Notes from Advanced Learning/HC Services meeting

Tuesday, October 22, 2019 | 6:00-6:30 pm | Thurgood Marshall Elementary School Library

Thurgood Marshall PTA Board Co-President Kathleen Lendvay welcomed everyone, introduced guest Wyeth Jessee (Chief of Student Support Services, Seattle Public Schools) and Brandon Hersey (newly appointed District VII Board Member representing SE Seattle who replaced Betty Patu), and introduced topic today about HC/AL services and related questions about HC within STEMbyTAF at Washington Middle School (WMS).

Kathleen Lendvay mentioned the handouts being passed out:

1. Proposed changes to 2020-21 Student Assignment Plan (not available on district website, obtained by a parent through a public records request)
2. TAF FAQs (printed from district website)
3. Proposed Changes to district policy 2190, HC Services and Advanced Learning Programs

Wyeth Jessee said he was invited to this meeting the day before, understanding that it would mostly be around TAF in relation to WMS. He shared that the proposal is to start TAF at WMS in 2020 for 6th grade, and that 7th and 8th grades would remain in the Highly Capable Cohort (HCC) and would not be part of the TAF model. He said that the language around the Student Assignment Plan designates where Student Services are located, and informs the Open Enrollment process, showing which programs are located in which sites. WA state is one of 37 states in the US that recognizes HC services. One of the self-contained HC sites is WMS. TAF requires an integrated approach and will not sign off on the current Highly Capable Cohort model. There are no other plans in relation to TAF being at other HCC pathway sites – it would be a one-off as proposed with WMS. There are other variables at play – the Student Assignment Plan is in progress and there is no signed contract with TAF. Jessee also claimed that 850 students get HC services at a non-pathway site (several parents disputed this, saying that many schools do not actually provide HC services despite having HC students).

Kathleen Lendvay raised some themes from the questions asked in the many emails she has received. One is the question of Professional Development (only 4 days in August that TAF proposes), which has also been mentioned as a concern for WMS teachers she spoke with. How will that be sufficient to provide training and support for teachers for Project Based Learning, integrating TAF’s mission and approach, as well as addressing the huge differentiated learning needs of blended, randomized class assignments including HC students? The question is - Will the HC students receive HC services in this model?

Wyeth Jessee – There has been a lot of going back and forth between the District and TAF. TAF is going to have to have HC services by state law and needs to have a plan for advanced learning. The model will have to go to School Board, including WMS and TAF. He has been in conversations with parents, especially interested in Math (e.g. 6th grade HC students continuing into 8th grade math as they would in HCC, not going into 6th grade Math). He understands this concern but does not know how TAF would address this.

Kathleen Lendvay was wondering what other options have been considered. There are a lot of good things about TAF that seem helpful to students who are underserved in the current model, but how to provide that and address HC remains unclear. There are 309 HC students at WMS and 334 open spots at Meany – has there been any thought to move HCC to Meany?

Wyeth Jessee – it is not on the block to make Meany an HCC site for the 2020-2021 school year, as they are not ready.
Kathleen Lendvay – But are they any less ready than TAF?

Wyeth Jesse – WMS is choosing to do TAF, there aren’t other schools or other programs being considered.

Kathleen Lendvay – That’s not accurate. At WMS, there is a new principal who inherited this and teachers are feeling as new to this as others. The school is not choosing this, the District is.

Wyeth Jesse – The TAF discussion started last year under the previous principal when there were a lot of challenges. But current WMS staff have to support this model for it to move forward.

Questions from Meeting Attendees:

– Why is the change to HCC not happening in the schools north of the Ship Canal? The black and brown students that are in HCC are going to be affected are in the south end. That is not equitable.
– I’m a mom of a 4th grader of color in HCC and I’d like to push back. I can tell horror stories of my child not being recognized as highly capable. Our family had to give him work at home because district wouldn’t give him this work. How would this make it equitable? The District is predominantly white – teachers’ bias doesn’t make them open to seeing kids of color as highly capable. Since my son has been at TM, it’s the first time he hasn’t been bored in class, he’s finally being challenged. It wasn’t happening in neighborhood school model. The only one who recognized it in his neighborhood school was his music teacher. This proposal is not going to address the equity issues. There are far more ranging issues here – e.g. identifying who’s highly capable, the way in which the test is administered.
– Parent: Does Mercer allow you to work ahead? I’ve heard stories of students having to do a year over in Math. Seattle should be providing a higher quality education.
– I second that neighborhood schools are not prepared.
– The fact that this isn’t happening up north is appalling.
– This is how it happens in the District. This room is full of parents. But what would this room look like in the north end? The South End gets shit on all the time. It’s not equitable reasons if the North end isn’t doing this.
– Why is TAF and HCC set up as a zero sum, where only one can exist or the other. Why not both?
– Why isn’t the ability to serve all students at WMS a condition for coming to the table with a contract negotiation with TAF? People feel like we’re guinea pigs. That’s part of history of the district’s South End, feeling like guinea pigs.

Wyeth Jesse – TAF at WMS is born out of issues at WMS – trying to turn around test scores, having the highest degree of suspensions. I hear the mistrust around it and it’s valid. That’s where the conversation is now among the staff - it seems too soon for some of these folks, why not build this up in a slower way. I’m not going to say that that is not part of the conversation. TAF at WMS was taken off of table (for now) in a board committee for the Student Assignment Plan.

Brandon Hersey – The School Board in the Operations Committee took language on TAF out of Student Assignment Plan until it could figure out a clearer pathway forward, for this very reason. As it currently stands, there is no language around TAF in the Student Assignment Plan.

Kathleen Lendvay – The handout is a District proposal that hasn’t yet been voted on.

Brandon Hersey – It’s unfortunate that this conversation has entangled TAF with conversation about Advanced Learning. I would like to not muddy waters further. As it stands right now, TAF right now is not in Student Assignment Plan. We’re not moving forward right now. I’m not saying it won’t move forward though. We are
having these types of conversations, learning from meetings like this. Will take this info and come up with a plan.

**Participant** – What is the timeline?

**Wyeth Jessee** – The timeline would be mid-January for a TAF contract and firm decision. That is the drop dead date due to open enrollment timing. Board has gotten so much feedback that it hasn’t voted to change it now.

**Participants:**

- I’ve heard children in elementary are testing at 3 levels below grade level. That’s where these issues start, that’s where we should be focusing district resources and changing things.
- How about a Strategic Plan for students furthest from educational justice? It should not be acceptable that students are coming into middle school 3 grade levels down.
- HCC is fine, it’s cheap, but we just need to fix identification. We’re being guinea pigged. Why can’t we fix the problem of kids who are not ready?
- How did this meeting come so quickly together? We’ve all made adjustments to get into this program. We want to understand basics of these programs – we couldn’t ask questions at TAF meeting. What’s the HC plan?
- What can we do to have Advanced Learning now north and south of Ship Canal?

**Kathleen Lendvay** – She and other parent saw all these posts on FB and wanted to call meeting so people aren’t relying on FB. Parents need to know what’s happening. The district should be coming to us and asking for input but they aren’t so we set up this meeting just a few days ago because things are moving so quickly.

**Katie May** – We will put something else in place to discuss this further. We are moving into a workshop now is about Equity. Everyone is welcome to stay for the PTA Meeting. I will ask Wyeth Jessee to find out another time to discuss this.

**Wyeth Jessee** – I would like to talk about building equity in HC Services and the issues like students being 3 grade levels below. Happy to come back and engage.

**Participant** - I would like you to have a special meeting to engage families of color inside HC.

**Brandon Hersey**. I also found out about this meeting yesterday. Would like to engage families of color outside HC as well. This conversation is not only about families of color in HC.

**Participant** - How do we follow conversation if not on FB?

**Kathleen Lendvay** - We’re trying to figure that out as a PTA. We don’t have a PTA policy around these issues. We respect that families’ perspectives vary in what benefits their family. The PTA will share info and help you know how to engage. As we find out about District policies, etc, we will update our website, which is tmlink.org. Also will send out PTA eBlasts. These are the mechanisms. When we need a boost, Principal May has a broader list. Occasionally we can also do backpack stuffers to send information on paper.

**Brandon Hersey** – Join me for a community meeting on Thursday, October 31st at Rainier Beach Library from 6:00-7:30 pm.
Kathleen Lendvay – All are welcome to stay for our PTA meeting and workshop with Equity Action Teams. For those who have to go, that’s fine too. We will take a few minutes now to transition to that meeting.

<meeting concluded, 6:35 pm>