

Madison West High School

Principal Update

November 2009

This update will address some of the concerns that have been raised since the beginning of the year as well as review many of the major initiatives, events and programs at West during the 2009-10 school year.

District Concerns

High school pupil/teacher ratios for allocation purposes have remained static or been reduced. All four high schools struggle with allocation issues and every school but Lafollette has classes above 30.

In a system where we are working with a finite allocation and have to respond to a set number of required courses first, electives may have to be capped so that required courses can be staffed. As a result we guarantee that all students will have access to the required courses needed to graduate within their four-year high school career.

West High School Concerns

The first issue I would like to address is the misinformation reported to the West High School Community regarding our enrollment numbers here at West. I would like to clarify what our enrollment numbers are, and then explain how that mistake was made. The second issue involves our scheduling practices. Concerns related to scheduling were raised by numerous students and parents this Fall, and there were questions and concerns at grade level meetings as well.

I take full responsibility for the manner and content of the information that was shared with the West community regarding enrollment numbers this Fall. This was a human error, not a computer error. Infinite Campus has the ability to generate enrollment numbers in two ways. One screen calculates and displays all students linked to West, including those in alternative programs. For example, a student attending Shabazz is still listed on that screen as a West Student. A second screen does not include all students linked to West; instead, only students physically attending West, and serviced through our site based allocation. Simply put, I relied on information from the incorrect screen generated on Infinite Campus. I apologize for the frustration this mistake regarding enrollment numbers caused.

Each year we closely plan our scheduling procedures and attempt to implement a process that is equally efficient and effective. This Fall particularly, we have heard concerns from a number of students and parents; primarily dissatisfaction with the availability of certain course offerings. Here are some of the challenges and issues related to scheduling,

followed by specific changes we will be implementing based on the concerns we have heard.

- 1) Class schedules are built on student request, but also are built to accommodate single offerings of courses such as orchestra or AP Calculus. Courses are also capped when they have only a specific number of lab stations or the class activity has safety requirements that demand a smaller enrollment. Teacher certification also may restrict the number of sections that can be offered. When all things are considered in the master schedule, student requests cannot all be honored.
- 2) The district allocation process gives each school a finite number of teacher allocations to be used to staff all classes, study halls, and positions for specific programming needs. I deployed the information in a manner similar to the other schools and as we have in previous years.
- 3) Assistant Superintendent Nash gives out all allocation to schools with the exception of a few FTE that can be requested for unexpected changes such as a spike over the predicted enrollment.
- 4) West students tend to take seven classes out of seven periods rather than take a study hall. West tries to use its allocations to staff more offerings than other schools that use allocation for study halls with higher enrollment numbers.
- 5) West, as do the other three high schools, runs the computerized master schedule builder in a manner that promotes access to classes that are needed to fulfill graduation requirements. Special education and ESL students are placed first in the run, followed by seniors, juniors, sophomores, and freshman.

West High Solutions

The proposed plan below is designed to address two concerns: 1) overcrowding and 2) access to electives. The first step in the plan is to convert unassigned Education Assistant (EA) Clerical hours to .2 teacher FTE. This allocation will be used to offer an additional section of Spanish V AP and Algebra I Honors during a zero hour.

Four computers will be added to each of the two Graphic Design labs which will allow for 40 additional slots. All courses, except for one have pre-requisites.

We will identify the students who originally requested the course and have fulfilled the prerequisite, then use a lottery for student selection. We will also consult with art teachers, as needed.

We will also be adding an additional class of creative writing. The same process listed above will be used for student placement.

Biology I classes are now at 29 students or below. Mainstream Biology at Memorial ranges from 27-30, East 25-29, La Follette 24-27. Because our class size numbers are in line with other Biology classes across the district we will not be adding any additional Biology sections

In the coming year, all assistant principals will be trained and knowledgeable about the master scheduling process so that each Smaller Learning Community is prepared to monitor their own respective scheduling and student enrollment concerns.

Since the scheduling software does not allow students to prioritize alternate requests, alternate requests will not be entered on-line for the 2009-2010 school year. Instead, the students will list up to 4 alternates, in order of preference on the schedule request card. Designated schedulers will refer to the request card when completing schedules and/or contact the student.

Students will receive tentative schedules for the 2010-2011 school year before the end of the current school year, allowing students to meet with their counselor to discuss modifications, if needed.

Autumn Updates

In addition to the issues outlined above, the following items are just a few highlights as I reflect on Fall and the first quarter of the school year.

Ash Street Entrance

Our 80th Anniversary Homecoming Parade and Ash Street Entrance Dedication ceremony was a culmination of a five year project that brought faculty/staff, students, parents, alumni, community and the Madison School District together for the state of the art renovation of the Ash Street Entrance. The celebration embodied the spirit, pride and integrity of the rich tradition of West High School.

REaL Grant

This is year two of our District wide REaL (Relationships, Engagement & Learning) Grant. The four priorities this year are Providing access to rigorous curriculum for all students, Ensuring that all students complete their high school program and/or graduate, Improving collaboration and communication among staff, students, and parents, and Improving the sense of community at West High School. Year two of a five - year grant cycle is typically the beginning of implementation of all the prioritized initiatives that have been outlined over the five year cycle of the grant. As a result, faculty and staff are very busy, working on a variety of committees that support our priorities.

West Roundtables

Hosted by PTSO, the recent West Roundtable discussion drew over 80 staff, students, parents, and community members. The event was planned by a committee of West staff

and PTSO in an effort to foster communication and collaboration within our community. It was facilitated by professional consultant Kathleen Paris. Participants gathered in small groups to discuss their opinions on the values, expectations, and future of West. We view the evening as a big success and look forward to the facilitator's report to help guide the vision of West High School. Many thanks to those who attended and for the hours of work by Deb Neff, Shu-Chi Liang, Beth Thompson, and Heather Lott.

Academic Support

We are excited that we have consolidated our academic services into one area. It is in the best interest of our overall academic programs to relocate academic support programs to a centralized area in order to bring the resources to the students. Cross Grade Tutorial, Schools of Hope tutors, The Literacy Center and the Credit Recovery and Increasing Skills (CRIS) program are all in close proximity to room 225, the Resource Hall(9th-10th grade study hall). All of the services are up and running and are helping students to access tutoring, help with homework, and specialized literacy supports.

After School Supports

We continue to expand academic supports into the evening hours and look to identify specific groups of students who need tutoring. West is partnering with community-based organizations to provide much needed person power for after school academic support. In addition to ASPIRA, the University of Wisconsin PEOPLE Program, and Schools of Hope, we look forward to partnering with the Nehemiah Corporation under the direction of Dr. Reverend Alex Gee and Mount Zion Church Pastor Rick Jones to bring in volunteers to help with homework, provide mentoring, encouragement, advocacy and support. We hope to have this additional programming up and running by the third week of November.

Adopt-a-School Program with the Foundation for Madison Public Schools

Much like the adopt a highway program you may have heard about in years past the Foundation for Madison Schools sponsors a program called Adopt-a-School. The idea is that businesses in the Madison community form a partnership with one or more schools to create a reciprocal relationship of giving. The Group Health Cooperative of Madison has adopted West. We are in the process of determining what this new partnership might bring to West High in terms of resources for our students health care, academic support and possibly financial support of projects for our school.

Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID)

We are in the first year of implementation with our new 9th grade AVID students. Carrie Bohman, Lead AVID teacher, Lee Anne Johnson, AVID coordinator 9th grade core and the rest of the AVID site team are doing an incredible job getting this program up and running.

Our AVID students are utilizing AVID strategies in our tutorials each week on Tuesday and Thursday. We are in our fourth full week of tutorials, and I think our students are seeing the benefits of the AVID strategies, like using Cornell notes and asking high level questions regarding their understanding of the content presented in their courses. All 9th grade core teachers were exposed to AVID methodologies during a staff development retreat held in October. These teachers are utilizing AVID methodologies in their classrooms and are exposing their students to some of these strategies. We are excited about the progress we have made thus far and will begin the selection process for the new AVID elective teacher for the 2010-2011 9th grade AVID class in the coming weeks.

Literacy

The Literacy Center is now open for business. The new Literacy Center is located in room 223 in the old social studies office just inside room 225. The Literacy Center has conducted several student workshops around writing college essays, organizational skills, and note-taking. The response has been fantastic, with over 100 students taking part in those.

West is exploring two new web-based instructional programs that will build students' reading and literacy skills. In addition, our Literacy Committee has been meeting to identify 3 literacy strategies that will be the focus for the whole school this year. Our literacy coach will be in classrooms supporting curriculum development and instruction in those 3 literacy strategies.

Positive Behavior Support (PBS)

PBS is a process that emphasizes systems of positive behavior. It is an interactive approach that includes staff, students, support people and administration. PBS is a system of behavior expectations that includes all students. West's PBS Committee, comprised of over 20 staff members, developed a framework of expectations around the word HOUSE: Honor, Opportunity, Understanding, Safe, and Education. Three separate groups are working on implementing various aspects of PBS. The data group is analyzing behavior data to determine where more professional development and student instruction could be useful. The teaching group designs classroom lessons and strategies for classroom teachers to use in support of positive behavior and the acknowledgement group plans positive recognitions and acknowledgements for students who are exhibiting positive behavior.

Technology

Over the past year and a half, many faculty members wrote technology grants and received electronic whiteboards, document cameras, slates, and student response systems. These staff have participated in over thirty hours of professional development learning how to use these tools to create interactive lessons, to differentiate instruction, and to

promote inquiry in their classrooms. The level of collaboration between and among students and teachers at West and beyond continues to grow, creating even more excitement about learning. We are proud to say that a number of our teachers shared their strategies for using technology in the classroom at the district-wide staff development workshops in September and at the University of Wisconsin in October.

In addition, we are in the process of writing proposals for our final round of Smart and Promethean whiteboards. West will be submitting requests for 30 additional interactive whiteboards. That means 60 classrooms will be equipped with the latest instructional technology equipment.

West will be the recipient of additional updates in technology at the beginning of the second semester. Wireless access points will be installed in the Resource Hall (225), the CRC (203), and the LMC. Seventy new computers, including Netbooks, will replace outdated hardware.

We have installed a second a wireless Mac Lab to increase the number of Graphic Design courses we can offer. At the semester, we will be adding another eight stations to our labs. That will open up 40 seats for students interested in taking second semester Design graphics classes.

New Television Screens at the Ash Street Entrance

As you walk through the main entrance of West High, above the information window you see two new 50-inch television monitors. These monitors will allow us to easily communicate to everyone what is currently happening at West. It will also enable us to instill school spirit and pride. We will post announcements for the day and itinerary of what is happening in the building after regular school hours. We will also use the monitors to highlight various programs, events, special activities and individuals in the West community.

Weekly features may include:

Know Your Madison West Regent

The Principal's Corner

Accomplishment of the Month

General candid shots of members of the West High Community

Sports, Art, Programs, Performances

Special Recognitions

Being Principal of this great institution continues to be an honor and a privilege. In a comprehensive high school of over 2000 diverse learners it is indeed a great challenge to help every student reach their full potential. I along with West's incredible faculty and staff am working hard every day to prepare ourselves, our school and our students for the

best public education possible. It is our tradition and legacy of educational excellence that we strive to achieve in all that we do.

Sincerely,

Ed Holmes, Principal
Madison West High School