

**Lawton Elementary School  
CAS Team Meeting # 6  
February 15, 2011 (Office Conference Room)**

**Members**

Present: Christine Helm, Susan Dowd, Lyon Terry, Shirley Rybock Bryan Hester, Mark Strasburger, Kimball Mullins and Roger Daniels (SPS Advanced Learning Department Consulting Teacher)

Absent: Peter Hubbard, Kaycee Pomeroy

Quorum Present: yes

**Proceedings**

Meeting called to order by Christine. Members signed in.

**I. Review Norms**

Christine read and reviewed the meeting norms.

**II. Approve Meeting Minutes**

Meeting minutes were reviewed and approved unanimously as edited.

**III. “Word on the Street”**

Bryan received an article from a parent about the Federal Way SD's placement of gifted students pursuant to MAP scores, placing all (6-12 grade) students who “meet standard” into AP classes. See attached article.<sup>1</sup>

Lyon received feedback from a fellow staff member identifying diversifying the classrooms as a desired outcome. Lyon fielded a question from a parent regarding options for his child who recently tested into Spectrum. The parent indicated that he had experience with self-contained gifted education when growing up and did not like the way it separated him from all the other kids at his school. He found it hard to make friends with kids outside his classroom and grew tired of the kids in his classroom. It was noted that the parents have a choice about whether to enroll their child in the Spectrum program.

**IV. Problem Statement**

The group further discussed creation of a problem statement that succinctly identifies the issues. The group understands the issues, but we are responding to community requests to form a problem statement. Issues include, but are not limited to forming balanced classrooms (taking into account: academic ability, gender, race, behavioral abilities, social-emotional considerations.) The goal is to make intentional classroom placement which includes all of these factors. Regardless of the outcome, students will continue to be ability grouped for math in the form of the Walk to Math program so all

students (Spectrum and non-Spectrum) will receive math instruction at their appropriate level.

We have a historical model but are trying to come up with viable alternatives for which we can adequately measure outcomes. There is research to support cluster grouping and it is the model that SPS has suggested we investigate. Additionally the cluster grouping text speaks to the issue of students as role models and says the academic abilities should not be “too disparate in order for students to be considered effective role models.” (p. 15)

A passage from the Recommendations section of the National Association for Gifted Children March 2009 Position Paper - “It is important for schools to select those grouping options that will be most successful considering the school context (its teachers, community values, special needs of the school population, etc.). In general, the more full-time options (full-time ability grouping, regrouping for specific instruction, cluster grouping) require little more than additional professional development, differentiated curriculum materials, and a reorganization of teacher responsibilities in order to be implemented appropriately.”<sup>2</sup>

## **V. Discuss proposed solution and how they match goals**

The group discussed various options regarding classroom placements. The discussions and drafts of proposed solutions will be compiled by Christine into a proposal(s) for review at our next meeting.

## **VI. Book Talk**

The group discussed Chapter 3 regarding identification of students into the different ability groups, especially Groups 1 and 2. Members sought clarification about which students should be placed in Group 1 and whether only students testing in the highest 3% should make up Group 1. Roger clarified Seattle School’s criteria for admission to Advanced Learning programs. Students scoring at least in the 87% percentile in two out of three cognitive areas and in reading and mathematics qualify for Spectrum services in Seattle. Other districts, like Kitsap County, qualifying students score in approximately the top 3% on the cognitive abilities section and in one content area not both like Seattle. Excelling in one content area is called “single peak.”

Since staff and administrators don't see exact Spectrum scores and since the SPS already has a definition of gifted, the group agreed that all Spectrum identified students should be assigned a Group 1 classification. It was also noted that if the teachers found a small group that were deemed “highly gifted” by their achievement in the classroom, that it would be best practice to do our best to keep those kids together in a classroom. Other teacher-identified students who can do above grade level work can also be placed in Group 1. It is best practice to find the students who are working at the same ability and make intentional placements accordingly.

## **VII. Additional Discussion:**

Christine called Susan Winebrenner, author of the cluster grouping text we are reading, in order to ask Winebrenner's advice as to gifted student placement when the numbers

of gifted students are greater than 8 in a grade – as in the case of Lawton. Christine will report the conversation results and Winebrenner's feedback to the team when the call is returned.

Some believe there is nothing wrong with the model we have now (self contained to the extent it can be) and that the problems stated are based more on emotions and feelings, and not facts. We have anticipated and desired outcomes from cluster grouping, but they are untested, and are unknowns. Fall MAP scores for Spectrum students at Lawton were higher than district average across every grade level. Additionally, families who have children in the Spectrum program also have opinions and feelings regarding program delivery, and they were left out of the conversation regarding the staff petition submitted in the summer and the resulting authorization by Dr. Vaughan to explore cluster-grouping instead of self-contained, until recently.

A passage from another Winebrenner book Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom was read:

*"Isn't it better for gifted kids to be grouped together in self-contained classes for the entire school year?"*

Yes, that is the best arrangement for gifted kids, provided the district is large enough to get political support for such a practice. Gifted students in self-contained classes are more likely to "stay gifted" and remain true to their ability. Gifted kids have characteristics and needs, such as competitiveness, that are often not facilitated in mixed-abilities classes. However, when self-contained classes are not going to happen, cluster grouping is the next best thing, in my opinion."

The staff belief is that implementing cluster grouping will not hurt the Spectrum students, but the question was posed, will it help the remainder of the students?

Some are concerned that the issue of imbalanced classrooms is more of an isolated problem, which is more pronounced in some years/grades, but that is not a widespread problem. If it is an issue of one grade, or one class, or staff member (or even a few classes) is it better to address those instances individually versus changing the entire system? We don't want to get rid of what works well, even if some parts of it might not work as well (i.e. throw the baby out with the bathwater).

It appears that some staff work in grade teams more than others and that some staff have greater experience with differentiating instruction than others. Some teachers have exchanged groups of students to accommodate their needs, socially and academically through efforts such as walk to reading and moving students between classes for special projects like World Cultures.. These are also factors that should be considered before deciding to move away from self-contained, since they are key to the success of cluster grouping. With a move to cluster grouping, staff will need to work collaboratively on grade level teams and to also focus on (and regularly report back on) differentiation in the classroom.

## **Cluster Grouping Definition and Information:**

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. 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

Group 1, Gifted – Students in Group 1 are identified as gifted by local criteria because they have the highest ability in the grade level. This group includes gifted students who are nonproductive (so-called underachievers), culturally diverse learners, and twice-exceptional learners.

Group 2, High Achieving - Group 2 students are highly competent and productive, are working to the fullest extent of their abilities, and are not identified as gifted.

Group 3, Average - These students achieve in the middle (average) range when compared to others in their grade level.

Group 4, Below Average – The students in Group 4 may struggle with math or reading and score slightly below grade level, but can achieve at grade level with some support.

Group 5, Far Below Average - Students struggle with most subject areas and score significantly below proficiency levels on standardized tests.

## **VIII. Additional Meeting and Scheduling:**

Our next meeting is Thursday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Meeting adjourned: 5:10 pm  
Minutes submitted by: Kimball Mullins

---

<sup>1</sup> Westneat, Danny; “The ‘Tiger Mom’ within Federal Way schools” (02/05/11)  
[http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/dannywestneat/2014142479\\_danny06.html](http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/dannywestneat/2014142479_danny06.html)

<sup>2</sup> National Association for Gifted Children – Position Paper on Grouping (March, 2009)  
[http://www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/Information\\_and\\_Resources/Position\\_Papers/Grouping.pdf](http://www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/Information_and_Resources/Position_Papers/Grouping.pdf)