



The RFSD PEAK Newsletter

November 2017

The purpose of the PEAK program at RFSD is to advocate for, challenge, and inspire students who show exceptional potential by providing appropriate opportunities and support in order to ensure that they thrive both academically and socially-emotionally.



by **Kim Hamilton**, RFSD Gifted Director

Parent Tips for Successful Parent-Teacher Conferences

Parent-Teacher conferences are this month so I wanted to share some ideas for making the most of this valuable time with your child's teacher.

Prior to the conference discuss with your child his or her feelings about school. This may help you set a focus for the conference. Also, come prepared to share either positive experiences or unusual situations at home that might affect the emotional well being of your child at school.

Below, is a list of questions that you might choose to ask the teacher to help you better understand your child's experience at school:

- Does my child seem happy at school? What are her special interests or strengths?

- How does my child interact with others (age-level peers, older children, younger children, adults)? Is she perceived as a “know- it-all” and made fun of, or do others seek her out? Whom does he play with on the playground?
- Does the academic work seem challenging or is it done with little effort?
- What provisions are made for students to learn at their own pace? Are assignments altered to accommodate abilities and interests?
- How does my child feel about trying new things or making mistakes? Is he a risk taker?
- What opportunities are there for problem solving or critical and creative thinking? How does my child respond?
- In what ways does my child show the ability to work independently, accept leadership roles, assume responsibility, and exhibit intellectual curiosity?
- What can we do at home to help our child develop her abilities?

Advanced Learning Plans (ALPs)

The Fall Conference is also a time to finalize your child’s Advanced Learning Plan so please make sure this is part of your conference if you haven’t already discussed it. The purpose of ALPs is to set (and then monitor) academic and affective (social-emotional) goals for this school year in order to ensure growth for each student. These goals are set alongside students and appropriate teachers who work with your student in their area(s) of giftedness and your input is valuable to this process.

What is Differentiation Anyway?

Differentiation, defined for Parents

Differentiation is a term you’ve probably heard us use to describe how we meet the needs of diverse learners in a classroom. But what does that actually mean and really look like?

In short, differentiation means finding the “sweet spot” for each learner. All kids come to school to learn so we need to find this learning sweet spot for every student.

Sound impossible? It’s not. Let’s be clear. Differentiation does not mean an individual learning activity for every kid, every day. That *would* be impossible.

At times, whole group instruction is appropriate and effective for all students. In a differentiated classroom, decisions about student grouping and learning activities are made *intentionally*. Therefore, for all activities, teachers have a learning objective that is based on the needs of the students.

At times, students are working in groups in order to differentiate learning. Flexible grouping means that groups change depending on the intended learning objective. Sometimes groups are based on academic need; other times, they are based on student interests; and still other times, students are purposefully grouped by mixed-ability in order to build classroom community or to expose students to diverse ideas or perspectives. However students are grouped, all students have a defined role in the group and everyone in the group is able to do the work assigned.

Classroom activities are often differentiated as well. We want all students to be involved in what we call “productive struggle.” This is that sweet spot where learning happens and why differentiation is critical. In the classroom this could mean that as students are ready, they are assigned more complex resources or more complex questions. It can also mean that students are learning with less teacher-directed structure or support or that they are engaged in a more open-ended task or final product.

Differentiation is not more of the *same* work. Students need productive struggle, not volume of workload. In addition, differentiation does not mean that high-ability students are always working independently or tutoring their peers. All students need direct instruction and meaningful feedback in order to learn and grow.

After all, the chance to learn and grow is why all of our students come to school.

Find More Parent Resources on the [RFSD PEAK PARENT RESOURCES](#) Webpage!