

LAUREL PTO GENERAL MEETING MINUTES

Date: December 2, 2004
Location: Laurel Library
Submitted By: Lexi Bisbee
Board Attendees: Shari Conrad, Jeannie Cole, Karen Iyer, Lexi Bisbee, Jen Novak,
Julie Roth, Nancy Hendry, Paula Hughes, Christie Tonsfeldt

Jen convened this meeting at 8:35 AM.

Guest Speaker: Assistant Superintendent Jo Sauer Mitchell

Jo Mitchell attended our PTO General Meeting to speak on topics of interest to the PTO membership.

Kindergarten Study:

Jo described the study that is currently underway. The goal of the study is to look at the best practices for the structure of the kindergarten day. The study will not focus on the curriculum, which is considered to be working well.

The full-day Kindergarten pilot at Oak Knoll is working well so far. With no addition to the curriculum, the longer day simply allows the teachers to slow down the pace of the day.

To complete the study, the district is analyzing research, looking at models at other schools, and considering needs of our families. It is possible that the final recommendation may be a mixed model, offering parents options. At this point nothing has been ruled out. The goal is to complete the investigation by March. The implementation time frame depends on the complexity of the model adopted.

Foreign Language:

The district is going through a similar process with foreign language. The district is seeking to determine why we are not teaching foreign language to younger elementary kids. At the early elementary level, there are two ways to approach foreign language instruction: 1) culturally in a social studies context, and 2) direct language instruction with either daily lessons or full immersion.

There are many issues surrounding the choices here. First, younger children pick up sounds easier, so it would appear to be beneficial to start instruction earlier. However, to teach the language directly, we raise the issues of how do we fit this into the school day on a daily basis. Something will have to be taken out to make room. Also, to add 20 minutes of language a day, we will need to add at least five more teachers. And, we probably do not have the necessary number of students to do a full-immersion program.

Other questions include:

1. Why should we do it?
2. Does starting in upper elementary prove to be an advantage?
3. What happens downstream through high school?
4. Which language?
5. How do we get teachers?
6. Should we simply continue the Berlitz program?

At this point there is no time frame for answers. The study is exploratory.

Technology:

The district has another study running to evaluate the best ways to use technology for instruction and to determine how useful it is in lower elementary education. A consultant was brought in to do an appraisal. She looked at: 1) access to technology and support, 2) the vision of the district, and 3) how it is being used.

The results of the appraisal highlighted the following:

1. We have a great infrastructure already in place.
2. However, the kids aren't using it much.
3. The district and teachers have no clarity on why we are using technology and what we expect to accomplish with it.

The district understands that technology is ever-present in our children's world, and that it can be used as more than just a "glorified pencil and paper." There are ways to leverage learning with technology as a tool. To this end, the district has launched a study to provide the clarity on why we are using it and what we expect to accomplish.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20.