

SPAN Meeting Minutes
January 17, 2017 – 7 PM
Westwood Media Center

Apryl Henry welcomed everyone.

A reminder our next meeting will be a showing of the movie *2e: Twice Exceptional*. Twice exceptional students are gifted and something else. They may be gifted and have ADHD, be gifted and have autism, be gifted and have a learning disability. This has it's own challenges. The film has won awards and has been shown in various locations. At our meeting, the film will be shown and then a discussion will follow.

Detailed Remaining Meeting Schedule for 2016/2017 School Year :

Date	Time	Location	Event
Th. Feb. 9	7pm	WW Media Center	Meeting. Showing of <i>2e Twice Exceptional</i> film (http://2emovie.com/) with discussion to follow. Film is 54 minutes in length.
Th. March 9	7pm	WW Media Center	Meeting. Speakers Sandra Mortensen (Guidance Counselor) and Tim Chivarri (Assistant Principal), both from Bloomington's Oak Grove Middle School, will present on the Science and Engineering of Calm - Providing Tools for Parents to bring Mindfulness into their home .

WW: WestWood Elementary School (5370 WestWood Dr. SE; Prior Lake, MN 55372)

Apryl then introduced topic for tonight.

Tonight we have a panel of middle and high school students who were in SAGE or Synergy in elementary school. Our panel is:

Sydney is a 6th grader who attended SAGE
Lily is a 7th grader who attended Synergy
Izzy is a 9th grader who attended SAGE
Duncan is an 11th grader who attended SAGE
Megan is an 11th grader who attended Synergy
Sam is an 11th grader who attended SAGE
McKenna is an 11th grader who attended SAGE

Question: What parts of the experience in Synergy and/or SAGE do you feel best prepared you for middle school and/or high school?

The types of things mentioned: keeping things in lockers, learning how to deal with different types of people, switching classrooms, not having one teacher, having more independence, course rigor, being exposed to different ideas, and development of critical thinking skills.

Question: When you were in elementary school, was there anything about middle school or high school that worried you? And do you feel now that you needed to be worried about that thing? Why or why not?

The types of things mentioned: Time was mentioned several times – time to move between classes, to balance, to schedule everything, time to get to and from locker in between classes. Also mentioned more than once were friendships—separating from elementary friends and would you know people in classes. Concern about adapting to the routine was a concern. All panel members agreed the transition time needed to adapt to middle school was very short; they needn't have worried.

Question: Do you think SAGE better prepared you for the deadlines in middle school and/or high school?

Yes. Getting the mindset early is a great preparation, especially when it comes to high school where you get half credit for late assignments.

Question: Are middle school advanced classes enough challenge coming from SAGE?

Overall, most middle school advanced classes go at a fast pace but maybe do not have the depth that SAGE classes had, which make them easier, but that is a nice change. It allows you to focus on the classes that do go in depth. Ms. Tindal really prepared us for the workload in the in depth classes (think 7th grade life science and the Latin roots). The nice thing is, in elementary, you have the same level of rigor all day long, but in middle school you can cater to your own interest and rigor level, which allows you to manage your workload. At the high school level especially, advanced/honors classes have a much higher homework level.

Question: Do you feel that you can take all four honors or AP core classes in middle and even high school or do you feel like you need to balance that with a general class or two?

It is a matter of pacing yourself, knowing yourself and your schedule. Once you get to high school, AP and Honors classes have a lot more work than general classes. Knowing this allows you to balance what you like with what you do outside of school. Because of the high workload in AP classes, two panel members dropped to 3 AP core classes and are taking the 4th as a general class. This allows them to keep involved in their extracurricular activities. It gives balance.

Question: How do you choose which class to not take AP?

You look at what you are good at and consider what people say about the courses and the workload the teachers offer. You learn what adds stress and when the work is not worth the time. On the flip side of that, in middle school, don't be afraid to take all 4 advanced classes. One panel member only took 3 and wished she had taken all 4. She could have handled the workload and ended up really bored in the general class.

Question: How do you know if your child qualifies for advanced classes in the middle school?

District policy is to place students for middle school advanced classes based on their MAP scores from the Fall of their 5th grade year. A form will come home in the spring of their 5th grade year with the placement. Participation in SAGE or Synergy does not automatically qualify a student for advanced classes in the middle school and does not mean you need to participate in all advanced classes. You can choose to opt in or out of any of the classes your child qualifies for placement in. Teachers are willing to discuss placements at spring conferences. Any questions should be directed to your child's teacher. If you feel you would like to appeal the decision of your child's placement in advanced classes, for whatever reason, you should talk with your child's middle school counselor.

Question: What do you do outside of school?

Each of the panel members had an impressive list of activities, from clubs at school to community service groups to robotics to sports to band/music to speech and yearbook to working a full time job! This is one busy group of students!

Question: I keep hearing time management is an important skill; can you guys think back to your 3rd and 4th grade selves, and was strong time management part of your personality then or is this something you've adapted into?

Time management seems to be a struggle at one point or another for all the panel members. SAGE teachers were mentioned as working with the kids on those skills in elementary school. It did help, but all wish they had listened more and worked on those skills more in elementary school. However, with age, they do get better.

Question: I would like to hear some of the things you learned in SAGE/Synergy that helped prepare you for middle school. Can you share?

The panel mentioned what the teachers did to prepare them for the next class/level, relationships with peers/learning of social skills, the allowance of independence, and just being allowed to go through the transitions without too much interference.

Question: Is there a difference between the two middle schools?

No. They are the same. There is always hype that one is better, but they are the same. If there isn't a class at one, you cross the street to get the class at the other. And, even if you switch schools for classes, you will know someone in your classes.

Question: As you got ready to transition from elementary to middle school and then from middle school to high school, with all the opportunities ahead of you, do you get guidance on picking classes?

Our panel felt like their teachers are always willing to offer guidance. Their transitions have been successful because teachers and guidance counselors are always willing to talk about the transitions and class choices so much that you never

feel like you are making decisions on your own. From the parent perspective, speaking to teachers at conferences is a wonderful way to get advice on guiding your child into the right classes from them.

As for classes from year to year, intro classes (art, tech ed, FACS) do a great job prepping you for later classes and what is appropriate to take next, but other classes just expect you will know what comes next.

Question: Did any one of you skip 6th grade science or a double skip in math?

Yes. There were members of the panel that double skipped in math. No members skipped 6th grade science, because that seems to be a newer option. There is a bus that takes the double grade skipped kids to middle school or high school when they are out of the building for their classes.

The district has a very clear policy for subject acceleration. MAP scores are taken into account and the child must pass a final for the class they are skipping over. (author note: Please talk to your child's teacher or building principal for the full policy if you think acceleration is appropriate).

Question: What drives you because I am hearing stress and long days, so what drives you to take this upon yourself? And what is the best way your parents/guardians support you?

What drives our panel members is loving what they do and the results they get when they do get to the end/see the results of their work. The pursuit of knowledge is also key as the students learn what they are passionate about. In some respects, our panel doesn't want to disappoint their parents, but the panel's advice is to do activities for yourself and have a positive attitude about what you do.

The parents can be most supportive by listening, offering constructive suggestions in areas the students may struggle, positively encouraging their students toward goals, and taking an interest in what the student is doing each day.

Question: Did you ever have to change your friendships to change your drive or keep your drive up?

Here the panel was mixed. Some feel their drive is not affected by their friendships. Others feel like being surrounded by like-minded people after years together in the same classes is a natural match. Overall, the message is friendships have not changed much since middle school.

Question: You all have a lot going on, what do you do to manage your stress?

Taking mini brain breaks by spending time with friends, watching videos, or doing something enjoyable are all ways the panel resets their brain. But overall, the older panel members have realized that when they focus on the activities that bring them enjoyment and are worth their time versus the things that don't bring joy, there really

isn't a feeling of stress. Most of the panel doesn't let it get to the point of too much stress.

Question: Do you use planners?

Most of the panel uses a paper planner. The middle school still sells the paper planners. The high school does not, but most students still own one. Using a planner is key to managing your time.

Question: You are not often with your parents at your extracurricular events, so how do you get extra help with your work?

Getting help from teachers was the most common way, either through Schoology or in after school time, high school Wednesday extra hour, around lunch, or middle school primetime. From peers, they work together through group chats or study groups. Also, the use of online sites, like Khan Academy, can be useful for understanding tough subjects.

Question: Can you give us an idea what you are thinking as far as career and colleges, if you are thinking that far ahead?

Sydney: Not really thinking that far.

Lily: An Astronaut and going to Mars

Izzy: A Lawyer and getting into public sector work

Duncan: Looking at a lot of colleges. Looking to double major in either Electrical or Computer Engineering and Music Composition

Megan: A passion for photography, so hope to have my own photography business.

Sam: Psychiatrist

McKenna: No idea

Question: What time do you get up? Go to bed?

Most of the panel got up between 5:30 and 6:00 am for school. Most of the panel was in bed between 9 pm for middle school. The high school panel members stayed up later, 10 pm to midnight, sometimes later!

Question: Do you think the middle school and high school offer enough classes and a good variety of classes to keep you challenged?

Yes, there are a lot of choices in the high school in classes, almost too many! In the middle school, you have advanced choices in your core classes and then many choices in electives.

Question: Qualities of your favorite teachers?

The best teachers are well versed in their subjects, knowledgeable in their area of material. The panel appreciates teachers who are laid back, have a sense of humor, and balance the classroom with interesting material and respect for students.

Students also comment on those teachers who have helped students throughout their tenure, those willing to go above and beyond. Elementary favorites mentioned: Ms. Tindal and Mr. Brandell. High School favorites mentioned: Mr. Volm and Mr. Daggett.

Question: I know Prior Lake is getting really big and with the referendum cancelling and trying to come up with some solutions, are your classes too much for you? And if it is too much for you, how do you fix that so it is more comfortable for you?

It seems in the middle school, the classes are big (around 30 students in core classes), but teachers seem to be able to get to all students. But sometimes you don't get to ask all your questions. Electives classes are larger, especially when there are fewer sections of a certain class. In the high school, core classes can be up to 35-40 students, but as you get more advanced, the classes get smaller. When classes are bigger, you need to make sure you are participating to get the most out of the class.

Question: What is the difference between Honors Classes and Advanced Placement (AP) Classes?

Honors classes are a district curriculum-based class. AP classes are college-board determined with a set national curriculum. AP also has a standardized test at the end, which, depending on score, could give the student college credit. The benefit of the AP class then could be lower college tuition if you go to a college that will accept those AP credits/test score.

Thank you to our panel for answering all of these questions!