

Minutes of APP Task Force, November 2004, Washington Middle School

Present: Val-Morris Lent, Bev Hesterberg, Karen Jensen, Mary Ann Gwinn, Karen Jones, Jane Fellner (task force co-chair), Norm Hollingshead, Chris Jackins, Jim Lorang, Charlie Mas, Marian Sussman, Colleen Shea Stump (task force co-chair), Roger Daniels (head teacher, advanced learning), Lanie Young, Alex Ginn, Stephanie Bower

The meeting opened with building reports. There was no staff representation from Garfield, but Colleen Stump, district manager of highly capable programs, reported that eight Language Arts teachers from Garfield spent the day the previous Monday discussing the needs of APP kids and strategies for teaching them, including differentiated strategies for reading and language arts, providing depth and breadth in the curriculum and the social/emotional needs of highly capable children. Not all teachers attended, but all grade levels were represented. Similar sessions are scheduled with Spectrum/ALO teachers.

#### LOWELL

Comments on the program at Lowell focused on the new report cards. Several parents were confused about the new cards and said they'd received different interpretations of the cards from different teachers.

Points made:

1) The decision to jettison the "two grade levels advanced" criteria for APP students may more accurately reflect the reality of what goes on in the classroom, but now parents don't know what standards are in place for APP, other than the district-wide standards for all children.

2) There needs to be a frame of reference for comparing an individual child's performance with others in his/her grade.

3) Parents would like to know if the new cards represent an adjustment or a philosophical shift in the curriculum.

Colleen said that the new report card came out of dissatisfaction with the old cards. Teachers felt like they were spending all their time explaining the report card, and not enough time actually discussing the pupil's work. She said teachers and parents needed time to get used to the new cards, and that a survey will be sent out later this year to get parent feedback. Stephanie Bower noted that it was good to have the cards available at the parent conference, which has not always happened in the past.

#### WASHINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL

Norm Hollingshead reported that things were going very smoothly, and that the language arts/social studies teachers had gotten a lot out of their training day with Roger Daniels (consulting teacher for advanced learning programs).

#### TESTING

Colleen reported that testing is proceeding smoothly. The referral pool is pretty much the same as usual in terms of diversity, though testing isn't complete yet. Jane Fellner asked for trend data on numbers, diversity, appeals and acceptance rates. Colleen said this would be available at the Nov. 29 parent meeting.

#### DISCUSSION ITEMS

##### CAPACITY

Colleen said discussions were ongoing at the district level on the rising numbers of APP students and how they affect building capacity, but the solution had to be worked out in concert with all the other capacity issues in the district. She said that she did not believe there would be any significant changes in 2005-2006; that will be a planning year and any changes would likely occur in 2006-2007. Jane Fellner cautioned against any interim solution turning into a permanent solution, or an interim solution becoming the justification for not arriving at a long-term solution.

Stephanie Bower said that in a previous survey taken of APP parents on the middle school issue, the first choice was to remain at WMS; the second choice a school devoted just to APP kids. Splitting the program into two geographical parts was the least popular choice. Jane cautioned that the survey results needed to be put in the context of what the district appeared to be offering at that time.

It was noted that attitudes on this issue change according to where parents' children are – parents with kids at WMS generally favor that arrangement more than parents whose kids are still at Lowell.

##### APP NAME CHANGE

This proposal addresses the long-standing confusion on the part of the public on the difference between APP and the AP classes offered at the high school level. Several possible names, collected by Roger in an informal survey of similar programs around the country, were discussed. He said he would go back and look for more prospective names.

##### REEVALUATION OF STUDENTS

This issue concerns the fact that some kids who test into APP don't necessarily perform to program expectations over time. Points discussed included whether or when this should happen (perhaps at the third, fifth or eighth grade level), what the circumstances of the "reevaluation" would be and where kids would go if they weren't making it in the program.

Marian Sussman and several other parents recommended some version of a red-flag process covering two years of performance, since kids' work can be affected by a host of factors, including the teacher they have at a particular grade level, personal issues, etc. Val Morris-Lent said such a process has merits, but not if it means kids have to take another test, since they take so many tests already and there should be plenty of data already at hand to assess their performance. Jane noted that kids who enter the program in the older grades sometimes take longer to adjust to its expectations.

Next meeting: Dec. 9 at Garfield High School