

**Port Angeles School District
Middle School Transition Team**

Report 3

November 13, 2006

CURRENT REALITY

The Middle School Transition Team (MSTT) has met four times now and is planning to meet this coming Tuesday late afternoon. As the team continues to lead and manage the transition affecting both middle schools, the focus is on building a high functioning, accountable team to lead this content and process work effectively. (See Appendices A & B.)

A decision has been made to thoughtfully and conscientiously review the research on effective middle level practices and the developmental needs of middle level students, primarily in the 10-15 year age range. Further, with regard to processing the transition, significant work continues on the effective management of transitions in general.

The literature we have chosen to use in our focus on the content of middle level developmentally appropriate needs is the National Middle School Association position paper entitled, *This We Believe*. This text enables us to deeply understand the research synthesis on effective middle level practices. A summary of the middle level student developmentally appropriate characteristics, as well as the staff response to them, is located in Appendix D.

The text we have chosen to work with in our thoughtful guidance of the transition process itself is the text, *Managing Transitions*. We have completed study of chapters one through five as of the timing of this report.

Another resource the team studied was the article titled, *When Leadership Spells Danger*, by Heifetz and Linsky. This article prompted spirited discourse on the responsibilities of leadership in general, and the increased level of responsibility during challenging times.

Attendance is high at the team meetings and the conversation has been spirited, thoughtful and honest. We evaluate each meeting on both content and process effectiveness, as we endeavor to be as effective as we can in meeting our ambitious work plan expectations. We recognize it is not just the work which must be done well; rather, it is equally important that the manner in which the work gets done, is done well.

Communication continues to be carefully and thoughtfully structured. Students and parents presented their communication plans and will continue to keep the team up to date with artifacts of this process. Internal staff communication continues to occur within stated expectations. Wednesday morning meetings continue to take place at each middle school on the Wednesday morning following each MSTT Tuesday evening meeting. This is an opportunity for all staff to hear the work of the MSTT and to feel both a part of the process and supported in their transition needs.

ON THE HORIZON

In the intervening meetings prior to the next board report, we will be reviewing and moving forward on our work plan. The public hearings took place the weeks of October 9 and 16. These conversations informed our team time and work in a significant way.

Chapters six and seven from *Managing Transitions* will be covered at MSTT meetings as will later chapters in the text. *This We Believe* will continue to be reviewed in some detail. On the October 13 Learning Improvement Day (LID) afternoon the two middle school staffs met together at Roosevelt Middle School to do a text study with *This We Believe*, and with an article regarding middle level students. They began the afternoon with a movie clip reminding everyone of the “wonder” of the wonder years – the middle years.

The afternoon was carefully constructed to have both faculties work collegially together and also to gain a deeper understanding of the developmental characteristics and needs of middle level children. This collective understanding must be reached as any subsequent decision made must reflect what truly matches the researched about the needs of children in this age group (again, check Appendix D). We must keep these needs in the forefront of our minds during decision-making.

Concerns and questions regarding the transition raised during the course of the LID presentations were collected (see Appendix C) and will inform the work plan. This work on the LID continues to inform the work of the MSTT.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS & REFLECTIONS

The MSTT is currently on course and functioning effectively. Communication continues to be transparent and consistent with stated expectations. The opportunity taken on the LID day for both middle school staffs to get together and focus on the developmental characteristics of middle level adolescent youngsters was an important one as we focus intentionally on the needs of these students in our transition and design work. Student needs remain our focus.

While tensions and anxiousness will remain front and center throughout our journey, every possible step to mitigate those issues we can is being studied and thoughtfully taken. The opportunity for staff to identify and chart their questions and concerns was a positive activity. We will respond to each of these questions and concerns as we support the transition process.

Following the final determination made by the board of directors on November 27, 2006, the work plan becomes much more activity oriented as we address a multitude of logistical topics.

Our norms and conscientious detail to best practice research will likely guide us through the challenging waters ahead.

Appendix A

Talking Points
October 11, 2006

- Welcomes and connections were taken care of.
- Minutes from the September 26, 2006 meeting were reviewed and approved.
- The team reviewed the evaluation summary regarding the norms evaluated in the previous team meeting for the manner in which we are working. These will continue to be closely monitored and routinely evaluated as part of our practice as we relentlessly commit to being a high performing team.
- The MSTT reviewed the assigned article, *When Leadership Spells Danger*, from the spring 2004 edition of *Educational Leadership*, regarding the “issue of leading meaningful change in education taking courage, commitment, and political savvy.” Lively discourse followed small group discussion of this compelling article.
- Communication plans on behalf of the parent and student team members were reviewed. More will be reported at the October 23 meeting. Communication plans and strategies continue to move forward with intentional focus.
- The MSTT work plan was discussed. It is clear, we as a team are more thoughtful than any one of us are as individuals. The work plan will be connected to the elementary plan in the date’s necessary, revised and put in front of the MSTT for review and approval at the next meeting. While there are varying degrees of importance to a fairly wide variety of topics, we will get through them in a thoughtful manner.
- Essentially, we will be working on parallel tracks prior to the November 28 meeting. The two major bodies of work to be focused on prior to the board decision on the 27th of November are the transition strategies and middle school research best practice ideas. The hearings in the next week will surely provide more feedback for the conversations we are having.
- The text, *Managing Transitions*, will be a focus prior to the November meeting. We will also be studying the text, *This We Believe*, a position paper outlining successful middle school research and strategies. The latter text is published by the National Middle School Association.
- During the afternoon session of the Friday LID activity, both the article, *Understanding and Appreciating the Wonder Years*, and the position paper from the NMSA, *This We Believe*, will be reviewed and discussed. The MSTT will then be informed as to the “best interests of middle level children”.
- The MSTT reviewed the importance of the marking of endings in the creation of new beginnings. The checklist from the text, *Managing Transitions*, provided fertile conversation as to the thoughtful planning of conversations regarding this most important of transitions.

- The neutral zone is one that requires careful attention in our leadership of this transition, should it become necessary.
- MSTT members completed evaluations of the meeting which we will discuss and continue to integrate into future team planning and operations.
- A reminder that if staff want copies of the readings, they need to e-mail Michelle.

Appendix B

Talking Points
October 25, 2006

- Welcomes and connections were taken care of.
- Minutes from the October 10, 2006 meeting were reviewed and approved.
- The team reviewed the evaluation summary regarding the norms evaluated in the previous team meeting for the manner in which we are working. These will continue to be closely monitored and routinely evaluated as part of our practice as we relentlessly commit to being a high performing team.
- The team reviewed two hot topics as items for discussion. The first item concerned staffing decisions and criteria for assignment next year. This item was identified as one that would likely be processed by district Human Resources staff and PAEA leadership, ostensibly Mrs. Hebert and Mr. Burnett. The second topic centered on responses to the recently completed board hearings. With regard to this topic, the team affirmed several tenets of their norms. Team members were encouraged to speak their truth, clarifying they may well be speaking for themselves and not the team as an aggregate whole when sharing opinions, particularly dissenting opinions. Team members were also reminded that we will need to continue to extend one another grace as we individually and collectively respond to this transition.
- The MSTT reviewed the assigned text, *Managing Transitions*, Chapters 3 and 4, regarding the grief process, defining what is lost, etc. and the management of the neutral zone. Lively discourse followed small group discussion of this compelling text. We will continue at the next meeting with Chapters 6 and 7.
- Communication plans on behalf of the parent and student team members were reviewed in generalities. Discussion ensued with regard to communicating often and concisely, particularly the rationale for the Facilities Efficiency Task Force recommendations. There is a concern that the community and even some staff do not fully realize what is going on. More will be reported at the November 14 meeting. Communication plans and strategies continue to move forward with intentional focus. Working effectively with the press was discussed as a priority.
- The MSTT work plan was discussed. It is clear, we as a team are more thoughtful than any one of us are as individuals. The work plan will be put in front of the MSTT for review and approval at the next meeting. While there are varying degrees of importance to a fairly wide variety of topics, we will get through them in a thoughtful manner. The LID information was very helpful in informing the work plan. This information will be integrated into the work plan by Michelle and the middle school administrative leadership.
- Essentially, we will continue working on parallel tracks prior to the November 28 meeting. The two major bodies of work to be focused on prior to the board decision on the 27th of November are the transition strategies and middle school research best practice ideas. Both

the gingerbread people info and the cloud concerns will be incorporated into our work. This good work resulted from our LID time together.

- The text, *Managing Transitions*, will be a focus prior to the November meeting. We will also be studying the text, *This We Believe*, a position paper outlining successful middle school research and strategies. The latter text is published by the National Middle School Association. We did review both page 7 from this paper and page(s) 43 and beyond at the LID activity.
- During the afternoon session of the Friday LID activity, both the article, *Understanding and Appreciating the Wonder Years*, and the position paper from the NMSA, *This We Believe*, were reviewed and discussed. The MSTT is now informed as to the “best interests of middle level children”. This will serve as a filter for our thinking, conversation and decision making.
- The team did discuss the essential questions: 1) How do we compensate for peoples’ losses? And 2) How do we support those staff not on the MSTT (and parents & students)? We must attend to these queries as we continue our journey.
- MSTT members completed evaluations of the meeting which we will discuss and continue to integrate into future team planning and operations.
- A reminder that if staff want copies of the readings, they need to e-mail Michelle.

Appendix C

Middle School LID Results
Compilation of Concerns/Questions Raised By Staff

Concerns....Questions.....Is it even on the Radar?

1. Who decides what schedule we adopt? ---Will all opinions and concerns be facilitated? --- (In scheduling conflicts).
2. Who decides what electives there will be?
3. Any possibly of expanding our electives from what is currently offered?--(foreign language, drama, photography, boys choir, and home economic.).
4. Small learning, communities bonds with teacher/students.
5. Electives----how will we get all kids in classes of their choice?
6. Jobs---when do we know who teaches what/where?
7. Busing—Length of bus ride?—Will students go to Sequim.
8. How to combine the two libraries?--- How to make Roosevelt Library appropriate for Kindergarten through sixth grade.
9. Special Education concerns.
10. Scheduling blocks.
11. Length of class time. ---Double Math 90 minutes. -----4 commitments.
12. Para Educators placement.
13. Sport teams. --- 2 commitments.
14. Club pride, Leadership classes, Outdoor Ed, Yearbook, Dare, Teaming, Web, and Natural Helpers.
15. Teacher placement by New Year—3 commitments
16. Jazz Band---5 commitments
17. Identifying and supporting at-risk kids.
18. Where will the Life Skill kids go?
19. To know if people will be rified ASAP.—this has to be known already how many teachers will be needed. Should I sell my house? When will I know if I have a job? -----2 commitments.
20. Will web be utilized in 7/8 grade?
21. Choices in teaming. ---Placement based on what's best for kids vs. Union. Who works well together?
22. Roosevelt representation in administration.
23. Discipline policies. --- 2 commitments.
24. Sharing of elementary schedule trans. Team (ESTT) information.
25. What happen to the investment of READ 180?
26. Are we looking at looping team advisory?
27. Process to access Monroe bond money?
28. How will I be assigned a classroom at Stevens?
29. Re-paint, Re-model Stevens, so new site can be bright and welcoming.
30. Are we really creating something new, or are we just going through the motions?

These concerns and questions were raised as a result of time set aside on the October 13, 2006 Learning Improvement Day activity sited at Roosevelt Middle School in the afternoon. Staff from both middle schools took time in both small and large groups to work through tough issues. A commitment was made to put these questions and concerns forward to the MSTT in order that they inform the work plan in real time.

Appendix D Middle School Data on Developmentally Appropriate Characteristics
As Identified and Discussed by SMS and RMS Staff on October 13, 2006

Physical Development

- ❖ Need daily physical activity because of increased energy, and if not actively engaged in regular physical activity, often lack fitness, with poor levels of endurance, strength, and flexibility.
- ❖ Experience restlessness and fatigue due to hormonal changes
- ❖ Need to release energy, often resulting in sudden, apparently meaningless outbursts of activity.
- ❖ Have an increased need for comprehensive, medically accurate education about sexuality and health issues that responds to these increased concerns.
- ❖ Are physically vulnerable because they may adopt poor health habits or engage in experimentation with alcohol and other drugs and high-risk sexual behaviors.

Moral Development

- ❖ Greatly need and are influenced by trustworthy adult role models who will listen to them and affirm their moral consciousness and actions.
- ❖ Working toward developing their own personal morals and values (quick to see flaws in others-slow to see their own)
- ❖ Fairness and equity for themselves
- ❖ Value experiences in participatory democracy

Psychological Development

- ❖ Believe that personal problems, feelings, and experiences are unique.
- ❖ Desire recognition for their positive efforts and achievements. Exhibit intense concern about physical growth and maturity as profound physical changes occur.
- ❖ Are psychologically vulnerable, because at no other stage in development are they more likely to encounter and be aware of so many differences with themselves and others.

Cognitive – Intellectual Development

- ❖ May show disinterest in conventional academic subjects, but intellectually curious about the world and themselves.
- ❖ Display a wide range of individual intellectual development
- ❖ Are inquisitive about adults and are keen observers of them; depending on their cultural upbringing, some young adolescents also may often challenge adults' authority.
- ❖ Prefer to work with peers
- ❖ Easily discouraged if they don't feel successful

Social-Emotional Development

- ❖ Have a strong need to belong to a group, w/approval of peers becoming as important as adult approval, sometimes more.
- ❖ Dependent on the beliefs and values of parents and other valued adults, but seek to make more of their own decisions.
- ❖ Experience mood swings often with peaks of intensity and unpredictability
- ❖ Are often intimidated and frightened by their first middle school experience due to the large numbers of students and teachers, the size of the building, and what may be for many their first day-to-day experiences with significant proportions of students who are different from them.

These five characteristics encompass the five characteristics as put forward by the National Middle School Association in their position paper, *This We Believe*.

Staff from both middle schools contributed ideas and commentary regarding these characteristics. We must keep these front and center as we proceed with significant decisions regarding the lives of these young people.