

Oak Forest Elementary School
SDMC 2/13/2025 Minutes

Agenda:

- 2nd Grade Departmentalized
- GT
- TES
- Additional Concerns

Mr. Casler opened the meeting at 3:20 PM

2nd Grade Departmentalization

Mr. Casler explained the new possibility of 2nd grade going to departmentalization by content. Mr. Casler explained the campus reason for why this discussion started to open. He explained that 2nd grade team and Ms. Hines has thought a lot about this and their reason for why. He explained that they've tried this before and it didn't go as well as before. He explained the commitment that is required from teachers and the buy in from previously. The team at the time didn't like the departmentalization but not this seems to be different for the 2025-2026 school year. He wants the parent, teacher, and community input.

Ms. Kirk, 2nd grade teacher, discussed multiple pros for this reason. With NWEA, the pressure teachers feel with student growth is already at grade level when they come to 2nd grade. They feel as a team, 5 subjects is just not enough opportunity for us to go in depth. We are a community and we meet 2-3 times a week and we still don't have the opportunity to internalize the lessons. Ms. Rangel, 2nd grade teacher agrees with Ms. Kirk. She was able to speak to the past version that the buy in from teachers has to be there for this to be present. They didn't necessarily think about it with commitment. I agree with what Kirk is saying. It is a lot to keep up with the pace of the curriculum. If you were to work on just one subject, you can become an expert. It opens other doors to be able to cater the populations you have. It is daunting having to differentiate for 5 subjects. I know when they come in as a 1st grader, they will likely grow into this transition from one class to another. As a homeroom teacher, we still have our community but now they have another community from the other teacher. Our culture is focused around the community they build around each student. I've asked our 2nd grade team, how are we going to make sure we figure out that the kiddos are still feeling the community feeling. Ms. Hines continues with how this conversation got started. We had some lower grade teachers go see upper grades and they got excited talking to the upper grades who are departmentalized regarding becoming an expert in their content. I've been both a departmentalized and self contained teacher and I'll tell you I always knew my students and who they were and what they needed. If we do this, we aren't just the Kirk team but we are the Kirk and Hines team. We are together with discipline, styles, etc. When I listen to my teachers getting excited with the content , I want to support them.

Mr. Roberts asked a clarifying question regarding 3rd, 4th, and 5th, being departmentalized. Mr. Casler said yes. Mr. Casler said the difference is that it feels like 2nd grade and the development of children still being able to maintain a great 2nd grade. Mr. Casler explained with PD tomorrow, we will break into vertical teams and go deep into ELA and Math.

As parents, what do you think?

Ms. Thompson asked what schools have done it successfully? Ms. Kuo has been a 2 and 3 way split before is a huge advocate for departmentalization and she's also an advocate for SEL.

Ms. Olaloko asked about similar schools who are going to do it next year?

Mr. Casler said not a lot that I've heard have had this discussion, I know West University is not going to be doing this.

Ms. Olaloko asked how teams are determined and the subject that they get?

Based on personalities and this relationship going to look like together. We also look at teachers' instructional strengths.

Ms. Hines mentioned she's spoken to Ms. Rangel, there's always going to be a team even if they are in a different context. We also know there is a lot of planning that has to happen and that is why we are talking about now.

Ms. Rangel said that before we didn't have these sit down conversations. I think this will be successful because this time we were asked, have conversations, and then we get to truly have the buy-in.

Ms. Thompson said I'm going to be very frank, I think parents are really going to hate this. How is this going to benefit our kids? I heard what teachers think but what about kids? Ms. Patel asks, what does this look like with blocks?

Ms. Rhodes asks why wouldn't parents like this?

Mr. Roberts is saying if teachers are saying they need this, why would parents not buy into this? If parents don't know what the teachers are dealing with all the time. They may not like the idea but they aren't at work everyday.

Mrs. Rhodes asked why parents wouldn't like this and Mrs. Thompson said they're little.

Mr. Casler reiterated that let's talk about why we would do this for the kids. Mrs. Rhodes explained that they have more people to care about them. Mr. Casler asked for Wendy Paule's input on this. She explained that it is about connectivity. As I examine and reflect with colleagues and speak with them, we see a slight increase in the schools that are moving to departmentalization. When there is complete and total commitment, and a dedication to the craft of teaching, there seems to be a fairly smooth transition. Quite readily, they become part of a bigger family that they love. I don't see a great concern. You've got more time to expand on the knowledge base and ensure there are great work stations for students at different levels to plan for that.

Mr. Casler explained that communication is big and as we move forward, we will have more discussions on this topic.

Gifted and Talented

Let's talk about our G/T. We have this WINN hour and some students leave the class for intervention and those that are remaining are doing projects, extensions, or things kids are interested in. When people ask us what G/T programming is, we don't necessarily have this unique answer because it is unique. The real answer to having a good gifted and talented program is to have really good teachers. They need the time to build and

facilitate these cultures in their classroom and experiences to flourish. Offering a lot of fine arts and music is also important. This is important because we moved from homogeneous to heterogeneous. We are not fully there yet. I still think it is the right decision but we aren't there yet. I know this can be done right. We committed to the families in this school that we are going to get this right.

Mrs. Thompson explained that the project came home to our kids. In 4th grade it came home and there were some frustrations. Mr. Casler explained that we didn't want to go home. It should be student driven. Mr. Casler explained the vision we see happening in this classrooms on a day to day basis. Mrs. Rhodes explained that she doesn't want the projects to look different but explained an example of how different groups when working on different activities look different. Mr. Casler explained that the campus has grown 14% of students who weren't G/T to being G/T when they left our campus.

TES

Mr. Casler showed a TES video and then proceeded to show rubrics. Teachers and parents asked the following questions:

1. Will teachers be responsible for bringing their own artifacts similar to T-TESS now?
2. Where is the student-centered version of this because this is all teacher-centered.
3. How does intervention work for non-NES campuses if schools are G/T and have different ways of intervention?

Mr. Casler showed the distinction rubric. The following questions were asked:

1. The awards and recognitions are interesting. What does this mean? Teacher of the Year? What else? Will Non-NES schools receive awards?
2. All of us in 5th grade meant that a distinguished teacher is in the classroom and just because you do this extra club doesn't mean you are a distinguished teacher?
3. Could stipends and other things be considered for those above and beyond items? Single parents, parents in general, etc. can't always spend hours upon hours with extra curricular but that doesn't take away from the strong instruction they bring everyday.
4. Do we really have to limit it to just rewards from HISD? If working to be nationally recognized, that is a lot of work as well.
5. How do you quantify the classroom climate or student-teacher relationship?
6. This may cause teacher burnout.
7. How many points are needed to be considered distinguished out of the 17 current criteria?