

AS#1 Community Meeting – December 1, 2009

Introductions, passed around minutes from last meeting.

Attendees identified burning issues:

- Defining ourselves as an alternative school and what that means
- Electives
- Community building
- Ski committee
- Defining core of what kids need to know, not just District standards
- AS#1 being successful and vibrant; survival
- Kids learning math

Community norms presented

Ruth Balf, math coach, presented information about math at AS#1:

- Ruth has been a teacher at Wing Luke and at Olympic Hills. At one point she attended a series of math-related professional development courses that changed her thinking about teaching math. Now she works with teachers to help them understand how kids learn math and how teachers should be teaching.
- Most adults learned math without any depth. A teacher explained how to solve a problem and then we were instructed to follow those steps with little understanding of why. Ruth works with teachers to help them teach math in a way that helps students gain a greater depth of understanding.
- The new state standards for math are good for the first time. Instead of hundreds of small outcomes, each grade level has three or four key concepts that should be explored in depth.
- For example, with addition, students start out with concrete objects like pencils. They have pencils in front of them and they can count them and learn what happens when they add more pencils or remove some. From there, they begin to gain a more abstract understanding. The pencils can be drawings instead of real pencils and students can explore what happens when they draw more, etc. Then they begin to strategize. They can hold the pencils in their hands instead of needing visual representation, etc. From there, they continue to build greater layers of abstraction. Eventually, once they understand the concept in depth, they are introduced to the standard procedure (lining up columns of numbers to add them, etc.). This is the new state standard.
- Research tells us that kids generally learn math best through classroom discourse: small groups, explaining concepts to each other, articulating thinking and then readjusting ideas based on the ideas of others. It's hard for teachers to facilitate this type of learning when they themselves don't fully understand the concepts, so teachers need to be taught how to facilitate this model. Kids need to be taught how to engage each other and it's a difficult transition for teachers.
- It's okay for adults to say, "I'm just not good at math," in a way that it's not okay for adults to say, "I'm just not good at reading." That needs to change.
- Ruth clarified that she works directly with teachers and not with kids (unless she's modeling a teaching method for a teacher).
- One parent asked about Singapore math and Ruth stated that Singapore math doesn't teach the concepts behind math processes and that while it has its uses, it can't be the heart of math education.
- One parent asked if Singapore math was valuable because of the story problems that help provide a real life context for math problems and Ruth clarified that these story problems aren't actually good examples of real life math problems. In the problems it's clear that the student is supposed to use a

specific operation on a specific set of numbers, whereas in real life problems are much more complex and can be solved in many ways using many options.

- Research also shows that heterogeneous groups work best. "High" kids don't do better by moving them out of a mixed group, but losing the "high" kids slows the "low" kids. "High" kids are needed to bring depth to the discourse. If teachers were to try to take on that role it would come across to kids as "the voice of God," the one correct way to solve a problem.
- There also needs to be differentiation in instruction. Some kids work more deeply and need different/additional work as a result. Classes need to get away from group instruction where all students are working on a particular problem and move toward small group work.
- The conversations we need to have are whether we are currently doing this and what kind of professional development do teachers need.
- Thus far in Ruth's experience at AS#1, the teachers are very open but there are logistical difficulties based on when math is taught during the day at different grade levels. Ruth is only half time.
- Still need to figure out how parents can be supportive of this shift. Parents want to help their children but only know the way they learned.
- We still don't have a clear way for dealing with the needs of individual kids and the handling has been haphazard thus far. We need to have a conversation about how we can serve all kids, not just a few.
- At each grade level AS#1 has kids working at a wider range of levels than at most other schools.

Literacy coach could not make the meeting and will reschedule.

Committee reports presented:

- Committees at AS#1 are informal. If you show up, you're part of the committee. If you want to start one, that's all it takes.
- BLT (Building Leadership Team): Started working on the CSIP (Continuous School Improvement Plan), which is due on December 15th. The math and literacy coaches are writing goals for those areas and BLT will put forth other goals pertaining in particular to alternative learning and wants ideas from community. If you have ideas, post them to the Yahoo! Group or send them to a BLT member. BLT also looked at the annual report that includes the recently changed vision and mission and are going to update it. This will be sent out. Next BLT meeting will take place on December 10th.
- Equity Committee: Equity Committee is six years old and is interested in anti-racism work in a K-8 context so that income, race, ethnicity, etc. are not determining factors in success at AS#1. Currently some parents are going through anti-racism training at the People's Institute and committee fundraising is focused on getting more parents to that training. The next Equity meeting will take place on December 10th, from 6:30 to 8:00pm and will be an Anti-racism 101 workshop. Childcare and dinner are provided.
- Sir Herbert Read: SHR is the nonprofit organization that fundraises to support AS#1. They are still looking for one more board member. AS#1-A-THON is coming up and has changed a lot this year. Kids will choose an activity and perform it on Friday, December 11th. Kids will collect pledges for sponsors and if they don't have anyone to ask to sponsor them, they should talk to their core teacher. The format was changed this year to support kids who don't have support at home. Now they'll be supported by the community.
- Enrollment/Marketing: Work is somewhat up in the air until the School Board votes on the new Student Assignment Plan. January will be the big push for enrollment help. Next meeting is January 10th at 2:00pm.
- Communications Committee: Communications Committee focuses on improving school communication by improving kidmail, encouraging participation in the Yahoo! Group, etc. Kidmail

was recently brought up at cluster meetings and teachers are working to get mail home with kids. The newsletter is being produced by the Equity Committee and they are especially looking for positive classroom stories. The newsletter comes out weekly and has a Wednesday deadline.

- Snow Sports Committee: So far 38 kids have signed up for snow sports. A new requirement this year is that all kids take lessons, which adds a new expense. Other expenses include the bus, lift tickets, and equipment rentals. Costs have increased significantly and we need to find out why or whether we can get better group deals. The program will start January 22nd and Susan is confident that it will happen despite the fact that we are somewhat behind due to losing the teacher who used to coordinate the program. Any student who wants to participate gets to, regardless of ability to pay, so fundraisers are particularly important. There is an upcoming gift wrapping fundraiser at Barnes and Noble (more information coming soon), and if students participate in the Husky Stadium cleanup they'll get money credited toward their snow sports costs. Susan is also collecting clothing, so if you have some to donate, contact her. If you have questions, contact Susan Jenkins (librarian) or Irene Grebenschikoff.

Parents asked about community events, particularly a talent show and a spelling bee. There is a goal to have a talent show in winter and in spring and a spelling bee may be in progress for the middle school. There will also be a climbing expo in the spring and activities for Literacy Week.

Roy's comments:

- He really appreciates all the parents and staff who are coming to meetings and getting work done for the school. The school has taken big steps since he started, including:
 - Getting the progress report policy approved.
 - Hiring math and literacy coaches.
 - Upgrades to technology, computer lab, fiber optics coming soon.
 - Carmen wrote \$15,000 grant for Rites of Passage and we are finalists. She'll be giving a presentation in two weeks.
 - Group of principals came and observed school to watch student learning. They visited 12 classrooms.
 - Math is exciting, they are having workshops in staff and cluster meetings.
- Now we need to keep working:
 - Math and literacy.
 - Alternativeness, what we can do and how we want to define it.
 - Test scores, we have to play the district game. We have lost parents because of our scores.
 - What's going to attract people to our school.
 - CSIP is in the works, then we need to focus on the budget.

Minutes for last meeting were approved without objection.

Next meeting will take place January 5, 2010!