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Re-organization Options

1 message

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To: RCS Board <rcsboard@rcs137.org>

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Dear Members of the RCS Board of Education,

After attending last week's special board meeting and listening to the options presented for reorganization next school year, I have had time to process what each change would entail. I plan to attend the board meeting this Thursday, but because the decision you are making is so impactful, I believe it is important for you to have as much information as possible ahead of time.

I will specifically address options 3, 4, 6, and 7, as those are the ones you are considering.

Option 3

The pros mentioned for a PreK/K center revolved around collaboration. While it is true that they could collaborate with those at their same grade level, I'm not sure how it would look between the two grades. The wall being built that separates the two wings along with the different schedule each grade level has would be barriers to overcome.

In addition, this model would single out Pleasant Acres, forcing all of our current students to relocate to a new building. Almost all staff members would have to relocate as well. Pleasant Acres is a building that has worked hard to embrace Conscious Discipline, create a positive climate and culture, and provide a safe and secure School Family. Many of you as board members have commented on the positive climate and culture. Our student growth is evident in our change in state designation from "Targeted" to "Commendable." We clearly are headed in a positive direction for our students. We had 100% of teachers returning to RCS in some capacity this year. To take a school like that and completely reorganize it does not make sense.

Option 4:

The main pros I heard involved collaboration for teachers and students having the opportunity to form relationships with each other across the district, rather than waiting until junior high school.

According to the Illinois State Report Card, our district's mobility rate is 16%, which is more than double the state average. Rantoul provides many opportunities for students to meet others outside of school including youth sports programs, church, youth groups, daycares, public library functions, etc. Many of the relationships my own children have made are through these avenues, which include kids from St. Malachy and surrounding communities.

As elementary teachers, it is our job to teach the social skills necessary to make friends. Essentially, just because you put a bunch of kids the same age together, does not mean they will just know how

to get along and become friends. In fact, there will be more opportunities for conflict because developmentally they are all at similar levels and many come with missing skills socially. In order to learn how to interact socially, they need adults that they know and trust to teach them. If they are switching schools every two years, then they will be expected to form new relationships with the adults teaching them, and the conflict with peers will carry with them. I started to cite references that state that the number one most important component to educating kids is forming relationships with the adults teaching them. I lost count. To name a few that we use with fidelity: Conscious Discipline, Responsive Classroom, and most recently the work of Brian Mendler, who we were fortunate enough to learn from at our January Professional Development.

Collaboration is important. As the instructional coach, it is one of my main responsibilities to collaborate and allow for collaboration amongst teachers. I can tell you from experience that quantity (meaning the amount of people at the same grade level) is not as important as the quality of different perspectives, approaches, and vertical alignment. At Pleasant Acres, we regularly plan and collaborate with teachers at, above, and below our grade levels. Closing the gap in the form of student growth is our goal. If we move to grade level centers, the perspective of growth from the grade levels ahead is lost. Just the other day, a 5th grade teacher left our PLC (Professional Learning Community) with a new engagement strategy to try after learning it from a 1st grade teacher. We use "Colleague Consultations" regularly to problem solve solutions for our scholars. We invite staff members who have formed previous relationships with the student including former classroom teachers and interventionists. We also invite staff members who may have a different, fresh perspective. The relationships we create through these consultations have resulted in new ideas, strategies, and opportunities which often span across grade levels because of our different perspectives and experiences.

Our scholars also benefit from being of service to each other. Dr. Becky Bailey (founder of Conscious Discipline) and Brian Mendler both specifically talk about the value of feeling helpful. Kids need to feel and know that they matter, they have a valuable contribution to make to our school community, and that when they aren't there, they are missed and we notice. We have 5th graders that trade in their recess to be Kindergarten or 1st Grade Teaching Assistants. We have 4th graders mentoring 1st graders who are struggling in the classroom. We have classroom buddies school wide where grade levels come together to read, strengthen skills, or make a project together. Grade Level Centers would take away these opportunities for collaboration.

Adding extra transitions every 2 years for students is not developmentally appropriate, and does not allow students to form relationships with teachers, staff members, and administrators. Another job at the elementary level is to teach kids how to transition and handle the feelings that accompany change. We have students that struggle to transition from recess to the classroom, from the classroom to specials (Art, Music, Technology, P.E.), or even within the classroom from the carpet to their seats or one content area to another. Luckily, we have resources we have learned to use thanks to Conscious Discipline and Responsive Classroom that are developmentally appropriate. We teach them the skills they need to transition throughout their day. The hope is by junior high, they will be ready for the different structure.

Option 6:

Although I appreciate that this option causes fewer disruptions, it does not include an adequate solution for our bilingual students or staff.

Option 7:

It is clear to me that, given the four options you are currently considering, this option provides the fewest amount of disruptions and avoids the problems I mentioned with the other options, while still allowing our bilingual population to grow for now, and makes the most sense.

We are fortunate that we have a “problem” of a growing bilingual population and the opportunities this present excites me as an educator. I do think it would be for the benefit of our district to start having more long-term conversations now so that such important decisions do not feel rushed in the future. While I don’t envy your position of having to make decisions such as these, I do firmly believe that what is best for students is ALSO best for staff and is ALSO best for families, as that is how a true School Family operates.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing your discussion this Thursday night. If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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