

Grade Alignment – Frequently Asked Questions – February 2010

Question: What was the recommendation of the Grade Realignment - 2009 and Beyond Committee for K-12 education?

Answer: The Committee developed 12 grade alignment possibilities. Each alignment was analyzed with respect to strengths, problems, opportunities and threats. The group narrowed alignment ideas to two possibilities:

- 1) K-5, 6-8 and 9-12. The group felt this scenario was feasible only if Graveraet was considered as a possibility for a K-5 school.
- 2) K-4, 5-8 and 9-12. The committee was in support of this scenario if K-5 classrooms remain self-contained.

The final recommendation of the Grade Alignment Committee was to support a K-4, 5-8 and 9-12 program for MAPS elementary children. The Grade Alignment Committee's complete report and meeting minutes can be reviewed through mapsnet.org.

Question: What are the primary issues in considering grade alignment and how are those factors prioritized?

Answer: Grade alignment changes are being considered due to budget shortfalls. Declining enrollment and loss of revenue are driving forces behind the need to consider alternatives. Student needs remain most significant when considering variables. While research strongly supports the notion that all alignments are potentially of value to school-aged children, the following must be addressed when making grade alignment decisions:

Educational Levels – Most educators agree that distinct differences exist between elementary, middle school and high school-aged children. Educational needs vary depending on students' developmental stages. Elementary students benefit from exposure to limited numbers of children, smaller and more personalized surroundings and emphasis on development of basic skills. Middle school-aged children, often encompassing years prior to onset of puberty as well as some period of time directly after onset of physical maturation, thrive in environments built around those social-emotional needs. Especially in Michigan, a state with extremely high standards for graduation, high school-aged students succeed in secondary programs tailored to interests of mid and late teenagers. Alignments that blur lines between distinct educational levels (e.g. 7-12 or 8-12 junior/senior high schools) are at risk of sacrificing what we know are successful middle school and high school practices in favor of "fitting kids in" to particular buildings due to economic needs. The same may be true at the opposite end of the spectrum. Exposing young elementary-aged children to instructional practices normally associated with middle school students can result in lower achievement levels for all groups.

To summarize and when economically feasible, practices honoring distinct educational levels (e.g. elementary, middle school, high school) should be sustained. MAPS has exemplary elementary, middle school and high school programs built around the needs of students. If possible, grade alignment decisions should build upon current successes.

Question: Does the grade alignment plan focus on buildings or students?

Answer: The Grade Alignment Committee’s recommendation (K-4, 5-8 and 9-12) was based on needs of children. That plan would sustain current and successful K-4 programs at Cherry Creek, Sandy Knoll and Superior Hills. Our current 6-8 Bothwell Middle School would be expanded to house grades 5-8, thus maintaining an appropriate middle level program for emerging and adolescent children. Marquette Senior High School would continue serving grades 9-12 through programs that been significantly reformed in recent years. Other proposals which place middle level children in Marquette Senior High School, were not endorsed by the Committee.

Question: What is student capacity for each school building in MAPS?

Answer: Each building’s threshold for children differs according to school program purpose, room use, class size and other variables. If teachers have access to their classrooms during preparatory hours, a building’s capacity is relatively lower. If elementary art and music are taught in children’s classrooms instead of specialized areas, a school’s capacity is somewhat higher. Based on average class sizes and past experiences, the following reflects approximate numbers of children per building:

| | “DESIGNED” CAPACITIES |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Marquette Senior High School | 2,500 |
| Bothwell Middle School | 1,250 |
| Graveraet Intermediate School* | 800 |
| Superior Hills Elementary School | 400 |
| Cherry Creek Elementary School | 450 |
| Sandy Knoll Elementary School | 540 |

*No current “as designed” figure available; the figure used is an averaging of MSHS & Bothwell capacities, adjusted for Graveraet’s building square footage.

Question: What is the District’s best estimate of K-12 enrollment through 2013?

Answer: Enrollment projections are based on factors which change over time. Estimates based on an average of three enrollment projections done by different organizations include the following:

| Grade | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | 2012-2013 |
|--------|---------|---------|-----------|
| K | 228 | 234 | 259 |
| 1 | 208 | 206 | 212 |
| 2 | 204 | 204 | 201 |
| 3 | 194 | 200 | 200 |
| 4 | 233 | 191 | 196 |
| 5 | 197 | 225 | 184 |
| 6 | 205 | 201 | 229 |
| 7 | 219 | 206 | 201 |
| 8 | 257 | 216 | 203 |
| 9 | 259 | 297 | 250 |
| 10 | 265 | 251 | 288 |
| 11 | 243 | 256 | 243 |
| 12 | 268 | 242 | 255 |
| S.E. | 42 | 42 | 42 |
| Alt Ed | 65 | 65 | 65 |

Question: What is the expected longevity of each school building without dramatic upgrades?

Answer: MAPS has not identified dates after which a building is no longer of value. Each school or facility has worth and each is sustainable as long as funds remain available. MAPS has identified infrastructure needs for each District-owned building. Older facilities (1927 Graveraet and 1957 Sandy Knoll) require more updating than newer structures (1993 Cherry Creek and 1994 Superior Hills).

Question: Will Kaufman Auditorium be closed under the current recommendation?

Answer: No. MAPS is not proposing closure of any school building or facility. Kaufman Auditorium continues to undergo improvements. In recent years the auditorium's ticket room has been replaced, bathrooms have been expanded, stage flooring and curtains have been updated and other maintenance has been performed. Bids are being sought for courtyard updates, thus underscoring MAPS' continued support for Kaufman Auditorium.

Question: Would a bond issue have to be passed to keep Graveraet viable?

Answer: Some form of referendum may be necessary to create a K-5 Graveraet. Other building uses are also likely to require retrofitting. To gain more perspective, you may wish to review Integrated Design's review of that facility. That report is located within mapsnet.org.

Question: Would fifth graders have designated classrooms at Bothwell? Will they have a designated play area?

Answer: Yes. If Bothwell becomes a 5-8 building, fifth grade classrooms will be self-contained and located in their own area of the school. Appropriate play areas will be designed and constructed, providing age-specific facilities.

Question: Why is Vandeenboom not being considered as part of the grade realignment plan?

Answer: Effective July 1, 2009, MAPS Board of Education closed Vandeenboom Elementary as a traditional school building and realigned Superior Hills, Sandy Knoll and Cherry Creek to serve K-4 students. Declining enrollment was the driving force behind the Board's decision. Vandeenboom now serves special kindergarten-aged youngsters. The building also serves as headquarters for American Red Cross and Great Lakes Center for Youth Development and a MAPS/YMCA child care and preschool partnership. Because sufficient space exists within other MAPS buildings to house all K-12 students, Vandeenboom can now be considered for use by other programs.

Question: Is this grade alignment a question of Sandy Knoll vs. Graveraet?

Answer: Two groups have made recommendations to the Board of Education. MAPS Grade Alignment Committee recommends a K-4, 5-8 and 9-12 program with continued use of Sandy Knoll as an elementary building. Graveraet would house other K-12 education-compatible programs. The *Parent Committee* is recommending a K-5, 6-8 and 9-12 alignment, utilizing Graveraet along with Cherry Creek and Superior Hills as elementary buildings. That group recommends closure of Sandy Knoll.

Question: What facility structures are required for special education students?

Answer: Special Education is a broad term pertaining to over 580 MAPS enrolled children. Facilities range from resource rooms within each school to highly-specialized structures complete with medical equipment and in-room therapy capacities. Suffice it to say special education programs require sizeable numbers of classrooms and ancillary facilities to meet needs of students aged 0-27.