

The Merger of Starr and Longfellow Elementaries into a Theme School

The merger of Longfellow Elementary and Starr Elementary allows the district the opportunity to develop a theme school for the Royal Oak School District. Although Addams will not be considered a magnet school, the research on magnet schools reveals several important findings, which can be applied to a theme-based program considered for Addams:

- It has been noted that magnet schools provided a "high quality" education, measurable by assessments in instruction, curriculum, student-teacher interaction, student learning opportunities and use of resources.
- Eighty per cent of magnet schools had higher average achievement test scores than their district averages for the same grade level.
- Noted in the research was the assignment of an innovative principal who provided leadership in developing curriculum, recruited and motivated staff and sought out school resources.
- There is a high degree of coherence to the magnet school's program, curriculum, and teaching expertise that defines the program.
- District support allows for flexibility with rules, conventions and procedures.

I would like to recommend that the district consider making Addams Elementary a Teaming Building using Longfellow's Pods System for the delivery of instruction. Longfellow has evolved the delivery of instruction to be composed of eight research-based components: early intervention, teaming, looping, multi-age, flexible grouping, content specialization, learning styles and acceleration. Since the inception of the Pod system students have consistently scored above district levels on standardized tests. More importantly, the staff has been able to quickly and effectively identify problem or weak areas in academic achievement and address the situation to show improvement. This has required the staff to look at innovative programs, to research what is available to them and to use resources in a creative fashion. Longfellow introduced to the district the Reading Recovery Program; use of Orton/Gillingham in the general education program, the in-house television show, content specialization for elementary teachers, science labs in the elementary and the use of SOAR to promote comprehension skills. Emphasis was put on implementing a systemic phonics program in the early grades creating an early intervention program. The philosophy of the pods is *Time on Task and Direct Instruction*. With this philosophy in mind, teachers break down specific skills into smaller tasks, giving individualized instruction and the time to practice the skill resulting in student mastery and successful learning. A direct result of the implementation of the pod system has been the reduction of students needing to be labeled as learning disabled.

Flexible Grouping

Flexible grouping increased student achievement by reducing the disparity in student ability levels, which increased the likelihood that teachers could provide instruction that is neither too easy nor too hard for most students. It allows the teacher to increase the pace and raise the level of instruction for high achievers and provide more individual attention, repetition and review for low achievers. The Joplin Plan is used to group students for reading instruction. This plan assigns students to heterogeneous classes for most of the day but regroups across grade levels for reading instruction. A non-grades plan places students in flexible groups according to performance rather than age, which allows students to progress at their own rate. Frequent reassessment of students and their placement within the groups is on going. To raise the scores of students, individual learning styles were addressed and flexible grouping was incorporated. As student achievement improved, flexible grouping allowed Longfellow to group students with like learning styles, thus creating the opportunity to accelerate high achievers. The ability to accelerate rather than enrich our high performers has attracted recruitment of students from other schools in the district. At the present time twenty percent of the enrollment is made up of open enrollment students.

Looping/Teaming

Looping has allowed students to stay with the same teachers for two years minimally. This eliminates the need for extensive review at the start of the second year. Teachers know where the class instruction ended from the previous year thus increasing instructional time without lengthening the school day. Teachers have a better understanding of their students' strengths, weaknesses, learning styles and personalities resulting in more effective instruction. Research supports that looping: a) improves student achievement; b) increases instructional time particularly during the second year of the loop; c) increases time for slower students to learn basic skills; d) improves relationships between teachers, students and parents; e) lessens student apprehension about the new school year; and f) there is more time to develop positive peer relationships. Teachers work on a three-person team. All three teach a language arts block for fifty percent of the day and then are responsible for one of the content areas, social studies, math and science, for the grade levels in their pod.

Multi-age/Non-graded

To facilitate a more efficient use of time multi-age or non-graded placement has provided Longfellow students a chance to learn from one another, tolerate diversity, and maximize instructional opportunities. Leadership skills, nurturing behaviors and a sense of community are inherent to the multi-age programs. Children who fall behind are not penalized, but rather teachers are more likely to address differences within students and it is more acceptable for students to be achieving at their own levels. The Primary Pod

allows students to have a third semester of kindergarten while also attending a half-day in first grade to receive instruction in the content areas.

Learning Styles

In 2000 Longfellow piloted a non-graded Primary Pod that recognized that children experience success when the learning environment supports their individual areas of strength. The instruction is delivered to match the learning style (auditory, visual and kinesthetic) of the students. Teachers modify their instruction to meet students' varying levels of readiness and interests. The same concepts are presented to all students but the degree of complexity can be modified as can the means teachers use to have students acquire skills and knowledge.

Early Intervention

Longfellow addressed a need in the district a decade ago by creating an early intervention program, that's sole purpose was to eliminate labeling students as learning disabled. The organizational structure of the building was altered at that time to support this program introducing teaming and looping and the multi-age concept. The use of Orton/Gillingham, a phonics program used primarily with learning disabled students, was introduced into the general education program in the lower grades. The district also saw the need to develop an early intervention program as the NCLB regulations started to play a more important role in the delivery of instruction and mandated competency for all students regardless of their label.

Acceleration

Students, who are able to prove mastery of skills, are allowed to move faster than their counterparts who may require more time on task to develop competency. In combination with flexible grouping we are able to provide the ability to move a student to a different grade to receive instruction in their area of strength/achievement. It must be emphasized that all students receive the same curriculum but the degree of complexity can be modified as can the means teachers use to have students acquire skills and knowledge. Advancing a student to receive instruction at their instructional level is used at all grade levels and has allowed Longfellow to offer an in-house program for the talented and gifted child in their home school.

Content Specialization

Teachers at Longfellow are charged with spending fifty percent of the day in a language arts block. All grades must spend at least 45 minutes of that time writing. In the lower grades students receive a fifty-minute Orton/Gillingham lesson everyday, regardless of their learning style. All students are given an opportunity to participate in a guided reading lesson or literature circle. The rest of the day, a teacher becomes a specialist in one subject area, which results in a higher quality of instruction, a rigorous vertical curriculum and more appropriate distribution of resources. This collaboration has united

the staff creating a strong sense of teamwork and encourages innovation in teaching methods and the use of resources. One resource employed very differently at Longfellow is the academic support teacher who works with all students eliminating the pullout program for students who have learning differences.

Recommendation

Upon review of the above, it is hoped that the district will consider designating Addams as a Teaming Building using the Pod System for the delivery of instruction. Attached you will find a data sheet revealing the last three years of Stanford scores for grades one through five. Additional data can be provided upon request. Longfellow is most proud of the fact that less than 2% of their student population is labeled as learning disabled. The implementation of the Pod System is credited with this result.