

TO: Board of Education

FROM: Randall Booker, Superintendent

SUBJECT: **ELEMENTARY INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM DESIGN PROCESS**

I. **SUPPORT INFORMATION**

In support of Shaping Our Future 2.0, and to prepare and best serve our 21st century Learners, the Tri-School Site Council identified the need to evaluate how we can optimize our efficiency and effectiveness to support our elementary age students. By examining the various components of the elementary instructional program (math, literacy, science, technology, music, library, art, PE, etc.), as well as the time required to appropriately address each component and their corresponding standards, we aim to develop a daily instructional schedule that can best provide the needed coherent blocks of time for instruction.

To gain an understanding of the most valuable and effective approach to guide the redesign, a core Design Team of Tri-School principals, school staff, and parents has participated in a facilitated process that utilizes a Design Thinking approach. Design Thinking is a process that focuses on the needs of end users: our students. This facilitated process, beginning in the 14-15 school year, has continued over the past several months. Ultimately, with the support and input from all stakeholders, the goal is to develop a new daily instructional schedule for the three elementary schools.

This elementary Design Team has conducted observations and engaged in interviews with teachers, students, administrators, and parents to define our strengths and identify any potential needs and priorities. They also researched best practices within and beyond the school district and reviewed scholarly research that best supports student learning.

The team has developed six guiding principles that have provided direction for the next phase of work—creating schedule prototypes. These principles have stayed front-and-center during the elementary Design Team's discussions. The guiding principles are as follows:

- **Create Opportunities for Integration of Curriculum:** Provide opportunities to integrate a variety of content and subject matter into core curriculum.
- **Support Flexibility and Creativity:** Create structures that support flexibility with how we use our learning spaces, and time to foster exploration and creativity for our students.

- **Minimize Transitions:** Design our schedule thoughtfully to minimize the impact of transitions and/or eliminate them when possible.
- **Attend to Well-Being of Students and Staff:** Be thoughtful and supportive of the whole person (academic, emotional, social, psychological, physical) to optimize learning and teaching.
- **Create Uninterrupted Instructional Blocks:** Create uninterrupted blocks of time that are developmentally and grade appropriate.
- **Integrate Collaboration Time Within the School Day:** Create additional opportunities for teachers to collaborate with grade level teams, specialists, enrichment teachers and support staff.

Ultimately, the goal to develop a new schedule that best supports our elementary students is driven by three issues identified by teachers and administrators:

1. The current schedule does not provide enough time for core academic instruction.

The goal of our instructional program design work is to maintain a rich, comprehensive elementary learning experience, while preserving instructional time for core academic instruction. As we transition to teaching Next Generation Science Standards, which include engineering, we will need sufficient time to address the three dimensions of learning that are integral to any new science curriculum (Scientific and Engineering Practices, Disciplinary Core Ideas, Cross-Cutting Concepts). Currently, in many classrooms, science instruction is not given the time it deserves due to the constraints on student learning time.

We are extremely fortunate to have the support of PEF and parent support groups, which have allowed us to offer an extremely rich program. Our program is much richer, in fact, than similar districts such as Orinda and Palo Alto where students do not receive nearly the same breadth of programming outside of the general education classroom. As we have shifted to common core standards and the expectations that go along with them, we have reached a point where we needed examine how we teach all content areas in a holistic way. For example, the standards support technology instruction becoming embedded in art, science, math and literacy.

The adoption of Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics requires teachers to provide their students with opportunities to explore fewer concepts more deeply, experience real-life problem solving, and work across disciplines.

Our goal is to provide a balanced educational program for students where the core academic standards are studied across disciplines. For example, if students are studying the solar system. They can read about solar systems in Reader's Workshop, they can write about solar systems in Writer's Workshop, use facts about the solar system in their math work. They can be creating solar systems in art, and do creative movement representing solar systems in PE. The possibilities go on, however currently we do not have the time or structure to make this vision for interdisciplinary learning opportunities a reality.

2. The current schedule has too many transitions and does not provide consistent “blocks” of instructional time.

Our goal is to create a consistent schedule for students. In the current schedule, literacy instruction happens at various and inconsistent times during any day of the week. In our prototypes, students will go to their specialist class the same time each day, which allows literacy instruction to occur consistently as well. Longer blocks of instructional time give teachers the flexibility to use their professional judgment and capitalize on teachable moments. When students are highly engaged in an activity, teachers can provide more time without having to transition students to specialized classes as often.

To maintain the breadth of our current programming and gain consistent blocks of instructional time, we need to make adjustments to the instructional programs taught by teacher specialists. Although the minutes students spend receiving direct instruction from teacher specialists will decrease, shifting to a model where we provide interdisciplinary learning experiences will result in a net gain for students over time, and teacher specialists will be provided the time to support these endeavors. Classroom teachers will have more time with their students and as a result students will have increased opportunities to connect what they learn to other disciplines and their real life experiences.

Furthermore, when we examine our current schedule, we must take into account the time needed to accommodate transitions. When a group of 25 elementary students return from PE or recess or Music, getting them to settle into a math lesson is no small task. As much as 5-10 minutes is lost in these transitions as students put away snacks, take out workbooks, and use the restroom, before a lesson can begin. It can feel like the class just began a new lesson before another interruption comes along. This is another reason behind the desire for longer “blocks” of instructional time.

3. The current schedule does not provide adequate collaboration and planning time for teachers in order to create lessons that align to the Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards, as well as develop interdisciplinary units.

Creating interdisciplinary units at all grade levels where students are making high-leverage connections will take time. Currently, our teachers have limited opportunities to collaborate; therefore, an integral aspect of our design work is to create shared prep times for teachers (i.e., having the same time each day to meet and plan together) so they can develop curricular units and lessons that provide consistent experiences for students. Teachers will have the flexibility to use the common planning time in whatever way is most productive for them.

In the current schedule, elementary teachers get only 30 minutes of “prep” per day which is rarely aligned with grade level colleagues. In order to meet the changing demands of the elementary program, teachers need additional common planning time to provide consistent learning experiences for students.

Illustrations of potential schedules are provided below.

The first is a sample schedule of a **current** 5th grade teacher. Please note: in the current model, the classroom teacher is present during both art and computer lab with the teacher specialist.

2015-2016 Typical 5th grade schedule

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:30-9:00	Reading Workshop	Word Work (Spelling and Vocab work)	<i>PE (8:30-9:15)</i>	Writing Workshop	<i>Art</i>
9:00 - 9:30	Reading Workshop	Reading Workshop	Reading/ Writing Workshop	<i>Library</i>	<i>Art</i>
9:30-10:00	Writing Workshop	Writing Workshop	Reading/ Writing Workshop	Reading Workshop	Reading/ Writing Workshop
10:00-10:35	Writing Workshop	Writing Workshop	Reading/ Writing Workshop	Reading Workshop	Reading/ Writing Workshop
	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess
10:55-11:25	Math	Math	Math	Math	<i>Technology</i>
11:25-12:00	Math	Math	Math	Math	<i>Technology</i>
12-12:45	Lunch/recess	Lunch/recess	Lunch/recess	Lunch/recess	Lunch/recess
12:45-1:30	Number Corner	Science or Social Studies	Second Step/Social Emotional Learning	Writing Workshop	Math
1:30-2:15	<i>PE</i>	<i>Music begins at 2pm</i>	Homework (1:30-1:45) early release	Science or Social Studies	Math
2:15 - 3:00	Science or Social Studies	<i>Music</i>		Number Corner	Reading/ Writing Workshop

Below is a **model** 5th grade schedule illustrating our current proposal. The **red** content areas are core curriculum taught by the classroom teacher. The **blue** are classes taught by teacher specialists, which also provide prep time for classroom teachers.

Please note: While the content is the same, the time specials are scheduled, and how teachers use their time will vary. This is a model only to illustrate the curricular shifts.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00-8:45		<i>Instrumental Music</i>			
8:30-9:20	Science	Social Studies	Science	Social Studies	Science
9:20-10:30	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
10:30-10:50	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess
10:50-12:10	Reading Workshop	Reading Workshop	Second Step/ Social Emotional Learning	Reading Workshop	Reading Workshop
12:10-12:55	Lunch/Recess	Lunch/Recess	Lunch/Recess	Lunch/Recess	Lunch/Recess
12:55-1:45	<i>Technology</i>	<i>PE</i>	<i>Vocal or Art</i>	<i>PE</i>	<i>Library*</i> /Project Time
1:45-3:00	Writing Workshop	Writing Workshop		Writing Workshop	Writing Workshop

*Library meets every other week as a prep.

Classroom Teacher Curriculum Responsibilities:

Best practice is that math is taught for 45-60 minutes daily. The publisher recommends that Bridges and Number Corner are taught for 80-90 minutes daily.

Best practice is that Literacy is taught for 80-90 minutes daily, although the publisher recommends two hours.

Best practice is that Science is taught for 180 minutes weekly. As we move into an adoption of a NGSS curriculum we will learn the publisher recommendation.

Best practice for social studies instruction is 120 minutes weekly.

The Second Step Social/Emotional curriculum requires 60 minutes weekly.

Research shows that students learn best when student learning is connected across disciplines and to their personal lives. Teachers work to build these connections throughout the instructional day.

The following subject areas are taught by teacher specialists and represent prep time for classroom teachers:

Here's the proposal for prep distribution (an illustration follows):

TK/Kindergarten:

Art and Vocal Music alternating
PE twice a week for 30 minutes
Library once a week for 30 minutes

1st – 3rd Grade:

Technology/Computer Science, including media art 40 minutes weekly
Art/Vocal alternating 40 minutes
PE x 40 minutes
PE x 40 minutes
PE/ Library rotating weekly x 40 minutes

4th - 5th Grade

Technology/ Computer Science, including media arts 50 minutes weekly
Art/ Vocal alternating 50 minutes
PE x 50 minutes
PE x 50 minutes
Library every other week for 50 minutes

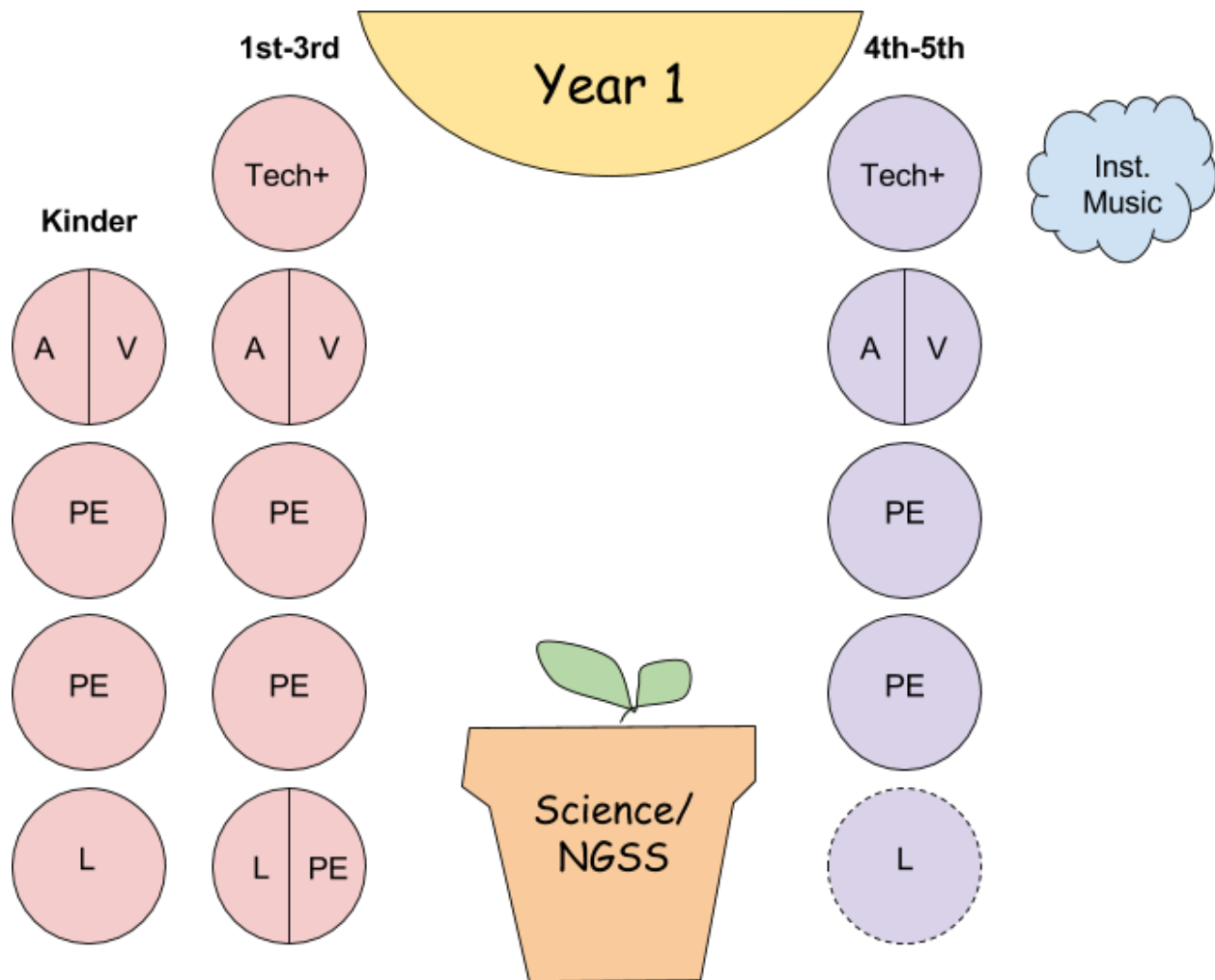
A few details to note:

Instrumental Music will remain a weekly class at fourth and fifth grades. We are exploring an early start to the day one day a week to allow instrumental to start around 8:00am and extend into the school day. Site Principals will work with the Piedmont Language School to best coordinate schedules.

Fifth grade students will have vocal music in addition to weekly instrumental music time.

The National Core Arts Standards: A Conceptual Framework for Arts learning will help us integrate visual art, media art, dance (taught through PE), and vocal and instrumental music. Credentialed art teachers will be hired to teach art prep.

Additional time for curriculum integration with library, tech, art, and music will be scheduled with teacher specialists by individual teachers or grade level teams. For example, a library commons model will also be available for classes to flexibly sign up to use library resources during non-scheduled weeks.



A = Art V = Vocal Music L = Library PE = Physical Education

Couldn't we just phase in some of these proposed changes?

The challenge in attempting to phase in one aspect of the plan without the others is their interconnectedness. If we focus on only one aspect in 2016-17, for example, hiring credentialed art specialists, the rest of the work becomes problematic to implement. Our goal through this process has been to address program changes holistically because we believe the outcome is what will work best for students.

How can we ask questions and provide feedback?

The information shared above has been presented to, and discussed with, the teaching staff. We have the following opportunities scheduled for parents to provide feedback and ask questions about this proposal. However, we would welcome the opportunity to answer individual questions as well, so please do not hesitate to contact us directly. Please know these meetings are for informational purposes only and no final decisions will be made at the time.

May 10: School Site Council Meeting

May 11: Board of Education Meeting

May 25: Board of Education Meeting

- II. **RECOMMENDATION: REVIEW**
Review the Elementary Program Design Process