

Steele SAC Meeting - 11/15/22

Attendees:

Susana Moreno
Amanda Walls
Maggie Couper
Maggie Hart
Elizabeth Harris
Marika Gillis
Terry Spotts
Alli Klein
Kelly Banet
Tyler Cornelius
Jessica Barnett

Rhonda Toombs
Jessica Gemm
Ryan Capp
Bryan Relich, D11 Area Superintendent
Michael Gaal, D11 Superintendent
Kristen Fuller
Marcy Olson
Parth Melpakam, D11 School Board
Trudi Jackson
Ellen/Rob Seel

1. Welcome & Introductions

2. Quick updates from Ryan Capp:

- a. **READ Act numbers** follow-up from last month (students identified as needing additional reading support)
 - i. Last year's numbers: 35 students at end of 2021-22 year.
 - ii. This year current numbers: 25 students; we know we will add kids in K (10 likely) and 1st (4 students likely) at mid-year. (Typically it's a pendulum swing - 30+ students, get more resources to invest in tutoring, then lower the number as students don't need the plans anymore; then goes back up as we get more students - this pattern goes back to at least 2013.)
 - iii. Hard to draw a lot in analysis from these numbers due to turnover last year (about 40 new students, and lost about 40 students over the summer - largest turnover in recent memory). Meeting monthly or so as tutoring groups during school.
 - iv. Next month's SAC we can dig into global numbers, trends, how the testing works and what it informs as far as support.
- b. **Special ed assistant / impact** - still have an opening. May have an application but it's been hard to attract people at \$14/hour, 32 hours, with benefits. When we have a current team member out, it's tough to cover the secondary tier needs, if it's a good day. Team is excellent dealing with crises. But we have some concerns that students aren't getting their required minutes on a consistent basis; they do get the total required by the end of the month, but it's often more crammed. Not able to get subs in for this role. Concern is that we are competing with \$20/hour restaurant jobs. **The best profile for this role is someone from our community.**

- c. **Parent-Teacher Conferences update:** Nearly all parents attended, following up with remaining 1 or 2 parents who we haven't connected with yet. Great feedback from parents, having everyone in the building.
- d. **Blueprint/integrated units work:** We'll go deeper on this in the December SAC, but a high-level overview of the work teachers are doing on integrated units:
 - i. 6 phases of learning focus from the district. Mr. Capp worked with the central office in the spring to get ahead of this - we are the guinea pig, developing blueprints of learning that combine disciplines, integrate units.
 - ii. Adding a layer called Depth and Complexity - looking at ways to guide thinking and raise the level of critical thinking.
 - iii. Examples: 1st grade unit on circuses, 3rd grade homelands and borderlands. Planning for 3rd quarter to roll these out.
 - iv. Reminiscent of IB structures - is something to keep exploring as a possibility for Steele.
- e. **SAC Training Dec 1, 6-8pm:** Put on by the District Accountability Committee (DAC). Planning to have a Steele rep to attend. Topics include: STAR benchmark results, parent support for math curricula, school budgets or communication ideas for ELL families.

3. Enrollment discussion / parent engagement

- a. Jessica Gemm shared context for this discussion:
 - i. October departure of two fifth grade families, and the related concerns about enrollment numbers and structure of funding teachers.
 - ii. There has been declining enrollment at Steele since before Covid. Last year our numbers dipped low enough that we had to lose a FTE in our other 5th grade teacher, and combine a 4 / 5 classroom. While this year has gone better, there is some worry among parents of students in younger grades about what the 4th and 5th grade experiences are, which could continue to have impacts on our enrollment, which, based on the current funding formulas could lead to the loss of another FTE.
 - iii. We also pursued the Arts Integration Pathway last year as a way of attracting new families, but the district determined our building wasn't big enough - that was a frustrating experience.
 - iv. Jessica raised these issues in separate conversations with the DAC Chair, School Board representative for Steele (Parth Melpakam), and Assistant Superintendent who oversees Steele (Bryan Relich). Steele continues to be a very strong community, and a school with some of the highest test scores - and we don't want to fall through the cracks and not be able to retain current families, or attract new ones.
 - v. We also need to encourage parents who have frustrations to raise their concerns and allow the team at Steele and beyond to try to resolve problems. May be unclear to parents how best to do that.
 - 1. Mr. Capp shared the preferred process for parents to follow: Start sharing concerns with teachers first; if not resolved from that,

come to Mr. Capp, work together to identify ways he can support the student/family. If there is a pattern of concern, Mr. Capp will address that more broadly - HR, instructional support.

2. Additional resources are available if parents still feel a concern is not being addressed - by raising it to PTA member, SAC chair, or Mr. Capp's supervisor (Area Superintendent Bryan Relich).

b. Mr. Capp shared some additional context on enrollment:

- i. Current numbers: K - 45, 1st - 45, 2nd - 46, 3rd - 36, 4/5 - 79
- ii. The current 3rd grade was in kinder when Covid hit, and experienced the most families leaving for other options (private, charter, etc.) that promised in person learning, even if those schools still went remote.
- iii. Mr. Gaal shared that once people have left a school, it's very hard to get them back - even if their choice wasn't the ideal one, they are committed.
- iv. Parents at other schools are more used to loss of teachers, combining classes. Change is scary, parents are wondering will it happen again, what is a 4/5 combo - 5th grade last year felt cheated and that was hard to overcome. This year that hasn't happened - set the culture, communicated that ahead of time to parents.

c. Additional comments/questions:

- i. 5th grade math section addition has been great - link with North about where kids can go after Steele, helping them see the connections about what's next. Mr. Kelley (North math teacher) is very intentional about how he engages - conferences with him, grades are clear and online, homework. (And there is a teacher from Palmer coming to North to do a similar set-up.) Mr. Capp shared that we'll be looking ahead to the STAR testing to see the results of this increased math support.
- ii. Look for an opportunity to talk about where the gaps are - vertical alignment, preparation for middle school.
- iii. Parents worked hard to get the word out in the community about Steele, so it's frustrating that we didn't really move the needle on enrollment overall.
- iv. Mr. Gaal: Need to give more resources, support schools in building community. Can't change choice being a factor. Not meeting the student numbers is feedback that something isn't working. Every school needs to be a quality neighborhood school, and have a specific identity. Every principal should have one FTE to apply as they need. What are some ways we allow building leaders to solve problems because they are closest to them.
 1. He is trying to create more fluidity in the budget - to be responsive to the needs. Not just forcing creativity with the same dollar amount.
 2. Help people think differently about how students can learn - project-based learning as opportunities, differentiated learning.

3. Public education is changing, need to think about how we can adjust.
- v. Concerns that the district needs to be more nimble with things like inflation - the \$14.25 hourly rate was established 3 years ago, and the world has changed since then.
 1. The funding is linked directly to the community - but lost the bond measure by 10,000 votes, not insignificant.
 2. Need to rebrand D11 as linked to the health of the city of Colorado Springs - met with the mayor to raise that as a point of discussion, linking between the city's need to hire police, fire, utilities, etc. and the opportunity to produce students who can do those jobs.
 - vi. North MS teacher (Mr. Kelley) shared that the data he sees about students who are struggling with math in middle school often goes back to 3rd grade. Is there a possibility to get more support for early grades so students are ready? Talked as teachers about doing something like that - kids go to where they need to go vs. staying in their own grade all the time; parents have been open to that in some situations (e.g. 4th grader doing math with 5th) but less so in others (4th grader doing math with 3rd). And - Steele kids in particular seem to come to middle school with the math skills they need.
 - vii. Mr. Gaal emphasized there will be more support for Steele with marketing - want to make sure this school is full! And other ideas long-term such as looking at early childhood centers downtown - need to invest in what will be a population boom downtown that will then feed into D11 schools. (Mr. Gaal has done something similar in DC Public Schools.)

4. Superintendent presentation and Q&A

- a. How to shift the city to a place that's not afraid to dream
- b. Possibility of a new bond measure? Working on that with the board. Needs to be exciting and visionary, not just about maintenance, or schools shutting down - he sees those as some of the issues with why the measure failed last year.
- c. Establishing trust - measuring trust index through surveys in districts around the country. Where there's high trust between student and teacher, regardless of where they enter the system - that's the foundation of success. Trust extends as you move up the chain. But then stops at the administration level.
- d. Want to shift the administration to the role of servant leadership - "I'm here to help." Did this in the military, taking away rank and structure to help build trust regardless of place in the hierarchy. His goal is to put the school in the center vs. a massive hierarchy that you have to keep moving through each step to get anything done. Working to build radial support out from the school in the middle. Teachers are the true levers of change, have to work our way toward providing more direct support to teachers; in the meantime, the principal is the lever the district can most directly support.

- e. Most recent D11 numbers: 22,046 kids in the system - first time have added kids to the system in 10 years.
- f. Shifting OnePlan symposium to not just be at the end of the year and then have the plan sit on a shelf, and instead regular check-ins and updates on it. Providing coaches for Area Superintendents. Looking at the layers of support that each school needs based on their circumstances (each school may need a different combination of things). Area Superintendents intended to help principals access resources faster from central office.
- g. Other schools are struggling in significant ways compared to Steele - and don't want to forget about Steele. Want to figure out the right balance of support for each school. Driving equity into the system by delivering resources appropriately.
- h. Measuring success in his leadership: being out in the community, and being able to provide resources where they're needed.
- i. Looking into how to find the funding to provide more flexibility for principals to staff their schools. He seems to have identified funding for .5 FTE for each school from the Mill Levy - and it seems that hasn't been distributed throughout the system. Halfway to filling the need for a school like Steele to get their FTE back.
- j. School board hired him to create change - working on executive cabinet, area superintendents to deliver that message. Then on to the principals, teachers, families.
- k. Parent question about Taylor closing? No school closures in the first year.
- l. Pathways - how can we build backward from what the high schools offer to create similar pathways from elementary level. IB program at Palmer doesn't have the enrollment it should for a district of our size, and want to invest in that. IB is a well-rounded program - teaches kids how to learn, vs. AP-driven, specific skills/knowledge. Could get a high performing elementary school to step into that place. Need to put some rigor into the system so parents can understand how to navigate it.
 - i. Needs to be a marriage between school's ability to implement a pathway and the community's interest in it. Not pitting schools against each other as happened last year with the Pathway process.
 - ii. Is Steele interested in an IB pathway? (For future discussion at SAC and within the building.)

5. Snow days converting to remote learning / quality instruction discussion

- a. Parent question: Fundamental issues with inequities we dealt with before, and more remote learning doesn't solve the problem. More likely to end up with students who are already struggling continuing to fall behind.
- b. Mr. Gaal: Can't come to a system that's so far behind and just give free days off. Colorado Department of Education limits us to 5 remote learning days/year. Not trying to force teaching when there's a catastrophic situation. Realistic calls based on the weather in our district (vs. Monument Hill), using 2 hour delays where that's appropriate.

- c. Teacher question: Are you expecting outcomes from remote learning? Given all the challenges with it during Covid? Mr. Gaal: Not trying to push for outcomes. What I want to do is identify and overcome barriers - e.g. making sure all kids have Chromebooks, Wifi access. Recognize he may lose some trust with adults - given lots of freedom to principals to implement what works for their schools. Want to know what the issues are, what's not working. Will keep a close eye on how it's working.
 - d. Parent comments:
 - i. Concerns about how remote learning works (or doesn't) for younger kids (K-2) compared to high school students. Older students are used to engaging online, can self-manage. Younger students aren't used to logging on regularly - would be a heavier lift for parents (if their devices even get home).
 - ii. What are the expectations about how much time kids need to be online, vs. doing asynchronous work? Some facetime to start the day, ideally some canned lessons ready to go.
 - iii. Concerns about burden on teachers, especially those with their own kids who will be on remote learning and need management. What if teachers need to get subs on those days? Mr. Gaal: Feel we can be flexible enough to adapt to those needs 5 days per year. This isn't an accountability drill. Just asking what if we had 176 contact days per year. The inequities are in the system regardless of snow days. Biggest challenge is getting adults in the right places - inequity in filling the positions across the district (Steele is not a school with multiple open positions). How can we take the strongest leaders and help them to fill the gaps across the system. Don't want to ask for forced placement, moving people around as happened last year. Have to be able to break the patterns of how things have been done.
 - iv. Mr. Capp shared high-level what the remote learning plan will look like at Steele: Staff team has built a 2-tiered plan, K-2 first, then 3-5 to stagger online access and kid management. Will put that out on Thursday and parents can respond with questions and feedback to Mr. Capp after that (and we can circle back at December SAC).
6. **December meeting plan** - Our usual SAC time falls during winter break. We will plan to meet on **Tuesday, December 13 at 5-6pm**, before the PTA meeting to continue the discussion on many of today's topics.