



**FOREST LAKE AREA SCHOOLS  
FOREST LAKE, MN 55025**

**October 6, 2011**

**AGENDA ITEM: 10.4**

**TOPIC: FIRST READING: PROPOSED 8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE ACCELERATED  
SCIENCE COURSE**

**BACKGROUND:** Junior High accelerated classes have been offered in three of the four core subject areas for many years. Beginning in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, students may be placed in accelerated Mathematics, English, or Social Studies classes. This holds true for 8<sup>th</sup> grade as well. An accelerated Science course is available at 9<sup>th</sup> grade. During the 2010-11 school year, the School Board approved adding .5 credit of science at 7<sup>th</sup> grade. This also brought about changes in elective course offerings in grades 7 and 8. Throughout the discussion that ensued, suggestions concerning the addition of an accelerated Science offering prior to grade 9 were brought forward by parents and staff.

**PROCESS:** The Science Curriculum Review Committee has worked diligently for the past five years in order to keep up with changes in the MN Academic Standards for Science. They have worked to place the standards by grade level at the elementary level and by course/topic at the secondary level. The committee is still about a year away from having the new curriculum units completed at elementary level. With the additional .5 credits at 7<sup>th</sup> grade this year, the team is feeling that alignment at the secondary level is very close.

The Science Review Committee is recommending Board approval of an accelerated course at 8<sup>th</sup> grade, which would be available to 8<sup>th</sup> grade students during the second semester of their 8<sup>th</sup> grade year. A course outline is not attached to this proposal. Work on that outline will occur throughout the 2011-12 school year. The outline will be aligned with the Academic standards currently placed within the 8<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum. Changes in the course outline will include additional research and discussion requirements for students.

The list below identifies the committee reasoning behind this proposal.

- Identification for any accelerated course should be based on student achievement data, teacher recommendation, and student interest. The committee feels that appropriate student achievement data can be gathered by second semester of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade year.

(Over)

- Classroom teachers who are not content specialists deliver science curriculum at the elementary level. While these classroom teachers are dedicated to the delivery, students may not receive the same depth of content knowledge across the district. The Science Committee feels that the content delivered in 7<sup>th</sup> grade should be received by all students, allowing 7<sup>th</sup> grade teachers to fill any gaps they may notice in student understanding up to that point. Because of this reasoning, the committee would not currently propose an accelerated course at 7<sup>th</sup> grade. They would advocate for use of differentiated instruction strategies to provide necessary acceleration or remediation of students in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

- The Science Curriculum Review Committee is proposing that 7<sup>th</sup> grade students be registered for a standard 8<sup>th</sup> grade Science course for the first semester of 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Throughout the first semester, science teachers would proceed teaching the required standards, identifying students for an accelerated course that would begin second semester of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade year. The new course would carry on with the appropriate standards, allowing for more in-depth discussion and research by those students who have shown they are ready for the challenge. Existing staff that had been involved with the regular courses during first semester would be reassigned to teach the accelerated section(s). Students would be recommended for a full year of accelerated Science at grade 9 based on student achievement data and teacher observation.

- The Science Curriculum Review Committee will revisit the idea of offering an accelerated Science section earlier than second semester of 8<sup>th</sup> grade when they have completed implementation of the full year of science at 7<sup>th</sup> grade and have evaluated the curriculum for any necessary modifications.

**RECOMMENDATION:** First reading of a proposed 8<sup>th</sup> grade accelerated science course to be implemented second semester of 2012-13.