

Port Angeles School District
Middle School Transition Team
Report 5
February 12, 2007

CURRENT REALITY

The Middle School Transition Team (MSTT) has met eight 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 continues to be on building a high functioning, accountable team to lead this content and process work effectively.

A decision early on in the process was 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. This research remains the filter for all the recommendations the work groups will bring forward to the larger MSTT team as well as the MSTT recommendations. Developmentally appropriate decision-making in the face of tight budget constraints will remain a challenge.

Further, with regard to processing the transition, significant work continues on the effective management of transitions in general. This research is being put to the test as identified work teams continue to wrestle with the various topics leading to the successful integration of the two existing middle schools into one new middle school as directed by the board.

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.

The text we have chosen to work with in our thoughtful guidance of the transition process itself is the text, *Managing Transitions*. This text continues to guide our thinking with regard to the effective leadership of what is proving to be challenging work. This text will remain on the table throughout the process as we make different quantifiable decisions affecting curriculum, instruction, assessment and the culture and climate of the new school.

Another resource the team studied was the article titled, *When Leadership Spells Danger*, by Heifitz and Linsky. This article prompted spirited discourse on the responsibilities of leadership in general, and the increased level of responsibility during challenging times. As we recognize our collective leadership responsibilities for this work, it is incumbent on us to continue to study and practice effective leadership practices.

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.

Communication continues to be carefully and thoughtfully structured. 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 work teams will continue to address the work they are doing in the specialized areas for which they have chosen to spend focused time. There has been a format and process constructed for these work groups to effectively function both as independent groups and then their re- assimilation into the MSTT as a whole. The work teams have met at the skill center and will next meet at the two middle school sites on concurrent meeting dates. Work groups are also independently scheduling significant blocks of time for work outside the more formally structured MSTT meeting dates and times. Staff, students and parents are working hard to reach consensus on recommendations to the MSTT team at large.

Each work team must connect their work and recommendations to research. The recommendation must be written and include the rationale, based on research and best fit.

The various work teams have gotten off to a strong start. The physical education and health group is researching delivery models for the effective delivery of a coherent physical education and health program at the middle level. The master schedule work group is researching the benefits of a variety of schedule options, while looking at the research connected to collaboration and teaming structures and purposes.

The highly capable program work group is busy discussing different models for the highly capable middle level program. These models range from more of an inclusion model to one that is an elective choice. The special education work group is discussing similarly the relative merits of different models for delivery, again the inclusion versus pull-out strategies and their effectiveness with middle level students.

The school name and mascot work group, deliberating with regard to the mascot, school colors and school name recommendations has spent a great deal of time identifying key issues and audiences for input. They have constructed a survey and timeline for publicity and a venue for bringing this recommendation to the MSTT for review.

Other elective work groups, (e.g., shop, technology, and art. etc.) and the athletics work group are discussing options with the developmentally appropriate considerations front and center. The options being considered in these content areas are heavily dependent on the master schedule decision making and the space to situate programs within the building. In the athletics work group, discussions about type and number of sport teams are being discussed. Fiscal constraints are certainly part of this conversation.

The activities and ASB leadership group is strategizing about possible scenarios to integrate student leadership and accompanying activities, taking “the best from both schools” and building on

our collective strengths. The music work group is constructing possible course scenarios dependent on the master schedule recommendations. Facilities are also being scrutinized for the music course sections and offerings.

The transportation work group has met with Jerry Eldred, our district transportation supervisor, to look at various components of the transportation challenges. For example, the increased traffic flow around Stevens Middle School was looked at, both parent drivers and increased bus traffic as more buses are navigating the premises. Also, the length of bus routes and number of routes continue to be discussed.

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 subsequent work teams dedicated to other practical topics, such as the design and content of the student handbook and staff handbook, discipline policies, etc.

Please see Appendix A and B to review the more specific talking points for the January meetings. These have been communicated to staff, students and parents and give a clear and concise record of the meeting(s) documented.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS & REFLECTIONS

The MSTT is currently on course and functioning effectively. Communication continues to be transparent and consistent with stated expectations. Work groups are open to any staff, parent and student who choose to participate, rather or not they are formally on the MSTT group or not. Candid conversation continues to be the norm as research is reviewed and preferences articulated for the design and implementation of instructional program and co-curricular opportunities. 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 has become much more activity oriented as we address a multitude of logistical topics. The work plan has been approved and members of the team have self selected their work of particular interest. It is clearly noted that the recommendations of these work groups are only that—recommendations. They will not be formal MSTT recommendations until the entire MSTT has had time to process and vote on the recommendations.

In the month of February several work teams will be presenting their work for the whole group to debate and decide upon with regard to recommendations that will, or will not be moved forward. Until these work groups have presentations ready for the MSTT at large, their work is largely research-based and thoughtfully synthesized.

Each work group making a recommendation (e.g., master schedule work group) will need to identify the research they relied on in coming to their recommendation, several options available

in their recommendation, a clear connection to what's best for middle level students and a clear rationale for their recommendation. These will all be taken into account as the MSTT at large then wrestles with the work group topic.

The next two MSTT meetings will occur at the actual middle school sites, the first being at Stevens and the second at Roosevelt. This will allow the work groups to spread out more effectively and access artifacts they may need for their work.

Appendix A

Talking Points
January 16, 2007

- Welcomes and connections were taken care of.
- Minutes from the December 12, 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 from the New York Times, *10 is the New 15 as Kids Grow Up Faster*, regarding the ways in which young adolescents are different today than perhaps they were even ten years ago. Our world has changed significantly in the last number of years. Young adolescents need assistance as they cope with the ever higher expectations for their success in this climate.
- The MSTT reviewed the Board Report #4. There was general consensus on the findings and resultant report.
- 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. 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 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 was 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.
- The text, *Managing Transitions*, will continue to guide our work. We will also be referring to 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. The board of directors is also in receipt of this text and has reviewed the information we have shared.

- 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. Particularly, if MSTT members wish to have copies of the *Breaking Ranks* text, they need to contact Michelle.

Appendix B**Talking Points
January 30, 2007**

- Welcomes and connections were taken care of.
- Minutes from the January 16, 2007 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 teachers. The team was reminded of the importance of taking into account the feelings and impact of the transition process on staff members. With regard to these topics 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. In essence, all matters connected to staffing decisions and protocols will be referred to Mary Hebert, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources and Barry Burnett, the Port Angeles Education Association president, as they will be collaborating on such decisions in concert with the negotiated bargaining agreement.
- 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.
- Work group teams met to address various work team topics. Work teams were expected to likely meet outside the formal MSTT time and will keep Michelle apprised of their progress. Further, Michelle is available to meet with work groups as needed or to answer questions and concerns as they arise.
- MSTT members completed evaluations of the meeting which we will discuss and continue to integrate into future team planning and operations.
- The next meeting will take place at Stevens Middle School on February 13, 2007, with the following meeting on February 27, 2007 to be located at Roosevelt Middle School.
- A reminder that if staff want copies of the readings, they need to e-mail Michelle.