



Marion Cross

Principal's Newsletter

November 28, 2005

Marion Cross Website: www.marioncross.org
Link to WMUR for School Cancellation Information

Calendar

12/5 PTO Meeting 7:00

12/7 School Board
Meeting 7:00

12/13 K-3 Holiday
Program 1:00

12/15 4-6 Holiday
Program 1:00

**12/21-1/2 No School
Holiday Vacation**

Foreign Language Immersion Program

(An idea being discussed)

As many of you likely saw in either of the two local papers recently, there is an idea being discussed that involves creating a Foreign Language Immersion Program here at MCS. Please keep in mind that very few details have been discussed or worked out at this point in time. Many of the questions that leap to mind are on our list to research and answer before any recommendation can be made. With that background, let me discuss a few points with you.

History

This idea rose out of discussions concerning a) expanding the foreign language program into the primary grades and b) strategies for dealing with a period of low enrollment at MCS. The foreign language discussion has been ongoing in our district for years. In 2002 a group of board members, administrators, parents and community members prepared the Duncan report, which gave recommendations about the introduction of foreign languages. The introduction of Spanish in 7th grade, which began in 2004, was the Duncan report's recommended first step, but not the only idea in the report. Although most of the discussion has occurred in Hanover, it is important to keep in mind that all Norwich and Hanover students ultimately wind up in the same place by grade seven. Therefore, any expansion of a program in one elementary school would have a significant effect on the other. In recent years, the school boards for both Hanover and Norwich, as well as Dresden, have used budget guidelines that severely limited program expansion due to budget pressures. In addition, the curriculum in the primary grades is already quite full and carefully balanced. As a result, neither the administration nor the school board has supported expanding the foreign language program into the primary grades.

The Proposal

Our superintendent of schools, Dr. Wayne Gersen, has taken a different look at this issue. The proposal, in its current form, would create a classroom immersion program where all subjects in the classroom are taught in a foreign language. The idea would be to have Hanover tuition some students to Norwich, and to have those students join some of ours in this class. The first year would see a grade one classroom, the second year would add a grade two, and so on. Subjects outside the classroom, such as music and art, would be taught in English.

The Logistics

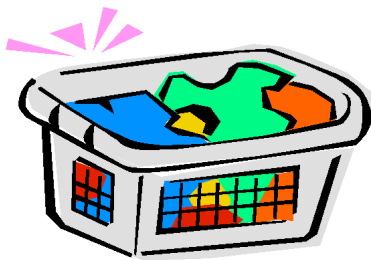
The superintendent met with the Ray School principal, Bruce Williams, and me to take an initial look at some logistical questions. With our projected enrollment dropping over the next several years, we would have the space to add these classrooms here at MCS with little or no impact on the space required by the rest of the school. There are many other logistical questions that have yet to be addressed. What is the depth of the teaching pool available for a program such as this? Are there more Spanish speaking elementary teachers than French speaking teachers? How many spots would be available? How are placements determined? How does this impact state testing requirements? Do Hanover students count towards our Per Pupil Spending ratio? Etc., etc. We are taking a look at these questions over the next month or so.

The Process

There are two main steps in the process at this time. First, The SAU school board and the two local school boards (Norwich and Hanover) are still wrestling with the philosophy of this proposal. They will be considering what the best avenues for innovation might be, and looking at whether this is the place they wish to see us put our energy towards over the next few years. There are obvious pros and cons, and the boards need to consider these issues carefully. Second, the administration needs to address the various logistical questions that have been raised. We will be taking our first visitation to a school district that has been running an immersion program since 1991 just after the Thanksgiving break. That visit will help us answer some questions, and it should help us define what some of our other questions should be.

Finally

We have a long way to go to figure this out. You may have thoughts, ideas, and questions that you wish to discuss. While I encourage you to talk to me, to attend the Norwich School Board meeting on December 7th or the SAU Board meeting on December 12th, please keep in mind that we have more questions than answers at this point. As information becomes available, I will keep you informed.



Lost & Found

Please check the pile soon. We will need to deliver unclaimed items to a local shelter before the snow begins to fly. Lost & Found is located near the stairwell across from the library entrance.

Final Word... *Parent Conferences*

During each Parent Conference Day, I try to get to at least one conference with each teacher. I am very appreciative to the families and teachers for letting me “drop in” on your conferences. It is a wonderful opportunity to see how our educational program is working from the point of view of parents, and to listen to what topics are being discussed. So, if you see me coming one day, not to worry, your slot just happened to come up in the schedule! Thanks, again

Rob Edson