

September 1, 2009

The Janney Jamboree began this week. Although I briefly explained the gathering in last week's newsletter, I want to use this opportunity to provide greater clarity and to share some reflections.

As I have mentioned before, I had many conversations with teachers, staff, students, and parents over the summer. Although Janney's strengths dominated most discussions, I also asked that everyone identify growth areas for the coming year. Concerns abounded that not all stakeholders felt like part of the community; there seemed to be a lack of efficient communication; tardiness rates were high and growing; announcements interrupted the learning day; parents who could not attend PTA meetings or other evening events felt isolated; increased connections between older and younger students were desired; some students were struggling to make friends and feel part of Janney; students were not aware of the work that their peers were doing; the morning arrival time was chaotic and disconnected; and celebrations of good work were limited. Each of the previous sentiments arose repeatedly. It was not my intention to make value judgments about their validity, but rather to hear the concerns and how they could be ameliorated, whether for the sake of the important minority or for the majority. Through personal experience, research of best practices, and a study of the work on experts on building school community, a common thread emerged: starting the day with a community gathering. Thus, the Janney Jamboree began to take shape.

I have received varying feedback on success of the Jamboree across all grade levels. To this point, feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with several suggestions for improvement. As is often the case with something new, I also want to acknowledge the discomfort and problems that the Jamboree has surfaced. We have improved the process each day, many suggestions have already been incorporated, and solutions will continue to be implemented in the areas of time, opportunities to communicate with teachers, supervision and structure, weather (the Jamboree will be cancelled for inclement weather, in tandem with recess moving indoors), and content.

The Jamboree and its content serve to promote four core values at Janney: equity, collaboration, reflection and experimentation. As the Jamboree committee plans future meetings, there will be increased teacher leadership, student involvement, and opportunities for parents to contribute. Although Mondays will always serve as a welcome day, and Fridays will be reserved for celebrations, the middle of the week might include song, team building, performances, sharing, presentations, thought questions, etc. This first week represented a foundation only, and in the spirit of experimentation and reflection, the Jamboree will grow into a more interesting and useful event each week. In fact, this week (please see the schedule in advance on the Janney website and in the weekly newsletter) we will hear from all three of our major stakeholders: staff, students and parents.

As the Jamboree begins to be led by different members of our community, I am excited to see the interpersonal connections that will be made. Students have been respectful, responsible, safe and focused in their classrooms and in conjunction with classroom lessons, have a clear understanding of the expectations at Janney. Most of all, I hope you will agree that the Jamboree has become more efficient each and every day and that it has been increasingly evident how the event supports our vision and values.

More information about the Janney Jamboree is available on the Janney website at:  
<http://www.janneyschool.org/jamboree.htm>.