

Dear Trustees,

I write today to share my views on the 7-12 approach that we take at Chippewa. I do so as I believe strongly that it has been very beneficial to our students, and in the hopes that an integrated approach can be adopted regardless of the 3-1 or 3-2 scenario.

Different Approaches for 7-12 Model

Approach	Integrated One Building One School	Segregated School within a school	Isolated Middle school
Building	Shared	Some sharing	Separate Building
Timetable	Common	Separate	Independent
Cross panel CI	Always and easy to implement	Separate timetables create difficulty	Rare and difficult to implement
CDC access	As needed	unknown	Referral needed
Leadership opportunities	Plentiful for all grades.	Varies by grade.	Limited
Mentorship opportunities	Abundant	Limited	Limited

The integrated approach leads to improved:

- Transitions
- Continuity of teaching approaches
- Understanding of the strengths and needs of the other panel (Elementary/Secondary)
- Student behaviour
- Sense of belonging for secondary high risk students

Transitions

Students are already familiar with the building, routines, and expectations required of them for secondary school. Students have been in all areas of the building and feel more comfortable in their environment. Many secondary students have expressed gratitude for that comfort.

Teachers are also visible to students and can become familiar to them through shared clubs and cross panel coaching. Secondary teachers (especially in Math) often visit intermediate classrooms to get a sense of next year's students. When setting up sections for secondary, input can be sought from intermediate teachers.

Intermediate teachers are a great resource for secondary teachers for struggling students. Informal chats over lunch or in passing in the staff room or at the copier can help secondary teachers gain greater insight into student needs and special circumstances.

Continuity of teaching approaches

Teachers have the opportunity to discuss curriculum and see each other teach both formally and informally. Formally, teachers participate in CIs (Collaborative Inquiry) together with representation of each panel.

Teachers can also seek assistance easily by asking cross panel colleagues for resources, and common language or formats for labs, essays, assignments etc...

Informally, teachers pop-in to observe classrooms as they are passing by, discuss assignments in the photocopy room, lunch areas, or hallways. Teachers also have discussions with students working in common areas (halls, library, etc...). These opportunities present themselves naturally and lead to better continuity.

Understanding strengths and needs of other panel

Similarly, the above mentioned formal and informal opportunities also help staff and students to understand the strengths and needs of the other panel.

Staff meetings are another opportunity to get a window into the unique requirements of the other panel.

Student behaviour

Intermediate grades often bring a mix of hormones and change in home life. In an isolated environment, (as in k-8 schools, and 7-8 schools), intermediate students are the oldest and have a tendency to act "too cool for school". The integrated environment reminds intermediate students that they are still children, and lessens, if not eliminates, the sense of entitlement often prevalent in middle schools.

What I have observed in the various settings, is that the integrated approach keeps intermediate students young. They are more likely to spend time on age appropriate activities and seem to be in less of a hurry to grow up. They do not tend to act "too cool for school" because they know they are not "cool".

By the same token, secondary students see intermediate students behaviour, which in turn can inspire them to differentiate themselves by behaving more maturely.

Sense of belonging for secondary high risk students

Intermediate teachers are blessed with the opportunity to form strong bonds with high risk students in grades 7 and 8. These students are sometimes not even in our classes, but may be in clubs, on teams, or just a familiar student in the halls. These bonds often continue into secondary school. Secondary students often pop-by to visit caring intermediate teachers. We have become an important caring adult in these students lives, and continue to help them navigate their difficulties. We make a very significant difference for many students and are often able to improve student success.

In closing, I would like to mention that these past years teaching at Chippewa with an integrated approach, have been the most rewarding of my career. I feel that our model has allowed me to grow considerably as a teacher, and more importantly I feel that I make a tremendous difference in the lives of our students.

When making your decision about 3:1 or 3:2, please bear in mind the tremendous success we have at Chippewa and choose an option that will allow that success to continue. Please also remember that your "stakeholders" are under a tremendous amount of stress and that staffing and program decisions should be made as early as possible to facilitate a smooth transition and minimize stress and uncertainty on students, staff, and parents.

Thank you,

Robyn Colvin-Smith

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