



District 41 Think Tank—updated

Revised Nov. 20, 2012

What is the Think Tank

The District 41 Think Tank started in 2011 with a group of teachers and administrators; it has now grown to about 60 members from across the district, including parents. The group has spent about 18 months taking a systemic and long-term look at how students can be more successful given the world they will be experiencing. The Think Tank's work is grounded in the district's Long-Range Plan (especially the LRP Transformative Actions), Learner Characteristics and Positive Core. It also connects with other groups and initiatives underway in the district, for example the Foreign Language Committee, Problem/Project-Based Learning and the Master Facility Plan update.

What motivated the Think Tank's work?

Students in the United States are losing ground to those in other countries, especially in science. In a few years, our students will be looking at colleges or thinking about careers. The foundation they receive in District 41 will make a big difference to their ability to thrive in a 21st century world. We can't even imagine today what their opportunities will look like, but we know that we must prepare them to be flexible, critical thinkers with a solid grasp of scientific principles, strong literacy skills and the ability to work collaboratively with others. The Think Tank has researched the global achievement gap, survival skills for the workforce of the future, project-based learning and other areas as it developed its direction. In addition, members have visited districts that are implementing 21st century practices such as integration of curricular areas, flexible student grouping and use of STEM labs at the elementary level. These site visits have been crucial to the Think Tank's research and its ability to frame its findings in a practical way grounded in what really works in schools.

Think Tank next steps

In November, the Think Tank visited all the schools to share its work to date with staff members and to collect feedback. It has also shared information with PTA Council. The group will bring its findings to the Board of Education on Nov. 26. It also will share information and seek feedback at subsequent parent meetings as it continues to refine its concepts. Below are the key ideas it will share and that it will continue to develop.

Key ideas

- Provide significant blocks of time for literacy/social studies and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Math)
- Organize elementary schools to allow multi-grade opportunities that will improve teachers' ability to target instruction. These opportunities would be focused on grades 2/3 and 4/5.
- Create potential for a multi-year relationship between students and teachers (homeroom concept)
- Provide all staff members daily time for common collaboration (as part of the district's commitment to being a PLC, or Professional Learning Community)
- Make Project/Problem-Based learning a key instructional approach
- Make STEM/STEAM learning a key component of the curriculum
- A future goal is full-day kindergarten to prepare students for a more rigorous first grade and beyond

Think Tank's

Guiding Principles

1. Give every child what they need when they need it
2. Give every child an experience that is rigorous, relevant and built on strong relationships