

Parents Council Notes

March 23, 2010

Opening Video:

CMS School of the Week excerpt “Formative Assessment”

Feature Presentation:

Curriculum Supervisor Donna Gaffney highlighted the District’s efforts in the area of Differentiated Instruction, or designing instruction to meet students where they are in the learning process. She detailed how Colonial provides flexible instruction and multiple learning opportunities for students. Mrs. Gaffney also noted that Differentiated Instruction is just one area of focus for the District’s comprehensive professional development program. CMS Principal Bob Fahler highlighted some activities at the middle school and noted that teachers collect student performance data, analyze it and then act on it. He stated that Professional Learning Time for teachers is an invaluable part of this process.

Two additional videos related to Differentiated Instruction were shown.

Questions/Comments:

A parent questioned how students were identified for differentiation noting that some students don’t test well.

Mrs. Gaffney stated that testing is not the only measure. She noted that teachers monitor classroom performance in a variety of ways, including talking with students and monitoring their progress through engaging activities.

Mr. Fahler spoke to the example of Socratic Seminars at CMS where students evaluate students and students are measured on how they present information.

A parent commented that good teachers were tailoring instruction for students years ago.

Superintendent Dr. Vincent F. Cotter stated that was more the case at the elementary level and less so in the higher grades. He stated that it was a District goal to move the process forward and up through the secondary level. He stated that students are no longer disengaged in District classrooms.

A parent asked if this is a move toward individualized education.

Director of Pupil Services and Special Education Karen Berk stated that she was impressed with how the needs of students are being met without the benefit of an IEP.

A parent commented on the different levels of maturity of students at CMS and wondered how one teacher can effectively reach each student.

Mrs. Gaffney stated that students have many opportunities to be involved in the cooperative learning process.

Mr. Fahler stated that the classroom structure facilitates participation for each group member, and that teachers monitor the overall process.

A parent asked how often administrators visit classrooms.

Dr. Cotter stated that there are multiple observations including those by principals, assistant principals, curriculum supervisors and District Office personnel. He added that there are formal and informal building observations.

Mrs. Gaffney added that specialists also observe classroom activity and provide feedback to teachers and administrators.

A parent asked if parental feedback is sought regarding the learning traits of their children.

Dr. Cotter stated that some teachers seek that information, but the practice is not formalized. He noted that it may be something the District can incorporate in the future.

Information Updates:

Dr. Cotter explained that the District has used the four snow days that were built into the calendar. He noted that seniors at the high school have fallen under the 180 days required by the School Code. He explained that the Board had amended the calendar to declare Monday, April 12 as a career and community service day for seniors.

Assistant Superintendent Dr. MaryEllen and Science Curriculum Supervisor Maria Bellino discussed the Girls in Technology Summer Academy. Ms. Bellino stated that the program will focus on developing technical skills. [Click here to view a fact sheet that was distributed.](#)

Chief Financial Officer Joe Bickleman stated that the District is looking to save approximately \$185,000 in interest fees by refinancing the General Obligation Bonds, Series 2005. He also reported on a positive real estate assessment appeal that will net the District approximately \$80,000 per year. He added that the District is aggressively pursuing similar opportunities.

Director of Human Resources Richard Hartz provided an update on the search for a new principal at PWHS. He stated that interviews will begin on Thursday. He also noted that the District table at the Pennsylvania Job Fair had long lines of prospective teachers visit. He stated that some teachers waited in line for two hours even though the District had only one position posted.

Director of Operations Terry Yemm provided updates on the McCarthy Park construction project, the Victory Fields lighting project and the Colonial Elementary School (CES) window replacement project. He noted that the April 8 Whitemarsh Supervisors meeting will be important in the Victory Fields lighting process. He also stated that the CES window project should be completed over spring break.

Chief Information Officer Drew Boegly stated that the next Technology Review Committee meeting will be held on April 7 from noon until 3:00 p.m.

Mrs. Berk encouraged parents to check out the college counseling page on the Plymouth Whitemarsh High School Web site. She said that it contained a lot of valuable information. She also promoted an upcoming Violence Prevention Forum on May 12 in Colonial Elementary School.

The next meeting is Tuesday, April 27 at 9:30 a.m. in the District Office General Meeting Room. The featured topic will be the mathematics program and methodology.