

In the Book, Cultures Built to Last by Richard Dufour and Michael Fullan, the authors use the term, “Systemness” to describe a philosophy and practice where every individual recognizes their role in the bigger organization. They further point out that all segments of the organization must be working with the end goal in mind. This concept of “Systemness” is a theme in many of our conversations at Aspen Elementary. I frequently pose the question, “How does the experience appear to the student?” In a perfect world, a student would connect their classroom work with all of the other experiences throughout the day. This “Systemness” would help students connect ideas and master skills and content in a more authentic manner. It is my purpose in this month’s message to give you this background information and an overview of the many ways we work to serve the individual needs of your students each day while trying to maintain a systemness and coherence.

Tier One Instruction – This is what we think of as the “Normal Class Instruction.” While each teacher brings their own style to the classroom, teams identify Essential Learning Goals and share ideas for teaching content. Teams use Common Assessments to identify effective teaching techniques and identify students that did not get it, struggle a little, or need extended content to challenge them.

Intervention Time – each grade level has set aside a 30 minute block each day where no new content is taught and the goal is to reteach students that did not get it the first time, did not quite master the content, or need to be challenged by extending the content to a more complicated level.

Extended Day – formally known as Double Dose, Extended Day is meant for students that are struggling due to holes in previous learnings or just need a preview of the content to be better prepared to connect new learning with previous ideas.

Stars Reading – while not tied to daily content, this program looks at the many sub-skills required to read and provides students with one-on-one help to solidify these skills and turn struggling readers into fluent readers. Fluent readers are able to comprehend what they read because processing text has become a fluid task that does not take a significant amount of effort.

Specialty Classes – the Aspen staff has put a significant amount of effort into taking our already awesome Specialty Program to the next level. First, they have created a schedule to give students in the upper grades a longer experience by moving from daily sessions to every other day. This allows our students a real opportunity to have a deeper creative experience. Secondly, classroom teachers have created curriculum maps for the year and Mrs. Washington and Mrs. Green have taken these maps and worked to align their curriculum to the grade levels content and support the bigger classroom projects throughout the year.

Beverly Taylor Sorenson Art Grant – due to the extra efforts of Mrs. Green and Mr. Jackman, our District Art Specialist, Aspen Elementary received a grant to provide extended creative opportunities to our students. Mrs. Green is working side by side with the regular classroom teacher to incorporate art into math, language arts, science, and other areas where individual creativity has not necessarily been highlighted in the past. We believe that this will provide an opportunity to engage the whole student into areas that may have been less than engaging when limited to traditional methods.

As the Aspen staff works to hone the “Systemness” of our programs, I would encourage you to talk with your students about their day and to ask the staff about our programs. I appreciate the opportunity to work with your children and your families.

Mr. Freeman