

# Summary of Feedback and Questions about the Middle School Transition Plan



**Board of School Directors Business Meeting  
Monday, June 14, 2021**

Presented by: Kristina Ayers Paul, Ph.D.

With LMSD Administrative Response from Dr. Alexis McGloin and Mrs. Sarah Stout



# Approach to Gathering Community Feedback

**Proposal:** The LMSD Administration presented the Middle School Transition Plan to the Board of School Directors on Monday, May 10, 2021. The proposed plan is to open the new middle school at full capacity in Fall 2021, and to transition all 5<sup>th</sup> graders across the District into their respective middle schools.

**Collection of Feedback:** Community members were invited to submit feedback using a digital form. The form was open for three weeks (May 11 through June 2) and offered an opportunity to: (1) submit questions and (2) express perspectives on the proposed plan.

*This was not a survey designed to measure support.*

*It was a tool for gathering input from those who were motivated to contribute their voice.*



# Responses Received (N=434)

## Characteristics of the submissions:

- **About half (n=210) addressed the transition plan directly.** The others focused on related topics, such as attendance boundaries for the new school and the plan to incorporate grade 5 into middle school across the district.
- **About 85% of the submissions (n=368) said “yes” to having a student in the household who is currently in grades 3-6.** For perspective, there are currently 2,744 students in grades 3-6.
- The most heavily represented school communities were **Penn Wynne Elementary (119 households represented) and Bala Cynwyd Middle School (75 households represented).**



# Making Sense of the Responses

Responses were analyzed for common themes, which were summarized in a report for Administrative and Board review. The full set of un-edited submissions were also provided.

## ***Key Question 1: What would you like the Administration and Board of School Directors to know about the proposed plan?***

Four types of responses, which will be detailed in the next set of slides:

- Reasons for supporting the transition plan
- Reasons for concern with the transition plan
- General concerns related to the new middle school
- Suggestions and Requests

## ***Key Question 2: What questions do you have about the proposed plan?***

Responses have been grouped according to topic, and the LMSD Administration will respond accordingly.



# What would you like the Administration and Board of School Directors to know about the plan?

## Key Reasons for Supporting the Transition Plan

- i. It relieves overcrowding immediately.
- ii. All students and families will make the change at the same time.
- iii. The plan keeps households with multiple middle schoolers together.
- iv. It accelerates opportunities to build school community as a fully-functioning 5-8 building.
- v. Out of all of the transition plans, it is the most cost-effective.

*I think the plan to fully move into the new school makes sense. Open at full capacity and move everyone together. The transition year will be the same for all and all families can adjust in the same year.*

Parent/Guardian - Belmont Hills, Grade 3

*Thank you, Board! I fully support opening this wonderful new school at full capacity. I'm delighted that my current PWES 5th grader will have the opportunity to attend this new school. While, I'm sure there are challenges ahead, I know LMSD will adapt and address student needs.*

Parent/Guardian - Penn Wynne, Grade 5



# What would you like the Administration and Board of School Directors to know about the plan?

## Key Reasons for Supporting the Transition Plan (cont.)

*This new plan is a vast improvement over the other proposed plans, and we support it unconditionally. We commend the Board for developing it. Other prior plans seemed wasteful and would have unnecessarily prolonged overcrowding, but this plan seems perfect.*

Parent/Guardian – Gladwyne, Grade 5

*We agree with the plan as outlined. We believe moving all of the students at once would benefit the new school/friends/environment as well as give more room to the existing 2 middle schools.*

Parent/Guardian - Penn Wynne, Grade 4)

*I support this plan because it seems to be the most efficient way to alleviate crowding at all schools and build community in the new building faster.*

Respondent without grade 3-6 student

*As you know better than anyone, you can't possibly make everyone happy. This plan is obviously well thought out and the best solution to a complicated situation.*

Parent/Guardian - Bala Cynwyd, Grade 6



# What would you like the Administration and Board of School Directors to know about the plan?

## Key Reasons for Concern About the Transition Plan

- i. Too many transitions for current 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders.
- ii. Implementation too soon after the tumultuous year of 2020-2021.
- iii. Playing fields will not be ready in time for school opening.

*I am concerned that this plan will require too many transitions of current 5th and 6th graders following what has already been a difficult time. It will also impact students left behind, not just those who will change middle schools.*

Parent/guardian - Cynwyd, Grade 5

*Given the inconsistency of the last year and a half, you're really putting these kids through a lot of unnecessary drama in middle school. Making new friends, leaving friends, making more new friends. It will be a disaster for these kids socially and being half in and half out of a community is not good for anyone.*

Parent/Guardian

Penn Wynne Elementary, Grade 5

*The plan seems to ignore what the current 6th graders have gone through due to COVID. Their 5th grade year end was devoid of most of the usual fanfare of graduating to Middle School. They were either fully or partially virtual for 6th grade. Will spend one year in one school and then abruptly moved again for 8th grade and then abruptly split again for high school. Give these poor kids a break.*

Parent/guardian

Gladwyne Elementary, Grade 4  
Welsh Valley Middle School, Grade 6



# What would you like the Administration and Board of School Directors to know about the plan?

## Key Reasons for Concerns About the Transition Plan (cont.)

We are excited for the new middle school, but our support was based on the school board's original plan that our younger daughter and her 10-year-old classmates would have the opportunity to acclimate to middle school with a smaller subset of students in Fall '22. Since the field issue will likely not be resolved by then, an extra year to build fields is much more equitable than asking 7th and 8th graders to leave school early to travel back to their former middle school to play sports.

Parent/Guardian

Penn Wynne Elementary, Grade 3 & 5

These PWES and GES children will need to transfer too many times and during a difficult enough time during their development. Why wouldn't you stick to the original plan of starting the new middle school with only 5th and 6th graders that are transitioning anyway and then add a new class each year? By year 3 it will be full capacity. Please think of these children's social development and anxiety before thinking of your own agenda

Parent/guardian

Gladwyne Elementary, Grade 5

We are extremely concerned about the impact this proposed move will have on our son from a social emotional and educational perspective. Due to COVID, he has not had the chance to develop regular social relationships with classmates and school staff during his 6th grade year at BC, but has worked admirably to do so. He needs stability in his educational environment, not more upheaval for his 8th grade year.

Parent/Guardian

Bala Cynwyd Middle School, Grade 6



# What would you like the Administration and Board of School Directors to know about the plan?

## Concerns about the Change, Generally

1. Fifth grade students in the middle school environment
2. PWES attendance area as a feeder school for the new middle school:
  - a. Commute times, time in transit
  - b. Impact on students' sleep due to earlier pick-up times than others in the District, particularly if earlier start times are adopted for middle schools
3. The attendance areas for high school, which will split the new middle school student body
4. The environmental impacts of the new school and transition plan (e.g. field space, emissions)

*I am very opposed to moving 5th graders up the middle school and exposing them any earlier than necessary to 6th-8th grade cultures. I think we are taking their innocence away and also putting them in a situation they are not yet equipped to handle.*

Respondent without current 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grader

*My children attend PWES and I am concerned about the distance they will travel and the time it will take to get to the new middle school. This concern is increased if/when the start time of middle school is shifted to an earlier start.*

Respondent without current 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grader



# What would you like the Administration and Board of School Directors to know about the plan?

## General Concerns (cont.)

*I would like to know how the district is going to manage busing students who live in PW to the new middle school without these kids spending an inordinate amount of time on the school bus. What is the final plan for athletics; how is that realistically going to work when it is likely going to be dependent on ADDITIONAL busing...and wasted time.*

Parent/Guardian - Penn Wynne, Grade 5

*As the parent of a current 5th grader in PWES, living near City Line, I am very concerned about long bus commutes to a school at the other side of the district, and also the impact on our ability to engage with afterschool programs. I am also concerned about the impact of school start times on this choice. I just wish there was a middle school nearer where we lived.*

Parent/Guardian - Penn Wynne, Grade 5

*I am concerned about the unnecessary traffic that will be caused by bussing students from Penn Wynne to Villanova. I am also concerned about the impact this plan has on the canopy.*

Respondent without current 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grader

Our child would be pulled from WV and many of her friends for 8th grade and sent to the new school. She will not be able to graduate from her home school. Breaking bonds with other children at an important age for emotional growth. Then this plan pulls her apart from new friends AGAIN for 9th Half going to Harriton and half going to LM. No child should be subject to this much change.

Parent/Guardian  
Welsh Valley Middle School, Grade 6

*I understand concern with overcrowding, but I'm very concerned whether 5th graders will be developmentally ready to join middle school. What is the science behind this model?*

Respondent without current 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grader



# What would you like the Administration and Board of School Directors to know about the plan?

## Suggestions and Requests

1. Consider redistricting.
2. Consider delaying the transition to:
  - a. provide distance between COVID schooling and another transition.
  - b. wait until the field spaces are also available.
3. Consider giving choice for those living in the new middle school attendance boundaries:
  - a. Choice of whether or not to stay at current middle school instead of switching in Fall 2021.
  - b. Choice of which high school to attend after middle school.
4. Consider changing the plan to make the new middle school a different type of school (e.g. 5/6 center; 7<sup>th</sup> elementary school).



# What questions do you have about the plan?

## Categories:

1. Decision-making processes
2. Social and emotional supports for students during transition
3. Programming for the new middle school
4. Logistics of opening the new middle school
5. Districtwide impacts/changes



# What questions do you have about the plan?

## About the Decision-Making Process for this Plan

- Who was involved in the process of making this recommendation?
- What factors were used to determine the recommendation?
- Why did the preferred plan change from earlier in the process, when it seemed that a phased-in approach would be taken?
- Was this plan selected for logistic reasons or is there an educational reason for the plan that was selected?



# What questions do you have about the plan?

## Social/Emotional Supports for Students

- In what ways, specifically, will LMSD support students through the transition from a social and emotional perspective? What will the community-building look like?
- How will students be supported with counseling and mental health services? Have counselors and psychologists been involved in the planning?
- In what ways will the special education department ensure that students with social difficulties are supported through this transition?
- How will 4<sup>th</sup> grade students be provided with a special, last-year-of-elementary-school experience in 2021-2022? Will the HSAs have additional support to extend special “final year” activities for both 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders during the 2021-2022 school year?
- How will 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade students be teamed in 2021-2022?



# What questions do you have about the plan?

## Programming

- Will the interdisciplinary programs like Artifacts, Waterbound, and Communique be available?
- Will the same clubs, languages, activities be available for students who switch from WVMS and BCMS to the new middle school?



# What questions do you have about the plan?

## Logistical Considerations

- What will happen if construction is delayed?
- What, specifically, is the plan for athletics, given the fields will not be ready?
- Will there be outdoor space *adjacent* to the building for physical outdoor activities during the school day?
- Transportation questions: How long will the bus rides be? When will the bus schedule be released? Will there be late buses? What actions will be taken if a bus ride takes more than 30 minutes, as routed?
- How will the new school be staffed?
  - Which BCMS and WVMS teachers will move to the new middle school?
  - Will the new middle school have a staff that is as equally experienced as the existing middle schools?
  - How can the quality of the new middle school teaching staff be guaranteed to equal to the “best-in-class” teachers at the existing middle schools?



# What questions do you have about the plan?

## District-wide Impacts/Changes

- **About 5<sup>th</sup> graders in middle school:**
  - Will/how will 5<sup>th</sup> grade students be kept separate from 8<sup>th</sup> grade students? (e.g. classrooms, lunches, buses)
  - Will recess and physical activity periods be available for 5<sup>th</sup> graders as they currently are in elementary?
  - Will afterschool childcare through Right At School be available to 5<sup>th</sup> graders in the middle school setting?
  - What athletic and extracurricular club opportunities will be available for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders?
- **About BCMS and WVMS:** Will the other two middle schools be renovated (inside and outside) to provide an equally updated educational environment? How will the schools be re-organized to accommodate a whole new grade level?
- **Start Times:** What time will the school day begin and end for middle school students? If new times are selected, when will they begin?
- **Full Day Kindergarten:** Will full-day kindergarten be available once the 5<sup>th</sup> graders are out of elementary buildings?



# Emergent Themes

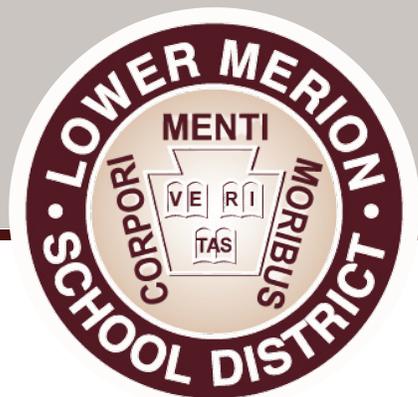
- Staffing
- Programming
- Social and Emotional Wellbeing
- Fields, Clubs, and Activities



## Mission of the 5-8 Middle School Committee

We dedicate ourselves to building relationships, cultivating curiosity, and developing intellectual independence.

Knowing our middle school experiences are more than a stepping stone to high school, we inspire and empower students to positively impact their communities, affirming the continued growth of adolescent identities.



# Transitioning to the New Middle School and Reimagined K-4 and 5-8 Student Experience

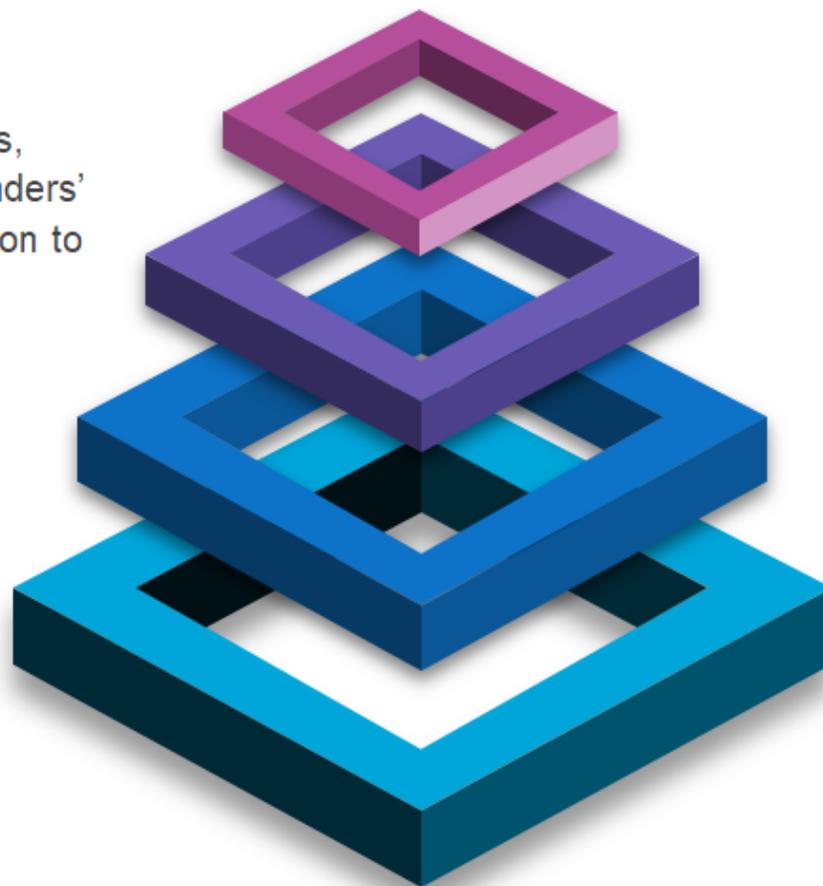
## The Building Blocks of Reimagined Middle School Learning Communities

### Building Relationships

Builds culture; Grows existing relationships; Ensures Collaborations, Learning Communities, Shared 'founders' experience, Common Vision & Mission to advance ideals of Strategic Plan

### Cultivating Curiosity

Shared reimagination and design thinking, advancing culture of inquiry targeted on developing our unique ideal and student-centered vision



### Developing Intellectual Independence

Organic and embedded opportunity for student leadership, ownership and voice in development of the new school culture and routines.

### Equity & Achievement

Greatest allocation of equitable resources to support rich programming, innovation, and vision of interdisciplinary learning that prioritizes enrichment, intervention and well-being.



# 5-8 Committee SEW Recommendations

## Social Emotional Wellbeing Recommendations:

- To the greatest extent possible, students should be scheduled with their team throughout the day.
- Each Gr. 5-8 school will convene a building level Social Emotional Learning (SEL) committee.
- Daily schedule to include Homeroom/Advisory period in order to systematically deliver programming and interventions to support students' success socially, emotionally and behaviorally.
- Create an Advisory Rotation Calendar for the Intervention/Enrichment block that provides the following new opportunities as a part of an I/E rotation that includes Mentoring and Peer Mediation and includes a daily Intervention/Enrichment period in order to facilitate the implementation of systematic interventions to ensure students' success both academically and social and emotionally.
- Assign students to a team member for homeroom to help build community. Homeroom should become culturally like a home base where there is belonging and collective responsibility. The schedule should include time to cultivate relationships within the community of learners.
- Within the curricular and extracurricular program, create and provide opportunities for social, emotional and physical well-being content and activities. Organize events that foster physical, social and emotional well-being of students, staff and the community.



# Fields, Clubs, and Activities

- The new Middle School will have tennis courts, a playing field and stadium, and a practice field on school grounds when the school opens in 2022.
  - Continue with combine sports teams based on interest
  - Ancillary fields at Gladwyne, the Proving Grounds
- A new Athletics and Clubs Subcommittee of the 5-8 committee will be created in the summer/fall.
  - Recommendation of the 5-8 Committee: *Create opportunities for students to participate in extracurricular clubs/activities during the school day as part of a rotation during the I/E period*
  - Clubs will primarily be consistent but evolve due to the culture of the school
  - Possible introduction of intermural sport to 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade