

MIDDLE SCHOOL TRANSITION TEAM

September 26, 2006

Meeting Minutes

Present: Sara Jensen, Kat Dadd, Michelle Devlin, Brooke Hendry, Tami Schmitt, Jeff Lunt, Lisa Cornelson, Mimi Tiderman, Penny Fiscalini, Butch Webb, Katie Ross, Donette Kessinger, Nikki Tomason, Paul Brinkman, John Kilzer, Ed Donahue, Shirlene Fitzwater, Jody Smilay, Brenda Mansen, Paul Reed, Brenna Mack, Campbell Kirkman, Chuck Lisk, Tally Swanson, Carol Sinton, John Wagner, Bonnie Hansen, Michelle Reid

Welcome and Check-in

Team members checked in and reacquainted themselves with one another.

Checking in on Norms and/or Working Procedures

Evaluations of how well we are using the norms will be passed out at the beginning of the meeting and then collected at the end of the meeting. We will continue to check ourselves on this important topic. Formative assessment(s) regarding the manner in which we stay grounded in our norms will help us to become an ever higher functioning team. It also will enable us to hear all voices as to how well we process this critical work. As is often the case, our success will depend not just on the work we accomplish; but, rather in *how* we are able to accomplish it. There are so many lessons we have yet to learn.

We will review the norm evaluation data, in both anecdotal and graphic form, at the beginning of the next scheduled meeting. This will inform our practice in real time.

Review of Reading Text to be Studied

Guess Again: Will Changing the Grades Save Middle-Level Education, Educational Leadership/April 2006, pp 26-30.

We engaged in a text study as both small group discussion and large group conversation informed our thinking on this topic. Following are excerpts from the large group conversation. Page numbers are cited where they were referenced in the course of the conversation.

Pg 27, 29, 30: not the configurations, but the structure: small learning communities, teams, larger school/more kids but seem like a smaller environment.

Pg 28: having schools of smaller sizes and building stronger relationships to know what is really going on.

Last paragraph of article: Recurring statement: issue of poverty and prejudice and its impact on achievement.

Smaller setting kids respond the best because of a supporting, more family feeling environment. Create that they feel secure and think about school regardless what is going on at home.

Smaller classes are getting huge; because there is so many that need help.

Pg 28 Age 9 to 13 year olds worry about: grades, looks or appearance, problems at home, being liked and fitting in at school, being out of shape or overweight: Student team members spoke to the list that they think national research sees them worrying about. Some of the list is more individual and they could see how some kids would have more issues. Drugs and alcohol weren't even listed. The order and importance of the list is dependent on the day and occurrences of these topics as they come up. It would be a goal to find a way to support these issues as they do come up. Regardless of age or problem: kids need someone to go to and feel safe and able to talk with.

When team-teaching, the opportunity to make connections with kids can arise a lot more easily (two teachers vs. large classes w/one teacher). Student voice indicated that team teaching is a good idea, because there is one teacher going around and students are still getting instructional attention from the other teacher at the same time.

Connecting points: athletics, music, academic focus, in middle school there aren't that many opportunities to have a relationship built outside of class. Natural building of relationships with students that is sincere was identified as important. When you have continuous teaching with the same teacher, it helps students feel comfortable. Para-educators feel the same connection to help students and individualize their help. Parents would like to see smaller class sizes, and want all their kids to be loved while understanding that is a hard task. Holding a conference with every kid individually around their student work was really powerful, even though it was time consuming. There is an acknowledgement that kids won't always come to you even if you are an adult who offers assistance. It was noted that students in this age group spend relatively little time in one-on-one conversation with an adult.

Small communities were referenced to allow kids to form a bond, particularly with an adult. Form bonds with areas of student interest. An idea emerged regarding the possibility of looping; then, you would not lose as much time getting to know the new year's kids.

P 26: It seems like we might be getting off track. We keep talking about keeping things small when maybe the author had several other messages with regard to relationship and working effectively with families and the community.

The major tenets of the author's viewpoint could best be summed up in the following points made regarding effective middle school structures.

Pg 26-27 *"High quality middle-level schools should:*

1. *Improve academic achievement for all students.*
2. *Understand young adolescents.*
3. *Provide a challenging and integrative curriculum.*

4. *Create supportive and safe environments through such structures as small teaching teams.*
5. *Ensure better teacher preparation for the middle grades.*
6. *Improve relationships with families and communities.”*

Pg 28 What does middle-school mean? What is the middle school concept? The article made some major assumptions. What are the reasons why middle schools were developed? The article mentioned desegregation and baby boomers. We are here to make it with “financial coercion: more cost-efficient than building extra elementary schools.” It appears that in a very real sense, we are still wrestling with the fiscal constraints while trying to plan the best possible school under the circumstances.

Review of Communication Expectations (the concept of talking points)

1. Parents
 - a. Roosevelt: monthly newsletter going out Thursday. Presented at last PTO
 - b. Stevens: talking tomorrow night at PTO.
 - c. Both groups will report back at the October 10, 2006 meeting.
2. Students:
 - a. Roosevelt: Brenna put an article out in the RMS newsletter. She reported at the last ASB meeting. All ASB reps haven’t gotten back to their classrooms.
 - b. Stevens: Tally is getting information out to her ASB reps and is instructing them to get it back to their classes. She will also announce on the SNN (Stevens News Network) and keep connected in this way

Review of Work Plan with Time Markers (rough draft)

1. Green: start
2. Red: decision making
3. Blue: communication plan

The conversation regarding the work plan was grounded in the idea that many minds were better than few as we planned and time bounded our work for the year. While we endeavored to come to firm agreement as to the timing of various decisions and conversations, we also recognize the need to flex, should that become necessary as we proceed through the work this year. The following then is an anecdotal record of the conversation that ensued with regard to the work plans for the year.

Calendar of work plan:

1. Move decision on staffing before spring break/as soon as possible.
2. Mascot name and uniform changes; students may not think it is that big of a deal. We ay want to tie into what RMS will be called as a new elementary school name. (Kat and Sara will communicate back because they are on that committee also.)
3. Head count (how many staff members to build the master schedule) would like to move to December/January (how many FTE staff assigned to building: no names yet). Create more than one master schedule for back up.

4. Special education conversations added to January 30 meeting agenda, with an emphasis on transition of students, and programs that need special attention and care.
5. Staffing and building master schedule topics might be more important than the school mascot and name. But, students, staff and parents may need the concrete name of new school to mark a new beginning. These transition topics are challenging.
6. Sports and activities added to December 12 meeting agenda. Single and double team calculations will be brought up later by Michelle Reid and Scott Brodhun as the budget numbers and impact are crunched. Culture building is important, and athletics and activities are recognized as critical in this endeavor. Parents should discuss with school board.
7. Music decisions also affect the master schedule.
8. Extracurricular athletics and activities are made explicit on the December 12 agenda.
9. Grading periods decision (trimester vs. semester) is moved to April 10 meeting. The prevailing thought is that this decision needs to be made more in concert with the master schedule planning.
10. LID days were suggested to be at least partially dedicated to these issues. (October 13 afternoon devoted already). March LID may be an entire day of MSTT if we need to use the time.
11. With regard to the May 22 and 28 meetings, moving metrics are the priority; but team building was added as a conversation topic for the upcoming summer months in anticipation of a successful start to the new academic year.
12. Add district fiscal commitment decision for new staff to work together in the summer 2007 as a target communication item on the February 27 meeting.
13. There are many details that will need extensive conversation and planning: e.g., a building discipline plan, extracurricular activities and their requisite requirements, assemblies, clubs, student handbook, etc. Maybe start (April 24). Would like to have the whole group together to make these planning and calendar decisions: make time lines for these decisions as they are appropriate for this team, not the micro management of the actual decisions.
14. There was discussion and speculation as to the possibility of using the little house by Stevens Middle School as a classroom location.

Thanks and Gratitude

Thanks and gratitude for the continued generous contribution of time was acknowledged.

Evaluation

MSTT members completed the meeting evaluations that assessed our commitment to keeping the norms while we deliberate.

NEXT MEETING:

Assignment:

1. Fill out and bring to next meeting checklist on *Managing Transitions* (pg. 37) and make some notes on the final question on the bottom.

2. *When Leadership Spells Danger*, Heiftz, Linsky article. Come having read and reviewed the article to discuss.
3. Read Chapter 1 in *Managing Transitions* (pg 3-10).
4. Read Chapter 3 in *Managing Transitions* (pg 23-38).

Transition Process & Middle Level Research (this will carry us through to November 27th)