Teaching and Learning Update
January 2011

The SuccessMaker home program is up and running and we have about 25 6th grade students working on math from home. We will begin signing up 5th grade students next week. It is still to early to gather any data on student progress from this initiative but I can't wait to see what we learn towards the end of the school year after some time has passed.

I would like to note for you and thank Josh Soske, Eric Hoppe and Mario Spitzer who have volunteered and are acting as technology resources for other parents in the use of this program. This is a great example of how as a district we can accomplish so much more by viewing our parents and community as team members. When we ask and provide an opportunity for them to be involved we can exponentially increase our ability to provide top notch learning opportunities for our students.

The "Teen depression and Suicide Prevention" presentation was a huge success with over 100 parents and students attending. Aaron Chidster from Unite4life did a great job with his message and information. The talk in the hallways at the high school over the next couple of days was all about his presentation so I know he made an impact on our students. Our ASB group is working to bring him back later this spring for a school wide presentation to students.

Substitute and classroom response forms are in the buildings and we are beginning to use them. As these are collected and the data collated I will have the ability to help our substitutes become more effective and our principals will be in a position to work with teachers to improve their learning environments in the teacher's absence.

I'm working with Bonnie to re-work our highly capable testing and identification process. We are going to begin the identification process now in the 2nd grade and take a look at our actual test, the process for qualifying students based on that test and then what services we can provide based on our limited funds the state provides for these services. With some of my other projects now in the rear view mirror, this will be a stronger focus this spring. Some of the proposed state budgets have the highly capable dollars completely eliminated for next year and even worse, some eliminate them for this year! Regardless of funding it is imperative that we continue to indentify these students and do our best to provide differentiated instruction and additional opportunities to the best of our ability.

Speaking of differentiated instruction we have a team of elementary teachers and administrators, including myself, that will be working on this skill through the spring, beginning with a seminar at ESD and then followed up with collegial work in their classrooms. What we learn from this experience can then be shared with the rest of the district as it applies to highly capable, special needs and the diversity of learners in all classrooms.

I have organized a "Love and Logic" parenting class for our parents. Joni Hancock, who is a master instructor of this curriculum, has agreed to teach the class at a much-reduced rate for our parents. The PTO has agreed to pay $250 for purchase of materials. This is allowing us to provide this training to our parents at no cost to them. We are collecting a $25 deposit from them that will be refundable upon completion of the course. We quickly hit our limit of 40 parents for this class and we have now begun to create a waiting list for a second class. Subsequent classes will likely need to have a small fee but I believe we can keep it at a level where everyone who wants to, may access this training. Concurrently, Joni is teaching the teacher version of this class for 30 of our teachers. I want to thank Joni for her energy and dedication to provide this opportunity to our learning community!

With the help of our CTE parent advisory committee, the distribution of the Perkins grant dollars has been decided and the teachers are now in the process of accruing the agreed upon items for their areas. At the same time staff is working to complete their proposals for sequences of classes for next years master schedule. To remind you of the uniqueness of this process this year, we will not have any CTE class on our master schedule next year that does not align with a two-year sequence of classes ending in a "next step opportunity" post high school.

Lastly, I add this only for perspective! I have been spending a significant amount of time in the 5th grade math classrooms to observe learning environments and curriculum with an eye toward improving the success of our 5th grade students. Here's the perspective, my first year teaching math at the high school in 1993, I was teaching the same thing to high school students as our 5th graders are learning today. When I heard a 5th grade teacher say, "remember we talked about the Identity Property of Multiplication", I thought I was in a time warp. We've come a long ways!

Dave.