September 18, 2013

Dear RMSEL Parent Community,

I hope that each of your families is safe and dry after last week’s devastating floods. During the flooding last week, we had a crew out in the field, which had to return from their fall crew trip. The decision to return was made by our Adventure Coordinator in the interest of student safety. Any time we are faced with adverse weather conditions that could impact student safety, we will remove students from the field and return to school.

Over the past week, I have had the opportunity to connect with multiple groups of RMSEL parents through “Chat with Chad” and our District Accountability Committee (DAC) representatives. During each of these two meetings, clarifying questions were asked regarding our focus on Mathematics and student achievement. In our organization as a K-12 community, any change to a single school level or grade will impact the vertical alignment of curriculum. In making shifts to increase student achievement and close the disproportionate gap between literacy and mathematics achievement at RMSEL, we have implemented a new lower school common core curriculum, created flexible differentiated groups in middle school, and provided access to level IV Integrated Mathematics to high school students. Each of these shifts has an impact on the alignment K-12. To help explain and remain specific, we will continue to inform our parent community each week with specifics to your school level.

During the 2011-2012 school year, we began piloting differentiated flexible groups in 6th grade. During that year, we made adequate growth for the first time in 7 years in 6th grade. Last year when we expanded the 6th grade into a two-crew stand-alone team serving 50 students, we expanded the differentiated flexible groups to serve two groups of students in Mathematics and Literacy Workshop. Once again during the 2012-2013 school year, we made adequate growth. This pilot project paved the way for implementation of differentiated flexible groups in grades 6-8 at RMSEL for 2013-2014. Students participate in mathematics instruction and curriculum based on mastery of standards and not by grade level or course title. We intend to build mastery of understanding in concepts and skills as students prepare for post-secondary education.

To provide parents with additional understanding into adequate growth and what this means as compared to an annual TCAP score, adequate growth measures the growth of students compared individually from year to year. Adequate growth measures progress of students, not a single year state test score. Growth provides insight into the effectiveness of a learning expedition, instruction, curriculum, and/or organization. Since 2007, RMSEL has made adequate growth in 6th grade only during the 2012 and 2013 school years. In grades 7 and 8, RMSEL has not made adequate growth since 2007. With the implementation of the new system we hope that the trend for our upper middle school grades is similar to the success we have found in 6th grade. To bookend middle school and specifically the pilot in 6th grade last year, 53% of 6th grade students made adequate growth, as compared to 29% in 5th grade and 28% in 7th grade. We feel strongly that the use of differentiated flexible groups provides all students with the opportunity to master mathematical content standards and grow as young mathematicians. We look forward to a continuation of this positive trend in successive years.

We will continue to provide parents with opportunities to develop a more complex understanding of our shifts with Mathematics throughout the school year. We are looking forward to
a first trimester evaluation of the new Envision Curriculum at lower school. If you ever have any questions, feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Chad