

Continuum Teacher Profile: KRIS

Kris is a teacher at Sun Valley Community School. Over the past year or so, the staff has investigated many strategies for increasing student engagement in their lessons. They have conducted a book study, brought in experts, and sent a couple scouts to some conferences to pick up tips and approaches.

As a 15-year veteran teacher, Kris has a slew of engagement tools in his toolbox. And, as a charismatic individual who really “gets” his kids, he relies quite a bit on his natural instincts and his relationships with students to get them involved in their lessons and projects. He’s a busy guy – recently married, just had a baby at home, works as a bartender a couple nights a week, plays in a band and on a softball team – so he rarely takes work home to grade or write detailed plans. When putting together his lessons, he focuses most of the time on the tasks and the content they must cover – the teaching, he has realized, takes care of itself during the course of the class periods.

When contemplating his goals for the school year, Kris focuses on student-learning outcomes. He wants the students to learn as much as they can and progress as far as possible. He sets his targets high, though he understands that some students just won’t achieve the goals he’s set for them. These days, it’s harder and harder to get some of his students to engage in the learning, and it seems there are more and more kids with all sorts of special needs – language, behavior, learning disabilities, and kids who just plain struggle – that complicate his work.

He’s been to a lot of PD sessions over the years, and he’s incorporated many of the strategies he’s learned into his repertoire. Some days are better than others, and he’s begun to get accustomed to the waxing and waning of classroom success. As he readies himself to sit down with his principal to set his professional-practice goal, he struggles to identify a focus. Engagement really isn’t his issue – he provides engaging lessons, it’s just that many of his students aren’t taking advantage of it.