

## Site Council Minutes

April 17, 2013

Attendees: Roger Avedon, An Chen, Anu Hoey, Leslie Huie, Ingrid Kitahata, Katie Pierce, Jamie Adams, Angie Padian, Kristi Shreve, Colleen Golden, Jay Beams, Betsy Miller, Marlene Tuzar, Don Geddis, Sarah Adams, Mary Ellen Benninger

Approval of Minutes: Leslie Huie moved to approve, Ingrid Kitahata seconded, all members approved minutes as written.

Topic of Discussion: Gifted Education at West--whether gifted children at West are an unserved or underserved population.

One core discussion item was the definition of gifted. According to US averages, we should have two gifted children per grade. But, given our demographics, should our numbers be higher? There is a difference between gifted and academically talented. The current STAR testing does not directly correlate with identifying naturally gifted children; it focuses more on achievement.

One other flaw of our current system is that the STAR tests results does not identify a child as GATE until fourth grade. How can we better serve the K-3 gifted children? Also, once a child is identified as GATE, nothing really happens. There are not funds that are directed toward GATE and it does not seem like a District priority.

Given our current system, there is a concern that gifted kids are underperforming because they are not being engaged and therefore not rising to their full potential.

Individual teachers make accommodations for students and most strategies for gifted children are organically grown. Despite these efforts, there is no agreement between the staff and parents whether gifted kids are being well served.

The current system does not focus on the gifted rather it is designed to identify children that are falling below benchmark.

There was agreement that we need to split our language when talking about gifted children.

1. High achievers
2. Gifted

Also there was a question on how we should help a child that is exceeding in one area but underperforming in another. Teachers regularly put together individual enrichment packets for student, but they can receive push back from the parents, or the children feel as if they are being punished, in the sense of being asked to do additional work because they have finished all the assigned work.

In fifth grade, the differentiation occurs in project work. They have an upcoming unit on architecture where they can select their partners and they usually self-select to challenge themselves. The fifth graders also have math tiles and writing/journal prompts for enrichment.

Operation Risk really speaks to a lot of this concern since the goal is to drive students to their own level and capacity. The teachers will start a lesson and then set the students free, and this has provided a great opportunity to differentiate.

There was a question as to how we could better leverage Khan Academy so classes could spend 10% of the time on review and 90% of the time on going new places. But, that is difficult given the current State standards. With Common Core and the State shifting toward greater understanding of concepts we will be moving in the right direction.

Don Geddis suggested that we could evaluate a child's skills over time. Then on an individual basis, we could ensure that they are advancing on every skill level. We could produce a one-page sheet that explains the child's skills which could be passed onto the teacher for the next year to provide continuity and consistency.

There was also a concern that Speedy Math has become too much of an aggressively competitive activity. It is tainting the way that some kids are thinking about math. Children can also develop a bad self image given the competitive focus.

One idea is to bring a different set of skills to our children beyond straight academics, like social skills, folk dancing and Shakespeare.

One challenge with coming up with set enrichment programs is that the needs of the high achievers vary from year to year. Last year's first graders were much stronger in math. But there is a different focus each year.

Overall, at West the teachers look forward to getting to know each child every year. They really like getting to know what makes each child tick. We really need to highlight these efforts to the parents to ensure that they understand the teachers' commitment to each student.

GATE will remain a robust topic of conversation for years to come. Jamie would like us to offer up more concrete suggestions of what they can try. But first, we must split the definition of gifted and decide which population to serve. Roger was concerned that we may not have enough gifted kids within the District to make significant inroads.

Finally we discussed members of the 2013-14 Site Council and Sarah Adams and Valerie Leung have both agreed to serve. Leslie Huie, who served a short term, will continue with a full term starting next year.

Meeting adjourned.