

On Friday, May 3, 2013 I had the pleasure of meeting with Marlene Wilks, the Network Leader of CFN 209. Ms. Wilks joined me along with the rest of my Administrative Team for a "Lunch and Learn" at our school. During this working lunch, we discussed our school's annual report card, progress report, and various other documents filled with data about our school. She helped us realize our strengths and afforded us an opportunity to brainstorm ways we can use these strengths to work on areas needing improvement.

During this lunchtime meeting, I also had the pleasure of interviewing Ms. Wilks. As an educator for over three decades, she brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the table. To begin the interview, I asked her what inspired her to take on such a high-level leadership role. She responded with a smile and then told me that the position kind of fell into her lap. She mentioned that she was entreated repeatedly to take the position. Ms. Wilks prides herself on being an educator through and through --- she's a self-proclaimed "teacher by nature." Ms. Wilks mentioned that the leadership piece is "secondary to the teaching piece, where you help people learn how to do things... how to make things better."

There were so many questions I had for her, but wanted to remain focused on her last statement, that teaching needs to take the lead. I asked her about professional development offered by her office --- how does she decide what her network will focus on? How does she implement her professional development? Ms. Wilks said the primary focus is always on whatever the citywide expectations are -- even she has to answer to a boss. She then mentioned that she looks closely at the schools under her leadership and guidance and determines where they most need the support.

With regard to implementation, she credits her success to her team. Ms. Wilks stated that they meet to discuss their resources and then decide which groups would be recipients. Her team also discusses whether or not they need to educate themselves prior to scheduling any of the workshops.

The Network team is constantly inquiring. As they work in schools to offer support, they are collecting data regularly. The team then evaluates the data to determine what is working and what is not. Sounds very much like the inquiry work done by our teachers...