

SPAN Meeting Minutes February 23, 2012

***Reminder: Our next meeting on Tu. March 13 at 7pm will be in the high school auditorium.** We are pleased to host a MN Council for the Gifted and Talented CHAT night titled, “**College Planning for Gifted Kids.**” Valerie and Donna, owners and consultants at College Connectors (<http://www.collegeconnectors.com/>), will facilitate this event. Valerie and Donna both had careers in higher education before putting their passions into their business for guiding students as individuals toward the college choices that are best for them. They will give a brief presentation followed by a question/answer/discussion session.

*Nominations were taken for next year’s SPAN Board; no nominations were made.

Presentation by Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Jeff Holmberg and Superintendent Sue Ann Gruver:

**Sue Ann encouraged all attendees to consider joining MCGT (www.mcgt.net), as the organization has many wonderful resources. She then reviewed how the district has progressed in the last several years with the opening of SAGE, the study on E-STEM (more details to come), the upcoming study of language immersion experiences, the consideration of starting SAGE with grade 2 rather than grade 3. She also shared that the efforts to have the middle schools continue the level of rigor in the advanced classes are ongoing.

**Jeff then gave a powerpoint presentation about the state of the district with respect to gifted education:

Elementary:

*Synergy classes with Jane Balow or Greta Soleim

*SAGE for highly gifted kids in grades 3-5 (with a conversation to expand SAGE to grade 2)

*Accelerated math opportunities for grades 4 and 5 (with the one-year-math-accelerated 5th-grade students now experiencing 6th-grade math within their elementary schools rather than being transported to one of the middle schools; 5th- and 6th-grade teachers are working together so that the accelerated 5th-grade math students will have a comparable experience; they are using the 6th-grade text/materials; they may in the future use Skype to “be” in a middle school math classroom; there may be “flipping” in the future, where students would watch a video of a lesson at home and then do related activities to the lesson during classtime)

*Testing: using CoGAT instead of OLSAT this year for grade 2 students; MCA III math testing done on-line this year; reading will be on-line next year; MCA tests are adaptable to one grade level above; students will have the opportunities to take each MCA test up to 3 times each school year, with results being immediate and therefore able to guide instruction.

*E-STEM study: looking to have a district-wide E-STEM (Environmental Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) program

*World Language study: likely to start next year (stemming from feedback from early childhood families as well as middle-school advanced programming conversations related to IB)

Middle school:

*Synergy with Angie Toeller

*Advanced courses in core subjects and specific spectrum classes (Project Lead the Way); Middle School Advanced Programming committee reconvened this past year and will again after they have more data from experiences this year (the first year of Advanced courses); there is work being done toward addressing the range of difficulty levels in advanced courses, staff collaboration between Hidden Oaks and Twin Oaks, training and support for staff on differentiation and

SPAN Meeting Minutes February 23, 2012

developing appropriate rigor in their classes, gaps between grade levels where students are not prepared for the next level of class; there is continuing evaluation of the student experience (higher workload, increased anxiety) as well as entrance and placement criteria so that the right kids are in the right classes

*Student transition from elementary to middle school: grade 5/6 teacher meetings are happening to address transition issues (logistics, expectations, curriculum alignment)

High school:

*Synergy: Jared Daggit

*Senior to Sophomore (S2S) classes (currently only for Physics)

*Advanced Placement (AP) classes (district is experiencing higher student participation and higher scores on AP exams); work being done to create Honors Science for grade 9 and AP Biology for grade 10.

*Student transition from middle to high school (logistics, expectations, curriculum alignment); 8/9 teacher meetings happening to address issues

*Valedictorian/Salutatorian study: recommendation to eliminate Val/Sal recognition starting in 2012-13 (reasoning: experience shows that the differences in GPA among Val, Sal, and the next-highest GPA students are a few hundredths of a point; students choose courses based on how they will affect their Val/Sal ranking; most post-secondary institutions don't consider a Val or Sal recognition in their admissions process); Board Scholar designation (students with GPA 3.8 or above) will remain; new designation of "Distinguished Scholar" (students with GPA of 4.0 or above); transcript would still list class rank.

Q: When do students start having weighted grades?

A: grade 9

Q: What about AP Physics?

A: High school already has this as well as an S2S class

Q: How many Senior-to-Sophomore (S2S) classes and AP classes are offered?

A: Only Physics currently for S2S: an S2S Chemistry class didn't have the necessary enrollment to be offered; work being done to start an S2S Spanish class. Don't have exact number of AP offerings; it's in the teens; AP Accounting being considered.

Q: Currently, the transition from elementary to middle school can be tough due to higher expectations in middle school with respect to testing (tests covering only what is on study guide vs. other material). What can be done to prepare 5th-graders better for the more challenging tests that they will experience in middle school?

A: This has been part of the discussions that have started between 5th- and 6th-grade teachers, along with note-taking. Work is being done for "more robust preparation."

Q: What are the main challenges students face when transitioning between middle to high school?

A: Things (GPA) "count." Social/emotional maturity (big difference between 9th-graders and 12th-graders). Ability to multi-task.

Q: What is the criteria for getting Synergy services in grade 6?

SPAN Meeting Minutes February 23, 2012

A: 90th percentile on MAP reading and math; MCA scores exceeding standards; 4's on report card; teacher recommendation; 5th-grade technical writing sample (looking for high-level thinking...drawing conclusions)

Q: From a STEM perspective, is there an aim toward more technology education (computer programming) in the high school? Is there a roadmap for developing this?

A: A roadmap has started, but not for computer programming; it's more engineering-based. The plan is to start at the elementary and work up from there. Example: This year, in some high school classes,, students are encouraged to bring their phones to class to use. There is a 5-year technology upgrade plan to enhance instruction happening in the district.

--follow-up: What about education on creating technology rather than just using it? They will work on this.

Q: Are SAGE graduates split between the 2 middle schools?

A: Yes.

Q: Are all SAGE students in all advanced programming classes?

A: Most are.

Q: How is the district doing with its goals? Are they somehow measuring this, particularly with the "bridge to nowhere" (having SAGE and then not following through with a rigorous middle-school experience)? Are SAGE students being tracked/measured for growth after entering the middle school to see if they are continuing to progress?

A: Things are continuing to improve, with appropriate rigor, alignment between HOMS and TOMS. They are looking at cohorts of students and their performances but not at individual students. They aren't looking nationally for comparisons, as the program is too new; there will only be 1 year of data after this year. Pam W. stated that at the elementary level, they do look at MAP growth targets and whether students are meeting those.

Q: Are district representatives interacting with various corporation headquarters that we have in MN to understand what is needed in schools? They want to help.

A: They are engaging with them.

Q: How do you know what is best for a child with respect to how many Adv. Prog. Classes in which to enroll? The answer has been that it all depends on the individual child, but parents/students have nothing to compare to (advanced vs. regular); how can parents/students do this?

A: Need to look at academic criteria match for getting into the classes; talk with middle- and high-school counselors and teachers about the individual child and course expectations. Email teachers right after the school year begins to check in about how things are going.

--follow up: It's still hard to know what to expect from the adv. Prog. Classes; concerns about amount of time spent after school on homework.

Responses: Could a poll be done after students are in a particular advanced class about the average amount of time spent on homework each night? Could there be curriculum nights with advanced teachers (maybe the previous winter/spring, before registration) so that expectations for the course are more clear? Advanced programming teachers will collaborate about work load expectations.

SPAN Meeting Minutes February 23, 2012

Q: Is it true that if a student takes Honors Geometry as an 8th-grader in the middle school that they will not get high school credit for it and it will not count in their high school GPA?

A: True. The reason is that data shows that having this grade count toward a high school GPA tends to be more of a liability than a help. There is some consideration of adding high-level math courses (there are PSEO options) for these students who will run out of math courses before the end of high school.

Q: Are there other curricular opportunities for elementary Synergy beyond what is currently offered?

A: There are STEM things happening, accelerated math starting in grade 4....

--follow-up: Could there be more at the 3rd-grade level? SAGE is really the way that highly-gifted students' needs are being met.

Q: Could 3rd-grade math acceleration be considered? When are more E-STEM things happening?

A: 3rd-grade math acceleration is happening at some schools. Scheduling is an issue, as the class schedules need to be set up so that math is happening at the same time. More E-STEM curriculum should be in place starting next year; teachers are starting with lessons but will move to a more thematic approach.

Q: If there are many more Synergy students at a certain school, is one of the elementary Synergy specialists (who is split among 3 schools) still only at that school 1/3 of the time?

A: Yes, as she still has students at each grade-level at each school with which to meet.

Q: Do elementary teachers with Synergy-student clusters receive additional training on meeting those kids' academic needs?

A: All teachers are expected to differentiate; there are reader's and writer's workshops, and math differentiation is already there. There hasn't been a lot of training this year due to staff development needs with the new science curriculum and upcoming new math curriculum.

Q: If a student takes 3 years of Spanish in the Middle School, does that student get 1 year of high school credit for Spanish?

A: No.

Q: High-school Synergy specialist Jared Daggit has only one hour available during the day to meeting with Synergy kids, and if kids don't have that period for lunch and have other activities before/after school, they can't meet with him. Is anything being done to address this?

A: Yes; there will be efforts made so that Jared is available next year during both periods when lunch occurs.

Q: Is anything being done to address the issue of 9th-grade students who, if they take band/choir, Spanish, and AP Human Geography, must take 0-hour PE/Health?

A: They should be able to take PE/Health during 11th-grade or 12th-grade.

--follow-up: Could there be a PE/Health class offered during the summer to address this problem? Hasn't been done before; best to look at meeting it in a later grade.

Meeting ended around 8:55pm.