

Haggerty Middle School Working Group Minutes June 7, 2010

In Attendance: Jeff Young, Cheryl Monroe, Kathy Sampson, Ray McCann, Robyn Gaillard, Mary Ann Fox, Rowan Murphy, Leslie Kramer, Janelle Bradshaw, Kevin McGonegal, Meg Moloney, Mara Levine, Marlene Orellana, Jim Maloney.

Previous meeting's minutes are distributed, tonight's agenda is reviewed.

JY: Gallery walk protocol is previewed: In Gallery Walk, Several options will be presented on chart paper, group members will walk around the room, visit each, and comment via sticky notes. Feedback will be considered for each plan.

JY: Web site for group will provide transparency for the process. All group documents will be shared with the Haggerty community via the Haggerty web site.

JY: Five big themes which surfaced at first meeting:

1. FRC Communication: How can the FRC be more user friendly, more responsive to needs.
2. Potential Peabody/Haggerty connection: How can we cement the relationship (joined activities, visits, teacher exchange) as opposed to it being a "road to travel."
3. Cohort vs. Choice: Advantages/disadvantages in making policy choice that would maintain cohort, versus having choice.
4. The future of Haggerty and its Structure: Should we be a K-5, and how would that impact this issue? (Can past survey results inform this?)
5. Operational Issues: Decisions need to be good for the Haggerty AND for the District. (Enrollments, physical space, budget, etc.)

"Once Around the Table"

Each Working Group member states his/her definition of the problem as well as the most important objective for a successful plan:

Ray M: Parents worry that there is no culture that reflects the Haggerty in 7/8, lack of confidence/predictability for parents.

Kathy: Anxiety about timing: Finding out from FRC in the summer where they stand, while decisions for private schools need to be made.

Robyn: "What comes next" is a big theme for the fifth graders. We need a structure that keeps Haggerty intact.

Mary Ann: Parents have different expectations: some want high achievement, some a "holistic experience" with values, arts, creative thinking, etc. Sister school idea doesn't

work for this on several levels. For many reasons, the sister school will not work for many parents. Our values don't extrapolate to other schools. Students are welcomed into 7/8s in different ways, for some, they find that "everyone's different and you don't belong."

Rowan: There's been no relationship with a MS program that has inspired a majority of parents to send their kids. Parents have developed their own solutions to the problem. We need to find a solution that benefits the majority, and inspires confidence in families.

Leslie: From a teacher's point of view, would not know as a parent where to send her student. High quality, high standards, inclusion, where does that exist? Is there an articulated school vision that aligns well to the Haggerty's?

Janelle: Brought together by interest, and it holds us together. Nearing the MS level, it gets frayed. A solution would keep this bind together through the 7/8 transition. How do we ensure that inclusion practices are the norm throughout CPSD? What does it mean to think about the child in a holistic way, and maintain rigor? Parents look for similar rigor. Worried about sister school and proportion of ISP to general education. Students need opportunities to join larger cohort. Going forward, how do we fit in as a K-6 in terms of stability (students on wait lists early, changing plans during kids' tenure at Haggerty). Other work doesn't get done...

Kevin: From a teacher's perspective...As a specialist who sees all of the kids, it sometimes feels like a "School Interrupted". There is a constant murmuring that happens and has so over time. Time Consuming conversations at the staff and school level. Understand the concerns of the parents, I understand why parents make difficult choices to move in the fifth grade. I think that there is a value to keeping a cohort together over time through sixth grade (30-40 percent); it is helpful to maintain the values of the Haggerty mission. Possible Solution: Parents would stay on through sixth grade when they sign onto the Haggerty. Confidence that they can place their child in a school of their choosing.

Meg: As a former Peabody teacher, she would like to see that vision fulfilled. Having been through a painful "absorption," the adult behavior is worse than the kid behavior. Needs to be conducted by a master with vision and communication skills. Bullying can be enormously destructive at any MS, and when angry adults are involved, it's exacerbated. Adults on both sides need to be passionate, talented, and accepting of the plan, and the kids will be alright.

Mara: If we can make a middle school, just do it. Smaller MS model isn't working, and students are transferring.

Marlene: Student was in Longfellow ISP, then to KLO. Kids were upset about moving, but were resilient. Bickering/finger pointing was among adults and staff, but the kids did fine. Special Education parents at CRLS have had no transition program, and so the kids suffer socially, emotionally, and mentally. Parents are lost in the abyss. Her student has

made great progress here due to support at the Haggerty, and she doesn't see that available at any 7/8. "Where are peers going?," anxiety over losing peer cohort/support. Parents don't want to feel this anxiety; their special education students are very unique, and need support in transitions. (JY: if a school did exist that mirrored our culture, would you want to see all students trucked to it? MO: It's become competitive, and gen ed parents are looking more for academic rigor. JY: parents have fear that their students may fall through the cracks.).

Jim: Confidence seems to be a recurring theme... Parents are concerned around "next steps," and this is seen in the 6-8 years at our K-8s. The perception that the G and P provides the only prelude to an ivy league education is damaging. Sub-group achievement varies at different schools. Parents are concerned about their students' social acceptance/safety. Power of perceptions; the danger of anecdotes... Longitudinally, it's hard to prove that some schools have worse bullying problems than others.

JY: Many other states/communities, you are simply told which school you are going to next.

Cheryl: Student transferred to Baldwin, on an IEP, might have fallen through the cracks. At the Haggerty, this is an accepted thing. Also, leaving the Haggerty is a very emotional process as their cohort broke up across several middle schools. Found out about Baldwin assignment the day before school started. (MO: Put yourself in the shoes of parents of special education kids. We prepare before the school year to help kids assimilate, and it helps so much. How can we prepare if we don't know our assignment until the day before?).

JY: How can you extend the Haggerty experience into the upper grades, if there's not enough room here in this building?

Maryann: If a centralized middle school had a similar mission, this would not be an issue. (JY: Right, but that is a long term solution).

Jim: Controlled choice says you can move whenever you want, though principals would like to see fewer transfers. Retention rate: Not one school had 50% of its K class graduate 8th grade. G and P had 47%, the highest.

Rowan: Child left after 5th grade, spot opened up three days before school started. Small kindergarten led to small cohort. Had a positive experience BECAUSE he was new as cohort at the middle school had grown restless. If managed correctly, it can be a good transition point. Also, parental expectations are high and difficult to manage. Transitions can come quickly.

Jim: Private schools expand at the 6-8 level, it can stimulate "host" students and arriving students.

JY: Jim said one of the best things about “Controlled choice says you can move whenever you want,” but it can also be the worst.

JY: No time for Gallery Wall, but let’s brainstorm possible concrete steps we can take. Say what you want, no criticism.

BRAINSTORM:

- ❑ What if Haggerty Parents didn’t go down to the bottom of the list when they turned down that 48 hour spot? A specialized application for Haggerty students.
- ❑ Case manager for Haggerty 7th graders.
- ❑ Expanding the Peabody MS, no ISP, strands for curricular areas.
- ❑ Make Haggerty K-8, move to Tobin, Tobin moves here.
- ❑ Make Haggerty become model for K-5 schools to feed into a central MS.
- ❑ Two teachers rather than four teachers teaching subjects. Reducing number of teachers student faces up until standalone MS.
- ❑ Moving up timelines of FRC tremendously.
- ❑ Strengthening partnerships; pen-pals across schools. Kids are not strangers when they meet.
- ❑ Would another school be a better match than Peabody? (JY: How important is Geography? JB: Stops at Harvard Bridge)
- ❑ More staff development so that EVERY school is inclusive and has high standards.
- ❑ Implement our IEP/Inclusion training in sister school.
- ❑ Smoother transitions for kids on IEPs. (JY: We talk about transitions because we believe there should be fewer, and they should be managed, but the policy says you can do whatever you want. MAF: You feel like a bad parent unless you get into the game.
- ❑ Build excitement for 6th grade transitions.
- ❑ Case manager/counseling for parents, so their anxiety doesn’t pass down to child. Meeting at end of 4th grade.
- ❑ Collaborating on Science Fair projects and other events may smooth transitions.
- ❑ Non-competitive “Project Adventure” type of activity for merging kids (and adults!)
- ❑ Can we make Haggerty a K-8 school, and manage enrollment down making small cohorts? (ML: Move to Tobin and we could keep cohorts large)

Other comments emerging throughout brainstorm:

JM: Difficult for FRC to predict student lists; no cash deposits like Shady Hill and other private schools.

JB: Some families have space at k/8, but we can’t yet inform them. That should change.

Rowan M: If you don’t take your offered slot, the slot goes, but you stay number one on the list.

ML: Peabody IS working this year for new Haggerty kids.

Rowan: ML means the Haggerty 5th grade kids who joined the Peabody ISP for 6th grade, and there are 10-11 of them making a bit of a cohort.

Kathy: The families of Haggerty 6th graders who left last year said that if their kids didn't get their first or second choices, they would be happy to have their kids go to Peabody.

Rowan: That is not the case with parents of this year's 6th graders because the dynamic at Peabody has changed with two ISP classes now, and only one gen ed strand.

JB: Hard to brainstorm good list when new school may have its own strong culture.

Rowan: Would like to meet another school "in the middle" with our school cultures.

LK: Watching these kids and parents is difficult; how do we manage the anxiety?

Meg: We're partner shopping. Forcing/arranging a marriage might not work; cultivating the interest might be a better strategy... "Speed dating" session?

NEXT STEPS:

JY: This group feels good about exploring a sister school scenario, and there are things we could do to build this into something workable. Some are long term, some short.

JY: Next time, explore in more depth what Haggerty would look like as K-5 and K-6, what the pros and cons are of each.

JB/ML: Is there a district decision to come that will undo our issue?

JY: The hybrid model still calls for some K-5s, some K-8s, but this will take time.

Rowan: So many hybrids and structures (standalone classrooms, etc) makes the "speed dating" idea difficult.

JY: Must identify natural "sisters" to a Haggerty K-5 OR K-6. Must work on paper AND real life.

JB: Difficult for us to discuss sister schools in the abstract (of knowing if we're K-5 or K-6).

KS: Lots of evidence that Peabody was a good second choice for many Haggerty parents.

ML: If and when the Hybrid Plan happens, what is the future for the new Haggerty middle school partnership?

JY: It will not impact the new Haggerty middle school partnership. That will be one of the programs that remains K-8. It will remain intact.

JY: Plan for next time: Don't try to determine what the best sister would be, but add about/develop/refine our list of steps we want to take to strengthen a sisterhood. What would make it work? Some will be short term steps, some long (inclusion, philosophy, mission statement). A good plan, though, has different goals of different sizes. We want a blend. Let your creativity flow!