

Reorganization of the Two Elementary Schools in Somersworth, New Hampshire

Parent Forum

Idlehurst = Prek-2nd

Maple Wood= 3rd-5th

Why this configuration?

First, the proximity of Maple Wood to the middle school lends itself to a natural transition from 5th to 6th grade. The administration will be working to put activities in place throughout the year to get the 5th graders ready to transition to middle school successfully (walking trail between schools, field trips, buddy programs, attending Middle School community days, concerts, etc). Second, Idlehurst was specifically designed to meet the needs of smaller children including the size of the classrooms, equipment, a fenced in playground designed for the developmental needs of small children, furniture, and having bathrooms in every classroom.

Will the start and finish times remain the same?

The administration is working with the bus company to create a staggered start time/finish time. This would allow two separate runs, which would mean fewer kids on each bus and would allow parents time to get to each school for pick up or drop off.

How would we prepare students for a possible transition?

Each school would collaborate to create opportunities for children to visit the school he or she would be attending. These visits would include building tours, meeting staff, having lunch at the school, and participating in activities based on team building. In the future, common events with both schools would be utilized alternating the location of the event so all students became familiar with the layout of both schools. In addition, guidance counselors at both schools would play a vital role in preparing students and answering questions.

Why is the district considering this?

The driving force for this initiative is based on the inequalities that have evolved between the two schools, which include:

1. Staff to student ratios- There are bubbles of students in each building that create unequal staff to student ratios and large class sizes.
2. Difference in specials offered- Idlehurst has a "Health" and "Computer" special. Maple Wood does not offer those specials due to staff restrictions.
3. Instructional resources- Idlehurst receives more federal funding because of the amount of students that receive "Free and Reduced Lunch". This money is used to employ reading/math tutors that work with struggling students. Maple Wood receives a small amount of funding, resulting in less services being offered to struggling students.

*Free and Reduced Funding is based on a Federal Formula

4. Student diversity- Due to staff restrictions, all students who qualify under “English as a Second Language” go to school at Idlehurst.
5. Space issues-There is a need for an autism and behavioral program at both schools. Maple Wood has the space to create these programs but Idlehurst does not under the present configuration.
6. Teacher diversity- Idlehurst has four teachers per grade level and Maple Wood has two. If the schools reorganized, this would create a team of six teachers allowing more collaboration and the ability to specialize instruction.

Another consideration is busing. Presently, the buses are crowded and the bus routes are long. The administration and the bus company are presently in talks to create two separate bus runs, which would decrease the amount of students on each bus as well as shorten bus runs.

What about the “personality” of each building? Will that get lost?

Administration acknowledges the history in each building and they will work to protect the identity of each school. Since some staff will switch buildings, this will help unite the two-school communities.

This process seems fast, why not wait a year?

The SAU team looked into other schools in New Hampshire that have moved to this configuration. Other considerations such as bus routes/populations, class sizes, resources and personnel at both schools, state testing results, and preliminary cost analysis for a reorganization were researched. The team wanted to be well educated and well informed on all the moving parts before presenting the possibility to the school board. It is the belief of the SAU team that reorganization could successfully occur in the 2018-2019 school year, which means students would start benefitting from the configuration. The team also recognizes that a decision will be made by the May 8th school board meeting in order to give parents and students time before school ends and the summer to get ready for the reorganization.

Has this type of configuration been successful in other districts?

Presently, the state of New Hampshire has over a dozen schools that use this type of configuration. Some of these districts are similar to Somersworth and some are not. Data provided by the Department of Education, show that most of the students from these schools are at or above proficient in reading and math.