

# WESTPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Education  
FROM: Dr. Colleen Palmer, Superintendent of Schools  
DATE: February 4, 2019  
RE: Progress Report on K-6 Model of Education for 2019-20

In response to the request from the Board of Education seeking an update on the progress of the development of the K-6 Model of Education for the 2019-20 academic year, I have compiled a collective update on the various components of this model within this document for your review.

The information regarding this update will be organized in a manner consistent with the guiding indicators utilized to make the decision on the pathway of K-6 from the viable options of the original nine models presented to the Board of Education. The operational impact of this model has been clearly defined within the Superintendent's Proposed Operating Budget for 2019-20, and therefore, this overview will focus solely on the educational program update.

### Guiding Indicators

*Note: These are not in any order of ranked importance, and options were evaluated holistically with these indicators, while placing more weight on: a) the social emotional well-being of our students and; b) maintaining high standard of educational experience/academic program.*

#### **Educational Program**

1. Minimize Disruption
2. Maintain academic program (core and encore)
3. Minimize transitions
4. Maintain co-curricular and after-school activities
5. Appropriate learning spaces, e.g. art room, science room, gym (grade specific)
6. Social/emotional impact
7. Maintain high standard of educational experience

#### **Operational Impact**

1. Transportation
2. Staffing
3. Facility cost
4. Security
5. Food services
6. Technology

Please refer to the Superintendent's Proposed Operating Budget FY 2019-20 posted online for further detail.

## Educational Program Indicator Updates

### **Indicator 1: Minimize disruption**

- The K-6 model allows all current PreK-7, CMS grade 8, and grade 9-11 students to remain in the same school next year. Only the current BMS grade 8 (292 students) move to a new school setting for 2019-20.
- Every effort would be made to maintain the current grade 6 teams that are working together this year. These teams are already have established professional relationships with each other, and transplanting teams to respective elementary schools would preserve these connections that enhance the effectiveness of teams.
- Teachers for some encore classes would provide instruction at more than one school, and world language teachers would most likely serve all 5 schools. Refinement in scheduling can reduce the number of schools for many encore teachers, but our current practice is that numerous teachers now serve multiple schools as part of their professional assignment. The assignments would continue to be refined as the schedules are fine-tuned.
- This model maintains more of our middle school teachers, preserves talent in order to allow two years (or more) of natural attrition through retirements and typical separations for the District for personal reasons.
- The needs of our students receiving special education services are already known to each respective elementary school, allowing a smoother transition for ongoing support in this smaller educational community.
- The daily “life” of an elementary student in grades K-5 revolves around his/her home base of the classroom in which most of the school day is spent. Most likely, younger students in the school will not notice grade 6 students comings and goings because they would be separate at most times. Unlike a middle school, there are no bells where all students head to the hallways to move to another part of the building. Transitions for grade levels happen at different times, in different patterns of scheduling.
- This model is least disruptive to students, but requires a system-level adjustment to house grade 6 at the elementary.

### **Indicator 2: Maintain academic program (core and encore)**

- The Scheduling Design Team, comprised of teachers and administrators, was successful in developing a schedule which would provide all core and encore classes for grade 6 in a manner that is closely aligned with the current grade 6 schedule. Minor reductions in passing time allow an opportunity for grade 6 students to return to their homeroom teachers at the end of each day for a second check-in, in addition to the welcome-to-school homeroom each morning. Also, there is a window of flex-time for students after lunch to check in with teachers, see support staff, or take care of other educational needs.

A sample schedule is shown below: *(Note: While this represents the draft schedule for one of our elementary schools, the frameworks for the other four schools have been developed as well. Typically, scheduling for schools is finalized in last spring – early summer. The work for scheduling the elementary schools is in the final stages at this time.)*

Schedule of One of Our Elementary Schools  
(Drafts of the other schools have been developed.)

GRADE 6A Daily Schedule - Working Draft												
Times	8:30-8:39	8:40-9:22	9:23-10:03	10:05-10:47	10:48-11:30	11:31-12:13	12:15-12:56		12:58-1:40	1:42-2:22	2:24-3:04	3:06-3:15
M	HR	ELA	PE	Math	Social Studies	Social Studies	Lunch 30	F	Science	WL	ART	HR
T	HR	Science	STEM	ELA	Math	Math	Lunch 30	L	Social Studies	WL	MUSIC	HR
W	HR	Social Studies	HEALTH	Science	ELA	ELA	Lunch 30	E	Math	WL	PE	HR
TH	HR	Math	THEATER	Social Studies	Science	Science	Lunch 30	X	ELA	WL	MUSIC	HR
FR	HR	ELA	PE	Math	Social Studies	Flex	Lunch 30		Science	WL	ART	HR

- We were able to maintain the current K-5 schedule of core and encore as is currently offered. Space allocations for art create the need for a handful of art classes to be taught in alternative locations. Mr. Thomas Scavone, Dept. Coordinator for Music and Visual Arts, is currently working with the art teachers to ensure the impact of double art space can be minimized through scheduling refinements or by creating actual physical space in which art can be offered.

**Indicator 3: Minimize transitions**

- Of the entire current population who will continue in our system next year (not including grade 12 who graduate), only BMS grade 8 moves to a new school, 292 students or 6% of our students. The remaining 94% of our current students remain in the same schools as the current year.
- Without certainty about the length of time before a possible reentry to the CMS facility or the long-term use of that school, maintaining grade 6 in the elementary schools minimizes the chance of multiple transitions with different cohorts of students over their middle school years.

**Indicator 4: Maintain co-curricular and after-school activities**

- The design team dedicated to these after-school activities is in process. However, the concept to be further developed includes;
  - after-school activities would include a host of co-curricular activities offered at each elementary school, as well as some located in more central locations for which the District would help facilitate in terms of logistics and advisors;
  - funds for CMS co-curricular activities have been set aside to provide financial support for grade 6 at the elementary schools; and
  - the elementary schools would expand their current offerings to include grade 6, as appropriate.
- A partnership with the Westport Public Library has been established, and the District is working with the Executive Director, Bill Harmer, to set aside time throughout the school year that all grade 6 students would be transported to the newly renovated space for both curricular and co-curricular activities.
- A survey will be completed at each school among the grade 5 students to gather their interests as well to inform the planning process; and

- Tom Scavone is working on a schedule for music that will ensure that students have appropriate musical groups in which to participate.
- CES and SES will start 30 minutes before the other elementary schools, and therefore, end 30 minutes sooner. Our Transportation Director, Sandra Evangelista, is working out a schedule that the District can provide transportation, as needed, after school to move larger groups of students together for specific activities.

**Indicator 5: Appropriate learning spaces, e.g. art room, science room, gym (grade specific)**

- The District has been able to schedule all core and encore classes within each school to support effective instruction, with the caveat a few art classes are still displaced from art rooms and those are being addressed.
- Draft room allocation schedules have been shared with the BoE and public.
- The assumption is that the elementary schools will have the availability of 14 modular classrooms as follows:
  - KHS will have 3 modular classrooms
  - CES will have 3 modular classrooms
  - LLS will have 4 modular classrooms
  - GFS will have 2 modular classrooms
  - SES will have 2 modular classrooms
- Contingency plans have been developed in the event a school had several grade levels increase over the summer prompting extra sections, including: 1) making technology mobile from computer labs and opening up a teaching space in each school, 2) utilizing science labs for instruction when not used by the science coaches and teachers, and 3) creating new space with the internal construction of modified spaces.
- The District is in the process of creating a pathway for students at LLS to opt to attend grade 6 at CES if desired, as CES will be an early school and the time frame may work better for some families.
- Dr. Tina Mannarino has completed a thorough assessment of all K-6 students with special education services to determine appropriate space needs in each elementary school. This work will continue to be refined as any students receiving services move in or out of our District over the coming months.

**Indicator 6: Social/emotional impact**

- The model of a large comprehensive middle school has many attractive features and could be a long-term option for the District, but the current facilities even with 6 additional portables, would not afford a grade 6 team to have its own “home base” or its own secluded area away from older students. The close to 100% utilization of spaces translates to multiple times a day that grade 6 students would be competing for space to enter/exit the classroom pod areas. As 100 grade 6 students would be entering/exiting, another 100 students of grades 7 or 8 would be exiting/entering that space through the same set of double doors. This congestion and forced interface with older students throughout the day would create stress in many students.
- During the current school year with 1,150 students, there is an increased level of noise, commotion in the halls and common areas with the added number of students. This has created stress in a number of students and staff this year. The alternative model would house approximately 1,300 students at BMS.

- The developmental goals of a grade 6 student are greatly influenced by the pressures of older students, and the advent of social media exacerbates the already difficult self-development for a pre-adolescent to begin to understand self. The developmental need to assimilate into one's peer group becomes more dominant during this stage of development, leaving students more vulnerable to peer pressure. In a more dense population of students and staff, it is more challenging for many students to thrive as the social pressures of the middle years impact and distract many students in the academic realm. It is common for younger students to emulate the behaviors of their peer group – both positive and negative; this approach allows the “gift of time” for grade 6 students to mature.
- Research has indicated that one of the most challenging transitions in students' K-12 career is entry to the middle school. Understanding that this is already a difficult time of transition for students of this age to navigate, maintaining the 6-8 model next year increases the stress of this transition period.

**Indicator 7: Maintain high standard of educational experience**

- The educational experience of a student is contingent on feeling safe, supported, and accepted within his/her environment. A student cannot learn well if these foundational elements are not in place. Our excellent teachers and professional staff would be providing the educational program in another location, but the integrity of the program would remain the same as it has been for other cohorts of grade 6 students. We are changing the location of where these students are educated, but not the substance of their academic experience. I am confident our educators can and will develop ways to allow our grade 6 students to become more independent and to take ownership of their learning. Our students' academic success and emotional well-being can be nurtured in positive, productive ways in the K-6 model.

**Comments:**

The District has an urgent need to provide a transitional model while it develops a long-term plan to reclaim lost instructional space of CMS. This interim approach allows the delivery of a high-quality educational plan that is minimally disruptive to students.

By utilizing this model, it does not define, influence or limit the future of the District. The short-term strategy and long-term plan are two distinct pathways that are determined by different sets of variables and goals. The interim strategy is the optimal decision with current available assets versus planning for assets to actualize the best long-term pathway.

The future of Westport Public Schools is bright. Our District is not defined by available square footage – our educational vision and standards of educational excellence transcend the brick and mortar structures that house our amazing students and our committed team of professionals.