Hawk Report: November 2010

This month I had the opportunity to meet with my fellow administrators in La Center as well as around South West Washington. I always enjoy these opportunities because I am able to reflect on my own practice and LCMS. As I listen to my peers around the state I wonder if the changes that they have made in their schools made a difference in student learning. I also have to ask myself the same question. Over the last few years we have had the opportunity to collaborate as a staff and make changes to address the needs of our kids. After three years of hard work, we are at the point where we have to answer that question. "Have the changes made a difference?" The first question that has to be asked is "How do we determine what success is?"

Success for me comes in many different forms. Here are some of the things that I look for:

- Student engagement and voice in the classroom. Does the teacher do all the talking while the students compliantly listen or lose focus?
- Are the teachers always talking at the front of the room or are they facilitating cooperative learning in the classroom?
- What sort of conversations do the students have to solve a problem?
- What sort of conversations are the teachers having together to solve problems with their peers?
- Can the students apply the information that they learn to solve problems?
- Does the teacher always validate the learning or do the students take responsibility for that?
- Is student discipline and removals from class decreasing?
- Are GPAs going up and students' failure rates going down?
- Are the numbers of students taking the accountability exam going down?
- Are we improving on the MSP?

These are many of the questions that are going through my mind as I observe classrooms. While the MSP is an important assessment it is important that that is seen as a snapshot of learning and not the whole plate.

As I walk around classrooms I am pleased to see a positive answer to my questions. I am seeing a strong partnership between teachers and students which is a credit to teachers for releasing control and for the students stepping up. Students are working hard and being challenged by

the work presented to them.

One area that I have seen a significant difference is in the Special Education classroom. As a former special education teacher I have seen over the years a need to assist special education students with additional support in curriculum and teacher involvement. My staff with the support of the Special Education team has decided that their students are capable to do more and be challenged with work that the regular education students do. The big change has been raising the bar and allowing the students to work in groups to support each other and solve the problems. The students have learned important group norms and skills which enables them to be successful. The big change that I have seen in these classrooms has been what I call the 'learning buzz' in the classroom where students enthusiastically challenge each other, voice their ideas and learn from each other. It is worth a visit and I truly appreciate the efforts of Mr. Sutton and Ms.Haynes.

This month we have been able to give our students some additional opportunities to expand their learning outside of the regular classroom. On November 16th, the 8th grade class, as part of the Advisory program, was able to tour a college campus. The students had the choice of three campuses; WSU Vancouver, Clark College and Everest College. It was important for our kids to have that experience as we want them to start thinking about post secondary options before they get to high school. Thanks to Ms. Jeske for organizing this event. The 8th grade students will also be able to attend a Career Fair at La Center High School on February 17th which will also help them to expand their career horizons.

LCMS students have performed well on the extracurricular front again. We had over thirty students on the wrestling team including six girls which is our biggest group so far. Sometimes our team wins, sometimes they lose but they give it everything they have and that is all that we can ask. The four girls' basketball teams have had a challenging year as there have been many close games. I am not sure how much more our coaches' hearts can take. I appreciate all the time that our coaches and students put into their sport.

Mr. Pritchett, Mr. Calabrese and Mrs. Slinkard put on what I believe was our best assembly yet. There were so many veterans in attendance and both of the assemblies were packed with people honoring them. This inspired the band and choir who I have never heard perform so well. The passion that these three teachers put into the assembly comes through every time and we greatly appreciate their efforts. Most importantly we appreciate the sacrifices that our veterans made and continue to make.

Two choir students, Hailey Macho and Haley Wilson were named to the All State Choir which is a tremendous effort. Kevin Mairose was also named to the All-State Band. This is not an easy achievement so it is a testament to the quality of our band and choir programs.

This month our school is preparing for the Save our Scraps program which has successfully started at the high school under the leadership of Rebecca Morris' Project Study group. Three of our students and Ms. Tyrrell had the opportunity to separate all of the food scraps from the

garbage and were amazed by the amount that is thrown out. I met with the SOS team and they did a presentation for the school so we are ready to start it on December 1st. We are excited to be involved in this as it will make a difference in so many ways.

We are now a quarter of the way through the year and it has been a good one so far. Our staff and students will have a well earned break at Thanksgiving. I wish you and your families a great Thanksgiving and will see you in December.

Go Hawks,

David Cooke

Principal

La Center Middle School