Elementary Board Report

A Paws-itive Community Learning and Playing Together

Our theme for the month of January was goal setting. We set goals to help us decide what we want and how to make a plan to make it happen. This month we are working on self-reflection. An important part of this is reflecting on our longer and shorter term goals to see how we are doing so we may learn and grow. The following shares a small bit of reflection on some recent work and goals:

Math

As you know, we are constantly working to improve our abilities to meet our students' math needs. You have heard more about SuccessMaker and some about ALEKS. Both continue to have positive impacts in the lives of our students. We have recently participated in math vertical teaming. It is so critical that grade level teams get together and share the math strengths and areas of opportunity for current students with the teachers who worked with them the year prior. We did so last year and plan to do so in the coming years. Better understanding how well we are preparing our students for their next school year helps us to better make changes to strengthen weaker areas and keep consistency in areas we are strong. Our next step at our upcoming grade level workshops at the end of February is to work as grade level teams to find ways to strengthen in areas of need.

Our math leadership team had a lengthy discussion last week and has also decided to meet for a half day on March 10 to better understand our overall math program needs and prioritize them according to importance. We will then start work on each priority so that we can best support our students. My prediction is that we will work on such things as better aligning our lessons with our math power standards since this will help us so much in balancing time and math focus where they belong.

Empowering Students

One of our goals for this year has been to gradually increase the opportunities to empower our students. This is their school. You had the chance to speak with our Bobcat Ambassadors and a few third graders. There have been other opportunities. Students have chosen to present at our monthly playground team meetings so that they could gain approval for new games, toys, and activities on the playground. This has helped to improve student options at recesses. One recent purchase in progress is for a fun math game that lead students have volunteered to teach to others in the bench area of the playground during recesses. Given student recommendations, we are looking to designate a reading area on the playground. Students have also been working on plans to re-introduce 4-Square safely, and in a limited fashion, on the playground. We are very near the implementation of their ideas.

One third grade class requested to present and presented to our playground teachers. They shared what they appreciated about recess, what they have concerns for, and potential solutions for the given concerns. It was quite an impressive presentation by the six representatives. Playground teachers had an extra monthly meeting to discuss and start implementation of ideas. One of the students' recommendations was to send student and playground teacher representatives to a local school to learn of potential options and

ways to improve. Students are currently testing a questionnaire they have created with a Ridgefield school and will then use it with other schools to help them decide which school we should visit. A couple of the other ideas being worked on includes creating a daily student feedback setup for recess and a substitute playground teacher feedback form similar to what has been created for certificated teachers. This is in part came from our work to improve consistent communications on expectations for our substitute playground teachers.

Though it does not sound so exciting, students are playing a larger role in student discipline. When students work with an administrator on a discipline referral, students are doing the figuring things out. For example, students work to solve their own concerns and create their own consequences. One main goal they know they are striving for is to learn from mistakes and work to grow so that they may not happen again. Students have been quite impressive and effective in working to get to the core of problems and grow. Their solutions tend to also be more meaningful and effective.

Staff Growth

We are always striving to consistently find ways to create the conditions needed for student learning and for students to become life-long learners. You have heard a bit about such things as team teaching, lab classroom projects, and mini grant work. As you know, we have been participating in Love and Logic workshops after school on Thursdays. I have been impressed with the level of implementation already. There are times when professional development may not show itself in practical settings much, if at all. I have been hearing from teachers how they have been using it from at least two teachers a day.

Those team teaching have continued to take thoughtful risks, grow, and learn. A more recent example of this comes from Jennifer Matanich and Joni Hancock. In their reflections they realized an opportunity to improve effectiveness and meet students' needs. They made a gutsy move for the time of year by re-distributing students within their homerooms so that they were better grouped by student strengths and needs. This is not something anywhere near common. I have been impressed by how positive students and parents have been about something that could easily have been seen to be controversial. Now teachers in two other grade levels are looking at adapting the concept to better support their students. I look forward to experiencing the longer term impacts from the ideas.

Another impact of all our change efforts this year seems to be showing in staff wishes to visit other campuses and seek further learning. We visited Corbett last year and planned for a second that was postponed due to Corbett's earlier finish to the school year. Our second visitation was to have four participants. When offered another visit recently, eighteen teachers put their names in. We now have planned for two more visitations this year. Teachers are visiting open to whatever they may learn, but are also very focused on areas they are seeking improvement in. I am sure we will once again learn a great deal.