

REVITALIZING AND IMPLEMENTING MUSEUM LEARNING AT STUART HOBSON MIDDLE SCHOOL

PRELIMINARY PLANNING PAPER

WHAT IT IS:

Learning in a museum magnet school includes object creation, exhibition creation, and museum creation. It emphasizes a process-oriented and interactive learning environment that is fully interdisciplinary and expands beyond the classroom walls to the museums, the community and the world.

A museum magnet school is collaboratively designed and implemented through a partnership between the school and at least one museum. *(The partnership can range from field trips tied to the curriculum to museum learning units to a museum school, and we need to decide where on this continuum we ultimately want to be).*

Building on a strong collaborative relationship with local museums, a museum magnet school leverages the educational power of museums and other community resources. It works on two levels: at the programmatic level by bringing museum programs and professional resources and expertise into the classroom; at the pedagogical level by facilitating collaborative, interdisciplinary, process- and project-based learning.

Essential materials and spaces to support museum-based learning:

- *Working garden and other outdoor classrooms*
- *Dedicated exhibition space for flat and 3-D display, with adjustable lighting, wired for internet access and digital media*
- *Ongoing development of collections: digital archives; images and objects; specimens; etc. that can be used over and over by students*
- *Collection storage and management that would include materials created or acquired by students and staff; digital archives; museum materials, etc.*

WHY DO IT:

Museum learning links learning to the outside world of scholarship and also stresses the importance of sharing knowledge, analysis, and interpretation with different audiences. In the museum magnet school, students become part of knowledge-building communities beyond the school building and learn to take ownership over their learning

Object- and project-based learning stimulates interest and investigation, facilitates reading, research, and writing across disciplines, provides a tangible focus for learning, and motivates students to be more engaged in the learning process.

Museum-based learning is an antidote to drill-and-kill test prep. Students learn how to do independent, original research using the many resources available on line and in the DC area. They learn how to synthesize content and presentation/design.

HOW IT WOULD LOOK:

At each grade level, students collaborate with teachers and museum staff in the early weeks of the school year to shape a theme. Field trips are coordinated with the theme, which is related to one or more aspects of the curriculum. Teachers will combine traditional class work with the study of primary sources, including museum objects.

Typically, each class will focus on a particular interdisciplinary theme for a full year, with the goal of developing their exploration of the theme into an exhibit (or series of exhibits) that represents their research and also reflects a mastery of DCPS standards for each subject area. Along the way, students will complete research papers, expository essays, and creative writing exercises that will then form the basis of exhibition labels.

One possibility for developing themes would be to look at the Smithsonian’s “Grand Challenges,” four broad areas of research identified as priorities for carrying out and disseminating research at the Smithsonian (<http://www.si.edu/ofg/GrandChallSOLAA.htm>). They include “Understanding the American Experience,” “Valuing World Cultures,” “Understanding and Sustaining a Biodiverse Planet,” and “Unlocking the Mysteries of the Universe.” Teachers could work with each other and develop syllabi for each subject and grade level that would take one of these “challenges” as a jumping-off point.

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES:

This is an important, complex, and time-consuming project. Although parents can support the endeavor, it cannot be parent-driven, since many of the challenges are simply beyond the purview of parents. These include budget, staffing, professional development, coordination, and curricular alignment (with DCPS standards and demands of NCLB testing).

Funding:

The original programs, at Brent and SH were developed from a \$3 million grant from the US Department of Education. Internal support from DCPS is unlikely in the current fiscal environment. Grant money (from the Smithsonian, IMLS, and MacArthur Foundation) exists, but is generally for school systems, not local schools. This kind of fund raising will require a lot of advance planning and collaboration between SH, DCPS, and one or more museum partners.

Questions: Who will identify the grants and write the proposals? Will DCPS support the grant if it is just for one school? If two or more schools are required, should we consider a vertical program in which Watkins is brought in? Or would we want to engage another middle school?

Professional Development:

Professional development and support are key. Funding is needed, but relationship-building (between institutions and individuals) and administrative support are equally important. . We will need to develop and sustain relationships with museum professionals to help with teacher- and class-development and training. Successful programs often include summer institutes for teachers and year-long support through in-service days devoted to the museum program.

Questions: Who identifies professional development opportunities? How will they be funded? Will they be in lieu of or in addition to DCPS professional development? Who pays for them? Will they be school-wide or limited (at first) to teachers who are piloting the museum approach?

Curriculum:

School and DCPS staff will need to work together to align the museum magnet program with DCPS standards; Cluster staff would need to collaborate across campuses and with other Hill schools to ensure vertical alignment across campuses and feeder schools.

Staffing:

A dedicated project director and museum liaison is required to navigate complex levels of internal and external coordination within the school. Research has indicated that as the intensity of collaboration increases, so does the amount of systemic change required for implementation, which raises the question of sustainability of the program, particularly if staffing is not adequate.

IMPLEMENTATION SCENARIOS:

How fully we decide to implement the museum learning model and where on the continuum we ultimately want SH to be are key questions affecting implementation. In order to test our assumptions about the program, trouble-shoot the challenges, and perhaps discover new opportunities and potential funding sources, a *pilot program* might be rolled out in September (??) in which one or more subject-areas participate in a year-long investigation of a theme/topic based on one of the Smithsonian's Grand Challenges.

Beginning now, and continuing through the fall, a group of teachers (**Science team? Social Studies team? Where will specials teachers fit?**) could plan a series of museum-connected programs around themes that can result in student-generated exhibitions at each grade level for the end of SY2011-12.

Spring:

Teachers determine who will participate and brainstorm programs via web research; reach out to local museums for materials, possible professional development opportunities, tours, and in-school-time visits. (Parents can take an active role in this part of the process).

Summer:

Administration organizes one or more in-service days to support the program.

Fall:

Participating teachers roll out the program to their classes; have brainstorming sessions to identify theme; schedule field trips and in-school visits by museum staff.

TO LEARN MORE:

Kim Fortney and Beverly Sheppard, *An Alliance of Spirit: Museum and School Partnerships* (American Association of Museums, 2010.)

http://iweb.aam-us.org/Purchase/ProductDetail.aspx?Product_code=I278

Kira S. King, "Alternative Educational Systems: A Multi-Case Study in Museum Schools"
Ph.D. diss, Indiana University, 1998.

Museum Magnet Schools:

Normal Park Museum Magnet School, Chattanooga, TN (received IMLS grant)

<http://www.normalparkmuseummagnet.com/>

Museum Magnet Saint Paul, MN

<http://museum.spps.org/>

Museum School 25, Yonkers, NY (partners with Hudson River Museum)

http://www.yonkerspublicschools.org/schools/schools_mms.php

Museum Magnet Project, Queensland Australia

<http://www.mms.eq.edu.au/>