

Bainbridge Island School District #303
NEW SCHOOL CONFIGURATION TASK FORCE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Prepared by the BI School Configuration Task Force
March 10, 1997

Introduction

The prospect of opening a new school in September 1999 requires important decisions to be made now regarding what grade levels will be served by each school. The school board created a task force charging it with collecting information and, ultimately, making a recommendation based on its findings.

Task Force Membership

The size and make-up of the task force was determined by the school board based on administrative recommendation. Individual members were selected by the constituent groups (i.e. school staff and school councils). The task force members are:

Leanne Preble	Blakely School Parent
Carol Connelly	Blakely School Teacher (gr. 3 & 4)
Maryann Lee	Ordway School Teacher (gr. 5)
Susan Sivitz	Ordway School Parent
Sheri Ley-Mackey	Wilkes School Parent
Penny Bright	Wilkes School Teacher (gr. K)
Marilynne Gardner/ Kathy Bergum	Family Classroom Parents
Celine O'Leary	Woodward Middle School Teacher (gr. 6/special education)
Doug Olson	Woodward Middle School Teacher (gr. 6)
Darcy Herrett	Woodward Middle School Teacher (gr. 6/7/8 art)
Sandy Martin	Woodward Middle School Parent
Jania Henderson	Woodward Middle School Parent
Lee Adamske	Elementary School Principal
Clayton Mork	Middle School Principal
Bill Bleakney	Superintendent
Brent Peterson	Assistant Superintendent for Instruction

The initial meeting of the task force was January 21, 1997. The group met on a weekly basis up through Tuesday, March 4, 1997.

Basic Assumptions/Givens

- The school board will make the final decision regarding the school configuration plan based on the recommendation received from the task force. The recommendation is expected by March 13, 1997.
- The reconfiguration recommendation must include the sixth grade to ease crowded conditions in the middle school. Therefore, beginning in September 1999 Woodward Middle School will provide instructional programs for grades seven and eight. The new school is also intended to relieve current elementary schools of their over capacity concerns as well.
- The proposed size of the new school is 50,000 square feet - about half that of Woodward.
- The new school must meet 1999 needs yet be adaptable to new demands of further growth.
- The task force is expected to gather input from parents and staff at both the elementary and middle school levels (e.g. site councils, PTO, focus groups, and/or surveys) Parent/Staff Input Process
- The new school will be built on the district owned property just north of Woodward Middle School
- At some time in the future (5-10 years?) the new school is expected to serve as an elementary school facility

- Specific program structure for any of the possible configuration options is not determined at this time
- Current long term school district plans anticipate the eventual need for up to six elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school
- The current long term school district configuration plan supports a K-5, 6-8 and 9-12 student distribution model
- School district planning has identified the following “optimal” school sizes: K-5 (500 students), 6-8 (650-700 students), 9-12 (1000+ students)
- Middle school and high school program and facility costs are higher than elementary level costs
- The 1997 school construction funds provide for the construction of a new school and remodeling/new construction at the high school but do not provide funds for remodeling of other existing schools

Assessment of Task

Initial discussions of the configuration questions and the underlying “givens” revealed to many on the task force that the issues involved were complicated and not likely to be resolved easily or quickly. The group recognized also that, in order to communicate the views of the community to the Board, the task force needed input from parents and staff outside of the group. Finally, the task force realized that obtaining informed input would require providing some education regarding the “givens” and the choices.

The task force respected the School Board’s decision to delay discussion of the school configuration issue until after the February bond election and the goal to complete planning and construction in time to open the new school in September 1999. However, members were concerned that the schedule allowed inadequate time to obtain informed feedback and to make a considered recommendation. In an effort to accommodate the scheduling demands and to properly fulfill its obligations, the task force requested three additional weeks to develop a recommendation. Members hoped the extra time would be sufficient for the group to communicate with the community and for the community to inform the task force.

Some task force members expressed concerns that a school configuration decision “had already been made” at the board/administration level. Bill Bleakney and Brent Peterson assured the task force that the configuration was not predetermined and that all options should be seriously considered.

Information: Dissemination

It was decided to present the community with some basic information concerning the question: “What grades should be taught at which schools?” As much as possible, the task force hoped to provide the community with common information and equal opportunities for input. The group drafted an information sheet and survey (see attached) which was to serve two purposes. First the information sheet was intended to provide background information regarding the task, the “givens” and possible options. Second, the survey was designed to determine community preferences and concerns.

In preparing the information sheet/survey the task force members reviewed the configuration options which had been identified by the school administration:

1. K-4 schools at Blakely, Ordway and Wilkes, gr. 5-6 at the new school
2. K-6 at Blakely, Ordway, Wilkes and the new school
3. K-3 at Blakely and Wilkes, gr. 4-6 at Ordway and the new school

Members discussed additional options, but the group did not find an additional option that satisfied all of the “givens”. Instead of presenting its own fourth option, the task force decided to ask for suggestions from the community by providing an “Option 4” write-in space on the information/survey form.

In Task Force meetings, the group discussed at length the impact on students, families and the schools of the various options. These discussions elicited a breadth of concerns – some pragmatic, some emotional – from task force members. In the information sheet, the task force attempted to include

objective information that would answer specific questions people might have about an option and also would notify people of possible consequences associated with a particular choice. Respondents were asked to identify what criteria were important in making their decisions and they were invited to write comments.

The information sheet/survey was mailed on February 7, 1997 to all K-12 parents. Additional copies of the survey were available at the District office, all school offices, and local grocery stores. School bulletins and the Review notified parents and wider community about the survey and the process for determining the grade configuration of schools.

As another means to provide island wide information, the task force held a community forum on the evening of February 11, 1997 at Woodward Middle School. Approximately 45 parents and staff members attended the forum where Brent Peterson elaborated on the material provided in the information sheet and people had the opportunity to participate in small group discussions, ask questions and make comments.

In addition to the community forum and survey, task force members gave presentations and answered questions at their schools through staff meetings, PTO meetings, Site Council meetings, and informal discussions. The names of the task force representatives were identified at each school. All group members received written and oral comments, which they preserved and shared at task force meetings.

Data Collected/Feedback

A total of 430 surveys were returned (see summary below). Additionally, task force members received a number of separate written comments. At the forum and in other discussions the task force received scores of oral comments. The survey results, written comments and records of oral comments have been shared with the entire task force and preserved.

Summary of survey data:

First Ranking Matrix				
	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Elementary Staff*	34.5	63.5	6	2
Woodward Staff	35	4	0	1
Elementary Parents*	67	135	8	9
Woodward Parents	17	8	3	1
HS Staff & Parents	14	17	0	2
Parents (Sch. Unknown)**	9	10	2	0
Family Classroom	2	4	1	5

* The response from school to school did vary significantly both in numbers of surveys returned and in the mix of responses. There are also a significant number of "multi-school" families that have data included based on the school at which they returned the survey.

** These surveys were returned to the district office from "multi-school" parents.

Criteria Ranking*	
Configuration	43
Population	28
Age range	72
Transitions	106
Cost	14
Program	75
School boundary	5
Transportation	4
Staffing	11

* Many respondents did not complete the "criteria priority" portion of the survey.

Number of Surveys	Total	Staff	Parents
Blakely	124	26	98
Ordway	105	49	56
Wilkes	98	31	67
Woodward	69	40	29
BHS	33	9	24
Family Classroom	12	1	11
Parents (Sch. Unknown)	21		

Task Force Analysis of the Two Major Configuration Alternatives

The initial task force analysis determined that Option 1 (new school grades 5 &6) or Option 2 (new school and existing elementary schools grades K-6) were the two most viable school configuration options. Analysis of the two major options included a review of: survey data, written/oral comments, focus group input, staff/PTO/Site Council meeting discussions, financial implications (i.e. transportation & construction costs), staffing implications, broad program issues and other criteria as identified throughout the process. The major "organizing tool" for the issue analysis was the development and review of a "PRO/CON" Matrix (see pages 5 & 6).

Option #1 - Grade 5 & 6 at New School

Pro	Con
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 6th grade could move toward block schedule with math/science specialist (more elementary model) fits in w/ long range district plans - fits in w/ long range district plans - program impact less at 6th grade - efficient use of 6th grade resources - minimal boundary changes - better for classroom teachers specialist - mini-transition to Woodward - configuration best aligned to long term commitment to K-5 6-8 staffing program - provides possible sharing of Woodward facilities - keeps 6th grade teachers together, better program delivery - placing 5th grade teachers together improve program sequences - allow more appropriate grouping of teachers to meet state standards - removing 6th grade from 7th and 8th will slow down "growing up" - adds one more rite of passage for preteens(a good thing from child's point of view) - have option of both teaming and self contained for 6th grade - # of students per grade, larger class groupings - would orient kids towards middle school model - maintain strong math/science program that could move to include 5th grade - in-line with school vision - current 6th grade model excellent; a way to retain model - 6th graders need to be stimulated - # of schools adapting to new students would be fewer - less impact of a grade moving out of elem. Schools vs. a grade moving into schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - parents concerned with too many transitions; takes time to settle into new school and 2 years too short - too much separation of age groups in district; limits opportunities for multi-age activities and programs; separates siblings/families into different schools - temporary program until new middle school is built,(in 7 years?) 5th and 6th grade staff will create a 5/6 program that may be abandoned when district continues it building program - new school ----- is built to elementary school standards (both quantity & size) for best investment in the long run- can 5/6 program well accommodate in an elem. school, or will we pay a premium to build to quasi-secondary school standards - early start and release - remodeling required later - added potential problems for at risk students because of additional transition - 5th grade students lose cross grade level mentorship - 5th grade teachers will need to move

Option #2 - Grade K-6 at Three Current Elem. & New School

Pro	Con
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fewer transitions - can be designed to accommodate elem. programs that are traditional and alternative - take advantage of 6th grade science teachers knowledge - varied age groupings - large community support - new elem. school will get parent commitment from start; temp. 5/6 program may be abandoned in 5-7 years - take advantage of 6th grade science teachers knowledge - varied age groupings - large community support - new elem. school will get parent commitment from start; temp. 5/6 program may be abandoned in 5-7 years - varied age groupings - large community support - new elem. school will get parent commitment from start; temp. 5/6 program may be abandoned in 5-7 years - large community support - new elem. school will get parent commitment from start; temp. 5/6 program may be abandoned in 5-7 years - more "ownership" - start foreign language at 7-8 grade - maintain neighborhood schools - more opportunity for multi-age grouping, and more opportunity for self-directed learning with multi-age nurturing, supportive, secure, stable - keep families together longer in one school - teachers know kids better - more opportunity for self contained classes - allows more continuity of principals, counselors, and teachers - allows one more year to nurture - 5th benefits from working with younger students, (role models) - better to have families live close to school - gear kids to elementary model - better continuity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - immediate boundary impact on schools and neighborhoods - more remodeling needed now - 6th graders <u>need</u> more changes - one elementary school bigger now - less efficient use of 6th grade resources (lib. sci.) - harder to retain teaming elements for 6th - difficulty meeting 6th graders needs acad. and soc. in elem. - band in rest of Peninsula starts at 6th, BISD would most likely have students start in 7th - lessen entirety of unified arts, PE, & science by eliminating or reducing 6th grade programs - teacher concerns about teaching outside area of expertise - lose continuity of 6th grade teachers working together to maintain a strong common sequences in curriculum, field trips, etc. - concerns about we are going to staff 4 K-6 schools with specialist - sixth grades too lg., physically, for present schools - loss of 6th grade teachers prep. time, which was for integrating special ed.. students, etc.

Task Force School Configuration Conclusions/Recommendation

The vast majority of survey respondents who identified the grade 5/6 option as their first choice selected the K-6 option as their second choice. Likewise the vast majority of those who preferred K-6, identified grade 5/6 as their second choice. It appeared that the community, like the task force itself recognized advantages and disadvantages of the grade 5/6 model and of the K-6 model. Particularly in light of the total number of surveys returned and the inconsistent number of surveys school to school, the surveys cannot be considered as an absolute reflection of the opinion of the entire school community, the preferences and comments expressed did provide assistance to the Task Force in evaluating the options themselves and in weighing the advantages and disadvantages of each option.

Ultimately, the Task Force recommendation is influenced most significantly by the following issues:

- student school/program transitions,
- input from staff and parents who have had specific experience with both configuration options,
- potential disruption of current elementary school boundaries,
- program impact on the ability to maintain current academic standards/expectations,
- minimizing program impact on the three existing elementary schools,
- new program development opportunities, and
- funding limitations for the “retrofitting” of the existing elementary schools to accommodate 6th grade students

Therefore, based on the process outlined in this report and a careful analysis of the available data, the School Configuration Task Force has reached sufficient consensus to strongly recommend that, at the time of the opening of the new school, the K-8 schools be reconfigured as follows:

Grades K through 4	- Blakely, Ordway and Wilkes Elementary Schools
Grades 5 and 6	- New School
Grades 7 and 8	- Woodward Middle School

Related Issues/Recommendations

A number of issues/recommendations not directly related to the school configuration recommendation have surfaced during the work of this task force. We provide this list with the suggestion that these ideas be given further review and consideration by the appropriate individuals/groups.

- The challenge of designing a “flexible” facility is a significant challenge. Careful monitoring and support for this activity must be provided.
- Careful consideration should be given to how the new school and Woodward Middle School can share both facilities and program opportunities (i.e. a “sister school” relationship).
- School transitions emerged as a very important issue for both parents and staff. Every effort should be made to carefully examine this issue as the new school plan is developed and implemented. The task force believes the new configuration presents a very positive opportunity for a “rethinking” of the nature of the transitions that occur, particularly between grades 4, 5, 6 and 7.
- Planning for the new school should provide opportunities for 5th and 6th grade staff to explore various program organization models.
- Many parents have expressed a desire to see specific efforts to reevaluate program structures to ensure that the students’ social and developmental needs are carefully considered.
- Many staff and parents highly value the current 5th and 6th grade programs and would like to see them retained in the new configuration (6th grade science and 5th grade self-contained classroom structure were mentioned often).
- Many parents expressed strong support for moving the 6th grade students out of the 6th through 8th grade environment

- K-8 or K-8 alternative school was the most frequently mentioned “option #4”.

Task Force Membership

The size and make-up of the task force was determined by the school board based on administrative recommendation. The constituent groups (i.e. school staff and school councils) selected individual members. The task force members are:

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Doug Olson	WMS Teacher (gr. 6)
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Critical Issues List

- student school/program transitions
- new program development opportunities
- program impact on the ability to maintain current academic standards/expectations
- input from staff and parents who have had specific experience with both configuration options
- potential disruption of current elementary school boundaries
- minimizing program impact on the three existing elementary schools
- funding limitations for the “retrofitting” of the existing elementary schools to accommodate 6th grade students

Task Force Recommendation

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Educational Specifications/Program Planning for New Grade 5/6 School

Process

April 17 and 18

Two full days of "ed. spec." work facilitated by Allen Anthony. Allen has a specific plan in mind to move the group (see list below) through a variety of planning issues. Allen is aware of the added challenge created by our lack of clear vision for grade 5/6 "program model"

Planning group membership:

- 2 - District Administration (Bill Bleakney/Brent Peterson, Richard Best)
- 6 - Grade 5 and 6 teachers (one fifth grade teacher from each school and three sixth grade teachers, including one science specialist)
- 1 - Elementary Administration (minimum of one elementary principal, involve all three as much as possible)
- 1 - Middle School Administration (Clayton Mork)
- 1 - Special Education Program (Doug Emerick)
- 5 - Parents (one parent representative selected by each elementary school site council and two parent representatives selected by the middle school site council)
- 6 - Special Programs Representation (Art, Music, Library, PE; Art & Music reps. from elementary and middle school, one library and PE rep. for elementary/middle school)
- Total of 22 participants

April 21 through May 2

Allen conducts follow-up work sessions with sub-groups and other specific program staff (i.e. food service, librarians, etc.)

Week of May 5

Day long meeting of planning group to review draft "ed. spec." plan as prepared by Allen Anthony.

May 12 through May 29

Refinement of plan, additional meetings as necessary

May 29

School Board review of final educational specifications plan for new school.

June 2

Deliver final plan to project architect. The architect selection process will run parallel to the ed. spec. process so that the architect selection process is completed by the end of May.

