



Recommendation for Robert Kaplinsky

I am pleased to recommend Robert Kaplinsky as an inspiring and innovative math professional developer. He has a keen understanding of the goals of the new math standards and gift for making the complex and frightening nature of change accessible and doable for teachers. He is professional, well organized and makes the most of every moment with teachers.

Robert and I had met at West Ed Math Conference. He subsequently connected with our Math Teachers on Special Assignment at another meeting. We were all impressed with his knowledge of math content, instructional creativity and grasp of the common core standards. We were looking for a math professional developer to take our teachers to a deeper understanding of the shifts with the new standards and felt certain Robert could make a difference with our teachers. He lived up to our expectations and more. He began with us conducting a 3-day summer seminar for middle and high school math teachers and followed up with a 2-day workshop just prior to the start of the 2014-2015 school year.

Robert uses excellent instructional models to engage teachers. He began our 3-day summer seminar with an innovative problem involving a giant stack of In & Out Hamburgers. He involved teachers in this and many other relevant and interesting problems that bring math to life for students. He challenged teachers' own math thinking and skills and, in so doing, introduced the new standards, including the Standards of Mathematical Practice, in a truly relevant and meaningful experience.

Robert uses his own experience as a math teacher and coach to lead teachers on journey to the common core. He wears a tie, carries himself professionally and is very serious minded about data and math performance. He balances these qualities with a humility and sense of humor that make him approachable to teachers. He is in no way a consultant that is out of touch with the day-to-day realities teachers face. He blends videos from his own classroom work and resources from others to craft a challenging and replicable experience. Teachers leave his sessions armed with skills, strategies and resources to take directly to their classrooms. His website is a treasure chest of easily accessible and dynamic resources. In the months since his work with our teachers, I have seen "Kaplinsky lessons" in many of our classrooms. Teachers have adapted his practices and ideas to their own style and, as a result, improved their instruction.

We brought Robert back to the district in January of 2015 to do a "rewind" for the teachers who missed his summer sessions. He customized the professional learning knowing many in the audience were our special education math teachers. Once again, he challenged teachers to probe the standards deeply and consider ways to more fully engage students in conceptual mathematics.

Our post professional learning surveys of teachers garner some of the best feedback I can offer about Robert's skill and talent. One teacher wrote: ***"This training gave me tools that I will use in my classroom to engage my students as well as give them conceptual understanding of the material."***

Many of our teachers commented specifically on improving their questioning techniques. Robert stresses the need for teachers to become thoughtful about asking students questions to provoke student thinking. He stresses the concept of asking the “least helpful” question to get away from feeding students the information they need. Instead, he says by asking the “least helpful question you move student’s thinking in the right direction without leading or getting in the way of the student’s own problem solving.” This has been quite a revelation for our teachers and our surveys included many comments like this: ***“I will change the type of questions that I ask my students to be the least helpful.”*** Teachers also indicated they would take more time planning the exact questions they would ask with a lesson to provoke critical thinking and problem solving with students. One teacher put it this way: ***“I am going to focus on helping facilitate student thinking instead of giving them so much information where they are not thinking for themselves.”***

Honestly, many of our teachers have found the transition to the new standards difficult. The Standards of Mathematical Practice and new content standards are formidable challenges and a dramatic departure from the computational oriented instruction of the last decade. Robert has helped shine a light on what is possible in an attainable way for our teachers, those most concerned about the change and those most willing to adapt and move forward. He has also been a wonderful collaborator with our Math Teachers on Special Assignment.

I would encourage any district to work with Robert at any stage in the transition to the new standards. I imagine that we will continue to work with Robert over time, even as our teachers become more comfortable. Robert is the perfect professional developer to help teachers find the next step in their learning.

If you would like to learn more about Robert’s experience with San Marcos Unified School District, please do not hesitate to contact me at 760 752-1229 or melissa.hunt@smusd.org.

Sincerely,



Melissa Hunt
Director, Secondary Education
San Marcos Unified School District
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