

CSC Meeting Notes Hamilton Middle School

Date: February 11, 2020

Time: 5:30-7:00 pm

Location: Hamilton Conference Room

Present: Dr. Christian Sawyer, Heather Wilson (Chair), Carolyn Leahy, Robyn DiFalco (secretary), Melissa Megliola, Natasha Forrest, Martha Gomez, Nilka Kentish by phone

Absent: Trista Fussner (at SeaCamp)

Guests: Rhonda Keel (6th Grade Dean), Patricia McDonald-Morland (7th Grade Dean), Michelle Powell (8th Grade Dean), Monica Snyder (parent)

AGENDA

1. Welcome, agenda, norms and roles, opening rituals (5 mins)

- Observer: Martha

2. Introducing ourselves to our guests

3. Presentation on School Culture Improvements - with guest Presenters: Our Hamilton Deans: Rhonda Keel (6th Grade Dean), Patricia McDonald-Morland (7th Grade Dean), Michelle Powell (8th Grade Dean)

- We've done a lot of work on School Culture improvements, over the past few years but especially this year.
- We started the year with some professional development and training, all staff reading the book Culturally Responsive Teaching by Zaretta Hammond. This book study has really improved relations between students and teachers, as well as between teachers. Helped teachers engage with students better and to better understand biases we each might have.
- A key talking point is to build up relationships between teachers and students. Relationships are a key foundation to stronger academics. Really making connections with students, simply taking time at lunch to ask them about their likes and dislikes.
- When addressing behavior and academic issues, the teacher perspective in the classroom is so valuable. This year the sharing between Deans and Teacher collaboration has really improved, partly due to the schedule change that allows all staff to meet in the mornings, rather than try to chase each other down to connect in the afternoons. Teachers and Deans are problem-solving together.
- The MTSS process (Multi-Tiered Systems of Support) is moving in a positive direction this year, with more family involvement in the process. Discipline is not really the right word; it's more about providing support to students in addressing behavior or academic challenges. The Deans are not just calling about problems; they're calling parents when positive progress is happening. They're also learning if something's going on at home that's affecting school-life.
- How does the process begin? I can either be academic or behavioral. Teachers do a referral or recommend the involvement of the MTSS team. For example a student might get assigned to Lunchtime "Academic Zone" to get the support they need in certain classes. There are Math Fellows and other certified teachers there to help kids. After the referral process, there are parent meetings, an Action Plan, and Progress Reports. Over 4 weeks, we see how it's going. If the student is still struggling, we get the S-team involved, that's the Counselors and Social Workers. And it always starts with a student interview so the student is involved in the process.

- We're gathering data and tracking with measurable metrics, studying the impact and the data to see what's working and what needs to be tweaked.
- We also have Behavior Support from 2 Behavioral Technicians from DPS who bring expertise and have been great resources. If the first approach hasn't worked, they can advise on some alternate strategies based on their professional experience and training so we can revise the strategy.
- We may decide that a 504 is needed for a student who has "fallen through the cracks" with an undiagnosed learning disability or ADHD. That means we get in writing the accommodations that can help a student make it through class or have modified testing conditions.
- The Husky Success Center in room 103 started in late November. This is a space for Restorative Practices and the faculty identified this as a need. This allows for a disruptive student to be removed from the class, to this Center, where they can get support to regroup, reflect and prepare to re-enter that class the next day. This means that student gets the support they need, and the rest of the students and the Teacher can move on with learning/teaching. The student will write about what went wrong, how they'll conduct themselves differently in the future, etc. Some kids need to be escorted, by a Dean or security officer, while others can just go there on their own. The key is having a session to resolve issues before the student returns to that classroom.
- Question about teachers having different expectations, tolerances, management styles. "The Hamilton Way" is something that outlines appropriate behavior expectations school-wide and that is emphasized at the beginning of the school year and throughout the year -- posted in all classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, etc. And there is The "Positive" Hamilton Way where students can get rewarded, earn badges to buy things at the school store. There's also the "disciplinary" Hamilton way that clearly outlines the consequences of a first strike, second strike, etc.
- Celebration: We're trying to highlight the bright spots whenever we can through fun events like cultural celebrations and assemblies, talent shows, movie days, shout-outs, and on-track field trips. Question about emerging science on how people respond to rewards/awards, particularly when they get recognized for just doing what they're supposed to be doing. Discussion about trying to incentivize/motivate students who need it with positive reinforcement.
- Attendance is one of the biggest challenges, especially with 8th grader "senioritis" -- Our current 8th grade group has shown the greatest improvement, after they've been part of these rewards/incentives for their entire 3 years at Hamilton. This class has a 62.3% improvement rate.
- Next Steps: Moving Forward -- This Friday on the Teal in-service day, we're doing our own Hamilton-only training on Microaggressions, rather than go to the DPS training. We're tightening hallway passing period systems, focusing on teachers engaging students during the first 5 minutes, creating a welcoming atmosphere in the classroom, Refine & improve restorative practices, and keep improving cross-collaboration across staff roles.
- Questions? Comments? Suggestion that with our new IB implementation, this may enhance student engagement with project-based learning and help students feel motivated, enjoying school more. Question about whether we're seeing better stats on bullying, fighting, suspensions, police called to campus. Yes, we have seen that fighting and bullying is down, suspensions are down overall but are holding steady for students of color. That's not great but at least it's not getting worse. We have seen more "reporting" which is good. For example, students reporting that they heard so-and-so are planning to have a fight after school so we can get some adult intervention.

- It really feels like our efforts on Hamilton Culture are on track! Our focus on whole child, every child means we're putting our resources into these efforts, and the key staff and it's finally really come together this year with tangible results!
- Last thought: Our communication home to parents has really been successful this year. Instead of calling home to just report the problem, we have a script that outlines all the supports we can offer and asks the parents how to help us help the student. The conversation is different now. Also, we even have kids asking how they can get into Academic Zone and coming voluntarily because they know they need help to get on track. This may be because of athletics and they don't want to get benched from the game. Actually our Athletic Director has been great about emphasizing this & working with the rest of the Hamilton team to have consequences and make sure athletes are on track.

4. Budget Update

- *These notes are not public and therefore not included in these notes.*

5. Open Topics (quick list of things we'd like to discuss, put up on board)

- *With only 15 minutes left in the meeting, let's just take 5 quick minutes on each and then come back to things that need more time.*
- **School Uniforms / Attire Policy** -- teachers have been saying they want to see school uniforms as an equalizer, to prevent bullying, increase school unity, reduce the haves vs have-nots. Input from several DSC Members was quick to say that's a deal-breaker and they, as parents would not send their student to a school with uniforms; it squashes individuality and personal identity which is so important to students at this age. Other members expressed that it wasn't necessarily a "deal breaker" but a "strike against" a school when considering options. Another sentiment was that as a teacher, having experienced uniforms at another school in DPS, enforcement was a constant, daily, nightmare for teachers and staff alike. It is also a cost challenge for some families. And even if every student has an identical uniform, there's always someone with the expensive shoes, jacket or other accessories. Dr. Sawyer says he will share this input and more discussions will happen but that a decision will need to be made by next month.
- **Adding World Language, possibly Arabic** -- Since we need to add a 3rd language teacher, we have the option of offering a 3rd language, possibly Arabic since we have a significant Arabic-speaking population in SE Denver AND we already have an Arabic-speaking French Teacher. Input was that we should probably focus on offering a Heritage Spanish class (for native spanish speakers to become truly biliterate in Spanish). Having those native-Spanish speakers mixed in a beginning Spanish class with non-native peers really isn't a good fit. We have approximately 30% of our population are native spanish speakers so that would be amazing to offer them that option. Maybe we could also offer Arabic as an option, or a heritage-Arabic class for native Arabic speakers. Another consideration is "vertical alignment" with the high schools that currently do not offer any language besides French and Spanish. But maybe we could collaborate with other schools in getting that vertical alignment started, since SE Denver is the primary area for Arabic-speakers in Denver.
- **Recruitment/Retention & Communications/Branding** -- This topic really merits additional time so we decided to schedule time for this at our next CSC meeting in March, and be sure to include Madeline our Marketing/PR person so we can get some strategic planning to happen.

Next Meetings: Tuesday, March 10 from 5:30 - 7:00