



ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT - SECONDARY

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Pamela Nash, Ph.D., Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Schools

Daniel A. Nerad, Superintendent of Schools

TO: Board of Education

FROM: Pam Nash, Assistant
Assistant Superintendent – Secondary Schools

DATE: February 25, 2010

RE: Request for Renewal to Reduce the Number of Schools Days through the
2013-14 School Year

We are asking that the Department of Public Instruction renew our grant for a waiver so that the first day of school can continue to be structured as an orientation day for 6th and 9th graders only. Transition from elementary to middle and middle to high school is difficult for students and this provides a strong, positive, non-intimidating first day of school so they have a chance to learn the physical layout of the building, locker locations, how to navigate the lunchroom, use the LMC and where to find help for academic or personal issues.

Issue: In order to renew the waiver, we need to provide the following evidence to the Department of Education:

- Opportunity for public input regarding the extension. A public hearing will be held on March 8, 2010 for this purpose.
- Approval from the Board of Education seeking the extension.
- Evaluation of the educational effects of the waiver over the previous four year period. (see attached response from the middle and high schools.)
- Financial effects of the waiver over the previous 4 year period.
- Calendars with bell schedules for the first year of the waiver for the affected schools.

Background: The District received approval from the Department of Public Instruction on July 26, 2006, to reduce the number of days from 180 to 179 at the middle and high schools for the years 2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-2009 and 2009-2010. We are seeking a renewal of this waiver for the years 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14.

Fiscal Note: There are no financial effects.

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1st Day of School

<p>Black Hawk</p>	<p>When 6th graders come to school in September, it is critically important that only the 6th graders are here. It is not as frightening to them as when all 400 students are in the halls. We spend the entire day having all staff work with the 6th graders so they get to know everyone - not just their academic teachers. It gives us a chance to take them on a tour of the building and explain a lot of things while it is quiet. We take them to the cafeteria and explain all the cafeteria rules. We give them extra time at lunch that first day because most of them do not remember their ID numbers to enter for lunch. It takes them a really long time to get through the line. Then we help them understand what they must do to exit the cafeteria and what they must do while on the playground.</p> <p>We also show them where their locker is and give them their locks and help them figure out how to use them. They get a lot of practice that first day which is crucial. We go over school rules and give them their planners and teach them how to use them. At the end of the day, we have an ice cream party for them as they are leaving to celebrate a successful first day of middle school! I cannot express how much this has helped our 6th graders transition from elementary school to middle school.</p>
<p>Cherokee</p>	<p>Parents absolutely rave about the intimacy, immediacy, and practicality of the day set aside for 6th graders only to attend school. Parents report that they and their children are comforted by the extra attention and instruction students receive on their inaugural middle school day.</p>
<p>Hamilton</p>	<p>Strongly supports the continuance of the 6th grade transition day. 6th grade students report they really feel welcomed. Parents love the opportunity to get to know the "lay of the land."</p> <p>Use grade 7 & 8 students, known as "Hamilton Hawk Helpers", to welcome 6th graders on the bus and in the schools. 6th grade students ask the older students about what to expect. The older students are assigned to each of the 6th grade homerooms.</p> <p>Have involved every staff member in this process, staff report they believe this was a great idea and everyone feels this should continue.</p>
<p>O'Keeffe</p>	<p>Have appreciated the 6th grade only day immensely. All staff accompany students and have lunch together. The confidence level of students is positively affected. The entire staff acknowledges this is a vital contribution to building a positive school culture. The day affords time to meet all support staff and to learn all the routines. It sets the tone for a great start to middle school.</p>
<p>Sennett</p>	<p>I am full support of continuing the practice of having the first day of school be for the sixth grade students. Reserving the first day for sixth grade orientation has been one of the best practices we have implemented in the district. Sixth grade students come to school very nervous and scared, but after a day of community building, orientation, etc. they feel very comfortable and confident. The staff have found this day to be invaluable for getting our sixth grade students off to a great start for the school year. Parents have also been very pleased with the results.</p>
<p>Sherman</p>	<p>This is an excellent opportunity to meet and greet new students. We are afforded the opportunity to personalize the entire day to our incoming 6th grade students. Believe that keeping the 6th graders best interest in mind, we should continue to have the 1st day devoted to just these young adolescents.</p>
<p>Spring Harbor</p>	<p>Students, parents, and teachers are all hugely in favor of having this day for 6th grade students alone. It makes transition to middle school much easier – almost seamless. Starting with the trip on Metro – far less intimidating to have the building and staff to themselves. 6th graders have given us rave reviews that this is the way to go.</p> <p>Student ambassadors (doing 5th grade presentations) speak very highly of their first day of school. They indicate that their first day was welcoming, fun, and enjoyable. Parents are very positive, feeling that the 6th grade day helps take the "worry" out of an enormous developmental transition milestone. Staff enjoy the opportunity of meeting our new students and being able to have them all to themselves for a day.</p>
<p>Toki</p>	<p>6th Grade orientation (1st day of school with 6th grade only) is great for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students ride the metro bus for the first time • four feeder schools merge into one 6th grade at Toki • time for community building activities • tour • locker assignment • lunch room procedures and extra time • longer recess • meet all teachers • meet support staff <p>Overall is allows the 6th grade students to acclimate to a new place.</p>

Whitehorse	Whitehorse has seen a dramatic improvement in student engagement since the initiation of the 6th grade only first day to the academic year. The entire teaching community is able to participate in a day filled with activities that welcome students. The transition to middle school can be stressful and anxiety producing for many students and families. Having the time to engage in community building activities and establish routines is invaluable. We are able to orient students to the new routines of following a complicated schedule, using a lock and locker, use an assignment notebook, take notes and resolve social problems in a peaceful manner.
Wright	The staff strongly support the continuation Day 1 for 6 th grade only program. This day has made the elementary to middle transition much less traumatic and stressful for both 6 th graders and their parents. Staff has noted that the positive benefits are felt throughout the school year in helping students feel comfortable and stay connected to their new school setting.
East	This first day with the 9th graders is a great way to have the entire staff be involved in meeting and greeting our freshman. Having this day is a wonderful way for the freshman to experience school and classes in a smaller environment. We have had positive feedback from both the students and parent regarding this first day.
La Follette	The 9 th grade orientation has provided new students and staff a personalized first day together. Our school goals of academic success for all students, improved student to student and student to staff relationships, and post-secondary options for all students are reborn for each incoming cohort of 9 th grade students.
Memorial	<p>The 9th grade orientation at Memorial High School is an opportunity for students to become familiar with the high school and its resources. The focus of the day is on the 9th grade experience. Students meet with their teachers on several occasions throughout the day and get a good understanding of academic expectations. Students also are given a structured tour of the building by upper class students so that they begin to develop a familiarity with the school and the location of resources. Having the chance to follow their daily schedules alleviates anxieties. And, meeting as a whole class helps to develop a sense of class unity. Academically, socially, and culturally, having the building to themselves helps increase the 9th graders level of confidence in surviving the high school experience.</p> <p>Our 9th grade school counselors conduct focus groups with freshmen to gain valuable feedback on their initial experiences in the high school, including their first day. The most consistent responses address the opportunity to meet with teachers, particularly Core teachers. Students tend to feel that this gives them a clear understanding of academic expectations. Students also report that the time spent with upper class students relieved anxieties about high school.</p>
West	<p>The 9th grade orientation is always an incredible success for West for a number of reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eases incoming students into an otherwise challenging new school environment. • Gives the upper class students an opportunity to take leadership in welcoming incoming 9th grade students. • Allows for development of new student/staff relationship interaction. • Helps identification of classrooms, familiarizing new students with physical plant. • Helps students understand sequence of the school day. • It is fun, engaging, and informative.