



Stamford Public Schools

EXCELLENCE IS THE POINT.

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INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

To: Winifred Hamilton *WH*
From: Judith Singer *JS*
Subject: Responses to Board of Education Questions on Middle School Transformation
Date: February 2, 2012
cc: Mona Hanna *MH*

Attached please find responses to Board of Education questions on Middle School Transformation submitted to staff during the last three weeks.

JS/cz

Responses to Board of Education Questions on Middle School Transformation

Introduction:

The Middle School Update Report was emailed to Board of Education members on Friday, January 13, 2012. Additional questions were submitted by Board members to staff over the past three weeks. Responses to Board questions are provided below.

Questions on Middle School Transformation:

1. What changes are planned for 2011-12?

For the 2011-12 school year, we will continue to follow the procedures outlined in the Middle School Reference Guide, published in Summer 2011.

For the 2012-13 school year, the Middle School Transformation was discussed once again at the January 10, 2012 Middle School principals' meeting, as this initiative has been reviewed annually for the past three years.

The group looked very favorably at the Scofield model, realizing however, that this would be a long range goal. The plan for logical next steps supported by the group, for implementation in 2012-13 includes the following elements:

- Science and social studies would be heterogeneously grouped. These areas lend themselves to project-based learning which ties in with our preparation for Common Core State Standards.
- ELA and Math would continue to have two groups: CP and Honors
- Placement in either group would be determined by teacher recommendations, parent input, scores, effort, and participation.
- Flexible grouping would exist within ELA and Math with accompanying criteria that allow movement between CP and Honors.
- Students would continue to receive additional instruction in Academic Extension and Academic Support periods.

Further discussion is planned for the February Middle School Principals' meeting. The Middle School Advisory Council (MSAC) will be reconvened by the end of March to hear a presentation and discuss recommendations for 2012-13.

2. What is the process for moving from Honors to College Prep?

Middle School principals are recommending greater flexibility in the placement of students in Honors and CP. Criteria for moving a student from Honors to CP would have to be developed. Moving a student from CP to Honors could include a parent/student contract in addition to regrouping assessments, teacher recommendations and student grades. Modifications for placement in middle school groups will be discussed at the February Middle School Principals' meeting, for implementation in 2012-13.

3. Please break down survey results by school and provide exact numbers, not "approximate" percentages.

The charts describing survey results have been modified to include number of respondents. These charts will be shared at the Tuesday, February 7 Board of Education meeting.

4. Explain the AS/AE curriculum and which students get world language.

All sixth graders are scheduled one hour each day for an AS (Academic Support) or AE (Academic Extension) period. Seventh and eighth graders take world language in place of Academic Extension. Curriculum for AS/AE classes is described below and is the Middle School Reference Guide, published in Summer 2011.

English/Language Arts:

Academic Support (AS) – The AS class is intended for students who score at/below Proficient on the Reading subtest of the CMT. In this class, students are enrolled in the Read 180 or System 44 program of the Scholastic Reading application.

Academic Extension (AE) – The AE class extends the regular ELA program. Teachers use the Reader’s Workshop as a strategy for students to engage with text and respond to text related questions. In addition to the assigned core books and Book Club tests used in the ELA class, students in the AE class select texts from the classroom or school library to apply strategies taught in the Reader’s Workshop.

Math:

Academic Support (AS) – The following resources are used in AS classes:

- Intervention Program
- Balanced Assessments
- Figure This website
- Additional Practice and Skills Workbook
- Special Needs Handbook
- Online Skills Practice
- Exam View to create, additional practice problems
- Online games and quizzes
- Test-Taking Strategies and Test Prep Workbook

Academic Enrichment (AE) – AE classes incorporate the following:

- Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics Activities
- Math Olympiad
- Math Counts
- Balanced Assessments
- Online games and quizzes
- Logic puzzles
- Connected Math Program Investigations not covered in the core math class

5. Update on 7th grade Algebra.

Seventh grade students in Algebra I are very successful. Of the 19 seventh graders in Algebra I, 12 achieved mid-term exam grades of 95% or higher; grades for the remaining seven students ranged between 83% and 94%.

For the 2012-13 school year, students successful in Algebra I (achieving an A or B on the final exam) will participate in an Honors Geometry class.

6. Building administrators have suggested that a 7 period day would provide greater flexibility and allow more time for supports, enrichment and opportunity for world language. Please address this.

The middle school schedule was adjusted in 2008-09 to expand class time in core areas from 45 minutes/day to one hour/day. As a result 45 instructional hours per year were added to ELA, math, science, social studies and world language.

Reinstating a seven period day would necessarily reduce class time from one hour/day to 45 minutes/day. The Workshop model in ELA and math require a minimum 60 minute period. Academic Extension and Academic Support classes would be reduced from one hour/day to 45 minutes/day. World language would also be reduced from one hour/day to 45 minutes/day.

7. Please explain how the current grouping protocol, dictated by central office, complies with Board Policy Number 6152.

Board Policy Number 6152 states: “Pupils in the Stamford Public Schools are placed in classes on the basis of their needs and previous experiences. The specific criteria applied may be included in administrative guidelines. Placement may also take into consideration the professional judgment of the school staff. Final accountability for placement and any changes thereof shall be that of the school principal.”

The current grouping practices for students placed in CP and Honors classes take into account “student needs and experiences” as measured by a variety of objective assessments. Middle school principals participated in the development of the current grouping practices.

After two years of experience with the Efficacy Program, middle school principals are seeking greater flexibility in placing students in Honors and CP classes. As noted above, discussion is in process with middle school principals both to move students to Honors from CP as well as to move students from Honors to CP.

8. Discuss the disparity between final course grades and grades on final exams in math and science.

Final course grades are higher than final exam grades, for several reasons:

- Standardized final exams, tied to content standards in math and science are new. These exams have been administered to all seventh graders, beginning in June 2010. For only the second year then, have all seventh graders taken the same end of year assessments in math and science.
- The final exams in math and science are cumulative, testing what students were taught from September through June. For some middle school students, cumulative tests are new.
- The standard formula at the middle school level for calculating second quarter course grades includes the midterm as one test. Because the midterm has very little impact on the second quarter grade, disparities between midterms and quarter two grades are possible.