

Meeting Notes

LD@LAB

Tuesday, November 1, 2005

Paula Worthington started with a few announcements: website not up yet, but promised for soon; November 29 program on *Schools Attuned* program is set. Next, P.W. introduced our guests: Jennifer Gates, Susan Olander, Susan Eisenberg, and Maureen Schmidt.

We heard from the lower school first:

Reading and math: Susan Olander, learning specialist, described how she spends her time in various classrooms: for example, each 3rd and 4th grade classroom teacher has two “slots” of her time each week, which can be spent as needed (enrichment, remediation, etc.); during this time, S.O. reaches all students but may pinpoint attention as needed. She also anchors/leads two lunch-time math clubs in this age group, one with an enrichment purpose, the other with a remediation focus. “Membership” in the clubs is fluid, changing over time as needs change. On reading instruction: reading specialists Connie Barrett, Molly Day, and Kay English are also an integral part of Lab’s reading program and support. In first grade, children are “pulled out” in small groups (typically 4 students) for instruction; “reading recovery” program (Connie Barrett) is one-on-one. Students may come and go in these groups as needs change. By third grade, groups tend to be more formalized, with focus on either comprehension, fluency, or decoding, depending on students’ needs. In fourth grade, reading support becomes more inclusionary with less (none?) pull-out instruction.

Big picture: Jennifer Gates, learning consultant, described the different responsibilities of her position, emphasizing that all students in the lower school are “on the radar screen,” not just those with specific, identifiable learning disabilities. J.G. acts as a resource collaborator and case manager; does assessments of students; and oversees the lower school’s formal assessment programs (standardized testing, end of first grade reading assessments, etc.).

Staffings: S.O. and J.G. emphasized that there is no formal “template” and that each one is different, as it is individualized for the student and his/her circumstances. Staffings are opportunities to share information; incorporate the views of tutors; review/discuss outside evaluations; discuss transitions (e.g., to new grade); brainstorm/problem-solve; and/or make specific plans.

Role of parents: S.O. emphasized that parents must be advocates for their child and must support the “drill and practice” work needed to reinforce concepts/ideas from school (e.g., math facts, reading daily, etc.). Parents also need to identify their child’s affinities and strengths and nurture them.

We next heard from the middle school:

Susan Eisenberg and Maureen Schmidt, learning consultants, described their roles in supporting students with learning differences in middle school. S.E. laid out the process by which they track

and monitor students' progress through the middle school, beginning with spring of the fourth grade year, all the way through eighth grade. S.E. communicates with teachers and parents at regular intervals (tied in part to grading periods) to monitor progress and share information, and she meets regularly with groups of teachers to discuss students. M.S. described the study skills class offered to some students, who under certain circumstances opt out of foreign language class to take her course. The study skills class offers support for the curriculum and homework help. By eighth grade, the goal is for students to be responsible and independent learners who know to take advantage of all the support and help available to them (office hours, tutorials, etc.). S.E. and M.S. noted that much of this material was included in the November 2005 "On the same page" column from David Magill, Director of the Lab Schools, and available on-line at <http://www.ucls.uchicago.edu/about/welcome.shtml>

Note that this piece complements the October column written by Jennifer Gates, available at <http://www.ucls.uchicago.edu/about/message/1005.shtml>

A lively question and answer session followed to close out the evening: Could/should lower school parents be notified when their child is the subject of discussion at various meetings of teachers and learning and counseling staff? How has current research in reading pedagogy affected the Lab school's approach to reading instruction? How and when does the Lab school screen or try to identify children at risk for developing reading problems? How can foreign language teachers be more involved in discussions of students with learning challenges?

Notes prepared by Paula Worthington