

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL CONFIGURATIONS

Prepared for Alexandria City Public Schools

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In the following report, Hanover Research provides an analysis of 16 in-depth interviews with teachers TC Williams' King Street and Minnie Howard Campuses. The report explores teacher perceptions of the impact of a split campus format, as well as attitudes towards alternative high school grade configurations.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

In the following report, Hanover Research (Hanover) provides an analysis of 16 in-depth interviews with teachers at TC Williams High School to understand the perceived impact of the current ninth grade academy structure. Specifically, this report explores teacher impressions and attitudes toward a split campus format. This research is part of a series of mixed methods studies Hanover has conducted to help inform Alexandria City Public Schools' (ACPS) facilities planning. Unless otherwise noted, all information in this report was obtained through telephone interviews.

This report comprises two sections:

- **Section I: Perceptions of the Split Campus** explores teachers' impressions of the current split campus format, including impact on teaching and learning, and school climate and culture.
- **Section II: Thoughts on Reconfiguration** presents teachers' attitudes toward alternative high school grade configurations, including receptiveness to a 9-10/11-12 format.

SAMPLE & METHODOLOGY

The following report findings are based on qualitative research findings from 16 in-depth interviews with TC Williams High School teachers. Hanover recruited interview participants using a list provided by ACPS. In conducting outreach, Hanover made best efforts to recruit teachers from a variety of subjects, and with different levels of tenure at the district. In two cases, participants answered interview questions in a written format rather than over the phone. Participants are identified throughout the report by campus: Minnie Howard (MH) and King Street (KS). Please see the appendix for a detailed list of interview participants.

KEY FINDINGS

9-12



9-12



- **ACPS should consider implementing one large or two smaller comprehensive high schools.** Teachers stress a sense of community and feel that ninth graders should be in the presence of older grades to learn appropriate behavior and academic expectations. Dividing students leads to perceptions of schools not being ‘real’ high school, a lack of vertical planning among teachers, and logistical challenges.
 - **The intimacy and focus of the ninth-grade academy can be recreated in a larger school** through holding ninth grade orientation sessions, spatially grouping students into wings, or social grouping into academies. Alternative education programs should also be offered to target more specific student needs.
 - **While acknowledging that having two high schools presents issues of diversity, teachers believe there is a way to divide the district equitably.** Teachers argue that while resources and district lines can be carefully controlled, the maturity of high school students cannot be. Participants believe a two high school model is in the best interest of the students.

If moving forward with a split campus configuration, ACPS should:

9-10



11-12



- **Ensure that students have access to a wide variety of courses.** Students must be given the opportunity to take advanced courses when needed, as well as be provided an array of electives to choose from to keep them motivated and engaged in their education. To accommodate this need, a split campus configuration must either:
 - **Establish a seamless transition between the two campuses.** Schools must be in close proximity—ideally right next to each other—to accommodate students moving between classes over the course of the day. In this case, schools must take care in creating a master schedule that will align across campuses and devising a plan for testing days and other scheduling discrepancies.
 - or
 - **Arrange for each campus to be equipped with its own resources.** To provide for ample options and equality without moving students, each school would require its own facilities and teachers. In this case, the district should invest in duplicating specialized classrooms (e.g. art studios, home economics) and hiring additional staff.
- **Allow campuses to act independently, while providing opportunities to come together as a whole school.** Teachers prefer their campus have its own administrators and decision-making power, but seek a sense of unity and school spirit between both campuses. The district should have a space that is able to accommodate the entire student body for schoolwide assemblies and special events.
- **Establish regular means of communication among teachers, across grades and disciplines.** Teachers at the smaller campus appreciate the increased collaboration with fellow Minnie Howard teachers, but report a lack of knowledge and communication between campuses which hinders expectation setting and continuity of curriculum.

SECTION I: PERCEPTIONS OF THE SPLIT CAMPUS

This section explores teachers’ impressions of the current split campus configuration, including the impact on teaching and learning, student behavior, and school climate and culture.

SCHOOL UNITY

TEACHERS APPRECIATE THE TIGHT-KNIT COMMUNITY OF THE NINTH-GRADE CAMPUS

Teachers at Minnie Howard benefit from a smaller and more intimate teaching environment. Participants consistently refer to the ninth-grade campus as ‘close-knit’ and position this as an advantage for student learning. This can be particularly important for the ninth grade, as one teacher explains, “I think there is something nice about having the ninth graders protected. The ninth grade tends to be a very difficult year...because we are smaller and more focused, we can be more engaged with the students.”

“Because we are smaller and more focused, we can be more engaged with the students”

Furthermore, Minnie Howard teachers feel the smaller campus is more conducive to collaboration and communication among teachers. As one ninth-grade teacher describes,

All of the teachers are willing to help one another and we all kind of know everybody. We know who to go to if we need help with a student. We know who to contact. It's very easy to find people... it's kind of like small-town USA, you know? We're a very tight knit community. (Resp 7, MH)

Elective teachers at Minnie Howard, however, may feel secluded from a larger group of peers at the main campus.

Teachers are quick to highlight the opportunity for ninth grade students to take advanced courses and electives at the King Street campus. One King street teacher depicts the connection between campuses and the opportunity for taking classes at the main campus as the “next best thing to having [ninth-graders] on campus” (Resp1, KS). Most teachers indicate an easy transition to the main campus since many ninth-grade students will participate in courses or activities at the King Street campus at some point.

THE NINTH GRADE ACADEMY IS NOT THOUGHT OF AS PART OF HIGH SCHOOL

Despite noting a strong sense of community, almost all teachers view Minnie Howard campus as its own entity and not part of TC Williams. Teachers are quick to note that students also feel a sense of separation from the high school. Participants highlight a strong disconnect

between the two campuses. For example, one Minnie Howard teacher states, “we seem to be more of a stepchild to the other school. They always kind of forget about us” (Resp5, MH). As an example of the exclusion felt by the ninth-grade campus, many teachers cite a recent pep rally that, due to size constraints, was split up by campus. “In previous years, we have had whole school events where we come down for an assembly or pep rally so the whole school was together,” one teacher comments, “but that’s not gonna [be] happening” (Resp7, MH).

“We seem to be more of a stepchild to the other school”

As a result of the disconnect between the ninth-grade campus and main campus, teachers express concern that rather than thinking of Minnie Howard as high school, “most students

“THE REAL TC WILLIAMS”

Teachers describe the ninth-grade campus at Minnie Howard as a way station, not perceived as the ‘real’ high school

“Holding Place” “Stop over”
“Dead zone”

think of it as an extension of their middle school years” (Resp6, KS). This, teachers feel, lowers student expectations and has a negative impact on student performance and achievement. One English teacher with experience teaching ninth-grade students in other districts indicates a higher number of failing students at Minnie Howard and attributes this difference to the student mindset. She reasons, “They’re seeing this as another level of middle school and they’re not going to push themselves to maybe achieve all they could” (Resp8, MH).

MAINTAINING ADMINISTRATIVE CONSISTENCY IS A CHALLENGE

Several teachers point to the decision several years ago to merge the administrations of the ninth-grade academy and King Street campus as a turning point. One participant commended

“you can’t maintain uniformity if you’re separate”

the change as a means of unifying campuses under one umbrella, declaring, “it was harder before. Ninth grade center was one set of rules...here at TC it was different. But there’s consistency now...the rules here apply over there and vice versa” (Resp1, KS).

Other teachers, however, highlight the difficulties encountered when trying to implement standard policies and procedures across physically separated campuses. “Sometimes you can’t maintain uniformity if you’re separate,” says one Minnie Howard teacher, “It’s just not practical in many instances” (Resp3, MH).

Several participants highlight distinct practices between campuses despite having a single administration. For example, one Minnie Howard Social Studies teacher notes,

Every coworker of my mine would vehemently agree that there are differences with our campus versus theirs. Case in point being the way we operated last year versus how their campus did in terms of PLC departments and data collection. (Resp15, MH)

Others describe the single administration as hindering practices and decisions at the school level. One teacher notes that in moving away from a stand-alone campus structure, “some of the systems that we had in place for kids are not there now that I felt were more effective for this age group” (Resp4, MH). Another ninth-grade teacher reports a decrease in teacher input and participation in decision-making:

in the past...teachers were more able to participate in some decision-making at the school level for the benefit of students and instruction and I think in an attempt to create more uniformity, the teachers have been removed from that decision-making (Resp3, MH)

STUDENT BEHAVIOR & MATURITY

THE NINTH GRADE ACADEMY PROVIDES A SAFE TRANSITIONARY SPACE

Both Minnie Howard and King Street teachers acknowledge the benefits of giving ninth graders their own space and attention to transition into high school life and expectations. Stressing that ninth grade can be a difficult year and the progression from middle school to high school is quite challenging, one reading teacher affirms,

It's a great transition center for students coming out of middle school and trying to adjust to high school and understanding all the differences within what mattered in middle school and not what matters in high school as far as graduation and things like that. (Resp4, MH)

Teachers, like one Minnie Howard librarian, position the ninth-grade campus as an ideal “opportunity to kind of mold them” (Resp10, MH) into new, more mature ways of thinking and behaving. By secluding the younger students, some argue, older high school students are not exposed to the immature behavior of these students while faculty work to prepare them for high school life.

HOWEVER, ISOLATING NINTH-GRADERS STUNTS THEIR BEHAVIORAL GROWTH

While acknowledging the benefit of having a space to transition, most teachers feel the transformation into mature high school students is ultimately delayed by the current ninth-grade academy structure. One teacher suggests that rather than easing ninth graders into high school standards, the ninth-grade campus “babies” (Resp12, MH) these students and fails to prepare them for a higher set of expectations. Furthermore, several participants highlight the disadvantage of creating multiple transitions for students within their formative years, and argue that a second transition is more disruptive to students than helpful.

Most teachers agree that ninth-graders would benefit from the presence of older peers to set expectations and demonstrate appropriate behavior. One art teacher describes the

“the sooner students mature, the sooner they’re going to take school seriously”

advantages of having a mix of grade levels in her class, saying, “if the freshmen got a little squirrely or a little out of control, the upperclassmen could model good behavior for them” (Resp2, KS). Others echo the sentiment that when ninth graders remain at the “top of the totem pole” (Resp7, MH), they are emboldened to misbehave. Teachers who have taught in other districts contrast the maturity level of freshmen and incoming sophomores in Alexandria, and claim “it’s lower here” (Resp13, MH). This delay in maturity will also delay student learning, as one science teacher argues, “certainly the sooner students mature, the sooner they’re going to take school seriously” (Resp9, KS).

Teachers note that introverted students may benefit more from having a separate ninth-grade campus

In stressing the importance of smaller communities to engage students, teachers note that a separate campus is advantageous for shy students who may otherwise feel isolated and overwhelmed.

“I would guess that having a smaller campus would benefit those students who are more... introverted or shy or don’t seem to have maybe a club or a sport that gets them involved with a smaller community of people. I think there might be some benefit for those students to not feel so overwhelmed.” (Resp9, KS)

COMMUNICATION

TEACHERS REPORT INCREASED COMMUNICATION WITHIN MINNIE HOWARD

Teachers at the ninth-grade campus praise the ability of the smaller school to facilitate communication and collaboration between teachers within the school. Participants highlight that teachers from different disciplines, who might not be expected to work together in a larger building, are coming together to align on ninth-grade curriculum and create a comprehensive and supportive learning experience for their students. One teacher explains,

I think it makes it a little easier to collaborate with other teachers, other departments, just because we’re small in nature. So, while we’re the largest high school in the state, the fact that we have this small building here makes it very easy for teachers to get together and collaborate, deal with student problems, deal with student issues, because everything is in just a smaller physical space. (Resp5, MH)

HOWEVER, COMMUNICATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS IS LACKING

Despite noted attempts at distributing school-related information to both campuses, teachers at the Minnie Howard campus say they do not receive important information in a timely manner, and often feel out of the loop. “Things that happen at our main campus sometimes are not communicated to us well or things that aren’t appropriate are communicated...when it doesn’t really apply to [us],” says one Minnie Howard reading teacher, “I think communication is something that breaks down between the two campuses” (Resp4, MH). Another ninth-grade teacher indicates the athletic department in particular as a key offender:

The athletic department is located at the other building. They really aren't good about communicating which students are playing which sports and the contact information for those coaches because they're supposed to be eligible with certain grade criteria but that really is not something that's communicated to the ninth-grade building. (Resp3, MH)

Teachers at the main campus who have ninth-grade students in their classes also note their frustrations with poor communication. One world language teacher cites the example of not being informed when schedules prohibit students from coming to the main campus for class. He writes, “Several times STEM field trips were not communicated to the [King Street] campus and thus, we ended up with classrooms that were half empty. It was very frustrating” (Resp6, KS).

CONTINUITY OF CURRICULUM SUFFERS IN A SPLIT-CAMPUS FORMAT

Many teachers lament the lack of communication between teachers at the Minnie Howard and King Street campuses and the resulting absence of vertical planning and expectation setting. One ninth-grade English teacher explains, “I can't plan more closely with 10th grade or 11th or 12th and I don't maybe share the same vision as them. Sometimes I have little questions. ‘Am I being too strict? Am I being not strict enough with these regulations? Are these specific things what matter to you across to board?’” (Resp8, MH). Similarly, teachers at the main campus highlight their inability to check-in with teachers in the same subject area at Minnie Howard to align on curriculum and course expectations. One teacher remarks, “I don’t even know who they are to get on them about, ‘Hey, you guys have to be more rigorous’” (Resp12, KS). Another King Street teacher describes taking his students on a field trip only to learn that they had been on the exact same trip in the ninth-grade. Not only is this lack of communication frustrating for teachers, but they feel it puts students at a distinct disadvantage.

“I can’t plan more closely with [the main campus teachers] and I don’t maybe share the same vision as them.”

While the lack of vertical planning is noted across disciplines, and primarily in core subject areas, one teacher suggests this is less of an issue for the **STEM program**.

“there’s excellent communication...so that the kids aren’t just getting the same thing over and over again. It’s more scaffolded” (Resp1, KS).

TRACKING STUDENTS

MINNIE HOWARD TEACHERS CAN PAY MORE ATTENTION TO STUDENT NEEDS...

As a result of a smaller, tight-knit community, students in the ninth-grade campus receive more time and attention from teachers than they would at a comprehensive high school. Teachers note that the increased communication helps them work together to monitor and support the progress of individual students. “I just think the more we can collaborate, the better it is for students,” says one Minnie Howard teacher, “they probably get more teacher attention here, a little more nurturing” (Resp5, MH). Another teacher highlights the ability to focus on addressing issues before students get to high school where they may get lost in the shuffle. She observes that in a smaller space, “it’s kinda hard to get passed us” (Resp11, MH).

One Minnie Howard librarian also points to the advantages of the smaller campus to tailor instruction and programming to the unique needs of each incoming class. She explains,

Every year it's a different group. So it's different personalities...Some years I have low readers and I got to have special things for programming for them.
(Resp10, MH)

...THOUGH SOME SEE THIS EXTRA ATTENTION AS A WASTED EFFORT

While teachers appreciate the ability to focus on particular student needs, many highlight the irony that after taking the time to intimately familiarize themselves with students, the students move to the other campus. One participant notes that student counselors and class deans will move up with the ninth-grade class, though others express disappointment in seeing a year’s work go to waste. One teacher declares, “Having a smaller group, we do get to know the kids really well, but then they leave...It’s great that we have that opportunity but then we can’t use the knowledge that we’ve gained over the course of the year to further help the kids in any way” (Resp7, MH).

*“we do get to know
the kids really well,
but then they leave”*

TEACHERS ARE UPSET BY CURTAILED RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS

In addition to feeling that their efforts have been wasted, teachers are saddened by the fact that they are unable to maintain a personal relationship with students. Teachers note that the ninth-grade campus structure prohibits what for them is one of the most rewarding aspects of teaching this grade level. One art teacher who had previously taught at Minnie Howard comments, “Part of the fun of teaching high school is that you get to see these kids grow from year to year...you get to really watch them turn into great young men and women” (Resp2, KS). Another teacher in her first year of teaching at Alexandria City Public Schools expresses dismay at the prospect of losing touch with students:

I feel like I’ll completely lose touch with all my students next year. I would be writing college recommendations despite being a ninth-grade teacher in the past. That’s one thing that just hit me.” (Resp8, MH)

SCHOOL RESOURCES

RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE BUT INCONVENIENT

Teachers are quick to point out that the Minnie Howard campus is small and not equipped with many of its own resources. However, most say students are given easy access to facilities and programs at the King Street campus, and that the back and forth between the two campuses generally runs smoothly.

While access to resources at the main campus is undisputed, teachers note their frustration with not having more resources at their fingertips. One Minnie Howard librarian notes, “it feels like you got the leftovers. I know they don’t mean it that way, but what you have over 1,000 staff members over there and they got first dibs to everything” (Resp10, MH). Teachers wish more electives, after school programming, and resources were available to students and staff without having to travel to another building.

“It feels like you got the leftovers”

SHARING ONE ADMINISTRATION RESULTS IN MINNIE HOWARD FEELING LEFT OUT

Teachers at the ninth-grade campus say that since the district instituted one administrator shared between high school campuses, they have not been getting as much administrative time and attention. One teacher notes that “all too often, administrators are pulled over to the main campus for other things and we’re left in the building without an administrator, and that’s not appropriate” (Resp11, MH). Another frames the lack of administrator presence in terms of student familiarity and accessibility, stating, “unfortunately some of the kids here don’t even know what the lead administrator looks like” (Resp7, MH). These participants say they preferred the old system in which the campus had more independence and decision-making power, and could apply more targeted policies and procedures for the age group.

“some of the kids here don’t even know what the lead administrator looks like”

Furthermore, a Minnie Howard librarian notes the bureaucratic headache of having administrative offices across campuses, and the need to travel to the main campus in order to accomplish her work. She explains, “when we do purchase orders and budget and things like that...we have to get our paperwork through this office and to King Street to get it signed. That’s a process” (Resp10, MH).

COURSES & SCHEDULING

THE SPLIT CAMPUS HAS LIMITED IMPACT ON CORE SUBJECT COURSES AND TEACHING

Teachers of core subject areas such as English and Science report little to no impact on their teaching or on course offerings, reiterating that students will travel to the main campus for courses which are not offered at Minnie Howard. One King Street teacher notes that this can in turn “[ease] the impact on the number of course sections we need” (Resp1, KS) since ninth grade students are given access to courses at the main campus. Similarly, a world language

teacher adds that “we need the ninth graders...to be able to run our courses with a reasonable amount of students” (Resp6, KS).

One issue, raised by a Minnie Howard teacher, occurs when ninth grade students fail a course and must re-take it. The teacher points out that, “The only option is during summer school because they don’t offer that course widely. Kids cannot repeat ninth grade classes for all subject areas easily” (Resp3, MH). While not wishing to encourage failing a course, she frames this as a limitation of the current grade configuration.

ELECTIVES CAUSE THE BIGGEST HEADACHE

While core courses run smoothly, teachers tend to agree that, when it comes to electives, “the multi-campus set up and different schedules provide for a logistical headache” (Resp15, MH). While most say course offerings are not seriously impacted, several point out that students are limited to the last two periods of the day, and one art teacher questions what happens when electives at the main campus fill up. In the case of electives offered at the Minnie Howard campus, an art teacher reports being limited in the scope of what she is able to teach, noting “if I were on campus with all five art teachers, I might have more opportunity to teach other subjects, other areas of art” (Resp13, MH). Most teachers express a desire for increased elective offerings at the ninth-grade campus.

Most of the trouble with electives comes when scheduling them. Teachers highlight days in which schedules between the two campuses are not aligned, due to testing or other events, as problematic and frustrating from a variety of perspectives, as noted below.

Nomadic Teachers	Scheduling complications arise for teachers who must go back and forth between high school campuses <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Sometimes the schedules for testing...didn’t work well because I had to be in two places at one time, depending on how they scheduled classes for those days” (Resp2, KS).
Minnie Howard Staff	When classes at the main campus are cancelled, Minnie Howard is left with ninth-grade students with nothing to do <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Well [if] King Street’s got something else going on [like the PSATs], it totally screws up our day...now we gotta babysit 300 kids for a period during the day...literally 300 kids do nothing during a period of the day. I don’t like things like that.” (Resp11, MH)
King Street Staff	When ninth grade students are unable to make it to the main campus for class, teachers end up having to repeat lessons <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “When...the 9th graders don’t come because of whatever reason I have to reteach everything we have just done. Which is really irritating.” (Resp14, KS)

Lastly, a trades and industry teacher at the King Street campus notes the complications of offering afterschool work to students at different campuses. “I allow my students to come and work after school here for a project they’re doing, or even for extra credit,” she explains, “[but] the ninth graders are very rarely able to do this because they’re not here” (Resp14, KS). She acknowledges that due to the need to extend project timelines for these students, opportunities are more limited. “They have less activities that I offer them because they take longer to do activities.”

A SEPARATED CAMPUS HINDERS PARTICIPATION IN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMMING

Teachers affirm that, like electives, students at the ninth-grade campus are invited to participate in any of the after-school clubs and programming offered at the main campus. Several indicate, however, that despite receiving the same information, the physical separation requires ninth grade students to take more initiative to become involved in these activities. One Minnie Howard teacher suggests that the extra effort involved means fewer ninth graders are participating:

If they maybe walk by a classroom and see someone they know, they might be more inclined to go in and check it out...but if it involves walking several blocks then they’ll just kind of shoulder shrug and ‘no, I’m not going to do that.’ So, that is a concern. (Resp3, MH)

Other teachers suggest that limited ninth grade participation is the result of students not regarding Minnie Howard as part of the high school. “I think, weirdly, that they see that as something they’re gonna do at King Street,” says one English teacher, “It’s kind of like...‘oh, I’ll do that next year’” (Resp8, MH). Moreover, a science teacher describes not actively advertising his club as it already has plenty of participation from students at the main campus. He notes, “it’s one of those things where I don’t want too many kids in the club, so I don’t really make an effort. That probably puts ninth graders at a disadvantage because they’re not exposed” (Resp9, KS).

“ninth graders [are] at a disadvantage because they’re not exposed”

Teachers say when they try to offer more programs at the ninth-grade campus, they are prohibited by administrators who tell them it is already offered at the main campus. In cases where ninth graders do have their own extra-curriculars at their campus, teachers wish for more collaboration between the ninth-grade and main campus clubs. In describing her poetry club at Minnie Howard, one librarian regrets that the club “never [has the King Street] kids that participated in the national slam poetry contest to come and present at our café” (Resp10, MH).

- Teachers note curbed participation in after-school programming **with the exception of sports**
 - *“Not being in the big, physical building, we probably have less kids involved with clubs...unless they’re involved with a sport.” (Resp5, MH)*
- However, navigating ninth grade participation in sports teams can create disruptions in class time
 - *“the ninth graders are often pulled from class early because they need to be transported over to the other building before the team can leave or something. So, that does interfere with academics if we have to pull students early because they’re not physically already located at the same school as the rest of their teammates.” (Resp3, MH)*

The ninth-grade campus is **not** a barrier for participation in school sports



TRANSPORTATION

TRAFFIC MAY INTERFERE WITH CLASS TIME

Teachers note that while there are always buses running back and forth between campuses, the traffic encountered en route between Minnie Howard and King Street can lead to delays and interrupted class time. As one King Street science teacher describes,

It's too bad you have to go through one of the worst intersections in Northern Virginia to get here. There's a place where three major roads cross. And we like to call it 'dysfunction junction'. There are times it can take you ten minutes to go from one building to the next. (Resp1, KS)

In addition to legitimate transportation delays, another King Street teacher suggests students may arrive late to class and use the late bus as an excuse.

TRAVELING TO THE MAIN CAMPUS IS AN ADDITIONAL BURDEN

A few teachers note some frustration with consistently having to travel over the to the main campus for events and meetings. “I mean it’s no more than a mile,” says one teacher, “but somebody’s gotta get in their car and go, and that’s after you’ve just done your duty here at your school” (Resp10, MH). These teachers decry the unbalanced obligations on Minnie Howard staff and wish King Street faculty would come to them from time to time.

SECTION II: THOUGHTS ON RECONFIGURATION

This section presents teachers’ attitudes toward alternative high school grade configurations, including receptiveness to a 9-10/11-12 format.

COMPREHENSIVE HIGH SCHOOLS

MOST TEACHERS PREFER A COMPREHENSIVE 9-12 GRADE FORMAT

Many teachers express a strong preference towards having one or two 9-12 high schools. These teachers argue that the comprehensive structure facilitates a sense of unity throughout the school, and continuity throughout the curriculum. Furthermore, this format allows ample time and opportunity for students to learn from each other, and provides a wide variety of course offerings available to all students without scheduling complications. These teachers believe that both academic and behavioral outcomes would improve under this structure:

two schools [or one massive] unit...I think they’d see scores come up and I think they’d see behavior improve because again, you’re all one unit.” (Resp8, MH)

Several teachers argue that these larger schools can still maintain a sense of intimacy and community through holding ninth-grade orientation sessions, separating groups of students into their own wing, or breaking the student body down into smaller clusters or ‘academies.’

TEACHERS ACKNOWLEDGE DIVERSITY CONCERNS

Many participants indicate a concern around dividing the district up into two high school populations, but express different views on the attainability of diverse and equitable schools.



9-10/ 11-12 CONFIGURATION

TEACHERS FEEL THIS FORMAT WOULD EXACERBATE CURRENT PROBLEMS

Teachers who find the current ninth-grade academy problematic express concern over a 9-10/11-12 configuration and feel that it would create even more complications for the district in terms of school unity, scheduling electives, and continuity of curriculum. While a few suggest ninth graders would benefit from having an older grade to look up to, many teachers feel the format would instead hold back tenth graders. One teacher offers, “I think the tenth graders are going to lose out. I think they’re not going to be as big a part of the high school as we’d like” (Resp5, MH), and another expresses concern about student behavior, remarking, “they’re not gonna get that boost of that maturity level up. I think they’re just gonna kinda stay where they’re at” (Resp13, MH). Lastly, one English teacher highlights the importance of continuity between the SOL-focused tenth and eleventh-grade years, and worries that splitting up those grades would result in lowered scores.

Several advocates for the current ninth grade campus structure echo concerns that incorporating tenth graders would jeopardize the focus on ninth grade students and limit opportunities for tenth graders. While less participation in clubs and programming is seen as acceptable for ninth graders who are transitioning to high school life, hindered participation for tenth graders is seen as more problematic.

A few teachers report that this configuration would not be a significant change from the current format, but stress that the problem of a divided community would persist. One teacher suggests that a split campus format could work if the district had a space where the entire school population could converge. She explains,

That’s a good idea, as long as there’s opportunities for the whole school to come together and really support that whole community initiative as like, ‘we’re all one school’ and be able to work together (Resp7, MH).

COURSE OFFERINGS MAY BECOME LESS FLEXIBLE AND MORE LIMITED

In considering a 9-10/11-12 configuration, teachers indicate that students would be more restricted to the courses offered at their own school. “You’re limiting the kids to what’s offered within the confines of the building,” (Resp1, KS) says one King Street teacher. Elective courses continue to be the primary concern among teachers. Without a larger pool of students to pull from, a world language teacher notes that a 9-10 school would “not be able to offer as many classes since we wouldn’t have the numbers” (Resp6, KS). Rather than highlighting specific courses or disciplines, teachers emphasize the importance of offering a wide variety from which to choose. As one elective teacher describes, “there’s just got to be

“You’re limiting the kids to what’s offered within the confines of the building”

enough choice. Not every kid wants to take art. Not every kid wants to take home [economics]" (Resp11, MH). A few teachers, however, indicate that vocational/CTE courses are of particular concern since they may be sequenced over the course of several years.

In addition to electives, teachers also express concern about opportunities for younger students to take advanced classes. One King Street teacher ponders:

So our high flier tenth graders, where do they go? How do they fit? Where do they duplicate/ Where can we combine? We would have to think of one school in two places even more than we do now" (Resp16, KS).

TO ENSURE ENOUGH CHOICE, SCHOOLS REQUIRE PROXIMITY OR THEIR OWN RESOURCES

Teachers feel strongly that students should not be confined to the courses and programs at one specific school. Several teachers suggest continuing a flow of students back and forth between schools. In this case, schools would need to be close enough together that students could easily walk back and forth between campuses.

Alternatively, many teachers suggest that both campuses would need to be equipped with independent resources. While one science teacher worries about the earth science division, noting, "we'd have to split the deck. Which means we'd have to split the staff, we'd have to

"I'd like to see a campus where we have everything on one campus."

split up the equipment," (Resp1, KS) others propose that facilities and staff would have to be duplicated. In addition to more teachers and classroom facilities, several participants push for schools to be run independently for increased efficiency. One Minnie Howard teacher notes, "I'd like to see a campus where we have everything on one campus. When I need something, I can get it done right there. I don't have to go to King Street [to] get answers to a budget question" (Resp10, MH). In contemplating how to best implement the configuration, teachers indicate that both solutions come with major obstacles. These are presented in Figure 2.1 on the following page.

NEW CONFIGURATIONS MUST SUPPORT THE NEEDS OF ALL STUDENTS

Several teachers emphasize the importance of addressing the needs of students who require additional support or an alternative educational environment, and express uncertainty that a 9-10/11-12 configuration would allow for this. One Minnie Howard reading teacher asserts,

I would like to see some alternative program set up for students that would do better in a smaller environment or...like designed specifically for their needs and things or if we had a vocational program, things like that. I don't know if nine, ten, eleven, twelve solves the problem with meeting the needs of all the different learners that we have. (Resp4, MH)

Another teacher claims that the biggest problem with the high school currently is a lack of alternative education options, and calls for such opportunities within a new configuration.

Several teachers highlight the International Academy specifically, and wish to maintain this program throughout the high school grades. Though, as one science teacher points out, these students should also have the opportunity to participate in traditional classes as well. He notes, “I think it’s important that whatever final decision is made that it remain a school within a school so there’s opportunities for those students...to be able to try classes outside of the academy to learn more English” (Resp9, KS).

Figure 2.1: Primary Barriers to 9-10/11-12 Solutions

Commuting Between Schools	Teachers say that trying to align schedules to allow for students going back and forth would be 'a nightmare'
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•“You couldn't have a situation where kids are traveling between buildings so you would need to fully staff two buildings with teachers who could teach all of the different courses that we offer in our program of studies because that would just mean more travel otherwise and more complicated master schedules.” (Resp3, MH)•“I don't know that you can transition them all back and forth all the time, so unless those buildings were physically right next to each other where you could go from one building to the other very easily, I just don't see it happening (Resp 5, MH)	
Independent resources	Teachers doubt whether the district is willing to pay for duplicating facilities and staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•“I have a great ceramics room over here with a whole bunch of pottery wheels, I can't imagine they're going to give me the same exact studio as a 10th grade school and hire somebody to teach that.” (Resp2, KS)•“If they're going to have a second building they will have to offer the same facilities in the second building that are here....So, that's money. It's going to cost a whole lot of money because they're going to build, not exactly the same, but very similar to this”(Resp14, KS).	

ALTERNATIVE CONFIGURATIONS

A few teachers bring up ideas for alternative configurations for a split campus concept.

9&12	“because your 9th grade class is always your biggest class [and seniors] are nowhere near that...I like it because of [the] sheer numbers.”
10&11	"Cause in 10 and 11, it is so SOL driven. That would be kind of nice to have them all in one building. (Resp12, KS)
9-11 12	“I think that it would probably be more effective if it is the seniors who have their own campus because they're more mature. The 9th graders, I think, they're too young to be on their own and not have any big brothers or big sisters to look after them" (Resp14, KS)

APPENDIX

Figure A.1: Participant List

PART.	CAMPUS	YEARS AT ACPS	SUBJECT	PREFERRED FORMAT
1	King Street Campus	41	Science/Planetarium	9/10-12 or 9-10/11-12
2	King Street Campus	7	Art	2 comprehensive high schools
3	Minnie Howard Campus	14	Anonymous	2 comprehensive high schools
4	Minnie Howard Campus	16	Reading	2 comprehensive high schools
5	Minnie Howard Campus	25	Anonymous	9/ 10-12
6*	King Street Campus	22	World Language	1 large high school campus
7	Minnie Howard Campus	2	Anonymous	9-10/11-12 campus
8	Minnie Howard Campus	1	English	2 comprehensive high schools
9	King Street Campus	18	Science	1 large high school or 9-10/11-12
10	Minnie Howard Campus	17	Library	2 comprehensive high schools
11	Minnie Howard Campus	15	Anonymous	9-10/ 11-12 (2 comprehensive high schools is ideal but does not trust district to do equitably)
12	King Street Campus	19	Anonymous	9-10/11-12
13	Minnie Howard Campus	3	Art	2 comprehensive high schools
14	King Street Campus	18	Trades & Industry	9-10/11-12 or 9-10/12
15*	Minnie Howard Campus	3	Social Studies	2 comprehensive high schools
16	King Street Campus	18	Anonymous	No preference

*Participated via written response to questions

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