

School Board Meeting:

December 13, 2010

Subject:

Quest Program progress report

Presenter:

Pam Miller and Laura Halldin

SUGGESTED SCHOOL BOARD ACTION:

Report only; no recommended action (at this time). Action will be taken at the next school board meeting.

DESCRIPTION:

Following the approval of the school board in January 2010 to launch the Quest Program for highly gifted students in September 2010, planning went into high gear. Letters were sent to students who appeared to be likely candidates, with publicity about the program placed in the district *Insider*, the *Wright County Journal Press*, and in other local newspapers in neighboring communities. 95 students in grades 3, 4 and 5 applied for the program. Following assessment and a meeting of a group of decision makers who reviewed the student data, 23 future 6th graders were offered placement in the program (one declined) and 28 future 4th and 5th graders were offered placement (two declined.)

Quest classes at TES and BCMS are alive with energy. The 22 sixth graders and the 26 4th- 5th graders are actively participating in a multitude of stimulating learning activities. 6th graders will be attending an orientation at the Minnesota History Center to learn about History Day. All of them will research and prepare a project that meets the History Day Guidelines. 4th-5th graders recently conducted a mock trial when learning about European explorers in the new world. They followed this activity with a research project on explorers producing an I-movie. Lively discussions of challenging novels, poems and essays abound. Students are doing homework – for many of the students this is the first time they have had to spend time doing homework, and it is proving to be a challenge. They have to organize their time to get studying done.

The grades 4-5 classroom at Tatanka Elementary School is taught by Laura Steabner. She is teaching a combination of accelerated district curriculum in math and science and curriculum units designed by the College of William and Mary for gifted learners for language arts and social studies.

The 6th grade classes at BCMS are taught by Wendy Whitmore (students accelerated to pre-algebra); Eric Cagle (students accelerated to life science); Teresa Corfman (students using William and Mary English units); and Natalie Hagberg (students using enhanced 6th grade world history curriculum.)

Feedback from parents is generally positive. Survey data, which reflects parent impressions regarding the launching of the program, was collected over the last 3 weeks. The complete results of the survey are attached to this report. Parent

responses were overwhelmingly positive regarding the program staying focused on the stated goals, providing appropriate curriculum, students having positive interactions with one another, assignment of appropriate homework, teachers meeting student academic and social-emotional needs, and parent willingness to recommend the program to others.

An advisory task force including teachers, administrators and parents met on Wednesday, December 8 to discuss the progress of the program to date and to discuss recommendations to be made to the board in January. These recommendations include the following:

- Expand the Quest Program at BCMS to include grade 7. Students who are currently enrolled in the program and meeting success would be assigned to 7th grade Quest classes in English, science, social studies and mathematics. We would also add any new students who qualify for the program.
- Explore the possibility of adding a grades 2-3 class at TES. The purpose of this exploration would be to determine if we have enough families who would be interested in sending their 2nd or 3rd grade child to TES to participate in a Quest class.
- In order to lend some stability to the Quest Program and encourage enrollment, the school board should make a three-year commitment to develop and maintain the program.

The commitment from the school board would include money for start up costs for the grades 2-3 class and the grade 7 classes. The costs would be quite minimal for the 7th grade classes as much of the curriculum already exists at another grade level. The other cost would be for a grades 2-3 teacher, and some additional allotment for staff at BCMS.

We are currently accepting applications for grades 4-7 for 2011-2012. We are actively seeking open enrollment students through participation with the Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented (MCGT) school options fair that provide information for families about available gifted programs for students. Quest will be featured in the upcoming edition of the district *Insider*, and a press release is being sent to local papers in surrounding communities to inform them about our program.