On March 28, 2007, the second meeting of the Luther Jackson GT Center Transition Committee was held. In addition to School Board member Kaye Kory, the Cluster II Assistant Superintendent Phyllis Pajardo, and Cluster II Director Ulysses Cox, approximately 12 parents from 7 feeder schools attended the meeting. The agenda included updates, proposals, and input and suggestions for the April 17 Parent Orientation. The next meeting will be Wednesday, May 2, 7:30 pm, in the Library at Luther Jackson Middle School. New members are welcome – please email Dr. Carol Robinson, Principal, of your interest (carol.robinson@fcps.edu). Thank you for your interest and participation in the Transition Committee.

**Updates**

**Curriculum**

Like other Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) GT centers, Jackson’s GT Center curriculum will follow the FCPS Program of Studies (POS). The Center curriculum extends the POS by increasing and varying the levels of depth, complexity, and pacing. Included in the curriculum are problem-based units that have been created by GT Center teachers or obtained from the National Center for Gifted Education. This includes the William and Mary units of study. The FCPS GT specialist is currently completing a Framework that will provide a scope of, and materials for, lessons that GT Center teachers can use in their planning.

With the exception of History 7, GT Center and general education courses use the same textbooks. An optional History 7 textbook is approved for GT Centers and is used by several of the Centers; Luther Jackson will purchase and use that textbook. GT Center programs have shared lists of supplemental materials used in their programs – a wealth of choices for the new Center at Luther Jackson.

FCPS has established procedures for determining if students should take advanced level math courses in middle school. Jackson will follow the procedures outlined by FCPS --- The GT Center at Luther Jackson will offer Honors Algebra I, Honors Math 7, and Math 7 on the team with the GT Center students.

Foreign languages offered to students at grade 8 will include Spanish, French, Latin, and Japanese. Currently, FCPS does not approve first year of a language in grade 7. There is a discussion about offering the first half of a language in grade 7 and the second half of the language in grade 8, with the high school exam being given at the end of grade 8.

**Staffing**

As soon as the new GTC boundary was approved in February, Jackson GTC was approved to advertise the new GTC positions for 2007-08. Those positions are: one GTC coach and GTC teachers of core subjects (English, math, science, and
The GTC coach position is the first of its kind in FCPS. The position is designed to provide support for the implementation of the GT Center program at Luther Jackson. The GTC coach’s main responsibilities will be to closely interact with GTC teachers, support curriculum and instruction, assess student achievement, foster student involvement in after-school activities, communicate with parents, promote the GT Center, participate on the Transition Committee, and facilitate integration of the GTC program with the base school.

The Cluster II Office completed round one of interviews for the position of GT Center Instructional Coach. The panel of interviewers consisted of curriculum and GT experienced personnel. A second round of interviews will be held in the next two weeks. Members of the Transition Committee suggested additional questions for the second round.

Jackson is in the middle of interviewing for teacher positions for the GT Center. This process also involves a panel of curriculum and GT experienced personnel. With four positions under consideration, the teacher position interview process is expected to wrap up in later spring.

A staffing update will be provided at the upcoming Orientation and the next Transition Committee meeting.

Additional Answers to Burning Questions

Many “burning questions” were answered during the updates on Curriculum and Staffing.

Mrs. Pajardo, Assistant Superintendent for Cluster II, explained that the “charge” of the Transition Committee would be to serve in an advisory capacity to her as she has oversight for Jackson MS and all schools in Cluster II. A rigorous curriculum, strong home/school communication, comprehensive after-school programs, and active involvement of parents are areas of focus and expectation for a successful GT Center at Jackson. The Transition Committee will need to meet the needs for both the immediate and long-term involvement of parents. The Committee will have a Steering Committee and work groups. It is expected that the Committee serve in this capacity for 2-3 years, as the Jackson Center is phased in. After that time, the Transition Committee’s work should be accomplished and/or fully integrated within the Jackson PTA.

Blog

Parent Sulamit Widawsky has created and will serve as the moderator for a blog site for the Committee. To read the blog, use http://ljgttc.blogspot.com. To post on the blog, use LJGTT.post@blogger.com. To reach Sulamit Widawsky directly, her email is shulamit@erols.com. The Transition Committee
appreciates Ms. Widawsky’s efforts to provide another method of communication.

**Proposals**

**Committee’s Organizational Structure**

The Transition Committee will be structured with a Steering Committee and subcommittees that will work on various projects and aspects related to the GT Center. Committee members made recommendations for subcommittees during this meeting and will continue to do so throughout the life of the Committee. The following were recommended for subcommittees: organization, GT curriculum, coordinate home/school involvement, new parents, integrating GT/base school, GT parent liaison, and after-school and enrichment. Denise Pensinger volunteered to serve as secretary to record and post minutes from the meetings. In May, we will begin to confirm specific subcommittees/work groups.

**Future Meeting Topics**

The members of the Transition Committee suggested the following topics for future meetings:

- How to integrate GT Center students in school
- How to communicate with parents: email; email for staff
- Curriculum
- 21st Century
- High School Student Panel
- TA (Teacher Advisory)
- Block Scheduling
- Drama
- Electronic Progress Reports
- Technology Class
- Rumors/Safety
- Use of Blackboard

**Input and Planning**

**Orientation for Parents of Rising Grade 7 Students (April 17, 7:00 pm)**

Committee members provided input for the Orientation on April 17 in the form of questions that they would like answered or general areas of interest. Items listed below were generated by the Transition Committee:

*GTC Staff*

If possible, introduce new GTC coach/teachers

*Middle School*

Teams
Transition from elementary school
Core – PE – electives
Explain four core classes.
Block scheduling – explain it.
Courses
What is the compatibility with high school classes?
Electives – teachers should make some kind of presentation about their elective courses.
Which classes are strictly GT and which ones have both GT and base school populations?
Algebra – Will it be offered to those who qualify and want it? Will it matter how low the number of kids?
What is offered as foreign languages?

After School Activities
Math Counts – run by Math teachers – is this done?
Odyssey of the Mind – does LJ have a team?
Science Olympiad – also run by Science teachers?
Model UN – run by teachers?
Any intramural after-school sports?
What activities do you have now?
Drama/Talent show after school?
Who supervises after-school activities?
Does LJ participate in (music) festivals?

Follow Up to Orientation
Cook out with incoming GTC students and parents (August), or pot luck
- teachers and coach should attend
Ice cream social
Follow up letter to parents reiterating what was covered at the orientation
- send to all parents, not just those at the orientation)
- have email sign-in sheet at meeting and email same letter as above
- on email list give “check mark” if they want their email shared (not bcc)

Next Meeting
The next meeting of the Transition Committee will be Wednesday, May, 2, 7:30, in the Library at Luther Jackson Middle School. A few days prior to the meeting, a tentative meeting agenda will be posted on the Luther Jackson website.