Intermediate Elementary News!

Board Report
10/19/09

What an exciting time for learning! Imagine at the start of the school year all the energy put into finding out about each student, discovering their interests, applying their talents, listening to their ideas and challenging each person to take ownership in their learning. This challenge is spreading throughout the building and students are excited to share with others what they are learning.

Math is one of our key target goals for improvement this year. As we focus on the K-5, across grade level improvements, our teachers are also looking at vertical teaming improvements. For example, the fifth grade teachers are meeting with the sixth grade teachers to have a better understanding of the specific items the sixth grade team sees lacking in our students when they move into sixth grade. This meeting, early in the school year, will help our fifth grade teachers prepare and reinforce specific targets, including the state standards, into their lessons. This vertical teaming will also take place with fourth to fifth grade teachers and so on.

Each grade level team meets regularly to discuss what the new Math Investigations is presenting within each unit, agreeing on key lessons, sharing of ideas that have been successful in class, and documenting on a template the things that work and what possible supplemental items are needed to reinforce specific standards within the new unit . This information will be very helpful for next year.

All of our fourth and fifth grade students are being assessed on the computer program, "Success Maker." This assessment analyzes each student's current level of understanding in math, then determines the areas of deficiency and finally charts a program for growth. Students will spend approximately 20 minutes, three times a week on this computer program, if they are found to be below grade level in math, did not pass the math WASL and/or the teacher feels they need supplemental support in math. Parent permission is also given for each child to participate in this additional math activity.

As classroom teachers are continually working on improving instruction, the Intermediate Lab Classroom group of educators has additionally focused their "problem of practice" on improving the effectiveness of cooperative student groups. Each teacher in the group worked with their class to create a student framework, listing specific goals the cooperative learning groups need to strive for each time they work together. This student generated framework is proving to be very powerful as each student knows clearly what they are held responsible for while they are learning the target goals of each assignment. Our LC groups of teachers are also focusing on student interactions, responsibilities and effective interactions during a math lesson. We observe each other teaching a math or science lesson and then regroup to discuss what we saw from the students. Some of the questions we ask ourselves are: how are the students involved in learning, were the students sharing ideas and learning from each other, was the cognitive demand of the lesson higher creating learning to think, how was the flow of information facilitated, how could the teacher tell if all students were learning and what type of questions were used in facilitating the groups discussions. This awareness in improving instruction through facilitating the flow of information from student to student empowers students in their ownership to learn, think and share their ideas.

This past week was another successful first of the year Parent/Teacher Conferences. Parents had scheduled a meeting with their child's teacher to hear how successful their child is in school, areas of concern and/or improvement needed to accomplish this school year and ways to help parents help their child at home. We are viewing all children's education with a team effort approach. No one knows their child like the parent and we want to involve each parent in helping with their child's education. Some of the many ideas include having a child read each night before bedtime, help them with a quiet place to do homework, ask them what they learned in school today and listen to their child's opinions, concerns and successes. It was a very successful week of positive conferences.

The many PTO volunteers, teachers and students that helped with the Fall Carnival and the Haunted House did an outstanding job on this fundraiser. Hundreds of families attended and enjoyed the many games, activities and scary trips through the Haunted House. The Lion's Club had a new and improved 'jail' that many visited throughout the evening. It was a wonderful event and once again, thank you to all those that helped with this fundraiser.

The 2009-2010 Bobcat Ambassadors have been selected. Each student applicant had to complete a three part questionnaire, have their teacher write a letter of recommendation and then the MS ASB officers rated each packet. Names had been removed from the packets and numbered, so no one knew who the applicant was, except our counselor. The MS officers selected one boy and one girl from each fourth and fifth grade classroom. The Bobcat Ambassadors have had a couple of leadership meetings to date and helped with their first service project at the Fall Carnival. What a great group of students!

My new role as the Title I and Special Projects Coordinator is exciting and challenging. I helped Bonnie Lock with the applications on the grants at the end of August and first of September, to get a better understanding of what goes into writing a grant, budgeting within each grant and how individual grants apply to various groups throughout the entire district. As of this date, all Title grants have been approved! Thank you Bonnie! Programs are in place and items are budgeted throughout the school year. I have attended the Title I Directors meeting at ESD 112 and found it very interesting. I will enjoy helping implement the Title programs throughout this school year.

My personal goal under the Title umbrella is to find ways to help improve the understanding and implementation of the Highly Capable program, especially in the elementary. Working with teachers to learn how to identify specific characteristics and abilities that Highly Capable students exhibit we have found they are sometimes different than what some teachers currently believe. Also, I am working with the other Title programs, including the K-12 ESL and Bilingual program, Free and Reduced program, students registered with the McKinney Vento Homeless register, and am leading the K-12 Music Adoption Committee. This is an exciting time for me to be that life long learner. I look forward to learning much more about the Title programs, the state and federal laws that apply to these programs, upcoming legislative decisions and the applications that give additional opportunities for our students.

Respectfully Submitted,
Carol Patton
Intermediate Principal