

School Council Meeting 01/07/2020

Present: Monica Crowley Christina Grady, Chris Diester, Laura Basileo, Ken Yamada; Carolyn Mansfield, Rhodinne Wang, Sharon Kiernan, Peter Cipparone, Laura Horst

Presenting: Chloe Wheaton, Kirsten Alper, Shannon Egna

Public comment:

(I'm moving some public comments here from later in the meeting for clarity)

- Request for a Lawrence listening session on upcoming budget news
- Requests to Monica for information about the way the School Improvement Plan is presented to the School Committee, request for information about the budget narrative

Previous meeting minutes: Approved

Presentation:

A team of staff from Lawrence visited an K-6 elementary school in Acton, MA to learn about whole school community building events.

- They visited the Merriam School- choice school, themed around community. Project based-learning emphasis, all classes loop for two years and are integrated by grade level
- Merriam is a "community-focused" school, and uses "family groups" to connect students and staff. Each family group is a mixed-age group of students who meet at school, outside the classroom, with the support of an assigned staff member.
- Students have "buddies" assigned within the family group, and the family groups stay stable year over year (losing a 6th grader and gaining a new K, but everyone else stays connected). Staff rotate family groups once per year.
- The family group is the "unit of deployment" for multiple school activities and events. Examples include some assemblies and field-day type activities. Our team visited on "Community Day", which is held 4X/year
- Activities on "Community Day" are themed for the year; this year's theme was "nature". Example activities on the day observed included building a mandala out of found natural materials outside. The day was well-structured - filler activities were impressive, extra staff was floating as-needed.
- Other family group activities throughout the year include participating as a family in Lawrence-style community meeting; filling showcase displays in the school entrance.
- Staff are also placed into cross-grade groupings.

Question for school council: what do you think about this type of program for Lawrence?

Group talk-back:

- What did Acton staff recommend as getting started? They suggested using existing events and try out family groups
- Our K-5 already has buddy-classes; perhaps we could build off of that
- The special day-long activities are a large amount of work - but deploying family groups as an organizing principle into existing Lawrence activities could be a lighter lift in Year 1
- Potential to improve recess behavior, by fostering cross-grade relationships
- The staff pairing is important and desirable - with student family groups, allows kids to connect with an adult outside their classroom; connecting with other staff across grade levels is hugely helpful, would like structure to support those relationships
- Lawrence PTO is willing to support however needed
- Check out "CANstruction" projects as a fun large-format activity for groups
- Can we formalize a leadership role for participating 7th and 8th graders
- On the topic of leadership by middle schoolers - another inspirational school in Falmouth MA has middle schoolers go to elementary school one day a year - to plan and help teach a science class
- Time is a constraint, but we have some room to play with - great to see different ages work well together.

Monica will work with co-chair Florrie to move plan options forward

Budget Update:

Interim Superintendent Lummis - asked principals to think about a cost savings target of \$200K. Principals are collaborating, striving to apply equity lens - to balance cuts consistently district-wide. Principals offered listening sessions to school staff early in the process. Principals have a per-pupil discretionary fund, otherwise they make budget recommendations back to the district.

The next planned update to School Council from Monica will be after the proposed budget is presented by Interim Superintendent Lummis - the proposed budget is "embargoed" until then.