

To: Dr. Mark Fredisdorf
From: John A. Glimco
RE: Response to Class Size Parent Concern
Date: November 10, 2014

The Board of Education received a memo from a parent (Mary Rockrohr) addressing several concerns regarding the class sizes at the Middle School, specifically regarding the 5th Grade classes. The memo raises many issues, and concludes with questions for the Board to address regarding class size. I greatly appreciate the time spent by Mrs. Rockrohr to express these concerns, as well as the nature of these as well. I would like to do my best to provide some feedback regarding the issues raised to assist the Board in their response.

There is a misconception expressed throughout the letter that larger class sizes are preferred or planned for the future at the Middle School. In scheduling classes, a class size of 25 was utilized as a guide through the process, as it has been in past years. Class sizes above this number have occurred in previous years, based primarily of upon the composition of the class (number of on and above level students) and overall class size. There is no intent to increase class sizes, and current and future schedule will continue to work within the targets. However, classes surpassed this number in a few cases, as they have in past years.

The composition of the class and the level of the learners have a far greater impact on the pacing of instruction versus class size. However students in smaller class sizes do have an increased access to the instructor. If older, “stand and deliver” models of instruction are present in the classroom, opportunities for student presentations and individualized instruction do greatly increase in small classrooms. If instructors are effectively facilitating learning within our current class sizes, there should be no impact beyond the opportunities for one on one support.

The blocking of the English language Arts classes and Social Studies was done so at the request of the instructors to allow for fewer staff transitions for the students, providing for a “home base” for the 5th graders and easing the transition to the Middle School Schedule. This scheduling is not present in the 6th grade and will allow for greater flexibility for the upcoming year with this large class.

The additional math time has been highly valued by the instructors both at the 5th and 6th grade levels, allowing for greater instructional minutes and opportunities to provide individual supports to the students.

Many of the larger classes in the schedule do have an aide to support the specialized needs of the students present in them. This is purely based upon the needs of the students in the class, not a reflection of class size. A specific request for a classroom aide in the 5th Grade Math and Science Classes has been made to provide additional support to all students within these classrooms, specifically targeting math skills. Details regarding this request are included in the Board packet.

The issue of class size is somewhat misleading and greater detail is required to understand the numbers reported. The State Report Card utilizes the number of sections divided by the number of students and reports an average class size. Special education classes are excluded from this report, although included in others. We have 5 sections of English language Arts in the 5th grade, with an average class size of 20.2. With 4 sections of Math/Science, we have an average class size of 25.25. Calculations can be deceiving, with other variable to be considered. However, for this particular class, the recommendation for future scheduling will include additional sections in Math, Science, and Spanish to allow for greater balance and fluidity to the schedule.

I appreciate greatly the realization that it will be challenging to provide the Board with valid data concerning class size and student achievement. There are many factors to be considered, with the composition of the class and level of the learners being foremost. There is no comparable data to be utilized, with new assessments in these classes, new district and state assessments, different instructors, and in Spanish, Math, and ELA, new curriculum. With limited data to measure, we have been looking at student engagement and time on task in larger (above 25 students) and smaller classes. Additionally, we are looking at student grades in the core subjects, comparing performance in grade 4 vs. grade 5 of individual students. We are also looking at behavioral data to see if there is an increase in infractions within the larger classes.

Although it is not my position to respond for the Board to the posed questions, I would not recommend a hard and fast limit to class sizes. Such limits could lead to greater scheduling challenges, especially as students enroll through the course of the year. I do recommend the class size of 25 continue to serve as a guideline for future scheduling, with the goal of equal distribution of students, when possible.

To best meet the needs of the students and community, I will be working closely with the provided supports from our class scheduling system, Skyward, scheduling specific additional support, as needed. We will be starting this process shortly in order to be able to early address staffing needs and scheduling challenges. We have many unique elements on our schedule to address, including: special education ratios/smaller class sizes; single offering classes (labs), alternating Math/Spanish, ELA blocks, Above Level/On Level, RtI, multi-grade level instructors. One of the greatest benefits as well as challenges to our School District is our size.

We accomplished a great deal this year with our schedule to address the needs of our students, including: the English Language Arts blocks, increased Math in grades 5 and 6, RtI and balanced distribution of students with specialized needs. As it should be, it is my hope to always seek to better to address the needs of our students and staff alike. Working together, we will continue to strive to best provide for our students to assure a quality and equitable education for all.