

4/23/07 Orca K-8 Update
by Mikala Woodward

Friends, the rubber has definitely hit the road on K-8 Planning – lots of things are happening all over the place, seriously challenging your correspondent's ability to keep up with them. Here are some highlights:

K-8 Community Meeting to discuss K-8 Decision-Making Structure – this Thursday, April 26th, 7 pm at School. (There really is childcare this time, promise.) After the usual update on K-8 Planning and Q & A time, we'll discuss the Process Committee's draft proposal for a K-8 decision-making structure. The proposal below is based on feedback we got at the last K-8 Community Meeting about child-centered decision-making; input from people who have participated in successful staff-parent collaborations at Orca, including the K-8 Steering Committee; and ideas gleaned from the experience of other schools. It's definitely a work in progress – so come talk about it on Thursday – or e-mail us your thoughts at orcak8process@yahoogroups.com.

Proposed Decision-making Principles: We want to create a decision-making structure that is transparent and well-documented, that supports collaboration between staff and families, that provides opportunities for everyone's voice to be heard, and that allows for decisions to be made in a timely manner. We need to be clear about what kind of decisions merit wide community involvement, which should be made by staff alone, and which fall somewhere in between. We need to build trust in each other and in the process, so that we all can support community decisions, even those we may disagree with.

Proposed Decision-Making Structure: Rather than having the PTA Board serve as the only functional nexus between parents and staff, we propose creating a Leadership Council (or Allthing, or whatever we want to call it) composed of Parent Reps (from elected PTA officers), Staff Reps (Principal plus others determined by staff), and Student Reps (elected by the Student Council – whose structure is yet to be determined). This body would meet once a month, alternating afternoon and evening meetings to accommodate teacher and parent schedules. The Leadership Council would make decisions by consensus. Leadership Council meetings would be open to anyone – and Committee Chairs, teachers, or others may be specifically invited to attend particular meetings that pertain to their work. The Leadership Council may also appoint Task Forces or Subcommittees to work on specific issues.

Ideas and concerns could be brought to the Leadership Council from any of the three other bodies (PTA, Staff, Student Council). Issues would be kicked around by the Leadership Council – perhaps with time for research or information gathering – and then sent out for discussion to the other groups as needed. This process would rely on clear, timely communication. The whole community needs to know where to take ideas or concerns, when and where issues will be discussed, and who has final decision-making authority.

MIDDLE SCHOOL PLANNING

Things are starting to fall into place for next year's 6th grade – Science, Social Studies, and Anti-Bias curricula are all being mapped out and integrated with each other and with other Orca programs (Garden, Race Forum, etc). The Discipline Policy is coming along as well.

Middle School Schedule: I get a lot of questions about the middle school schedule: well, we've got a draft going around. It includes a homeroom/advisory period, alternating quarters of integrated Science/Literacy and integrated Social Studies/Literacy, Math and Drama every day, Electives two days a week, and alternating Art/PE for all kids. We'll share the gory details when we get it finalized.

Middle School Alumni Panel: Friday, April 27th, 2 pm: In order to take advantage of the presence of a bunch of Orca alumni who will be here doing service learning anyway, we've moved this up to this Friday. L-Pod students and K-8 Steering Committee members are looking forward to hearing from Orca grads about what middle school is like and how to make ours **rock**. Thanks to Camille Pahl, Katherine Law, and Kelly-Warner King for putting this together.