

Wellesley Middle School Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)
Minutes from the January 22, 2016 Meeting

President's Welcome by Andra Jensen:

Welcome and thank you for coming out. we have a great meeting planned today. We are going to jump right into so that we have lots of time for questions.

Speaker: Kate Mahoney, Head of Guidance at the Wellesley Middle School

[Please see powerpoint presentation included at the end of the minutes.]

Overview of course transitions — every year from 6th grade until senior year, students will pick courses for the next year. In the middle school, many of the classes are selected for them but students get to choose electives. All of the dates for course selection can be found on the webpage of the WMS Guidance Department. All course selection will be done on line and we will send home directions on how to register on line. We hope to put up a video on our webpage on how to register for courses. Please look at the webpage for more information especially dates/deadlines.

- Course selection happens each year at WMS; school counselor work with the kids to help them with this process; parents should call their children's counselor if they have questions.
- 6th grade to 7th grade transition process
 - Counselors will visit classrooms and explain to kids the change from house model to cluster model. (For those parents unfamiliar, the cluster model means students in a particular cluster share the same teachers for their core subjects as other kids in their cluster but they have different students in their actual class. They do not travel with their homeroom and do not have same kids in each class.) They also discuss foreign language with the 6th graders as kids start taking foreign language in 7th grade. There is also more independence in 7th grade especially with respect to lunch tables and open seating, In 6th grade, there are assigned tables.
 - Electives/Specials — In 7th grade, kids are required to take lab (guided study time), art, music and industrial technology. But they are given choices with respect to electives in the performance arts area. Electives are all in the performing arts. Options: drama, orchestra, band, chorus or a combination.
- 7th grade to 8th grade transition process
 - In March, counselors visit classrooms and discuss with students the change from the cluster model to teams. The team model gets the kids ready for high school. There are 200 kids in each team and math is leveled for the first time in 8th grade. In addition, there are many more electives that the kids can choose in 8th grade. There are no required electives in 8th grade. There are lots of options — painting, jewelry, woodworking, etc — and the kids get to select which electives they want to take and they are excited about making this choice.
- 8th grade to 9th grade transition process
 - Lots of work done to prepare the kids for this transition. Counselors spend a whole period with the kids talking to them about the transition, scheduling, course selection at the high school. Counselors also have a 20 minutes individual meeting with each of the students (this meeting usually happens in March).

Speaker: Nancy Cali, Head of the Math Department at the Wellesley Middle School

- Brief overview of math transitions from 6th to 7th. For many kids, this is the biggest jump. For the first time in 7th grade, kids find that math is not always easier.
 - *What to do for your kids to help them with this transition?* (1) encourage them know their teachers' schedules and go and talk to their teachers to get help. (2) If your kids have not already established routines for studying and doing homework at home, help them do so. (3) Engage in conversations with the kids about what they are learning as this helps them work and develop their communication skills which is important in math.
- Brief overview of math transition from 7th to 8th grade. In 8th grade, students choose their own level of math. Algebra is taught in 8th grade and there are three levels. We provide kids with a series of questions to determine the correct math level for them. [Note: A copy of these FAQs is included at the end of these minutes.]
 - Levels are not an indication of your child's intelligence; rather levels are a measure of the child's current level of achievement and desire. Typically, kids who succeeded at honor level 8th grade math (8R) are comfortable with uncertainty and frustration; can think abstractly, have mastered computation, are able and willing to communicate orally and in writing, and are unafraid to seek help. Those who succeed in 8R are typically willing to raise their hand and ask for help. They really understand that their ideas can be validated by logical reasoning and do not need teachers to tell them they are correct. These kids are typically able to study independently without lots of outside support and tutoring. We, the teachers, will share with the students what level we think is the right level for them. We also ask the kids to tell us what level they believe is right for them. Parents will be told what has been recommended for their child (Please seek out your child's teacher if you have a question about the recommendation.) Students/parents can override the teachers recommendation. It is your choice to override the recommendation. We do find that where the decision was made to override, often those earn lower grades at the higher level of math. For some kids, this is fine and for others kids, they really panic because they have not seen a B or C grade before. If your child would react this way, I would strongly encourage you not to override the recommendation.
 - A student can change out of 8R (honor math) if they decide it is not the right place for them but only if there is room in other math level. In addition, this change can impact their entire schedule and impact other courses. It can be disruptive.

We love teaching math to your kids and hope that they enjoy it. It is much more important that kids take math each year rather than reaching a specific level of math by the end of their senior year.

Questions:

What is the break down between kids taking honors math and not in 8th grade? It is usually a 50/50 split — usually fewer kids in the higher level but there is usually a significant number of override of the recommendation in the 8th grade.

What are the math options from 6th to 7th grade? No choice. There is one math level taught in 7th grade.

Can you post the FAQs? Yes [Note: The FAQs are included at the end to these minutes.]

What is the main difficulty in transition from 6th to 7th grade? level of abstraction and the self-advocacy needed by the kids.

[Comment: Russian math and courses like it are good at teaching kids how to do computations but they do not explain how number and operations work. That skill is not developed so doing these type of courses does not necessarily mean child will be recommended for honors math.]

What changes from 8th grade to 9th grade? In 9th grade, the choices for math are geometry are three different levels — honor, College Prep (CP) and Advanced College Prep (ACP).

For 6th grade kids taking 7th grade math, what do they do in 8th grade? For those few kids, in 7th grade they take 8R (honors math) and as 8th graders, they will be placed in a separate geometry class.

What if you do not take 8R (honors math), does it limit the child later on? It is possible to change math levels from 8th grade to 9th grade and also from 9th grade to 10th grade but harder harder thereafter. To go from 8th grade math (non honors level) to 9th grade honors, it will require the student to do some extra studying because they will be missing some topics that were not covered in their math class. It is not an irrevocable decision.

Do all kids take Physics? All of the students take Physics in 9th grade. It is strongly recommended that for kids who want to take honors physics that they should take 8R (honors math). But even if you do not take 8R, it is still possible to take honors physics. You should talk to the teachers.

Speaker: Tim Eagan, Head of Classical and Modern Languages at WMS and WHS

- The transition from 6th to 7th grade requires student to make a choice about which language to study. Students have the option to take one of five languages: French, German, Mandarin Chinese, Latin and Spanish.
- Language is a major subject in 7th grade and meets every day. It is a core subject and it is important for kids to understand that it is a core subject — they will get homework, quizzes and tests.
- You can help your children with their study of language by asking them question; checking teacher websites which are good and helpful. Ask your child to explain what they learned.
- We are teaching students in a way that will help them be proficient in a language.
- Typical sequence for foreign language: grade 7 and 8 are equal to one year of language and the kids move to year 2 of the same language at the high school.
- 7th and 8th grade language class are the equivalent of one year of foreign language at the high school; the curriculum and pacing at the high school is much more challenging and fast-paced. 9th grade is Year 2 of the foreign language. 9th grade foreign language is a transition and it takes time. Please talk to us if you need support to help your child. Sometimes kids are asked to repeat year 1 of foreign language if they need a little extra time.
- The question sometimes is asked whether a student should change the foreign language at the HS. The answer is that it depends. Most competitive colleges wants fullest sequence of study — minimum of 2 years.
- At the high school, Spanish 1 is sometimes over enrolled and that means kids cannot always get into it. Typically, is it upper class students who are not able to get into Spanish 1. If a class is under enrolled, we cannot run it. When that happens, we communicate the information to parents and counselors so that they are aware of it.
- At the high school, there is an alternative path for Spanish. For students who need the slower pace and who will be ready to take Spanish 3 in 12th grade, they can take Introduction to Spanish and then Advanced Introduction to Spanish. In addition, there is also an alternative path for Spanish at the high school for students who are only going to take two years of the language — Spanish A and Spanish B.
- For those interested in more than one foreign language, it is hard to schedule two language as a freshman; it is easier to do after freshman year.
- We have travel programs at the high school:

- French Exchange Program with Lycée Ste-Marie, Lyon
- German Exchange Program with Friedrich Hecker
- Kids who are part of this exchange program go to these program for three weeks and then we host kids from those cities here in Wellesley for three weeks.

Questions:

Any thoughts on having a Spanish Exchange Program? Yes. As soon as I have a Spanish teacher who is willing to do it, we will. The reality is that most of the Spanish teachers have young children so it is hard for them to leave for three weeks. Hopefully, this will happen in the future.

Is there a limit on the number of students per language class in 7th grade? Yes, but we have never had to turn a child away at the middle school and kids almost always get first choice of a language.

Given the fact that we have a Spanish program at Sprague and Hardy, will there be language in 6th grade? Yes, we are in the planning stage and it will happen but we do not have any information to provide to you yet as we are working on it.

When will 6th grade foreign language program start? 3 years from now —when we have the 5th grade kids entering the middle school who would have had language in the elementary school.

If there is a student who speaks a foreign language at home, is there an option at the middle school for them take an advance language? No, not at the middle school, but this is available at the high school because we have more flexibility of because of the courses available.

If you have further questions, please contact Mr. Eagan at the following email — eagant@wellesleyps.org — or call him at 781-446-6290 x. 4619

Speaker: **Pete Ritter, Instructional Technology Specialist (District)**

- Serves as a Instructional Technology Specialist. In this capacity, he works with teachers and helps them with use technology. He also works on the 1:1 iPad program at WMS. Next year all of the kids at the middle school will have their own iPads.
- He is also working on BYOL (bring your own laptop) Program for the high school. School Committee, however, is looking to delay the BYOL program at the HS. Unfortunately, he does not have more information to share about it; this is just what he has been told. As a result, it will not be mandatory for each student at the high school to have a laptop but we hope that kids will bring them in.
- He is also working on CANVAS, which is a learning management system used teachers to distribute homework assignments, receive assignments from students, give tests, etc. We have been piloting CANVAS and right now we still have a number of teachers taking courses on how to use CANVAS. Only about 30/40% of teachers at the high school using CANVAS right now. CANVAS is essential if we are going to continue the 1:1 program at the high school. It is also good for kids to have exposure to CANVAS as they will use it (or something similar to it) in college.
- The learning management system used at the middle school is GOOGLE Classroom , which is a more simple form of a learning management system.
- There will be an upcoming iPad parent night meeting so there will be an opportunity for those conversation.

Questions:

As students transition from iPads to computers, is there a formal class for kids to learning typing/ keyboarding? No [Note: Parent in the audience relayed that they are told at the high school

meeting that there is a keyboarding class that students can take at the high school and it is recommended that students take this class in the 9th grade.]

Will current 6th graders, keep same device they current have for 7th grade? Yes

For those kids who have been on iPads at the middle school, will they transition to laptops at the high school? The thought is that at the high school, the students are producing, creating and doing the type of work that will require them to use laptop so that is what is recommended that students use at the high school.

Is a specific model or type of laptop recommend for the high school students? We did have some specifications ready to go when we had been planning on BYOL program. We will still put out those recommendations even though the program has been delayed.

If you have further questions, please contact Mr. Ritter at the following email — ritterp@wellesleyps.org — or call him at 781-446-6210 x. 5439

Speakers: Steve Favulli (Head of Guidance at Wellesley High School) and Kate Mahoney

8th Grade Transition to the High School

- Goal of this discussions not to be repetitive from what was discussed at the high school meeting last night. We are here to answer questions.
- Kate: I have worked with 8th graders for many years and learned that they all have a different perspective about going to the high school. We focus on the social emotion — this is a new experience for kids; new ; experience for kids to hear about the different levels that they are being recommended for at the high school; teachers are having conversations with the kids and asking them what they think they are best suited for; kids also talk to their peers and it can be hard for them if they are not recommended for levels that there friends are being recommended to take; the counselors talk to the kids about what they are interested in. Please reach out to your child's counselor if you son or daughter is struggling with their identity and their place with respect to the recommendations. 8th graders are really ready for the independence that comes with high school and it is an exciting time with them.
- Steve: Levels are really important and I have a big ask of parents. Please help your 8th graders to think about being their best selves and not competing with the best selves of others. We want to set this as the expectation for the 8th graders. We had the opportunity to hear from students last night who spoke about coming to the high school with a specific focus and then really taking advantage of other opportunities that were presented to them at the high school. It is okay for 8th graders to come in not ready for the most rigorous academic program at the high school. It is okay. Colleges understand that these kids are coming from Wellesley and will do well and the kids will be able to continue to study (at the college level) if they want to do so even if they did not take all of the most rigorous classes. Let's encourage our kids to be their best selves and not compare themselves to others. Kids love the independence at the high school but it is not a free for all. If you have questions, please reach out to the counselors at the high school. For the first half of freshman year, counselor's see your kids each week. All of yours kids will be cared for at the high school.

Questions:

How large are the advisory groups and guidance seminars?

Guidance seminar is a class that meets one time every seven days; there are 10 to 12 kids in the class and the numbers are kept small number to allow discussion. Your student will almost always

be scheduled to be in a guidance seminar with their assigned guidance counselor. (The Guidance Seminar has a fully developed curriculum - content ranges from figuring out building and getting acquainted to those at the high school to what does your GPA mean and how do grades affect it to how to figure out a 4 year plan of courses to understanding learning styles (visual vs. auditory) — the curriculum can be viewed on the high school website.

Advisory group happens every single day. The purpose of this group is to give the kids one additional adult in the building besides their guidance counselor to whom they can connect. There are only 10 to 12 kids in this group and it meets for 8 minutes after 2nd period each day. (Content of advisory group is really just about checking in — How are you? How is it going? How are you doing?) Kids have the same advisor for the entire 4 years at the high school. On the half day Wednesdays, the Advisory Group meets for an extended period. This is a good support system.

How do you structure advisory so kids gets same advisor all four years? Because advisory is always at the same time for all kids at the high school and in the same room so there is no conflict with other classes or commitments. It is held at the same time for all students at the high school.

Can you talk about the independence at the high school and the use of phones? No one rule at the high school on phones. Teachers set good expectations on the use of phones in class and will tell kids to put it away if it is not helpful in class. Teachers are vigilant and good at setting expectations (teachers can decide whether the phone can be used in class — varies from teacher to teacher)

Can kids have study halls and how many of them can they have? Hard to say what is the right number of study halls (they are called “directed research” at the high school). Some kids may have multiple days when they do not have to be at high school until 8:30 and some days they have to be there at 7:30am. A few directed research throughout their schedule is okay but not too many — they may have 8 directed research and that might not be too much — depends on child and their schedules and courses they are taking.

Will this be posted somewhere information about schedules and directed research? Yes, it will be provided to you. We do provide information to you slowly as we do not want overload parents.

At what point do you start to talk to kids about college and making sure they are on track? We do it early; it is the elephant in the room. We do not avoid it but we do not focus on it. For example, we figure out how kids learn and that helps us determine what type of courses are good for your child and that will impact their college choices. We start talking to kids in guidance about their four year plan as that will impact their next four year plan. (Lots done in Junior year) We want to make sure the kids are developmentally ready for those conversations.

What does the typical freshman schedule look like? There will be a link on the website to show parents what a typical schedule looks like but freshman take English, Math, World History, Physics with lab, Physical Education, Guidance Seminar, electives (1-2 classes) and then they have space available for directed research (study hall). Kids take a total of 42 blocks of classes at the high school. (Kate: How many electives a student takes is also dependent upon how busy your child is after school. If the kids have a packed schedule after school, it is good to have directed research to give them time to get homework done. Steve: Electives also have homework so taking more than 1 to 2 is hard because you need to find balance for the kids especially if they have after school activities. You want to make sure they have time to be successful rather than over extending them.)

How are students assigned to guidance and advisory? Guidance is done by alphabetical order and advisory is random assignment.

When will the curriculum be available? It will be on the link for freshman selection course —it is being worked on right now.

Work load question: if your child is recommended for all honors, how will the work load fit? Some kids are recommended for all honors classes and some kids can handle it. Those kids have developed a way to handle it. It is only a small percentage of kids who can handle all honors classes. Even if you think your child can handle it, you should really discuss it with their guidance counselor and ask why do you think your student can handle this schedule. If the student is having a tough time, we need to be aware of it and make adjustments. Even the recommendation is made for your child to take all honors, then it might make sense to take extra directed research and some easier electives.

What is the risk of not taking high level classes? Are there options to moving up? Yes. For example, a student may start at one level of math and are successful — you would have a conversation with teacher and figure out what your student needs to do to move up to another level. Talk to teachers. There is lots of flexibility to move up and not limited at all.

Are you recommending 2 electives? Yes — 2 electives that meet only three times per week to achieve balance.

[Note: Your child;s housemaster is the administrator assigned to your student and can help you deal with any issues.]

Kate: We encourage parents to talk to us especially after counselors have had a chance to meet with your 8th grader about classes and electives. We can then talk to you about the discussion we had with your child. Also, please remember that parents have to sign off on the course selection.

When will the recommendations for courses come in for 8th graders? Final recommendations are made by February 25th. Teachers should share this information with their students. Counselors will as talk to the kids about the recommendations.

Thanks to all our speakers and to parents for coming to the PTO Meeting.

These minutes are respectfully submitted by Connie Burton