Hawk Report: January 2011

January is always a good time of year. The students and staff are well rested and are on the home stretch for the first semester. The school year has gone fast this year which is always a good thing.

Following the lead of our president January is my time to hold our State of the Middle School Union Address. This month for our in-service we will be focusing on:

- What has gone well so far?
- What are some areas that we would like to work on as a group?
- What is the role of assessment at our school?
- How do grades impact the learning environments at La Center Middle School?

Four staff members will also be presenting their experiences of being a middle school student for the day. Some of the 'learning nuggets' that they got from their experience were:

- Students have to adjust to six different teaching styles every day
- Students act differently with different teachers
- If a teacher talks too long it is easy to lose focus/get sleepy
- Students are hungry by fourth period so it is hard to concentrate
- There is a lot of juggling involved in being a middle school student

This was an important exercise as staff wanted to learned what their students experience and have already made adjustments to their teaching.

The in-service will start the discussion to help me with my current problem of practice which is assessment. I want to learn from staff about why they give the assessment that they do. The main questions I want to know are:

1. Why did you choose the assessment that you did?
2. What does this assessment say about your educational values?
3. How does your assessment condition the students in your classroom?
4. Is your assessment a reflection of your learning environment?
5. Is the assessment a valuable learning tool for students or is it compliance?

Lab Classroom groups met again this month. Staff appreciates the time to focus on their own practice and make adjustments that they know will help them immediately in the classroom which is why this form of staff development is sustainable. It is certainly a lot more fun then having their mumbling Australian leader teaching them for three hours. It seems the less I get involved with their staff development the better the classroom environments improved. It is certainly a lot easier on me. I sometimes feel that I am working my way out of a job. I am very proud of how this staff has worked on their own practice and the students have benefited from that.

An exciting new venture for next semester is our Educational Leadership elective. Twenty students have been selected to tutor students in classrooms from elementary PE to middle school choir and math. This is a structured class where our kids will be involved in working with younger students such as reading groups, science labs, band and choir support. The mentor staff has been told that the students are not there to file, run errands or meaningless tasks as this is not a learning experience. Every two weeks I will conduct 'staff development' with the students to address how they are doing in their classrooms. Like the teachers I will ask them to have a 'problem of practice' and to focus on areas that they would like to work on. I hope through the teaching experiences and staff development seminars that we see even more growth out of our students.

Boys' basketball begins this month and it looks like we are going to have a very competitive season. The boys are disciplined and are motivated to succeed. The two seventh grade teams are practicing at 6am every morning which shows their dedication. Thanks to Coaches Tippets, Rice and Ott for all of their efforts plus the many girl managers who help to make it all run smoothly.

There are many great things happening at La Center Middle School right now and I look forward to letting you know how they all turn out in my next letter.

Go Hawks,

David Cooke
Principal
La Center Middle School