

## Implementation of the INSPIRE Initiative in Eastern Carver County Elementary Schools

The eight elementary schools of the schools of Eastern Carver County began implementing four Elementary Inspire Initiatives during the 2011-12 school year. This personalized approach to learning applies a system-wide effort to enhance an already strong elementary program. While all elementary schools will implement these initiatives of STEM (Science Technology, Engineering and Math) Cultural Competence, and Continuous Progress, each school will operate within common expectations while recognizing the individual personality the schools develops over time. This is consistent with the district view that we have one elementary program at eight sites.

Beginning with discussions and surveys of staff and parents in January 2010, INSPIRE committee members sorted through recent research on the best in elementary education. Based on parent and staff feedback, four committees worked throughout the summer of 2010 to identify possible enhancements to the elementary program. The focus groups made up of parents and staff members brought the following recommendations to the school board in November 2010:

- Embed STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) concepts and strategies as a core in all elementary schools with a simultaneous curriculum review in math and science which began in early 2011 to propel the initiative and enable programs to begin in the 2011-2012 school year.
- Initiate a Dual Language Spanish language program to begin in a K-1 pilot in 2012-2013 at one site while continuing to study the introduction of other languages in the future.
- Nurture and build cultural competence focusing on the arts, specialists and cross-curricular connections.
- Moving toward a continuous progress instructional model that allows children to progress through curriculum as they are able, rather than a strict adherence to age/grade configuration fully implemented by 2015.

The implementation of STEM also began during the 2011-2012 school year. This initiative supports the state science and mathematics standards. Through *Engineering is Elementary*, developed by Boston's Museum of Science, basic principles of engineering are explored in two units of engineering in grades 1 and 2, and three units at grades 3, 4 and 5.

La Academia, a two way dual language program, will open kindergarten and first grade classrooms housed at the Kindergarten Center in 2012-13. Elementary schools will also enhance and embrace the study of cultures through the specialist (art, music, physical education, and media) curriculum and delivery systems. Art, music and physical education staff have developed curriculum to support the cultural aspects of each country setting of EIE.

Specialists continue as the catalyst for ongoing development of the culture/language threads across all curriculum areas within each school site

As schools expand the study of world cultures, a committee is working with the CARLA Institute at the University of Minnesota (Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition) to determine the best practices in the area of Spanish language instruction. La Academia staff will attend the CARLA summer institute to be ready with the best practices identified for immersion instruction. In addition to the after school opportunities in Spanish offered at several of the elementary schools through a partnership with Community Education the Minnesota International Chinese School offers comprehensive Chinese classes on Saturdays. A daycare embedded preschool language pilot options are planned for Chinese (Chan EI) and Spanish (Kindergarten Center).

Implementation of the Continuous Progress Instructional model began in the fall of 2011. This model allows a child to progress beyond their typical age/grade in math and reading in all elementary schools. The personalized instruction initiative has an implementation timeline of five years, with all schools meeting common expectations to advance students at their own rate with rigor and opportunity. Consistent with the District 112 premise of one elementary program at eight sites, this initiative will initially begin at various points that are consistent with the personality of individual schools. Continuous Progress initiatives may include; flex grouping of instruction which places students in groupings based on skills, interests or learning styles. Groups may be part of a classroom, grade level or even provide movement across multiple grade instructional groups. Continuous monitoring of student achievement will occur through the use of multiple assessments and analysis of student achievement data. Information gathered over the five years will drive initiatives at the middle school level.

The INSPIRE initiative is consistent with the schools board's commitment to providing world class elementary schools by enhancing student learning through innovation and a commitment to personalized learning. District 112 supports the creative problem solving and skill development of every elementary staff member through classrooms partnerships, visitations, feeder school professional development sessions all staff training.

## **INSPIRE! Expanding Excellence in District 112 Elementary Schools Continuous Progress in Action**

### **What are some of the challenges so far?**

- **To have all schools committed to the same agenda--** one elementary program at eight sites but allow flexibility and creativity to get there
- **To pick a date to be fully implemented--**some are more ready than others
- **To have enough time to work together—**having staff involved in all strands of Inspire working in the same school for three days in June had many advantages of cross-pollination of ideas
- **Starting the process without having all the details in place--**trusting that “Together We’re Better” and we’ll get it done
- **Keeping others in the loop that changes--**constant communication and re-communication—and being sure the middle schools will be ready for the students

### **How have we worked with parents?**

- All school site councils have been involved since the process began in January of 2010. They were the study groups. They did the research. We worked backwards from the research done through our secondary school redesign process. Many parents were involved in focus groups that did additional research/visitations in each of our INSPIRE strands.
- Families were familiar with flex grouping. We have had flexible instructional groups that crossed classrooms in most, but not all of our elementary schools. We have purchased curriculum materials K-6 for use in K-5 in mathematics and language arts for a number of years.
- We are challenged as parents talk because schools could begin in either mathematics or language arts or both. They could begin with primary or intermediate grades. Consequently different schools are initiating their work toward a continuous progress model with math or reading or both in primary or intermediate or both! While this allowed principals to get started, it also complicates communications.
- We have used our district publications to send a common message.
- We expect more challenges as we move forward, especially as students access curriculum more than one year above what is typical. We are using this year to get ready for that.

### **How are we working with staff?**

- There is some pushback. There have been opportunities for professional development in the summer, before the start of school, and with late starts.
- Some are eager.

- We are doing a lot of 'new' with continuous progress, cultural competence, and STEM all at once so it feels over the top—and it is. But sometimes that is a good thing because you can get initiatives in the door.
- Three days in June groups of teachers from across the district worked together in one school. They were creating supports for advanced readers, resource materials around cultural competence, training for the EIE Engineering is Elementary program, and embedding more online links to enhance curriculum maps. Being in one place with the opportunity to bounce ideas off other teachers helped forge relationships and the sharing of strategies and resources.
- We are doing some professional development by feeder schools to the middle level—promoting collaboration across schools.