

Since the announcement of next year's changes in how we organize our classrooms, a number of similar questions have been asked. In order to facilitate our dialogue, I would like to respond to those questions in this document.

### Will students have the same teacher for all of their subjects: Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, Science, and Bible?

Yes. Students will continue to go to their "specials" classes as homerooms as well. These classes include art, library, music, physical education, and Spanish. Time in the computer lab will be integrated into the thematic units of study.

### Will my child have opportunities to mingle with students not in their homerooms?

We will be looking at alternative cafeteria arrangements as well as continuing the practice of recess by grade levels. It will be important in the cafeteria to manage the desire of students to choose their seats with the varying abilities of younger children to be orderly and appropriate in this less structured environment. In addition we will encourage grade level activities including spirit days, field trips, rewards, and special events.

### How will homeroom groupings be made up?

Homeroom groupings will intentionally be made up of the range of learners and achievers, along with a good mix of boys and girls and personalities.

### How will individual learning needs be addressed?

Differentiated instruction, which we have been learning about and practicing since the 2000-01 school year, is driven by the premise that children should be provided with multiple means for meeting an instructional goal. When students are provided with choices as to how to respond or work through a unit of study, they are likely to choose related to their interests and strengths. In addition, teachers will be making greater use of utilizing both recall level and higher order thinking questions and activities in their daily practice. Through the use of class and teacher designed rubrics, students can contract for their response level, allowing them to participate in the setting of their learning goals and the resulting assessment. Students will always be encouraged and challenged to perform their best.

As needs present themselves, teachers and the elementary principal will create strategies to meet the needs of highly capable students and struggling students. Self-contained classroom formats do not mean that there will never be pull out experiences for some children. But it does make it much easier for these pull out experiences to be of short duration for the purpose of accomplishing specific learning goals. It will not be difficult to move children back into the classroom when goals have been met, or to form new groups when the need arises.

This spring we will be participating with Quakertown Christian and Christopher Dock in taking a careful look at the learning support services we provide and making use of a consultant to advise us in maximizing our resources. We will continue to provide services from the learning support personnel employed by Penn View, as well as, reading and math specialists from the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit.

The needs of our most capable students are also of concern to us. Several of our teachers have particular interest in providing for these students. Together we will look at designing particular experiences for our most capable students. This may take the format of after school experiences.

An exciting provision we have made in preparation for this change is the purchase of hundreds of books to enhance classroom libraries with both fiction and nonfiction books at all the needed reading levels. As each child is able to choose and read texts in their reading range, they will make continued progress in their use of reading strategies.

In self-contained classrooms, teachers will also be able to plan for the integration of subjects. The reading and writing assignments that relate to social studies, science, math, and Bible will be a part of the language arts curriculum. One subject area can serve one another, furthering real world connections.

### How will students meet eligibility requirements for middle school?

Middle school personnel recognize that changes in the elementary school impact them as well. One of the thoughts that has emerged is a performance model. After an appropriate length of time, sixth grade students who qualify for the honors experience in various subjects would be regrouped.

### In summary

A great deal of communal thought has gone into the plans we are making for the next school year. We have read and talked about the trends in educational research. One resource we have made use of is from the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development. This highly respected professional organization has consolidated current research and the following synopsis is provided related to heterogeneous classroom groupings and their management.

Successful teachers form instructional groups within the classroom that fit students' academic and affective needs in a variety of ways. These teachers:

- Use whole group instruction when introducing new concepts and skills.
- Form smaller groups as needed to make sure all students learn thoroughly. Then place students according to individual achievement levels for short-term learning activities, avoiding underplacement.
- Monitor their instructional approaches, so that students in lower groups still receive high-quality instruction.
- Review and adjust groups often, moving students when achievements levels change.
- Form small groups for instruction and practice in the use of higher-order thinking skills.
- Make use of heterogeneous cooperative learning groups, structuring these so that there are both group rewards and individual accountability.
- Set up peer tutoring and peer evaluation groups to use time effectively and to ensure that students receive the assistance they need to learn successfully.
- Ensure that learning groups exhibit gender, cultural, ability-disability, and socioeconomic balance.

In the area of integrated instruction the research summary indicates that teachers:

- Use thematic units as the organizing principle for instruction in agreed upon areas.
- Include student input when determining themes around which to organize instruction.
- Engage students in projects requiring knowledge and skill across several traditional content areas.
- Make use of other resource, including hands-on materials, in addition to textbooks.
- Organize themselves into teams to plan and deliver instruction.
- Use performance assessments that allow students to demonstrate knowledge and skills from several traditional subject-matter areas.

As we continue our journey together, let's continue to keep the dialogue going! Continue to pray for us during these wonderful challenging times!

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