

**Lawton Elementary School
CAS Team Meeting # 3
January 27, 2011 (Office Conference Room)**

Members

Present: Christine Helm, Kimball Mullins, Peter Hubbard, Shirley Rybock, Mark Strasburger, Kaycee Pomeroy, Roger Daniels (SPS Advanced Learning Department Consulting Teacher), and Lyon Terry.

Absent: Susan Dowd, Bryan Hester

Quorum present: yes

Proceedings

Christine called the meeting to order at 3:35, welcomed and thanked everyone for coming. Group norms were reviewed.

I. Minutes

Minutes from 1/20 were approved with suggested changes.

II. Word on the Street

Minutes are posted on the Lawton PTA webpage under the CAS team page. A CAS Team update will be written by Christine and the link to the minutes will go in the newsletter.

Someone on the playground heard a member of our group saying that the book (SCGM) does not apply to Lawton. Yet, we have not come to any conclusion as a group.

We need to be careful about our messaging. We will communicate through our minutes and speak in one voice through them. At the same time we are willing to listen to others for input. We are in process now.

Roger received calls from 2 parents concerned about our timeline and want info soon, so they can make decisions about private school applications. We are working hard to come to a conclusion

Mark was asked again by a parent “why do teachers who don’t test their kids and are opposed to the spectrum program teach it? What is the training they have received?” We feel the first question does not pertain to the stated purpose of our group and is a personal issue for teachers and their families. However, the teachers at Lawton are all professionals and are willing to talk with any parent. In regards to the second question, there was training 4 years ago for each grade band. Since then Roger Daniels has delivered some books to the teachers, but there has been no formal professional development in this area.

District Policy? Dr. Robert Vaughan (manager of advanced learning for SPS) approved Lawton’s use of the Schoolwide Cluster Grouping Model (SCGM) in place of a self-contained model contingent on Spectrum outcomes (test data.) Some feel this makes it not a deviation

from Spectrum but part of the Spectrum program. Others feel it is a deviation from the Spectrum program and against the current program. We are a Spectrum program school and will continue to be designated as such if we go forward with SCGM. It is different than most other spectrum programs but not all of them. Christine has asked Dr. Vaughan to add cluster grouping to the district advanced learning website. Lawton has never had completely self-contained classes on any grade level. Given this some believe we have basically been using cluster grouping for years. If we do reach the numbers to fully self-contain then what do we do? Will going with this model essentially make us an ALO (Advanced Learning Options) school only worse because we will not have the flexibility they have in forming groups? We don't have an answer to these questions at this time.

What is the staff attitude about gifted education? We are back to defining the problem. The staff appeared in their petition to want "full flexibility" in forming classes; this is an ALO model. Dr. Vaughan did not grant this option but approved SCGM.

There was more discussion about how we have arrived at this point as a school and community. We then realized that we still need to define the problem. Christine asked everyone to take 5 minutes and write about the problem as they see it.

II. Why are we here? What is the problem?

The following are statements and discussion items started by members of the group in response to these questions. They were stated in a different order and then grouped together.

1. Worries by the staff about a loss of control and the need to have to start collaborating more, yet the program is popular district wide.
2. Students and parents are labeling kids.
 - a. This whole issue could be seen as an opportunity for clarification and instruction about how kids learn and be at school. We can use a "learning line" to talk to everyone about how all people are at different places with their learning.
 - b. Part political/philosophical. People are afraid to label kids at an early age.
 - c. Adults are labeling, but gifted education is an academic special need. The SPS school board has passed a resolution saying this. Students who are gifted have different academic needs than students who are not.
3. Students are placed in classes by ability first.
 - a. The spectrum class issues are much less than the issues in the other classes. This becomes more apparent in the 4th and 5th grades as the gap between the two groups both academically and behaviorally continues to grow, and there are fewer classes per grade level in which staff can form different groupings (for example, when there are only 2 5th grade classes.) Not all agree with this and believe that all classes have issues that are challenging.
 - b. Teachers want to "fit" all students with a teacher and classmates in a classroom.
 - c. Self-contained spectrum limits placement of students in friendship groups (this is repeatedly the most requested item on student placement forms.)
 - d. Stratification in the school. The program splits the school. Some students have asked a teacher: "I don't want to be with the bad group of kids?"
 - e. The staff want to balance the classrooms behaviorally.
 - f. The team needs to consider how to best meet the needs of Spectrum students as well as Special Ed students as we are the inclusion school. Attention should be given to appropriate usage of the term inclusion, in it's educational context.

4. Is there misinformation among the staff about gifted education and did they just sign a petition because that is what everyone was doing or because the framework was missing.
5. Two of the 3rd grade teachers (Tessie Wong and Shirley Rybock) have shared students for reading and math for many years. Non-designated students have moved into groups with gifted students and gifted students have moved into groups with the non-designated students.
 - a. Shirley Rybock has a master's degree in gifted education and has found this to be a great experience as a teacher and for the 3rd grade students.
 - b. All children need to be engaged and challenged.
6. There is parent misunderstanding about the quality of the teachers at Lawton. They all have their unique talents that should be recognized by all. We have an outstanding staff that cares deeply about their students and parents who care deeply about their children.
 - a. A belief in the parent base that because some teachers are teaching the gifted students they are "better." This is a widespread, repeated misperception, and it has made teachers feel awkward because they believe all the teachers at the school are doing great work.
7. We are not fully self-contained and thus can't follow the district self-contained policy, so what are we supposed to do? This is what got us to this point.
8. There is a perception in the community that we are tracking at Lawton and not every student is receiving a challenging education.
9. There is concern over the presumption of and the perceived advantage regarding class assignments resulting from a Spectrum designation.
10. There is an extreme range in the reading abilities in all of the classes, particularly the 5th grade.

IV. Issues

We have a vital opportunity now to address these problems. We want a thriving community where everyone feels welcome. In the section titled **How Differentiation communicates Respect for Individual Differences** (p.90) in the SCGM book we are reading the authors quote a teacher who says to a student, " 'all kids in this class don't get the same work as all other kids. Each student needs different size 'shoes' for spelling, math, writing, and other subjects. My job is to make sure all the 'shoes' I give to all my students are a good fit in whatever subject area we're learning." We feel that this message needs to get out to everyone.

It was noted that the "Gifted" designation on the website states 87% on the COGAT is passing. Last week we were told it was 90%. The reason for this is that the COGAT test has a 3-point standard deviation error.

At this point we agreed to abandon the agenda and address issues. Christine asked if we could list the issues we see then all take a few in the coming week and see how these issues would be dealt with in the SCGM. The issues list is:

1. Gifted students have special needs.
 - a. Educate parents and students around the fact that we all have different strengths and intelligences; Howard Gardner has identified 9 intelligences. Academic intelligence is only a part of them.
 - b. Staff needs professional development focused on how to challenge all students. "Gifted" doesn't mean better, but it does mean they having different instructional needs, and clarifying this would help staff, students and families.

- i. Some parents with gifted students feel a bit stigmatized when they advocate for their kids who are in the spectrum program.
2. Labeling of both students and teachers.
3. The spectrum program is a program for the whole McClure cluster, not just Lawton.
4. Balancing of classrooms both with the number of “time-intensive” students, gifted students and other students given we are an inclusion school and a spectrum school.
 - a. It does state in our mission statement that we are an inclusive school. Roger Daniels stated, “by definition self-contained spectrum is not inclusion.
 - b. **Lawton Mission Statement:** *Lawton learners are kind, respectful, responsible, and are achievers. We support and encourage students’ creative expression and critical thinking skills through an inclusive and integrated education that provides both guided practice and independent exploration.*
 - c. Flexibility with classroom placements. All teachers feel they have a wide range of student ability levels and behavior needs but some feel that in a self-contained model there is no flexibility with classroom placement of students.
5. How do we keep cohorts of students together? And, should we keep cohorts of students together?
6. How are we going to ensure that all students are challenged at Lawton? What are our next steps?
7. Defining inclusion as a specific educational term.

Staff would like to have flexibility in creating and managing student groupings, both in terms of classroom placement, and for breakout ability groups, similar to what Shirley Rybock and Tessie Wong regularly undertake for math and reading groups in the 3rd grade. This is more in line with what the staff intended when creating and submitting the petition to Robert Vaughan.

OUR GOAL; Brainstorm solutions to these issues within the SCGM, get them down on paper and submit to Christine via email before next week’s meeting, or bring them to the meeting.

Meeting Adjourned: 5:08 p.m.

Minutes submitted by: Lyon Terry, edited and approved on February 2, 2011