



BLUESTEM UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Bluestem High School

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*Joel Lovesee - Principal
Brian Minks - Asst. Prin.*

Bluestem Middle School

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*Joel Lovesee - Principal
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Bluestem Elementary School

501 Mill Road
Leon, KS 67074
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Debbie Webster - Principal

December 30, 2010

Good afternoon,

I hope all of you have had a relaxing break and a Merry Christmas. I wanted to provide you with a short review of the information that I presented to the USD 205 Board of Education at their December meeting. My presentation was titled, School Structure Concept Presentation: A look at a more effective and efficient configuration of the 7-12 buildings. There are 2 goals that have driven this proposal forward, they are to provide the best possible education to our students and be able to sustain that quality of education if there are additional budget cuts in the future.

Thinking along those lines lets take a look back at what changes we have made over the past year. There were 4 major cuts besides the 4-day school week that actively impact the way we run the middle school and high school. Those were the absorption of 1 Middle school teaching position, 1 high school teaching position, 1 district testing coordinator, and 1 school administrator.

To be able to share staff, manage daily tasks more efficiently, and move middle school and high school students between buildings for additional elective options we formed some major transitional changes, they include similar rules and procedures, 7-period bell schedule, combined budgets and spending accounts, and a combined 7-12 site council.

But even with these transitions to a more efficient system we still have deficiencies that impact our students' education. Some of those deficiencies are administrator availability, slower communication between staff, counselor availability, and minimal student options for elective classes.

On the lines of goal number 2, sustaining a quality education for our students, looking at our district there are a few aspects of our staffing and student enrollment that will be a major concern in the near future that can be reduced if we are proactive on our approach towards these issues.

With the smaller class sizes in the elementary school moving up to the middle school we will be rescheduling from 3 sections of every required class to 2 sections. This will give our middle school staff either 1 or 2 open hours that they will not have a class. We currently have used these open periods to offer remedial classes and electives at the high school level. Another concern is that we offer too many sections of similar classes at the high school bringing our student teacher ratio to 9.3 to 1. We have large classes in the required courses but very small classes in our elective course offerings; some of those hours could be better utilized by providing more electives to our middle school students. This rescheduling is currently underway to provide the most elective offerings and balanced required class sizes to both the middle school and high school next year. Unfortunately for this to happen, we will have both the high school students and middle school students going back and forth between both buildings for classes almost every hour of the day. For safety and security reasons alone, it is justified to house all the 7-12 students in the high school building and then use the middle school building for supplementary duties.

Provided are some of the benefits of a combined 7-12 building. We would have consistent policies and procedures for both staff and students. More effective support services, we would now always have an administrator and counselor in the building. The school nurse, resource officer, and technology coordinator will only have to make usual rounds in two buildings instead of three. We will maximize course scheduling opportunities for our students. We would provide a smoother transition from middle school to high school, which are always challenging years in an adolescent's life. And a major reason, we will increase school unity and spirit by providing quality young adult role models for our younger students.

Additional benefits for this transition would be the uses for the middle school building. We would be able to create a project based learning academy. Several people in the district have been studying this type of alternative education and we are ready to move forward with this endeavor, the main set back has been having a stand-alone location for this school within a school. Using several of the classrooms in the middle school building, we would be able to pilot the program with 12-20 students next school year. Along those lines, we would be able to have an administrator also in that building by moving central office to a truly centralized location. This would benefit all three buildings currently on our campus. And finally, we would move the high school weight room to the middle school band room and gym. This would provide more room for the strength and conditioning classes that would allow more students the opportunity to take the class. All regular physical education classes would be ran out of the high school gym.

This has been a lengthy email but I wanted you to have a solid overview of my intentions. There have been numerous concerns and questions concerning the future of our district that has kept this topic moving forward but as I analyze the facts in front of me, I see this as being the best possible option for the education of our students.

Please share this information with any staff, parents, or patrons. Mr. Minks and myself would be happy to listen to any questions, comments, or concerns. The best way to reach me is by email or feel free to come and discuss this issue at the next site council meeting on January 10 @ 6:00 pm in the BHS library.

Thank you for your support and have a Happy New Year!

Joel R. Lovesee, 7-12 Principal

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