

## Driscoll School Site Council Minutes

April 16, 2015

Attendance (Members): Heidi Cook (co-chair), Steve Watson (co-chair, taking notes), Meenakshi Garodia, Derek HAtchett, Brian Sheehan, Jeri Hammond, Eric Hazlinsky

Also: Sara Stoutland

- I. Approved Last Meeting's Minutes
- II. Heidi Cook – proposing ending 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> grade looping, driven by programmatic decisions with Bill Lupini and administration

Heidi presented an overview.

*Plan* – current 1<sup>st</sup> grade will loop to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade in 2015-2016, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teachers will move to 1<sup>st</sup> grade. For 2016-2017, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teachers placed in the “best fit” grade.

*Decision-Making Process* – conversation has happened informally for years, more formally between teachers and Heidi for two years. This past year, Heidi has been in conversation with district leaders. We are the only school who has across-the-grade looping for two grades. Other places it happens on an as-needed, or as a teacher desires, basis. Heidi was opposed to this change initially, believes in looping, but over the past couple of years, she's been persuaded, given teachers' needs and challenges.

*Challenges Teachers Experience:*

- materials difficulties (that could be managed)
- district PD and connections are challenging, given we're the only school with Grades 1-2 looping (also could be managed)
- of the 6 teachers, there is a range of opinion, but the majority would like to stop looping
- detailed, standard-driven conference forms are challenging to master
- differentiation of specific content is challenging to master when you teach it every other year
- difficulty to perfect teaching
- This is not about the occasional difficult mix of kids or about parent-teacher relationships. This is experienced as a loss.
- Open to having this conversation about bringing back looping if in 5-6 years, if teachers ask for it.
- Looping works best with experienced teachers who have time to master curriculum.

*Questions/Feedback:*

Brian: Is this driven by the superintendent/district or teachers? Heidi: absolutely the teachers.

Jeri Hammond: Loves looping, came to Driscoll with enthusiasm for looping. Recognizes Heidi's thorough decision-making process. Has taught 22 years, but looking at the challenges of less experienced teachers with constantly changing curriculum, she has empathy and recognizes this change is sad for her but is best for the school.

Derek: A lot of the basis of the decision is that things have changed recently – complexity of teaching, teacher turnover. Why aren't we addressing those things? Heidi: but some of

these changes are positive. There is an expectation for differentiation in math that there wasn't before. This is a huge gain, to have math groups/stations, not one approach for all kids, but the curriculum isn't designed for this, so it requires more work and complexity for teachers.

Derek: How and why did looping start? Jeri: her understanding is that developmental research acknowledged that in early elementary, growth processes (reading, writing, increasingly abstract thinking) are multi-year endeavors. This is still true. But now, the expectations for the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade are higher and far more specific. (General murmur: we've lost a lot in a less student-centered approach, with less fun and play.)

Sara: we're talking a lot about curriculum and pedagogy, but what about student-teacher and family-teacher relationships? There's a loss here. First to second grade is a hard tradition. How can we help this go better? Various ideas proposed. (First graders getting to know second grade teachers, cross-class events....) Heidi – we've been talking about this, some ideas have been considered – potentially keeping kids together, but there's some parent feedback against that.

Meenakshi: Why would 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> grade be treated differently than other grades? (shouldn't all grades have the same, thoughtful transitions?)

Steve: Disappointment (with national trends, not with Heidi or school) that bad practice driving this – onerous conference forms, content over student in early elementary, inflexibility of curriculum, and no student voice in curriculum and constantly changing top-down curriculum.

Heidi: Agrees, but also acknowledges that nationally, teachers aren't being trained in curriculum design, they're being trained in standards-based backwards planning. Some PD work in this with teachers. Heidi again emphasizes that as we retain teachers and continue PD, we could perhaps return to this, but looping requires teachers to be well-equipped and highly motivated for this, and this isn't the case right now.

Eric Hazlinsky: Reflected on challenge of constantly changing curriculum. Heidi: rather than changing curriculum every few years with a curriculum review, there's been a steady – yearly, gradual – changing of curriculum to align with standards. That's required regular curriculum changes, along with the challenges of a small school that asks middle school teachers to change who and what they teach based on the number of sections per grade.

Sara: Agrees with Steve's perspective and loss, but we gain teacher collaboration, which did not exist like this years ago.

Derek: What do we "give back" to teachers, when new challenges are being added?

Brian: His children think looping is wonderful, but not all teachers can adequately differentiate over two years. Make it clear this was driven by this school, not by district leadership.

Survey Result Discussion moved to May 7<sup>th</sup> meeting.