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To: Dr. Mary Pfeiffer, District Administrator
Board of Education

From: Steve Dreger, Assistant District Administrator of *LD*
Learning and Leadership

Date: January 4, 2013

RE: Elementary Planning

Introduction

The Board of Education will discuss elementary planning at its January 8, 2013 special meeting. Topics of discussion will include results from the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) Analyses conducted at each elementary school, the potential expansion of Alliance Charter Elementary School, and kindergarten enrollment. Central Office administration, elementary principals, Brian Wunderlich, Horace Mann Principal, and I will be in attendance to address elementary planning and answer any questions you may have regarding the report.

Background Information

The Board and administration began discussions relative to class sizes in the elementary program during a Board Retreat in June of 2010. The Board again discussed class size at its January 4, 2011 meeting. One result of those discussions was a decision to institute a limit of twenty (20) students in each kindergarten class in the District. Another outcome was the creation of a concept titled the Triad Model, which was predicated on three (3) large elementary attendance areas each with two (2) K-3 schools and one (1) 4-5 school. Though the decision was made not to proceed with the Triad, much of the foundational work on which the Triad was built paved the way to new thinking regarding planning protocol and program design. In particular, implementing a process for stakeholder input would be central to planning going forward.

The Board and administration met again in July of 2012 during a Board Retreat to discuss K-5 class size ranges, charter schools, four-year old kindergarten, and conceptual elementary school designs aimed at accommodating student enrollment. The Board and administration conducted an abbreviated SWOT Analysis to generate ideas for the elementary program with the intention of gathering input from additional stakeholders as the process unfolded. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. SWOT analyses are used in a variety of settings to assess an organization's current function or status, as well as to identify opportunities for growth or improvement and potential threats to the organization.

Most recently, the Board held a special meeting on October 9, 2012 to discuss the following issues:

- Potential expansion of Alliance Charter Elementary School
- Kindergarten enrollment
- Possible boundary revisions
- Building usage
- Potential additions to buildings
- Structure of our schools
- SWOT Analyses with each elementary school's staff and parents

Current Reality

The Neenah Joint School District currently has a 21.7 class size average in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Kindergarten classes have been capped at twenty (20) students with most first grade classes at twenty-one (21) or fewer students. While class size is favorable, especially in kindergarten and first grade, structural issues persist that are preventing students from being accommodated at their home schools, Alliance Charter Elementary School from expanding, and schools from using instructional space efficiently and appropriately.

In the 2012-13 school year, four (4) classrooms of kindergarten with a total of seventy-eight (78) students could not be accommodated at their respective home schools because there are no classrooms available. Additionally, some of these students will not be able to attend their home school for first grade in 2013-14 for the same reason unless there is a plan to accommodate them. Alliance Charter Elementary School has experienced significant interest from families beginning in kindergarten annually but is unable to accept more students due to space constraints at Roosevelt. Art and music instruction at most elementary schools occurs in the students' classrooms with the specials teachers traveling from room to room with a cart of supplies. Locker rooms and other spaces not designed for instruction are being used as such.

Process

The Elementary Administrative Team met on October 19, 2012 to determine a process for addressing the issues presented at the October 9, 2012 Board meeting. The team developed protocol for schools to conduct their respective SWOT Analyses with their staff and parent groups, which included completing the analyses by the end of November. The team also resurrected the previously developed Success Criteria and considered revisions. The revised criteria and the results from the SWOT Analyses would be filters or checks-and-balances for planning going forward. The Success Criteria list is on page 3.

Success Criteria

(The elementary program will be successful if...)
Class size ranges are maintained
Instructional areas are structured to accommodate learning
Dedicated space is available for art and music
Students are accommodated at their home school to extent possible
Classroom design is developmentally appropriate
Special education programs accommodate identified student needs
Transportation costs remain stable or less
Early Childhood/Preschool program remains centralized
Gifted and Talented Magnet Program is accommodated
One principal is assigned to each school/site
Playground designs are age appropriate and equitable
Consistent times for art, music, and wellness education
Plan allows for future growth
Instructional time for content areas is defined
Teacher collaboration time is maximized
World Language recommendation is accommodated
Plan is financially viable
Maintain neighborhood school concept where practicable
Class sizes are equitable across schools
4K program is implemented
Technology matches instructional need and is equitable across schools
Educational opportunities/alternatives are available (e.g. music/fine arts, world language, year round school, etc.)
Buildings meet safety and instructional needs
Staffing/school day/schedule supports best instructional practice
Split classes are not implemented
Alliance expands as enrollment warrants

Parents and staff at each elementary school were invited to participate in a SWOT Analysis in an effort to obtain their perspectives of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats regarding the elementary program. The primary focus of the SWOT Analysis at Roosevelt Elementary School and Alliance Charter Elementary School was the potential expansion of Alliance. SWOT Analyses at all other elementary schools considered the elementary program in general.

An aggregate report of the findings was developed and will serve as a resource in planning for the future of our elementary program. If an item was expressed on more than one analysis it was placed on the aggregate report. The aggregate reports for both staff and parents are presented on pages 4 and 5 respectively.

Staff SWOT Analysis Aggregate Report

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Staff Technology Curriculum Literacy Coaches and Math Specialists District Literacy and Math Coordinators Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) K-5 schools Neighborhood schools Class size in Kindergarten and 1st grade School Board support of class sizes Parent/family support Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs) Professional Learning Days and other professional development opportunities Before and After School Care Program Developmentally appropriate classrooms for Early Childhood Centralized Early Childhood Program</p>	<p>Staff morale Technology training, support, and equity across schools Lack of equitable resources across schools Writing curriculum Staffing level of Gifted and Talented Program Lack of time for staff collaboration/preparation Lunch program Condition of some buildings Various sizes of classroom space Space for supportive services, specials, and classrooms All students cannot be accommodated at their home schools Class size in grades 3-5 Part-time Library Media Specialists Lack of full-time Math Specialists at each school Not having electronic report cards Socioeconomic diversity varies by school Parent support 2:15 p.m. and 11:30 a.m. dismissals can be confusing for families Communication</p>
Opportunities	Threats
<p>4 K Program World language program K-4, 5-6 structure Washington building Additions to buildings Available land for building a new school Adjust boundaries Full-time principal at each school Special education services at all schools Emotional Behavioral Disabilities program for students with severe needs Updated and electronic report cards Consistent instructional times for art, music and wellness education Schedule/structure that supports collaboration time Additional professional development opportunities Full-time Math Specialists at all schools Enhanced literacy materials Community partnerships Use of fund balance</p>	<p>Funding Economic conditions Open enrollment Boundary changes Effectiveness Project (teacher supervision model) Increased expectations on staff Stress on teachers Socioeconomic diversity Lack of time for training, collaboration, preparation, and instruction Time to administer assessments Opportunities for input into planning process Communication</p>

Parent SWOT Analysis Aggregate Report

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Staff Technology Curriculum Differentiated instruction Intervention services Suzuki strings program Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) K-5 schools Neighborhood schools Class sizes especially Kindergarten-2nd grade Washington building available if needed High interest in Alliance Charter Elementary School Parent involvement Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs) Volunteer opportunities in schools Before and After School Care program Community Learning Centers</p>	<p>Climate/morale of teachers Equitable level of technology across schools No world language offered No 4K program Staffing level of Gifted and Talented Program Number of elementary schools in Neenah Various sizes of classroom space Overcrowding Space for supportive services and specials Storage space Students displaced from home schools Class size in some grades Boundaries Number of transitions for students/families Loss of neighborhood school for Taft Early dismissals Communication to parents</p>
Opportunities	Threats
<p>4K program World language program Washington building Additions to buildings Available land for building a new school Adjust boundaries Technology enhancements More differentiated instruction Half day Kindergarten Expansion of Alliance Year round school Enhanced communication</p>	<p>State funding Economic conditions Open enrollment Socioeconomic diversity Equitable technology for all grades Lack of 4K program Balancing class sizes Space for art and music Lack of space to grow in current schools Families may not be able to attend home school Adding transitions for students/families Transportation (transferring buses) Limited time in school day to meet instructional expectations</p>

Meetings were held with the parent leadership as well as the staff of Alliance to discuss potential issues related to expansion. Alliance leadership and staff indicated that while there would be issues to address such as teacher hiring and training, facility and resources, finances, timeline, and metrics of a successful transition there was an interest in expansion.

The Elementary Administrative Team and Mr. Brian Wunderlich, Principal of Horace Mann, reconvened on December 12, 2012 to review the SWOT analyses, consider the input from Alliance parent leadership and Alliance staff, review the previously developed Success Criteria, and craft the main components of a recommendation to the Board. Mr. Wunderlich participated in the meeting because there were suggestions on the SWOT Analyses that had potential implication for grade 6.

A review of the SWOT aggregate reports indicated a degree of similarity between staff and parents. As examples, both parents and staff viewed staff, technology, curriculum, neighborhood schools, primary class size, and parent involvement as strengths. Opportunities listed for both groups included 4K, world language program, use of the Washington building, additions to buildings, and boundary adjustments. Common weaknesses were staff morale and climate, equitable level of technology at all schools, variability in sizes of classroom space, lack of classroom and instructional space, students not able to be accommodated at their home schools, and communication. In terms of threats, both parents and staff viewed funding, economic conditions, and open enrollment as issues.

Structural ideas and issues that surfaced from the SWOT Analyses that administration discussed in more detail included the concept of a K-4, 5-6 model, expansion of Alliance Charter Elementary School, 4K, a world language program, and boundaries.

A concept that emanated from the SWOT Analyses was a K-4, 5-6 structure. The team considered possible class size ranges in a K-4 structure to estimate factors such as staffing levels, building usage, and general adherence to success criteria and SWOT results. The overall class size range proposed in a K-4 structure would be 18-24. The range allows flexibility in the staffing and student placement process. Within that range, the target for K-2 would be 18-20 and the target for 3-4 would be 20-22. The targets provide appropriate class sizes for instructional purposes.

A preliminary review of the Success Criteria and SWOT Analyses relative to the K-4, 5-6 concept indicated a favorable correlation. That is to say, a K-4, 5-6 structure would appear to meet most of the Success Criteria as well as support strengths and opportunities listed and mitigate many of the weaknesses and threats on the SWOT report.

Structurally, a K-4 model would allow the elementary schools to capture approximately nineteen (19) classrooms district-wide, which would allow for the accommodation of students in their home schools including kindergarten, a school for Alliance that would accommodate twelve (12) sections, dedicated instructional areas such as art and music, and room for growth. Additionally, the K-4 model would require minimal boundary adjustment.

The potential benefits for a 5-6 program include the opportunity to work with students over a two-year rather than one-year period, not adding another transition for families

(students would simply transition to Horace Mann in grade 5 instead of grade 6), and enhanced curriculum articulation, intervention/acceleration and collaboration between grade 5 and 6. A few issues relate to the misalignment of the 4/5 Magnet Program and a K-5 Alliance Charter Elementary School with a 5-6 model. Solutions exist for both issues.

Mr. Andrew Thorson, Director of Facilities/Engineer, Mr. Wunderlich and I met to assess the Horace Mann facility, determine considerations for a potential expansion that would accommodate fifth grade, and develop a preliminary estimate for the project. The estimated cost of an expansion ranges from \$6,000,000 to \$8,000,000. To add onto Horace Mann at this cost would not be fiscally responsible.

Because the K-4, 5-6 model appeared to address the short and long-term issues previously discussed, it was the concept on which administration focused. At this time, administration is prepared to offer the following recommendations and next steps in the planning process. Further discussion and development will be necessary to prepare a comprehensive recommendation.

Recommendations

Administration recommends the expansion of Alliance beginning with the 2013-14 school year to eventually become a twelve (12)-section school over the next five (5) years or so. In addition, it is recommended that Alliance continue its expansion by adding a second section of kindergarten and one additional section each year thereafter, enrollment permitting, until it is a twelve (12)-section school. Administration recommends the location for Alliance to be the Taft Elementary School Building. Depending on the timing of decisions relative to the elementary program, Alliance and the Early Learning Center or the additional kindergarten classes could coexist for one (1) to two (2) years at which time Alliance would solely occupy Taft. If Alliance were to relocate to Taft, boundaries would be reviewed and revised to ensure that the classroom space currently occupied by Alliance at Roosevelt would be maximized.

Administration also recommends that the Early Learning Center, including all of its programs, remain together irrespective of location to maintain the coordination of services it currently provides. An option for the Early Learning Center could be offsite to capture additional space to accommodate students in the elementary program. We anticipate this would happen in approximately two (2) years.

Next Steps

If the Board is supportive of the administrative recommendation, next steps would include developing a transition plan for Alliance and the Early Learning Center, and addressing the projected need for additional kindergarten classroom space for the 2013-14 school year and beyond.

Administration seeks Board support to investigate a 4K program for the District. The demands of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) comprise a compelling argument for providing students with a formal educational experience prior to kindergarten. Information about the CCSS for Math and English/Language Arts follows the report. In addition, we believe that by having a 4K program, our students would be more likely to reach Governor Walker's expectation of all students reading at grade level

by third grade. A 4K model supported by administration would be hosting the program at a non-NJSD site such as preschools and daycares with non-NJSD teachers. Details of the program including implementation timeline would need to be developed.

The World Language Task Force will be making a recommendation to the Board in February. Preliminary work at the elementary level indicates that the recommendation will be predicated on offering world language to students at all elementary schools (specific grades to be determined) rather than at select schools. The future structure of the elementary program will be a factor in terms of which grades might participate in the world language program.

The District made a commitment to reviewing elementary boundaries every three (3) to five (5) years, which is commensurate with the timing of this planning process. Boundaries will be reviewed and most likely be adjusted in some fashion as soon as the 2013-14 school year.

There are a number of general considerations for planning going forward including but not limited to:

- Special Education program
- Art, music and wellness education class times
- School day length and schedule
- Communication plan
- Budget
- Other

I and my administrative colleagues will be present at the January 8, 2013 Board meeting to present information regarding elementary planning and answer any questions you may have about the report.