

Lawton Elementary School

Challenge All Students Team Meeting #5

February 10, 2011 (Office Conference Room)

Members

Present: Christine Helm, Bryan Hester, Lyon Terry, Kimball Mullins, Peter Hubbard, Mark Strasburger, Roger Daniels (SPS Advanced Learning Department Consulting Teacher)

Absent: Susan Dowd, Shirley Rybock, Kaycee Pomeroy

Quorum Present: Yes

Proceedings: meeting called to order by Ms. Helm

I. Norms reviewed

II Minutes discussed and approved unanimously.

III. Word on the Street

There were several emails read by Ms. Helm. Questions and feedback given to other team members were also shared. Because time does not permit the team to reply to each question and issue, we decided that the best strategy was for them to be assembled in the form of a FAQ and answers will be provided at the community meeting and not via our meeting minutes.

Ms. Helm did want to address one issue raised in the emails: Is the self-contained model still an option for next year at Lawton?

In general, team members understood the mission of the CAS Team was to study the Cluster Grouping Handbook, learn about cluster grouping and explore whether this is a model that can be successfully implemented at Lawton to mitigate the self-contained v. not-self –contained class placement issue. Since our study and work is not finished, it is premature to take any options off the table. As such, the self contained option remains on the table at this point.

Discussion

Christine had a conversation with Bob Vaughan, head of Advanced Learning, and she reported that he would support Lawton's proceeding with cluster grouping next year and is reviewing the minutes which track the committee's progress. Roger stated that the progress of students in the Spectrum program would be monitored by the Advanced Learning Office to determine the effect of any change.

Roger stated that the district feels the cluster-grouping plan is a compromise to address the objections that Lawton staff made regarding self-contained classrooms. Dr. Vaughan offered this as an option to help schools create new ALO and new Spectrum programs where there have previously been none.

Because some of the emails requested a succinct problem statement, the committee discussed a draft Problem Statement prepared by Christine. Minutes from meeting number 3 are very clear on the definition and scope of the problem and committee members are clear on the issues

It is difficult to compact the issues into a one or two line issue statement but the team agrees that it was a majority of staff who were seeking to address the issue of Spectrum delivery at Lawton, specifically moving away from the self contained delivery model. Teachers want increased flexibility in student classroom placement. Many families of students in Spectrum want the above grade level academic rigor offered by the program to continue. Some parents of children not in the program feel a lack of equity and want equally suitable academic rigor for their children. A final problem statement will be forthcoming.

What exactly does staff perceive to be the problem?

Some teachers feel a “school within a school” which can create disunity among staff, students and the community. It can appear to be a dual track of learning where one group is separate from the rest of the classrooms. Some teachers find the classes are lop-sided with a disproportional amount of time intensive kids in the non-Spectrum class(es). These students need more one-on-one time and some believe that changing to a more flexible class assignment model would allow those students to be distributed more evenly among classes to foster positive academic role models. Some find the current model too much like tracking.

There have also been instances where some students who were not in Spectrum were not receiving adequate attention because there was an insufficient number of high achieving students in the non-Spectrum classrooms to create a large enough group to work together on advanced material. The staff consensus is that no harm will be done to Spectrum students with a switch to cluster grouping, as long as there is an emphasis on differentiation..

The team discussed the ample research showing that removing high-ability students from regular classrooms allows other students to assume the leadership roles and increases academic performance school wide. Roger affirmed that these are the research findings of meta-analysis studies of grouping. He also expressed concern that teachers could not differentiate for such a wide range of students in one class, but felt they could with intentional clustering of all students within regular classrooms, including Spectrum students within regular classrooms.

The NAGC (National Association for Gifted Children) states in their “grouping position” paper that students who participate in a “walk to” math and reading perform at the same level as those students who are fully self-contained.

<http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=4450>

Christine related her experience teaching in Harlem, New York City. She worked with a remedial class and saw that they had no peers to inspire them to do better and provide positive role models. She wonders if students will follow the example of the Spectrum students and achieve at a higher level if they are present in the classroom.

Clarification was sought on whether all teachers were willing to participate in walk to math. Lyon informed the group that all teachers were participating in Walk to Math this year and would do so in the future. There is concern that it is not the job of students to be role models to fellow students. Some community members would like specific examples of problems resulting from the current self-contained model.

Training

Roger believes that the staff must commit to training in differentiation in order to successfully apply the cluster grouping model. He is available to facilitate PLC (professional learning communities) as a low-cost development tool. There is no budget for hiring substitute teachers to provide training time.

Carryover

The committee will not be soliciting input from either teachers or administrators who work at other SPS Spectrum sites at this time. A majority of the committee felt that it was unnecessary as we have the staff perspective of self contained support on the CAS Team. . The request was made in order to hear the positive side of Spectrum and the way the problems we are encountering at Lawton are addressed at other schools and whether this would be valuable information for the committee.

Timeline

The committee plans to present its report to the BLT on March 7

Due to a scheduling conflict, the community meeting will not take place on March 10th and we are looking for an alternate date.

Because the SPS open enrollment has been extended to April 15, the team felt we have more time to formulate and present a proposal to the stakeholders.

Team members are to read Chapters 7 and 8 of the text, work on FAQ’s and answers and work on a succinct problem statement. Next week’s roles are: Norms (Kaycee), Notes (Kimball), Snack (Shirley), Timekeeper (Mark).

Explanation of Cluster-Grouping

The Challenge All Students Team is using The Cluster Grouping Handbook, How to Challenge Gifted Students and Improve Achievement for All by Susan Winebrenner and Dina Brulles. Winebrenner defines cluster grouping: Cluster grouping occurs when a group of gifted students is placed with groups of other students in a mixed-ability classroom. A group of four to eight identified gifted students, usually those in the top 5-8% of achievement potential of the grade-level population, is clustered in a classroom with a teacher who has had training in how to teach exceptionally capable students. If there is more than the optimum number of gifted students across a grade level, two or more classrooms may be designated as gifted-cluster classrooms. p.13

The implementation of the model requires administrators and staff to classify students into five different ability groups. It is noted in the book “We use the terms such as *gifted-identified, non-productive, high-achieving, and below average* to categorize students’ ability and learning levels. The terms are not intended to typecast students but rather to give educators readily understood descriptions that will help them in determining placement of students in the cluster classrooms.” p.14

The committee is working on draft proposals for student placement using the cluster grouping classifications .

Minutes submitted by: Mark Strasburger
Meeting adjourned 5:15 pm