

Grade Configuration Review

On January 28, 2020, The K-4 administrators and I got together to review the current elementary configuration, multi-age classrooms, and grade reconfiguration. Here are the points that were discussed about each configuration and the administrative team's recommendation.

Current Grade Configuration:

- Creates Multi-age classrooms that some parents and staff do not like
- Provides opportunities for some student to stay with the same teacher for two years (modified looping)
- Shared staffing
- Grade level collaboration is a challenge across the district
- Transportation is regional
- Community based schools preferred by staff and parents
- Extra TA support possible and enticements to Teachers taking on multi-age classrooms
- Professional Development can be needed for differentiation
- Space in schools to allow for fluctuation with increase and decrease in enrollment

Summary: Our current configuration keeps students in their neighborhood schools, which in past years has been valued. It does create multi-level classes to effectively use teacher staffing and building space (Manchester). It does create a challenge for teachers covering standards in two different grades and concerns from parents. Some of those challenges could be offset with extra teaching assistance, professional development and/or other enticements. Collaboration currently is implemented through late starts, SIP Days, and sub teachers for portions of the day.

Eliminating Multi-age Classrooms:

- 4-5 FTEs will be needed to accomplish staffing
- Financially will not allow for other staffing FTEs to be considered
- Class sizes are small in many classes already (Could this create inequities across schools and classes who have super small classes)
- Differentiating needs to occur by teachers
- Keep home schools and doesn't force transfer students to classrooms with openings

Summary: Adding teachers to eliminate multi-age classrooms would add 4-5 FTEs. That would be significant financially and limit the possibility of growing FTEs in other district areas of need. Classes would be a single grade and in many cases will create very small class sizes.

Re-aligning grade configurations to graded centers:

- SPED students (Life Skills and Pre-K) who need accommodations would not be able to use Manchester and stay with their grade level peers
- Creates more transitions for students beyond the three they currently have

- Transportation and start times will become a challenge to bring students from every part of the district to certain attendance centers
- Curriculum alignment will need to be put on hold for at least a year at the K-4 level in order to switch focus to reconfiguration
- Will lose the community schools district wide at the elementary level
- Creates collaboration between grade levels.
- Realigns staff and could potentially raise class size

Summary: This concept would move students away from community based elementary schools. It would create extra transitions for students beyond the ones we have currently have. Transportation and school times would need to be studied, because busing would become district wide and it will impact when buses can arrive on the central campus. Manchester is not ADA compliant so students in our life-skills classes may not have equal accessibility with their peers. Curricular work in K-4 would be slowed for re-configuration planning and transition. This configuration would allow for grade level collaboration among teachers. It would also allow for classrooms to be more equal in size and come closer to our class size policy.

Recommendation: Each of these options can be done. All of them have pros and cons with them that would need to be weighed. After much discussion and consideration, the Administrative Team is suggesting that the district explore adding a dual language program (concept would need to be developed). Our current configuration could realistically open a program for elementary students beyond the traditional classroom. Our student demographics could make this program appealing for many. If it were housed in Capron Elementary, students from the district could participate and transportation could be shared with our Pre-K students. This could offset class sizes and possibly minimize our number of multi-age classrooms in other buildings. Nicole Difford brings experience with developing a dual language program and is our current EL Director.

All of these options were only discussed at the administrative level. If this is something that would be requested to investigate deeper it would be appropriate to bring into Strategic Planning (New plan will be made in the 2020-21 school year) and our Board Committees.