

Team Teaching at Jordan

On Tuesday January 25, 2005, The Jordan PTA sponsored a presentation and question and answer session regarding the implementation of Team Teaching in grades 7 and 8 at Jordan. Presenting were Cathy Kroymann, School Board member and Jordan School Board Liaison, Mary Frances Callan, Superintendent of the PAUSD, and Suzanne Solomon, Jordan Principal.

First, Ms. Kroymann outlined the lengthy history of the team teaching discussion in the Palo Alto Unified School District. In 1988, the Committee of 2000 conducted a middle school study. Following were recommendations included in the report:

- Create smaller communities of learning
- Provide flexible timing in the class schedule
- Move school configuration to K-5 in elementary; 6-8 in middle schools; and 9 – 12 in high schools

May 1989, the Board set a primary goal to implement a middle school program that: was child centered, gave opportunities for students to participate actively, increased opportunities for interdisciplinary learning, and provided time and resources for staff collaboration. Since this time, the Board has worked steadily toward implementing a Team Teaching model in the middle schools. Terman Middle School was opened utilizing a Team Teaching model, and is fully teamed in all three grades. Jordan and JLS both have team teaching in 6th grade, and each school has some model of team teaching in grades 7 and 8.

Dr. Callan reviewed the numerous meetings and information sessions that have been held at Jordan and at the Board level regarding teaming. Also, the Jordan Journal and the Jordan web site have provided information as Jordan moves toward a team teaching model. A Question and Answer about Teaming will be posted on the PAUSD website by 1/28/05. The Middle School Advisory Team was originally convened to assist with the opening of Terman Middle School. After that was accomplished, MSAT2 was formed to assist the middle school principals in preparing to move to a team teaching mode. MSAT reviewed many different models in use throughout the country for team teaching. No one model was chosen; the unique characteristics of each of the three middle schools will determine how team teaching will be implemented at each site. MSAT2 will make a presentation to the Board of Education on February 22 about its work. When the Board decided to move from K-6 elementary to the middle school structure, they acknowledged that middle schools should be structured so that students are encouraged to mature socially and emotionally, as well as excel academically.

Creating a master schedule is a complex undertaking at middle and high schools, whether or not teachers and students are placed on teams. The schedule must reflect both student interest and teacher qualifications. Next year at Jordan, all 7th and 8th graders will be on a four person teaching team (math, science, language arts, and social studies). Each student will still have two electives and PE. The bell schedule will remain the same (7 periods, 6 period days, rotating schedule). Each subject matter will have the same number of instructional minutes as it has this year. Curriculum standards are not being changed.

Ms. Solomon reported that all Jordan students are on some kind of team currently in 6th, 7th and 8th grades. The teams that may not be recognized by parents are the teams of social studies and science teachers and the teams of English and math teachers (7th and 8th grade). Currently there are 24 students in the math/language arts classes and 28 in the social studies/science classes. With the implementation of team teaching, class sizes will average 26 students (this is currently the class size at Terman). If the parcel tax is approved and no further budget cuts are made, then the District will endeavor to have 24 students in all classes. Each 7th and 8th grade team will have approximately 130 students; the schedulers will have to work with the numbers to get them to work out evenly. This is one of the challenges of team teaching.

Questions Asked:

- Is there a nexus between a decline in electives and teaming? No. There may be a loss of elective opportunities for some students because we now have three smaller middle schools, so there may not be enough students choosing an elective to make it feasible to offer that elective. There also may be losses in the elective opportunities because of budget cuts at the district level. Last year the district cut 4.3 Full Time Equivalent middle school teachers, resulting in the loss of 23 teaching periods. Also, there are always conflicts in scheduling, i.e., a student elects two electives that both happen to only be

offered in Period 2. That student will not get both of his/her top choices. These changes are all independent of moving to a team teaching structure.

- Will students who are teamed in 7th grade stay in the same social groups as they move to 8th grade? No, they will intermix throughout the day, as they do now on the “mini-teams”.
- How will teaming affect math laning? It will not affect laning. Both lanes of math will be offered on all teams. There will not be an “advanced” team and a “regular” team.
- Band is a dual grade elective. Will this program be affected? MSAT has placed a high priority on keeping dual grade electives, such as band. Next year, dual grade electives will not be affected.
- Math is a sequential progression of concepts. How can one integrate math with other subjects? Examples of integration of math and social studies can be found throughout the 6th grade curriculum. For example, when students are studying ancient Egypt in Social Studies, they might also be learning about the geometry of a pyramid in math. When students are gathering information for a Greek project, they might be asked to prepare a graph, Venn Diagram, or plot chart of their data. The purpose of interdisciplinary teaching is to draw natural connections between the subjects that will make the subject come to life for the student.
- Tell us about teacher preps. How often will they meet? Will they be required to meet? Full time teachers in the PAUSD teach 5 periods per day. Each day each teacher has one prep period per day, two prep periods in their schedule. Teachers use that time for a variety of purposes: preparing lessons, grading papers and tests, meeting within departments. Team teachers will also meet as a team, probably once per week. They can meet more or less often if they choose.
- What are the advantages of extending the existing two teacher team to four teachers? First, the 6th grade two teacher teams will not be changed. Second, in 7th grade and beyond, teachers in the PAUSD must hold a credential in each subject that they teach. Going to a four person team means that each teacher will only have to hold one credential. That was a limiting factor when MSAT2 considered three and two teacher teams.
- Will teams of teachers really have time to discuss all 130 students on their team? Certainly not every week, but the current 8th grade team has discussed each student at the team meetings. In addition, Marti Jacobs, the 8th grade counselor, has had the opportunity to meet with the 8th grade team teachers to discuss students. One big advantage of team teaching is that parents are able to ask for a conference to speak with all of their student’s teachers at one time during their common prep period, instead of having to schedule them during each individual teacher’s prep period.
- What will be the impact on differentiated teaching in teaming? Will there be different levels within a team? Could there be laning for all subjects? Will high achieving students be able to go to Paly for classes? Differentiation continues to be a priority in the PAUSD. Each team will offer both lanes of math. Right now there are no plans to lane any subject other than math. Currently 2-5 students each year are able to take advanced math classes at Paly; that will not change as a result of the implementation of team teaching.
- How do you decide who will be teamed? Every 7th and 8th grade student will be on a team of four core academic teachers next year.
- Will students stay in the same groups of 24 or 26 for each class? No, they will mix up within the team for each class.
- What about special day classes? They will continue as currently scheduled.
- Could teaming result in a direct instruction team or a connections team if the teachers choose? No, there will be no change in instructional strategy. Teachers will still have individual teaching styles. Direct instruction in the 6th grade will continue to be taught as it is currently taught, which of course, means a team of two teachers. Direct instruction at Terman, as well as Connections at JLS, are both taught utilizing a team teaching structure.
- What are the tradeoffs? A student’s best friend may not be in the same class or team. Teaming might complicate elective scheduling a little. Teacher preparation will change; it will be more work in the beginning. Staff development time and resources are imperative to the successful implementation of team teaching.