

Notes from the East High United meeting on January 8, 2009

The meeting began with a welcome from Jill Jokela and around the room introductions from the 10 or so people initially in attendance. (By the meeting's end, more than 20 people were there.) The majority of the meeting was spent in discussion of the two items identified on the agenda as the topics of Alan Harris's Principal's Report: an update on the Facilitated Language Study pilot for next school year, and more information on the ongoing process of developing East's Vision. In the course of the almost exactly 1½ hour meeting, some points were revisited several times; these notes group and combine questions and discussion.

Principal's Report

Update on Facilitate Language Study pilot for next year

Mr. Harris began with a brief **recap of the Facilitated Language Study (FLS) proposal** that was presented in some detail by World Languages Department staff at the October East High United Meeting. At present, French and Spanish are the only World Languages offered at East. Since the discontinuation of German as an ongoing language offering at East in 2006, the World Languages Department and East administration have sought a way to offer instruction in an additional language or languages that would be sustainable and would meet the needs of students. The FLS proposal would involve cohorts of students studying different languages in an independent learning setting facilitated by a World Languages teacher, with native speakers of the languages being studied brought in as conversational tutors on a weekly basis. Following their presentation in October, World Languages staff surveyed students—who expressed a great deal of interest in the FLS idea, particularly the study of Chinese—and talked to the Department of Public Instruction, the UW, and other high schools that currently offer world languages other than Spanish and French. Their plan, which is fully supported by Mr. Harris, is to **offer Facilitated Language Study as a pilot in the fall of 2009**; it will be part of the registration process this spring. The FLS pilot is geared primarily for students who will be sophomores and juniors, and who have had two years of a World Language with a B or better average. (Note: a freshman with a B average currently enrolled in, for example, Spanish 2 at East would qualify; both actual years of the language do not need to be taken at East.) Next steps for the staff will be to survey students again in February to determine the languages with the greatest interest, and then begin researching the availability of curricular materials, online and hard copy, in the chosen languages, and seeking conversational tutors, either UW students or teaching professionals from the community. Parents (including those who indicated interest at the October EHU meeting in serving on a committee to study World Languages options at East) will also be brought into the conversation in February.

Mr. Harris stressed that he and the World Languages Department staff believe that the **Facilitated Language Study pilot is the most viable option available for offering an additional language at East this fall**, especially since the FLS pilot doesn't limit the new offering to just one language. Other options will be explored for the future, including the possibility of adding a traditionally taught third language, but the World Languages Department feels that FLS pilot is a good place to start; they will get feedback on the pilot and then determine next steps. Considerable discussion ensued. Would **FLS be more cost effective than hiring another (probably part-time) language teacher**, given the release time needed for the World Languages staff, who are currently teaching Western languages, to learn about teaching (very different) Eastern languages, and the cost of bringing in the conversational tutors? Cost is not the only factor. It is difficult to schedule part-time staff—both internally and coordinating with other high schools, all of which have different bell schedules—and difficult to recruit and retain qualified part-time teachers. **Will FLS work for language acquisition**, which depends on interactive language use in context? For example, would it be possible to get the tones in Chinese with this kind of instruction? Will the **native speakers** be “informants” only, but not necessarily **trained as teachers**? FLS is a pilot and has not been tried at the high school level, although the model has been used at the college level; efforts will be made to find native speakers trained as teachers. Is it realistic that even motivated **high school students can learn a language**, especially a language like Chinese, **independently**? Discussion became particularly intense here, with the suggestion that perhaps FLS languages could be thought of more as an introduction, which students would take to a higher level in college. Following the protest that FLS wasn't a minicourse, and would be counted as an academic credit, Mr. Harris stated that Facilitated Language Study will be designed as a rigorous academic class. It was noted that students graduate from MMSD high schools with credits in traditional languages which have been traditionally taught by trained teachers, but are not necessarily

comfortable speaking the language. **Will the pilot be sustainable?** It is not possible to guarantee that this brand new idea, offered as a pilot, will continue, even for three years. **Will the pilot cause an underestimation of student interest in offering other languages?** No. **If students start with the pilot but it didn't continue, would they be able to continue e.g. Chinese at the UW?** It depends. The MMSD policy is that students are only able to take classes at the UW, paid for by the district, if there are no comparable classes offered anywhere in the school district. Memorial currently offers Mandarin, so students could choose to take it there. For more info on the 'Youth Options Program' and taking college classes for high school credit, please see the MMSD website. **Is MMSD looking at World Languages district-wide**, possibly as part of the strategic planning process? They are not having this conversation currently, but they want to have it. The **World Languages Department will host an open house night**, farther along in the development of the pilot, to explain more about Facilitated Language Study and address parent and student questions.

East High Vision Discussion

What is a vision? When Mr. Harris started at East in 2005, he was often asked about his vision for the school; his vision was, and is, that "you will have one", in other words, to come up with a shared vision of values that we—meaning the East High community—want for our students, and to articulate those values. A vision is an ideal, where you *want* to be, not where you are. One way of thinking about it: what would you want people to say about East in 10 years? A vision is also larger than one group of people; it is about what happens beyond "you", a point Mr. Harris illustrated with an example from his experience at Clovis West in California, a high school noted for athletic excellence—except for the boys cross country team. It was necessary for athletes and coaches to commit to building up the cross country program, even if individual players were not able to share directly in that future glory, they were inspired to "labor now to bear fruit later."

Department leaders need to develop a shared vision. The East Leadership team, which includes Department chairs, Mr. Harris, Literacy Coach Annie Potter, and SLC Coordinator Lauri Weis, is working on this vision, which will be shared with the rest of the staff at the in-service half day Monday, January 12th, and with parents in the form of a written statement at the February East High United meeting. Department chairs, as part of the shift from their former focus on ordering materials, scheduling, and *representing* their colleagues, to a new focus on instructional leadership, will get feedback within their Departments, with the idea of "laying in" goals in August. In addition to **student credit acquisition**—students should earn 5 ½ credits each year to be on pace to graduate—**goals will include a focus on reflective practice**; how to teach better every day, how to get kids to achieve. This happens at the elementary level, but less often at the high school level, where instruction is more stratified, and there is more of a focus on subject expertise. Will also look at advisories, peer mentoring, and accelerated programming. In August the lengthy process of processing the goals through representatives of our school community will begin.

Getting the voice of the wider East High Community. Every part of East's community—students, staff, parents and other adults who support students, ultimately the larger community as well—needs to have input into the development of East's vision and goals, so that everyone can feel that they *own* the vision and the goals. People who are involved with East High United can be considered parent leaders; Mr. Harris would like East High United's contribution to the vision process to be figuring out how—or at least trying—to get the voice of the entire East community—a difficult task, especially in a school as diverse as East. East High United meetings are one venue for input and discussion—and they are a good venue, where people are able to disagree without being disagreeable—but how to connect with people for whom meetings, especially those held in a school building, don't feel comfortable and natural? Again, there was considerable discussion. Parents tend to be involved in what matters to them and their kids, particularly sports and other school activities such as concerts; make sure that representatives of EHU are at these events. A community potluck meal in the cafeteria would feel non-threatening, but some parents will just never go to school. Where do parents (and other adults who support students) gather? It was suggested that EHU reps could go to, for example, food pantries, driver's license offices, other points of contact, and see if they could get a half hour of people's time to talk about East. Other suggestions included reaching out to Neighborhood Associations and other community organizations, trying blogs and structured online comments, and adding something simple, maybe a checklist of concerns, to the materials handed out at registration.

Other questions and topics

What's going on with theater renovation?

Mr. Harris and parent Ann Brickson explained that a committee is working on the theater renovation project quietly and slowly. In 1-2 months, more information should be available, but progress *is* being made. The committee is working with an architect, fundraising professionals and others to create a thoughtful, clear, structured product. They want to avoid mistakes that are easy to make on a huge fundraising project like this one, a quick flare of energy that would dissipate before the groundwork is laid. There are two phases in a project of this size: the first phase involves securing major donors, and requires a "case statement"; the second phase, which begins once the donor base is built, is to bring in the smaller donors. On January 7th, the committee met and gave significant input on a case statement which had been prepared by a professional writer. The plans for the theater have been revamped by a parent and an East graduate who both do professional theater operations and development work. Ed Hughes noted that the new (national) administration is looking to improve America's infrastructure, and seeks "shovel ready" projects: get this one on the list!

Update on AP/Honors

Annie Potter has moved into her new position as the CLC grant-funded (and mandated) Literacy Coach. Within the next week or so, a position will be posted to focus initially on honors/AP, with literacy built in later on. Mr. Harris noted that East is the only Madison high school that titles courses as "TAG"; they are really *Honors* rather than *Talented and Gifted* courses. It was pointed out that other high schools do not require an essay for acceptance into Honors classes; the essay is a sticking point at O'Keeffe, where students are not required to apply for TAG classes. Aside from the addition of an AP class in the English Department, the lineup of classes will be mostly the same for next year, but may look different by the fall of 2010. Discussion is still ongoing on the best way to provide access to accelerated programming at East, but the vision for what East provides for accelerated learning on a school-wide scale will be included in the overall vision/goals development process happening over the next 18 months. Then each Department will work on its own vision, developing a clear idea of where their Department is going. Mr. Harris said that change may not happen as quickly as some would like, but stressed the importance of avoiding hasty decisions. He returned to Clovis West, which was located in an agricultural area, for an illustrative phrase: "go slow and plow deep."

Proposal to put East on the National Register of Historic Places

The meeting concluded with an announcement by East parent Sharon Redinger that her daughter, East alumna Rebecca Redinger, has submitted a report to the State Historical Society proposing that East High School be placed on the National Register of Historic Places. East is already on the local register.

Next meeting: Thursday, February 12, 7 pm