

SPAN Nov. 2, 2017 Meeting Minutes

Meeting focus: How are the needs of gifted kids met at all levels in the district?

Elementary Synergy—Jane Balow and Becky Smith, Elementary Synergy specialists

*Grade 2—Talent Enrichment Classes (TEC)

- *3-week cycles focusing on reading or math
- *placement by teacher recommendation
- *students not formally identified as Synergy students

*Grades 3-5—Synergy and TEC classes

- *students identified for Synergy based on CogAT results (ability test taken in grade 2)
- *Synergy students clustered in classrooms
- *pull-out classes; first ½ of school year is math, 2nd ½ of school year is reading
- *possible single-year math acceleration starting in grade 3; student would have to meet district acceleration criteria
- *out-of-district kids are assessed based on a previously given ability test or take the CogAT when entering the district

SAGE—WestWood Principal Karen Zwolinski & 5th-grade SAGE teacher Michele Tindal

- *grades 3-5 self-contained gifted academy for highly gifted students
- *students identified for invitation based on CogAT score, MAP scores, teacher recommendation
- *out-of-district students capped at 1%, in line with rest of district
- *currently has 4 classes
- *curriculum is compacted, accelerated, and deepened
- *opportunities to interact with other WestWood students during lunch, Phy Ed., etc.
- *extra field trips, inquiry, labs
- *5th-graders attend Wolf Ridge with the rest of WestWood 5th-graders
- *Math:
 - *in grade 3, do all of 3rd grade + 1st ½ of 4th-grade math
 - *in grade 4, do 2nd ½ of 4th-grade + all of 5th-grade math
 - *in grade 5, do 6th-grade math
 - *some students are double-accelerated and take 7th-grade math during grade 5
 - *done at one of the middle schools during middle school 2nd hour, then bused back to WestWood
- *Other subjects—taught at least a year beyond grade-level (on top of grade-level standards)
- *looks different from regular classrooms, with kids “on-the-go”
- *introduction to allusions, more grammar, more writing

Middle School—Middle School Synergy specialist Missy Short, Hidden Oaks principal Sasha Kuznetsov, Twin Oaks principal Dan Edwards

- *Missy’s role is to support teachers who work with students in advanced classes; she goes back and forth between the 2 middle schools. Uses a push-in rather than pull-out model: she goes into classes for a few days or week at a time to assist with an activity or unit. Puts out monthly newsletter. Helps gifted kids with social/emotional issues when contacted by parent or counselor.
- *focus on developing critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills
 - *work to challenge students and help them overcome failures

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*Examples of advanced work—App challenge (engineering design), mock trial, website design around an “essential question,” geography and history bees, Future City competition, interdisciplinary work with English and Social Studies

*Advanced classes offered in grades 6-8 in 4 core areas (math, English, science, social studies)

*also opportunities to develop passions in classes like Architecture, Aerospace Engineering, Robotics, Medical Detective

*Spanish offered starting in grade 6

*Some students take advanced sections in all 4 areas, some take in 2 or 3

High School—Principal John Bezek, Synergy coordinator Jared Daggit (via prerecorded video)

*13 AP, 16 Honors classes; 9 school-to-school classes (paired with MN State schools like Mankato and St. Cloud)—students receive high school and college credit for courses taught at high school; Post-secondary enrollment option (PSEO), where juniors and seniors can take classes at a college/university like Normandale Community College or University of Minnesota

*Many activities, including new ones like Science Olympiad, Debate; students can create new clubs that might evolve into activities through a written application plan

*Activities allow students to “find their people”

*Jared teaches social studies (AP Human Geography to 9th-graders and AP Economics to 12th-graders) and has 1 period each day for Synergy; Synergy hour + prep hour are periods 3 and 4, during lunches, so that students can access him during their lunch period

*also involved with mock trial and speech

*has Synergy course on Schoology where he posts daily questions/information, surveys, etc.

*helps students with schedules, letters of recommendations, etc.

Parent Questions:

Q: Does the district track the SAGE kids through high school? Do they apply to exceptional colleges?

A: Some informal data, but not formally at this point. This is something to come. Noted that all of this year’s 6 National Merit semi-finalists went to SAGE.

Q: Do students have to qualify to take advanced courses in middle school? What is the criteria?

A: Yes, students must qualify. Fifth-grade fall MAP scores are considered. Need 90th percentile or better on reading to qualify for 6th-grade advanced English and social studies, 90th percentile or better on math to qualify for 6th-grade advanced math, and 90th percentile or better on both to qualify for advanced science. Also may consider 4th-grade MCA scores and teacher recommendation. If close on Fall MAP scores, can qualify with Spring MAP scores.

Q: Are some SAGE kids not in all advanced classes?

A: Almost all qualify and take 4 advanced classes. Some families choose not to have the child take all 4 if there are other concerns such as executive functioning/organizational concerns or if students are involved in other activities that are very time-consuming. A student can choose not to take an advanced class even if qualified and then choose at a later

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grade to take the advanced in all subjects except math. Multiple advanced sections of classes at the middle school; there are many more students than just SAGE students in these classes.

Q: How does math work at SAGE again?

A: grade 3: all grade 3 math + 1st ½ of grade 4 math

grade 4: last ½ of grade 4 math + grade 5 math

grade 5: 6th-grade math (done at SAGE...at WestWood)

Double-accelerated kids go to the middle school for 7th-grade math when in 5th-grade. They have a study hall during the 5th-grade's math time and can complete homework then. Day at middle school starts earlier than SAGE start time. Students are bused back to SAGE for start of SAGE's school day.

Q: Some students qualify for SAGE but don't go? Why? What are risks of doing this?

A: The decision to go or not to go is for each individual/family to make. Some students/families have a great deal of anxiety about changing schools. Not being at school with established friends can be an issue. The transition to a new school can be an issue.

At SAGE, students are there for 3 years and become a family; they look out for each other when in middle school. At SAGE and beyond, it's ok to be smart because that's been accepted among peers at SAGE; this is an intangible benefit. Some students NEED to be with like-minded students; they aren't comfortable in the "regular" classroom. They think differently.

Q: Do parents have to drive kids to SAGE?

A: No, there is busing.

Q: What is the class size in AP classes at the high school? Does anyone who wants to be in an AP class get into it?

A: Anyone who wants to take an AP class will get in. Average class size in middle and high schools is 30-32, regardless of whether the class is an AP class.

Q: Michele—you have taught in both the traditional classroom and at SAGE, correct? (A: Yes.) From a teacher's perspective, do you have the same challenges at SAGE as in a traditional classroom?

A: 10-year-old kids are 10-year-old kids. SAGE kids might be more motivated as a whole. There are "robust refusers," but they usually come around and work. There are passionate, deeper discussions at higher levels, and the subject matter is often different from what would be found in the traditional classroom.