Question 1

M: I just want to go over the questions you have already looked at in the survey. I want to go down these one at a time to see if we can get any discussion going. If you can think of scenarios while you are thinking of this as this is really abstract. It’s a prototype we’ve been working on, however this is your first experience with it. Think of frustrating and good experiences you have had in the past using online tools or with using any kind of software at the school. I gave the example of Peoplesoft, which really annoys me to this day with the university. It’s just not user friendly at all and has given people a lot of headaches, so things like that. So the first one; can you describe your current process for planning curriculum within your grade level. So whenever I say that you are all probably thinking of lesson planning as that’s what you do on a day to day basis, but you also do curriculum planning, you all have your grade level meetings. So what kind of things do you do in your curriculum planning? Do you think about common core? How does that come into play? Is everything done on paper – do you use spreadsheets?

T1: With 4th grade we immediately go to the common core website to find what standards we ned to meet and then we go and start taking that to find learning targets and fitting lesson plans into that since we already have been a year into what we’ve been doing, so we’ve already have things done. It’s now making that shift and making sure we’re meeting those standards.

T2: I think starting at square one would be coming up with a topic and then going to the standards and seeing how can I fit this in or teach through this lens of ancient civilizations. How can I teach adding double digit numbers through this? I guess this is a bad example of this math.

M: So coming up with the initial topic …

T2: Yea the initial thing and then diving into those other documents to find connections.

M: Would it be helpful if you had easy access to see what everyone else at the school is doing in terms of topics, would that help?

T2: If everyone’s was linked to the section or standards – this is done in these 5 grades in a row …

M: Yeah, cause even if it’s a different grade level you could still gleen something from that to use …

T3: Or their final products, just to make sure people aren’t always making a book or making a calendar. The final products are varied too would probably be beneficial. In years past, we’ve always worked from what our product is going to be and then work backwards. So looking at if we want students to able produce this by the end of the expedition, what standards do we need to address to teach and create that final product.

M: That’s the whole backwards design

T3: Yeah, so we do a lot of ifs and thens

T4: Another concern we had was gaps in the sense of ok according to the VSC, which we still use for science and social studies, somebody needs to teach plants. Ok well who’s teaching plants in their expedition, with this new program we could look it up. Also just checking and seeing if still in the VSC who is expected to teach plants and when. 5th and 6th grade had that problem with government, we were both expected to teach government, but it looks a bit different, focuses more on the United States in 5th grade, starts to get into more areas in western, eastern, all over the place Europe. So being able to have access to the VSC for science and social studies until common core gives us the same equilevant that they’ve done with ELA and math.

M: Do you find that a lot? Do you find you have gaps or overlap in grade levels or is it something you keep in the back of your mind as you’re ...

T4: That’s always something we talk about at the end of the year at our retreat. I feel that from the year before we had fixed some gaps but there was still some repetition. Maybe the gaps weren’t as concerning, especially with the addition of 4th grade and 8th grade, but now we are having some repeat. 5th and 6th grade does water cycle. It’s just nice to see what 6th grade is doing so 5th grade can plan to support them but not teach the exact same thing as before.

T2: Which would be helpful with the linking, to see what they did and as far as how deep they went and how they looked at it…

T4: What was appropriate redundancy and what’s just exactly the same.

T3: Cause teaching plants in first grade would be very different from teaching plants in a higher grade.

T1: And I think it’s also great for math, for when you’re teaching something to see where they last saw this and if it’s something that you really need to hit hard reteaching-wise, or something that they did it or lets see what they know and remember. It would be good to link the math up.

M: Yeah cause one of the things we are trying to do is this whole alignment, like the different things across the whole map, but the piece you haven’t seen yet that we’re still working on is the actual, well I call it reporting, but it’s really the mapping or core of the thing – what you want to get out of it, but we can’t get to that until we figure out what we’re going to put into it and what’s going to be meaningful. So that’s why we were focusing mainly on the data collection and more so on the teacher’s burden for data collection. Cause the whole idea of curriculum mapping now is like it decentralizes it. Traditionally curriculum mapping back in the 70s Fenwich English was the guy who coined the phrase. Then you didn’t have the laptops or computers, it was a lot more burdensome to the teachers. Now we have these online things to help spread it out and if everyone’s participating, the hope is you will get some benefit out of it a well, then you can look across and see what everyone else is doing and that helps. Do you do any of that now? Do you talk to other teachers in other grade levels? Do you have meetings across grades? I know you meet in your individual teams.

T3: I would say semi-annually we do. It’s not very often that you get to meet and talk with other teaches, but then after the expedition we all meet and ah crap we taught the same thing or oh great we didn’t and it’s kinds like we plan for the next year.

M: Right, so it’s almost not enough.

T4: Yeah it came up in hallways but we only done it once really so far this year.

T2: And then there’s problems with overlapping hallways like 5th-6th and 2nd-3rd, which don’t even get that chance and it has to happen some other time.

T3: Which is basically staff retreat in June

T1: Or that one hour that we had when we were mapping at the beginning of the school year

T3: And a lot of time what happens is your plan is to teach certain things but then as the year goes on you realize that your kids need something different or they’re interested in something different so you don’t teach what you had written down. So if you could modify it and say I didn’t do this or I’m doing this and we could see what’s being changed, that would help, that way we could all be flexible with each other.

T1: Like flagging it

M: Yeah cause right now it’s kind of like you meet, but the damage has already been done, whereas if you had some way to collaborate a little bit better during the year. And the problem with meeting, like today, it’s hard to get dates and times that suits everyone and even when you do you’re limited to a very small timeframe that you can actually get some quality discussion going.

T3: And then too because of our grades, kids coming in at different years sometimes you realize they were supposed to learn this and they didn’t. So if we could flag I noticed 3rd grade didn’t pick up on this, I’m going to reteach it.

M: Ok, so flag the gaps essentially, yeah.

T4: Question I was going to ask was some, I don’t even know if it’s possible – this year we are making huge efforts and strides to use student data to make instructional decisions. I realize curriculum mapping right now is the focus to make sure standards are taught. However is there a way this server could potentially house student data.

M: Well anything’s possible but it goes outside the realm of what this does. I would recommend this would be captured in a separate application. For this purpose it more at the other end of the thing.

T3: I thought it would be cool if you could click on a common core math strand and see based on whats on here so far who’s teaching it, like who picks up on it. Then we could see third teaches this, fifth teaches this, and we could use our own separate data from maps and MSA.

M: So you’re saying pick a common core for mathematics and then find out which grade levels are adhering to that standard?

T3: If you’re making your expedition or map and put in your STA this particular standard – then if you could click on the standard and see when it’s being taught. I guess my only concern is that common core is grade by grade though.

T4: It is, it’s scaffold and tiered too so one skill builds on another.

T3: So I guess that makes it a little bit tricky.

M: Well you could at least find in your own grade level, but you probably already meet more frequently in your own grade level planning.

T3: I guess it would still be nice if we do have that one strand, well we only taught this two weeks in the mini-mester, we should probably incorporate it into the first six weeks then so we teach it often. If you’re doing informational writing for common core and you realize that was just one first six weeks activity we did, we didn’t touch on it at all the rest of the year. Where should we put it?

T1: And I think that goes with the flagging. Right now we have these spreadsheets that we could look at and assume the teachers have done this and we need to do this and it’s like you said, hard to meet up with everybody to have these conversations. So to have that flag go up and say we brushed on it or we skipped it and that way we know when we get to this I have to really touch this hard that they get it.

T3: Or even like a check saying you did it.

T1: Yeah, or even if it was like while discussing this we touched on this so they have background knowledge. So if kindergarten starts teaching addition to numbers, at least first grade can look at that and go oh they have an idea of what this looks like.

M: Would this be helpful to have that kind of feedback when you entered your map and and you may have missed something for it to say – hey this hasn’t been covered.

T1: Yeah.

T3: Here’s my pushback, we have three different teachers per grade level, particularly anything for math that looks different.

T1: But it could be as you’re putting it in there you could put, lets say level 1, didn’t touch or missed this because we had to go three weeks on this instead of the week week week thing. So we know the lower level math kids didn’t hit this so it’s something that they have to come back to. That way there’s three – I mean it’s going to be different for like the primary side, but the intermediary side we all switch for math classes, so we can easily have that say level 1 huh, level 2 hmm, level 3 yep, like that kind of thing.

T3: See in the way grades 3 through 5 does mathematics is that each teacher teaches a different group of kids in the grade level and the teachers that are co-taught co-teaching with a special educator, have friends that really struggle with math, so maybe they have basic MSSA or maybe their IEP requires math skills. Sometimes math, while we’re all teaching the same objectives, but like I teach the friends that struggle and so I know we spend tons of time on multiplication, but Lillie’s crew got way more time on division because her friends are the friends that get advanced and need an extension, so that’s my only push back.

T1: What if instead of flags, notes, that way when 5th grade goes onto 6th grade and map could look at that year archive

M: That would be part of the reporting and pulling up things to see where those gaps are and where those overlaps are.

Question 2

M: What resources and tools are essential to you in terms of planning the curriculum? It sounds like if this web based thing was out now, those would be essential tools. But essential now, like using the common core website – that’s an essential tool. What other things are essential for you coming up with your topics or planning them.

T3: EL Commons would be a great link tool to have accessible within.

T4: You need a passcode – it’s where you see all the EL schools and final products.

T3: It also makes sense to have a tool to link to the Anne Arundel county Blackboard and Intranet because those are web-based tools that are very useful as well.

M: So you use those tools a lot.

T3: And the same thing too are online databases

M: Like educational databases

T3: Yes, like the ones students can access. It would be a very useful tool even for planning processes. If you’re studying a country and you want to know more about the amount of water and rainfall this country gets every year. You can easily go to a geographic database that has all of that information accessible.

M: So maybe context specific, like if you go into the mathematics, there is maybe a resource at the side for Mathematics databases.

T3: I think that would be very helpful. Especially when we need to try to incorporate more multimedia into our instruction. That there was the ability to add links onto that tool to be able to add a web base, so that people can eventually click on it.

Question 3

M: What about non-web based stuff though in terms of tools or things you use when you’re planning curriculum.

T1: We don’t have much.

T2: Past maps, not only other grade levels but our own. Did we hit these things, what should we work on more?

T4: I always look at my last year’s plans to see if I’m even close to what I was doing last year. Just our regular investigations books and phonics books.

T3: Any cool other resource books like published books like making work books, trying to think of another resource. I use a reference book of list.

T4: In math we use investigations just like a math curriculum, but we still pull from other places as well.

M: So a lot of books and stuff that you need to bring in

Question 4

M: Number 4 is very open-ended. If you could do this yourself – build a curriculum mapping system the way you want it, can you think of any high level things off the top of your head that you would definitely include that we haven’t already covered.

T2: Like a screen to see previous and past or something for specific standards, some sort of multi-view

T1: Like a year before, year after type deal?

T2: Or you could just have one on one

M: For standards only, or for everything?

T2: Well like I don’t know, I was just wondering if the standards are what Suzie was saying would link up to what they did in the classroom to meet that standard and then you could have a comparison view.

T4: I always think of when I worked at the hospital and we had to use a system for all the charting of the patients and it was so much stuff to click on. Everything was there it was great but you would stare at it for five minutes and then find there x-rays, so just keeping it simple and right in your face where if I need something I don’t have to stare at it, just need to click and it’s there. A lot less to click and open.

M: So sort of like a dashboard that contains everything that you need

T4: Like how you were showing you could just click and type, you don’t have to open anything else, I love that

M: Yeah that’s what I’m trying to aim for with these new dynamic tables, instead of going to a form submit save, it’s so much quicker

T1: My question with that is how do you know it’s saved? There’s a few people I know that are constant savers and need that button.

M: Once your mouse leaves the focus of it – it will be obvious. I think it will just be the first time you’ve used it – it might be a bit weird, but once you’ve used it a few times.

M: Ideally where would you want to access all your stuff? Say you could access the grade book from anywhere, your iPhone, your mobile device, things like that. Are there applications here that are frustrating because you can only access them from the school, or are there certain things you’d want to access from home– or do you not want to access anything from home, you just want to do your work here and be done?

T4: We can’t get the share drive at home.

T1: I think the one thing that might be beneficial, would be a read only

T4: This is just me and a preference I would like to have. I know you have the STA, however I want to know what text the kids are reading as a reading teacher

M: The text yeah, right resources

T4: What book are you going to use, or what article are you going to use. I think that needs to be defined within our expeditions. Also something along the lines of differentiated instruction.

M: What does that mean?

T4: Like where you have multiple choices within a task. I know we have our long term targets and short term targets, but we know everyone is going to do this activity, but maybe people might do it in different ways or different outcomes.

T3: That sounds more like lesson planning

M: This is more high level, this is more your curriculum planning meetings, not lesson planning.

Question 5

M: What obstacles, what would really infuriate you to not want to use this thing. Think of the worse web sites you have used. What kind of things would hinder you from adopting this in your process? The idea of me building this is to make your workflow easier ultimately, but think in terms of what would hinder you from adopting it

T4: If it was too much for me to type in

M: Ok too much data to enter

T4: Yeah, if I’m spending all my time typing in what I’m doing versus doing what I’m doing I’m not going to do it to be honest

M: You already have a lot of stuff you do

T4: Yeah, like this year has become a lot of paperwork because so many things have changed. I feel I am constantly filling out forms but I’m not actually getting to do it. So just making sure there isn’t too many things to put in.

T1: My thing is just login in the sense of not having to have a super hard username and password. Password security.

T3: Whenever you tried to close or end an application, it would always say things were missing or not filled in

M: Strict validation

T3: Or reminders, like I mean because maybe you aren’t going to get to everything

M: This is going to be flag based, you’ll have a little nagging icon, but it’s not going to be intrusive

M: Would you use it on an iPhone or a tablet?

T1: Even if it was read only so you would have that information

M: So not for entering data?

T2: Personally I would like it. I don’t have a computer, I have a tablet. Having it available on both would be ideal.

T4: Can our server handle this?

M: We need to figure out the details

T1: How much data would it take to hold all of this?

M: I don’t know currently, but I don’t think it is going to be too bad. Remember Curriculum mapping is more high level, we’re touching on standards at a higher level and not going into detail. There will be capability to upload attachments, if you want to upload actual assessments, etc. you’ll be able to do that and you can see other people’s stuff. The main goal of this will be for mapping and for mapping you will not going to contain gigabytes and gigabytes of information.

T4: I’m wondering what would happen if you accidently click the box and delete everything you just typed.

M: Nothing will be permanently deleted, basically anything you delete will be flagged on the database and the admin team would be able to undelete it, I may add a feature to allow teachers to undelete.

T4: Hypothetically you start a new school year and you’re going in and changing something and then you realize I still want to do that.

M: There will be a fresh set of records each year, but you have the ability to bring in information from the prior year, but you would never be able to edit anything you’d done then. The only stuff you could edit would be the current year.

T4: So you could just say fall kindergarten last year and import and everything’s there.

M: You would have a way to import that and then edit and submit it

M: Basically we want to make this as easy as possible and improve the process you’re currently doing. I’ve done research on this – Heidi Hayes Jacobs she’s really big in the field of curriculum mapping. One of things she says is that these bi-yearly curriculum meetings don’t really work well because as you said you’re fixing things after the fact. The idea of this is that you’re collaborating all the time, you can always see what people are doing and can log in anywhere, either at school or at home.

T4: And it does seem it’s an efficient tool, especially with drop downs for common core.

M: We want to make it as easy as possible. Thank you very much for your time.