

AEC Meeting 10-1-08

Members present: Hina Yousufzai, Mr. Da Sylveira, Ms. Alvarez, Laurie Ferro, Gena Vincent, Dan Puglisi, Ms. Moore
Invitees: Amy Oringer, Jan Landon

Mr. Da Sylveira will e-mail the AEC Findings report of May 2008 to the group.

Introductions

Purpose- To put together criteria for selecting schools that will be visited and to develop a list of questions for these school visits.

Criteria: To visit schools with self-governance and those that has similar demographics. Also visit at least 1 school with a separate leadership council.

Janet Landon is a teacher from Orville Wright Middle School and was one of the members of the AEC team for that school. She was invited to share her experience on that team with the Cowan AEC team in order to provide us with some guidelines to organize the visits. The following is information that she shared.

The OWMS team visited schools in Oakland. There were two schools that had been formed from the division of one large school. There were vast differences between these schools due to leadership. The school that was successful had a teacher group that was like minded and leadership was unified. The school's curriculum was project based and each student had a 40 minute advisory period. There was a culture of affection amongst community.

During the process of visiting one organization called BAYES. The **Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools** (BayCES) is a nonprofit agency that provides education coaching and related services to schools and districts undergoing reform efforts. This organization encouraged the team to develop a vision first then begin planning the structure. Loyala Marymount Family of Schools and iDesign asked that visioning be done after governance is in place. OWMS began to use their Professional Development time to begin visioning by creating surveys and questionnaires for students, parents and teachers input. It was felt that visioning was a very important part of the planning phase.

It was the opinion of Ms. Landon that more information would come from Charter Schools. One the schools that were visited included High Tech High. This school was located in San Diego and also had a Family of Schools structure. The elementary, middle, and high schools were connected. There was a high level of community involvement. The emphasis was on character building and the school used funds to hire a psychologist to come twice a week. The psychologist created presentations for the parents and placed a strong emphasis on sense of self.

Big Picture Schools had various characteristics and it is important to note that not any one program or school will work for all students. The positive qualities of these schools that should be noted include holistic experiences, a strong emphasis on writing, money was spent on teachers, a culture was created through visioning.

Some obstacles that were encountered by the OWMS AEC team include

- difficulties coordinating schedules between AEC members and between schools.
- there was little time to ask questions. The school that was visited planned out the trip.
- there was little time to prepare for presentations that reported on findings.
- there wasn't enough reporting out

Some suggestions offered were:

- To email questions to the school prior to the visit.
- Ask the individuals at school for a set amount of time to ask questions
- Make contact with teachers with whom you can continue to ask information.
- Utilize team to see more schools by sending fewer members of a team to one school.
- Look for great schools and gather as much information as possible
- Presentations should be meaningful, well planned and relevant.
- Inquire about connections between schools from the Family of Schools member partner.
- Engage community. Have many opportunities for parents to visit during school hours
- Develop organic ways to communicate
- Ask who is behind the success at the school site and where the funding for projects came from

The group discussed criteria to be used in the selection of schools for the first round of AEC school site visits. They are:

1. Elementary school
2. Local geographically (perhaps within 45 - 60 minutes of us)
3. High-performing - API above 800
4. Similar demographics to Cowan (our enrollment is approximately 458, our student population is approximately 5% Asian, 62% African American, 7% Hispanic, and 25% White).
5. High-achieving subgroups and growth in the subgroups over the last several years
- **6. Autonomous governing body.

The next AEC meeting will be this coming Monday, October 6, 2008 at 3:00 p.m. in the school Library. At that meeting, the committee will compile a list of questions to ask during school site visits. The committee will also narrow down the list of schools to be visited, with the goal of scheduling several visits within the next two weeks.