

# Ypsilanti Community Schools

*COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUP*

*RECOMMENDATION*

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High Quality Teachers & Teaching

## Design and Configuration Recommendation 2

Date: March 14, 2013

## Recommendation

*The High Quality Teachers and Teaching Advisory Committee recommend the Board of Education adopt a Small Learning Community Configuration Model with the first focus of implementation at the secondary level.*

The High Quality Teachers and Teaching Advisory Committee recommend multiple options for small learning communities at the middle school and high school level. The number of small learning communities will range between 3-4 at the middle school level and 3-5 at the high school level.

We recommend the Board of Education develop in-depth planning to support the implementation of small learning communities through a work team process to include parents, staff and community members. The instructional model, theme, and partnerships for each learning community will be determined through the work team.

There will be non-negotiable instructional standards for all of the small learning communities in the district outlined by the instructional model committee on March 28.

Using the following assumptions we recommend that the program configuration committee move forward with making facility recommendations for the secondary programs:

- The numbers of students in each small learning community will range from 120-600 depending on the program focus and design.
- These learning communities may or may not be co-located in the same building.
- Athletic facilities and access is important for both middle and high school students

In addition to the recommendation we support one of the middle school small learning communities to be an international academy partnered with the Washtenaw International High School and the board's previous decision to support New Tech as one of the secondary instructional program/models.

## Recommendation Details

*Develop small learning communities as an instructional model for the secondary schools in the Ypsilanti Community School District. These small learning communities will exist as an interdisciplinary team of teachers who share a few hundred or fewer students in common for instruction, assume responsibility for their educational progress across years of schooling, and exercises maximum flexibility to act on knowledge of students' needs. Details, including programing, facility usage, and other specifications will be forthcoming at future board of education meetings.*

The committee realizes that this process will take time to transition from current modes of instruction and configuration to the ultimate vision. As work progresses to address research and move to sustainable educational paradigms embracing small learning communities, efforts to scaffold from current realities towards realized goals must be intentional and data/research driven.

The work team must be mindful of:

- Transitional periods in education, which according to research yield the greatest challenges for youth, and intentionally plan for the academic and personal needs of students as they transition through the secondary configuration
- Short Term and Long Term Planning - intentional planning for immediate needs in Year 1 (2013/2014) and long term big picture planning for growth phased in throughout the next 5 years
- Planning for the phasing in of SLCs – plan for SLC startup and growth in a way that allows for early success during implementation
- Interdisciplinary Teams - sharing the instructional responsibilities for a group of students over multiple years and creating opportunities for looping
- Advisory – an advisory structure that allows for students to build an advisory relationship with a consistent adult and peers over multiple years
- Flexible Entrance and Advancement - intentional planning for flexible entrance and advancement for students
- Exploration and Decision Making – intentional planning around supporting students early and over time in:
  - exploring interests
  - assessing and exploring personal areas of strength and areas for growth
  - short and long term personal goal setting
  - decision making around SLC best personal fit

**Critically important thinking that intersects with other Advisory Committee Work**

- Professional Development for SLCs – intentional, sustained, continuous, and meaningful to the needs of staff and students in the SLC
- Instructional Models
- Student Support Services – special education, RTI, assessing and acting on areas of student needs early
- Climate and culture - supporting a unified positive school-wide community as well as strong learning and social environments in all individual Small Learning Communities
- Co-Curricular - using a holistic district-wide approach to academics and co-curricular experiences where student needs, voice, empowerment, safety, physical and intellectual growth and are at the heart of every program.

## Process

*January 15th*

*The High Quality Teachers and Teaching Committee Facilitation Team met to prepare for organizing the work of this committee and began planning the Advisory Committee Kick Off Evening. Three subcommittees were formed: Teacher Criteria, Elementary Instructional Model, and Secondary Instructional Model.*

*January 22nd*

*The High Quality Teachers and Teaching Committee Facilitation Team met to continue to prepare for organizing the work of this committee and completed plans for the Advisory Committee Kick Off Evening including a walk-through of the event site.*

*January 24                      Advisory Committee Kick Off Evening*

*An overview of the advisory committee work and timelines was shared with interested stakeholders. The High Quality Teachers and Teaching Committee began its formal work. At the first meeting, feedback from the participants suggested that a majority of the group did not want the instructional model work for elementary and secondary levels to be split between two separate subcommittees. Chapter One from "Simply Better: Doing What Matters Most to Change the Odds for Student Success" by Bryan Goodwin was shared with all committee members.*

*January 28th*

*The High Quality Teachers & Teaching Facilitation Team attended the Facilitation Task Force Meeting. The purpose of these meetings is to keep all advisory groups informed of the committee work progress for all of the advisory committees and to discuss the overlap of work between advisory committees to ensure the seamless development of initiatives in Ypsilanti Community Schools.*

*January 29th*

*The High Quality Teachers & Teaching Facilitation Team met to prepare for the 1/31 Advisory Committee Meeting. The issue of separating the instructional work into two separate subcommittees was discussed. A decision was made to honor the feedback given and reorganize our subcommittee work into three areas: Teacher Criteria, K-12 Instruction, and Design and Configuration. Planning for the 1/31 Advisory Committee Meeting included a whole committee text based sharing activity with Chapter 1 from "Simply Better: Doing What Matters Most to Change the Odds for Student Success" by Bryan Goodwin followed by setting goals for subcommittee work.*

*January 31st*

*The second Advisory Committee Meeting was held at WiHi. Facilitators began the meeting with a discussion about the feedback received at the 1/24 and the changes made to the organization of the subcommittee work based on the feedback followed by a whole committee text based sharing activity with Chapter 1 from "Simply Better: Doing What Matters Most to Change the*

*Odds for Student Success” by Bryan Goodwin. The rich discussion around this text helped committee members build common understanding around the work the committee will need to complete together. The whole group session was followed by subcommittee meetings. The Design and Configuration Subcommittee focused first on generating lists from participants around Hopes and Fears for configuration at the secondary level and then moved into brainstorming and sharing thinking about the strengths and limitations of comprehensive configurations and small learning community configurations. Based on current success of small learning communities in both districts, the BOE decision to keep New Tech as part of secondary programming, and the discussion in the subcommittee consensus was building for a secondary design and configuration built around small learning communities. The subcommittee agreed to research small learning communities. Each member agreed to find research and share with the subcommittee prior to the 2/7 meeting. The 2/7 meeting would be devoted to discussion centered on our research inquiry. During the week of 2/4 subcommittee members shared research articles with each other. Minutes of the 1/31 were taken and the brainstormed charts became artifacts of this group’s work.*

#### *February 5th*

*The High Quality Teachers & Teaching Facilitation Team met to prepare for the 2/7 Advisory Committee Meeting. Facilitators discussed the work done in subcommittees on 1/31. The importance of keeping all of the subcommittees informed of the work being completed and providing opportunities for feedback to each other was discussed. A whole committee activity designed to elicit feedback for subcommittee work was planned for the beginning of the 2/7 Advisory Committee Meeting. Facilitators planned for subcommittee work focused on research.*

#### *February 7th*

*The third Advisory Committee Meeting was held at WiHi. The meeting began with a whole committee activity designed to collect feedback on subcommittee work. The Design and Configuration subcommittee shared artifacts from the lists created on 1/31 of Hopes/Fears and Strengths/Challenges for secondary design and configuration. Feedback was collected from three different small groups and taken to subcommittee for further discussion. Subcommittee discussed feedback given during the opening activity. One area of concern emerging from the feedback was the importance of wrap around services and co curricular activities. Many people believe that small learning communities should be surrounded by a shared comprehensive support structure. The subcommittee discussed research articles. One strong unifying idea in all of the research was the importance of implementation and having a sustained support structure in place to support teachers and teaching in the small learning communities. The consensus of the subcommittee work was to recommend designing and configuring the secondary level with small learning communities that share a comprehensive support structure. The focus of the 2/21 meeting would be on drafting the recommendation for the BOE.*

#### *February 9th*

*Research articles about small learning communities were shared with the BOE in an effort to give the board some information about this option. Articles shared included: ‘What Research Says About . . . Small Learning Communities” by Jane L. David from Educational Leadership*

*May 2008, Creating Excellent and Equitable Schools by Linda Darling-Hammond and Diane Friedlaender from Educational Leadership May 2008, and Dollars & Sense: The Cost Effectiveness of Small Schools by Barbara Kent Lawrence, Ed.D, Steven Bingler, and Barbara M. Diamond, J.D., Bobbie Hill, Jerry L. Hoffman, Craig B. Howley, Ed.D, David Rudolph, Ed.D., and Elliot Washor*

*February 11th*

*The High Quality Teachers & Teaching Facilitation Team attended the Facilitation Task Force Meeting. The meeting included time to get feedback from facilitators of other advisory committees. The feedback the Design and Configuration subcommittee received included ideas for getting student input, the importance of implementation, and questions about how co curricular and athletics would fit with small learning communities.*

*February 13th*

*The High Quality Teachers & Teaching Facilitation Team met to continue planning for upcoming meetings and recommendations due to the board.*

*February 15th*

*Jennifer Martin, Naomi Norman, and Debbie Swanson prepared a preview presentation for the Design and Configuration recommendation to be shared with the BOE on 2/18 during the YCS BOE meeting.*

*February 18th*

*Small Learning Communities preview presentation shared at the YCS BOE meeting. The research article ‘Small Learning Communities: Extending and Improving Practice’ by Diana Oxley from Personalized Learning, November 2005 was shared with the BOE and made available to the public. Parent, Meredith Schindler, volunteered to in the subcommittee at this meeting.*

*February 21st*

*The High Quality Teachers & Teaching Facilitation Team met to continue planning for upcoming meetings and recommendations due to the board. The Design and Configuration subcommittee met and collaboratively drafted a presentation to share with the BOE on 2/28 on the recommendation to design and configure small learning communities. The subcommittee began drafting the formal written recommendation executive summary. The subcommittee members agreed to review and give feedback on the presentation and the recommendation prior to submission to the BOE.*

*February 25th*

*Representatives from the Design and Configuration subcommittee attend the BOE meeting and were available to share information about their work and upcoming recommendation for small learning communities with the community.*

*February 26th*

*Representatives from the Design and Configuration subcommittee held a community meeting to share information about their work and upcoming recommendation for small learning communities with the community. Part of the meeting included activities designed to get feedback and input from participants.*

*February 28th*

*The Design and Configuration subcommittee of the High Quality Teachers and Teaching Advisory Committee presents the YSC BOE with the recommendation at the BOE meeting.*

**March 7th**

The Design and Configuration subcommittee met and discussed SLC configuration at the secondary level in preparation for the subcommittee's second recommendation to be shared with the BOE on 3/14. An overview of the discussion was sent to subcommittee members. Several new community members joined the subcommittee.

**March 9th**

Representatives from the subcommittee attended and participated in the BOE Community Roundtable held in the YHS cafeteria. All Advisory Groups were given time to interact with and collect input from participants. The Design and Configuration subcommittee collected information about possible SLC configurations and community partnership opportunities.

A website survey was created to collect community about SLC configuration. It is posted individual and unified district websites and will remain open to collect responses through March 20th at midnight.

**March 11th**

The High Quality Teachers & Teaching Facilitation Team attended the Facilitation Task Force Meeting. The meeting included time to get feedback from facilitators of other advisory committees.

**March 14th**

The Design and Configuration subcommittee of the High Quality Teachers and Teaching Advisory Committee presents the YSC BOE with the second recommendation at the BOE meeting.

## 5 Key Guiding-Principles

The High Quality Teachers and Teaching Advisory group believes creating small learning communities in Ypsilanti Community Schools would create teaching and learning environments aligned with the district's five guiding-principles. The five guiding-principles promote active involvement and accountability from all stakeholders. Small learning communities create focused, flexible, and creative opportunities for collaborative work where the guiding-principles can be developed, applied, and nurtured in ways that support all learners.

### High expectations for all learners:

Research from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory states that SLC's allow for the development of professional learning communities where consensus building is attained more quickly and at a higher level than in other teaching and learning structures. "Teaching and learning teams position teachers to form meaningful relationships with students as well as facilitate a more authentic, active form of student learning. Without the considerable autonomy and flexibility that teaching and learning teams bestow, it is extremely difficult for teachers to design student work that is both challenging and personally meaningful to students." This will allow for an effective and more immediate implementation of practices:

- Increasing the quantity and quality of time with students,
- Building strong social relationships,
- Developing and delivering rigorous, relevant curriculum,
- Exercising maximum flexibility to act on knowledge of students' needs.

### Evidence-based best practices while allowing for innovation and creativity:

Studies reveal that innovation in curriculum and instruction alone will not have a sustainable and meaningful affect on student learning. According to ACSD, "What's missing in current efforts is a substantial investment in teachers—for example, providing opportunities to learn what it means to teach in a rigorous manner and how to achieve relevance by changing the nature of curriculum and instruction." NWREL proclaims "a fundamental requirement for making the kind of adjustments necessary to support SLCs is to give teachers and their students a major role in decision making." This autonomy will allow activities to reflect conditions and needs unique to each SLC. Consequently, teams will have the ability to:

- Be intentional about teaching and learning,
- Analyze and respond to data efficiently,
- Collaborate to meet the demands of the Common Core State Standards,
- Engage in a continuous cycle of improvement and professional development,
- Utilize a wide-range of research-based instructional practices to meet the ever-changing/diverse student needs.

### Family and community partnerships:

Joyce L. Epstein and Karen Clark Salinas claim that by welcoming families and collaborating with the community, schools can strengthen families, invigorate community support, and increase student achievement and success. Small learning communities invite all stakeholders to actively engaged in supporting the learning process through intensive collaboration allowing



members of the community to partner in the teaching and learning process. These partnerships encourage student voice and empowerment, connecting the learning to the meaningful experiences, which provide for substantive opportunities to engage a wide range of stakeholders in the educational process. The MDRC reports, SLCs — “are particularly well positioned to provide these ‘21st-century skills.’ Indeed, work-based learning experiences, such as internships, are a central, possibly an instrumental, component” of small learning communities. Partnerships can provide invaluable:

- Opportunities for students and staff to develop and implement life-changing curricula,
- Unique professional development possibilities,
- Methods to engage students in educational options beyond the scope of most comprehensive programs.

### Student voice and empowerment:

The cornerstone of small learning communities is student-centered teaching and learning. The Coalition of Essential Schools says that in a small learning community a prominent pedagogy will shift the role of the teacher to that of teacher-as-coach. They claim that, “This pedagogy acknowledges student voice as central to the learning experience for every learner and requires students to be active, responsible participants in their own learning.” In a true learning community, everyone has a voice. The structure of small learning communities provides students an avenue to have a substantial part of developing and defining their role in the educational process. This allows students to:

- Take ownership learning to develop, test and design their thinking,
- Take a leadership role in the classroom,
- Work in flexible, cooperative groups to solve meaningful problems,
- Demonstrate understanding of core concepts through differentiated instruction, guided by the needs of the students.

### Responsibility, efficiency and financial viability:

It is our responsibility to provide an atmosphere where all stakeholders feel safe and are empowered to make decisions in the best interest of the greater community in which they are a part. Research from Dollars & Sense: The Cost Effectiveness of Small Schools states, “The best small schools offer an environment where teachers, students, and parents see themselves as part of a community, and deal with issues of learning, diversity, governance, and building community on an intimate level.” Data show that students drop out of large comprehensive schools at a significantly greater rate than out of schools with small learning communities (Barbara Kent Lawrence, et al, 2003). Small learning communities are structured to

- Promote shared decision making,
- Respond to student needs,
- Create an environment where stakeholders feel safe and empowered,
- Provide an atmosphere to establish the most appropriate setting that helps ensure student success and retention.

### Key Research

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## Key Issues, Challenges and Opportunities

*Develop small learning communities as an instructional model for the secondary schools in the Ypsilanti Community School District. These small learning communities will exist as an interdisciplinary team of teachers who share a few hundred or fewer students in common for instruction, assume responsibility for their educational progress across years of schooling, and exercises maximum flexibility to act on knowledge of students' needs.*

### **Common Expectations in All SLCs:**

- High Quality Instruction
- Rigorous Curriculum
- Career Credentials and College Credit
- Core Community Partnerships
- Support Opportunities for Creativity, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship

*Future decisions will need to be made around building locations, grade level configurations, and focus for small learning communities. The BOE has already determined the New Tech Model will be part of the design at the secondary level.*

The committee realizes that this process will take time to transition from current modes of instruction and configuration to the ultimate vision. As the district evolves into the future, it will be critically important to build a shared community understanding around the flexibility and fluidity of facility decisions and program locations. The Guiding Principles must guide all district decisions.

## Members of Advisory Group

Co Facilitator: Jennifer Martin, District Administration

Co Facilitator: Debbie Swanson, Teacher

Subcommittee Members

Aimee Conat, Parent

Sandy Bogoski, Teacher

Jason Evers, Parent

Kelli Green, District Staff & Parent

Kimberly Freeman, Parent

Georgina Hickey, Parent

Scott Heister, Teacher

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Jeannette Woltmann, WISD