

EXHIBIT B

5/21/19

To: Susan Burgess-Cox
Chair, Belmont School Committee

From: John P. Phelan
Superintendent

Date: May 1, 2019

Re: Configuration Working Group Recommendations

One of the first groups to form as part of the District Configuration Education Plan was the Configuration Working Group. The charge of the group was to review the research on grade configurations, consider options, and make a recommendation for the configuration of grades K-6. This report presents the group's recommendation to the School Committee for approval.

All educators from grades preK-6 were invited to join, and all who volunteered were accepted to the group. They include:

John Phelan	Superintendent	District
Kristen Bell	Grade 1	Wellington
Kate Calhoun	Grade 3	Winn Brook
Tricia Clifford	Principal	Burbank
Kate Coolidge-Bender	Special Education	Butler
Sarah Costa	Grade 3	Burbank
Janice Darias	Assistant Superintendent	District
Jessica Endres	Grade 4	Wellington
Nicolette Foundas	Assistant Principal	Chenery
Cliff Gallant	Grade 4	Burbank
Jennifer Mathews	Reading	Chenery
Theresa Milstein	Special Education	Chenery
Dori Pulizzi	Grade 5, ELA/Social Studies	Chenery
Jessica Smith	Special Education/OT	District

Briana Wall	Early Childhood Coordinator	Wellington
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The group met two times, on March 20 and April 3, and completed the following tasks during and in between the two meetings:

- Learned about the context of the configuration decision for the 7-12 school through the following materials:
 - District Configuration Presentation and Discussion slideshow from School Committee meeting on December 12, 2017
 - District Configuration Presentation and Public Forum slideshow from School Committee meeting on January 9, 2018
- Generated a list of the pros and cons of the proposed configuration of four primary elementary schools with grades K-3 (maintaining the preK at Wellington) and one upper elementary school with grades 4-6 in the current Chenery Middle School building.
- Read five articles containing research on grade configurations and annotated the list of pros and cons with points from the articles.
 - “Configurations Alone Don’t Breed Success,” The School Superintendents Association, March 2002.
 - “Grade-Span Configurations,” The School Superintendents Association, March 2002.
 - “How (and How Much) Do Schools Matter? Variation in K-8th Grade Achievement Trajectories in a National Sample,” The Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness, Spring 2015.
 - “Grade-Span Configurations: Essentials on Education Data and Analysis from Research Authority AEL,” District Administration, March 2005.
 - “Grade Configuration,” Education Partnerships, Inc., February 2012.

The Configuration Working Group recommends the proposed configuration of grouping grades K-3 in the four elementary schools and grades 4-6 in the Chenery. This recommendation is based on the following:

- There is no conclusive research that one configuration is better than another; rather, the research speaks to the need to ensure smooth, positive transitions from one school to the next.
- Our current facilities (Burbank, Butler, Wellington, Winn Brook, and Chenery) best support the creation of four smaller primary elementary schools with grades K-3 (maintaining the preschool at the Wellington) and a larger upper elementary school with grades 4-6 in the Chenery.
- At Burbank, this configuration allows for the removal of the modular classrooms because grades K-3 will fit inside the building.
- At Butler, Wellington, and Winn Brook, this configuration frees up space for other uses, including adding another classroom if a particular grade needs more than 16 classrooms to maintain class size.

- At Chenery, this configuration allows for the removal of the modular classrooms because grades 4-6 will fit inside the building.
- The grade groupings of K-3 and 4-6 are similar developmentally. In addition, we believe the 5th and 6th grade students will benefit from being with a younger grade.
- There will be increased opportunity for teacher collaboration among 4th grade teachers, and vertically with teachers in grades 5 and 6.

We note the following focus areas that subsequent District Configuration Education Plan working groups will need to pay attention to in order to ensure a positive school experience and learning outcomes for students in the new configuration:

- Develop systems for strong, positive transitions including communicating placement recommendations especially from grades 3 to 4.
 - Grade 3 → Grade 4
 - Grade 6 → Grade 7
 - Grade 8 → Grade 9
- Spend time building culture and community in all schools, especially for students and staff moving to a new school location (grade 4, grades 7 and 8)
- Develop leadership opportunities for grade 6 students, who will now be the oldest grade in the school, and consider ways for 4th graders (previously the oldest grade in the school) to continue to develop leadership skills.
- Consider carefully the instructional model for the grades in the upper elementary (4-6) school (contained classroom, 2-teacher team, 4-teacher team), and visit other 4-6 schools to learn from their experiences.
- Consider ways to make the 4-6 school feel smaller for students (for example, group classrooms within grades, create two lunch periods for grade 4)

We are excited for the opportunities that the new configuration presents for students, families, and teachers, and confident that the educators working in the schools and participating in the District Configuration Education Plan working groups will prepare the way for successful and positive school experiences and learning outcomes for all Belmont students.