

Date: 2/20/14

For ACTION X
For INFORMATION

Board Agenda: Yes X
No

FROM: Executive Staff

THROUGH: Alvin L. Crawley, Ed.D., Interim Superintendent of Schools

TO: The Honorable Karen Graf, Chair, and Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: The Future of Middle Schools

BACKGROUND: In May 2013, the ACPS School Board raised questions regarding the current middle school structures in ACPS and the impact on student achievement.

STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK: In January 2014, the public was given an opportunity to provide feedback on the 12 recommendations provided by the Middle Schools for Tomorrow Workgroup and ACPS leaders, which included the Middle School Principals and the Executive Leadership Team. The recommendations were presented to campus PTAs, staff and TAGAC. The feedback received from the various stakeholders centered around three recommendations: school structure, advanced coursework, and discipline. Table 1 provides a summary of the majority of the feedback received by each stakeholder group.

Table 1: Feedback Matrix

Feedback Themes	GW Parents	GW Staff	FCH Parents	TAGAC	FCH Staff
One School Structure		X	X		X
Multi-School Structure	X				
Personalization	X	X			
Consistent Discipline	X	X	X		X
Increasing rigor in advanced courses	X			X	
Additional Resources		X	X		X
Scheduling Flexibility		X		X	X

Francis C. Hammond (FCH) Feedback

Parents and teachers who attended the meetings agreed that Hammond should return to one school as recommended by ACPS leadership. Parents and teachers felt very strongly that returning to the one school model needed to take effect in the 2014-15 school-year. Both groups felt that one school would benefit students and staff by establishing one vision, one set of expectations, and consistent discipline policies. Furthermore, meeting participants felt that having one Hammond

leader would enhance coordination and communication amongst parents, teachers, students, and administrators. Other feedback received focused on pooling of resources to more effectively manage the facility and student services.

George Washington (GW) Feedback

The feedback received from the GW campus parents and teachers was divergent. Most of the parent feedback was regarding advanced coursework. Many parents believe there is a lack of rigor in honors classes and they are concerned that open enrollment honors has weakened the program. Parents expressed a desire to add a tier between standard courses and honors courses in order to strengthen the honors program. Parents generally felt that the current GW structure has worked and they like the personalization provided under this structure; thus they do not want to return to one school. However, several parents indicated that they would like to know how the teachers feel about the structure recommendation before fully weighing in.

The majority of the GW teachers who attended the meetings felt strongly that GW should return to one school. Teachers believe returning to one school will benefit everyone by creating better allocation of resources; providing better scheduling options for students and teachers; and enhancing the delivery of ELL and Special Educations services. However, there are a small number of teachers who believe GW should remain as two schools because the current model allows for increased personalization.

ANALYSIS: The feedback received from parents and staff revealed similar challenges and concerns for both campuses and prompted staff to conduct further analysis of student academic achievement.

Currently, four out of five middle schools are “Accredited with Warning” in the area of mathematics; three of these schools are in their second consecutive year of warned status. This is of particular importance as current state legislation allows the Opportunity Educational Institution (OEI) the authority, upon a majority vote of its governing board, to supervise and operate schools that have been in warned status for three consecutive years. After consulting with VDOE officials, should the Francis Hammond Campus be combined into one school it would enter spring 2014 testing with a “Accredited with Warning – Year 1” status. The George Washington Campus, should it be combined, would enter spring 2014 testing with a status of “Fully Accredited.” Accreditation statuses for SY 14-15 would be determined by campus wide results on SOL tests administered during spring 2014. Table 2 provides a breakdown of each middle school’s accreditation status.

Table 2: Accreditation Status

School Name	Current Accreditation Status	Accreditation Status if Schools Combined
Francis C. Hammond 1	Accredited with Warning Math – Year 1	Accredited with Warning Math – Year 1
Francis C. Hammond 2	Accredited with Warning Math – Year 2	
Francis C. Hammond 3	Accredited with Warning Math – Year 2	
George Washington 1	Fully Accredited	Fully Accredited
George Washington 2	Accredited with Warning Math – Year 2	

Current Structure

There are five middle schools with student populations ranging from 464 to 583. Each school has a Principal, Associate Principal, and two school counselors, and each campus has a Director of School Counseling. The advantages of the smaller middle schools, as supported by parent and staff feedback, are as follows:

- One middle school is fully accredited
- Student personalization

Several of the challenges listed for the multi-school campuses are also echoed by parent and staff feedback. These challenges are presented in four categories:

Leadership Challenges

- Implementation of ACPS curriculum
- Leadership across the campus
- Vision
- School climate
- Communication to staff and parents
- Accountability for facility management
- Student academic achievement

Organization Challenges

- Grouping of teachers and students
- Human and monetary resources
- Accountability for facility management

Staff Challenges

- Staff turnover
- Teachers teach multiple grade levels
- Leadership opportunities for teachers
- Implementation of ACPS curriculum
- Flexibility for scheduling staff
- Behavioral expectations for students
- Communication
- Student academic achievement
- School climate

Students Challenges

- Flexible scheduling
- Behavioral expectations
- Staff turnover
- Communication
- Implementation of ACPS curriculum
- Student academic achievement
- School climate

PROPOSAL: Staff is recommending that the middle schools return to one school per campus. In returning to one school, a new administrative structure would be introduced to maximize administrators' time to focus on student achievement while increasing the opportunities for personalization. Under this new structure, each school would have:

- **Principal:** Set the vision, implements accountability systems and a plan to effectively implement the ACPS curriculum which includes monitoring and feedback systems for teachers; embraces and practices shared leadership to maximize effectiveness of teaching and learning; models the use of technology to further organizational skills and enhance instructional methods
- **Three Academic Principals:** Observe classrooms to ensure the delivery of instruction is aligned with curriculum, differentiation, and targeted support for students; follow a cohort of students which provides consistency between the middle and high school structure of staff moving with students, increases personalization for students
- **Dean of Students:** Manage discipline for the school, implement PBIS in partnership with the counseling program and implement other discipline priorities set by the Principal
- **Director of School Counseling:** Manage a nationally recognized ASCA model counseling program addressing social, emotional and mental health and well-being of students; oversee the support systems for student services (MTST, AVID); work with key stakeholders across the division and community on transition events and academic advisement
- **Two Counselors per Grade-Level:** Follow a cohort of students for the entire three-year middle school experience; dedicate 80% of the workday to direct services to students in the form of classroom guidance lessons, individual counseling, student academic planning and small group counseling. This structure decreases caseloads to a range of 150-200, which will increase the level of personalization as currently middle school counselors have caseloads of 220-250.
- **One Resource Teacher for Talented and Gifted (TAG):** Consult with teachers on how to modify content; support differentiation within the honors curriculum scope and sequence for English; arrange for special seminars, field trips, external learning opportunities and other resources to support the needs of TAG identified students; consult with teachers and counseling team on the academic, social and emotional needs of the gifted learner
- **AVID:** Given the positive feedback and achievement gap impacting minority students, AVID would be expanded to include sixth grade students on both campuses while also encouraging increased participation of students in electives such as world languages, band, art and chorus.
- **Target Professional Development:** Staff will participate in professional learning opportunities to strengthen skills in differentiation, social-emotional development of middle school students and research-based intervention supports for students exhibiting academic and/or behavioral challenges.

Also, as part of this new structure, ACPS would restructure and define middle school advisory to provide consistent opportunities for class meetings on specific topics and activities such as: anti-bullying; organizational skills; goal setting; team building activities; student generated projects; discussion on a current local or national issue; academic advisement and refusal skills.

The benefits of the new structure include:

Leadership

- Four Administrators focused on instruction
- A single vision
- Clear lines of authority and accountability
- Consistent expectations for all staff members and students

Organization

- Student and teacher teams at each grade level provide continued personalization of the middle school experience
- Academic Principals observe classrooms to ensure the delivery of instruction is aligned with curriculum, differentiation, and targeted support for students
- Dean of Students manage discipline for the school
- Resource teacher for TAG consults with teachers on how to modify content, process and product to promote appropriate learning for TAG students
- Professional learning on teaming and collaboration
- Consistent expectations for all staff members and students
- Streamlined management of facility
- New advisory program

Staff

- Teacher teams provide continued personalization of the middle school experience
- Clear lines of authority and accountability
- Consistent expectations for all staff members
- Consistent discipline
- Increased opportunities for teachers to lead
- Increased flexibility for staff scheduling
- Teachers teach one grade level
- Professional learning on teaming and collaboration
- Better delivery of ELL and Special Education services

Students

- Teaming will allow for continued personalization of the middle school experience
- Four Administrators focused on instruction
- A single vision
- Clear lines of authority and accountability
- Academic Principals and counselors move with students
- Consistent expectations for all students
- Consistent discipline
- Increased flexibility for students schedules
- Better delivery of ELL and Special Education services

Timeline

February 6th 2014- Board reviews recommendations and feedback from stakeholders

February 20th 2014- Board votes on middle school recommendations

March 2014- Organize a transition team; determine staffing and communication needs

April 2014- Community meetings about new school(s); facility usage determination

MONITORING: The impact of combining schools on each campus would be reviewed mid-year and the end of the school year with the School Board as a part of systemic monitoring. The report would contain information regarding the revised organizational structure, academic progress of students, professional development of staff, and disciplinary data.

A committee will be formed to review student eligibility and supports in Honors classes, and options for students outside of Honors. This committee would convene in the September through November 2014. Committee recommendations would be used to inform the Program of Studies and budget for FY16.

IMPACT: ACPS would consolidate its middle schools in order to enhance the academic achievement of its middle school students.

CONTACT PERSON: Gerald R. Mann, Jr.

ATTACHMENT: Diagram of proposed new middle school structure, ASCA model