

Transition Committee for the Wallaceburg Community

Final Meeting, October 22, 2014

Student Presentation

WDSS Vice Principal Lisa McDonald introduced 13 students from grade 7 and 8 who shared their first six weeks' experience in their new school. There was a demonstration of the use of iPads supporting learning in 3 different subject areas. Students spoke of enjoying school, feeling involved socially and engaged in learning. No concerns about the transition process were expressed.

Committee Members' Reflections

Nineteen school representatives, including parents, staff, Principals and students engaged in a two hour discussion speaking candidly about their experience over the past year of transition. The overall consensus was that the process had been positive and that students were flourishing in their new environments. Several concerns were raised and they are included in the following sections of this Report.

Lessons Learned in the Total Transition Process

- Having Sub-Committees meet regularly throughout the transition year with periodic reporting to the umbrella Transition Committee was very valuable. Members felt that there had been an appropriate number of meetings with effective timing.
- The value of Open House, tours and special events at all of the involved schools was recognized and mentioned multiple times.
- Leadership opportunities were introduced for all JK-6 and grade 7 and 8 students. Students, staff and parents recognized this to be important.
- Positive support from the Wallaceburg community was seen to be key to a smooth transition. All media coverage was appreciated.
- The redistribution of DA Gordon resources and memorabilia went smoothly. Each of the receiving schools has given recognition to the history of DA Gordon. The idea of allocating all older memorabilia to the Museum was satisfactory to all. The auctioning of sports pennants was one of many successful activities at the Reunion event.
- Bulk orders and budget were areas that were not addressed adequately prior to the school closure causing confusion and extra work for School Secretaries in June. Grade 7 and 8 teachers found

themselves scrambling for basic supplies during the first weeks of school.

Lessons Learned with Transition of 7 and 8 students from 3 elementary schools to WDSS

- The opportunity to visit Ridgetown and speak with students, staff and parents was key in alleviating fears about the 7/8 model.
- Work done by school and Board staff prior to the opening of the school year at WDSS to accommodate the 7 and 8 students resulted in a smooth transition for students and staff.
- Parent Council reps from the 3 former elementary schools have merged into a cohesive group. It was a unanimous decision to have the 7/8 parents join with the secondary school parents for one School Council for WDSS grade 7-12.
- The initial recess play area was recognized quickly to be too confining for grade 7 and 8 students and by the second day of school students were able to move throughout the back campus when it was not in use by secondary classes. Parents, staff and students were pleased with this change that differs from the Ridgetown model.
- One student shared that he and his friends would welcome more opportunities to interact with older students. It was agreed that these supervised opportunities would be introduced throughout the year.
- Sharing of facilities has worked well with gym practice space available to accommodate a full offering of sports. The issue of 30 minute Physical Education periods being too short to accommodate travel to the gym and changing to gym clothes was raised by a grade 8 teacher.
- Professional development opportunities with elementary and secondary teachers working collaboratively were seen as a gain for staff.
- WDSS staff commended behaviour of grade 7 and 8 students. It would appear these students feel treated as more mature and act accordingly.

Lessons Learned with Transition of DA Gordon students to HW Burgess and AA Wright

- The process of “celebrating” DA Gordon with many special events made the closure easier for students, families and staff.
- Most students made friends quickly in their new schools. Efforts of staff to be welcoming to new students were appreciated. The majority of students speak to having more friends. After 6 weeks some students remain better connected to their former classmates. The adjustment has been slower at HW Burgess where only 13 students moved from DA Gordon.
- Events held at each of the schools to informally introduce students were well received and deemed very important by the Committee.
- Parents have the expectation that students will have the same learning supports in their new school setting. Reduction of the overall EA complement by 2 was disturbing to a number of parents. It was felt that for the first year in the consolidated schools the number of support staff should remain constant.
- Parents have the expectation that safety procedures be addressed as well in the new school settings as in the school that close. A number of participants discussed the issue of the buzzer entry system not yet being in place at AA Wright. Cameras to be moved from Gordon have not yet been installed at AA Wright. This appears to be an issue that “fell through the cracks” in spite of numerous requests and concerns raised during the spring of the transition year.
- The introduction of Junior sports at the two JK-6 school sites was seen as a gain for students. It will take the remainder of the year to work out the best situation for competitions with other schools. Intramurals and school clubs have increased with a focus on primary and junior divisions and extra staff at AA Wright.
- A new bus experience for the majority of new students at Wright proved to be challenging the first few days but all seem satisfied with adapted routines. It was appreciated that parking and bus drop and pick up areas were worked out with Transportation and Plant Departments prior to the start of school.

- The adjustment of a staff nearly doubling its size, serving nearly twice as many students has been challenging. Space at AA Wright is tight with 3 portables in use. Though these issues had been anticipated there have been some “growing pains”. The overall opinion was that students and staff are adjusting well.

Recommendations

1. A Transition Committee is an essential part to a smooth transition following a Closure or Consolidation of programs. Such an umbrella committee is important when students are being reassigned to multiple new school locations. The make up of the Transition Committee developed by the LKDSB, including students, parents, school and Board staff has proven effective.
2. The Transition Committee members should determine the number and themes of Sub-Committees. These smaller group meetings in the Wallaceburg process were highly productive.
3. Communications, both internal and external, should be a priority throughout the entire process. Meetings, newsletters, Open House events are examples of effective methods of sharing information.
4. Respect must be demonstrated for all those facing the Closure of their school as well as recognition of changes for receiving school staff and students. The many events from first day of school through to the last day at DA Gordon were considered exemplary and could be made available for Principals dealing with future closures.
5. The contracting of a retired Principal to oversee the packing and moving of resources and furniture is a good support for school staff. Close contact with Building services is essential.
6. Safety issues must be addressed prior to school opening in September. For example, if a buzzer entry system has been requested and is the expectation of parents its absence is noted quickly.
7. Close communication with Transportation and Plant Departments is important in planning drop off and pick up routines.

8. A Guideline should be developed to identify secretarial processes such as, budget and bulk orders that are changing with School Closure. It is particularly complicated with JK-6 students going to two receiving schools and grade 7 and 8 to the secondary school. (Volunteers have agreed to form a small committee and draft such a Guideline)

9. A follow up survey of students, parents and staff at the end of the first school year of the implementation of reorganization of schools in a community. The process followed in Ridgeway to gain feedback was found to be helpful in planning for the next school year and making recommendations to future community consolidations.