

Port Angeles School District
Middle School Transition Team
Report 4
January 8, 2007

CURRENT REALITY

The Middle School Transition Team (MSTT) has met six times now and is planning to meet next Tuesday in the 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.

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.

The literature the team chose 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.

The text the team chose to work with, *Managing Transitions*, chapters one through nine of which have been completed as of the timing of this report. This text continues to guide the team's thinking with regard to the effective leadership of challenging work.

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, setting the foundation for continuing study and practice of effective leadership.

Attendance is high at the team meetings and the conversation spirited, thoughtful and honest. The team evaluates each meeting on both content and process effectiveness, working to be as effective as possible in meeting ambitious work plan expectations.

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, work teams will be addressing the specialized areas on which they are spending focused time. A format and a process were constructed for these work groups to effectively function both as independent groups and in their re-assimilation into the MSTT as a whole. Each work team must connect its work and recommendations to research. The recommendation must be written and include the rationale, based on research and best fit.

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 information gathered from this work will form the filter for “the what’s best for middle level children” question; in many ways the nexus of the teams’ work.

There is also a clear understanding that the work plan takes care of the planning for the structure of the design and climate of the new school. There will be additional work teams dedicated to other practical topics, such as the design and content of the student handbook and staff handbook, discipline policies, etc.

The attached appendices (Appendices A and B) reflect the talking points shared with each staff following the MSTT meetings. For the more detailed minutes, please review the website.

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 focus together on the developmental characteristics of middle level adolescents was important as staff focus on these students’ needs.

The MSTT members know that the presence of tensions and anxiety must be acknowledged in this transition process, mitigating all of the issues the team can address. The opportunity for staff to identify and chart questions and concerns was a positive activity that responded to these worries. Responding to each question and concerns will be a major support component of the transition process.

Following the final determination made by the board of directors on November 27, 2006, the team’s work plan became much more activity-oriented as a multitude of logistical topics were considered. The team approved its work plan and divided tasks based on particular interest. The recommendations of these work groups will not be formal MSTT recommendations until the entire MSTT has processed and voted on the recommendations.

Appendix A

Talking Points
November 14, 2006

- Welcomes and connections were taken care of.
- Minutes from the October 24, 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 text, *Managing Transitions*, Chapters 6 and 7, regarding the organizational renewal cycle and the trust issues inherent in the transition process. Lively discourse followed small group discussion of this compelling text. We will continue at the next meeting with Chapters 5 and 9.
- The MSTT reviewed the Board Report #3. Appendix D needs some clarification with regard to the “implications” of the data analysis. Possible instructional implications of the research on developmental characteristics of adolescent children will be important to note for the board and public. It is also important that folks not realize these will actually all occur as we are in fiscally challenged times. These were genuinely brainstormed ideas. We are committed to keeping these ideas in front of us as we move forward in our work.
- 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 28 meeting. Communication plans and strategies continue to move forward with intentional focus. Having a succinct message is viewed as critical. 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. Responses will be crafted to each concern raised and run by the entire MSTT body. It is viewed as important to maintain high levels of candid and transparent communication.
- 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 reviewed both page 7 from this paper and page(s) 43 and beyond at the LID activity. The board of directors is also in receipt of this text and has reviewed the information we have shared.
- 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. These ideas will guide our work.
- 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 Reid. Particularly, if MSTT members wish to have copies of the *Breaking Ranks* text, they need to contact Michelle Reid.

Appendix B

Talking Points
December 12, 2006

- Welcomes and connections were taken care of.
- Minutes from the November 14, 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 one hot topic as an item for discussion. This item concerned staffing as it relates to para-educators. The team was reminded of the importance of taking into account the feelings and impact of the transition process on these important staff members. With regard to these topic connected to communication and inclusion, 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 5 and 9, regarding the launching a new beginning and concluding text thoughts. These thoughts centered on the five real and measurable costs of not managing transition effectively. Lively discourse followed small group discussion of this compelling text. We will continue at the next meetings to keep the text in front of us to guide our conversations. In a sense, the text assists us in having a rudder for decision making process and communication.
- 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 January 16 meeting. Communication plans and strategies continue to move forward with intentional focus. Working effectively with the press continued to be 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 was put in front of the MSTT for review and approval. 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 has been integrated into the work plan. Members of the MSTT signed up for the various work teams they had interest in serving on. Further, other staff members from the middle schools have the opportunity to sign on with the work teams.

- Essentially, we have been working on parallel tracks prior to the November 28 meeting. The two major bodies of work that were focused on prior to the board decision on November 27 were the transition strategies and middle school research best practice ideas. Both the gingerbread people info and the cloud concerns were incorporated into and continue to guide our work. This good work resulted from our LID time together and the collaboration the MSTT engaged in regarding the work.
- The text, *Managing Transitions*, will continue to guide us in future meetings. 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 reviewed both page 7 from this paper and page(s) 43 and beyond at the LID activity.
- Another article we looked at from the *New York Times* addressed what we all already intuitively feel and know that kids today are growing up faster than ever before. Indeed, the premise of the article is that age ten is the new age fifteen. This has real implications in the planning and design of our new school.
- 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 Reid.