

Moscow School District
Reconfiguration Recommendation
Dale Kleinert, Superintendent

This has been a year full of change in so many ways. In addition to all of the legislative changes, we've spent the entire year gathering input and researching how to best serve the students in the Moscow School District. Based on the benefits that a 9-12 school can provide and the programming and space issues that we are facing at the middle and elementary levels, I asked administrators at the beginning of this year to determine whether or not a 9-12 and 6-8 configuration could physically work in the Moscow School district. They were to assemble a list of barriers and benefits of such a move and then they worked to figure out ways to reduce the impact of the barriers.

We've also carefully considered the ramifications to West Park and Russell schools. Over the last 10 years, these schools have developed into very successful environments that allow for a wide variety of ability level placements for students with multi-classrooms per grade level. The reconfiguration choices for Russell and West Park schools included separate K-5 schools at each location with some single classrooms per grade level, or a configuration that is similar to the current with multi-classrooms per grade level in a K-2/3-5 setting. We met with parents and also took extra time to gain the insight from the teachers and administrators who have worked hard over the past ten years to develop their outstanding programming.

Programming at all of our schools is now based on a tiered instructional model that is much more effective when multiple teachers at each grade level can team together to provide the best support to students. This research based instructional model made it much easier to recommend a K-2 configuration at West Park School and an intermediate setting at Russell School where students in Grades 3-5 would be served. We are not making a recommendation to move the university kindergarten right now because we would like additional time to study the barriers and benefits of such a move.

After a thorough study, it was determined that a new configuration could take place in the district and I made a recommendation to the Board last December that gave the details of how this plan could work. I also reported timelines in which the project could be implemented. At that time, I recommended that any reconfiguration change should happen at the start of the 2012-13 school year in order to give time to address all of the details of such a move.

The District has studied and made recommendations for a grade level reconfiguration changes multiple times for almost 50 years, but we've always stopped short of making the move. We are in a situation right now that is causing us to make recommendations based on several factors that are now or will be negatively affecting our students. The factors include:

- The State of Idaho has adopted new high school graduation requirements with the implementation of its high school redesign program which affects all students in grades 9-12 beginning with the class of 2013.
- 10th grade students now take a high stakes graduation test. Having 9th grade in the same building would provide a more comprehensive selection of course options from remediation to accelerated courses leading up to the test, and they would not be hit with the test soon after they walk through the door.

- Idaho has also developed a middle level credit requirement that is in direct conflict with high school credits. Middle level students now must receive middle level credits and 9th grade students receive high school credits, and the system is not designed to occur under one roof. Moscow Junior High School is one of a very few schools in the State of Idaho that is in the middle of this transcript problem that will cause graduation issues if not resolved.
- More and more families are interested in the district's K-Plus program and we turn families away each year because we don't have the space. Moving the sixth grade to a middle level school provides more space for such programs at our current elementary schools.
- Sixth grade students can benefit directly from a protected transition middle level model. For example, sixth grade students would still be served in a separate classroom wing in their own intermediate style learning environments, but receive the benefits of a very robust elective program including more music courses such as band and orchestra within their school day, vocational-technical programming, foreign language, etc.

During the year, countless meetings and opportunities for input took place. From individual meetings with teachers, administrators and parents, formal meetings were held where I provided information and asked for input from parents and staff members, the League of Women Voters, Chamber of Commerce, Lions, Rotary, Kiwanis, and other community service groups. In all, nineteen formal and countless informal gatherings took place. In addition, media activities such as radio shows, feature newspaper articles, a special website, and blogs all were used to encourage and facilitate input. The administrators also hosted two public meetings and posted detailed answers to countless questions on a "frequently asked questions" link to the school district's website.

While the input window remained open, elementary administrators were also asked to brainstorm best practice ideas to facilitate an educational model that could enhance classroom instruction using the expertise of specialists at the elementary schools to more successfully implement the district and building level school improvement plans. This model could involve specialists working in an interdisciplinary educational setting to provide instructional remediation and acceleration through music, movement, and other exploratory curricula integrated with classroom instruction.

The administrators also developed a plan that would greatly reduce teacher travel between buildings. Currently, 8 sections or 1.17 certified FTE are lost just with travel. This change would result in an immediate related cost savings to the district of approximately \$75,000 per year.

We've also calculated the costs associated with keeping the ninth grade students in the current junior high school building. With the issue of the middle level credit and high school credit conflict at the junior high, it has become clear that it would be necessary to develop a schedule and staffing for "ninth grade" only classes. Splitting the master schedule into two separate modules would require additional staffing. I asked Mr. Hill to develop a model such as the one used by the Lewiston junior high schools. This scheduling split would require at least 1.0 additional certified FTE and would cost the district approximately \$60,000 per year. It is also important to recognize that a "ninth grade" split schedule at the junior high building would not provide the opportunity for ability level placement that would exist for those same students if they were at the high school.

Mr. Hill and others have researched how sixth grade students could be served in a middle level model using a protected transitional learning environment and those answers and the research is also included on the FAQ website. Some thought was given to an alternate arrangement of keeping the sixth grade students at the elementary schools and providing room for K-plus at the middle level, but staffing

barriers and other physical limitations hindered further exploration. Other ideas including redefining attendance zones to more equally divide the elementary students in order to keep the 6th graders at their elementary schools was explored, but that idea also left the junior high school building with 1/3 of its rooms empty while still not adding room for K-plus programming at the elementary schools. In the end, we know from research that the benefits of providing a middle level model that includes 6th graders with 7th and 8th graders can be a truly beneficial environment as it is in thousands of middle schools throughout the nation.

There will be short term costs associated with the transition activities that include personnel shifts to different schools. At the outset, I made it clear that any moves made will be done in a respectful and professional manner. To that end, we would budget \$30,000 to be allocated over a two year fiscal period to cover moving and staffing costs associated with the move. We learned many lessons with the last move that took place in 2002 and we will take this next year to plan and carefully detail every component of this transition.

Mr. Celebrezze has also carefully and deliberately studied the physical attributes of the current MHS building with the consideration that an additional 190 students would be enrolled. He understands the barriers and has developed plans for satellite meal service and has outlined course sequences for physical education to minimize busing costs. All of these details and more information regarding the high school are also located on the F.A.Q. section of the configuration webpage.

We also know that there will be staffing adjustments with the changes in student placement throughout the district. Movement of ancillary staff to follow student needs already takes place each year in our Title, Special Education, food service, and other support systems and we are ready to develop a more detailed plan for this transition.

We've also researched how this change can positively affect student achievement. If you look at nationwide student achievement test scores, you will see that almost all schools experience a dip in scores when a transition from elementary to middle school takes place. The "dip" is a middle level phenomenon that is seen in our district and nationwide no matter when they transition. We've researched many schools and grade level configurations and have found that those who have an earlier transition before going into high school have more time to come out of the "dip" by the time they take their high stakes test in 10th Grade. Having 6th grade in a protected transition situation at the junior high school building with additional supports will be part of our solution to decrease the "dip" and provide better readiness for all students by the time they reach high school.

All of our teachers and support staff take great pride in the cultures that exist in each of our schools. Rightly so, their high test scores, outstanding programming, activities, events, and daily routines have been developed with hard work, dedication, and passion. We've seen the same passion come forward this year as we've discussed the potential of this change.

At the beginning, I said this move would affect everybody in our school and community. Change is hard, and every change we make gives us an opportunity to more finely tune our programming to make things even better for kids. Over the past four years, we've developed and are now implementing high school redesign complete with a seven period credit opportunity and a new bell schedule at Moscow High School that will begin next year. We're almost ready to implement a district-wide sequential Response to Intervention program, a new certified evaluation process, and last year the junior high school

changed their schedule for the first time in 38 years. All of the changes we make involve passionate discussion, dedicated brainstorming, and hard work to develop successful plans.

As soon as school starts next fall, we will begin the formation of teams to plan every detail of the reconfiguration and I expect and hope that there will be more passionate discussion. I will ask principals at each building to assemble groups of teachers, parents and other stakeholders to plan staff physical moves, student and parent transitions, programming modifications, classroom shifts, textbook and media center changes, furniture allocations, transportation changes, scheduling alterations, and support staff changes. No stone can be left unturned and every teacher, administrator, classified staff, student, and parent must be cared for to make this project successful.

We have incredible teachers, administrators and support staff who are ready to work together on behalf of our students, and we are prepared to make this transition and implementation an all-MSD group project because we know that this change will benefit our students.

And so in closing, the Trustees of Moscow School District took positive action on our recommendation to reconfigure our grade levels to include grades Kindergarten through 5 at McDonald and Lena Whitmore Elementary Schools, grades 6-8 in a middle level setting with our current Moscow Junior High School to be renamed Moscow Middle School. This change will then allow students in grades 9-12 to be served at Moscow High School. We also recommended that West Park School become a K-2 school and Russell School serve students in grades 3-5. No action was taken to move the University Kindergarten to the West Park School campus. That recommendation may come at a later date. The recommendation also comes with a district-wide planning effort and timeline to occur during the 2011-12 school year and a complete implementation to begin at the start of the 2012-13 school year.