



April, 2008

Florence Sawyer School

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Information on the Placement Process at Florence Sawyer:

Now that more than two-thirds of the school year has passed, along with March conferences and report cards, we begin to turn some of our attention to transitions for the next school year. If you have been involved with this in past years, you are aware of the extensive process we use to place children into classes each school year.

This is one of the most thorough and significant processes in which we are involved. Professional staff must consider all relevant information so that ***the greatest possible learning for each child will result from the placement.*** It is our goal to place all students into a classroom that will provide each with a successful learning experience. We believe this can be achieved by developing well-balanced, ***heterogeneous*** classroom groups across all grade levels using the data available about each child. ***We are working especially hard this year to make decisions using student work samples and classroom assessment data for every individual.***

Phase 1 of the placement process begins now:

Our April, all-staff meeting reviews the philosophy, goals, and timeline for placement.

- Grade-level ***common planning time*** meetings are used to review the criteria to be used for placement decisions.
- The next professional development day, May 9th, will involve grade-level and grade-span discussions and comparisons of student work samples, as well as assessment data gathered throughout the year that will help inform the placement of each child.
- Individual teachers use their assessments of his/her current students academically to prepare for the discussion of each student's strengths, challenges, and needs.
- Teachers meet with specialists such as special needs teachers and guidance counselors, as well as administrators to develop ***heterogeneous lists*** based on learning needs, academic achievement, and ability. No receiving teacher names are included on the preliminary lists of students. It is an exercise in assessing the ***educational needs only, as the top priority, and in developing balanced classes.***
- We will be "cluster grouping" students during this phase. This means that each individual student will be placed in ***a cluster with learners of similar ability, interests, and skills*** that will be divided across the classrooms, making initial heterogeneous classes ***based only on academics.*** We are trying to group students who may work well together and have similar abilities, but still allow for flexible groupings for differentiating instruction. Classes, as always, are ***heterogeneously*** mixed as well as being ***inclusive of learners with special needs*** (there is a mix of all ability levels in all classes).
- These become "preliminary class lists" and insure initial groupings by academic needs and abilities.

What is "Total School Cluster Grouping"

(term borrowed from research by Drs. Marcia Gentry and Rebecca Mann)?

Total School Cluster Grouping is defined by Gentry and Mann: "Cluster grouping model that takes into account the achievement levels of all students and places students into classrooms yearly in order to reduce the number of achievement levels in each classroom and facilitate teachers' differentiation of curriculum and instruction for all students and thus increase student achievement."

The three common themes for applying cluster grouping are:

1. Individuals or groups of high ability or high achievement students are put together in a mixed-ability classroom, maintaining heterogeneous groupings.
2. Mixed ability grouping of clusters of like learners helps and encourages differentiated curriculum and instruction.
3. Teachers have the background, training, and/or experience in working with mixed-ability, high-ability, and students with different learning styles.

Phase 2 of the Placement Process:

Once initial groupings, based on academic ability and achievement, are formed, phase two of the entire process begins in early May and is completed in time for move-up day on the last day of school. At this point, many other factors are considered in addition to academic ability or achievement, keeping in mind that we still need to achieve well-balanced, heterogeneous classes across the grade level. The additional factors considered during this phase include:

- Having a similar number of children in each class;
- Maintaining a proportionate number of boys and girls;
- Having a mix of learning styles in each classroom;
- Consideration of peer relationships (friendships, the need for separation)
- Delivery of special education, support services, and/or remedial services;
- Balance of students with needs other than special education;
- Parental input such as, previous teacher experience with families ***that applies to the younger sibling(s)*****;
- A student's ability to handle transitions during the day.
- Teachers assigned to instruct that grade level.

Clearly, placement is a formidable task and is not taken lightly. We invest a great deal of time in this process.

****Parental Input****

While we accept parental input, ***we do not accept requests for specific teachers. In past years parents have written letters noting previous experience with a specific teacher. This year, you must include some specific reasons to consider this type of request. Any teacher name used will NOT BE CONSIDERED UNLESS ACCOMPANIED BY SOME REASONING OR EXPLANATION.*** To accept parent requests would make it almost impossible to meet the goals of every student in the school or to have heterogeneously grouped classrooms.

Whether you have previous experience with teachers or not, if you would like to share your insights regarding your child's learning style, academic or social-emotional needs, you must do so in writing to administration, ***not directly to your child's current teacher. Any written communication should be addressed to Ken Tucker, Principal.***

Note: Informal discussions with an individual teacher will not be considered a communication in this process.

Do not feel that you must write anything. Your child will be given the same consideration whether you write or not. All information is eventually shared with the teachers who help make the final decision about placement, but will not be shared until Phase 1 (outlined above) is complete.

If you decide to write, all written input must be received **NO LATER THAN MAY 2nd.** Please be aware of the following guidelines in order to help us during the placement process and to prevent any misunderstandings.

1. Submit your written input and/or comments no later than May 2 to ***the attention of the principal only.***
2. Write your child's name and present classroom teacher clearly visible across the top of the letter.
3. Do not request an appointment or call on the telephone regarding placement for your child.
4. Please do not feel compelled to write a letter. Your child will receive the same consideration whether you submit a letter or not.
5. **Do not request a specific teacher.** This will not be considered. If you have had an older sibling who has had that teacher you may ***ask us to consider that along with the reasons why we should consider it,*** but we will not guarantee placement with that teacher.

6. There will be no individual responses to your requests.
7. Final report cards will indicate your child's placement for the next school year and move-up day will be held on the final day of school (currently Thursday, June 19).

Parental requests to reconsider the placement assignments are handled during the summer. We will note your concern and make any necessary and appropriate changes in AUGUST.

STAFFING NOTE: At this time, there are so many variables regarding staffing for next year that it is impossible to give you information about who will be teaching at what grade level. Each year there are staff changes so do not assume teachers currently at any grade level will be in the same spot next year.

MIDDLE SCHOOL NOTE: In grades 6 through 8, students are placed in sub-groups called "Pods" based on cluster grouping, outlined above. This small, coed pod of 3-6 students travels together throughout the day, but is mixed with other pods for different classes. This allows for social interaction with virtually every other student at the grade level during the week, allows for different mixes of students in different classes, while again trying to provide a heterogeneous class, in most curriculum areas. It also allows for appropriate groupings in Math to meet the needs of all students. Although social (friendships) may be considered, it is not a determining factor in placement. The priority is meeting academic needs; therefore students might not be in a pod with a close friend. They should be with those friends for some classes and an effort is made to try to meet that social need, secondary to the educational needs.

If you believe you have a High Ability Student:

Include this information in any communication you decide to share with us during the placement process as outlined above. We would give consideration to your child during this process in determining placement by considering his/her work and through the checklist we use to help confirm the characteristics.

A Final Thought about Placement:

It has been my experience that each year some parents feel pressured into action on the basis of hearsay. In our estimation, it is not wise to rely on the "grapevine". Parents who are willing to offer advice sometimes forget that one parent's opinion with regard to a quality educational experience is vastly different than that of another. ***Also, the needs of one child are often much different than the needs of another child. One must only look within one's own family, to realize the truth of this statement.*** This is part of the reason why **we will not accept specific requests for teachers.**

As always, you have the commitment of our caring staff to work industriously and conscientiously, to make the most thoughtful placement decisions for each child, regardless of whether or not a letter is received from a student's parent(s).

Thank you for your trust in us as we go through this process.

- Ken Tucker, Principal