Passion For Teaching and Learning
Principal of Mackenize Glen
Conversation, Observation and Product

SPEAKER 1: I don't really like to see it as what I'm doing here. I think it's what we are doing together. So, I'm very, very, very conscious of that, and very intentional in including as many voices as possible around any decisions that need to be made. I mean, I was lucky enough to inherit a building that already was quite collaborative, and generally speaking, a very hard-working group of people. And I've spent a lot of time in building relationships, and ensuring almost on a-- not almost, really on a one-to-one basis, that we will continue the work, the good work that has been happening, and will tweak it to continually meet the needs of the kids, which is what we've done this year. Lots of work is happening in pockets. And I feel that my role as the administrator is to align the common understanding, and align the practices that really move kid student achievement. So, this year was a lot about learning. But really learning together, because I think, you know, it wasn't just about the administrator observing and making any sort of judgments. It was about the administrator sitting back, making observations, and having collaborative conversations with staff, and to really push thinking. So, and it wasn't just-- you know, conversations didn't come out of, you know, one isolated, maybe, walkthrough, or something I had seen in, let's say, in a play book. It was, I had to make sure that I was really collecting evidence, and really triangulating the evidence, so that when I'm having conversations with staff, it was a lot more well-informed than an isolated walkthrough or a quick conversation with a student. I was very cognizant around making sure that I had conversations, observations and products before we actually sit and really chit-chat and talk. So, my role as a principal really was about observing, taking a look at the culture. It wasn't about me changing culture. It was about me embedding myself in the culture that's already currently working. There was great stuff happening, and it continues to happen in the classes. But it was about tweaking the assessment to align with the particular need of the kid, and then at the same time, to align how the task is being presented to the students. We need to continue the conversation around assessment, but we continue to talk about ensuring, and I talk about this often, around ensuring that our assessments are valid and reliable, and to be able to ensure that our assessments are valid and reliable, the most effective way is to triangulate data, and ensuring conversation, observations, and product. And it's not just about making sure you have conversations, observations, and products about everything. It's about ensuring that, okay, what's the expectation? What is it? What's the big idea? What is it that they're actually looking for, and actually triangulating that as opposed to just having, you know, a plethora of different conversations, observations, and products. But the tweak was really to have the assessment piece involved in there, because we all had great evidence pieces around those conversations, observation and product, but it wasn't actually quite aligned to real assessment, to the actual tasks, to the actual expectation being addressed. And you know, I often talk about working smarter, not harder. So, to do that, to really refine assessment practices will just make it even that much more rich for the students. I have put out there that assessment is a reflection on our values around teaching. So, you have to always have a checkpoint that when you're making decisions around assessment, you have to think back, step back and say, is this showing what I really value as a teacher? And so, I give an example. If you step back and look out all your assessments, and it's predominantly
product-driven, you need to step back and say hey, is this really what I want to share as what I value as a teacher? And often times, it's no, it's not about the product. It's about the other-- it helps massively that the math leads are, the math leads at Mac G are very collaborative. We never claim to know everything. But we claim to do what we can for the kids in our building. I hope for them that they see Mac G as a place, Mackenzie Glen as a place for growth, that they grew, that they became a better person, no matter how long they were here. And I hope that they recognize that. When I think academically, what I really hope is that they learn to advocate for themselves as learners, and they do it in a respectful way. And that's a message that I really try to push with the staff, because the best way for these kids to be advocates of their own learning is if we bring the assessment on [INAUDIBLE]. That they can articulate, hi, I don't understand what's happening, or hi, can you tell me what the expectation is that you're looking at? Or by the way, this product probably isn't a best, you know, evidence of my learning. So that, those two kind of pieces that they see that they have grown, and continue to grow, and that they find themselves a way to advocate for themselves as learners. We start from always student need, so where are the student needs, and how can we support that, and that defines our next steps. So, the lead teachers, along with other-- not just the three lead teachers, along with other lead teachers who supported a process where the staff were pulled out, and they essentially came up with a backwards design that incorporated the math walls, but that specifically plans the assessment piece. It doesn't just stop at the lessons. It actually is planned out with the expectation and what the evidence is going to be collected. So that's where we're kind of moving towards around math. We continue to really think about the tasks we're asking the kids to do. But it's about, okay, so let's think about the expectation being addressed, and let's think about what output, what evidence of learning are we expecting to get out of these kids? So that's kind of another area that we're moving towards. And ideally, hoping with an embedded period that I've tried to timetable into the timetable next year, but really have discussions around student work in aligning, oh, well, you know, not just aligning our understanding around the levels, but also aligning what we think the next step should be for students. What is it that we're looking for, and how can we move these students forward? So that really is another area that we're moving towards in terms of next steps. We're in a good place around the comprehensive math program right now, right across the board. And, you know, of course every year, every building has new staff, long-term occasional that need to be hired. And I'm always very cognizant and share the fact that this is a very collaborate building. So, if your style is that you like to stay behind closed doors, this is not the place for you. Because the doors are all open, and everybody, we intentionally plan together in order to meet all the kids that, the kids in your class are not just yours. They belong to everybody else. So, that's also another part, because there's always a level of catching up and aligning the practices. But in order to keep this culture of collaboration and learning in the building, it's very intentional of me to say that this is the way the building is. And if this is not the place that you're looking for, then, you know, let's move forward. So, I like to protect what's happening here at this point, to make sure that it just continues.