

MSOC LEA Member Profile Part III: Full Narrative

Worcester County Public Schools: Excited about the Process

Judy Mills explained that WCPS is currently drafting its policies and procedures. “We hope to present to the board for approval in March so that we can do the online courses through the MVLO...Once we come up with our final draft, we will invite in guidance counselors and students and parents to come in look at it before we take it to the board for final approval. . . In the meantime, what we have done with our grant money, other than travel back and forth to meetings, is to purchase the College Board’s online SAT prep program for two of our schools that have after-school programs.”

The College Board program is a site licensing arrangement that will give large numbers of students access from any Internet connection, “but there will be directed instruction at the after-school program with a teacher.” In addition, at Snow Hill H.S., a group of students are enrolled in a year-long college research and study skills course that will have a portion of this course devoted to SAT preparation.

In relation to the soon-to-be-released MSOC online SAT Prep courses, Mills said that one school had spent \$4,200 on the College Board program, (or about \$3 per student), “which is very good compared to the \$15 per seat for the state course.” She added, however, that the cost issue really depends on the actual number of students taking the SAT Prep. She believes that “at some point we will (participate), but because we do not know what’s going to happen with the online course money for next year with the grant, we have to go on to something that can be subsidized or sustained by the county. In our online policies and procedures (in draft form) we have the parents paying tuition with scholarships available, and the school system will buy the materials the students need to take the online courses.”

Mills said the WCPS policies and procedures draft also addresses a need to produce a brochure that can be distributed prior to the Fall 2005 that outlines the online courses available. Mills also provided a detailed description of the remainder of the procedures being written, including a program description and rationale, adding that it’s becoming a lengthy document. “We start with what are the admissions, how to register for the courses, credit eligibility, what about the fees, withdrawals, expectations for participation, reporting of the grades, what happens with the GPA at the school level, failure, warnings, progress reports and, of course, exams. Worcester County also has end-of-course exams that we require students to take if they don’t take the AP exam.”

The procedures describe the responsibilities of online course coordinators at the school and board levels, the principal, guidance counselor, and mentor. “We also talk about securing student services, if there’s a student who has an IEP, a 504 plan, or is receiving ESOL services - how that will be affected in this – and of course it wouldn’t – we’d just have to make sure we follow the IEP. We talk about technology – the access and requirements we need for the equipment; we talk about the materials, management of the materials themselves that we would purchase, accounting, academic integrity and ethics agreement, right to privacy, teacher provider guidelines.” They also list reasons why to consider online courses and are creating registration forms for parents and students to sign. “We’re on our way as far as getting this ready. Once we get the approval, we can go ahead and do the brochures for the online courses for the fall.”

Regarding professional development activities, Mills said they are not sure about how to proceed because they don't know how many students will show an interest. She was hoping to publish the brochure in April in order to see what kind of interest may be generated. She has also talked with teachers about possibly becoming mentors and says that the responses have varied from "that sounds like too much work" to "what will I get for it?" However, after explaining more of the details of PD to teachers, the "interest level went back up."

The non-publics in their district, overall, is a very small population, "so small that to get \$150 out of a grant really does not do a whole lot for them, so they declined and then went in for the grants that are larger."

Overall, Mills said she is excited about this whole process and is looking forward to attending the NACOL conference. "Hopefully we can get some more good information there that we can bring back and share. . . Probably the hardest part of this will be getting the kids that can really be successful at this interested, and the mentoring." She believes teachers are misunderstanding what mentoring really entails, thinking it's teaching a class online. "That's not what it's all about, and we just need to make sure that they know that. I think once we get that straight, we'll be all right as far as mentors. And then we need to get them trained once we decide which way we're going to go as far as the kids, because that's going to be the ticket to the whole thing - how many kids show up. We certainly would like to be able to provide mentors who have some sort of expertise" in the actual disciplines being offered online. "So we're trying to get a match up too (of possible mentors to particular courses) once we see what kind of interest we have from the kids."