

**Freeport School District**  
**Freeport, Illinois**  
**Office of the Superintendent**  
**“Making a Difference For Each Student”**

TO: Board of Education

FROM: Peter Flynn, Superintendent

RE: Recommended Change in Grade Structure - Updated

DATE: February 27, 2009

We are recommending that that we go forward with the recommendation to change the grade structure of our school district in order to serve more effectively the needs of our students. The recommendation is based upon research on grade structure. It is our opportunity to remove from our current structure unnecessary transitions for students going from one level of education to another. The transitions are those four time periods when students currently move from *Kindergarten to First Grade* in elementary school, from *Fourth Grade in elementary school to the Fifth Grade* at Carl Sandburg School, from *Sixth Grade at Carl Sandburg School to the Seventh Grade* at Freeport Junior High School and from the *Eighth Grade to the Ninth Grade* at Freeport High School. The transition years are times when achievement indicators slow down for significant numbers of students at the four schools.

This new grade structure would eliminate two of the transitions so that students who have their first transition after fifth grade instead of experience two transitions by that time under our current system.

Our recommendation is to fully implement the changed grade structure in the 2010-2011 school year so that we would have six elementary schools (Blackhawk, Center, Empire, Jones Farrar, Lincoln Douglas and Taylor Park) with K through 5<sup>th</sup> Grade and with Pre-school classes in three of the elementary schools. (We currently have seven pre-school classrooms. The locations of the pre-school classes would be based upon the schools that are closest to where the students live and the room availability in the schools.

Each elementary school will have approximately 250-325 students with a racial balance that is close to that racial diversity in the school district at the elementary grade level. We would use the guideline of approximating the district African American population in each school within 10% on either side of the average. In our community race and income level are closely correlated. Therefore, when using the guideline of race to guide the composition of student group within boundaries of each elementary and middle school, there will also be a considerable balance in poverty levels that approximately reflects the district mix of poverty and non- poverty students.

We will develop a feeder pattern so that the students from three elementary schools will attend the same middle school and the students from the other three will attend the other middle school. The two middle schools will house grades 6-7-8 where the Carl Sandburg School and Freeport Junior High School are located. These newly structured middle schools will house significantly less students than they currently house, reducing them from more than 600 students each to approximately 450 students each. The size of the school will be large enough to have a ‘critical mass’ of students when seeking to offer advanced and specialized programs. The middle schools will also be racially balanced in the same manner as the elementary schools.

There will be one high school with Grades 9-12.

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**Grade Structure Recommendation**

**02.27.09**

**Page Two**

**Rationale**

The issue of grade structure in our school district has been the subject of study twice over the past seven years. Each time, two different groups determined that we should change our grade structure in the best interest of students. Our current grade configuration has too many built-in transitions for our students. Although many students are resilient when it comes to change, many students do not adapt well to the short lengths of schooling in one place and their grades and test scores show it.

We have documented the downturns in student achievement over the past several years during the years when students move from one school to another because of the change required by our current grade structure. The downturns in student achievement are at least partially related to the transitions.

In addition, it is developmentally appropriate and substantiated by the research on grade structure to have students at one school for more than one or two years particularly at the elementary grades. I

The recommended grade configuration will also allow us to make the best use of our facilities in order to maintain optimum class size (15-18) in the early elementary grades. In some of our schools we have been unable to accommodate all students at the elementary grade levels because of the current boundaries, especially when the students are registered with us after the beginning of the school year.

The recommendation to change is a recognition that some students do not respond well to a one year early childhood experience or to a two year upper elementary experience. The proposed grade structure will provide us with a learning environment that is supported in the research as being significantly more likely for us to see that more students will learn and students will learn more.

The **Student Achievement Work Group** (SAWG) This work group is affirming the recommended change in start times so that middle and high schools begin school one hour later and the elementary schools begin approximately one hour earlier than the secondary schools. The work group has further examined the research on grade structure and the middle years. This work group, chaired by Dr. Patty Burke recommends the following:

- A. Maintain the principal and assistant principal positions at each building and exchange one counselor position for the dean's position so that we will have two counselor positions at each building. This is a cost neutral recommendation. [In the interest of full disclosure, the sub-committee that worked on this portion of the recommendations recommended that we have two counselors and one dean at each middle school. I did not forward this recommendation because I could not in good conscience recommend an increased non-teaching staffing pattern for a smaller student body. In other words I could not recommend an additional counselor and an additional dean for a student body that is one-fourth smaller than we currently have. Currently we have three counselors and one dean in two schools that have approximately 1250 students. The committee recommended four counselors and two deans for 900 students. My recommendation is to have four counselors and no deans, but to maintain the same level of four administrators.]

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**Grade Structure Recommendation**

**02.27.09**

**Page Three**

- B. Eliminate the *Making Better Choices* position at Sandburg due to the addition of another counselor. This will result in a savings of approximately \$20,000.
- C. There **may** be a need for an additional one full time position to teach the elective classes (home ec/shop/technology-to be determined) between the two middle schools. Cost: \$45,000.
- D. With the fifth grade transitioning to the elementary buildings, the practice of providing band and orchestra music lessons will be maintained to continue to develop a strong orchestra/band program. This means an addition of one position equivalency to deliver those lessons to fifth grade students in the six elementary buildings. Cost: \$45,000
- E. Each middle school campus would have a Family Resource Coordinator (FRC). This would result in adding a FRC position at FJHS. Cost: \$15,000
- F. Extracurricular Activities: The recommendation is to share one team between the two schools for the 2010-1011 school in all sports except boys and girls basketball. The costs that the committee estimated were:

Four Head Coaches	\$8600
Four Assistant Coaches	\$5400
Uniforms	<u>\$3000</u>

Cost: \$17,000

AVID Program: With an additional middle school, the District would need an additional site license. There would also be a need for two AVID Elective classes at Sandburg School. [It may be advisable at some point to expand the AVID program to the sixth grade level, but that is not something that must be done in order to implement the change in grade structure.]

Costs:

Materials	\$ 250
Site License additional school	<u>\$3,000.*</u>

Total: \$3,250

\*[This was underestimated in the February 17<sup>th</sup> document by \$1,010.]

Total Costs:

Item C: \$45,000
Item D: \$45,000
Item E: \$15,000
Item F: \$17,000
Item G: \$ <u>3,250</u>
\$125,250
Item B: - <u>20,000</u>
\$ 105,250 net cost

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**Grade Structure Recommendation**                      **02.27.09**                      **Page Four**

The **Facilities, Boundaries and Transportation Work Group** has been continually monitoring the work of the Student Achievement Work Group and based upon that made recommendations to alter facilities and transportation to provide for the most efficient use of our buildings and transportation system.

**A. Facilities costs**

Replace miniature toilets and associated plumbing at Jones Farrar to standard height toilets	\$8,167
Add fencing on east side of Jones Farrar to isolate play area	\$4,500
In addition, we would estimate an additional \$10,000 in unforeseen costs of labor and materials that might be attributable to the change in grade structure	<u>\$10,000</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$22,667</b>

**B. Transportation**

The anticipated savings in transportation is inextricably tied to a change in grade structure and start time changes both occurring in the 2010-2011 school year.

Our Director of Transportation with the assistance of our computerized routing system has calculated that the average bus route (with new driver pay rate and no monitor) costs the district \$22,274.96 annually. This could increase with more experienced drivers and the assignment of a monitor.

By changing start times to reflect the high school and two middle schools starting/dismissing at one start time and the six elementary schools starting/dismissing at a time that is at least a 1 hour and 10 minutes different, there will a need for less routes.

Combining the start time change as indicated above with the proposed realignment of the building boundaries, we are projecting to decrease bus routes by a minimum of 3 routes and possibly up to 7 routes, depending on how the special programs are aligned. Single building programs will require dedicated buses, so the number would decrease from 7 towards 3 per each occurrence of single building programs (this does not include special education transportation). Minimally, we will be able to drop 3 routes.

A conservative estimate:  $\$22,274.96 \times 3 = \$66,824.88$  in annual cost savings.

Cost	<b>-\$66,824.88</b>
Net savings	<b>(\$44,157.88)</b>

**The Materials, Equipment** (Including Libraries and the reapportionment of texts) **Work Group** will plan the necessary purchase, distribution, re-distribution, allocation and re-allocation of materials and equipment throughout the school district based upon a system of inventory control and the ongoing decisions of the Student Achievement Work Group. [We do need a computerized inventory system, but that is not an expense that is attributable to a change in grade structure. We will be recommending such a system in the near future. ]

We estimate that approximately \$16,000 would be spent paying staff to stay beyond regular contract time to pack and unpack materials.

Cost	<b>\$ 16,000</b>
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**Grade Structure Recommendation**

**02.27.09**

**Page Five**

The **Staffing Work Group** is making recommendations to alter the staffing of our facilities to provide for the most senior employees in areas of certification. The Staffing Work Group is recommending the following:

**A. Professional Development**

Understanding Middle School Concept: Require middle school staff to attend (with assistance from ROE). National Middle Schools Association (NMSA):

- to provide training in Freeport: **\$2,500 - \$4,000** (including expenses plus stipends **\$6,000**)
- This We Believe, successful Schools for Young Adolescents is the landmark position paper from National Middle School Association in which the association's vision for a successful school for 10- to 15-year-olds is delineated in 14 characteristics. The most profound and enduring lesson learned in 30 years of active middle school advocacy is that the characteristics are interdependent and must be implemented in concert. Research and cumulative, empirical evidence have confirmed that these characteristics when present over time lead to higher levels of student achievement and overall development: \$5.00 ea. = **\$500.00**
- Other Professional Development: Teaming, Dealing With Change, Skill Updates, Curriculum, and Grade Level Areas Updates: **\$40,000** or about \$700 per person.
- Additional custodial staff hired for summer of 2010 to facilitate the movement of equipment and materials. District normally hires 20-30 summer workers to mow and paint. Five would still be needed to mow and the remaining would be used as packers and movers: **\$0.00**

**Total:**

**4,000 Training**  
**6,000 Stipends**  
**500 Books, Study Guides, and Glossary**  
**40,000 Training**

**Cost \$50,500**

The **Communications Work Group** has begun communicating with parents and staff and has anticipated the costs of continuing to communicate with the school district community about the recommended change in grade structure. This group will also gather information and share it with other work groups about lessons learned from other school districts, when they changed their grade structure.

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