

## **Lake Washington School District**

### **FAQ - School Configuration**

Answers to common questions about the move to middle schools and 4-year high schools.

Lake Washington School District will move from a grades K-6 elementary school, grades 7-9 junior high school and grades 10-12 high school system to a grades K-5 elementary school, grades 6-8 middle school and grades 9-12 high school system in the fall of 2012.

#### **Q. Why is Lake Washington making this change?**

A. High school transcripts and college admissions consider high school to be grades nine through 12. When ninth grade students are in a junior high school, it can be difficult for them to realize that their academic work actually counts toward high school graduation and college admissions. Four-year high schools are more conducive to college readiness. Students know from the first day of high school that their performance will have an effect on their ability to get into any kind of post-secondary education, whether technical college, community college or university. In addition to this academic reason for the change, demographic trends in this district are for a need for increased capacity in the elementary schools over the next ten years. By moving one grade (sixth) out of the elementary schools, classroom space is freed up for more classes in other grades. The amount of additional building needed to house the four-year high schools was considerably less than would be needed at the elementary level if sixth grade stayed in those schools.

#### **Q. What is the difference between a middle school and a junior high school?**

A. Middle schools are designed to create more of a transition between elementary school and high school. Students may have the same teacher for more than one subject. There are fewer transitions from class to class, especially for the sixth grade students. Junior high principals developed a set of Middle School Belief Statements based on their research into best practices in education for this age range. From those beliefs, principals developed a more specific Common Middle School Framework that will ensure an equitable and consistent academic program across all middle schools in the system while still allowing flexibility for schools in their structures and schedules.

#### **Q. Is the curriculum different in middle schools?**

A. The curriculum and learning standards are still the same at each grade level. In other words, sixth graders will still use the same books and learn the same things when they are in the middle school building next year as sixth graders in the elementary schools this year. What will be different is that instead of having the same teacher for all their core subjects in elementary school, the sixth grader in a middle school will have more than one teacher. (All three middle school grades will have one teacher for a language arts/social studies block.) However, what they study in the core areas will be the same.

**Q. Are sixth graders ready to leave elementary school?**

A. One of the reasons for the change from the junior high model to the middle school model is to provide a more gradual transition out of elementary school and into high school. As you read the Middle School Belief Statements, you will note the emphasis on personal connection and social development at the same time there is an emphasis on academic rigor and challenge. Sixth graders, like students in seventh and eighth, are going through many changes. Middle schools are oriented to the needs of this developmental stage.

**Q. I'm concerned about my ninth grader going to a large high school.**

A. Our schools are concerned about any students who may fall through the cracks. That's why one of the district's guiding principles is connection. Specifically, we know that students learn best when they are known well by adults in the school, and when the instruction and support they receive meets their specific needs as learners and individuals. Each of our high schools has been working on ways to ensure that students are connected to adults, through homerooms or structures like the house system at Lake Washington High School. Check with your student's school to find out more about how they are making connection work for incoming students.

**Q. What will happen to the 6th grade teachers? The 9th grade teachers?**

A. Teachers have volunteered to change level, from elementary to middle school or from junior high to high school. The HR department has determined if those teachers who volunteered to move are highly capable in the subject(s) they want to teach at their new level. These teachers are now on the priority transfer list. We have updated the enrollment predictions for next year so principals know how many teachers they will need. Over the next few months, teachers from the priority list will be placed in schools that need teachers to serve their new grade levels. Over the course of the spring, the new staff rosters for each school will be formed.