

Notes from the East High United meeting on December 11, 2008

Fifteen or so people attended the meeting, which began with a welcome from Jill Jokela, followed by around the room introductions. (Please note that while this was a fairly straightforward meeting, these notes force an even tighter structure on the reports and discussion, compressing and combining topics to save space.)

Principal's report

Alan Harris started his report by announcing that **Annie Potter**, currently East's TAG/Literacy Coordinator, will be moving into a SLC grant-funded **fulltime Literacy Coach** position at East; her background is in literacy so this will be a good fit. An Honors/AP position will be hired; down the road, this position will include a literacy component. Mr. Harris noted the need for both "recovery and acceleration", and the tendency for schools to focus more on recovery. Mr. Harris also talked about the early release for **staff development** on December 16th (postponed from December 9th due to the snow day on the 9th), an hour staff meeting for **sharing SLC grant ideas**, particularly assessing staff interest in being part of the numerous committees that are being formed at East. As parents are probably aware, East's **tardy policy** has undergone a slight change. Mr. Harris likened students and tardy policies to squirrels and bird feeders: the students and squirrels are always a step ahead of the tardy policy planners/bird feeder fillers... Finally, staff are discussing whether to **drop the extended club time during second hour on Tuesdays for second semester**. East is the only MMSD high school that has during-the-school-day club time, which was intended to give students an opportunity to participate in clubs in a way that wouldn't conflict with their other activities. 40-45% of students at East participate in at least one club. If the extended time were dropped, clubs would meet before or after school or at lunch.

Small Learning Communities (SLC) Grant Update

Lauri Weis, East's SLC Coordinator (204-1676, lweis@madison.k12.wi.us), passed out two handouts, one listing **East's SLC goals** ("Increase academic success for all students; Strengthen relationships, student/student and student/adult; Improve post-secondary outcomes"), and the other a more detailed **update on East's grant objectives** that was presented to the School Board. (This second handout is available for download at <http://www.madison.k12.wi.us/boe/docs/Appendices%2012-1-08/Appx11.pdf>; the pages relevant to East appear immediately after the introductory letter; note that the SLC grant is referred to districtwide as "Project ReAL" to distinguish it from the two *other* SLC grants already received in the district.)

Some background on the SLC grant The grant was written with ambiguity, even vagueness, because there isn't much grant money available for high school redesign, and this ambiguity gives the district some latitude in determining how each high school will satisfy the goals, without having to mandate a specific structure for all four schools. The district, seeking some level of **districtwide consistency**, will **define the essential learning outcomes, the broad goals; the four high schools will decide on how to make these goals happen**. There is freedom for each school to make it fit for its own culture and population; the four schools will look different. Mr. Harris mentioned the concept of "defined autonomy." ("...the expectation and support to lead *within the boundaries defined by the district goals*." From a 2007 article by J. Timothy Waters & Robert J. Marzano, <http://www.aasa.org/publications/saarticledetail.cfm?ItemNumber=8435&snItemNumber=950>)

(In a sideline to the main discussion, it was noted that each of the four high schools has its own identity, but that sometimes this difference leads to competition. Superintendent Nerad has the idea of trying "**occupational clusters**", for example, an automotive technology program, or an agriculture program, which might be offered at a "center", where students would go for a cutting edge program, or programs might be grouped at the high schools. Superintendent Nerad would try to involve the local business community to sponsor programs.)

Each of the four MMSD high schools has a SLC coordinator; these four coordinators meet weekly with Assistant Superintendent Pam Nash and the two MMSD facilitators assigned to the SLC grant, Kolleen Onsrud and Julie Koenke (who handles East.) East's SLC coordinator needs to make East staff aware of the parameters needed to fit the broad goals. Bruce King from the UW-Madison's Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis is the **outside evaluator** (always required with a grant of this significance) who will monitor that core goals are met and that an evaluation process is in place.

Ms. Weis's background: she was a public defender for 14 years, then a special education teacher, spending three years at Gompers Elementary, five years at Black Hawk Middle, and three years downtown as a support teacher for East side schools.

Steps toward achieving the goals underway so far this school year include the alignment of scope and sequence that is taking place in the English and Social Studies Departments (“Increase academic success for all students”) and the continuation of the AVID program at East. It was noted that East is ahead of the game both on SLC-mandated AVID implementation—the other three MMSD high schools will start AVID programs next fall—and having a literacy coach/coordinator position in place.

Committees (or Action Teams) are being created; ideally, these teams will involve every staff person at East in some way. Responding to a question about whether this was a realistic expectation, Mr. Harris noted that with AVID and the ongoing literacy work at East, there is energy and excitement at East, a sense that if people get involved, good things will happen. Staff will primarily serve on committees on their own time. There will be an Innovation Team which will look at the work of all of the other teams at East. This will feed into a “cultural cycle” in the building, where every three to five years the learning community will reassess itself, determining strengths and weaknesses.

Ms. Weis is setting up a **SLC-related data wall** (a bulletin board in Rm. 129) with data organized under specific goals, which will support the problem solving necessary to determine if ideas will work to satisfy the SLC objectives and goals—it is not enough that they are just cool new ideas. For instance, there is some discussion about starting **advisories** at East. What “problem” would advisories solve? What goals would they address? An Advisories Exploration Team would do a research study on how advisories would work, look at best practices across the country, and bring that back to the whole staff to process, before moving into the logistical phase of implementing advisories. One possibility would be to assign 10-20 freshmen to a staff member, who would keep track of their attendance, grades, involvement, etc. throughout their time at East, this staff member would also facilitate communicate with parents and teachers about the student. Advisories would not take the place of the Purple/Gold guidance counselor/psychiatrist/social worker team model. Advisories are not being used at any of the Madison high schools at present, Memorial has “backyards”, but they are more of a social grouping. East used to have homerooms; students stayed in the same homeroom all four years. The **first data wall** will feature WKCE and ACT scores, attendance and truancy rates for the last five years. Eventually, this data will be broken out by demographics. Other ideas that will be explored following the data gathering include freshman academy, senior portfolios, and service learning. It was suggested that since students are generally technosavvy, it would be wise to make better use of technology to involve students. Metrics to measure the goals are being developed.

Partnerships with Goodman Community Center

Becky Steinhoff, Executive Director of the **Goodman Community Center (GCC)**, and Meme Kintner, GCC Middle and High School Program Director, talked about the East/GCC partnership in the **Vocational Intern Program (VIP)**. 43 students are currently enrolled in the program, which runs from 7:30 to 3 each school day. Five East staff are based at the GCC to provide all special education and other services to the students, who are also doing internships in childcare, food service, or custodial work. Ms. Steinhoff and Ms. Kintner noted that there is a social skills development component to the VIP program, and that they have seen marked improvement in attitude from many of the students. In January a **separate program**, funded by the SLC grant, will begin, utilizing the same teaching staff for an **afterschool reading intervention** program involving eight computers loaded with Read 180 literacy software. There is some stigma attached to Read 180, so offering the program away from East and after school hours makes it more appealing to students. 9th and 10th graders were recruited for the program, based on the reading assessments that are given to all 9th graders. About 50 high school students are already involved in afterschool programming at the GCC; GCC staff are committed to finding ways for students to earn high school credit outside of school hours.

Mr. Harris responded to a question about the **changing role of Department Chairs**. No longer primarily organizers, schedulers, and orderers of textbooks, Department Chairs are being redefined as instructional leadership positions. While Chairs will truly be leaders in instructional practice, reading articles, looking at what other schools are doing and how, they will not be supervisors—administration will continue to set up any

structured improvement needed for Department staff. Mr. Harris mentioned a new emphasis on “reflective practice on the learning goals.” Teachers sometimes see themselves as teachers of information rather than as teachers of students, but a focus on essential learning goals and their measures, and how to move students along, makes a huge difference in student learning. The 14 Department chairs are working with administration, Ms. Weis and Ms. Potter, on how to make this shift in outlook and philosophy happen.

Final comments

Is anything happening with the idea of requiring **ACT testing for the whole district**? School Board Member Ed Hughes said that Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Schools Pam Nash has indicated that MMSD is moving in that direction.

Would **attendance at East High United meetings increase if meetings lasted only an hour** each month? Meetings usually last no more than an hour and a half, and are packed with information; reducing their length might be difficult without sacrificing content.

Next meeting: Thursday, January 8, 2009, 7 pm

Topics: Parent feedback on East Vision Statement,
Update from World Languages Dept. on Facilitated Language Study program pilot