Hawk Report: October 2011

Every day parents of four hundred middle school students send their kids to La Center Middle School and place their trust in us that we will help their child along their journey to maximize their potential as a learner. The question that our school is focusing on is, " Are we accomplishing that goal? We think that is important that we can show multiple forms of evidence to show student success. It is not only important to the school, parents and community but vitally important that students can identify their strengths and areas of growth and develop their own plan for future success. So our year long quest begins, "How do we know that we are making a difference?" This month we have seen examples of that.

The week of October 17th we held our annual parent teacher conferences. I was impressed by a number of things that night which made me think that we are accomplishing our goal. This was our biggest turn out in years with over 260 parents attending. This also including a one hundred percent attendance on Tuesday which is appointment only for struggling students. This has never happened before. I believe that part of the reason for the large turnout was the effort made by staff to contact every parent of their advisory students to introduce themselves as an advocate for their child. We also reminded parents of the conferences. Another positive part of the conferences was how well parents and teachers worked together to plan future success for the child involved. I did not receive any negative comments the entire three days. I was very impressed by how parents of struggling students played a critical role in the meetings. The message that was sent to our kids is that we are all on the same path to help them learn.

One of our goals this year was to give parents specific feedback on how their child can improve. If you ask the parent of a typical A student, you will probably hear the following, "He is a hard worker, who contributes in class and is well behaved." While it is nice to hear these things, it tells very little about the strengths of the child and how to become a better learner. As I spoke to parents I heard that parents were hearing some different things that they normally heard. This is an important step for our staff as we try to work together with parents to help students focus on learning and not just the grades. Staff, parents and students are still trying to work this out but we will get there.

This month Joe Bosch, Katie Tyrrell, Amy Haynes and I are beginning a yearlong study to address my problem of practice for the year. I want to learn how to collect evidence to see that students are improving as learners as a result of the learning conditions in the classroom. We have picked 30 students to study throughout the year. We will accumulate evidence of learning through student surveys, collection of work and classroom observations. Our summer will be very busy as we try to understand and learn from all of the information. The parents of selected students are very excited about the project as they can get a personal analysis of their child's abilities. Our goal is to learn from the information gleaned and develop strategies to address the needs of our kids. l

Joe Bosch has done a wonderful job as an administrative intern this year. On October 27th, Joe will host the first annual Parent Job Fair at La Center High School. As a resident of La Center, Joe has seen a need and has addressed it. We have received many enthusiastic responses from parents and businesses. Some of the businesses presenting are Wal Mart, Les Schwab, Banfield Pet Hospital, IQ Credit Union and some colleges. This has been Joe's 'baby' from day one of his internship so I wish him all the best.

Our athletic teams performed admirably this year. The 7th and 8th grade football teams battled hard all year despite lower number of students trying out. The other frustrating thing about the season was the number of schools that could not field full teams. The volleyball teams finished around .500 but showed great improvement towards the end against some difficult teams. The cross country team dominated again and performed very well at districts. I greatly appreciate the efforts of the players and the coaches.

We are also seeing students want to create more extracurricular activities. Students have recently started a comedy club and the chess team is in the works. We believe in the motto, “We put fun in dysfunctional.” This week our Advisory teams met to work on community service work and how to support our ASB to have fun activities for kids without having a leadership class.

I have seen this year that when things start getting tough, our kids and community step up. Students who struggled last year academically and behaviorally are making good choices. Community members have started working on ways to fund CISPUS and not rely on other outside sources such as The La Center Casino Charitable Fun. Things may get a little rough around here next year with the economic crisis but there is no one else I would rather be in the trenches with then the La Center community.

Go Hawks,

David Cooke

Principal

La Center Middle School