



# Grade Configuration Implementation

November 2007 Update

## PSD to transform junior highs to successful middle schools

A critical planning activity in PSD's grade level transition involves studying essential components of effective middle schools to meet students' academic, social and emotional needs as junior highs (grades 7-9) are transformed into middle schools (grades 6-8).

A PSD committee of principals, teachers and counselors studying middle schools (grades 6-8) is determining essential components of successful middle school education, based on student achievement and student well-being and effective instruction.

"We're taking the opportunity to create something very special with our new middle schools," says Joe Cuddemi, committee co-chair and principal of Kinard Core Knowledge Junior High. "Excitement and energy is building for this change. We'll focus on a smooth transition for students as we transform junior highs to successful middle schools. We're looking at the components that best meet the needs of students at this level."

The goal is to take the best of what schools are currently doing in junior high, research the essential components for successful middle school education, and blend them together to create outstanding middle schools.

Kinard staff, parents and students have experience with the middle school model, because Zach Elementary 6<sup>th</sup> graders have attended the school for 1½ years due to overcrowding at Zach. Kinard currently enrolls 6<sup>th</sup> through 9<sup>th</sup> grades, and will become a true middle school with other PSD junior highs in 2009 or 2010.

### **Middle School Committee Gathering Essential Components of Successful Schools**

The middle school committee is taking advantage of this transition to research 40 years of middle level education best practices. Some of the essential components consistent across successful middle schools include high expectations for student achievement, challenging students academically, using "active learning" strategies, creating adult advocacy or connection with students, and assuring the school structure supports social, emotional, and cognitive needs of students grades 6-8.

Themes are emerging from research gathered from high performing middle level schools in Colorado, the Colorado Department of Education, National Middle School Association, Colorado Association for Middle Level Education, and a key National Association of Secondary School Principals' study called *Breaking Ranks in the Middle: Strategies for Leading Middle School Reform*.

Committee members visited high-performing Colorado middle schools in Pueblo, Colorado Springs, Cherry Creek, and Loveland that have a variety of student demographics in November. In addition, many of PSD's junior high principals attended the National Middle School Association Conference in November.

### **Next Steps for Grade Level Change Transition**

- In late November, PSD tentatively planned to announce the year—either 2009 or 2010—that grade levels will change district-wide.

- The middle school committee will share its recommendations for essential components of a successful middle school model with the Grade Configuration Implementation Committee in December. Recommendations will be reviewed and refined by District Grade Configuration Implementation Committee (DGCIC) and a final recommendation of the essential components for PSD middle school and the readiness plans from the DGCIC will be made to the Superintendent in December.
- Schools will begin using the information gathered as they develop their “school readiness plans” (January through April 2008).

### **School readiness plans will address major areas of changes**

In November, the DGCIC continued finalizing the framework for the school readiness plan that each school will complete to communicate its plans for the transition. The Committee based the framework largely on the input received from various stakeholders during October. The DGCIC will make a recommendation for the Readiness plans to the superintendent for modification and/or approval.

Schools will work together in “feeder systems” or elementary, junior high and senior high regions January through April 2008 to prepare and submit their draft school readiness plans for their level—K-5 elementary schools, 6-8 middle schools, K-8, or 9-12 high schools. The DGCIC then will review all readiness plans. Site and level readiness plans will require the approval of the assistant superintendents. The feeder readiness plans will require the approval of the appropriate cabinet member responsible for the facilitation of these meetings. The district readiness plans will require the approval of the Superintendent.

### **PSD planning for smooth transition of classroom positions**

In November, PSD’s Human Resources department held four meetings in regions of the district for teachers and classified staff to discuss plans for movement of classroom positions.

For in-depth information, visit [www.psdschools.org](http://www.psdschools.org) under District Committee Updates, Grade Configuration Implementation, e-mail [info@psdschools.org](mailto:info@psdschools.org) or call 490-3427.