (freedom)

Autonomy is earned

Content knowledge

Training and PD

Recognize that not all teachers are the same

Recognize placement of teachers in and out of field

Recognize the curve of switching teachers

The district should differentiate their support for schools

Teacher level

Equity of resources

Equity of support

### 2. Broken Curriculum Guides (CG)

...the foundation (baseline) is broken

**Data:**

Guide—district does not tell you when (time) to teach it

CG is ready for teachers well before the timeframe

Flexible time / opportunities for remediation

Flexibility to structure pacing in lesson

Poor CGs, lack of availability of CG

No CG

Timeframe

Material delivery

Not available at beginning of the year

Modules

Teachers Ed./ Resources

Curriculum Guide on time



Compacting gifted and non-gifted  
Tailor resources  
Tweak order/ implementation  
    \* have all materials at the beginning of the year  
Curriculum Guide is a GUIDE  
SUGGESTED activities  
Administration perception on the CGs and CAST and knowledge of administration  
Time  
    CG pacing  
    Remediate  
    Testing grades  
    A-B schedules  
    Proctoring

3. **Relationship between the district and the classroom**

... Barrier to autonomy  
... Trust vs. fear  
... Clarify the Coach role and system: recruit, select, training, incentives, expectations, consistency

**Data:**

More reading specialist/ proven coaches to help with CG (veteran teachers)  
District mandates  
    Top down pressure  
    Classroom visits  
    Core subjects vs. music  
Lack of trust/ micromanagement  
If district wants a certain teaching model used, then model that for teachers  
Consistent across the board, not just specific schools  
Communication!  
School grades  
Computer-based everything  
    Lack of computers  
    Computer skills  
Equity 🎯 resources/ autonomy  
    Title 1 – extra personnel “stuff”  
        Turnaround  
    A/B schools – no extra personnel or stuff  
        More autonomy?  
    HS – Core subject vs electives  
Testing drives instruction  
FSA - No creativity ~ Timing ~ Testing calendars  
Testing schedules  
District should support, not punitive  
District needs to understand their schools...  
    Environments  
    Poverty



School grade is not an indicator of the school and what has happened all year  
GOOD teachers teach in F schools  
Evaluation tool – not the same throughout the state / counties  
No interventionist in the school  
When/How practice

#### 4. **Fostering Teacher Culture / Community**

...colleague/ support ~ Teacher-to-Teacher ~ Cultivate Autonomy

**Data:**

Trust that the teachers understand the needs of the students and the community

LISTEN to what the teachers know

LISTEN to what the teachers need in order to be effective

Differentiated training

Teacher-to-teacher conversations

Recognize teachers are professionals

Autonomy before creativity

“school culture”

School Culture / Leadership

Turn around

Lack of communication

Give clear instruction before school starts

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Meeting requirement for performance pay (developing vs. needs improvement)

Taking into consideration...

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Autonomy (freedom) of what to teach / Autonomy (freedom) of how to teach it



## Teacher Roundtable- Instructional Autonomy Belief Statements and Action Steps

### ***What is Instructional Autonomy?***

*Holding teachers to high standards and at the same time allowing appropriate professional discretion in making instructional decisions to best meet the needs of their students.*

### **Action Area: Differentiate for teachers**

Just as teachers value the power of differentiation for our students' learning, so should the district value the power of differentiation in helping teachers — specific to discipline, grade-level, experience, efficacy, needs. We believe the lack of differentiation is a barrier to instructional autonomy because a one-size fits all approach to PD and coaching is not working.

#### **Action:**

- Train coaches on differentiated coaching - assessing teacher/school needs and modes of coaching  
As reflected in a 2013 report from the Center for Public Education, *Effective Professional Development in an Era of High Stakes Accountability*, professional development should distinguish teachers' dual roles as both technicians and intellectuals — each demanding a unique PD interaction with the teacher.
- Increase the number of smaller, more specialized PD sessions that are focused on specific grade-levels, disciplines, experience levels, etc...
- Train school administration on differentiation among faculty, how to support instructional autonomy and/or paths to instructional autonomy
- Tap into the growing pool of teacher leaders as a means to accomplish teacher-to-teacher mentoring/support/PD.
- As the district moves to a more school-based approach to PD (i.e., more emphasis on school-based coaching and PLC's rather than the Schultz Center), the existing policies, procedures, and paperwork should be revised to facilitate differentiated/self-selected PD

### **Action Area: Foster better culture / community among teachers and staff within each school**

Just as we ask students to take ownership of their learning, we should create a school culture at every school that promotes teachers taking ownership of their own teaching and professional growth. We believe that the right balance of instructional autonomy — that holds teachers to high standards but also gives them the freedom to best meet their students' needs — goes hand-in-hand with trust and collaboration. We believe that this culture of trust should be an explicit goal of all interactions between district representatives (e.g., instructional coaches), building administrators and classroom teachers.

#### **Action:**

- Explore implementing PD that is designed to build trust and team building among all school faculty, staff and administration
  - Something like a "Challenge Day" for adults



- Another idea is PD or a PLC focused on professionalism, social behavior, emotional intelligence, building collegiality
- Increase teacher-to-teacher PD opportunities.
- Make instructional autonomy an explicit goal of school-based PLC's in order to foster innovation and teacher leadership.

**Action Area: Improve the relationship between the district and the classroom**

We believe the district/teacher relationship is a powerful one that works best when it is built on trust, not fear. Many barriers to instructional autonomy surface within the dynamics of the district-school-classroom relationship. The first step in this process will be to improve the relationship between district administrators, specialists and coaches, building level coaches and classroom teachers. With instructional autonomy being highly valued, the coach/teacher relationships should be created from the start as an inherently supportive partnership.

**Action:**

- Restructure the recruitment of instructional coaches and specialists, doing whatever it takes (including supplements or pay benefits) to ensure these roles are being filled by highly qualified individuals and subject area experts.
- Provide better training for instructional coaches (building and district level) on how to meet the needs of their school/s and teachers - how to differentiate and prioritize their coaching.
- The district should be more explicit and timely in communication to teachers and staff about the rollout of PD, CGs and the roles of building level and regional level coaches.

**Action Area: Broken Curriculum Guides**

We believe the Curriculum Guide is the foundation for what is to be taught; however, teachers should have the ability to work in concert with colleagues and administrators to modify and differentiate to maximize student learning. In addition, significant improvements to Curriculum Guides are needed to make them more usable in the 2016-2017 school year.

**Action:**

- Have hard copies of the curriculum guides by Aug 1<sup>st</sup> (including as much information as possible regarding assessments).
- Make the curriculum guides easy to find and download.
- Explore the possibility of making guides, materials, and resources on-line at the beginning of summer so teachers can study and prepare over the summer.
- Create a foreword that explains the intention and goal of each CG to boost understanding and in turn increase opportunities for instructional autonomy.
- Enhance the use of teacher leaders to review, create, and provide feedback for all CGs.





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