

December 9, 2009

Mr. Sindelar,

I wanted to share some of my thoughts with you regarding one of the scheduling options for the 2010-2011 academic year. I do so as both an educator and as the English Department co-chair.

Having two language arts teachers per team is a creative and valuable option to consider. It would move GBMS further toward being a true middle school. This is extremely important given the results of the Middle Level Oversight Comm. and the goals of the District 97 Strategic Plan.

A unique aspect of this schedule is the manner in which it can meet the social, and emotional needs of all of our middle school children. Sixth grade is a challenge because it is the initial year of transition. Seventh grade is a challenge (in my eyes and in the eyes of some other staff members, the most difficult of the three) because of the increased demands academically at a time where hormonal changes are occurring. Eighth grade is a challenge as students become excited and overwhelmed at the prospect of transitioning to high school. It is difficult for adults to "master" what is most beneficial for students as we set up K-8, middle, and junior high schools. One thing is clear. Having supportive adults in their lives is the best predictor of success for our students. By blocking a double period and having each LA teacher see half the core, the schedule would in effect, create an advisory feeling. Students who are at risk or simply having difficulties with the transitions of early adolescence would have at least two periods a day where a teacher can meet with them in a more intimate setting. This is especially appropriate in the area of language arts because writing is so highly personal. Studies often show that English and art teachers are the first to witness signs of distress among students because they are expressing themselves either in writing or artistically.

Academically, this schedule fully supports the middle school philosophy of teaming and creating interdisciplinary units. Teams would need to be in constant discussion regarding how and when units are to be taught. LA teachers could more fully act as a support for content area teachers, lending their role as writing and reading teachers to their peers. I have heard from many math, science and social studies teachers about how useful this framework would be. Imagine LA teachers assisting SS teachers with DBQs, SCI teachers with the analysis of labs, or math teachers with the abstract concepts of problem solving. Students would benefit because they would be able to make connections across content areas due to an increase in the time allotted to examine the objectives of a lesson.

Differentiating according to the needs of all students would also be more fully met. As you are aware, my student teaching occurred at Roosevelt Middle School in River Forest. There, I saw two groups of students for three periods a day. I was able to get to know my students quite well, and could therefore, better modify assignments across all ends of the learning spectrum. If this schedule were indeed adopted, LA teachers would be able to use their expertise as writing and reading teachers to assist students more deeply and share that information with their team.

The response by staff regarding this scheduling has been overwhelmingly positive across grade levels and content areas. For the first time, many of us truly see the chance to work more closely

with elective teachers as well. Thank you for putting it on the table as we try to more closely align ourselves with District 90, District 200, and the District 97 Strategic Plan. I know how incredibly difficult this becomes as we continue to make budget cuts while our student body increases.

Yours truly,
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