Primary Board Report

A Learning Community Works Together and Plays Together

Many things are happening as we near the end of the school year. We are working hard to help finish up a successful 2009-2010 school year while we prepare for a successful 2010-2011 school year.

The playground continues to be an important part of our school day. As you know, what happens on the playground can greatly impact what happens in the classroom. Our Playground Olympics are just finishing up. I have been quite impressed with students' efforts to lead their own events and improve upon their efforts. Running events on the playground have been popular. We also seem to have stumbled across a popular new activity, cup stacking. The benches can be quite packed with students at all levels practicing their cup stacking abilities. I have included a picture to give a small feel of what it can look like. Students have impressed me with their fine motor skills and stacking strategies. I have also appreciated watching how they work together to help one another learn new ways to improve their efforts. On an interesting note, discipline referrals in grades K-3 have significantly declined during the span of our Playground Olympics. Further reflection will be needed to better understand if this is just a coincidence or there is a correlation. I look forward to learning more.

There is another interesting note regarding our students and the playground. With the track and the running events come more students on the field. We have found some first graders migrating out to the two sandy play areas surrounding the track. Their creativity has had opportunities to flourish. They have learned that if the sand is moved there are "dinosaur bones" to be found. The "bones" are actually hardened clay and sand that have formed to resemble dinosaur bones. Many students have actually brought brushes from home to carefully brush of the "bones" so that they may better figure out which dinosaurs they belong to and which specific bones they are. Students are reading about their dinosaurs so that they may learn more and properly name and categorize. The "bones" are starting to weather a bit. Our hope is to be able to purchase cement bones and fossils so that they may start anew next year. What might our paleontologists find next year?

We recently held our kindergarten orientation for the families of students joining us next school year. Attendance and participation was great. We made some changes to the overall program so that participants spent more of their efforts on engaging in learning activities and less time listening to a presentation. Parents and students were very involved in the activities which could help them better understand what skills and experiences could help their students to be prepared and ready to start kindergarten in the

Fall. A notable observation made by our team was that of how polite many of our incoming students appeared. I appreciated how parents thoughtfully supported their children in these efforts.

As you know, there has been talk about starting a full day, every day tuition based kindergarten class. This is basically in an effort to better support our students. Our data is showing that too often our students who come into kindergarten not meeting start of the year benchmarks tend to stay behind through their elementary career. We have worked on various efforts to pull out of this trend. I am happy to write that we believe that we will be able to offer one all day, every day tuition based kindergarten class for the 2010-2011 school year. Registering parents have been surveyed and we have found that 23 are interested in participating and could fund the experience. Our hope is to have ten tuition paying students attending, with ten more students "scholarshipped" into the class. Our June student assessments will help us to better understand who would best benefit from the class. These assessments also help us with placing students into classes, helping parents understand what students may work on over the summer, and which students could benefit from our summer learning program. A small example of why we believe the all day, every other day tuition based class will benefit our students comes from the Olympia area. A first year class tuition based class with a roster of students of higher need found that all students met all state benchmarks by February. This is not typical of what happens with a standard half time kindergarten class. I look forward to experiencing great results with our students and seeing what we learn.

Many other efforts to improve our abilities to meet our students' needs are being explored. One of note is that of teachers researching and preparing for "expert model" teaching next year. We have teachers in first and second grades who have put in impressive efforts to better understand how they can work with each other to utilize their strengths to help students learn. For example, a teacher who is passionate about math may help the students of two classes learn while another who is passionate about literacy helps those same students in literacy. With teachers being counted on to be experts in at least seven content areas, this can help them to focus and improve their abilities to meet students' needs. What impresses me most is what will come from their efforts. Students should learn more while teachers are collaborating, communicating, and helping one another to improve their practice. This will be a great learning experience for all involved.