

**FREEMPORT SCHOOL DISTRICT 145
BOARD OF EDUCATION
Regular Meeting
April 15, 2009
Grade Structure Information
(Superintendent)**

Background

A committee made up of administrators, teachers and two Board Members recommended that based upon the research for the most effective grade structure and fewest transitions feasible in Freeport that our district change our current grade structure. Following the committee recommendation and a report to the Board of Education, the Superintendent of Schools established five work groups. The five work groups made recommendations, most of which were the basis for a recommendation to the Board of Education to change the grade structure of our school district beginning with the 2010-2011 school year. Following that initial recommendation and the ensuing dialogue that took place with staff and parents, the superintendent presented a modified recommendation to the Board at its April 1, 2009 Board Meeting. The attached document contains responses to the inquiries during and since the April 1st Board Meeting.

Information Report

It is the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools that the Board instruct the staff to continue with its pursuit of a change in grade structure effective with the 2010-2011 school year.

Rationale

The staff has strived to respond satisfactorily to the questions and concerns that were presented at the last Board Meeting. The benefits of the plan presented on April 1, 2009 are that more children will learn, that is students who have been hindered by the multiple transitions in schools will be relieved of two of the four transitions and stand a better chance of learning the intended curriculum. [Transitions are periods when students move from one school to another and experience considerable change in surroundings, routine, staff and fellow students, and where we see downturns in student achievement that are at least partially related to the transitions.] In addition, children will learn more as a result of the changed grade structure. Students will have more opportunities to learn at a deeper level going beyond the normal curriculum and achieving higher standards of learning. 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 early grades. In order to make the best use of our facilities when considering their size and location, we are recommending this changed configuration in order to maintain optimum class size (15-18) in the early elementary grades in such a way so that students can remain in the school closest to their neighborhoods, something we have not been able to do consistently under the current structure.

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Grade Structure Responses Based Upon April 1, 2009 Board Meeting April 15, 2009

These are answers and solutions in response to concerns and questions raised at the Board Meeting of April 1, 2009 pertaining to the proposal for changing the grade structure in our school district.

Student Achievement

The configuration of 5-6-7-8 is found in the research* on middle schools as a viable grade structure. The Grade Structure Committee found the research recommending a K-8 configuration, which of course would have grades 5-8 in the same building. In addition, it was brought out that the 5th Graders will not actually be attending classes (or going to lunch) with the 8th Graders anymore than the 1st Graders are attending classes with the 4th Graders in the elementary schools. It certainly would make sense to keep 5th and 6th on one side of school and 7th and 8th on the other.

We have been in contact with the Dixon School District where this configuration has been in existence. The 5th Grade will have an elementary feel to it just like it does now at Carl Sandburg. The 6th Grade will be basically self-contained, but with some movement for flexibly scheduling students in Reading and Math and of course movement for instruction in the areas of Art, Music and Physical Education. The 6th Grade will also be a time to begin to see how the 7th Grade works with more teachers but still in a team approach for Grades 7 through 9.

We also realize that we do not necessarily need to have two middle schools of the exact same size since the schools have different capacities. Therefore, we should consider having those 7th Grade students who would under ordinary circumstances attend Carl Sandburg as 6th Graders, Junior High as 7th Graders and then back to Carl Sandburg for 8th Grade, remain at Junior High for 8th Grade.

* **We are attaching the research as an appendix to this document.**

Magnet School

The role of magnet schools includes the following:

- Offer distinctive curriculum or instructional approach
- Attract students from outside an assigned neighborhood attendance zone
- Have diversity as an explicit purpose

Here are the most likely models for an elementary magnet school that we would share with parents and staff in focus groups at the six elementary schools in order to determine the one that would have the most appeal.

Magnet students would go to the middle schools based upon where they live and receive support for their continuing transition.

1. LEADERSHIP MAGNET SCHOOL – Principles of Steven Covey, Baldrige, W. Edwards Deming

The Executive Director of Magnet Schools of America, Dr. Brooks, referred to the leadership theme for magnet schools as one that is growing in popularity. Located in Raleigh, North Carolina, A. B Combs Leadership Magnet Elementary School was mentioned by Dr. Brooks as exemplary and the recipient of numerous awards. Combs Leadership Magnet Elementary School is based on two core foundations: Steven Covey’s “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” and Baldrige practices based on Deming’s work.

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Leadership Magnet continued...

The Covey principles are embedded in the school’s culture and guide students and staff in building the leadership model. Opportunities are provided for parents and other stakeholders to learn about these principles.

Each quarter students identify and set their own personal academic goals. Using Baldrige criteria, data collection and data analysis practices, students track their progress over the course of the school year.

Combs Elementary School, a school with a diverse student population, outperforms the district and the state based on the percentage of students who passed both the reading and math state assessments. However, there are significant disparities between majority and minority students.

The Covey organization provided the contact information for a consultant who trains educators, Connie Spencer. Among other things Ms. Spencer shared the cost for training staff would be around \$25,000. This cost includes 5 days of training, certification of some staff, implementation, materials and travel. We learned from Justin Petrarca, that we can receive Covey training through Lynn Adler at the IEA for no charge. No other costs are anticipated.

2. International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program

The International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP) is designed for students aged 3 to 12. It focuses on the total growth of the developing child to encompass the academic, social, physical, emotional and cultural developmental needs.

The philosophy of PYP is commitment to structured, purposeful inquiry as the leading vehicle for learning. There are six trans-disciplinary themes for student exploration and study, which address the Illinois Learning Standards:

- Who we are
- Where we are in place and time
- How we express ourselves
- How the world works
- How we organize ourselves
- Sharing the planet

An additional component of the program is that students in the PYP are required to receive instruction in another language.

The cost involves two to three years of training prior to gaining approval as an International Baccalaureate School. Staff Development involves the lead teachers, one administrator and the International Baccalaureate Coordinator/Coach.

	First Three Years	Ongoing Cost per year
Application	\$21,000 (\$ 7,000 per year)	\$5,000
Staff Development	\$30,000 (\$10,000 per year)	\$ 5,000
IB Coordinator/Coach	\$15,000 (part time)	\$15,000 (part time)
Foreign Language Teacher	\$40,000 (full time)	\$40,000 (full time)
Total Cost	\$72,000 per yr for first 3 yrs. (\$106,000 for the first three years)	\$65,000 Ongoing cost after first 3 yr.

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3. Fine and Performing Arts

This would be a school with a focus on the fine and performing arts including music (choral and instrumental), art, dance, speech, drama. There is a school in Waukegan Illinois, the Andrew Cooke Magnet Elementary, which is a high achieving school with almost no gap for its diverse student body of 511 students. (29% Black, 32% Hispanic, 29% Caucasian and 32% Free and Reduced Lunch.

We are still working on costs estimates for this.

**4. Accelerated Learning with Multi-age Grouping
Accelerated Learning**

Accelerated Schools is an approach to school reform that aims to enhance academic growth for students through challenging and stimulating activities that build on students' strengths. A key idea behind the approach is that rather than remediating students' deficits, students are accelerated by providing them with high expectations and curriculum typical of programs for gifted and talented students. Through shared inquiry, the accelerated school takes stock of the current status of the school, forges a vision for change, sets priorities, and establishes governance structures that focus on participatory decision-making.

The Accelerated Schools approach is built around three central principles. The first is unity of purpose, or a common vision of what the school should become that is agreed to and worked toward by all school staff, parents, students, and community. The second is empowerment coupled with responsibility. Staff, parents, and students participate in a shared decision-making process, shape their own decisions about curriculum, instructional methods, and organization, and accept responsibility for the results. The third principle, building on strengths, strives to tap the skills, experience, and creativity in all members of the school community.

The cost of transforming a school into an accelerated school is generally less than 1 percent of the school budget, usually \$30-\$40 per student per year. (For 300 students this would amount to \$12,000.)

Multi-age Grouping

Statistical analysis (by researcher Susan Kinsey) demonstrated that students from multiage classrooms achieved greater academic outcomes in relation to their abilities and demonstrated greater increases in academic achievement than students of the same and higher abilities from single-age classrooms when all classrooms employed developmentally appropriate teaching practices.

5. Science Technology Engineering and Math

A Science, Math, and Technology elementary magnet program focuses on developing excellent mathematicians and scientists skilled in using technology as a key learning tool. Students participate in a rigorous, standards-based instructional program that emphasizes Math, Science and Technology throughout the curriculum. All teachers promote reading and knowledge of mathematics. Teaching methods are based on national and state standards. Students learn critical thinking skills through hands-on learning activities. Students would have access to multimedia technology in their classrooms and in a computer lab.

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STEM Magnet COSTS:

First Year

Convert classroom to computer lab:	\$1,200	(computer counters)
	\$ 900	(network wiring)
Convert classroom to elementary science lab:	\$ 500	(electrical work)
Purchase science lab tables:	\$2,200	
Purchase curriculum related equipment/supplies:	\$6,500	
Staff development:	<u>\$15,000</u>	
	Total: \$26,300	

Continuing Cost

Staff Development:	\$5,000
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HAPP/Accelerated Learning

HAPP students will go to both middle school buildings for a self-contained experience at 5th Grade. We will open the program up for additional students to join the HAPP classes at 5th Grade. The program will also be continued to be offered at the 6th Grade.

Staffing

This recommendation is for the optimal **administrative/leadership** configuration at the two propose middle schools. Because the two schools will not necessarily have the same number of students, the configuration could change as we get closer to knowing the exact enrollments.

Freeport Middle School (FMS) and Carl Sandburg Middle School (CSMS)

Additional Positions	Cost
One Additional Dean	\$60,000
One Additional Counselor	\$53,000
On Additional Family Resource Coordinator	\$24,000
<u>(One less position MBC Coordinator)</u>	<u>(\$30,000)</u>
Total Additional costs	\$107,000

Materials and Equipment

What will the cost be for the Jones Farrar Library? \$15,000 which could be purchased over two fiscal years.

Will we need 'Kindergarten' books for the elementary libraries? No, we will not.

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Facilities, Boundaries and Transportation

Is there money in the budget already for the expansion of the playground at Jones Farrar ELC? Yes, there is \$3500 to fence the side lot. Playgrounds are funded by grants and fund raising.

Do we need a playground for 5th Graders at Freeport Junior High School? No

What are the building capacities?

We made visual inspections of all elementary schools including Jones Farrar Early Learning Center. We know that we have 116 classrooms available in the six elementary schools for approximately 1,710 students. If we had 15 students per classroom, we would need approximately 114 classrooms district-wide. If we had 18 students per classroom, we would need 95 classrooms. (We plan for 15-18 students in classrooms for grades K-3 and no more than 25 students in the 4th Grade.)

School	Projected Enrollment	Classrooms Needed at		Available Classrooms
		<u>15 Students</u> Per room	<u>18 Students</u> Per room	
Lincoln Douglas	275	18	15	18
Empire	275	18	15	19
Taylor Park	275	18	15	16
Blackhawk	300	20	17	19
Center	285	19	16	19
Jones Farrar ELC	300	20	17	25
	1710	113	95	116

What about changing the grade structure, boundaries and start times in a phased in plan?

Here is the response from the Transportation Department, which has been projecting school sizes and boundaries, as well as bus routes.

We could change the boundaries for the elementary schools, moving the ELL program to Blackhawk without changing anything else for the 2009-2010 school year. However, we do not recommend this change because:

- if we did start times in 09, depending on how we did them we could potentially have to add buses,
- if we did the elementary boundaries only in 09 we would lose 1 bus route,
- moving kindergarten would result in the loss of 4 bus routes.

We recommend that if we are going to implement a change in elementary boundaries, the creation of K-4 elementary schools including a magnet school and a change in start times, we should tie them together to avoid, hiring, firing and possibly hiring again over a period of two years. [Although this recommendation is considering the ramifications in the Transportation Department, it is possible that similar things could happen with other employees. At this time when the Transportation Department employee group has become somewhat stabilized as far as retention goes, this should definitely be a consideration.]

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Start Times:

Following a recent meeting of the Administrative Faculty Advisory Committee, we asked the elementary teachers to share with us their best judgment as to what their students might respond best to in terms of elementary start times assuming a start time around 8:30 for secondary schools. The results were of the 100 teachers responding, **76% of the teachers selected the elementary start time of 7:45 a.m.** 7% chose 7:30 and 17% chose 9:15 a.m. David Thake is calling a meeting for the week of April 14th for the Start Times Committee and asking Dallas Rackow to attend to see what can be worked out in terms of a reasonable solution to the recommended changes in start times.

The Four Components of Our Current Proposal before the Board Of Education

Elementary Attendance Boundaries	Jones Farrar Magnet School & Pre K-4	Two Middle Schools 5-8 according to a MS boundary	Start Times
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APPENDIX A

National Middle School Research

The National Middle School Association recommendation regarding grade configuration is that when possible, middle schools should house grades 5-8 or 6-8. These grade levels should be included because they are the grades in which young adolescents are typically enrolled. By enrolling youth in these type of schools that are designed exclusively for them allows the staff to focus directly and fully on providing the best learning opportunities possible. Fifth grade is considered appropriate for inclusion in the middle level school by providing the programming for fifth grade students that offers opportunities which satisfy both student developmental needs and the need of the school to provide transition for one learning setting to another. The advantages of having the fifth grade in the middle level school include the following:

- Improve the "window of opportunity" for developmental middle school programming
- Provide a logical break in program by planning activities for grades 5 and 6 different from those for grades 7 and 8.
- Serve as a bridge between elementary school and the high school in a setting where a balanced approach to activities supports student acquisition of social skills, and ownership of learning.
- Support cross-grade level learning activities that provide opportunities for student on grade level learning and acceleration.
- Break down student tracking patterns used in the elementary school
- Encourage professional skill development of teachers through members in a teaching team.
- Introduce students to appropriate physical skill development which benefits them personally, socially, and physically.
- Provide specialized guidance services which assist in social skill development.
- Create an environment that will support continued student interest in and liking of school
- Provide additional time to build parental support for middle school programming and intent while helping them prepare for the child's future.

The above is taken from **National Middle School Association** "*On Target Grade Configuration.*"

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Appendix B

Library

The following are possible costs at higher estimates that would include expanding the Library holdings

Task	Definition	Total	Comments
1. K Books Purchase/ Jones-Farrar Center	3 books X 325 students X \$20.00 (per book cost)	\$19,500	Library standards to maintain an adequate library need to purchase, on an annual basis, two new books per child. With some distribution of books, the majority of the funds would be directed to ELC. The elementary schools would request money from the Public School Fund as a one collaborative request for the elementary libraries. There may be also grant money available for magnet schools which could be applied to the Jones Farrar Center.
2. Grade 5-8 Book Purchase	3 books X 325 students X \$20.00 (per book cost)	\$19,500	Both of the middle level buildings would use these funds to fill in titles of needed books. The District librarians have written a letter of intent to apply for the Library Science Technology Act grant which provides funds for libraries when a District undergoes a structuring initiative. <u>The grant can result in \$25,000 funding.</u>
3. Library Shelves	Approximately \$190 per shelf for additional book shelving space	\$8000	<u>This entire amount may not be needed after elementary libraries complete their inventorying and weeding</u>
Total		\$47,000	

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Appendix C

Music

The following are high estimates for an expanded music program at the middle and elementary levels. If we considered offering the same program that we now offer, but in two locations instead of one, the cost would be a fraction of the costs listed below.

Task	Definition	Total	Comments
.68 Band/Orchestra Staff		\$28,000	The additional staff is needed to instruct band and orchestra classes for grades 7 and 8. This means an addition of 4 classes to be covered while still maintaining individual lessons at grades 5 and 6. This is not an increase in the program.
K-12 Band	Music stands, music, storage cabinets, filing cabinets	\$11275	
K-12 Orchestra Instruments	2 pedal harps, cello repairs, bass bow repairs, 2.5 size basses	\$26,950	Pedal harps each cost \$12,000. Harps needed at CSS. The need for 2 harps goes beyond structuring initiative, because the. Next year there are already 6 high school harpists who share the four harps. There already is a shortage.
K-12 Orchestra Literature/Equipment	Grade 6-8 charts, storage cabinets, Filing cabinets, music folder racks	\$6,000	
K-4 Elementary		\$15,283	Majority of the funds needed due to the relocation of kindergarten in all buildings. One set of materials and instruments need to be purchased in other buildings.
	Total	\$87508	

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