

Board Linkage Meeting
February 2, 2009
Middle to High School Transition
6:30 – 8:00

President Blaine Peterson called the meeting to order and thanked participants for coming. He explained that the focus is how well the middle school students are doing with their transition to high school, what we are doing well and what we can improve on.

Participants introduced themselves and shared their role in the district.

Last October the Board met with parents and students and got their perspective on middle to high school preparedness and we wanted to receive the same information from the staff perspective.

They will ask guiding questions and want everyone to participate and share your ideas.

Academic Preparation:

What concerns do you have about your students' academic preparation for high school?

- One of the biggest burdens that they carry is that many of the students lack the appropriate level of anxiety of their grades. The students are lackadaisical toward grades. Students believe that grades don't matter because they will be passed along anyway and then they hit high school where they have to get credits. Some staff at JMS have brainstormed how to deal with that lack of "anxiety" and priority toward grades. Some students come in to the classroom and just do it but there are a lot of kids who don't take things very seriously.
- Aside from retention, have you considered solutions?
 - Entertain the notion that if kids want to be someplace that you can teach them anything. Not that school should be a playground but it should be rigorous. That is the magic bullet.
- How involved are parents by the 8th grade?
 - JMS: Hit or miss. Depends on the family. Unfortunately, more miss than hit. This is a very big topic within their staff right now. Why don't we have parent involvement? How can we get them more involved? They stop being so involved in 6th grade. Research tells us that if the family is involved, the student will do better.
 - CCMS: They were talking about involvement just this afternoon. Kids feel "hopeless and helpless" if they get far behind freshman year. Middle school students sometimes feel that grades don't matter. It is frustrating. Sometimes athletes even know they have to get something

in to play and that didn't even make them get the work in. Parents seem confused about why they don't get things in as well and they have good support. Doesn't change the fact that there is a lack of "anxiety."

- Have we lowered our standards to the point where we are letting things slide through?
 - I have a personal bias against retention. Research doesn't support this and it makes students feel like more of a failure. Even at the middle school level, there are students for whom a traditional model of school does not support them. Not all students learn the same way or under the same circumstances. Ideally, it would be nice to get to those students at a younger age when they are initially experiencing failure rather than waiting until high school. There is a need for something different for some kids. A model that might benefit these kids so that they don't end up being a junior or senior before someone can get to them. Anything along those lines would be beneficial. Would prefer something encouraging rather than retention.
- There are students who fail and it doesn't really mean anything. It doesn't hit them at the middle level. Find new ways to assess students so that they have some success. This could have a lot to do with helping some kids. There is a homework help program on Tuesdays and Thursdays and they are having good success getting kids to that and helping them with homework or teaching them. The middle schools need more help understanding what subjects the kids are having trouble with.

High school: What concerns do you have about the students' academic preparation.

- Two gaps. The higher achieving students do a great job. You also get the non-ready students in integrated I and out of 25 freshman in the first period class, there were no As and 10 Fs. Absences affected this. 8 had missed more than ten days in the first period. Tough to teach them when they aren't there. When they first got here, there were trimesters. Caught the failing kids in 60 days rather than 90. There is no class to help students who fail first semester of Integrated I. They just go on to second semester. They have a math lab on Tuesdays and Thursdays but it is tough to get kids to stay for that. Commends the middle schools for their communication to parents.
- Do you interact with the middle schools during the year to discuss these things?
 - This year not so much. The last four years in the Prism grant they met 2-3 times per trimester. As a whole, they don't communicate very much. They all go their separate ways.
- Do you do a baseline at the beginning of the year?
 - The last three years they were doing a MAP testing. With that data they were placing kids. Mainly take teacher recommendation. Forecasting in February. Timeline that they have to keep. They double check first of May end of June and make changes to students'

schedules as needed. He also checks at the beginning of the semester. Usually the students want to go higher and not lower.

- Do you have any data that shows how the students did in 8th grade?
 - Hasn't done that yet. Tells his students that if they get all of their work in, they will generally get at least a C. That has been his experience in 20 years of teaching.
- Students may have missed some concept at some time and they go on and then they repeat the class. They don't get the electives that they enjoy because they have to keep repeating classes to make a deficit up. A big issue is lack of organization. They don't know how to study. Parent start to drop off as they go into junior high or high school because the students have so many different teachers. They can even have different teachers each semester. Then apathy falls into place because they aren't successful. Cannot allow a culture of failure. Reactions have to be immediate, required, and have to be systematic. The interventions have to be the same for all the kids in the entire school but that is a big thing to put into place.
- A big thing is that kids in middle school move on if they don't pass a class but in high school they do not so that is a different culture.
- Do you think it would be beneficial only in the classes that they fail? For example if they fail 6th grade math, they take it again next year.
 - Need to do something different, not just the same thing again. Can't always tell if they can't do it or if they just aren't doing it. Absences are affecting their performances. Students know how to make it look like they are working.
 - JMS no longer has optional interventions. They are actually teaching note taking, organization, etc. in classes. They are looking at standards-based grading and looking at that are which is huge. Retention is not a key work but how do we get them to a standard.
 - CCMS also has an intervention class. They get their regular class as well as an intervention class. This is not optional. They also have a study skills class. They help kids get organized, communicate better with teachers and keep on top of what they need to be doing. She went through the mandatory retention with JMS but saw that system as unfair to the kids because some kids' parents were not comfortable in the system and they ended up being retained while others did not. Some kids just shut down because they didn't feel like they were ever going to be going successful.
- What does it do to a child when he has been passed on and on and ends up in 10th grade not knowing what a noun and a verb are or how to multiply? It is a self esteem issue if you hold them back but it is also as self-esteem issue if they don't have the information and everyone else does.
 - The willingness to keep trying is the thing that she sees as the problem for the kids who are failing. Little successes do count.
- What are the things we're doing well on?
 - WHS: Opportunities including math lab, English lab, opportunities are in place. They've been talking about rearranging the schedule so

there would be a carrot for students. Need to find a way to reach kids and convince them that they can be successful if they just spend a little more time. About two months ago 37 teachers wanted to do something now and the freshman are failing at a greater rate than other grades and staff is concerned about it.

- JMS: The assessment piece: with the PLC days and the assessments have helped. Grades 6-12 developed a science assessment and now analyzing it they can see where they need to focus and adjust the instruction. What do we need to address? What do we need to change? We will eventually see the impact of that.
- One of the things that is positive is that science has had some vertical teaming with common assessments that they have been giving. Some other schools do 6-week progress reports. Did them twice instead of waiting until 9 weeks. That could be considered. See a lot of freshman Fs in Biology. Almost to a student who has an F in Biology, they have Fs in all of their core subjects. Doesn't think it is subject specific; there seems to be an issue with the students in their core subjects. Students do seem to have a problem with managing the work and managing the papers. She has a storage place in the room for them to keep things and has things to help them that way. Starts them with something that everyone can be successful with. When she calls home to parents to communicate about Fs, many parents are reluctant to apply consequences. Removing cell phones, for example, would help. Those are a major distraction. Parents seem to think it is no issue to text or call their students during class time. Teachers are going out of their way to expand their teaching ability into different areas: web computer classes, trying to reach their learning styles, trying to speak their language. Students don't seem to have an awareness of the need to pass their classes at the high school. The old bell curve is turning into a U. More kids at A and F than there were 5 years ago.
- Is that unique to our district or our schools?
 - All schools are starting to struggle with this.
- Would it help to have meetings with other school districts?
 - Don't believe that any teacher in this district is giving less than 110%. Believes that the problem is coming from the outside. They are trying to pull students in. We live on the Pacific Rim and have connections to high tech companies, and connections with the Far East. We can be the little districts that could and it isn't or a lack of teachers or the board wanting it but the community may not buy it yet. Sees that from the research some schools (Philadelphia) when the community believes it come a long way. Maybe there needs to be even more top-down demand for excellence from the community, kids and staff. Kids in India have gone to school three times longer than our kids have. A school system that is built around an agrarian system so that kids can harvest...something has to change. Wants his kids to be able to compete. We are a small district and we can look at some outside the

box things to do. Kids here are smart enough to compete but what are we doing to do to make that happen.

- It would be helpful for our teachers to go see some other districts and would be helpful for some districts to come see us. We have good solid teachers but we can always learn. We can't get too comfortable with where we are and we can always be growing.
- If it isn't our problem, then there is no solution. We can't control the external factors. We can only control what we do. If students are failing, what can we do about that? One think we don't do well is Response to Intervention. We don't do this comprehensively anywhere. The districts that are very successful identify where students don't meet standard and then give them help in those areas. For 80 – 90 % of kids failing, they don't have the skills they need. We do not have a systems approach to help those who are not meeting standards. We are doing well in reading but could do better. Seems like we have a large population of kids who aren't meeting standards and they aren't getting interventions. Limited options. Gave example of 9th grade student who failed 6th, 7th and 8th grade math and first semester of freshman year and she has now been referred for special education. Her only two options are special education or second semester of freshman math.
- Do you think that sitting down as a department and talking about who is having success and working that district-wide?
 - They need some intervention to get the information that they don't have.
They need double dosing. May need double dosing in reading and math. The intervention needs to be built into the schedule first and then do the rest of the schedule. What is happening in the school day for kids who can't be successful in the class?
- No district wide-system that is holistic across the system. This is the first time in five or six years that they have the same math department at the high school. Have tried different things at the high school. Tried bits and pieces but didn't stick with anything to see if it worked because they always tried something new.
- There are painful choices if you want to do some of these things. If you double dip some kids miss electives. Have heard a commitment to a comprehensive experience with high school. There is a problem with the custodial nature of our system.
- Most of the Title, LAP monies are spent K-5 because that is where it has the most impact.
- Vertical teaming is important. Try to go both up and down. Has always been a very powerful discussion. Vertical piece is important but they end up with the PLC work in their own building keeping them busy.
- At math, it was powerful got together in JMS cafeteria and sit there for two days K-12 and hear what they should be doing at all grades. That was very powerful. Was able to talk to elementary.

- What does it take to get kids motivated (students and/or parent) and what do you need to have them do differently to have them turn around and be successful? What is EHS doing that others can nurture?
 - Start the kids where they are. Start them at the level they are at and get them where we want them to be. Students focus on four classes at a time. Personalized. Students are very involved in their learning. Student-centered hands-on. Their size and the method of instruction that their teacher use helps. Build on what the kids can do. Every student has had the opportunity to learn in a positive way. Project based learning. Rigorous. Sometimes do thematic based learning. They enjoy it so they don't even always realize how hard they are working. Interventions and rewards are built into their day. Seeing themselves earn credits and moving toward a diploma is a huge motivator for them. Each time they earn credit that motivates them. Starting them where they are. Just a whole different model. Harder to do in a traditional six-period day. Also have a huge parental involvement piece. Contract with parent and student is a requirement to be in the program. Call parents all the time. No student has ever refused to sign the contract except one who had a different motivation for being in the building. Harder to do in a traditional building but you can do pieces of it that are possible but the scale may be different.
- What are possible consequences that might be workable?
 - RtI: the idea is to catch them sooner before we have to refer them for special education. If they had been caught sooner and given a different approach, they might have done better. If this was top down, we might catch kids sooner. Like to see more interventions across the k-12 system. We have pieces here and there but it needs to be completely across the board.
 - Ultimate consequence could be not earning a diploma but a diploma is not concrete enough, especially at 8th and 9th grade. Incentives and consequences have to be immediate and systematic. When we look at the writing of DuFour, it takes time and work to put this together. An intervention team at WHS is trying to put this in place.
 - Right now it is still invitational; you failed this and now you are invited to come after school.
 - See that parents look at grades to check on students and see if they are really missing things. This is strength.
 - There is another thing going on at EHS: there are five staff members and the kids are "their" kids and it is hard for kids to "fall through the cracks." It isn't that the WHS teachers aren't caring but they have six periods of kids and it is hard to make that personal connection.
 - Perhaps we should reconsider the block schedule.
 - When you meet them where they are at, they aren't struggling to keep up and they aren't bored because they already know how to do something.

- JMS: interventions during the day, block schedule in two grade levels, progress reports go home every two weeks etc. Even with all that in place, 101 students had one or more Fs out of 178 students. Even with all those pieces, they are trying to figure out why the kids are failing and not doing well.
- Using the internet to communicate with parents. Is that effective?
 - Parents expect it now.
 - You can quickly email the teacher and they get input to you.

Appreciate all of these ideas. Very important to continue the dialogue.

Moving on to transition itself:

What transition activities are being used and how well do they work?

- Has been a little different every year. This year they gathered a lot more input from both schools. Having counselors at both schools has really helped. Marsha Spencer organizes the 8th grade tour and with that the students are given a taste of what it is to come. They can see the elective classes and some core classes. They have added the forecasting process with them this year. They can see the tour as more linked with the forecasting. They go to the middle schools and meet with smaller groups. Just before the school year starts, they have the freshman come in and they are assigned a STAR mentor and have some sheltered time and then the other students come in. What is lacking is how we help them understand what is going to be the expectation academically and behaviorally. Their four-year plan helps them see how the classes connect. How do we get them to see what is expected of them academically? This is also part of the advisory freshman year. Help to stress what their classes should be depending on their career interests. That is introduced in middle school.
- Very excited about the way the high school set up the program for the way that the students come in. The forms are now easier to navigate and it is clearer for students. The forms have been revamped and are very very clear and the expectations are easier to convey to students as we go into the forecasting process. Thinks that the process with be smooth.
- Looking forward to meeting about individual students and designing independent plans for those students.
- Do you articulate the expectations (behavior, work ethic etc) to the incoming 8th graders before they tour etc?
 - Those pieces aren't there. When students come back from summer, need to be taught how to behave and it takes time to do that. Getting through the curriculum prevents people from doing that.
- The mentor program really works. Make the 8th graders aware that they need to be focusing on their schoolwork, etc. There are a number

of students who want to come back and tell the 8th graders and tell them to listen to their teachers because they will not regret it. This has been happening under the radar but it might be good to make that more official. 8th grade has moved to a specialist model and helping the students better understand what it looks like in high school. Gives them a transition year to get ready for high school. They have more homework. They have more teachers. Students take the textbook home and having homework. Doing reading, taking notes, answering questions to do the type of thing they will face in high school. Get ready for it now. Get with the program. Colleagues are all on the same pages with cushioning the blow that the students see freshman year.

- What kinds of things do we need to know to prepare the students for high school? Do the high school teachers all have the same expectations for students on things such as heading papers? Middle schools will help them with this. They will support this as a staff. There has been less vertical teaming in Language Arts. They could be doing the same kinds of things in class getting them used to expectations. CCMS staff would be willing to support them. Tries to do a variety of activities whether it is taking notes or doing labs the same way that he remembers them from high school. An example of this is the late policy so that they can have the same policy.
- Importance of education should be learning not the diploma.
- Have kids who have been together who have the benefit of being together and having the best teachers. He worries about the kids who are not getting the same opportunities. Some kids don't have the benefit of parent support but something has to be done with them do they don't go off in a path so that they will never catch up.
- The kids in special services for transition it was very hit or miss. Sometimes special education kids felt out of the loop. It is a scramble to meet with the high school teachers for special education. Met with some high school teachers in October. Hard to be everywhere at once. In October they came up with a plan for transition but it has been hard to get it going. Have high school communicate who their case manager will be. She has some students who will need to visit more than once. Talked about doing a transition night to invite secondary special education students and their parents. The parents are worried about their students and want them to succeed. Some are facing huge obstacles to their success. Need some support with time for some of the ideas they have. Middle and high school teachers spend a lot of time and effort developing schedules and need those schedules to be implemented. These kids need more opportunities to visit the high school and find someone they can connect with right away. It is scary for those kids and they need that connection right away.
- Does the mentoring program work with special needs students as well?

- Yes. They get a personal contact. They work with them in small groups.

President Peterson expressed appreciation for all the information and help from everyone. Some great ideas and some things for us to work on. Keep up the great work. He knows from personal experience that teachers are doing their best for kids.

Dated this 10th day of February 2009

President

Secretary to the Board