

*"Learning and innovation go hand in hand. The arrogance of success is to think that what you did yesterday will be sufficient for tomorrow." - William Pollard*

## **FRCS School Improvement Project Results in Greater Support and Accountability in Student Achievement and Teacher Development**

As many of you know, last year I asked consultants from the Massachusetts Center for Charter Public School Excellence, to conduct a thorough evaluation of our school. My plan was and is to use their findings, their knowledge, and other best practices to help drive our school to a new level. Essentially, identify where we are, define where we want to be, and create the structure and plan to get us there.

In June 2008, the evaluative team spent eight cumulative school days observing classrooms and formally and informally interviewing members of the school community. Altogether they interviewed 30 parents, the administrative team (some for private follow-up interviews), all upper school department heads, and several upper school teachers. In the lower school they also spoke with two team leaders, six teachers for a group interview, and several of the intensive, Title 1 and reading specialist teachers. In addition they conducted many more casual, one-on-one conversations with instructional staff while in classrooms for observations. The team also interviewed fourteen students (7<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> grades) and spoke with guidance and student life staff.

Throughout the summer, we continued our work together, reviewing the evaluative data and putting together action plans for the year. We also reported out our preliminary findings and immediate next steps during staff orientation and the Breakfast Club sessions in the fall.

Although several areas were highlighted throughout our review as strong practices of the school, we found some common themes that often resulted from a larger identified concern: an unintentional departure from our core K-12, whole-school program. Given our tremendous growth of students, teachers, and programs in the past five years, we had clearly developed an educational system to embrace all students. However, also as a result of this growth, we now face organizational obstacles which serve to prevent us from becoming a truly great K-12 school district.

Since September, the team expanded in the number of participants and became focused on developing a plan that researched effective organizational structures which would complement our ever-evolving and growing school community. The team began to develop an effective K-12 instructional leadership model which would identify and implement

two plans: one that directly supports student learning and teacher development; and one that supports students and families in other non-academic settings. In addition, our goals have been comprehensive and focused:

1. To provide more direct resources, support, and guidance to teachers and students in the classroom
2. To streamline operations and administrative functions to establish clear lines of responsibility and to ensure accountability

Throughout our continuous review, we gathered additional information from the entire school community, reported findings along the way, and developed a recommended organizational structure that is highly supportive and accountable. We have provided progress reports throughout this process to staff, parents, and the board at monthly topic-specific meetings, general staff meetings, public board meetings, and the Breakfast Club sessions.

For the past two months, we have put the final organizational plan together, including:

- further defining the leadership structure, positions and responsibilities
- reviewing and creating plans for curriculum development, instructional oversight, professional development, supervision, evaluation, and management
- identifying ideal characteristics, backgrounds, and experience for leadership positions
- defining new reporting relationships
- creating the advertising and interview processes
- determining follow up action plans

A team of approximately 25 faculty and staff members have assisted to develop these criteria. Drafts were presented at a staff meeting of approximately 80 teachers and staff this month who provided additional insight and feedback. We then finalized the positions and started the advertising process. The attached chart provides a general overview of the newly-designed structure and supervisory responsibilities. Job descriptions can be found on the school's website.

*It is important to note that there are no layoffs as a result of this initiative. Often, people hear the word "reorganization" and immediately think of personnel reductions. This is not the case with this plan. However, some administrative leadership positions are being eliminated or changed. Incumbents within the positions will have the opportunity to apply to one or more of the new positions. (over please)*

One of the newly-created key K-12 leadership positions is the **Director of Teaching and Learning (DTL)**. The DTL's role is to lead, supervise and manage a powerful, coherent, and innovative K-12 instructional program. To this end, the DTL will be entrusted with the work of creating a K-12 culture of continuous instructional and curricular improvement. Through the DTL's leadership, our faculty will continue to become an empowered and engaged community, focused on increasing student achievement.

Another vitally important and newly-created role at the school is the position of **Director of Students and Families (DSF)**. The DSF's role is to develop, lead, and implement a vision for the support and development of FRCS' students and families, from kindergarten through graduation. To this end, the DSF is entrusted to create a powerful school culture within which students, faculty, staff and families thrive, developing their individual and collective strengths in service to the community.

The DSF will also coordinate all aspects of a student's life while at FRCS – from providing specific, individual supports before, during, and after school to working with parents to develop a network of services to ensure all students are prepared to succeed. This position will oversee a wide variety of services to students and families so that we can capitalize on our opportunity to provide a thoughtful, structured, and integrated learning environment for all.

In addition, through our research and planning, we have created new **Instructional Leader (IL)** positions to lead seven new departments:

<i>K-2</i>	<i>3-12 English Language Arts</i>
<i>3-12 Math</i>	<i>3-12 Social Studies</i>
<i>3-12 Science</i>	<i>K-12 World Languages</i>
<i>K-12 Integrated Arts</i>	

K-12 Special Education will remain as a vital department to meet the needs of all learners, yet it will become an integrated component of our K-12 Teaching and Learning program. This is consistent with our philosophy on inclusion and ensures that our academic and non-academic programs are accessible to all. This department will continue to have its own leader, working directly with and for the DTL.

Reporting directly to the DTL, each IL's role is to develop a research-based, developmentally appropriate academic program that uses a consistent set of best instructional practices and a coherent set of curricular materials and assessment strategies.

In collaboration with the DTL, each IL will be entrusted with the work of creating a K-12 culture of continuous instructional and curricular improvement. These are full-time, non-teaching positions which provide direct support, guidance, mentoring, and evaluative needs to teachers and staff within each academic scope. This instructional model is a hybrid, in some respects, to our current department head and coaching structures. A chart outlining the model is attached.

We have begun advertising for all of these positions this week. These positions are being targeted to professionals throughout the country through various online job search engines such as SchoolSpring, IHireSchoolAdministrators, EdWeek, Education Leadership, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Massachusetts Charter School Association, our website, and others. We are also posting at various college and university graduate offices and in this weekend's annual Boston Globe education job issue.

We are prepared and committed to hiring the most highly qualified applicants for each position. I anticipate resumes and applications from both internal and external candidates to begin pouring in later this month and into early March. We have established a March 23<sup>rd</sup> deadline for applicants to be considered in this round. However, if we do not find suitable candidates, we may re-open the process.

Once we have thoroughly screened interested applicants, formal interviews will be conducted. We have established a Hiring Committee and two interview subcommittees to coordinate this process. Twenty individuals, representing administration, faculty, staff, and parents are serving in a formal role throughout this process.

We have created a review and interview protocol handbook which will be followed by all members throughout the process. We have also developed a list of questions which will be asked of all candidates. Please know that the questions and protocol have not been shared publicly at this time, so as to keep the integrity of the process intact as well as keep it fair to all candidates.

As we progress through the interview and candidate selection process, I will keep you updated on our status. I will provide periodic updates through the Digest and at the monthly Breakfast Club meetings. We will also provide opportunities to meet those who are selected.

This is an exciting time for the school. There has been a tremendous amount of work on this initiative, and I truly appreciate the insight and recommendations of all of you who have provided it over the past year. The direct involvement of our entire school community to date and in the coming months will help create a dynamic structure to support our growth for years to come.

- Mark Logan