HAWK REPORT MARCH 2011

I would like to dedicate this Hawk Report to Greg Oden. His knee has become an educational metaphor in my learning journey the last couple of months. This may sound weird but the following analogy has made me think about how we address issues in education. While I was listening to sports radio, the question was asked to a trainer, "How would you fix Greg Oden's knee?" The response was that he would not focus his energy on the knee but on the rest of the body as the knee problem was really the result of a much bigger problem. The therapist said he would look at Greg's ankles, feet, wide gait, curved spine and weight to see the impact that it had on the knee. By fixing the rest of the body, then effect of the knee would be fixed.

Often the problems (knee) in schools are due to the overall school climate and systems in place (rest of the body). A case in point would be bullying. On March 4th, Katie Tyrrell, Andrea Austad and I presented to the WSU Vancouver campus about bullying. The first speaker talked about her program and how she is brought into schools to deal with serious bullying issues. On most occasions she comes in for a while, implements her programs and goes on her ways. Our approach was different. We said that bullying is a by product of a much wider problem which is a school culture. If a school creates a climate for students that they feel valued, have a voice and are engaged, then students focus on positive elements of education and don't get into bullying. Are we perfect? No. We still have bullying concerns but we have in my opinion a small scale and a method to address it when it comes up.

Another example of a sustaining culture would be our music programs. LCMS hosted the Lower Columbia River Music Educator's Association choir festival this year on Wednesday March 17th again this year. Nine schools participated in this event. The choir received a 1 and 1- which is an outstanding score. Jefferson MS and Alki MS stayed an extra 1/2 hour just to watch our group perform. The judges commented not on how well our students sung but how they presented themselves all day. This is another example of the results that occur for students (knee) who live their school lives in a culture of respect and high expectations (body). Students are not told 'you better behave'. It is just what they do. Thanks to Mrs. Slinkard, the custodial team and the flexible PE teachers for making it all come together.

In another choir event, 23 choir students, grades 6-8, participated in the LCRMEA (Lower Columbia River Music Educator's Association) Solo/Ensemble festival on Saturday March 5th. The students sang a memorized art song or Italian Aria in front of a judge and received advice and a score. All 23 students received either a 2 or a 1 (with a 1 being the highest score.)

On March 10th the Jazz Choir was the first middle school invited to participate in the Clark College Jazz Festival which has been going for over 50 years. They also performed at Clark College's Evening Concert through a "special guest invitation" and

performed between the college's women's chorale and their jazz group. This was a great honor and the girls performed very well.

Earlier in the year the Special Education staff were having concerns with a particular Special Education student. He was getting kicked out daily and was on the verge of a long term suspension. The special education team and I decided to see what we could learn from this situation. What we saw was a young man trying to express his frustrations at the fact that he was in the same classroom for four periods a day. The structure provided was not a supportive environment for the students or the paraprofessional working with them. This incident has led to a significant overhaul of our special education program. The way that we 'did business' in Special Education was reviewed and subsequently changed. We have moved this students and his peers out of this classroom and integrated them back into the regular classrooms. The special education para professionals have also gone out into the classrooms to support the students. We are currently developing our new special education integration model for our incoming 6th graders. We also realized that we need to put the Individual back into the Individual Education Plan. As we evaluated our procedures we realized that the current model 'does things to the kids' instead of helping the student be an advocate for their own education. Working with Special education teachers and administrators from the ESD, Kalama, Hockinson and the three La Center Schools we are developing a Student Led IEP process. We are also addressing the amount of time that Special Education teachers are spending on compliance matters and reducing that time so that they can focus on learning as well as having more balance in their lives. Our district, with the support of the ESD and other districts has made the choice to address the struggling students in Special Education (knee) by addressing the system that supports their learning (body). It is really exciting to be a part of it. I would like to thank Michelle Murer and Kristin Lawrence for all of their hard work with this project.

Dave Holmes, Jeremy Ecklund and I addressed another issue in our school this month which is that highly capable students are not being challenged. During this meeting the students analyzed a variety of assessments provided by the staff members for cognitive demand. They also gave feedback on how to make it challenging. The next part of the seminar was to make their own challenging assignment. I really enjoyed the energy of the students when they were given an opportunity to design a challenging project. I am looking forward to presenting the final assignments to teachers as there is a lot to learn from their example assignments.

A great accomplishment this month was Kristy Schneider and Laurie Cripe receiving a grant from the STEM foundation to make Rovers (Remote Operated Vehicles) for the new Discovering Engineering class next year. The grant was for $10,500. In true Kristy form, minutes after winning the grant, she told me that she had another great idea that she was working. I wouldn't have it any other way with Kristy.

We are currently in the middle of our Doernbecher Hospital Penny Drive. This year's drive is more personal this year after the great efforts of Doernbecher to nurse Max and Lance Cooke back to health. The devious plot of the students this year is to raise $5,000

to not only help students but to turn me into a human Rice Krispie Treat. Personally, I am rooting for the kids to raise $4,999 so I get out of this sticky predicament. The students also held a Doernbecher fund raiser at the Salmon Creek Burgerville. It always blows me away that kids will donate their allowances to a cause that many of them have no connection. It is once again, the right thing to do Thanks to Mrs. Broten and the ASB for another great fundraiser.

One thing that I have learned from the Differentiated Instruction workshop last month, this month's student led conferences and conversations with students and staff is the need for students to understand how they learn and how they can improve on their learning. Students see success or failure as effort or not handing things in. They will say that they got a low grade because they did not do well on the test. They do not articulate the actual skill or concept weakness that they have. This in my opinion is the result of how teachers grade and give feedback, not just at LCMS but nationwide. If you look at the average grading system of a teacher it will have projects, tests, daily work and participation. The system needs to be focused on the actual skills and abilities that they need to develop (see Core Competencies and Power Standards) so that students can really know how to improve their abilities. This is a discussion that we are starting to have at LCMS and I am really excited about where this is heading.

The month will end for me at White Salmon Valley School District to see what their schools are working on. I always enjoy looking at other schools to get new ideas and see what other middle school principals are coming from.

If we are looking at another example of high achievement then look no further then the 8th grade basketball team who had an undefeated season. I would like to say that this run will end when the staff plays them on April 1st but it is fair to say that the staff may be in trouble this year. My goal on April 1st is to find as many 6ft 5 in substitute for the day and see how we go.

GO HAWKS

David Cooke
Principal
La Center Middle School