

Response to Board Questions on Option D from the Facilities Study Team's Addendum • 2-9-10

Option D

- Middle schools are reconfigured into two 5-6 and two 7-8 schools.
- All elementary buildings are reconfigured as K-4 schools. (The decision on whether Highmeadow remains a K-5, or changes to a K-4 or K-6 school, still needs to be determined.)
- Alameda, FCS, Visions, Cloverdale programming and locations remain as is.
- Wooddale, William Grace, Flanders and Eagle Elementary Schools are closed.
- The Maxfield Training Center would close. Staff would be absorbed by the Ten Mile building and other District education buildings.
- District science center moves to the warehouse at Central Office.

Background

In November, the Facilities Studies Team raised a question about whether three middle schools could accommodate 800-1,000 6th – 8th grade students. With the help of our middle school leaders, it was determined three middle schools could house all 6th – 8th grade students, with a few renovations. However, the thought of having that many students in a school with an age span between 10 and 14-years-old drew concerns from administrators.

Subsequently, they began looking at ways to be near capacity, but without the vast difference in age level. Since some of our neighboring communities had recently transitioned to a 5/6 and 7/8 configuration, administrators began to look into this configuration. After investigation, this configuration can house about the same number of students, but having 5th and 6th grade students together and 7th and 8th grade students together it presented a much better fit.

The social, emotional, physical and academic needs of 5th and 6th grade students are very similar. These students would then transition as a group to a 7/8 school which is a blend between an elementary school and a high school.

The middle school leaders also saw how efficient specials and electives could be scheduled. This was also the case for general and special education staffing levels.

Realizing option D impacted elementary, middle and high schools, a group of leaders from all of these levels and central office began to meet in order to research the Board's questions.

Research

A preliminary review of literature was done on 5/6 and 7/8 schools. Many neighboring communities have gone to 5/6 and 7/8 schools and intentionally chose this configuration.

Transitions

The group reviewed the work that the Learning Configuration and Facilities Committee (LCFC) did during the 2008-2009 school year on transitions and then did additional research on their own. One of the sites this group reviewed regarding transitions is

www.nmsa.org/portals/0/pdf/publications/On_Target/transitioning_ms/transitioning_ms_7.pdf

Budget factors across the nation have forced schools to look at all options for educating their students. As a result of this, new transition programs have been developed. For example, our main high schools utilize the LINK program. This is something that has greatly helped incoming students for the duration of their first year in a high school. Similarly, a WEB program has been developed for younger students in 5th – 8th grade. Our middle school administrators were already in the process of being trained so they too can implement this program.

Transitions are a challenge for students and their families, yet by putting a number of programs and support structures into place, the effect can be drastically minimized.

Site Visits and Phone Contacts

In Michigan, there are more than 45 different schools that house grades 5/6 or 7/8. Twelve districts in southeastern Michigan utilize 5/6 and 7/8 schools. Contacts were made with these schools to also gain more information. Members of our administrative team asked questions about the process used to move to this configuration, changes in academic and elective offerings, curriculum, transitions, staffing and how to build a parent community. A summary of this data was presented to the Board of Education.

Members of the administrative team visited Riley Upper Elementary (5/6, Livonia), Meadows Elementary (5/6, Novi) and Heritage School (5/6, Saline). They spoke with administrators and teachers and learned of transition programs (for both students and parents), academic offerings and elective or specials offerings.

5/6 and 7/8 configuration in Farmington Public Schools

Taking all of this information, the administrative team met, discussed and began to put together a 5/6 and 7/8 program that would best support our students. The team suggested that Power and Warner would best be utilized as the 5/6 schools and East and Dunckel as the 7/8 schools. (This configuration is just one idea and administration is looking at a number of aspects to determine which schools will house grades 5/6 and which will house grades 7/8. As soon as the new school configuration has been finalized, it will be shared with everyone.)

5/6 School

The 5th grade students would remain with one teacher and the 6th grade students would be taught by two-person teams. Students would use lockers and gradually be expected to become more independent. The intent would be to have students move together to their 7/8 school.

Fifth grade students would receive specials of physical education, general music and art. They would be able to still receive instrumental music and it may be possible to have more of it. All students would have recess and would have the opportunity to visit one of the Teen Centers after school.

7/8 School

Much like our 6-8 schools now, 7/8 schools would have students rotating on a six-hour schedule. This would include math, physical education, science, social studies, English and a range of electives. Students could continue to choose band, orchestra or vocal music.

Competitive athletics would be offered, like it is now for both 7th and 8th grade students. Like the 5/6 students, these students could also attend the Teen Centers after school.

Parent involvement

In some districts, PTA's were combined – 5/6 and 7/8. They had one meeting each month, which alternated between each school. Other schools had separate PTA's, yet much was done to create similar formats and activities as students stayed in these schools for two years. These efforts made it much more welcoming for parents, as well as gave them access to learn the routines of each school.

Summary

There are many advantages to the 5/6 and 7/8 configuration, yet drawbacks as well. As a whole, the group that looked into this felt very comfortable overcoming the transition issue. They also felt given the goal to operate efficiently, this was a much more advantageous model than three middle schools with students in 6 – 8th grade.