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Cooperative Thinking Strategies anchor professional learning

Sustaining quality integration of strategic instruction is not a job for the faint of heart. It takes deliberate commitment to maintain teachers' excitement and interest when there is a shiny new widget around every corner ready to entice us away from tried and true resources like SIM. Teachers love the look of sites like Pinterest and the ease of finding novel ideas that appear to be fun and engaging. With so much competition, how do we fortify teachers' deep and lasting relationship with SIM? In Glastonbury Public Schools, we are addressing this challenge through three interrelated assumptions that anchor professional learning to our current integration of the *Cooperative Thinking Strategies*.

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Assumption 1: Educators value tools that help attain goals owned by our learning community

Our teachers are committed to our district strategic goals that stress high student achievement through development of 21st century learning knowledge and skills. Currently, we are revisiting the application of the *THINK, Solving Complex Problems as a Team,* and *BUILD* (a strategy students can use to work together and resolve a controversial issue) *Cooperative Thinking Strategies* as tools to support engagement and critical skill development. The foundation of these strategies is a true match to the 21st century skills of communication, teamwork and problem-solving necessary in post-secondary preparations of our students. Common Core State Standards related to argument and opinion writing and informational reading can be addressed through these strategies.

THINK and *BUILD* are relevant and produce high leverage results, but we don't assume that educators will make these connections at first exposure. Explicit connections are continually discussed through session advance organizers, post organizers, and reflection breaks, and through review of student progress through use of these tools.

Assumption 2: Shared leadership supports SIM implementation

We have four SIM professional developers (teachers and administrators) who support our district. Our curriculum directors have learned about the relevance of *THINK* and *BUILD*. Each has reflected on possible applications with their departments to address their content standards. A college intern is partnering with the ELA director to present *THINK* as a problem-solving strategy at the high school. Next year, teachers will discuss how to incorporate *THINK* and *BUILD* as resources in their curriculum development. If teachers own the strategies, they will use them.

Assumption 3: Model Strategies as Learning Designs

Use of *THINK* and *BUILD* as learning designs for staff development promotes relevancy. Once educators see the value of the tools during authentic work, they are motivated to use these resources with their students. We use the PASS steps in our RTI evaluation of interventions, and we use *THINK* steps in problem-solving around professional learning issues. If staff members experience the tools in real-world contexts, they will generalize their use independently and consistently.

Efficacious teachers are willing to apply methods that are worthy of the effort…but quality professional learning opportunities are critical. Our district professional learning plans continue to evolve as our community grows in appreciation of important instructional resources such as SIM.