

**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 - Revised

DATE: March 26, 2009

Background

Following the work of a committee of teachers, administrators and two Board Members, which recommended a change in our grade structure, we formed five committees and seven sub-committees to study more deeply the issues involved in changing the grade structure. The work of these committees, which included dozens of teachers, parents and administrators, yielded a set of detailed recommendations, which we then brought before three public forums, one attended by parents and staff (February 11th), one held primarily for staff (March 9th) and one held primarily for parents (March 9th). These forums were attended by more than four hundred people in total. The co-chairs of the Communications Work Group arranged for informational sessions with staff members as they visited all schools twice (except for one school for which they have a second session scheduled) and the Transportation Department. We also held informational sessions with students.

These opportunities for dialogue and listening with hundreds of parents, students and staff members provided us with pertinent questions, good ideas and concerns. Here are some of the things that we have heard from parents over the past four to six weeks, which may be legitimate criticisms of the planned change in grade structure.

- The middle buildings are being underutilized- Carl Sandburg and FJHS
- Jones Farrar as an elementary school is taking people who are within walking distance of Lincoln Douglas and Empire
- Some students who attend Jones Farrar now will go to either Lincoln Douglas or Empire for First Grade and then back to Jones Farrar under the proposed grade structure plan.
- Can we put pre-school children in the schools where they will be going to Kindergarten
- The elementary buildings will be too crowded.
- The Fifth Grade students will be moved with considerable logistical issues:
 - Band will be difficult to teach with the students spread out among six elementary schools
 - Sending the Fifth Grade materials and equipment to six locations will be difficult
 - Sending the library materials for Fifth Graders to six elementary schools and then duplicating the collections for Grades 6-7-8 may be difficult and involve an expense

Based upon this what we heard from people, we are presenting a modified set of recommendations.

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Recommendations

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 current 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 have their first transition after fourth grade instead of experience two transitions at 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 five elementary schools (Blackhawk, Center, Empire, Lincoln Douglas and Taylor Park) with Pre-K through 4th Grade and with Jones Farrar as a Pre K-4 Magnet School *.

[* We propose to discuss in focus groups three research-proven and successful Elementary Magnet School models that reflect preferences that we have heard expressed by parents. These focus groups would be held at elementary schools with parents and teachers combined. Following the focus group discussions, we would adopt the one elementary magnet school model that is preferred and prepare teachers and parents for implementation in August of 2010. Parents would indicate an interest in the magnet school and be accepted on a basis that would reflect the other five elementary schools. The Elementary Magnet School will be planned for an enrollment up to 275-300 students in PreK-4 with a racial mix of 65% (Caucasian and Other) -35% (African American and Bi-racial) and approximately 50% Free/Reduced lunch.]

Each elementary school will have 325 students or less with a racial balance that is close to that racial diversity in the school district at the elementary grade level. There will also be a considerable balance in poverty levels that approximately reflects the district mix of poverty and non- poverty students.

The result of this modified recommendation would be that we would...

- Still have only two transitions with five years (six with pre-school) at elementary, four at middle and four at high school. The research-based middle school concept includes Grades 5-8.
- Have more appropriate gym and pool facilities for 5-8 Grade Students
- Save money on the additional music teacher for Fifth Grades in six elementary schools
- Make better use of Carl Sandburg and FJHS facilities, pool, large classroom areas for elective classes
- Offer more people the option of a school within walking distance of Lincoln Douglas and Empire
- Eliminate the three schools in three years for current Kindergarten children.

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The result of this modified recommendation would be that we would... (continued)

- Allow pre-school children in the schools where they will be going to Kindergarten
- Relieve space considerations in the elementary buildings and allow for flexibility in instruction and to allow for fluctuations in enrollments due to mobility.
- Eliminate certain Fifth Grade logistical issues:
 - Band instruction will be more consolidated with 5-8
 - Materials and equipment from Fifth Grade classrooms will just have to be split between two schools
 - The library materials for Fifth Graders will only have to be split between two buildings as will the materials for 6-8 saving an expense of duplicating the collections.
- Have elementary schools where more of the children would be able to walk
- Simplify the movement of Fifth Grade teachers to just two locations instead of six

The proposed modified recommended changes to our grade structure will give us the best chance to reach the goals of our Plan On A Page.

The self-contained High Academic Potential Program (HAPP) would continue to be located at Center School.

Since approximately 60% of the students enrolled in the English Language Learners (ELL) program live in the attendance boundary around Blackhawk School, the ELL program will be located at Blackhawk School.

Carl Sandburg School would receive students from Empire, Jones Farrar and Lincoln Douglas and the Junior High School would receive students from Blackhawk, Center and Taylor Park

The two middle schools will house grades 5-6-7-8 where the Carl Sandburg School and Freeport Junior High School are located. These newly structured middle schools will house approximately the same number of students that they currently house.

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

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.

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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.

Program Details

I. Academic Program

- A. Maintain the principal, assistant principal and other leadership positions at each building.
- B. Carl Sandburg School administrative staff should have the latitude to use the lessons learned in the *Making Better Choices* position at Sandburg to design a leadership team for the school that would provide services for students to include counseling, social work and behavior intervention so long as it does not increase the current budget for their leadership team. If after the first year of implementation of the new grade structure, there remain unmet needs in this area, the principal may request an additional position through the budget hearing process.
- 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. Each middle school campus would have a Family Resource Coordinator (FRC). This would result in adding a FRC position at FJHS. Cost: \$15,000
- E. 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	\$8,600
Four Assistant Coaches	\$5,400
Uniforms	<u>\$3,000</u>

Cost: \$17,000

F. 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

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Academic Program Costs:	One Time	Continuing
Item C:		\$ 45,000
Item D:		\$ 15,000
Item E:		\$ 17,000
Item F:		\$ <u>3,250</u>
		\$ 80,250

II. Facilities, Boundaries and Transportation

A. Facilities costs

Replace smaller 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 for other costs of labor and materials that might be attributable to the change in grade structure [This could include the estimated labor time for our staff to install the new toilet equipment.]		<u>\$10,000</u>
Total		\$22,667

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 elementary schools starting/dismissing at a time that is at least a 1 hour and 10 minutes different, we will need less bus routes.

Combining the start time change 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. Minimally, we will be able to discontinue three routes.

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

Cost	-\$66,824.88
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Facilities, Boundaries and Transportation Costs:	One Time	Continuing
Item A	\$ 22,667	
Item B		\$66,824.88
	\$ 22,667	\$66,824.88

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III. Materials, Equipment

We 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 academic program. [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.

Materials and Equipment Total Cost	One Time	Continuing Cost
	\$ 16,000	

IV. Staffing

We recommend altering 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: **\$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, Preparing and Implementing a Magnet School 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**

Staffing Total Cost	One Time	Continuing
Training	\$ 4,000	
Stipends	\$ 6,000	
Study Books, etc.	\$ 500	
Other Professional Development	\$40,000	
	Total \$50,500	

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V. Communications

We will also gather information and share it as widely as possible about lessons learned from other school districts, when they changed their grade structure. We will also keep the community and the staff informed as the recommendation for changing the grade structure continues through the process. The costs of continuing to communicate with the school district community about the recommended change in grade structure are minimal.

The following are some of the activities and all of the expenses

A. Printed Materials

Monthly updates flyers; summer mailing; brochures; Newspaper columns and/or articles; Paid newspaper ads
Approximately **\$2480.**

B. Email communication

Monthly district-wide updates; Unofficial School board minutes; Press releases
No Cost

C. Website/Online/Electronic Communication

Prominently displayed logo
Superintendent's Grade Structure Blog
Continued posting of committee meeting calendar and meeting summaries
Comcast Cable Community Announcements Channel
No Cost

D. Face-to-Face Communication

All school staff meetings and other existing meeting structure
Key Communicators Quarterly meetings; Service Club meetings; Superintendent and Principals' student group meetings; PTO meetings, meetings with building staff; District-Wide Public Forums, focus groups:
Approximately **\$1400.**

Total Communications Cost	One Time \$3880.	Continuing
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Total of costs by category	One Time	Continuing
Student Achievement		\$ 80,250
Facilities, Boundaries and Transportation	\$ 22,667	(\$ 66,824.88)
Materials and Equipment	\$ 16,000	
Staffing	\$ 50,500	
Communications	\$ 3,880	
Estimated one time costs	\$ 93,047	
Estimated net continuing costs		\$ 13,425.12

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