



River Forest
Public Schools

Roosevelt Middle School

7560 Oak Avenue
River Forest, IL 60305
708-366-9230

To: Dr. Edward Condon

From: Larry Garstki

Re: Addition of Exploratory Course at RMS - Grades 5 and 6

Date: May 4, 2020

Because of the unprecedentedly large incoming 5th grade class of 186 students, it will be necessary to change the way we schedule the 5th and 6th grade exploratory classes.

Traditionally, we have run a three-day rotation of these classes. However, if we continue to run a three-day rotation of exploratory classes, the average class size will be 32 students. Therefore, it will be necessary to offer four exploratory courses. By adding an additional exploratory course at 5th and 6th grade it will increase the number of sections for students to be placed into during the exploratory rotation, bringing down the average class size to 24 students.

By adding a fourth exploratory course, not only will the student-teacher ratios be smaller, but it will recoup instructional time for ELA. Within the current program we have always offered a fourth "exploratory-type" class at 5th (Tech) and 6th (STEM) grade. These classes have been taught during ELA time. By adding these two classes to the exploratory rotation (and out of ELA), there will be an added benefit of giving back roughly 1,600 minutes of ELA instruction to both 5th and 6th grade students per year (approximate equivalent of 2 classes per week). With the academic rigor of our Units-of-Study curriculum in reading and writing, this was an issue needing attention regardless of the increase in enrollment.

It is important to stress that simply adding a fourth exploratory course on a rotational basis would now require 5th and 6th grade students to juggle 11 classes at one time (7 core classes and 4 exploratory). This would obviously increase the number of transitions during the week and add to what is often a confusing schedule for our youngest students. Adding a fourth exploratory course on a rotational basis would require them to remember whether it is a Day A, B, C or D, as the courses rotate throughout the year. It also makes the STEM and art classes far more challenging to manage. Utilizing a rotational approach means every student in the grade is enrolled in that subject at the same time. This means the art teacher has 170+ projects all being created at the same time, and the STEM teacher also has 170+ "modules" being built at the same time. In a rotational model, the teachers are also required to grade all of these students each quarter. Classroom space allocations, storage, materials, and supplies would be very difficult to manage. Last but certainly not least, having class every 4th day whether it is art, music, STEM



**River Forest
Public Schools**

Roosevelt Middle School

7560 Oak Avenue
River Forest, IL 60305
708-366-9230

or foreign language, makes it much more difficult to create a sense of community within the classroom and doesn't provide enough continuity for quality relationship-building between student and teacher. It also significantly undercuts the continuity of instruction from one lesson to the next.

Therefore, my recommendation for you to consider is establishing a quarterly rotation in 5th and 6th grade. Besides lowering the average exploratory class size to 24, this has benefits for both teachers and students. The students would only have 8 classes at any one time during the school year to manage. They wouldn't have to navigate the details of whether it is a day A, B, C, or D. Seeing the exploratory teacher every day for 10 weeks allows for continuity of new learning, sustained focus on projects, and community building within the classroom. For the teachers, it allows them to manage one quarter of the students at a time and provide more focused instruction. Classroom resources, storage, and supplies will be much more manageable. This approach also provides continuity of instruction by teaching students each day as well as providing consistency of proximity, allowing the opportunity for stronger relationships to be built.

Historically, the daily rotational exploratory model was in place to accommodate the foreign language component. The foreign language teachers believe that classes rotating every 3rd day is better for learning a language than everyday for a trimester or quarter. Having such a long time between courses from 5th to 6th grade is probably not ideal in a formal sequence of foreign language instruction. However, the essential design of exploratory classes in a middle school program is to provide students with exposure to new learning and give them a taste of elective offerings. Much like FLIP at the elementary level, the exploratory foreign language classes in 5th and 6th grade are intended to get students excited about foreign language so that they are prepared to build a strong foundation once enrolled in full-year foreign language classes in 7th grade. Along with the above mentioned benefits provided to the other subject areas and to the social emotional benefits to students overall, I ask that you consider the option of implementing the addition of the fourth exploratory course on a quarterly rotation in 5th and 6th grade.