

ACOS

Meeting Notes: December 7th, 2011

Meeting began at 9:50 am on December 7th, 2011, in the Quest portable at Hidden Creek Elementary School.

Present:

Maureen, Trina, Tracy, MaryAnn, Janet, and guests Greg Albertson and Kurt Wagner

Topics:

- November 18th Meeting Notes
 - Maureen opened by asking if there were questions or comments about the notes from the last meeting. There were none.
- Websites and Facebook Page(s)
 - Discussed changes to content of website.
 - Discussed the possibility of linking ACOS website to SKSD's website and SKSD's Facebook page.
 - Need to create a Facebook page for ACOS (Janet).
- Brain Power Bins
 - Maureen pointed out that it has been 3 ½ weeks since the bins were created and they are not being used because of the copyright concern – waiting to hear back from the district.
 - Kurt said he would follow up with an associate who is knowledgeable about copyright issues. Does not anticipate a problem with going ahead and putting the bins into circulation.
- Website
 - Maureen projected the website onto the smart board and discussed the pages:
 - Home Page blurb – thoughtfully written to avoid offending district personnel.
 - Parent Resources Page – emphasizes a positive approach by parents toward teachers and the school. Kurt suggested including information about what parents could do to help the schools choose the best teachers for their kids.
 - Child Study Team – discussed the possibility of needing one, and whether teachers would feel empowered to initiate this or if they'd feel it should be up to the principal.
 - Parent Resources Page – went over what was on it and why.
 - Contact Us Page – Maureen will respond to contact form submissions and will be responsible for screening website content.
 - Maureen asserted that the website should be shared to provide useful information to parents; Kurt explained that it will need to be carefully scrutinized by the cabinet to establish that the content and web links are appropriate, but thinks we “can probably make it happen.”
- “Four Questions” Central to Improving Student Learning (Kurt)
 - Question 1 – What do we want each student to learn? (High priority placed on state standards.)
 - Question 2 – How will we know when students have learned? (Common assessments will measure skills.)
 - Question 3 – What to do when a student does not meet the standard?
 - Question 4 - What to do when a student has already learned what's being taught? (Deals with high-achievers.)

Meeting Notes: December 7th, 2011 (page 2)

- District Push for Differentiation (Kurt)
 - There is a special emphasis on math.
 - Kids are being grouped according to skill level to avoid remediation settings.
 - District is working to help teachers adjust to [differentiation] strategy.
- Monthly Principal's Meeting and the Focus on Training (Kurt explained)
- Support for Kids
 - Kurt talked about the beginning-of-the-year learning assessments and support given to struggling kids. Blocks of time are dedicated to intervention for kids who are struggling but are also being used for enrichment of kids at the other (high-achieving) end of the continuum.
 - Discussed advisory groups; homeroom opportunity for kids to meet for career planning, etc.
- "Pockets of Success" in Differentiation (Greg)
 - Mullenix Ridge is a model in meeting the needs of all students through collaborative teams, daily assessments, and built-in routines to prevent kids who know material from repeating it. The hope is this type of success will spread across the district.
 - Kurt cites Cedar Heights Jr. High as a good model for enrichment; it sets aside daily blocks of time for enrichment activities in fitness, technology, and art. The goal is for all schools to have a 30 – 45 minute block of time each day set aside for enrichment opportunities.
- New District Grant Received to Evaluate Educators (Kurt)
 - Focus on student engagement.
 - Move in the direction of meeting all students' needs.
- SIOP (Kurt)
 - Used to teach kids who are "language challenged" but SIOP strategies can be applied to benefit a whole range of kids – including gifted kids.
- Junior High School Principal's Meeting Topics (Kurt)
 - Availability of honors courses and enrichment opportunities.
 - Study rigor (what creates high levels of).
 - How Quest is taught at junior high school level.
 - Are AP courses (developmentally) appropriate in 9th grade?
- High School AP Classes
 - Students graduating with many college credits.
 - WU has cross-crediting agreement.
 - Increasing focus on STEM concepts.
- Honors Classes for Non-Quest Kids
 - Maureen asked if there will be more honors classes available for non-Quest kids, citing parents' concern about lack of availability of advanced classes. Expressed a need for a program of recommending kids for higher levels of instruction.
 - Kurt said that the focus is on what constitutes an honors class – it should not just consist of extra work. Need to be careful about program changes. "7+" has had a high failure rate so they are limiting the number of kids placed in these classes.
- Classroom Instruction of High-Achieving Kids (Elementary School)
 - Tracy brought up the problem of kids working independently on math and receiving no individual instruction unless they ask questions.
 - Maureen estimates that 50% of Quest kids do math on their own or are bored sitting through instruction of material they already know.

Meeting Notes: December 7th, 2011 (page 3)

- Kurt stated that teachers should intervene to meet the challenge of working with gifted kids.
- Greg talked about the time availability problem and the goal to create a system that has an advance plan for instruction of kids identified as advanced rather than reacting to individual issues as they come up.
- Student Assessments at Beginning of School Year
 - Tracy suggested that a lot of time is wasted on student assessments and wondered if teachers can use existing data to discern skill levels.
 - Maureen said they do use MSP data.
 - Kurt said that assessments should be differentiated and that the need to assess kids decreases exponentially with age. Explained that teachers need to do assessments to find out how kids are applying skills and to identify sub-skills needs.
 - Tracy asserted that the assessment testing is geared toward average or low-average students and are not accurate measures of more advanced students' skill levels.
- Differentiation
 - District is working on training teachers to differentiate. From the teacher's point of view, it can be overwhelming.
 - Discussed what parents can do to help their children – Maureen asked what the district suggests in this regard.
 - Greg asked if the [ACOS] website can't help with this.
 - Tracy explained from a parent's point of view the value of having a collection of resources available to help parents advocate on behalf of their kids.
 - Trina suggested that we work into the [ACOS] website information about what parents can reasonably expect the schools to do and what is primarily the parent's responsibility.
 - Kurt remarked it would be good if providing parents with resources results in the development of a partnership between schools and parents and makes parents aware of what the schools are doing and what the limitations are.
 - Maureen will modify the advocacy statement on the ACOS website's Parent Resources page to emphasize a positive parent/school partnership.
 - Kurt said that expectations for the extent of parental involvement would vary according to individual family dynamics.
- SKSD Parent Resources/Outreach
 - Ready for Kindergarten program helps parents prepare children for school.
 - WaKIDS (Greg) – grant money will be made available to connect the schools with early learning providers and families to make assessments and provide useful information.
 - Kurt talked about the need to reach out to kids that don't attend preschool or childcare.
 - Maureen brought up specific ways to get information out there:
 - School District personnel can direct people to [ACOS] website
 - Pamphlets or brochures
 - Kurt offered to let people know in meetings about ACOS
 - ACOS linked to district website (contingent upon cabinet approval)
 - "Robocall" to inform parents about Quest Testing

Meeting Notes: December 7th, 2011 (page 4)

- Brain Power Bins
 - Maureen reiterated the need to move forward with the bins.
 - Kurt said to go ahead [with the bins]; he will talk to the instructional specialist about her reservations and follow up with an associate who is knowledgeable about copyright issues.
- Grade Level Teacher Meetings
 - Consist of two full days of training and assessment of issues for teachers at each grade level.
 - Maureen would like to address the 2nd grade teachers about recognizing characteristics of giftedness in kids – it is not always the high-achiever.
 - Kurt suggested Maureen craft a message to be presented to 2nd grade teachers in the event she cannot be present at the meeting.
- ACOS Group
 - Talked about the size of the group – will invite more people to join once completely organized.
 - Kurt and Greg would like to drop in on meetings occasionally.

Kurt and Greg left the meeting at approximately 11:30 am

Actions During Meeting:

- Went through the website and noted changes that need to be made
 - Revise advocacy blurb on Parent Resources (add parent/teacher partnership)
 - Change Advocacy Steps section – have a link for each step
 - Revise statement about school district's effort to differentiate
 - Add Quest nomination dates to “Events” section
 - Add to “Brain Power Bins” blurb - parents ask teachers about the bins

Future Actions Agreed Upon:

- Janet will make prescribed changes to the website.

Next meeting:

January 11th, 9:45 am, in the Quest portable of Hidden Creek Elementary School.

Meeting Adjourned at approximately 11:45 am.

Notes recorded by Janet.