Minutes for October 12th, 2010

Attendees:


Introductions and Icebreaker:

Approval of Minutes from June, August and September: Approved.

Announcements: Talents Night: Set for February 11th.

Consensus Model:
The model, according to the bylaws, was explained.

Treasurer’s Report (Chris Budd and Nova Herzog)
Budget needs more work before approval tabled until next month.

Principal’s Report

New Staff: Thornton Creek has a new School Assistant! Rae Keyes started her new position earlier this month. Jenny Evans has accepted the position as School Secretary following Lin Sullam’s retirement.

Checklist for Alternative School Self Assessments: The Cohort for Alternative Schools and the Alternative Schools Coalition met with Susan Enfield on September 30th to go over the C.54 Quality Indicators. The Board had asked that an audit be done of the alternative schools, but due to district budget cuts, schools are going to do their own assessment using an agreed upon format that will be approved by the CFO and the school board. The alternative school groups are going to work on developing a survey, using the C.54 Quality Indicators, for alt schools to use as their “self-study” and hopefully commence the Self Studies by the Spring and submit report of the findings to the School Board the CFO and the Superintendent by late May. John hopes that parents will attend the upcoming Town Hall meeting regarding the self-study to offer feedback. This meeting will take place on December 2nd in the School Cafeteria.

The committee will also be meeting with Tracy Libros, the head of Enrollment and Planning, to work on the distinction between Alternative School Format and Option School Format some time in October.
The September Teacher in-service day:  A great day learning with Roger Kukas, artist and educator, trained staff on Scientific Drawing and expressing math concepts using visual art, esp. fractions. Journaling and recording as part of what the kids are learning in their expeditions.

Special Ed PTA: John asks Site Council Parent Group to form a connection to partner with Special Education PTA “Linkage” to address the growing needs within our schools. Would a parent be willing to coordinate this?

Zone Crew: Working on small repairs needed around the facility, plumbing, patching floors, walls and ceilings.

Principals In-Service day: Spent an hour and ½ so discussing Article written by Stanford Professor, on Effort and Intelligence. Research shows that long term success in school, work and life has more to do with “effort” rather than intelligence.

Map Testing: Should be finished by Tuesday of next week. John’s observation was that the K-2 with the auditory support seemed to line up nicely with their skills. But he has concerns about the 3-5 in reading that the students were be taken to a point of frustration and failure, since the test attempts to dynamically test each student based on individual aptitude.

Hourly hire to proctor the MAP Test in the future. John’s time was consumed by administering the map tests over the entire three-week period. Need to train a person and have them proctor the exams. 3x per year 3 weeks each time. 9 weeks per year. And he is requesting site council to provide funding for a designated Proctor. Because of the integral value of library time for Thornton Creek students, John opted for testing the kids in the performance space so that the Library didn’t need to be closed for 9 weeks per year.

Thornton Creek Staff Response to New Contract with the District and MAP Testing: Presented by Rebecca

The MAP test is tied into the current Teacher contract and there are strong implications for measuring a teacher’s effectiveness via the MAP test scores. What is the purpose of a quality assessment? Rebecca emphasizes that an assessment at the level of each individual child is critical in order to determine their learning needs and current skill level. The purpose of the MAP test is theoretically designed to help target teaching to make it easier for teachers to determine these needs more quickly and easily. The MAP test does not provide data that is as valuable as the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). Teachers use a variety of methods to understand the thinking and individual needs of a child. Individual assessment can be formal or informal. For instance finding out a “just right reading” book for a student based on the “5 finger rule.” Is the student having a problem with skipping words, problems with fluency? Retelling? An eye tracking issue?

The district formerly used the DRA: 10-20 minute 1:1 assessment with each child. In Rebecca’s view this was a valuable assessment but is no longer required by the district except for 2nd grade. And instead is emphasizing the use of the MAP test as a method for assessing each student’s individual needs. However, the test results do not provide enough insight or detail for where a child is having problems.

The MAP tests are given on a tight, inflexible schedule, and unfortunately for Rebecca’s class the test was scheduled at 9:30 A.M., 10 minutes after school started for the day, which was the day after Curriculum Night, where many of the kids had babysitters and got to bed very late the night before. Many were tired and groggy. Every student had a different question pop up. They couldn’t show their work and Rebecca couldn’t monitor which types of questions each child was grappling with or the child’s thinking.

During the testing each student entirely different questions from one another. If there was a problem during the test, it was nearly impossible to find out if the problems were “wording issues” of how the question was asked or was it that the student understood the question but just didn’t know the answer.
The kids are forced to answer the question in order to move forward. If they guessed correctly, the next questions were even harder to both understand the question and also to try to figure out the correct answer.

The children also were frustrated that if they clicked the wrong button accidentally they could not go back to change their answer.

Quote from one of Rebecca’s 3rd grade students: “I answered three questions right and after that I could no longer understand what the questions were even asking.”

Here are a few of the most appalling questions that were asked of the 3rd graders:

- “Which 1st line of a novel is written in 2nd person?” The choices of novels that were given were: “Hitchhiker’s Guide”, Adams, “The Metamorphosis” by Kafka, “Asleep in Frog’s Pajamas” and “The Little Prince.”
- “Which best explains the effect of tone on the reader’s understanding of the poem?”
- A series of questions referenced a piece about Adolf Hitler and the Communist Party. (The complexity and the very content being presented to 3rd graders as a test item.)
- “Why does a Poet compare the music of a drum to a ruthless army?”
- “In evaluating the credibility of a website for research which probably contains the least reliable information?” Answers: A government site, A University site, A company site, A signed homepage?

Because the students are forced to guess, if they guessed correctly, the questions got even harder to understand.

Not only does the MAP testing take a long time and a log of energy it has serious implications for our school district. The results have severe implications for principals. How is it being used to assess schools principals and teachers? That the MAP is being used as a method for assessing teachers is frightening given it’s shortcomings in providing a fair and realistic assessment of the kids at an appropriate grade level.

**Feedback from the teachers in presence:**

**Liz:** There was no button for “I don’t know” so some students had ethical issues about faking their answers and were frustrated at being forced to answer. The questions started at an extremely high level. The students gave earnest efforts during the last hour of the day when they were scheduled after a long day working on a project at the local food bank. This test was a degrading experience for the students. Having walked into the test environment with an open mind, she emerged from this experience upset on behalf of the kids, and followed up with careful and thoughtful apologies to the students. She explained to the Site Council how horrifying the experience was and that this test is entirely against how teachers are trained! We would never choose to test kids in such a defeating manner, dumping completely foreign and sophisticated material upon them, and forcing them to continue guessing at answers.

**Sandra:** Our job here as educators is to teach children how to learn and teach them responsibility of how to learn. Giving them opportunities to reflect upon their work. Sandra is fine with the concept of Standardized Testing but something that allows the students to go back to previous questions and think about their answers. She believes that her kids did quite well under the circumstances, however, her top math students thought that they had “failed the test” and were very upset.

**Marcia:** Resource Teacher view of the test: The first day. The kids got the results but they ended up comparing their numbers to each other. Which pond has fewer ducks, which one has a few more. Do the
Kindergarteners really have a concept of “fewer” vs. “more”. There were questions asking Kindergarteners to finish the equation. Testing the Kindergarteners was traumatic for them. Most of them had never even used a computer. Marcia has spent most of the past 3 weeks administering the test. And is not happy about taking so much time to proctor the test and not teaching the kids! ¼ of the school year is spent on testing. Tiny microphone icon and so many kids needed help using the mouse to be able to click on it. So many were unable to do it without help and didn’t even have a basic understanding of how to use the computer.

G. Allemann: Is the test in compliance with IDA (students who are disabled), This test is now a gate keeper for Spectrum, APP. Also, how is it being used to evaluate teachers, and what percentage of their evaluation. Merit pay?

What other districts use MAP? And HOW do they use it and apply it?
John answered that many states use it. It is created by NWEA. Compares Seattle kids against a national norm/age.peers. Doesn’t know if the test data has been validated to be used for the proper assessment of teacher effectiveness.

Nora: I did not use it to inform instructions. No idea what questions were so how to target, no practical feedback is given to students. No time chance to reflect on questions.

Mari: Go On button is too tiny way at the bottom of the page. Many Kindergarten kids had a difficult time. Especially kids with neurosensory issues. The headphones were uncomfortable for them. The DRA is much more effective and also helps build the teacher/student relationship.

Jeanne: Forcing kids who would normally not be spending time on the computer who didn’t know how to use the computers. Once student’s father worked with his child to help give him comfort but several Kindergarteners do not have access to computers in the home.

Parent feedback about their child’s MAP test experience:

That Teacher evaluation would be tied to a computer based test is upsetting. Why is the district endorsing such a lack of confidence in teachers? Our district Superintendent was on the board of NWEA that endorsed this test contract with the district. (She has since resigned from the Board).

Appalled that the multi-million dollar contract with the NWEA it was selected via a “no-bid” contract (millions of dollars!) with the district. High stakes test for 5th Graders because it can determine their placement. And whether the child will even be allowed to take the tests for Advanced Placement. Teacher’s recommendation can also impact placement but since the MAP test results disallows the student from taking the Advance Placement what are the chances for that child?

Child rushed through tests because he thought it was a “race.”

Upset that MAP is now being used beyond it’s designated purpose. Upset that it’s being used as a high stakes test for 5th Graders because it can determine their placement for the rest of their school career. Teacher’s recommendation can have some impact on placement but will it be enough if they don’t do well on the MAP?

Upset that it replaced the DRA, the huge amount of time it distracts from learning and from the teachers being encouraged to use 1:1 assessments. Opt child out? What if it penalizes John, or my child’s teacher. Putting parents between a rock and a hard place forcing them to choose the best interest of their child and penalizing their teachers and Principal.

Don’t want to use parent dollars to fund a proctor for a test that we all seem to have an ethical and philosophical issues with. Where it doesn’t even help us parents with our child’s learning needs.

Child was extremely frustrated and discouraged. Didn’t understand words, directions, what she was supposed to do. Doesn’t sound like the results will be helpful as a parent, or for the teacher.
Volunteer Proctor, or schedule of volunteers to even just help kids with getting the volume right. Half the kids needed help with that.

Child said it was “boring,” later found out that she didn’t know any of the answers. She had problems using the computer. So we have started allowing her to play video games at home. But she has asked to never take the test again. And she didn’t want her teacher to see her scores because she felt she was smart enough to be in 2nd grade but the test was too hard for her.

Make the tests more comfortable for the kids. Also angry that the product and data that isn’t validated and being applied beyond it’s intended use and design. Holds the district and the school Board accountable that the district is irresponsibly wielding it to use against the teachers and principals.

Time and a place for computer skills should be later in academic career. Grade school too soon to have these kinds of expectations. Assessed using a tool that isn’t a tool that is used at home. And the test scores for my 5th grader will not reflect actual aptitude. As a result worried about child not making it into spectrum testing as a result of low test scores on the map. How much weight is actually placed on teacher recommendation in terms of getting into spectrum.

Test needs: Pass Button, and Time Allowances and allowing the teachers see the questions and more detailed view of the data.

Harium’s Comments:

The ship has sailed and the district will continue to use the map. Computer reliability. The Board believes that the test is valid. The MAP, vs. the WASL, which took too long to get data so wasn’t a good teacher assessment aid. Learning how to interpret the data that is being provided is where the rubber meets the road. Upon hearing that the data isn’t valuable: Does everyone understand the information that is available? Can bring suggested changes to the software company. Make recommendations to John and have him pass along.

No plans to survey the teachers for their feedback about the test at this time. District is looking to see how schools are physically set up, and assess the differences in test results for schools that have resources computer labs, and those that don’t.

Q: Why are we “locked” into using MAP?
A: Harium answered that it’s a multi-year contract.

Q: How was it selected and why?
A: The Team comprised of district staff was put together to find a good assessment tool. First they developed the criteria. This team was formed before Harium joined the school board. They looked at other tools also and asked other school districts of our size what worked for them. The Team presented the options to the Board but stated that the NWEA Map test was the only one that met their “criteria.” The Board voted on a “yes” or “no” basis on this Test system only. No vote commenced for any other Test Packages that the team had evaluated. This is why it was a “no bid” contract.

Q: Many 1st graders had never used a computer before and the students had a difficult time taking the test. Why we are using the software for purposes for which it isn’t designed such as assessing schools teachers and principals.
A: This is being used as only a piece of a large puzzle, using Charlotte Danielson Model. Worked collaboratively with teachers for 2 years. Will help struggling teachers get the support that they need also. Harium would not approve of using the test for a 50% teacher assessment.
Q: A teacher pleaded to Harium to encourage the Board and the rest of the district to ask the Teachers how “formative” the test actually is. Please poll the teachers in a scientific manner and ask the teachers how the test is helpful to them in instructing their students and if it has changed their teaching. There are reviews and reports such as the Virginia papers and Stanford papers that really question whether it is a valid test for teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

A parent stated a request to Harium that ALL students in Seattle Public schools be tested for Spectrum. Map is being used as a “filter” and may be disenfranchising our most vulnerable students.

K-2: 2 in reading 2 in math, 35 questions.

3-5 55 math questions 42 reading questions. An hour wasn’t enough time to complete the questions for most students at these grade levels.

**Meeting Adjourned at 9:00pm.** (Harium Martin-Morris from the school board met with the teacher’s who were in attendance right after the meeting)