

INFORMATION ITEM

Date: April 25, 2017

To: Raymond E. Lechner, Ph.D.
Superintendent

From: Mrs. Kelly Jackson, Principal

Subject: One Campus. Connected Community.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This is the sixth year of the leadership model joining the 5-8 campus together. As the leadership model has developed over the past six years, changes in leadership, district initiatives, and an ever-changing student body has necessitated a clear focus for this school year. The 2016-2017 year-long focus across the 5-8 Campus “One Campus. Connected Community.” initiative.

ONE CAMPUS

While it continues to be important to maintain the individuality of identity of Highcrest and Wilmette Junior High, it is also important to build in consistent practices across the “one campus”. Having consistency across 5-8 helps to clarify programming and support for parents and students, and helps to improve transition between schools. The following are focus areas for the 2016-2017 school year.

Report Card Cycle

The report card cycle for elementary schools and HMS includes progress reports at quarters one and three and report cards at the end of each semester (second and fourth quarters). This has left WJHS as the only school in the District sending home final grades after each quarter. As a result of the work of WJHS representatives on the Progress Reporting Committee, the decision was made to align WJHS to the reporting cycle used across the rest of the district. This move will build consistency in reporting for parents, teachers, and students.

Schedule

At the start of this year fifth grade moved to a consistent departmentalized model. This aligned with the model in grades 6-8 and was adapted for fifth grade to gradually increase the amount of content-area teachers students see (from 2-5) at each grade level. This change built in consistency between fifth and sixth grade schedules by giving an ELA block of instruction at both grades, and by requiring all teachers across the school to teach social studies. With this model, a need for common plan time has increased, as teachers plan both with their teams and with their departmental colleagues. Currently scheduling efforts are being made to build common collaboration time into the school day at HMS to better support these changes.

5-8 Mobile Learning

All students across the 5-8 campus are now equipped with iPads as a tool for classroom learning and homework. iPads are used by students to collaborate, communicate, and participate in learning anytime, anywhere. The 5-8 technology integration team is working with all staff members to increase consistency with iPad use integration across the campus. This year we have unified the core app list, handbook for iPad use, and the cross-campus iPad pledge that all students agree to

every time they log onto their devices. Schoology is the learning management system utilized across the campus by teachers and students to support instruction and to communicate feedback.

While all teachers and students utilize Schoology to access homework, notes for class, online discussions, and many features to aid in their classwork, parents have expressed through survey feedback and conversations that the inconsistencies between teachers and grade levels make Schoology use confusing. Teachers have been collaborating with our technology teams to discuss current practices and highlight areas where we can build in more consistency across grade levels. Based on parent feedback we are also developing increased learning opportunities for parents to become better acquainted with Schoology, easily access their child's account, and find feedback and updates from each class.

Supportive Programs

This year, as a part of our "one campus" efforts, we have been working as a staff to build consistency with our shared supportive programs. Homework Assistance, Student Accountability, Response to Intervention (RtI), and school-wide behavior have been a focus for consistency-building. At staff meetings in January and February, staff discussed current practices and areas of improvement, and now individual teams are working on outlining changes to each of these programs to increase consistency for the coming year.

- **Homework Assistance** timing, practices, and communication are currently under review. Teams are discussing using HWA as an intervention to help students manage time, changing time when HWA is offered, especially in light of potential schedule changes, and adaptations to practices based on the increase of technology since the inception of the program.
- The **Student Accountability System** (merits and demerits) is being reviewed at both schools for effectiveness toward rewarding positive behavior (merits), and correcting nuisance behaviors (demerits). Teams are aligning the system with the new restorative practices, and are developing adaptations based on variance in ages from fifth through eighth grade.
- **Response to Intervention** has much variance across the 5-8 campus. At HMS students attend Learner Qualities classes to help with executive functioning, and this takes place before school during a zero-hour period. Tier two math, reading, and writing classes are also held during this time. At WJHS students participate in a class called Success Center, also an executive functioning support, and tier two classes take place during one period during the school day. To be more effective with interventions across the campus, the time of day classes are offered, entrance and exit criteria for these classes as well as the quality of the interventions are being reviewed. One step in this direction will be naming the Success Center/Learner Qualities class the same at both schools. We will also be taking a one-campus approach to supporting teachers with interventions in the classroom, parent communication about interventions and the tiered levels of support across the campus, and communication of transition information across the campus to better adjust for students at each level.
- HMS implemented a **School-Wide Behavior Team (SWBT)** to meet monthly, create a behavior expectation matrix for common areas, redesign merits and merit celebrations, and take steps to review the Student Accountability System. A student SWBT is also in place at HMS, and they are currently reflecting on feedback from student surveys about school-wide behavior, and are problem solving improvements to areas and practices in the building, specifically hallways. WJHS has also formed a staff SWBT to align practices across the campus with the work HMS began, in an effort to bring about increased consistency and clarity. With consistent expectations and consistent language across the campus, transition, behavior, and understanding will continue to improve.

Extra-Curricular Opportunities

HMS and WJHS have partnered for many years in offering athletic opportunities to students across the 5-8 campus. These include cross country, track and field, and wrestling. The WJHS dance team also hosts students from HMS for a joint practice and performance as a part of its annual schedule. Clubs and experiences currently offered across the campus include the Debate Club, the High Five Junior Choir, and Science Olympiad. Next year, with the change in start and end times, we are hoping to provide more cross-campus club opportunities for students.

In addition to athletics and clubs, a “One-campus, one-book” experience is currently being planned by the 5-8 Library Media Specialists. Students across the campus will have the opportunity to read a common book, discuss themes related to the book on Schoology, and respond and share through Maker Space experiences. We look forward to this event taking place next school year.

CONNECTED COMMUNITY

One way to support the changes in cross-campus programs, while supporting district-wide goals of building a climate of empathy, is to create connections throughout our community between staff, students, and parents. Events have been implemented throughout the year to support these connections.

Connected Staff

During the first Institute Day, staff members were introduced to campus goals of consistency and empathy, and were provided an opportunity to connect with each other through shared experiences. This opens the doors for continued collaboration in academic departments as well as on social-emotional initiatives.

Last year, staff began work on creating a climate of empathy through learning from experts, and reflecting on articles and experiences in a collaborative fashion. Staff also participated in cross-campus discussions around classroom practices with behavior, technology infusion, and planning and instruction. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, and these opportunities for vertical alignment were included in the format again this year. Along with vertical alignment discussions, staff members engaged across the campus to discuss themes related to strategic goals for the year, and received resources to support them in their classrooms.

Connected Students

While we give staff many opportunities to connect across the campus, building connections between students has been a high priority. When students feel connected to their school and to each other, incidents of social conflict, bullying, and teasing decrease, and a climate of empathy and kindness is the norm. Students have had the opportunity to connect with each other in many new ways this year:

- **Kindness Day:** Traditionally the October half day has been dedicated to bully-prevention, and each grade level has participated in a separate activity. By changing the focus of this to a day of kindness, we were able to work toward bullying prevention through student connections. Students collaborated and joined together across grade levels and schools on this day by learning about each other and committing small acts of kindness.
- **February Half Day:** The half day activities in February continued the focus on kindness through building connections. Students participated in homeroom activities where they “found their common” and reflected together on ways to build resilience.

- **Mindful March:** The practice of mindfulness is strongly connected to the development of empathy, so across the 5-8 campus the month of March has been dedicated to equipping students with a better understanding of mindfulness, and sharing strategies to be more mindful in class and at home. This has been done through morning announcements and homeroom activities.
- **Fifth Grade Transition:** The first experience for students to connect with the 5-8 campus is as they transition to fifth grade. A survey was sent this year to fifth grade parents which gave feedback about the overall transition and several components of the transition. While 76% of parents taking the survey indicated a positive overall transition to fifth grade, it was clear that improvements could be made. The following are new components that will be implemented this coming summer and fall for our rising fifth graders:
 - Observations between fourth and fifth grade teachers have created collaborative partnerships and have made way for new practices to support rising fifth graders.
 - Partnerships between fourth and fifth grade classrooms offer opportunities for students to ask and answer questions about HMS and the transition. It also allows a brief glimpse into HMS classrooms, and a unique way for fourth graders to connect with fifth grade teachers.
 - A Parent Panel of current fifth and sixth grade parents will offer insights into the transition for current fourth grade parents. This event will occur the evening of May 4, and is sponsored by the HMS PTO.
 - Sixth graders will apply this spring to become mentors who will support fifth grade classrooms during orientation and the start of the year. Sixth graders will partner with their former homeroom teacher to answer questions, learn about the fifth graders, and offer a warm, welcoming face to bridge the transition to middle school.
 - Orientation activities will be restructured so students will learn more about those in their homerooms and their homeroom teachers. This orientation day will be led this year by 6th grade mentors as opposed to 7th or 8th graders as in the past.
 - iPad distribution will take place after the start of the year, giving parents the opportunity to participate in activities that will better equip them to support their children with Schoology and iPad use, and the transition to taking iPads home will be gradual. Expectations for use will be taught as a part of the transition to fifth grade.

Connected Parents

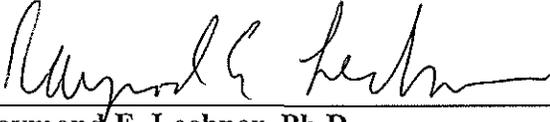
A strong partnership with parents is key to the effectiveness of the 5-8 campus model. In addition to regular communication via Friday principal emails, we have put new structures in place to increase our parents' connectedness with the 5-8 campus:

- **Twitter:** @HawkWolf39 posts messages daily for instant information about events and classroom activities across the campus. Follow the hashtags: #gohawks39 and #gowolves39
- **“One Campus. Connected Community.” Newsletter:** Quarterly communication about events related to our theme and goals for the year keeps parents informed.
- **“One Campus. Connected Community.” PTO presentation:** This fall at the HMS PTO general meeting we presented the theme for the year, and steps we would be taking to improve consistency and connectedness across the campus during 2016-2017.
- **Curriculum Night:** We are planning improvements to the HMS Curriculum Night to increase parent connectedness with the teachers. The aim is to understand more about classrooms, Schoology, and overall experience at each grade level.
- **GLAd Coffees:** Throughout the coming school year the GLAds and Principal will offer opportunities for parents to connect with the school, and with each other, by hosting coffees. Hot topics will be discussed, and parents can learn about each grade level in a casual setting.

SUMMARY

Through implementing consistency in programs, and by fostering connectedness for staff, students, and parents, we continue to focus on improving the effectiveness of the 5-8 campus model. We look forward to continued updates to the Board of Education and school community as a result of the 2016-2017 "One Campus. Connected Community." initiative.

**Recommended for approval
by the Board of Education**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Raymond E. Lechner", written over a horizontal line.

**Raymond E. Lechner, Ph.D.
Superintendent**