

HALIFAX REGIONAL SCHOOL BOARD Grade Configuration Consultation Report

PURPOSE: To provide additional information to the Governing Board in their consideration of Report 13-03-1398 – *Grade Configuration Report*.

BACKGROUND: On March 27, 2013, Superintendent White brought Report 13-03-1398 – *Grade Configuration Report* to the Governing Board. During the debate, Board Members sought additional information from staff in their questions about educational opportunities and input from students, parents and teachers. The Board's decision was to table Report 13-03-1398. School Administration Department staff collected input from three grade 6-9 schools (Brookside Junior High, Madeline Symonds Middle School & Ridgecliff Middle School) and one grade 9-12 school (Lockview High School) specifically about their school configurations. This information was collected and organized in the Grade Configuration Consultation Summary which is appended to this report.

Report 13-03-1398 *Grade Configuration Report* recognizes that the purpose of suggesting a change to a grade 9-12 configuration is in fact one that is based primarily on operational efficiencies. The Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB) is facing declining enrollment, aging infrastructure and funding challenges.

HRSB must maximize the use of schools and reduce excess capacity. The high schools are the largest of our buildings and have the most specialty spaces. Therefore when enrollment allows for the consolidation of grade 9 students in the local high school, a transition plan should be developed with the idea of ensuring successful transition of grade 9 students to the high school.

Reconfiguring schools is one of our strategies to be fiscally responsible with a declining student population. With appropriate transition planning, community involvement and a continued focus on high quality instruction, this can be accomplished without a negative impact on student learning.

This change in grade configuration will impact feeder systems and will eventually see the consolidation of schools within the family depending on the community's unique factors of geography and enrollment.

The HRSB successfully operates schools with a variety of grade configurations. As research has indicated, grade configuration is not a determining factor in regards to students' academic achievement. Rather, it is the quality of the teaching which makes the greatest difference to student achievement.

CONTENT:

School Administration Department staff collected information from several schools about grade level configurations. A sample of students, parents and staff provided their input in several school communities. Brookside Junior High, Madeline Symonds Middle School and Ridgecliff Middle School provided input about their grade 6-9 configuration; Lockview High School provided input on its grade 9-12 configuration. The information collected is organized by level with many quotations to allow the voices of those consulted to be heard throughout.

In addition, given that appropriate transition planning has been established as a significant variable to support student success, more detailed information is provided to describe the transition process.

Students, parents and staff at four HRSB schools have provided input on the grade configuration at their current schools. They have noted both opportunities and challenges with grade 6's in middle school and grade 9's in high school. Resoundingly though, they have emphasized the advantages of the proposed grade-level configurations.

In Appendix 1 of HRSB Report 13-03-1398 – *Grade Configuration Report*, it is stated:

The research is not conclusive regarding the effect of grade configuration on student success. The Halifax Regional School Board has 11 different configurations that are working well. Regardless of the grade configuration, there is no substitute for effective leadership and teaching. Transition planning is critical regardless of the age/grade of students.

This perspective was evidenced in the comments received from participants. They echoed the importance of a transition process anchored in social and emotional support for students.

COST:

N/A

FUNDING:

N/A

TIMELINE:

N/A

APPENDICES:

Appendix A: Grade Configuration Consultation Summary
Appendix B: Sample of input from focus group participants

RECOMMENDATIONS: That the board receive this report for information and consider it in their deliberations of Report 13-03-1398 – *Grade Configuration Report*.

COMMUNICATIONS: N/A

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