

Q & A – Middle School Teaming December 2004

"Belonging within a supportive web of relationships motivates young adolescents to make the effort and to take intellectual risks that produce high-level learning."

Turning Points 2000

Carnegie Corporation and National Middle School Association

Purpose

The Q & A below is intended to provide information about refining and extending middle school teaming structures in the core content areas.

An instructional team is a combination of teachers who work together, across content areas, with a specified number of students. Instructional teams support the academic, social, and emotional growth of young adolescents through:

- Flexible instructional time to meet learner needs
- Opportunities that provide connections across student learning experiences
- Smaller learning communities within schools

Additionally, instructional teams can provide a common planning time to support teacher collaboration.

Background

In March 1996, following broad community research, discussions, and guideline development, the Board adopted the *Guiding Principles for PAUSD Middle Schools* and *Characteristics of Young Adolescents* documents. An implementation status report was presented to the Board in October 2002 with a consolidated list of next step recommendations that included:

- Design and implement a common daily class schedule for all middle schools.
- Expand teaming structures and strategies in grades 7 and 8. The grade 6 structure, already in place, should provide a foundation for grades 7 and 8.
- Provide middle school staff with professional development addressing the above recommendations.

MSAT1 (Middle School Advisory Team 1) was formed in 2000 to advise the principal of Terman Middle School in the development and opening of that site using a teaming structure for core content areas. MSAT2 was formed in 2002 as an extension of MSAT1. The charge to this group was to research, discuss, and recommend to middle school principals how grade 7 and 8 teaming structures for core content areas can be implemented. MSAT1 and MSAT2 are representative working groups of teachers, parents, building principals, and District staff.

Teaming, in various applications, is in place in PAUSD.

- Jordan has implemented various teaming structures since its re-opening in 1991.
- J. L. Stanford has scheduled students in core teams since the mid-1990s.
- Terman was designed and opened with core content teams at all grade levels.

1. What team structures are currently in place in the District?

Grade 6 teams have been present in PAUSD middle schools since 1991. This is a 2-person model wherein each teacher teaches two core subjects. The combinations are math/science and English/social sciences.

At Jordan there are mini teams (2-person teams) in grades 7 and 8. There is also a 4-person grade 8 team in the core content areas. At J. L. Stanford all grade 7 and 8 students are scheduled into core content teams. Teaming structures are in operation at both grade levels. Terman is fully teamed in grades 7 and 8 in the core content areas.

2. Do all teams need to look alike at all middle schools?

No. Each school has its specified student enrollment, staffing allocation, budget, and curricular program variations. Decisions on instructional structures are informed by these factors.

3. Why are we currently discussing Teaming?

The current discussion is focused on the refinement and the extension of existing team structures in the core content areas for grades 7 and 8.

4. What are the criteria that guide MSAT2 in the analysis of possible teaming refinement in the core content courses?

MSAT2, through its review of the literature on effective middle schools and District documents (*Guiding Principles for PAUSD Middle Schools* and *Characteristics of Young Adolescents*) continues to use the four criteria below in reviewing teaming possibilities for PAUSD middle schools. The models are reviewed to see how they:

- Provide an opportunity for a teaming structure in the core content areas
- Provide for the flexible use of instructional time
- Provide opportunities for students to work with peers and adults in smaller learning communities
- Accommodate a rich elective program

5. How do teams work in the core content areas (English, social science, science, math)?

Core content teachers share the same group of students across the curricular areas. Teachers have common preparation time to plan instruction and the flexible use of the team learning time.

6. How does a team structure support my student's learning?

A team structure provides an opportunity for a more focused and smaller learning community to support a student's social, emotional, and academic needs...the whole child. The learning accomplished in each core subject area is connected, where appropriate, so that students can see applications and relationships between the subject areas.

Because teams of core content teachers share the same group of students, teams make it easier for parents to meet with more than one teacher to discuss their student's progress. Parents can get a better idea of how their student performs across the core content classes.

7. Will a team structure change how students are graded?

Student grading practices will continue as they are now in our middle schools.

8. How does a team structure accommodate Special Education?

Special Day Class teachers and Resource Specialists will be included as teams are developed at a site.

9. Will bell schedules be changed?

The bell schedules are already the same across the three middle schools. The bell schedules will not change for the 2005-2006 school year.

10. How have parents been involved in efforts to continue the implementation of the middle school teaming model?

Parents have been informed through the various school site publications, including PTA newsletters, eNews, and any others particular to a site. Jordan and J. L. Stanford have sponsored parent meetings on this topic. Parent input is brought to MSAT2 for consideration through the parent representatives from each middle school on this committee.

Since 2000, Terman Middle School parents have been involved and represented in the design and opening of the school. MSAT1 had parent representatives from J. L. Stanford and Jordan and eventually from the Terman Site Council and PTA. The Site Council at Terman has been central to the teaming model to the point of allocating funding for team planning days. These days have been focused on the development of interdisciplinary curriculum, the use of flexible instructional time, and building the smaller learning community.

Articles in the J. L. Stanford *Panther Tracks* have provided information on teaming to the school community. Discussions on the continuing implementation of teaming have been ongoing at PTA meetings and through the school site council. Approval and support of team leader stipends is given from the Site Council as well. How the school is structured to deliver instruction is presented at yearly registration meetings for parents and students.

At Jordan Middle School there have been staff/parent panels on the topic of teaming, a Q & A (question and answer) document placed on the school Web site, articles in the *Jordan Journal*, and letters to parents about student registration for the grade 8 team pilot. Jordan PTA provided "seed funding" for professional development.

11. What are our plans for 2005-2006?

Our plans for 2005-2006 are as follows:

- Maintain the current common bell schedule for the three middle schools (brought into alignment in 2004-2005)
- Maintain strong academic and elective programs
- Provide time for teacher collaboration
- Schedule students as much as possible with the same core teachers as has been or is current practice at the three middle schools

12. What information will be provided about the status and outcomes of middle school teaming this year?

An evaluation of the implementation of teaming at each of the three middle schools is planned for this school year. The evaluation will describe the structures in place at each middle school, including the resolved and unresolved issues with those structures. Students, parents, and staff will be surveyed in spring 2005 regarding their understandings, expectations, and levels of satisfaction with teaming at their schools. The surveys will focus on how well teaming is meeting the academic, social and emotional needs of the students, and the collaboration and instructional needs and responsibilities of teachers. The academic progress of students at each school will also be reviewed. Educational Services staff (the Directors of Secondary Education and of Assessment and Evaluation) have been meeting at the sites with teachers, parents, students, and administrators as part of this evaluation process.

Additional considerations

1. What impact does having three smaller middle schools have on electives?

Elective program decisions are based on the amount of student interest, the staffing allocation, and the available budget for any school year. Also considered are teacher credentialing requirements and the teacher contract. While every effort is made to offer elective program opportunities that cover a broad range of student interest areas, these considerations all impact decisions.

Smaller middle schools provide for a smaller student population from which to draw student enrollment in elective classes. The staffing ratio is based on a specified number of students assigned to each teacher for each class. There is, of course, reasonable flexibility according to budget. The impact on electives is that classes with high student interest will continue to be offered. Classes with low student interest will not be offered.

2. Is teaming a way for the District to reduce elective offerings and implement cost savings?

No. The District is not looking at teaming as a way to reduce budgets or as a way to reduce elective offerings.

3. Will teachers be asked to teach classes outside of their credentialed areas?
No. PAUSD places teachers in their areas of preparation and credentialing.