Managing Change and Merging Teams

Madeira City Schools Planning Commission
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Objective

The Madeira Planning Commission team was asked to look for best practices in how teams manage change and merge in light of the redesign of district grade levels. What are the pitfalls to look for? What are the strategies for success? What are the key aspects that parents should be informed of in rolling out communication on this major adjustment for our school district?

Process Followed to Address Study Topic

1. Research: Organizational change and how to promote positive impact change
2. Action research: Interviewed outside district administrators with like merge experiences from Reading, Deer Park, Finneytown, Southwest, and Three Rivers.
3. Action research: Interviewed outside district teachers who experienced a merge from Reading, Southwest, and Deer Park.
4. Parent communication needs
5. Action research: Discussion with Senior Director of Software Engineering at GE Aviation, Jim Schwaller, to understand how businesses manage change and merging teams.
6. Recommendations

Change Management

Change accompanies progress. Large organizations have systems in place to address change management. Smaller organizations often manage change based upon historical lessons learned and also attend to their understanding of all stakeholders. Emotional reactions to change ultimately impact the change process. When there is an acknowledgement within an organization of the human needs, and there is a consideration of natural reactions, management is better able to approach change with knowledge that is actionable. According to Kerber & Buono (2004) organization development theorists and practitioners continue to exhibit a strong normative bias toward involvement and participation as the solution for organizational change related problems. However, often these efforts fail as they either involve parties at the wrong time or provide those involved with too narrow of a view to feel included in the process.

There are three approaches to change management: directed change, planned change, and guided change. Directed change is change that is introduced from the organization's top and change that is defined as necessary to advance the organization. It includes relevant and logical reasoning, as well as a recognition of, and a plea to, emotions.

Planned change can begin within any part of the organization, but it is supported by those at the head of the organization. Chat and change leaders create commitment and support for change by employing proven strategies that decrease resistance within the organization and limit any loss of productivity. Based upon the Lewin Change Model (1947), planned change "suggests increasing the factors which push for change in the organization and reducing the forces or

factors which promote to maintain the existing state in the organization. This produces reduced tension and also less resistance to change" (Bhasin 2020). This change model involves 3 steps of: unfreeze, change, and refreeze. Unfreezing identifies current beliefs and practices and how they can be improved, change requires executing the new plan and refreeze involves solidifying the new change as permanent.

Guided change is born within an organization and emerges from the commitment of those within the organization. Guided change is similar to the 3 stages in planned change, but consists of: freezing, rebalancing, and unfreezing. This type of change involves a pause in practice to evaluate and connect previously isolated practices and initiatives.

The merging of buildings and teams at Madeira Elementary requires directed change. However, beyond the physical merge of grade levels, there is still a need to address culture and practices within the newly formed school. A common understanding of, and belief in, culture and practices are equally important to the success of the merge. Creating a consistent experience for students in grade K-5 requires intentional discussion and work. Defining these standards may seem routine for others but are imperative for success. Planned and guided change processes can be used to create more ownership and buy-in amongst team members. Identifying chat and change leaders who are committed to the change process and see value in its work can be essential to positive progress. Organizational leaders outside of administration can help disseminate the reasoning and meaning behind needed change and defined practices.

Culture and change

Within any organization, change will impact culture. To maintain the affirmative nature of change, Thomas International Ltd (2022) recommends applying the acronym CULTURAL.

C: Communicate using different channels and a variety of informal approaches to convey every aspect of change transparently, and increase positive impact.

U: Use company values holistically, making sure any communication activity or strategic priority is aligned to the unique culture foundation and the company's overall goals.

L: Let people have their say by encouraging feedback, clarifying plans and answering questions to remove barriers of fear and mistrust in the process-great examples are suggestion boards, town hall meetings, and surveys.

T: Time. It takes time-so be patient! Change is never adopted overnight–people have to change how they feel and think before they can change how they behave. Start as early as possible and ensure a progressive roll-out.

U: Understand that the strategy for managing cultural change needs to be flexible to accommodate for everyone in the business-and to avoid the many curveballs you may face.

R: Recruit champions for change-enthusiastic colleagues willing to engage, raise awareness and encourage their peers to do the same.

A: Accurately define what the change is-keep all communication relevant and be clear about the vision for improvement and expected behaviors.

L: Learning and development may be necessary to ensure that everyone is comfortable in adapting to behavioral adjustments and motivated over the long term.

Maintaining Performance and Success During Change

As with any change process, there will be success and resistance. Kotter & Schlesinger (2008) identified the top reasons for resistance to change:

- Lack of clarity or understanding of the change
- Reluctance to lose something that is perceived to be valuable to the individual
- Limited tolerance or ability to cope with change
- Different understandings of the situation or context

Many times, resistance can be identified and decreased if organizational leaders engage with parties throughout the change process. Regardless of the change model, Thomas International Ltd (2022) recommends 4 steps to guide change in an organization that continues to push the organization towards positive growth and avoid the resistance factors.

Step 1: Communicate the change: Effective change starts with effective communication. Make sure change is presented and communicated in a way that appeals equally to a range of different people within the organization. Get it right and you can help each employee navigate their way through the change process in a way that works best for them.

Digital communications are a quick and easy way to communicate one-way to a large group.

Individual sessions can help you get honest feedback, and even help bring employees around that may have been initially resistant to change.

'Address the masses' approaches offer a more personable alternative to digital communications and are a great way to announce the start of a new change initiative.

Town hall meetings give people a chance to proactively ask questions about the processand get their voices heard.

Thomas International Ltd (2022)

Step 2: Keep your people engaged: After you've announced the plans for change, you need to be conscious of the response from your people. This is where you need to look out for signs of disengagement and take early action to resolve it.

Step 3: Manage and Motivate: The next step is about making your people feel valued during change. As you start to come out of the other side of the process, it's important to maintain employee engagement by encouraging personal development.

By this stage, you know where you are going, and you are aware of any gaps in your process. By really understanding your workforce, you can train people to help fill those gaps.

Step 4: Coach for performance: This final stage is where you begin to see successful implementation of your change taking shape. But this is only the beginning.

This stage is about understanding that continued coaching is essential to maintain high performance and success. After all, one change often quickly leads into another. Only successful coaching will help you make each change smoother and more successful than the last. (Thomas International Ltd (2022))

When organizational leaders are honest and transparent in communicating the changes within an organization, members in the organization feel respected. Allowing organization members to have input also reinforces and initiates positive change in an organization.

Data collected: Action research

To help Madeira leadership work through all the change elements MES will experience with the merge of K-4 with grade 5, we interviewed outside district administrators with similar experiences. We spoke with administrators from Reading, Deer Park, Finneytown, Southwest, and Three Rivers.

Questions for administrators with similar experience:
- What was the transition (What grade moved up or down to join with what grade levels)?
- When did the change process begin?
- Who all was involved in the merging process (teachers, support staff, secretaries, etc.)?
- Were you intentional about group bonding activities?
- If it was present, how did administrators manage the anticipated feeling of "loss of grade level identity"?
- Pitfalls/How was the new grade level given PD about adopting existing behavior plans, procedures, etc., of existing school?
- Lessons learned/hindsight reflections
- Anything else?

Interviews are attached in Appendix A. A summary is provided below.

Combined Reflections from Administrators of Merged Schools

- **Reading:** Dr. Damon Davis, Director of Curriculum and Communications
- **Southwest:** John Hamstra, Superintendent
- **Three Rivers:** Holly Simmes, Principal 5-8
- **Deer Park:** Dave Bergan-contact
- **Finneytown:** Troy Edie, Teaching and Learning Coordinator

WHEN DID YOU BEGIN THE TRANSITION PROCESS?

- Immediately
- Well before construction began
- Administration tried to meet with staff as much as possible
- Gathered all staff as much as possible
- Administration identifed specific staff members to intentionally engage other staff throughout the process

WAS THERE INTENTION BEHIND TEAM AND CLIMATE BUILDING?

- Absolutely
- Intentionally planned for staff community development
- Release time used for teachers to travel & observe both buildings.
- Administration visted transitioning teachers in original environment
- Group brainstorming sessions

WHAT DID TRANSITIONING STAFF NEED TO KNOW WELL IN ADVANCE?

- **New and reviewed PD needed** on PBIS, Tier work, math programs and other school-wide implemented programming
- Utilize building BLTS to help make and implement decisions
- Define daily logistical operations and human resource roles

HINDSIGHT REFLECTIONS

- Combine leadership teams as often as possible
- SURVEYS: ask staff about concerns, hopes, & needs
- Create new identity and new traditions for new school
- Seek out staff who may be ready for a change too
- Teachers' perception is different than Administrators'
- Remember some staff may be leaving dear friends

Results from teacher Interviews
In speaking with administrators from districts who experienced merges. Our team recognized that the administrators were very cognisant of how the merge affected all parties. They worked to address any concerns and were as proactive as possible. We wondered if the teachers within the schools viewed the merges with the same success and pitfall stories as the administration. While we were unable to connect with teachers in all the merged buildings, we did connect with teachers in Reading, Southwest, and Deer Park.

Their interviews are attached in Appendix B. A summary is provided below.

Combined Reflections from Teachers of Merged Schools

- **Deer Park:** Kristen King and Jennifer Hooper
- **Reading:** Jenny Ernsthausen, 3rd grade
- **Southwest:** Jen Kiefer, PE Teacher

WHAT DID COMMUNICATION LOOK LIKE ?

- Communication with transitioning teachers and staff began immediately
- Day-to-day structure of the schedule was important for transitioning teams to know as soon as possible
- Each school created a list of celebrations and staff wellness activities they felt were important to continue

WAS THERE INTENTION BEHIND TEAM AND CLIMATE BUILDING?

- Everyone was on a committee (moving, calendar, PBIS, procedures, climate and culture, building leadership team) to develop buy-in and communicate with teams as well.
- Approximately 1 year before schools merged they began having joint team meetings

HINDSIGHT REFLECTIONS

- A desire for more staff gatherings and opportunities to come together.
- **Need clearly defined building beliefs and procedures** as well as definition of roles and responsibilities. This is beneficial for new and returning staff.
- Provide teachers with enough boxes for packing

Parent communication

While teachers and administrators have unique perspectives and questions about the merge, parents may also. The 5th grade class of 2023-2024 brings with it the most immediate group of parent stakeholders. Their students will already be familiar with the procedures and expectations of the ES. The transition for students and parents without older children, will be minimal.

Parents who have had older students travel through the district, may have some questions regarding MS traditions and practices, and their place at the ES. Communication will help parents understand that MES will become a K-5 building, not a K-4 building that houses the 5th grade.

We developed a list of questions parents may have that could be addressed within this communication.

- How will 5th grade MMS traditions and practices change/remain the same: band, student council, LIGHT Days
- What will 5th grade teacher teams look like?
- Will MES after-school programs include 5th grade students: CAPA, clubs, etc.
- Will 5th grade have parties and room parents similar to K-4?
- Will 5th graders have STEAM and all MES specials?
- What will grading and Chromebook procedures look like?

Summary of Discussion with Jim Schwaller, Senior Director of Software Engineering at GE Aviation

We talked about managing change in teams, bringing in new team members, and bringing teams together from a corporate perspective. We also spent time discussing overall team culture and encouraging new team members to bring their "whole selves" to work.

Ambassadors
At GE Aviation, a manager typically assigns a team "Ambassador" to the new member. The Ambassador serves as a "buddy" to the new member, providing support, answering questions, and helping the new member get acquainted with the team and company culture. This role is included as part of the Ambassador employee's yearly review. This is an important step as it creates a sense of ownership and responsibility. Standard "on-boarding" documentation is provided to the new member which includes basic information that new team members need to know. (Think: what is unique to us/our group/our building?)

Team Building
High level managers throughout GE encourage activities that help people get to know each other beyond work. They help create space for non-work activities during working hours (ie. potluck, board games, scavenger hunt) which help encourage people to bring their full selves to work. For example, some employees enjoy playing board games during lunch, while others

gather every Friday afternoon for a "show and tell" or demonstration. Managers acknowledge that some productivity during those working hours is lost, however, it gets paid back fully with team dynamics. Managers are key to helping new members learn as much about the company culture as they do processes.

Best Practices
A best practice that GE encourages is to treat people as part of the team from the beginning and avoid "protecting" them because they are new. For example, summer interns are given tasks and deadlines that directly contribute to the overall project as opposed to "busy work." This expectation is set from the beginning. After a few months of acclimation, new members are asked and expected to run or spearhead an activity or meeting.

What to look out for?
Managers are reminded to be mindful of not treating new members as "second class citizens." For example, not asking or adopting ideas from or suggestions by new members. Not doing so can lead to new members not feeling as if they are valuable contributors. New members can sometimes have a better perspective of ways to improve since they have a fresh lens. New members can also share and implement best practices learned from their previous jobs or experiences. In the case of 5th grade teachers moving to MES, there is better opportunity to help students transition to middle school.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The combined themes from the interviews and knowledge of change practices, reiterate the need for stakeholder involvement. The committee has developed a list of recommendations to engage all teachers, administrators and staff in dialogue and planning.

- Be transparent with staff—share what you know as soon as you know it.
  - Start conversations with all staff early and meet regularly; make sure all staff are heard.
- Provide PD to staff to be sure that all are trained in school-wide systems, such as behavior management and teaching strategies.
- Adopt an SEL (Social Emotional Learning) program that is K-5 focused.
- Create a defined discipline plan/hierarchy.
- Define school-wide expectations and practices on such things as hallway rules, cafeteria expectations, cell phone use, class parties, newsletters,…
- Convey parent communication expectations.
- Create a hierarchy of defined staff roles.
- Remember that teachers' perceptions can be very different from administrators.
- Include teachers in the various elements of change.
- Hold individual meetings with teachers possibly affected by the merge.
- Allow teachers to provide input on classroom locations.

- Create mentorships and partnerships between teachers.
- Provide collaboration opportunities for K-5 staff now; do not wait until August of 2023.
- Invite a 5th grade teacher to be on BLT in Spring 2022-23.
- Be explicit in expectations.
- Survey staff for input and ideas (see Appendix C for list of possible survey questions).
- Be mindful of school-wide activities involving all grade levels and new traditions that need to be incorporated into MES for new teachers/5th graders
- Communicate clearly with parents about program and procedural changes (or continuation) for 5th grade.

Appendix A

School: Amity Elementary School
District: Deer Park
PC Member: Maria Schwaller
Contact: Dave Bergan
Position: Assistant Superintendent Madeira (present)
Date of interview: December 13, 2021

Questions for schools that have merged:

When did the change occur?	
What was the transition (What grade moved up or down to join with what grade levels)?	● Deer Park was 4, 5, 6 building. 3rd Grade was brought up. K, 1, 2 was added a year later after construction of new building
When did they begin the change process?	
Who all was involved in the merging process (teachers, support staff, secretaries, etc.)?	● We formed a lot of different committees to try to preserve our identity such as a traditions committee, awards committee, PBIS, etc. ● All parties were included in the process, including custodial
What is something (or a few things) the District did to help with the transition that you found valuable?	● Simple ice-breakers but an off site retreat/team building day would have been valuable. ● Yes, but in hindsight, Dave wished they identified people who would intentionally and constantly engaged new staff members to "make them engage."
In hindsight, is there something that didn't happen that you wish would have happened to help with the transition?	● People like what they are accustomed to doing and have a hard time letting go of 'the way we have always done it.' It seems like maybe we should have ranked what was maybe most important to us. I think creating a new identity and new traditions may be a good idea too. ● Intentional about what "normally" happens during the school year (ie. Field Day, Halloween, etc.) – non-educational stuff. Staff was "caught off guard" when it came to planning Halloween parade and Field Day. They hadn't thought through logistics beforehand.
How was the new grade level given PD about adopting existing behavior plans, procedures, etc., of existing school?	
If it was present, how did administrators manage the	

anticipated feeling of "loss of grade level identity"?	
What did you do as an individual that helped you to prepare or you wish you would have done?	
Anything else?	- Team building and getting to know each other. - For MES, think about whole school activities that MES does and how can 5th grade engage in that (WKID, Field Day)? Also, the middle school does a LIGHT activity (character building) which the 5th graders participate in today. Do we and how can we bring that over to MES?

School: Finneytown
District: Finneytown Local School District
PC Member: Katie Maney
Contact: Troy Edie
Position: Teaching and Learning Coordinator
Date of interview: 12/8/21

Questions for schools that have merged:

When did the change occur?	Ongoing - Planned opening after Labor Day 2022
What was the transition (What grade moved up or down to join with what grade levels)?	Building two new buildings: k-6 and 7-12 Prior to this: three buildings k-1, 2-5, 6-12
When did they begin the change process?	We've already temporarily moved a few grade levels; we started formal and informal PD this year.
Who all was involved in the merging process (teachers, support staff, secretaries, etc.)?	Teachers, support staff, secretaries, administration.
Were you intentional about group bonding activities?	We've tried more informal ways of bringing staff together and haven't had a lot of luck so far. We plan to have more bonding opportunities for k-6 staff vs. k-12. It needs to be more focused and intentional. Used an outside consultant - staff brought worries, concerns, and broke into smaller groups. Used PD days - open spaces concepts type of planning. Invited everyone k-6. Open space conversations haven't always been very well received. Turnout was not great. Only 6-7 people. We realized that our staff really wanted details, nuts & bolts. (Classroom location, daily processes, etc.) Realized that we need to focus our meetings, provide more details.

How was the new grade level given PD about adopting existing behavior plans, procedures, etc., of existing school?	Behavior management will be consistent throughout the entire building. This will be built into future PD.
If it was present, how did administrators manage the anticipated feeling of "loss of grade level identity"?	Concerns - uncomfortable with leaving, very worried about transition to new space. 6th grade is our biggest challenge. We have already had a few teachers move up to 7th and 8th grades to avoid moving down. We are really working on project-based learning. We hope to let curriculum and teaching methods serve as a commonality between grades.
Pitfalls/things to avoid	2nd grade has temporarily moved into its own wing and they feel very isolated. Keep this in mind as you move 5th grade group to MES.
Lessons learned/Hindsight reflections	Keep lines of communication open. We don't have all of the details hammered out and our teachers are very anxious about this. For Madeira: Blend the middle school model into the 5th grade team at MES. Create a committee of teachers at MES, including 5th grade, for small group conversations on curriculum, procedures, etc.
Anything else?	

School: Reading
District: Reading Community Schools
PC Member: Katie Maney
Contact: Damon Davis
Position: Director of Curriculum and Communications
Date of interview: 12/8/21

Questions for schools that have merged:

When did the change occur?	2019-2020 School Year
What was the transition (What grade moved up or down to join with what grade levels)?	Opened a new campus (k-12). Prior to this, Reading included 2 elementary buildings, 1 middle school, and 1 high school. 2021-2022 school year, middle school was absorbed into high school. Now k-6 and 7-12.
When did they begin the change process?	One year in advance, especially in the spring before the merger took place.
Who all was involved in the merging process (teachers, support staff, secretaries, etc.)?	Everyone in the buildings were involved. Group effort.
Were you intentional about group bonding activities?	Yes. Elementary went to Camp Kern for team building. Spent a lot of time with staff so they understood procedures. We did not use anyone "out of house." No consultants.
How was the new grade level given PD about adopting existing behaviour plans, procedures, etc., of existing school?	We held monthly meetings with staff. Operations (lunch schedules, transitions, assembly days, dismissal/arrival) were a big challenge and we wanted those to be a focus. Principals spent a lot of time with teams. PD for planning as well as a walk-through of the moving process.
If it was present, how did administrators manage the anticipated feeling of "loss of grade level identity"?	**Biggest piece - most challenging - cultures of buildings. Two elementary schools were VERY different. Two different 4th grade teams that operated very differently. Not everything was aligned with the curriculum. They also had different principals & expectations.

	We made an effort to get staff to get to know each other. Must be intentionally planned. We honored the work that had been done, but prepared for the needs of a new environment. We really relied on staff. Everything was "written in pencil". Must be responsive to the needs of staff. We knew we couldn't rush the process and wouldn't have every question answered. We really focused on the "why" and how our changes benefited students. It was a priority for grade levels to maintain a sense of identity. Traditions, celebrations have not gone away.
Pitfalls/things to avoid	
Lessons learned/Hindsight reflections	Don't rush the process! You need to live through it. We still have growing pains. Plan for 4th grade teachers to connect and share ideas with 5th grade. Make sure someone from 5th grade is on the Building Leadership Team. It's ok to differentiate 5th grade from the rest of the school. Allow them to take on leadership roles.
Anything else?	

District: Southwest Local Schools
PC Member: Erin Beers
Contact:John Hamstra
Position: Superintendent
Date of interview: 12/6/21

Questions for schools that have merged:

When did the change occur?	○ This school year.
What was the transition (What grade moved up or down to join with what grade levels)?	○ 6th grade moved up to middle school and 4-elementary buildings merged into 3.
When did they begin the change process?	○ As soon as they passed their levy.
Who all was involved in the merging process (teachers, support staff, secretaries, etc.)?	○ John met with each teacher in the district to gauge the temperature on "Where each wanted to be?" ○ Tried to meet with as much of the support staff as possible ○ He wanted to put people where they wanted to be. John thinks that having a say was what led to such a successful transition. ■ Out of 203 teachers, only 2 or 3 refuse to talk to him today because they were not given their choice placement.
Were you intentional about group bonding activities?	○ Got the staff "Breaking Bread" together. ○ Fed staff dinner-potlucks. Got them together right away to discuss "building climate, to vibe, and building opportunities." ○ Lots of brainstorming sessions where ideas were thrown out on giant whiteboards. ○ "Knowing is predictable." ○ Kids Events-Olympics with snow cones where kids could meet classmates and teachers.
If it was present, how did administrators manage the anticipated feeling of "loss of grade level identity"?	○ 6th-grade transition was challenging for parents. Once the move was made parents were able to see that it was effective and successful, but parents didn't feel that their 6th grader was "ready" for middle school. ○ Kids loved the adjustment

School: Middle School
District: Three Rivers
PC Member: Betsy Henning
Contact: Holly Simms
Position: Principal, 5-8
Date of interview: 11/13/21

Questions for schools that have merged:

When did the change occur?	7 years ago
What was the transition (What grade moved up or down to join with what grade levels)?	● K-2 and 3/4 building combined with grades 5/6 ● Then transitioned back to k-4 and 5-8
When did they begin the change process?	● Began the change process before they broke ground on construction
Who all was involved in the merging process (teachers, support staff, secretaries, etc.)?	● All parties, including custodial
Were you intentional about group bonding activities?	● Absolutely and most staff meetings transitioned from data discussions to team building exercises ● New grade levels came to all meetings-existing grade levels even traveled to 5/6 for meetings to include all ● New administration went to 5/6 building and saw those teachers in original environment, checked on them, filled them in on decisions (visited several times) ● Release time to let teachers travel and observe in each other's building
How was the new grade level given PD about adopting existing behaviour plans, procedures, etc., of existing school?	● BLTS helped to make and implement these decisions implement ● BLT delivered many decisions to grade level teams so that it wasn't all administrative ● The discipline program was a bigger issue than anticipated-harder on the 5 and 6 ● Administration developed a list of non-negotables (cell phones, running in the halls, etc) and then grade levels met, then building guidelines developed after input
If it was present, how did administrators manage the anticipated feeling of "loss of grade level identity"?	● Recommend a survey right away to current and new staff. Ask them what is most important to them, biggest concerns about moving, biggest concerns about the new grade coming

	● Keep the line of communication open, always ● Surveys!
Pitfalls/things to avoid	● Don't forget to think about the little things-PBIS and discipline are very important. ● How are they going to go to lunch, how do busses work, recess, duties, how are they going to be teamed, attendance, report cards, lunch count, how you walk in the hall, lounge,workroom, copier, how use personnel differently?
Lessons learned/Hindsight reflections	● Don't forget the small things ● Team building activities extremely important ● Keep communication open ● As soon as you are able-allocate and define spaces for people ● Allow people to be in on construction decision making and furniture buying ● Combine leadership teams as much as possible ● Start inviting the new team to off-site building events like the staff Holiday party ● ES should share newsletters and classes sounds share newsletters with 5th grade teachers now to help understand communication at the ES--vice versa
Anything else?	● Remember the teachers' perception is very different than the administrators ● Always have food at your meetings ● PTO and parents were not involved in much decision making ● Target the staff members who are vocal ● Remember some staff members may be leaving dear friends behind

Appendix B

School: Harrison Elementary School
District:Southwest City Schools
PC Member: Beers
Contact: Jen Kiefer
Position: PE at Harrison Elementary
Date of interview: 3/7/22

Questions for schools that have merged:

When did the change occur?	2021-2022 school year
What was the transition (What grade moved up or down to join with what grade levels)?	Jen spoke specifically about the merging of Miamitown and Harrison Elementary-not only did Southwest Schools merge buildings, but there was also redistricting.
When did they begin the change process?	Communication with the transitioning teachers and staff began immediately.
Who all was involved in the merging process (teachers, support staff, secretaries, etc.)?	Administration, teachers, support staff were all involved in transitions.
What is something (or a few things) the District did to help with the transition that you found valuable?	Letting people know early on what role they will take on is essential, so that there is prep and reach out time.
In hindsight, is there something that didn't happen that you wish would have happened to help with the transition?	More staff gatherings/opportunities to come together.

How was the new grade level given PD about adopting existing behavior plans, procedures, etc., of existing school?	Forming of committees-everyone had the ability to be on a committee in order to have a say in changes and transitions. ● Moving committee ● Calendar committee ● Behavior committee
If it was present, how did administrators manage the anticipated feeling of "loss of grade level identity"?	Working to bring groups of teachers together through committees in order to feel like every teacher had a voice that could be heard.
What did you do as an individual that helped you to prepare or you wish you would have done?	As a physical education teacher, Jen shared how isolating that can potentially be. She made a concerted effort to branch out to different groups in order to build relationships that might not have happened if she stayed in the gym.
Anything else?	Thursdays are Donut Days in the commons area where building staff meets and eats. She said that it began slowly, but staff now look forward to these weekly "eatings" with no agenda other than to connect.
Reflection/Takeaway…	At times we may feel like we are being welcoming, inclusive, and friendly, but being deliberate, purposeful, and open to feedback is going to be essential for all throughout this transitional process.

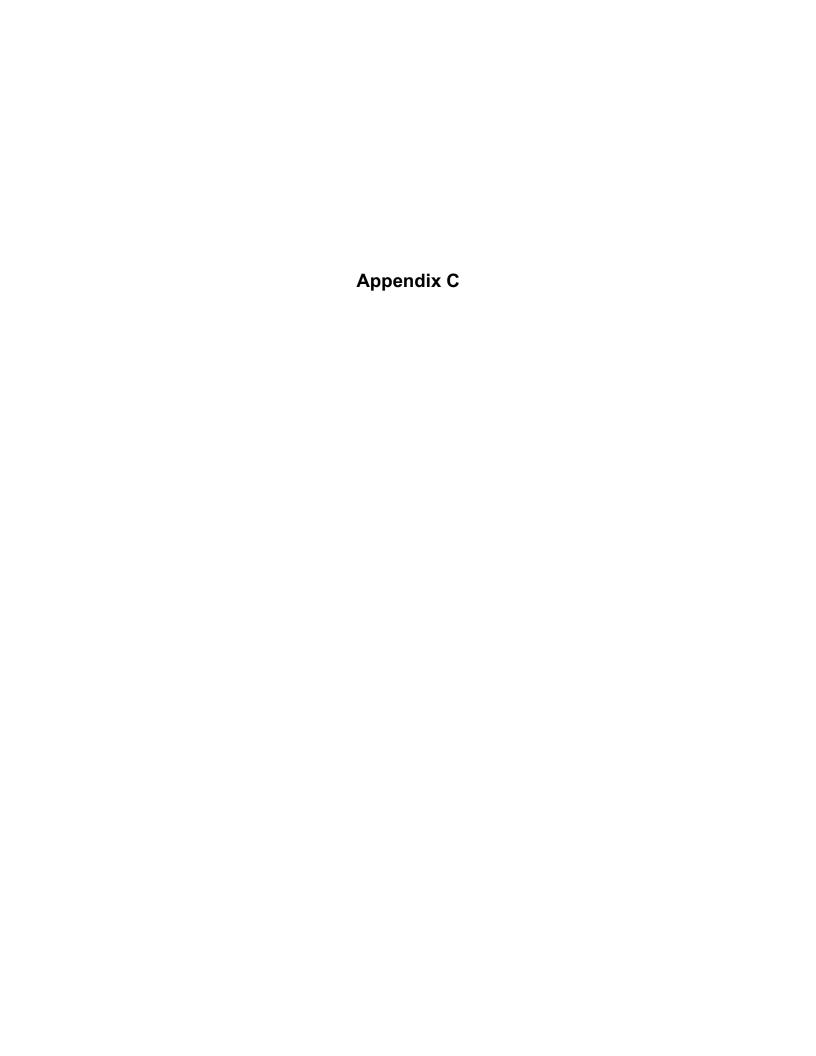School: Amity Elementary School
District: Deer Park
PC Member: Maria Schwaller
Contact: Kristen King and Jennifer Hooper
Position: 4th Grade teachers
Date of interview: March 22, 2022

Questions for schools that have merged:

When did the change occur?	● Fall 2018
What was the transition (What grade moved up or down to join with what grade levels)?	● Deer Park was 4-6 building. 3rd Grade was brought up. K-2 was added a year later after construction of new building.
When did they begin the change process?	● Change happened over time since there were phases to adding and renovating classrooms and buildings.
Who all was involved in the merging process (teachers, support staff, secretaries, etc.)?	● Everyone
What is something (or a few things) the District did to help with the transition that you found valuable?	● Provided packing boxes ahead of time so teachers could pack during school hours, a little at a time. Once teachers were done with a curriculum, they could pack up the supplies used for it. District also provided short coverage time (30 minutes here and there) to allow teachers time to pack.
In hindsight, is there something that didn't happen that you wish would have happened to help with the transition?	● Transparency, upfront, and honesty. Some communication was dropped which resulted in teachers not having enough boxes to pack items when it was "their turn to pack." Some teachers wished they understood how many boxes they get ahead of time, how much time they have to pack, whether they would be compensated if packing occurred during off school hours, etc. ● Also, when boxes are put onto moving truck or into storage, some consideration is needed in case teachers' supplies get damaged. ● More intentional team building activities at the beginning of the year. People tend to just hang out with those they are already familiar with during potlucks and social gatherings. Perhaps a team building activity like an escape room, scavenger hunt, trivia, or "amazing race" would have encouraged more team bonding. Even doing PD or afterschool staff meeting on a regular school day towards the beginning of the school year would have been nice.

How was the new grade level given PD about adopting existing behavior plans, procedures, etc., of existing school?	
If it was present, how did administrators manage the anticipated feeling of "loss of grade level identity"?	● N/A
What did you do as an individual that helped you to prepare or you wish you would have done?	
Anything else?	● Some identity is lost when traditions are lost. Some teachers did certain things that were not adopted with the new team. It is important to incorporate some old traditions as much as it is to come up with a new identity as a team altogether. ● Classroom locations (4th and 5th grade across from each other or "old" and "new" teachers located across from each other) encouraged staff members to get to know each other. ● If MES Kindergarten playground is lost due to the new build, consider rebuilding it. Kindergarten teachers may feel loss of small playground. At the same time, some Kindergarten students are not tall or coordinated enough to play on some larger playground equipment. ● Is there enough parking not just for additional teachers, but also for additional aides and support staff?

Appendix C

Possible survey questions for Madeira teachers

To include all teacher stakeholders in the change process, all of the schools interviewed conducted multiple surveys throughout the merge progression. Below are some suggested questions to seek feedback from faculty and help with discussions.

- What are you most concerned about with the building merge?
- What are you most excited about?
- Do you feel you have an understanding of school-wide programs and procedures such as PBIS, reading, resources, role definitions, etc.?
- How would you like to be included in the process?
- What does administration need to know about you?
- What does administration need to know about your grade?

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