

**Future of West
Reconfiguration of Educational Environments**

Subcommittee Report
Amended 3/22/07

Subcommittee Objective

- Provide the most educationally responsive and fiscally responsible proposal to address the utilization of the West High School facility

Committee Members:

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Karen Burkush, Assistant Superintendent
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Proposal:

- ❖ Reconfigure all schools on the west side of Manchester to maximize the resources available
- ❖ Convert the three elementary schools on the west side to Pre-3 schools
- ❖ Convert the Middle School at Parkside to a grade 4 to 6 upper elementary school
- ❖ Reconfigure the West High School facility into a 7-12 education environment
 - Separate physical educational environments: 7-8 and 9-12
 - Separate programming for grades 7-8 and 9-12
 - Separate schedules for grades 7-8 and 9-12
- ❖ Incorporate small learning communities model
- ❖ Incorporate a professional development partnership with a strong teacher training component with the University of NH
- ❖ Incorporate magnet ELL programs at one of the elementary schools to allow ELL students who reside on the west side to be able to attend a school on the west side (*students currently are transported to the magnet program at Webster Elementary School*)

Rationale (philosophy & research):

Currently, a common secondary school configuration in many school districts is to separate middle schools (grades 6-8) and high schools (9-12). This configuration has enabled distinct programming for early adolescents, as suggested by the 1989 Carnegie Corporation report "Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century." This landmark report recognized the need to strengthen the academic core of middle schools and establish caring, supportive environments which value adolescents, a step away from traditional junior highs in which the unique needs of early adolescents were not recognized. A decade after Carnegie's call

for stronger middle schools, research (Flowers & Mertens, 2003; Jackson & Davis, 2000) described many successes of the middle school movement but revealed that those gains were not happening for all students or in all districts.

Recently the configuration of middle and high schools has been called into question. The RAND Corporation report "Focus on the Wonder Years" (2004) acknowledged the need to meet the needs of early adolescents but questioned whether the current design and operation of middle schools were meeting those needs. The report suggested that the level of alienation, poor behavior and low achievement evident in many middle school students may be due partially to the configuration of schools.

In addition to the lack of success for many middle schools, the transition from middle to high school may also be problematic. Young adolescents entering high school experience emotional distress about being picked on and teased by older students, having harder work, making lower grades, and getting lost in a larger, unfamiliar school (Mizelle, 1995; Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994). Following the move into high school, many young adolescents experience a decline in grades and attendance (Barone, Aguirre-Deandreis, & Trickett, 1991); and by the end of 10th grade drop out of school. According to NH Department of Education data the Manchester School District 2004-05 annual drop out rate is 5.3 percent.

Some research suggests that grade configuration may be related to problems of low achievement and dropping out. For example, Alspaugh (1999) found that students who made the transition to high school at grade 7 (that is, those who attended high schools with the 7-12 grade configuration) dropped out significantly less often than did students making the transition at either the ninth- or tenth-grade level.

Examples of successful 7-12 schools have been described in recent educational literature. Prete (2006) chronicled the success of the University Park Charter School in Worcester MA which has attained an exceptional level of effectiveness, as reflected in student achievement. For example, all students at UPCS have passed the statewide test on their first try, with most scoring in the top two performance categories ("proficient" and "advanced"), and qualified for postsecondary education.

Most experts on school configurations agree that every possible configuration has benefits and weaknesses. "By building on the strengths and minimizing the weaknesses found within every grade configuration, school administrators can provide effective educational services regardless of the particular grade span being used" (Renchler). In general, psychological research has found that an emphasis on building student self-perception of success (Silverthorn, et al., 2005) and creating learning environments that emphasize developing and improving over demonstrating relative ability (Gutman, 2006) led to greater success in the transition into high school. Student interviews during the middle grades reform effort in Philadelphia revealed that students wanted teachers who would challenge them academically but also provide the personal and academic support that is fundamental for achievement (Wilson & Corbett, 2001).

In line with these general research findings, a core set of principles for adolescent success should guide the formation of schools within the configuration chosen. In describing the district's Secondary School Redesign Initiative, the San Francisco Unified School District identified four key elements to serve as the basis to redesign and energize their secondary schools: personalization, academic rigor, opportunities to apply learning, and access to powerful teaching.

However, how these goals are met within a 7-12 school should vary according to the different developmental needs of different grade levels. As one middle school expert explains: "If they do the right things with seventh and eighth graders in a high school setting and they're not making them into little high school students... intuitively, it seems like it would make sense." For the middle grades, existing guidelines for programming such as those found in *Turning Points 2000* (Jackson & Davis, 2000) and *In This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* (National Middle School Association, 2003), may provide an initial direction.

Advantages:

District-wide/Community

- Responds to concerns regarding middle school outcomes (Chamber of Commerce Report)
- Addresses the growth in northwest Manchester and likely facility needs
- Considers the educational research concerning the configuration of schools and the impact on student outcomes
- Proposed configuration of grades in buildings is better aligned with the NH Department of Education teacher certification
- Fiscally responsible

Grades Pre-3 Primary

- Provides opportunity for all day kindergarten to be at all three elementary schools on the west side (currently Northwest is the only school without full day kindergarten)
- Allows preschool students who live on the west side to attend their neighborhood school
- No increase in the number of transitions for students; the transition to a new school will be at an earlier grade
- Eliminates 6 portable classrooms
- Eliminates the need for leasing preschool space at Easter Seal (lease ends 8-31-08)
- Alleviates the over crowding at elementary schools on the west side: frees up 10 classes at Northwest, 6 at Gossler, 8 at Parker Varney
- Addresses the population growth in the northwest section of Manchester and the need for an additional elementary school
- Provides for an art room (Northwest)

Grades 4-6 Intermediate

- Provides for more consistency and flexibility with programming-remediation, acceleration, looping, scope and sequence
- Provides opportunity to continue with direct instruction in reading
- Grade 6 students will be afforded the benefits of the elementary self-contained instructional model; the structure provided in a self-contained model is more developmentally appropriate for 6th grade students
- Expands co-co curricular activity opportunities; facilitates increased participation in sports
- NH Department of Education certification levels are K-6

- Analysis of the Manchester School District's recent NECAP scores support the notion that students in 6th grade would benefit from an additional year of reading instruction. See attachment.

Grades 7-8 and 9-12 Secondary

- Eliminate that challenging transition from grade 8 to 9
- Students develop a stronger sense of belonging and confidence
- Gives teachers time to know the students to eliminates the lagging achievement in enrollment; reduces the time spent getting to know new students
- Expands co-curricular activity opportunities for grades 7-8; facilitate increased participation in athletics program
- Broad grade spans provide the positive role modeling to the younger students
- Drop out rates are lowered by the 11th grade
- Special education service provision can be maximized
- Provides for continuity in the secondary curriculum addressing concerns that students from middle school are not well prepared for high school
- Offers increased flexibility to establish small learning communities
- Recent newspaper articles provide examples of the strengths of the 7-12 model. See attached articles from the New York Times and The Boston Globe.
- Professional Development partnership with University of NH will enrich the collaboration and support for innovative practices.

Considerations:

- The proposed school environment configurations will be different than the rest of the district: Pre-3, 4-6, 7-12, elimination of middle school concept on west side
- High mobility rate; students moving from one type of environment to another if they move from the west side to the east side
- Parent concerns with children leaving elementary school at end of grade 3
- Possible staffing pattern issues with regard to certification and highly qualified teacher (HQT) requirement
- Space for Wilson Kindergarten classrooms that are currently housed in the Easter Seals facility
- Restructuring of the West facility; the facility needs to be able to accommodate separate areas for grades 7-8 and grades 9-12
- Professional development for staff
- Parent concerns with 7th and 8th graders being in a building with 9-12th grade students
- Administration staffing patterns to be determined: Preschool Administration, Upper Elementary Administration, and Secondary Administration

Fiscal Impact (if known):

- Eliminate the need for preschool space
- Reduce number of portable classrooms
- Delay or possibly eliminate the need for a \$10 million dollar elementary school
- Effort to have an impact on reducing the drop out rate thus positively impacting other community resources

- Possibility for the School Administration building to be relocated to West facility thus eliminating/reducing lease costs

Recommendations:

- ❖ To address the facility needs required to support separate environments for 7-8 and 9-12; secure facilities expert to evaluate the physical space
- ❖ Phase in the reconfiguration model over a three year period; address the preschool space needs for September 2008 as a part of this plan
- ❖ Enrich the collaboration between the University of New Hampshire and the District by establishing a professional development and teacher training partnership
- ❖ Determine the feasibility of relocating the School Administration offices as part of the facility needs assessment
- ❖ Consider a reconfiguration that includes the following:
 - Relocate grade 8 to the high schools district wide combined with redistricting for grades 8-12
 - Relocate preschool classes at leased Easter Seal location to elementary schools on the west side
 - Move grade 5 students from the 3 elementary schools on the west side to Parskide

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