



“Working together as a school community, we must put children first . . . we all have an obligation to touch children’s lives and make a difference.”

Superintendent
Kurt Wachholz

Superintendent’s Message

News from the Superintendent to help inform parents, staff, and community of current school district news, events and issues.

Safe Schools

In light of recent school tragedies, please know that we’re committed to keeping students and staff safe

OUR SCHOOLS ARE SAFE!

In light of the recent school tragedies, be assured that we are doing everything possible to ensure our students’ and staffs’ security in our schools.

Safety measures begin at the door. Each school has one entry way. All other doors are to be locked. Entrance doors are monitored in the office by video cameras. Visitors are only allowed entry after they have identified themselves and announced their purpose. All staff members wear identification badges with their name and photograph. Video cameras monitor the inside and outside of middle and high schools and they will soon be installed in and outside elementary schools. Thanks to a federal COPS grant and money made available from referendum security dollars, infrared cameras are scheduled to be placed at our schools as a means to monitor low light areas.

Last spring, every school in the district was assessed for safe practices. This in-depth safety analysis was made possible through a federal Homeland Security grant and follow-up will be conducted by the Pupil Services Department. The Department will be reviewing our schools’ entry and exiting procedures and protocols, emergency plans, crisis prevention strategies, and emergency response procedures, among other important issues.

A “Train the Trainer” program will put a staff member with expertise in crisis response, management, and prevention in each school. The task of these trainers will be to educate their co-workers in dealing with and preventing emergencies.

We have long enjoyed an excellent working relationship with the police and fire departments that serve our school district, and in urgent situations, we know that we can count on them. In fact, there are officers assigned to all of our secondary schools through the West Allis police liaison program. Officers are on site working hand-in-hand with administrators and pupil services staff to mediate disputes, problem solve, conduct workshops and discussion groups, discipline and more. One of their most important roles is providing students with a sense of safety and lending an ear to troubled students. In addition, anti-bullying and harassment programs are in place at each school to stop hurtful behaviors before they start.

Perhaps because our schools are safe, when something seems to be amiss, it quickly takes on a life of its own. This occurred last month during a Powder Puff Football game in celebration of Central’s homecoming. Aided by inaccurate reporting and misinformation relayed through cell phones, a couple of incidents involving a few students was, inaccurately, portrayed as a major melee. Within minutes, rumors were rampant. Despite West Allis Police Chief Dean Puschnig’s quote on the Journal-Sentinel Online web site which stated, “This was completely blown out of proportion,” several radio stations and a television station felt the need to report the inaccurate and unsubstantiated version which led to more inaccurate

(See **Safe Schools** on other side)

Help us help you

The School District needs your input concerning grade level alignment



Would you support replacing our current grades seven and eight middle school model with grades five through seven intermediate schools? How about a specialty high school or new elementary school? Would you prefer the status quo?

We need to know. Before the Board of Education makes a final decision concerning any possible grade restructuring plan or plans, its members want to know what you think. Very shortly, a survey asking some of the questions noted here and others will be posted on the district’s web page. Other surveys dedicated to different issues, such as high school grade level alignment, will follow in the weeks and months to come.

Don’t worry if you don’t have internet access. Many of our schools have indicated their willingness to make internet-equipped computers available for survey respondents at conferences and other events. We will also make paper copies available for those who would prefer them.

The web survey is expected to be posted the week of Oct. 16 and can be accessed at www.wawm.k12.wi.us.

Please help us better meet your and your child’s needs by completing our grade level alignment survey.

(More articles on other side)

information being spread throughout the school and community.

I am going to take this opportunity to dispel some of the rumors swirling around this event. As reported by Central High School Principal Jack Padek, the fights were not gang related. There were no weapons involved. None of the incidents involved students from outside the district. There were no intruders inside the building.

Hopefully, this information won't result in new rumors! Please, if you have questions concerning an incident in your school or child's school, contact the school office. Rumor mongering only hurts our students, our schools and our community.

We need to keep our schools safe and their reputation for excellence intact. Their future, and that of our community, depends on it. If you feel that safety is in anyway being compromised in your building, please contact your principal.

Find out the facts and please help us by not spreading rumors.



West Allis - West Milwaukee School District students have been educated in combined classes for decades. In fact, as a Longfellow Elementary School student in the 1960s, I was taught in grades 1 - 2 and grades 5 - 6 combination classrooms.

As a student teacher at Lincoln Elementary in the 1970s, I was assigned to a grades 3 - 4 combination classroom. Later, as a classroom teacher in the 1980s, I taught a grades 5 - 6 combination classroom at Roosevelt and a kindergarten - grade 1 combination classroom at Wilson.

Combined classrooms share many commonalities with single-grade level classrooms. In both cases, classrooms include students of varied skills, abilities, learning styles, and strengths. This is not a problem in our district. West Allis - West Milwaukee teachers are prepared to adapt or differentiate instruction based on each student's unique learning style.

Educators take into consideration a number of factors when making combination classroom assignments. These factors include children's level of maturity, motivation, subject level proficiency, friends, learning styles, and others. Single grade classroom teachers also use these criteria, but combination classes have a different set of classroom dynamics that must be considered. Wherever possible, children that educators believe can thrive in a combination classroom are placed in them.

Some parents are concerned that their children will not receive the attention necessary in a combination classroom to succeed. In reality, however, all single or combination classrooms share many similarities.

All of our staff rightfully takes pride in their ability to differentiate instruction. Every classroom is different. Whether it is a combination class or not, some students will be advanced in some areas while others will need extra-help. Teachers assess students on a regular basis and tailor instruction to meet each child's needs. Instructional differentiation allows our educators to meet the needs of students whether they are in single grade classes or combined classrooms.

A growing body of research is also documenting the benefits of multi-age classrooms. Combined classrooms use a comparable approach to learning. Like the multi-age classroom, the combined classroom includes children of different age levels. Among the benefits are those associated with challenging and nurturing students in ways not possible in the single grade classroom setting. Younger students can benefit from a more challenging curriculum while being assisted by older students. Older students learn to take care of and nurture their younger classmates. They can also be grouped for the purpose of enrichment. Children are encouraged to use different problem solving skills appropriate to their age level. The focus is on success, not grade levels. Students progress by building on prior knowledge.

Guided reading, which is practiced in all elementary school classrooms, is similar in concept. Students in math take a pre-test before each unit of study. Instruction is then tailored to build upon the skills the child has mastered and those that are a challenge are addressed.

As students move from elementary to middle school and high school, the combination concept continues. It is not unusual for small classes to be combined, such as foreign language, art, and business and vocational education. If we didn't combine these courses, we would not be able to offer them. Combination classes at this level allow students to continue their academic progression.

If our district did not use the combination classroom concept, we would have to transport children to different schools at the expense of the neighborhood school concept.

Transportation is expensive, but more importantly, research says children learn best in a stable and secure environment. Placing children in different schools from one year to the next is not an educationally sound practice. We want such transitions eliminated wherever possible.

As we strive to maintain the neighborhood school concept, combination classes, ultimately, are in the best interests of our students and district.

West Allis - West Milwaukee schools have utilized combination classrooms to good effect for nearly a half century or more. We have successfully educated students, preserved programs and services and maintained neighborhood schools. They are a good educational choice for students, the district and our community.

Combination classrooms: A long WA-WM history

Combination classrooms work well to maintain the neighborhood school concept.

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