

ONGOING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR SWUC EDUCATORS

Professional learning continues to be an emphasis for SWUC educators—both leadership and classroom teachers. Two recent professional learning experiences included the ASCD Convention and the SWUC Superintendents’ Retreat.

ASCD

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) is a preeminent global professional organization that focuses on teaching and learning strategies. The organization has recently merged with the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE).

The Southwestern Union Office of Education sends educators from each of the five conferences to their annual convention. Four teachers and principals, along with several conference superintendents and Union personnel, attended the convention in San Antonio this past June.

The theme of the convention was “Spark Joyful Learning.” The combination of the two organizations created a unique opportunity to explore how pedagogy and technology intersect to transform learning. One critical topic that was explored in a number of sessions was the impact of AI on learning.

Superintendents’ Retreat

In addition to providing professional learning opportunities for school-based educators, the SWUC organizes an annual Superintendents’ Retreat. The Retreat rotates among the five conferences in terms of a location. The superintendent of the conference that hosts the Retreat is instrumental in helping plan the activities.

The Retreat is a time to relax, reflect, and grow professionally. Collaborative experiences are always included, so superintendents have the opportunity to communicate, coordinate plans, and cooperate in their execution. Leisure activities round out the time together offering relaxation, enjoyment, and creative outlets.

The Texas Conference was the host this past July at the Hill Country Herb Garden in Fredericksburg, Texas. Each day began with an inspirational worship that provided a context for the day’s focus. Worship speakers included Dr. Smith Castillo, Dr. Kisha Norris, and Renee Whiting.

The professional learning included an interactive presentation by Lainie Rowell, a bestselling author and speaker, that focused on Cultivating a Coaching Mindset for Continuous Improvement. The topic aligned well with the SWUC’s emphasis on Continuous School Improvement (CSI) as the anchor of the Education by Design (EbD) Framework.

One intriguing component was the development of strategies to balance coaching and evaluation. This was particularly pertinent since the SWUC Office of Education has adopted a coaching model to ensure sustainable growth in teaching and learning.

Rene Whiting and the Texas Conference followed up with application to SWUC schools. A new framework for coaching and evaluation—The Danielson Framework—has been embraced to give focus to scaffolded growth plans, clear expectations, differentiated feedback, and progress tracking to ensure continual improvement.

Leisure activities spanned the exploration of Fredericksburg and the Hill Country with its scenic beauty, rich culinary delights, and warm hospitality. Culinary experiences included a class on the creation of healthy smoothies. They are incredibly versatile, allowing for endless combinations of fruits, vegetables, liquids, and add-ins to suit your taste and dietary needs.

The Southwestern Union Office of Education will continue to support the professional learning experiences of its educators as they prepare students for life on this earth as well as for eternity.

