

These minutes were approval by the Grade 5 Transition Subcommittee at the October 25, 2018 meeting

RYE SCHOOL DISTRICT

RYE, NEW HAMPSHIRE

The Grade 5 Transition Subcommittee Meeting was held at Rye Junior High School on Friday, October 5, 2018 at 7:00am.

PRESENT

School Board Members:	Paula Tsetsilas Jeanne Moynahan (not present)
Administration:	Salvatore Petralia, Superintendent Suzanne Lull, Principal RES Marie Soucy, Principal RJH
Staff:	Eric Ross (Grade 3), Sarah Harrington (RJH teacher), Andrea Papoutsy (RES music and Association Representative)
Parents:	Celeste Christo (Grade 4 parent rep), Sharon Scott (Grade k-3 parent rep)
Visitors:	Tasha Benson, Kerry Labovitz, Jess Moran, Kim Piela

Call to Order

Chair Tsetsilas called the meeting to order at 7:02 a.m.

I. Review and approval of Sept. 7 meeting minutes

Motion by Salvatore Petralia to approve the meeting minutes of September 7, 2018 as presented. Seconded by 4. All in favor.

II. Meeting Times – Feedback from community

Chair Tsetsilas noted that the subcommittee has one more meeting with a 7:00 a.m. start time. Community members prefer a time which would make it easier for them to attend. She opened the discussion up to the subcommittee in regards to the start time of the last meeting. She also noted that the start time of 7:00 a.m. keeps the members who are teachers in their normal

schedule with the students. That was one of the reasons for the 7:00 a.m. start time. She does not see a need to change the start time. The venue change was a positive step because the meetings can now be recorded and there is more space for people to attend. She asked the subcommittee if anyone would like to consider a new start time.

The subcommittee agreed that to keep the start time of 7:00 a.m., as it would be challenging for teachers to attend after school or during evening hours.

Chair Tsetsilas stated that she also received feedback from a parent in regards to the two work sessions being held on October 18th. The parent asked if the subcommittee would consider another work session for parents who could not attend that date. There are people who are already signed up for both work sessions on the 18th so she would not recommend any changes to the sessions already planned. She asked if the subcommittee would like to offer another date for a third working session.

The subcommittee agreed to offer a third session with a possible date of October 16th. The session will be held if at least five people sign up for the session.

III. Feedback from school tour

▪ York Middle School – Sharon Scott

Member Scott gave an overview of the York Middle School tour, attend by Paula Tsetsilas, Marie Soucy and herself, on September 21st.

Highlights:

- York Middle School is 5th through 8th grade.
- 140 students per in grade 5.
- 5th grade configuration is 7 teachers: 2-person teams + one self-contained classroom
 - Language Arts & Social
 - Math & Science
- 1 Single teacher team – self-contained classroom model
- The 5th grade students have a homeroom teacher for advisory and team meeting. The students follow a waterfall schedule, which means they have five classes that fit into a four class schedule so one class is dropped each day.
- The students return to homeroom to get their lunch, prior to recess and at the end of the day to wait for dismissal.
- There are doors inside the classrooms that connect between the two classes and teams.
- One class period is a flex schedule band, chorus and extra enrichment to allow the teachers to have planning time.
- The 5th to 6th grade transition is a bit challenging for the students because they go to a team of four. The transition is harder on the students than the parents, since there is no change in location; whereas the transition to 5th is harder for the parents than the students. There is no homeroom so the organizational piece is tough for the students.

- Most of the concerns are in regards to the bus transport of the middle school students with the high school students (5th through 12th).
 - YMS has a process that is followed for the transition of students from 4th to 5th. Handouts and cheat sheets for parents outline the whole process.
 - The middle school students and the middle school principal visit the elementary school to attend a meeting with the 4th grade students so they may ask questions.
 - There is a second meeting when the 4th graders visit the middle school and take a tour of the facility.
 - YMS holds a summer programming session title ‘Get Ready for 5th Grade’. The program is held for two days from 9 to 12. They have a 35 to 65% incoming class participation in the program.
 - The 5th graders have planners for organization.
 - There is no interaction with 7th and 8th grade students. There is minimal interaction with 6th grade students.
 - 5th graders do not share recess with any other grades. The playground consists of swings, monkey bars, field and a basketball court.
 - Band and chorus are offered to the 5th graders.
 - All of the 5th graders have lunch together.
 - The self-contained class is led by a strong teacher so the one class is working well.
 - Maine State policy does not allow 5th grade sports so no programs are offered.
 - The 5th grade students are in a separate wing from the other grades and have their own entrance into the building. The area is private and individualized for the 5th grade.
 - The model has been in place since 1978.
 - The biggest concern for parents is the 1 hour earlier start time and the previously mentioned shared bussing with the high school students.
 - The YMS Principal recommended strong communication between the School Board (SAU 50) and the parents (community).
- **Oyster River Middle School – Celeste Christo**

Member Christo gave an overview of the Oyster River Middle School tour, attended by Marie Soucy, Andrea Papoutsy, Sarah Harrington and herself, on September 28th.

Highlights:

- Structure is similar to YMS with 2-person teams for 5th graders and 4-person teams for 6th, 7th and 8th.
- There are 160 5th grade students with 20 to 25 students in each class.
- There are four teams with two teachers for each team.
- The Principal and 5th grade teachers saw no issues with the transition from 4th to 5th grade. The issue they felt was more problematic was that students need to be more prepared for the 4-person team because of the executive functioning skills.
- The 5th grade classrooms were spread out. Two of the classrooms were in a separate wing, which was more segregated from the rest of the school. The other classrooms were directly beside 6th, 7th and 8th grade classrooms.

- The interaction with other grades is not as streamlined as YMS. All students get off the bus together and wait outside with a teacher. There have been no issues with students interacting before school.
- There are no self-contained classrooms at ORMS. The principal felt this would keep those children away from the other students.
- The principal mentioned that he always has the younger children sit at the front of the bus. This is not due to any safety concerns. It helps the younger students to feel less anxious about riding and getting off the bus.
- They have five course subjects with 40 minute blocks with a block for 'Bobcat Time'.
- 5th graders have ProBooks and lockers.
- To prepare for the incoming 5th graders they send home a FAQ sheet, which gives the parents a lot of information. A parent night is held in the spring for students and their parents with a Q & A period for anyone with questions.
- The 8th graders visit the elementary school and visit with the 4th graders to answer questions.
- 4th grade students with an I.E.P have their meeting at the junior high so the parent and student can get used to being in that environment.
- A step-up day is held the last day of school. The students visit the school for a tour and visit with their new teachers. Each student also receives a t-shirt with their team and school name.
- The principal has an open-door policy during the summer. He welcomes any parent or student to meet with him regarding any concerns they may have.
- The parents are invited to the school on the teachers' first day of school from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. This is a time when parents can meet the teachers and ask any last minute questions. ORMS has an 80 to 90% attendance rate at this event.
- The contact with other grades is more than YMS because they are not in a separate wing and mingle with other students in the hall.
- The 5th graders have a separate lunch and recess period.
- After-school enrichment is held at the junior high with mixed grade levels. The 5th graders may be mixed with 8th graders depending on their interest; however, they are usually not interested in the same types of programs.
- An outing club is hosted by one of the 5th grade teachers, which is an overnight activity. This activity is held separately from the other grades.
- Band and chorus are offered to 5th graders.
- 5th graders can participate in cross country and track.
- The playground consists of a volley ball area, basketball area, monkey bars and a climbing wall.
- ORMS has 45 days of unified arts per quarter; 21st Century Life Skills Class, Health, Art and S.T.E.M.
- Music is mandatory and part of the school's curriculum. The 5th graders must choose strings, band or chorus, which are taught in a 40 minute block. The school has three fulltime music teachers. In addition, UNH students volunteer their time to hold small group instruction with the students.
- The school staff prefers the 2-person teams over the self-contained classrooms they had 13 years ago.

A third school tour is tentatively scheduled for October 16th at Berwick Academy.

IV. Update on potential configurations for middle school structure – Marie Soucy

Co-Chair Soucy presented potential ideas for the middle school structure, which were worked on by Paula Tsetsilas, Alison Dunn (RJH Guidance) and herself.

1. Current model used for 6th through 8th grade:

- 3 teachers for each team; language art, math and science with each teacher instructing a social studies unit.
- Like the current 6th graders, students move in pods from homeroom.
- Students get the opportunity to have different teachers and teachers have the opportunity to focus on their specialized area of instruction.

Pros – The system is in place and is working. There would be consistency across the school and 5th graders would feel the same as other students. It allows the school to stay on the same schedule, which would allow for other programs to be put into place; such as, a mentorship program with other students. The system allows the teachers to have common planning time.

Cons – Are the class sizes going to be too small when dividing the incoming students by the number of teachers per team?

Co-Chair Tsetsilas noted that the conversation as it relates to class sizes and working with the student population, in relation to which model makes sense, will happen at the school board level.

Superintendent Petralia confirmed. This will actually be part of the discussion at the next School Board meeting on the 17th.

2. 2-Person Team Model:

- 2 teachers; language arts/social studies and science/math
- 5th graders will change classrooms and will be part of the community.

Pros - 5th graders get to experience instruction from multiple teachers but on a smaller scale as compared to 6th - 8th grade. Allows for more flexibility for the teachers in scheduling and instruction.

Cons – In the future, will class sizes become too large with more students going into 5th grade? Does this allow for 5 year sustainability?

3. 3-Person Team Model:

- One 2-person teacher team (see #2) + 1 self-contained classroom

Pros - Allows for variability to meet students needs who may still need a self-contained classroom. Allows students who are ready for a 2-person team access to various teachers and changing of classrooms on a smaller scale.

Cons – Does it alienate children in the self-contained classrooms? Would placement be an issue? Hard to integrate students when there is a separation.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas noted that the models will be integrated into the working sessions. The pros and cons will be worked through with the people who attend the session. Other ideas that were considered included 5th and 6th grade sharing a 4-person team. Each teacher would teach a 5th and 6th grade curriculum. This idea started to become more complex than it needed to be. One of the negatives was that the 5th graders would have four teachers to rotate through, which could be difficult from an execution standpoint. She opened to the subcommittee for discussion.

Member Harrington stated that she likes the idea of continuing with the current model, which is the 3-person teams. That model would really integrate the 5th graders into the junior high. They are making the transition to 5th grade and will be a junior high student. It offers more flexibility within the school to do programming across the board. She also likes the idea of the 5th grade teachers having a specialized subject so they can focus their instruction. This would give the school a teacher that has that focus with social studies being shared, which has been working really well for the past three years. She likes the consistency and thinks the transition from 5th to 6th grade will be easier for the students.

Superintendent Petralia added that in terms of the configuration, the student demographics would have to be looked at in detail and in private. It will be likely that in addition to the regular unified arts support, there will be some special educators, case managers and paraeducators who will be working with students as well.

Referring to the specialized area of instruction, Member Christo stated this was one of the things that came up at Oyster River by one of the teachers. The teacher said he had a strong background in math and that was always the subject he wanted to teach. That teacher was able to do that on his team. The teachers decided amongst themselves what specialty they would be teaching, along with one other subject under the 3-person team model. Having the teachers be able to make that decision was felt to be an advantage.

Member Lull noted that all the teachers that would be considered are all certified K-8 in all subjects.

V. Update on RJH playground equipment – Suzanne Lull

Member Lull reported that Sarah Holmes has been heading this effort with 4th and 5th grade students. The students have been polled to see what they really want in a playground. The students want a climbing structure, swings or a zipline. They have reviewed catalogs and making calls to playground companies. The students will be making a presentation to the 4th and 5th grades with different options being presented. The students will vote on individual pieces to see what they liked in order to put a plan together. A report will then be given to the school board, PTA and REF. The playground is based on a budget of \$25,000.

VI. Update on Special 4th grade year end activities – Suzanne Lull

Member Lull stated that they talked with the 4th and 5th grades to find out what they wanted. The students were very easygoing about the whole thing. The 4th and 5th graders both want their own fun finale. They don't care to go any place special but would like it to be a surprise with the parents helping. The students were encouraged to give their parents some ideas if they are going to be doing the planning. The 4th grade wanted a clap-out. They felt the 5th grade deserved to walk out of the building first but they wanted to follow behind. Similarly, the 5th grade wanted to go out first with the 4th graders following behind. Both grades wanted to have an awards ceremony but they all thought the awards should be shared with both grades receiving the award. Regarding the yearbook, Principal Lull told the students they would make sure the yearbook had added pages for the students. The 4th graders agreed that the 5th graders should go first in the yearbook. She was very impressed by how kind the students were to each other.

Regarding the year-end assembly, Co-Chair Tsetsilas asked if it would be a joint assembly.

Member Lull replied that she envisions it would be one assembly.

Member Christo stated that 6th graders at RJH now do the Merrowvista trip. Oyster River was asked whether they do anything similar for their 5th graders. They do Merrowvista for their 5th grade. This might be something that could be added for discussion for something that could be done at the beginning of the year because the opportunity should not be taken from the 6th graders. She continued that this is something that the students look forward to. It should be something that is worked into the planning.

Member Lull stated there has been a lot of discussion between the guidance counselors and the principals about step-ups and parent nights. The 4th graders would have a step-up day in March and again in June with a parent night as well. The 5th graders would have theirs as well.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas noted that they have materials from the middle school tours that outline the whole process with key dates, which the subcommittee can work from.

VII. Update on initial Rye Recreation meeting – Paula Tsetsilas

Co-Chair Tsetsilas stated that she and Member Lull met with Lee Arthur, Recreation Director, and Gregg Mikolaities, Recreation Commission Chair. They discussed the space that would become available, specifically the lower level at the elementary school. The space would allow for accommodating more students in the After-School Child Care Program, which is a very respected program in the community with high demand. There has been a wait list for the program over the years and this would allow for those students to be accommodated. The space would also allow for other opportunities for the recreation department. The department may be able to offer their summer programming and camps at the schools, rather than in the modules at the recreation area. Everything is in place at the school, except for a bathroom. The modifications that the recreation department would want to make would have to come from their budget. It would not be the responsibility of the school as it relates to reconfiguring the space downstairs. There is a potential for some cross generational programming. This is something

that came up at the School Use Feasibility Committee. The idea is to make the schools more open to the community. There are a lot of retirees in Rye who are very talented. Perhaps they could come in and the students could have a reading buddy or learn quilting.

Member Lull noted that the school has volunteers but this might provide other opportunities. She has done programs with seniors, such as writing buddies in the town or nursing home. It would allow recreation a place to host some programs for seniors. There are some issues that need to be worked through, as far as safety and putting in bathrooms; however, that is in the future.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas stated that Rye Recreation has identified the need for an after school middle program that is similar to the elementary program but much more unstructured. They have been talking to Rye Congregation about space on the third floor but nothing has come to fruition. One area that was identified by the School Use Feasibility Committee is the space below the gym at RJH, which would require quite a bit of renovation. There is a follow up meeting with the Recreation Commission to talk about middle school programming on October 19th. Right now, most of the students go to the library. Other than that, there is not a lot of opportunity for them and this would open up another venue. The recreation department has been working on a year to year lease for space at RES and other parts of town. Since the committee's intention is to put a structure in place for five years, this might allow a longer-term lease for Rye Recreation, enabling them to think more holistically about their programming rather than doing ad-hoc programming based on their space availability at the time. If this is something that will be happening, the school board and recreation will need to look at a long-term contract. There is a question as to whether or not this will require a warrant article. This is something that could be discussed at the next school board meeting.

VIII. Update on sports programming – Marie Soucy

Co-Chair Soucy stated she met with Athletic Director, Piper Cronin, to go through the sports, teams and clubs that are offered to 5th grade and whether it will stay the same. The fall and spring running club are not under Ms. Cronin's jurisdiction. The 5th and 6th grade basketball teams would remain separate teams. They may still need to use the gym at the elementary school because of state issues. She continued there is a 'Girls on the Run Club', which is grades 3 through 5. This is something that would need to be considered.

Member Lull pointed out that this is not a school program. The club is run by volunteers.

Co-Chair Soucy continued that currently the 5th grade girls are allowed to play field hockey on the RJH team, which would continue. That is the one sport they are allowed to play. Other sports have more contact and it would be dangerous for 5th graders to be playing with 8th grade students. She commented that there would be no major changes in the sports programming.

Member Christo pointed out that 'Girls on the Run' was something that parents had approached her about because it is a program that is currently offered. It is not a school program.

Member Lull stated they have teachers that like to go with them. It is a separate program and she is not sure if they could start one at RJH.

Co-Chair Soucy commented there is a similar program that runs 6th through 8th.

Member Christo reiterated that this program is something the parents asked if it would be carried over to the junior high. She responded to parents that it would depend on the volunteers.

Member Ross asked if the fields are used every day with the current sports. Would there be an opportunity for 5th graders, at the RJH, to participate in sports they normally participate in, such as PTA's afterschool enrichment "Capture the flag."

Member Soucy stated that she and Ms. Cronin talked about how this may provide an opportunity to expand on what is offered at RJH. It would just take some scheduling creativity.

In regards to the Capture the Flag program, Co-Chair Tsetsilas noted that she and Co-Chair Soucy would like to talk with the PTA about programming. Would something be offered at RJH or would the 5th graders take the bus to the elementary school? How would that change start times? It is probably doable but the logistic would need to be worked out in the spring.

IX. Population projections – Salvatore Petralia

Superintendent Petralia stated that he went back to the final report of the School Use Feasibility Study. It was very helpful to revisit the study and extract some of the major trends that were seen when the study was conducted. He continued that what is generally seen in Rye, in terms of town population, is expected to be steady for the next several years. However, within the town's population, there are some variations to look at which are significant. From 2000 to 2015, the number of Rye children fell 38%. That is not only indicative to Rye but is the trend throughout the state. The school age population is dipping significantly over time. Also, within that timeframe, the number of adults, between ages 18 and 44, has declined 32%. The age group, 45 to 64, rose 27% during that time. Ages 65 and older rose 70%. What is being seen in this town, as in many communities, is a greying population. Over the years, the Rye School District has used live birth data to predict what the trends would look like moving up. In the study, it mentions that has been unpredictable because the data has not been accurate for the majority of years for the study. For example, for the years 2017-2018, the prediction was that 38 students would enter kindergarten that year; when in fact 53 students enrolled, which is a pretty wide disparate. A section of the study stated, "*It is difficult and perhaps impossible to have reliable methods for small school districts. Random variation will cause enrollments to fluctuate over time in unpredictable ways*".

Superintendent Petralia noted that they can look at their current cohorts moving up. This would be a discussion that would be helpful at the next school board meeting. Also, there are corporations that do enrollment projects and studies for towns and school districts. He suggested this be brought to the school board for consideration at their next meeting.

X. October 18 breakout sessions & online feedback system

Outline for the work session with the community:

- Talk about the change, answer questions and address concerns.
- Break up the participants into groups and give them a scenario that is being considered. Have them identify the pros and cons.
- Take the feedback from the work sessions and embed it into the work of the committee.
- After the breakout session, open an online feedback system that would allow parents to weigh-in for about a week's time. All that data will be collected for the committee to review prior to the meeting on October 25th.

Member Christo asked if similar sessions were held during the School Use Feasibility Study.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas explained they didn't have working sessions with the public but they had a final readout. The public was allowed to email the committee for about a week's time with any afterthoughts.

Member Christo commented there should be a way to solicit questions and concerns ahead of time before the session. She feels there may be a lot of things coming up that the committee will say they do not know and will have to get back to them. This will just generate the need to have another meeting or work session.

Superintendent Petralia stated they used index cards at the meeting and if someone did not want to come to the microphone to ask the question it could be read by one of the facilitators and answered by the appropriate individual.

Member Papoutsy commented that index cards are a good idea. She has been to quite a few meetings where index cards were given out in the beginning. It is a great way to get a lot of questions addressed. She has been at meetings where the index cards were collected and organized into groups, such as playground questions or modeling questions, which was very successful. She noted that she was on the Feasibility Committee. They brainstormed the pros and cons of multiple options. Going through the actual process is very helpful.

XI. Review of timeline and tasks

Co-Chair Tsetsilas stated she is very comfortable with how the committee is moving along. They are meeting all of their dates and have made a lot of progress since the committee was initiated. There was one addition to the implementation schedule, which was to communicate with New Castle and keep them abreast of the changes that are happening in the district.

Public Comment:

Jess Moran, 635 Long John Road, asked if the parents are going to have the chance to weigh-in on the models being considered.

Superintendent Petralia explained there will be a lot of input before it is discussed at the school board. Mrs. Soucy will not make a recommendation before all the feedback is received.

Ms. Moran stated that one thing she finds helpful when soliciting another person's advice is asking what they would have done differently. Rye is lucky to be able to start this from scratch and this might be something to ask. In regards to the parent session, she stated this is a great thing to do with the community. It may be hard to start with "what do you guys think" or "how are you feeling", unless someone is coming to all the sessions. It may be best to start with a quick summary of what the committee has been thinking about. It will give a baseline of all the work that has been done so people can think about what their concerns might be.

Member Christo stated the committee has a list of questions that were asked when they visited the schools. One of the questions that was asked was whether or not there was anything they would do differently or was something tried that did not work well. Most of them said they thought it worked well. They did not much negative feedback.

Member Papoutsy noted that Mrs. Lull does a Principal News Blog every Thursday. It is a great resource. On Thursday's news blog, she had bulleted out exactly what the committee has done and where they are. It was very easy to read.

Kim Piela, 25 Mountainview Terrace, stated that any information that can be given to help parents get used to the new junior high would be helpful. She feels it is still a little "blind" as to what goes on at RJH. She thinks any new parent is going to be completely blind. If those kinds of communications and meetings could be encouraged, it would be very helpful.

Member Scott stated that one thing they were considering for the parent-teacher conferences is doing a side by side comparison for RJH and RES showing the different aspects of each school.

Member Christo stated that a goal should be to provide options for students to get acclimated over the summer months.

Speaking to Member Lull, **Tasha Benson, 99 Alehson Street**, asked if she would consider a 4th and 5th grade girls' basketball team for this year, since they will all be going up together next year.

Member Lull replied she is not sure if they can. It might be that it has to be 5th grade but they will certainly look into it.

Kerry Labovitz, 44 Birchwood Drive, commented she does not know how the unified arts would be impacted at RJH when bringing in another grade. She wonders if some changes would need to be incorporated. She also asked if they looked into touring schools that are similar in size, which might have different implications. When considering the self-contained classroom, it seems very small for the number of students in Rye. It seems like this type of segregation is not something the community would be interested in doing. In regards to the playground equipment, it seems that during budgeting the school board should consider whether additional funds will be

needed to meet the needs the school has now. The \$25,000 that was originally discussed was really to address the need at the elementary school. It may want to be considered if more is needed and whether that can be worked into the budget.

Regarding the comment about schools of similar sizes, Co-Chair Tsetsilas stated that Rye is in a unique situation where there are not too many towns like it. The school in Allenstown has 164 students but is not the highest performing school. The schools were intentionally chosen on their performance level also. The guidance counselor put a call into Allenstown last year to ask questions. They have four teachers that share 5th and 6th grades and four teachers that share 7th and 8th. It was a model that was considered but not recommended. Regarding unified arts, she stated that they realize they need to look at staffing and how to support an increase cohort coming up. She noted that she will relay the budget comment to the school board.

Member Lull noted that she created a document on the students' perspective on such a move. The parents might like to see that information. There were a lot of positives. One comment from a student was that they were "feeling really special". She didn't get the sense that the students were all that fearful of the change, other than they might get lost in the building.

Member Christo commented that ORMS is huge comparatively to RJH. She specifically mentioned to the principal that the students were afraid that they were going to get lost. His response was, "Every kid is afraid they are going to get lost but once they get there they find it really silly that they thought it was going to be confusing." One of the things that can be incorporated into the summer program is a scavenger hunt so the students get a feel for the building.

Member Lull noted that the few concerns the students had were easily answered.

No other business was brought before the committee.

Adjournment

Motion by Suzanne Lull to adjourn at 8:22 a.m. Seconded by Salvatore Petralia. All in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dyana F. Ledger