

Superintendent's Report

September 19th, 2014

LEARNING UPDATE

Leadership Team Learning – At the start of school, we do not have Leadership Team (LT) meetings for the first couple of weeks. This is mainly due to how the calendar falls (we start on a Wednesday and the next Monday is Labor Day), but I also like to let the administrators and directors stay focused on the extra work of getting school off to a great start. But as we started the third week, we begin to get back into a routine of meeting as an LT each and every Monday for two hours.

We have now had two LT meetings and it feels terrific to get back into the learning mode as a team. So far, we have spent our learning time on being trained by a representative from Child Protective Services (CPS) on a new process they are implementing to help families navigate through a crisis rather than simply coming down with full investigatory force. Hopefully it will prove to be a better system than their current model. We learned a lot as a team and I feel our principals got a chance to ask some CPS process questions that they had on their minds.

Beyond this learning, we have begun to train and calibrate our processes for evaluations (known as Teacher-Principal Evaluation Project or TPEP). The first step in the TPEP process is what we call “drop in observations”. Both state law as well as the collective bargaining agreement (CBA) calls for a minimum of 60 minutes per year in order to have the necessary information to write an effective evaluation on a teacher. Using an informal drop-in model like this allows for far more than the minimum and at the same time provides higher quality information and is clearly more timely. This is because it is done in small chunks throughout the year.

To help us in this process, we will be collecting drop in observation data using an app called Notability. Some of our principals used the tool last year and this year we decided to have everyone use the same tool. To the right you will find an informal drop in that I did in the elementary using Notability. It can incorporate photos, text, drawings, etc. as a way to capture what is going on in the classroom. This type of feedback can be collected in around 10 to 15 minutes from start to finish. As I left the room, I emailed it to the teacher so the feedback is timely.



Groups of students working on making sentences.



Working with individual student with their work.



Words students chose from a larger list of words that they wanted to work on.



Then they wrote sentences (fiction or non fiction) that used their chosen words.



Students were very confident in their task. They had multiple strategies on how to seek help when needed on their own. [redacted] was focused on the helping an individual student with their learning need.

The flow of information was student centered and they were being asked to think and create. There is ample evidence of a Q1 learning environment.

This past week I have been on learning walks with Jennifer Blechschmidt, Amy Neiman and Lauri Landerholm as a way to help me calibrate my own practice with them using this tool. Starting next week, as a Leadership Team, we will begin training on using Notability as a team so all the evaluators will be comfortable to provide feedback to our teachers in this way. Once they do, our principals will easily be able to accumulate a significant amount of observation data in which to support the evaluation conclusions at the end of the year.

BOARD UPDATE

Start of School – The start of school has been busy, but overall very good. So far, the bus loading and unloading area that we started last year seems to be working smoothly especially since we have finished the extra concrete and fencing near the Victory Bell in the back of the elementary gym. The photo to the right was on the first day of school and students, staff and parents seemed to understand the process and everyone found their way home... always a good thing any day, but certainly a wonderful feeling on the first day of school.



Upcoming Legislative Session – Even though it seems like a long time away, the 2015 legislative session is just around the corner. With the State Supreme Court finding the legislature in contempt of court, an extra twist has been added to an always-interesting session that is on the front end of their biannual budget (2015 – 2017). There is a lot of talk with their hand being forced with the McCleary ruling that the only way to solve the funding problem is to do some sort of change in revenues.

One of the ideas that are once again floating around is what they call a Levy Swap. What this is essentially is the legislature will take a bigger slice of their constitutional slice of property tax and then reduce the amounts that schools can request from their communities. This idea for the most part is a revenue neutral solution and for districts like ours has some potential upside as well as some downside as well. On the good end of the equation, it just might mean that our levy request to our community will be very small or maybe nothing at all. This means that our periodic levy campaigns could be a thing of the past and thus freeing up a lot of time. On the downside, with these funds going through the state we would lose the flexibility of these funds to allocate them as our community sees fit but we just might be saddled with additional state requirements from the state (since they are giving us all this new money). In essence, the legislature could do a “shell game” with us to get out of their contempt of court situation; all without having to infuse any new money.

Now I believe that even though this is a potential solution, my sense is that they will not get off that easy. The reason is that I believe the Supreme Court will see through this on the one hand. On the other hand, those districts (especially those in the Puget Sound area) are at their levy max and much of these dollars have been bargained away. Therefore, this sort of “stunt” would cause a political firestorm and just may force some large districts into a financial crisis. With all this in mind, my hunch is that it will be some combination of a levy swap (or a more palatable name) with a creative solution that will get them closer to the line in the sand that the court has drawn for them. One thing is for sure, we will most likely not see a budget from Olympia until

midnight on June 30th. Therefore, it will be a long and interesting fight this coming year to be sure!

New Elementary School Playground Equipment – I am not sure if you have seen the elementary school’s new playground equipment yet, but the kids sure like it. This was funded by the ASB as a result of their annual Walk-a-Thon fundraiser. This equipment was selected by the students themselves which is really cool in my book. This accomplishment is directly related to Scott Lincoln’s efforts to have both a healthy way to raise funds and his commitment to have students make their own choices. I am very appreciative of Scott’s leadership with this effort.



I think that is all for now. Please give me a call if you have any questions. Talk with you later.

Mark