



Grade-Level Realignment:

A Journey of Discovery to Improve Transitions Between Schools

Project Overview

In 2014, citizens of Columbus, Nebraska approved a bond issue to build a new high school in the community. Columbus Public Schools is now moving forward with a plan to transition 9th-12th grades to the new high school building in December 2016. The current 6th-8th grade middle school, in addition to 5th grade classrooms currently housed in elementary buildings, will leave their present locations and transition into the vacated high school building in August 2017.

Historically, based on NeSA reading and math scores, Columbus has experienced a decrease in student proficiency from 5th to 6th grade and from 8th to 11th grade. This drop in proficiency accompanies the physical transitions that take place from elementary school to middle school to high school.

We propose that in order to better support our students through these transitions, we gather baseline data on satisfaction with the school climate, increase articulation between grade levels and tailor the learning environment to increase student engagement through positive reinforcement and visual representations of a positive climate.

Review of Literature

In a review of data, Schwerdt and West (2013), and Rockoff and Lockwood (2010), both found that structural school transitions adversely affect student achievement. In particular, the largest decrease in achievement scores were found after students transitioned from elementary school buildings into middle school settings (Combs et al. 2011). In the publication, *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* (2006), the authors recommend three focus areas to help address this decrease in achievement: 1) collaborative leadership and PLCs, 2) a personalized learning environment and rigorous curriculum, 3) instruction and assessment. The nine cornerstone strategies to support these focus areas include: rigorous essential learnings, common planning time, structured planning to align the curriculum to student needs, frequent student advisory time to evaluate progress, data-driven instruction, flexible scheduling, decision-making involving all stakeholders, equal access to challenging learning, and professional development that supports the plan.

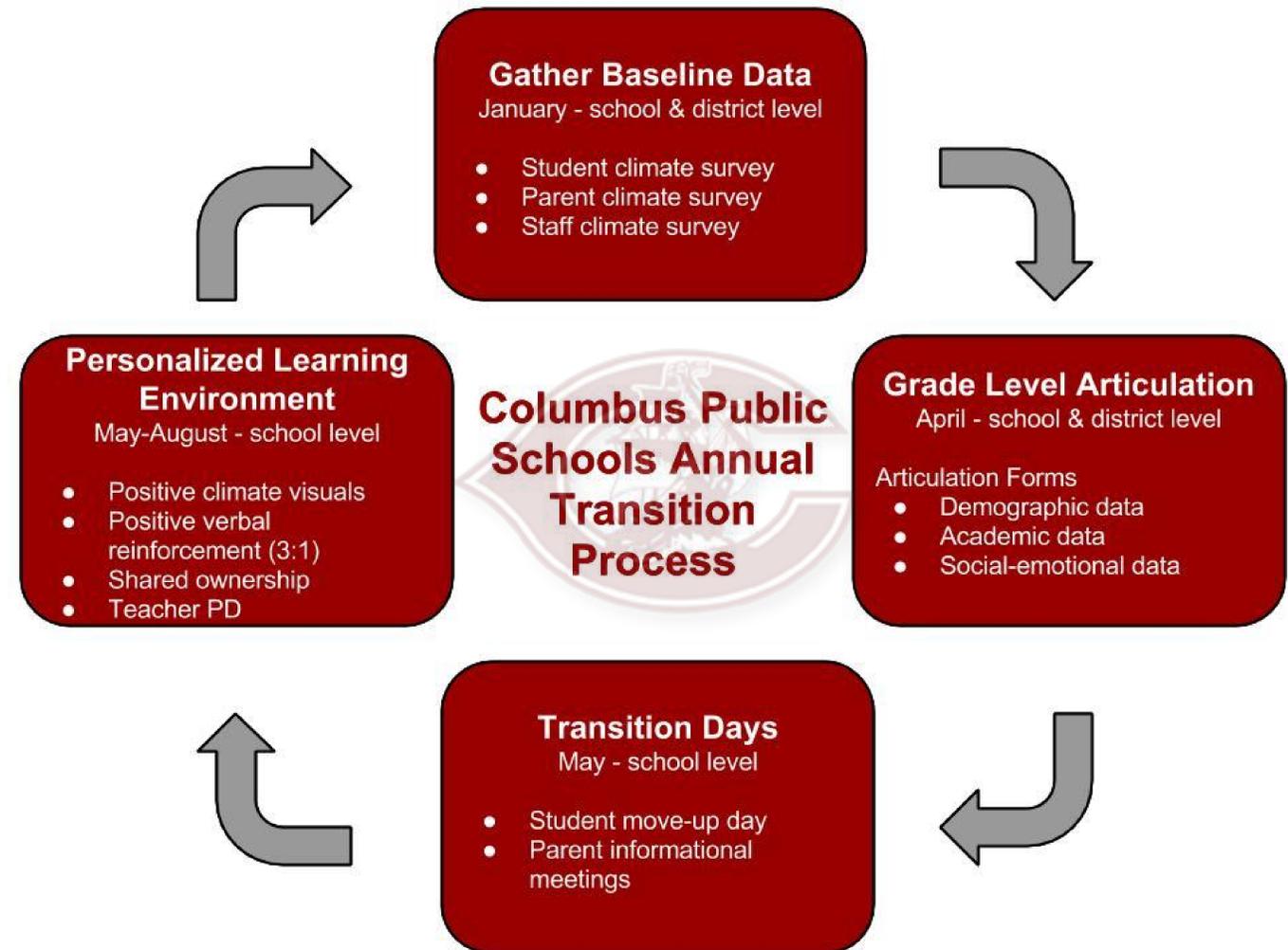
Resources

- Climate Surveys (Student, Parent, Staff)
- Grade Level Articulation Forms
- Breaking Ranks in the Middle
- Association for Middle Level Education (www.amle.org)
- National Association of Secondary School Principals (www.nassp.org)
- Personalize Learning (<http://www.personalizelearning.com/p/toolkit.html>)

Timeline



Action Plan



References

Combs, J. P., Clark, D., Moore, G. W., Onwuegbuzie, A. K., Edmonson, S. L., & Slate, J. R. (2011). Academic Achievement for Fifth-Grade Students in Elementary and Intermediate School Settings: Grade Span Configurations. *Current Issues in Education*, 14(1). Retrieved from <http://cie.asu.edu/>

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