

The *LINKS* that Bind Innovation to the Classroom

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Keeping up with the rapidly changing digital landscape that shapes how our students learn is no simple task. Districts seek to align professional development with 21st century teaching and learning practices, ensuring that all teachers are adequately trained in new instructional strategies and technologies. This requires a long-term solution to help educators keep pace with rapid change.

Educational research supports the positive impact of technology integration and innovative learning to improve student achievement. Today's students think and learn differently than students of 20 years ago. As an example, educators in Broward County, Florida, focus on educating today's students for tomorrow's world, through an innovative peer coaching program designed to support and sustain 21st century teaching and learning.

Broward is the sixth-largest public school district in the nation. The district serves 255,000 urban and suburban students across 284 schools. In alignment with the district's mission and strategic plan, media specialists help students and teachers acquire the information literacy and technology skills essential for innovative teaching and learning. To assist in this goal, the Department of Learning Resources & Instructional Materials selected a group of 12 accomplished media specialists to form a **Library Integration Network Support team**, or ***LINKS*** cadre.

The ***LINKS*** initiative aims to transform each library media center into the information hub of its school. ***LINKS*** uses the Florida Department of Education's ***ExC₃EL*** Rubric (Expectations for Collaboration, Collections, and Connections to Enhance Learning) to assess each school library media program. To support and strengthen Broward's library media programs, ***LINKS*** uses peer coaching.

Michele Rivera, Director of Learning Resources & Instructional Materials, believes the ***LINKS*** initiative will "support the media specialists in their multiple roles and responsibilities--teacher, technology leader, curriculum collaborator and library program manager—all of which are essential for effective school library programs and increased student achievement."

Over the summer 2008, the ***LINKS*** cadre attended the week-long, in-depth Peer Coaching Facilitator Training. Developed by the Puget Sound Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology, and supported by Microsoft's Innovative Teachers Network, Peer Coaching aligns with the principles of highly-effective professional development as outlined by the National Staff Development Council.

The program provides the curriculum and framework for a sustainable professional learning experience. Peer Coaching focuses on

- Coaching skills (communication and collaboration)
- Integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into teaching and learning
- Lesson improvement to engage students and promote critical thinking and problem solving skills.

The Peer Coaching Program promotes fidelity of implementation and aims for the commitment and support of administration, which is critical to the success of the **LINKS** initiative. As a result, the **LINKS** cadre will facilitate a two-year peer coaching program for Media Specialists. In turn, Media Specialists will collaborate with school staff and support Media Specialists in the District's Differentiated Accountability Schools.

Lynne Oakvik, Specialist for Learning Resources & Instructional Materials, believes that “continuous and sustainable professional development of 21 century teaching and learning strategies through peer coaching is the key to increasing student achievement and engagement of students.” “Through peer coaching, teachers have a built-in support system within their school community to reflect and refine their teaching practices. It's a win-win situation for the student and the teacher.”

Michele Rivera clarifies that the **LINKS** initiative is not intended to be ‘something else’ the district has embarked on, “but instead will enable educators to use technology effectively and help students compete globally.” The Peer Coaching Program focuses on creating opportunities for teachers to add instructional and digital strategies while cultivating a culture of collaborative inquiry and reflective practice. *Isn't this the same model we want mirrored in our classrooms?*

Working with administration and the **LINKS** cadre, Michele Rivera and Lynne Oakvik build the *links* that will improve student achievement in Broward County Schools. In a distressed economic climate, we must cultivate and capitalize on our human resources. **LINKS** will serve as the human chain that empowers district media specialists to create dynamic and vibrant 21st century media programs. These programs will engage learners as producers of information and creators of innovation.

To learn more about The Peer Coaching Program contact pcinfo@pugetsoundcenter.org. For more information about the **LINKS** program, contact michele.rivera@browardschools.com.



Pictured are members of the LINKS cadre: (row 1, seated l - r) Debra Divich, Ramblewood Middle; Bonnie Goldstein, Atlantic West Elementary; Maria Salomatoff, Coconut Creek Elementary; Maria Alves, South Broward High; (row 2, l to r) Michele Rivera, Director Learning Resources & Instructional Materials; Lynne Oakvik, Specialist, Learning Resources & Instructional Materials; Cynthia Zimmerman, Nova Eisenhower Elementary; Diana Haneski, Westglades Middle; Janice Brim, Stranahan High; Margaret Rohrbach, Atlantic Technical Center; (row 3, l - r) Neena Grosvenor, Silver Lakes Middle; Jennifer Narkier, Virginia Shuman Young Elementary; Paula Miller, New River Middle School and Joanne Endorf, Sheridan Technical Center.



L to R: Janice Brim, Stranahan High, Neena Grosvenor, Silver Lakes Middle, and Paula Miller, New River Middle engage in a *Chalk Talk* activity during Peer Coaching Facilitator Training