

How team teaching aids junior high students

By SUSAN AVERILL.

Four teachers at Highmeadow Elementary School in Farmington are teaming together to take the trauma out of junior high and give students a better education at the same time.

The teachers—Linda Gruss, Rose Christoff, Julie Wilson and Kay Brennan—are convinced that their "Highmeadow Plan" gives students and teachers the opportunity to delve more deeply into scheduled subject matter.

"We did it so that we could become more specialized. We have a great deal more time to spend on our own subjects and can therefore gather more materials," said Julie Wilson, who has sliced off social studies as her domain.

Nearly one-third of the school, 110 students, are involved in the program which encompasses fifth and sixth grade and one of two fourth grade classes.

Math teacher Linda Gruss explained that while this is the second year of the program, it did exist in a modified form during the previous two years. "At that time, though, it was just reading and math."

Benefits to the students cannot be measured only in terms of card marks, she said.

"IT HELPS and encourages them to have responsibility. They have to have the right books for the right class at the right time. It's very much a learning process for the child. They learn how to budget time," Mrs. Gruss said.

The students' schedules depart from the typical junior high model in several respects. The earlier part of the school day, until 1 p.m., is spent studying with each teacher for 35 minutes. The remainder of the day, the students will spend with their "home-room" teacher, where they will be taught language arts.

"It's like a security," Mrs. Christoff said. "They should have a teacher to go to for a problem."

Continuity, the teachers said, is stressed. "We like to hold meetings or discussions," science teacher Mrs. Brennan said. The meetings serve the purpose of discussing each child's needs and development, gearing programs and methods to work smoothly and consistently for the students.

For the teachers, the day seems to move quickly. "It seems that school starts at 9 a.m. and ends at 11 a.m.," Mrs. Brennan said. Even so, Mrs. Brennan said the freedom of planning for two subjects only motivates her to do twice as much. "I spend twice as much time at home planning things," she said.

Where we used to allow maybe an hour for preparation each evening, we would spend maybe 20 minutes on each subject. This way we can spend the full time and really concentrate in one area," she said.

THE SCHEDULING calls for different classroom compositions, which increases leadership potential for several students who might otherwise remain unpaired.

In reading and math, students are grouped homogeneously. This way, students learn with others of similar ability. Social studies and science classes are heterogeneously mixed, because they're mostly activities, and they can learn from other children.

Mrs. Christoff, the reading teacher, said.

Students are the only ones who must be worked into schedules.

"It takes a lot of flexibility of the entire staff. We're all willing to work together," Mrs. Brennan said. Music and art are tailored to the students' schedules, for which the teachers thank their consultants.

Those in the Highmeadow Plan also make extensive use of the media center, and the teachers praise Shirley Sirokin, media specialist, for coordinating media materials for each of the classes.

"Mrs. Sirokin correlates whatever we happen to be doing with books, films, visual aids and suggestions on where to go and what to see. She's a goldmine in herself," Mrs. Wilson, social studies teacher, said.

AS ENTHUSIASTIC as they are, the teachers aren't sure the plan would work in other elementary schools. A lot would depend on the cohesion of the staff and the attitudes of the students, they said.

"The four of us work very well together. It would depend on the students as well as the teachers, whether it would work in another school."

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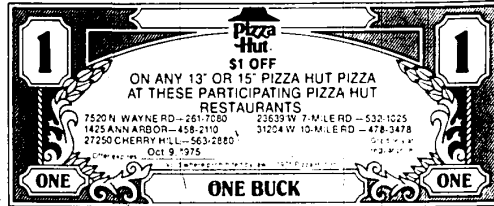
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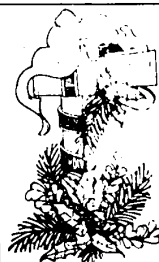
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