

Good afternoon,

Our goal is to always do what is in the best interest of our students. We recognize the number of things that impact the quality of our schools, such as arrival and dismissal procedures, bell schedules, and lunch room supervision, are not very exciting to discuss, but they are just as important to the quality of the program as any other item. Taken all together, the goal is to have procedures in place so we maximize the quality of instruction in the classroom and the quality of the learning environment.

In planning for next school year, one focus became the grade distribution at each of our schools. There are three main reasons for looking at our current distribution of grade levels. First, and this was the easy one, Pre-school doesn't belong at a middle school. There are much greater opportunities to share knowledge, materials, and support for 4 year olds when they are close to where 5 and 6 year olds are being taught. Second, we needed to open a new special education classroom at Holly Hills. Not having the program at Holly Hills would have been very unfair to our students that need such support as we would have to send them out of their home school to another school in the county. We simply do not have the room for a new classroom currently at Holly Hills.

To that end, and to address other areas of opportunity, I would like to share with you some exciting plans that we will implement for 2018-2019 school year:

- 1) The Pre-school classrooms will be moving to Holly Hills Elementary School.
- 2) The 4<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms will be moving to Westampton Middle School and the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades will form a "new school within a school" – with separate bussing from the rest of the middle school, different arrival and dismissal times than 6-8, a different bell schedule, and a section of the building that is their own.
- 3) Dr. Rachel Feldman will be the Principal of this newly created 4/5 School.
- 4) Mrs. Jennifer Murray will be the Principal of Holly Hills, which will be a PreK-3 School.
- 5) Mr. Matt Andris will be the Principal of Westampton Middle School, which will be a 6-8 School.
- 6) The Middle School (6-8 grades) will have a new schedule that incorporates Technology and Engineering coursework (STEM) for all students.
- 7) The new Middle School schedule will reduce class size numbers where they are currently the highest.
- 8) All 3 schools will have schedules and staff that allow us to put greater emphasis on mathematics instruction, technology integration, and social/emotional support while continuing our efforts in all other subject areas.
- 9) New procedures and improvements are planned to increase school security based on study of our current procedures in the last 6 months.

I am sure that you have questions about these plans. There is a great deal of work that is still going on, and we will be finalizing many things in the next few months. I have tried to anticipate many of your questions here and provided answers:

- 1) What is the purpose of moving the PreK to Holly Hills and the 4<sup>th</sup> grade to WMS?

By moving 5 fourth grade classrooms out and only bringing in 3 Pre-school classrooms, we free up a room for the new special education classroom. Also, having the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students fully integrated in the middle school has always been an issue. If there were room in Holly Hills, they would be there. The range of maturity and needs is so keenly noticeable from 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grades. If we could have 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> together, separate from 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup>, we can provide the appropriate, distinct environments for both 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students and for 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade students separately.

- 2) If they are going to WMS, how will they be on different buses and schedules?

We are currently working with our transportation company to create a bus schedule that will have three runs, one for 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade students, one for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, and one for K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade students. The 4/5 arrival and departure schedule will be closely aligned with Holly Hills, and be 30 minutes different than 6-8 WMS schedule.

- 3) How does this affect our current 3<sup>rd</sup> graders?

Our current 3<sup>rd</sup> graders are the ones most affected. Instead of having their 4<sup>th</sup> grade year at Holly Hills, they will be coming to the new 4/5 school at WMS. 4<sup>th</sup> grade is a big deal at Holly Hills and this group will miss out on some things – being the “big kids” in the school, safety patrol, and things like that. However, we plan on giving them great opportunities that no other grade after them will have. They will be helping select a mascot and a slogan for the 4/5 school. They will be helping select colors for their hallways. They will have special opportunities to create the new atmosphere from the beginning. We hope that we can help them feel special in this regard to take away some of the disappointment in leaving Holly Hills.

- 4) What is STEM and why is it important to thread it into the schedule?

STEM is instruction based on the idea of educating students in four specific disciplines — science, technology, engineering and mathematics — in an interdisciplinary and applied approach. STEM integrates them into a cohesive learning unit based on real-world applications. STEM occupations (and college programs to prepare for them) are growing at a rate far beyond other occupations. It is clear that most jobs of the future will involve more understanding of math and science, while technology will continue to play a larger and larger role. It is critical that we help our students prepare for this world.

- 5) What does a greater emphasis on social/emotional support mean?

Social and emotional learning is the process in which children develop the ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of their lives in ways that enable them to successfully manage life tasks including learning, forming relationships, and solving everyday problems. In conjunction with character education, social and emotional education aspires to teach our students to be good citizens with positive values and to interact effectively and

behave constructively. Such support will also allow us to meet the needs of students who are struggling with social/emotional issues and provide them with critical assistance before a crisis could occur. We plan to begin addressing this by hiring staff with specific skills in addressing these needs, training our teachers and administrators in identifying and intervening for students exhibiting signs of emotional distress, and utilizing our current counselors in roles that support specific student needs.

6) What will be new in terms of security?

There will be new procedures and equipment, and enhancements to current procedures and equipment. These will focus on three specific areas:

1 – Entrance: We will be revising visitor policies and creating procedures that minimize the risks of unwanted entry through the front doors.

2 - Classrooms: Based on feedback from the Police and other experts who have observed our drills, we will be modifying and enhancing certain aspects of our classroom/hallway procedures and equipment in the event an intruder does enter the building.

3 – Technology: We will be further adding and enhancing certain technologies to assist in securing the building during the school day. This would include cameras, communication devices, and other items.

Some of these changes will be evident and some will not. All changes to visitor procedures will be shared with you before school begins next year.

7) Will we be able to visit the 4/5 “school” to see what it will be like?

Yes! Soon we will advertise a Parent’s Night (probably for early June) so you can come out and see the plan. We can walk the drop off area and show you where the office and classrooms will be. We can then assemble in the cafeteria for a Q&A session.

That was a great deal of information! I hope that I have answered most of your questions here, but please feel free to reach out to me with any others. If you write your question via email, it will be easiest for me to get a full answer back to you. My address is [apetruzzelli@westamptonschools.org](mailto:apetruzzelli@westamptonschools.org). I may put out a second “FAQ” if more questions are asked so I can share with everyone.

***We are...proud to be Westampton Giants!***