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Task Force on Student Alignment

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The Report
of the
Task Force
on
Student Alignment

22 March 2010

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Task Force on Student Alignment

Members

Katherine M. Labanaris, Chairman
Richard Girard, Vice-Chairman
Jo Ann Heath
Kathleen Kamveris
Sister Frances Marion
Marina Skaperdas
Christine Telge

Task Force on Student Alignment Mission

The team shall conduct a non-political and thorough review of how we currently align our students across the school district. How School District lines are drawn. What busing routes are in effect. Recommendations shall include: How to more efficiently align our student population: Where the greatest opportunities to reduce overcrowding are: Whether the facilities are currently used in an optimal manner for the K-5, middle school, and high school model.

Testimony
of
Superintendents
and
Planning Department
Representative

TASK FORCE ON STUDENT ALIGNMENT

Dr. Charles Littlefield, Superintendent, SAU # 15

January 27, 2010

K-8 ADVANTAGES

- Transitions are tough for kids
- K-8 minimizes anxiety for kids and families
- Research indicates student achievement is linked to a sense of school community, stability, and true sense of community after 9 years in the same building
- Shared responsibility for learning across all grade levels. Coordinate curriculum both implicit and explicit instruction, differentiation.
- 8th graders stayed younger, longer and helped the younger children
- Larger facilities which gave the opportunity for younger students: regulation size gym, tech facilities, art, music, and media center. The ability to concentrate resources is also greater.

TASK FORCE ON STUDENT ALIGNMENT

Dr. Charles Littlefield, Superintendent, SAU # 15

January 27, 2010

FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION

1. Vision/Function
2. How does the form fit into the function?
 - What does the curriculum look like?
 - What do the classrooms look like? WWI vintage schools/racial/economic isolation
3. Facilities Analysis
4. 2011-2012 lead time, starting now
 - Two years to put the program together
 - Curriculum document
 - What will the new teaching and learning look like?
5. Ten years to complete
 - In any organizational change, no one gets hurt.
 - Parental support, key to success
 - Kids first
 - Concept of the “Grammar School”
6. Staggered Openings
 - K-5 Buses
 - 6-8 Buses
 - A safety question, walking today in some places is not safe
 - Bus full-day kindergarten
7. Supervising Principal
 - Two Associate Principals
8. Set high expectations
 - No excuses...higher than predicated performance
9. Kid centered HS principal
 - Less than 1% drop out
10. Discipline down and student achievement up

TASK FORCE ON STUDENT ALIGNMENT

Dr. Charles Littlefield, Superintendent, SAU # 15

January 27, 2010

REDISTRICTING

1. Must get it right the first time
2. It is not herding cattle, it is about intellectual development
3. Kid factors
 - all schools equal
 - balance of free and reduced lunch
 - regular and special ed
 - affluent/middle/poor
4. Small and large group discussion/PTA organizations
5. Effect on kids, facilities, and families

TASK FORCE ON STUDENT ALIGNMENT

Robert Suprenant, Superintendent SAU # 40

February 10, 2010

- 34 years of middle school experience
- His questions for the task force:
 - Why are you doing this?
 - Is it worth the cost?
 - What are you trying to achieve?
- Environment
 - K-8
 - Size of schools/fewer students mitigates noise level
 - Staffing: this can be the challenge
 - K-8 = general approach to curriculum
 - 6-8 specific expertise, HQT certification

Middle Schools...receive a bum rap/reputation based on traditional curriculum/ behavior of middle school students is loud, travel is packs, pushing and shoving. They challenge one's ability to manage.

Family and Consumer Science/Band/Industrial Arts

Configuration is not so important as: Can we meet the needs of students?

When schools are too small, students become restless with environment

Same teachers K-8

TASK FORCE ON STUDENT ALIGNMENT

Dr. Thomas J. Brennan, Superintendent, SAU # 37

February 3, 2010

- We have the capacity to make it work...but, no shoehorning
- Enthusiastic about K-8 approach, but implemented middle school concept
- Requires DOE waivers
 Course Offerings
 Meets administrative rules or must seek relief
- A logical plan...meeting overall needs
- Address make-up and structure of schools
- Fewer transitions the better
- A consistent approach
- A systemic change as this requires a generation +2 years to observe/evaluate the process as it evolves.
- Must vett everything
- Need facilities audit, demographic audit, redistricting
- For the West Side....1-2 year lead time, (premium location) theory

TASK FORCE ON STUDENT ALIGNMENT

Pamela Gaucher,
Planning Department, Deputy Director

February 17, 2010

- Constant population numbers, to slight decrease over the past ten years; Steady at 107K

Development:

- 198 units on Karatzas Ave.
- Countryside (Northwest corner): 380 units
- Woodland Pond: 72 lots, 50 homes built
- Neighborhoods at Woodland Pond: 487 units approved, 40 units built, additional 60 units to be built

Impact on schools:

- 1.8 to 2.4 children per single-family home

Impact fees:

- Fairly low, at two thousand dollars per unit
- Can only be used for capital improvements, not for renovations nor enlarging to increase capacity, not to pay debt service

Future Projects:

- South Mammoth Road: SOHA
- Edward J. Roy Drive: 80 homes
- Island Pond Road: 12 single-family homes, 15 condominiums

City of Manchester Master Plan is available on the web site: www.manchesternh.gov

PROS AND CONS

K-8

K-5/6-8

PROS K-8

- Fewer transitions
- Builds a stronger sense of school community and more active parent participation. This sense of community extends into the high schools as well.
- Younger students may benefit from greater resources, gym, music, art, media center available when K-8 in one school
- Fewer adolescents concentrated in one school, therefore, fewer discipline problems (issues)
- Students would stay younger, longer
- Upper grade students could mentor younger students; take responsibility, and show concern for them; younger ones look up to older students.
- Faculty, parents, and students build a level of trust. Students feel confident enough to speak to or confide in any teacher. Administration and teachers have significant history with students and families.
- Older students are more aware of their behaviors around younger students.
- More curriculum control and continuity.
- Greater opportunity for vertical articulation of curriculum with emphasis on differentiation of instruction.
- Student academic achievement improves.
- Potential transportation cost savings.

CONS K-8

- Elementary facilities are not built so that form fits function
- The possibility of loss of unified arts programs
- Possibility of loss of availability of algebra for 8th graders
- Cost effectiveness: Facilities audit, demographic audit, redistricting, professional development, retrofitting buildings
- Capability of each school to mirror the others. Equal access to: Gym, cafeteria, music, Family and Consumer Science and Industrial Arts classrooms
- Time required to make facility accommodations, retrofit facilities, prepare staff, inform public
- Systemic change in delivery of education services will be the source of much concern among parents, administrators, teachers, and students
- Teachers may need alteration in HQT designation or require waivers

PROS K-5/6-8

- Different teaching and learning strategies
- Professionals who want to work with and are trained in the area of younger adolescents
- Organizational structure may better prepare students for transition to and expectations in high school
- More elective options and sports programs
- Change in current system may cause disruption
- Middle schools offer a greater cross-section of our community; more diverse population
- Collaboration and team teaching allows for a correlation of goals/discussions of students/behaviors/curriculum
- Administrative staff and guidance are prepared to work with this age group
- Facilities with a library media center, gym, stage for band practice, concerts
- Opportunity to study algebra, science classrooms are available, access to guidance, health and wellness support programs

CONS K-5/6-8

- Isolation of the middle grades
- Discipline issues/large groups with similar developmental challenges
- Not enough emphasis on academic rigor
- Standardized test results indicate that the middle grades are the weak academic link
- Academic motivation is overshadowed by the challenges of adolescence; physiological changes.
- Another transition for students; may cause anxiety and stress
- 6th graders are too young to be with 7th and 8th graders

FINDINGS
AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. K-8 is a viable option, if it meets the needs of each student as well as the mission of the Manchester School District

Vision of the Manchester School District

Through the involvement of our families, educators and the community, the Manchester School District provides a safe, supportive, respectful and engaging learning environment which has high expectations for student achievement and embraces diversity. As a result, each student is prepared to be a responsible citizen, lifelong learner, and contributing member of society.

2. Redistricting, particularly in the Mammoth Road and Currier Hill areas, would serve to eliminate overcrowding in the affected elementary schools.

MINORITY REPORT

3. The current configuration of K-5/6-8 should remain in place. The administration must address the concerns included in this report with particular emphasis on the over-arching problems of student achievement and discipline issues.

The vote in support of K-8 was as follows:

Christine Telge
Marina Skaperdas
Sister Frances Marion
Kathleen Kamveris
Richard Girard
Jo Ann Heath

The vote in support of K-5/6-8 was as follows:

Katherine Labanaris

RESOURCES

New England League of Middle Schools Report on Grade Configuration

Leveling the Field
American School Board Journal, March 2010

Research Brief
The Principals' Partnership

Available from Superintendent Brennan