

Middle School Visits Questionnaire

YORK MIDDLE SCHOOL 9/21/18

RES Attendees: Paula Tsetsilas, Marie Soucy, Sharon Scott

York 140 students per grade vs. RES 44 incoming 5th graders

1. How do they structure the 5th grade classes/teams/teachers?

How many 5th grade classes and total students?

- 7 teachers, 3 pairs of two teaching teams (ELA/ Social, Studies Math/Science) and 1 single teacher (teaches all 4 content areas; self-contained classroom) vs RES with 3 teachers (self contained classes).
- In 1978 the 5th grade transitioned from elementary to middle school due to space issues.
- First thing in the morning 5th graders enter through a separate entrance at the school and go straight to the café. There is a duty teacher in the café.
- Start of school, the 5th graders go to their 1st class up the back staircase by themselves to their wing. The wing is specific to 5th grade only.
- 5th graders have a homeroom teacher for advisory. Morning meeting with group 7:40-8 am.
- Doors inside classrooms connect between the 2 classes/teams.
- Students independently pass between classes.
- They have a waterfall schedule and have 5 classes that need to fit into 4, so 1 class gets dropped each day. ie. All 5th grade classes are not teaching math at the same time, etc.
- Teams communicate weekly.
- Utilize Power School to help with the scheduling. The 4 lunch periods drive everything.
- 1 class period is flex schedule for band/chorus and extra enrichment- allows teachers to have planning time. 1 flex room, 1 room band/chorus. Lose instructional time but gain planning time for teachers.
- 6/7/8th grade has 2 teams, 4 core teachers. After 8th grade some kids tend to switch to private schools.
- At York the 5th to 6th grade transition is harder b/c they go to a team of 4, so it's more of a transition. Harder on the kids than the parents at this stage (since it's not changing locations).
- 7th and 8th grade has full class of world language level 1. Middle school has a literacy coach as well.
- 5th graders have laptops- chrome.

- 5th graders use lockers for belongings.
- Pods are done at the elementary school but not the middle school at York.
- 2 counselors for 2 grade levels; and 1 stays w/kids through 5th/6th and other stays through 7th/8th.

2. What have they tried in the past that hasn't worked well?

- Of all grade levels, tend to see more conflicts between 6th and 7th graders than any other two grades
- Most of the concern comes from the bus transport of middle school with H.S. which transports 5-12th grades.
- Transition between 5th to 6th grades is harder at YMS. No more homerooms and the organizational piece are tough for the kids (executive functioning).
- Over the years, administration has ramped up communication
- They moved from a 3-person teaching team to a 2-person teaching team for 5th graders b/c of scheduling and logistics

3. What do they do to prepare incoming 5th grade for the transition?

- Refer to handout with YMS transition timeline, 5th grade YMS parent “cheat sheet” and other helpful information (handout), staff organization chart and schedule handout.
- Middle school kids (and principal) go to elementary school to attend meeting where 4th grade students ask questions. This is the first meeting.
- 2nd meeting- 4th grade goes to Middle school to see chorus and band. Chorus sings for kids. Kids are greeted and walk through wings to see space; gym, nurse, etc. (but not classrooms).
- Summer programming- “Get ready for 5th Grade”. 2 days, 3 hours per day from 9-12pm Tues, Wed Aug 13-15th. This is promoted in the Spring and they have been doing it for approx. 12 years w/a 35-65% of incoming class. Rec dept. charges \$50 per student.
Course covers: lockers (combos), scheduling, games, and scavenger hunt for exploring and getting kids comfortable. Talk about what it takes to be organized w/o getting too specific with the kids. Instructor mentioned that 10 year olds don't have strong executive functioning skills and kids need to be trained. They are given explicit instruction on how to manage when moving through spaces.
- **Suggestion from YMS:** to have the 6th and 7th graders to get together w/the current RES 5th graders.
- Check the YMS website- the 5th graders made a video for upcoming kids to YMS.

- 5th graders use planners- all kids get one. Per staff “if kids have solid routines in the 4th grade just bring them up w/them to 5th.”
- Per staffing: “address the loss- ask the kids what they feel like they are losing. Tell them what they are gaining.”
- Push out the communications and teaming structure to help ease anxiety.
- Elementary school doesn’t have a yearbook.

4. How much interaction do the 5th grade students have with the other grades?

- No interaction with 7th and 8th, some interaction w/6th grade (minimal).
- 5th grade has to go down the 6th grade wing to get to NSG and guidance.
- 6-8th grades have 2 teams w/4 person team per grade; split 150 kids between 8 classes.
- 5th and 6th grade share student council (and 7th & 8th are together).
- School calendar lists activity nights, movie nights, socials, dodgeball, etc.
- There is an assembly to welcome 5th grades -- they are “clapped in” by older 6, 7, 8 students.

5. What benefits do they see in having 5th grade housed in the middle school?

- Band and Chorus are offered to 5th graders. Not offered at elementary.
- Band/chorus has 2 concerts per year; each grade is separate.
- Elementary has 2 pods and they don’t all eat lunch together. Middle school 5th graders all have lunch together.

6. How do you handle self-contained classrooms and what are the criteria used to place kids in a self-contained class? Or, if self-contained classrooms are not being utilized, what is the reasoning behind that?

- York was trying to avoid self contained but their model w/1 self contained class currently works as they have a very strong/versatile teacher for the self contained class.
- Self contained class kids are w/the same teacher for 3 blocks a day and advisory and w/o that teacher for Allied arts, lunch, recess. So they are w/the teacher for less than half of their day.
- There have been minimal parent concerns regarding whether their kids are in a self contained class or not.
- Input from self contained classroom teacher: 5th graders are still developing/still elementary mindset, and he tries to teach them that way regardless of the space/location. More responsibility comes at 6th grade.

- Parents complete a survey re: child's needs which may play a role in which type of class the child is placed in.

7. How do the self contained kids get to be part of the larger team projects?

- These kids participate in any grade level projects.
- At YMS, most team activities happen in 6-8th grade.

8. How are Sports handled for 5th graders?

- At YMS 5th graders can't play school sports (it's a state policy). 6th grade has 3 options (wrestling, cross country and tennis). There are intramural sports.

9. What type of playground equipment do you have and is 5th grade at recess with other grades?

- Recess- fairly basic: swings, field, monkey bars, basketball. Going to be adding a physics park (zip line, etc.)
- YMS 5th grade recess not shared with other grades

Other info

- Start time at elementary is 8:30 and middle school is 7:30 am.
- Kennebunk just re-structured to their schools to a K-2 and 3-5 formation
- PTO at middle school is separate from elementary school. PTO- runs school store, helps with staff appreciation, etc.

Action items:

- Create a side by side chart/comparison for RES/RJH (S. Scott to work on) and have available for parent teacher conferences for 4th grade RES teachers and for November meeting. Gather criteria for side by side and present to group prior to distribution.
- Potentially map out various school configurations in the nearby towns to have as a visual for parents if needed.
- Principal from YMS invited to attend forum at RES, accepted pending confirmation of the date/time.