
Transfer of Grade 9
from Chester and Area
Middle School to
Forest Heights
Community School:
Potential Impact on the
Students and Schools

Prepared for the South
Shore Regional School
Board

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Because this paper was to be a resource for the Superintendent of Schools and the South Shore Regional School Board, it was important to gather the most up-to-date information and expert opinion from various practitioners who are going through or have recently been through the reconfiguration of a middle school and high school. Fortunately, several such educators in the SSRSB and the two neighboring school systems had much to offer and were willing to share their insights and experience.

A very sincere “Thank you!” to the following very busy educators who contributed to this study:

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Transfer of Grade 9 from Chester and Area Middle School to Forest Heights Community School: Impact on the Students and Schools

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Last spring, the South Shore Regional School Board (SSRSB) decided to assess the option of changing the grade configuration of Forest Heights Community School (FHCS) and its two feeder schools. The reconfiguration would be to transfer grade 9 from New Ross Consolidated School (NRCS) and Chester and Area Middle School (CAMS) to FHCS. The possible reconfiguration of New Ross Consolidated is being assessed formally through the “school review process”, as defined in provincial legislation. An Impact Assessment Report for the school was made public by the SSRSB last month. This paper is intended both as a supplement to the NRCS Impact Assessment Report and as an additional resource to assist the Superintendent of Schools and the SSRSB in weighing the potential educational benefits, primarily, of reconfiguring the three schools—with some attention to any operational benefits that might result.

This executive summary is limited to listing the main points in each section of the paper; it does not include the section on the research on grade configuration.

Grade Configurations on Nova Scotia and Beyond

Only 21 of the 79 high schools (27%) in Nova Scotia have the grade 10-12 configuration and the number decreased by 5 over the past 6 years while the numbers of the other configurations increased slightly. The number of grade 9-12 high schools increased from 4 to 13 since 1996.

Beyond Nova Scotia, the grade 9-12 high schools are common in some provinces, as are 10-12 high schools in others. Close to home, a quick scan of the 2012 directory for public schools in New Brunswick showed that all high schools in that province have the 9-12 configuration, if not a P-12 or 7-12, whereas the high schools in Prince Edward Island are 10-12. Beyond the Maritimes, the situation varies from province to province. For example, Ontario’s high schools are grade 9-12 and grade 10-12 seems common in Calgary and Edmonton.

Enrolment Projections for CAMS and FHCS

If both grade 9 classes from CAMS and NRCS are transferred, the maximum projected enrolment for FHCS is 377 for 2013-14; if only CAMS grade 9 is transferred, it is 363. The enrolment of FHCS was 444 in 1996-97 and it has been less since that year.

The Middle School Approach

The middle school approach, or “middle school concept”, is built on the understanding that early adolescents (ages 11-14) in grades 6-8 have unique intellectual, physical, emotional and social needs

which should be taken into account in designing the approach to program delivery and preferred instructional strategies.

Classroom Space at FHCS

The four classrooms required for the grade 9 students are available and the gymnasium schedule can accommodate the additional physical education classes without having to be curtailed into two teaching areas.

Just last month, the Department of Education announced that FHCS will receive renovations to teaching areas and equipment to offer the new skilled trades program. It is possible that the grade 9 students could have some type of access to these teaching areas and the equipment.

Staffing Allocations for Each School

The total number of teaching positions for FHCS would increase by 6.11 full-time-equivalent (FTE) positions if grade 9 students were transferred from CAMS. The number of classroom teacher positions would increase by 4 and the vice-principal position would become a full-time administrative position. Also, the guidance position would become a full-time position and other specialist allocations would increase.

The total allocation for CAMS would decrease by 5.92 FTE's (net increase of 0.19). Most of this decrease for CAMS is due to a reduction of 4 classroom teachers, and reductions in the allocations to provide elective courses, program support (PST) and administration. The program support teacher allocation would be reduced by 50% and the vice-principal position would be 50% administration, instead of 75% as it is now.

The transfer of the NRCS grade 9 students would result in a net decrease of 1.27 FTE's between CAMS and NRCS. Thus, the transfer of grade 9 from both CAMS and NRCS would result in a net reduction of a full teaching position in the family of schools or the school system (+0.19-1.27=-1.08). Also, the administrative assistant allocation at FHCS would increase from 1.50 to 2.00 full-time equivalent positions.

Potential Impact on the Grade 9 Students and FHCS

Most answers to questions about potential impacts can be only general in nature because they do not apply to all students. As with all age or grade groupings of students, a grade 9 class is a grouping of unique individuals who cannot be described with only one set of characteristics. Because their personal interests, maturity levels, abilities, and aptitudes vary greatly, what may be considered as a benefit for some students are challenges for others.

This difficulty in trying to label a potential impact as a benefit or challenge becomes evident in discussions with families. For example, some families are deeply concerned about how their child may be influenced by negative role models in the high school. Others see more potential benefit than

challenge in how their child may be influenced by the various positive role models whether in academics, sports, the arts and student leadership.

The following potential benefits for grade 9 students are explained in the body of this paper:

- The physical, social and emotional developmental stage of grade 9 students dictates that their interests, behaviors and activities are or quickly become more aligned to those of the older students in high school than those of younger students.
- Grade 9 students who do not transfer to the high school until grade 10 commonly face two sources of considerable anxiety: moving to the high school next year and selecting their grade 10 courses. If they have already transferred to the high school after grade 8, one of these sources of anxiety has been removed. Also, becoming getting to know the staff and their surroundings in grade 9 increases their comfort level in going through the registration process for grade 10.
- The middle school approach is designed, more so than not, to suit students in grade 6-8.
- A decision to transfer grade 9 from a middle school to a high school for the first time provides an opportunity to redesign the grade 9 program and methods of instruction to fit the unique needs and interests of the students---the grade 9 program is presently under review by the Department of Education. Furthermore, as one of the well-established “community schools” in Nova Scotia and being surrounded by large tracts of crown forest land, the school is in a unique position to develop an outdoor education learning centre. Outdoor education activities have real potential to enhance the grade 9 program.
- Benefits or Challenges in Extra-Curricular Activities? As the most senior students in a middle school or junior high, some grade 9 students are lifted to high achievement levels and they serve as role models for the younger students. If transferred to a grade 9-12 high school setting, some of these same students do not get the same opportunities or are not as highly motivated to achieve. On the other hand, other students who move to the high school are enthusiastic and more highly motivated by being among senior high students.
- The fact that FHCS will have about 100 more students creates a benefit for all students. Teachers whose expertise and preference are in a particular subject area have a greater chance of being able to teach only in that area; i.e., they have less chance of having to teach a course outside of their expertise and/or preference. For example, those trained and experienced to teach science or physical education may not have to teach a course in social studies or English.

Potential Impact on CAMS and Its Students

Some of the most obvious challenges or disadvantages are related the loss of 6 teaching positions caused by the 25% reduction in the total enrolment.

The potential impact on the extra-curricular programs at CAMS can be both negative and positive. In one sense, the varied and significant contributions of the grade 9 students are a loss while, in another

sense, the experience of other schools has been that the grade 8 students will rise to the challenge of being the most senior students in the school.

This positive reaction of the grade 8 students to being the most senior is related to another effect which was described by the principals who were consulted during this study. They observed that the grade 8 students and other middle school students seemed to gain some freedom to be themselves as young adolescents once they are no longer under the shadow of the older grade 9 students.

If CAMS becomes a grade 6-8 middle school, then the priorities of the teachers and administration can be more specifically dedicated to designing and implementing the teaching and learning strategies of a true middle school approach. Furthermore, one of the top priorities can be to integrate the concepts and principles of inquiry-based learning with those of the middle school approach.

Financial and Other Operational Impacts

The financial impact of transferring grade 9 is primarily related to the changes in staff allocations.

Sufficient Time to Ensure a Smooth Transition

If the South Shore Regional School Board decides that Forest Heights Community School should include grade 9, then much should be done before the transition occurs. Fortunately, there is no reason whatsoever to argue that this must be done quickly.

One of the main reasons to “take the time to get it right” is that the grade 9 curriculum has never been offered at FHCS. It is easier to transfer students, whatever their grade level, from one school to another if the program is already being provided in the receiving school.

Not only should the teachers presently on staff at FHCS and those transferring from CAMS be given adequate time for professional development and planning, the administration of FHCS will need time to plan how the grade 9 students will be accommodated in the school. There are important questions to be answered through a process that includes collaboration with the staff and consultation with the student leaders in the school.

Sufficient time for the transition will be important for the grade 8 students of CAMS also----similarly for NRCS if it is included. Under the present and traditional practice, grade 8 students look forward to being the “senior” students during their grade 9 year. The effects of transferring grade 9 are magnified when the change occurs because the students in both grade 8 and grade 9 move from the middle school to the high school at the same time.

Open and regular communication with staff, students, school advisory councils, home and school associations and families would be just as important a feature of an effective transition plan as collaboration and consultation.

Transfer of Grade 9 from Chester and Area Middle School to Forest Heights Community School: Impact on the Students and Schools

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Introduction

Last spring, the South Shore Regional School Board (SSRSB) decided to assess the option of changing the grade configuration of Forest Heights Community School (FHCS) and its two feeder schools. The reconfiguration would transfer grade 9 from New Ross Consolidated School (NRCS) and Chester and Area Middle School (CAMS) to FHCS to make Forest Heights a grade 9-12 high school, NRCS a Grade P-8 school and CAMS a Grade 6-8 middle school. As in some other provinces of Canada, the number of grade 9-12 high schools has been increasing gradually in our province. Some grade 10-12 high schools in Nova Scotia have had grade 9 added over the past couple of decades and some of the new high schools built recently house grade 9-12. The decision of the SSRSB was based on the decisions being made in other boards and by the Department of Education. Also, it was based on the fact that the operation and configuration of 10 other schools in the region were identified for assessment through the provincial “school review” process. Because of severe financial restraints in an era of declining enrolment, the SSRSB must continue its search for all possible efficiencies in the operation of its schools, but the key rationale behind this study is to consider the most appropriate placement of grade 9 students in terms of programming and social/emotional health; in other words, where their needs are best met.

The possible reconfiguration of New Ross Consolidated is being assessed formally through the “school review process”, as defined in provincial legislation, because other factors about the school’s continued operation needed to be assessed. An Impact Assessment Report for the school was made public by the SSRSB last September. As indicated in that Report, if the Board decides that NRCS is to be reconfigured as a P-8 school, it could happen only if FHCS is reconfigured to include grade 9 from CAMS.

This paper is intended both as a supplement to the NRCS Impact Assessment Report and as an additional resource to assist the Superintendent of Schools and the SSRSB in weighing the potential educational and operational benefits of reconfiguring the three schools.

Although the operational impact is given attention in this paper, the main focus is on the educational impact on students. The operational impact on each of the schools is relatively minor compared to the potential educational impact for both the middle school and high school students.

The remainder of the paper will address each of the following:

1. Research on grade configuration
2. Grade configurations in Nova Scotia and beyond
3. Enrolment projections for CAMS and FHCS
4. The middle school approach
5. Classroom space at FHCS
6. Staffing allocations for each school
7. Potential impact on the grade 9 students

8. Potential Impact on CAMS and its students
9. Financial and other operational impacts.
10. Sufficient time to ensure a smooth transition.

The following steps were taken in carrying out this study:

- An internet search of the relevant research on grade configuration
- Consultations with the administrators of CAMS and FHCS and several in the regional office
- Consultations, last spring, while preparing the Impact Assessment Report, with the principal and School Advisory Council representatives of NRCS
- Consultations with the principals of 4 schools in the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board--- Hantsport School, Horton High School (Grade 9-12), Kings County Academy (Grade P-8) and Wolfville School (Grade P-8)
- Consultation with the principal of Maple Grove Education Centre, Hebron, Tri-County Regional School Board---a school which was reconfigured 3 years ago from grade 7-9 to grade 7-8
- Consultation with the Director of Programs and Student Services of the AVRSB
- Participation at a public meeting for the families and staffs of the schools which might be affected by this reconfiguration
- Meeting with the School Advisory Councils of CAMS and FHCS.

Research on Grade Configuration

This consultant reviewed the research on grade configuration in 2007 as part of a study for the Nova Scotia Department of Education. The results were reported in a paper entitled “The Relationship between Learning and Grade Configuration and How It May Influence the Use of Schools in Nova Scotia”. (The paper can be accessed on the author’s website, james.gunn.ca.)

Most research studies on grade configuration over the past 20 to 30 years are investigations of the success or failure of implementing the “middle school” approach to teaching and learning compared to continuing to operate schools under the traditional junior high school approach. Generally from the review of the literature, the more common configurations used in the implementation of the middle school approach are P-5, 6-8, and 9-12 or P-8 and 9-12.

The conclusions of the 2007 study which seem most relevant to this SSRSB study are the following:

Conclusion 1: The findings from educational research are indefinite with respect to the effects of various grade level configurations on students, in terms of how different configurations affect their learning and their social and emotional development. The most referenced and most current findings are about student achievement levels for middle school grades when tested under different configurations. Other findings address Grade 9 as a year of transition between middle or junior high school and high school. A few studies are about the negative effects of school-to-school transitions on students between Grade Primary and Grade 12. Very generally, academic achievement and other areas of student development are influenced by grade configurations, but negative effects can be minimized as schools are configured. Educators who are aware of the potentially negative influences of particular configurations and of school-to-

school transitions should be able to make beneficial adjustments in program delivery and organizational structures and processes.

Conclusion 2: The educational research on configuration does not clearly delineate the relative advantages and disadvantages of the Grade 6-8 middle school configuration compared to other configurations in common use, particularly the 7-9 junior high configuration. Some recent research has found that student achievement for middle school students in P-8 schools is higher than that for the same grades in 6-8 middle schools. As it should be, this finding is being questioned seriously because other factors may be the determinant variables.

Conclusion 3: From the educational perspective, Grade 9 should be housed in high schools, rather than middle schools or junior high schools, given the choice and with the understanding that no evidence strongly supports one configuration over another. The research does suggest that, whether in high schools or not, the Grade 9 year should be recognized as a period of transition, from the perspective of learning and teaching and the perspective of social, emotional and physical maturation.

The “understanding that no evidence strongly supports one configuration over another (Conclusion 3)” is based on the fact that the best configuration for grade 9 is not a serious question compared to questions about middle schools as grade P-8 or 6-8. In the professional literature or research, it seems to be generally assumed that grade 9 is included with the senior high grades. Whatever the reasons for the lack of studies, the grade 9-12 configuration continues to have or is gaining support in school systems across Canada and the United States. This may be an indirect result of the implementation of the middle school concept as a grade 6-8 or P-8 configuration, but also it may be based on the practical experience of educators.

Many teachers and administrators (including this consultant) who have worked under various school configurations which include grade 9, have long recognized that, generally, grade 9 students are going through a transitional stage in their physical, social and emotional development. The physical, social and emotional developmental stage of grade 9 students dictates that their interests and behavior are or quickly become more aligned to those of the older students in high school than those of younger students in middle school.

One of the first steps in this SSRSB study was to search the internet for new research on grade configuration reported since 2007. Two reports of recent research reports confirm that the attention continues to be on the best configuration for middle schools in the USA and on the effect of school-to-school transitions. A study of New York City schools looked at the student achievement levels in P-8 schools compared to those in middle schools which do not include the elementary grades (Jonah Rockoff and Benjamin Lockwood, 2010) and a Harvard study of Florida schools looked at the effect on student achievement of school-to-school transitions (Guido Schwerdt and Martin West, 2011). Whether or not middle schools should be configured as grade 6-8 or housed within the grade P-8 is the predominant question in the research. No studies on the preferred configuration for grade 9 were found in this recent internet scan.

Grade Configurations on Nova Scotia and Beyond

Table 1 is an update to a table in the 2007 Report for the Department of Education referenced previously. As the table demonstrates, only 21 of the 79 high schools (27%) have the grade 10-12 configuration and the number decreased by 5 over the past 6 years while the numbers of the other configurations increased slightly. The number of grade 9-12 high schools increased from 4 to 13 since 1996. In other words, 73% of the high schools in Nova Scotia include Grade 9 in their configuration and the percentage is increasing.

Table 1: Number of High Schools and Configurations in 1996, 2006 and 2012

Configuration	No. of High Schools 1996	No. of High Schools 2006	No. of High Schools 2012 *	Diff. 2006-2012
10 to 12	24	26	21	(5)
9 to 12	4	12	13	1
6,7 or 8 to 12	37	25	27	2
P to 12	21	15	18	3
Totals	86	78	79	1

*Data from Department of Education Public Schools Directory, 2012

In recent years, Nova Scotia's Department of Education has taken the position that the grade 9-12 configuration is preferred but not mandated. For example, 6 high schools in Pictou County were amalgamated into one new school with grade 9-12 and a second new school with grade 10-12. The new high school which just opened in Yarmouth houses Grade 9-12 and a new high school being constructed in Bedford will house grade 10-12. The maximum enrolment has been the limiting factor to determine if a new high school can include grade 9.

Beyond Nova Scotia, the grade 9-12 high schools are common in some provinces, as are 10-12 high schools in others. Close to home, a quick scan of the 2012 directory for public schools in New Brunswick showed that all high schools in that province have the 9-12 configuration, if not a P-12 or 7-12, whereas the high schools in Prince Edward Island are 10-12. Beyond the Maritimes, the situation varies from province to province. The P-12 or 7-12 configurations are the dominant configurations in small rural communities because of the very small enrollments. In the more populated centres, some provinces use the 9-12 configuration and others use grade 10-12. In Ontario, the Department of Education defines an elementary school configuration as grade P-8 and secondary as grade 9-12; most if not all high schools in Ontario have P-12, 7-12 or 9-12 configurations. In Alberta, a sampling of high schools in Calgary and Edmonton found the grade 10-12 to be most common. The Winnipeg School Division has 13 high schools; one with grade 10-12, 6 with 9-12, and six with grade 7-12.

Enrolment Projections for CAMS and FHCS

The enrolment data in Table 2 and Table 3, provided by SSRSB's Human Resources Department, are used annually to determine staffing allocations and for budget planning.

Table 2: Historic enrolment figures and future projections for CAMS

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
6	79	74	75	82	83	93	77	90	99	62	66
7	86	83	82	77	81	83	96	79	91	100	63
8	116	90	87	81	80	79	85	97	80	92	101
9	99	119	94	90	82	82	82	88	99	82	94
Total	380	366	338	330	326	337	340	354	369	336	324
% Change	-9.52%	-3.68%	-7.65%	-2.37%	-1.21%	3.37%	0.89%	4.12%	4.24%	-8.94%	-3.57%

As an update to the data in Table 2, the actual total enrolment of CAMS for this September is 346 (6 more than the projection) and the actual enrolment for grade 9 is 78 (4 less than the projection).

Table 3: Historic enrolment figures and future projections for FHCS

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
10	136	142	151	113	113	97	106	104	105	114	97
11	162	122	114	130	101	91	78	86	85	87	94
12	130	139	123	121	138	111	102	85	95	94	96
Total	428	403	388	364	352	299	286	275	285	295	287
% Change	3.13%	-5.84%	-3.72%	-6.19%	-3.30%	-15.06%	-4.35%	-3.85%	3.64%	3.51%	-2.71%

As an update to the data in Table 3, the actual total enrolment of FHCS for this September is 285, one less than the projection.

Table 4 provides two total enrolment projections for FHCS. Total 1 includes grade 9 from CAMS and Total 2 includes grade 9 from both CAMS and NRCS. If both grade 9 classes are transferred the maximum projected enrolment for FHCS is 377 for 2013-14; it is 363, if only CAMS grade 9 is transferred.

To put this maximum enrolment in a historical context, the enrolment of FHCS was 444 in 1996-97 and it has been less since that year. It declined to 393 in 2003-04 and climbed to 428 in 2006-07 before declining gradually to its present level.

Table 4: Enrolment projections for FHCS including Grade 9

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
FHCS Grade 10-12	286	275	285	295	287
CAMS Grade 9	82	88	99	82	94
Total 1	368	363	384	377	381
NRCS Grade 9	18	14	12	12	10
Total 2	386	377	396	389	391

As an update to Table 4, the actual grade 9 enrolment of NRCS for this September is 17, one less than the projection. It should be noted that the total enrolment of NRCS for this September is 127, 10 more

than the projected total; the main increase is due to the 8 students in Grade Primary, 5 more than the projected figure.

The Middle School Approach

The middle school approach, or “middle school concept”, is built on the understanding that early adolescents (ages 11-14) have unique intellectual, physical, emotional and social needs which should be taken into account in designing the approach to program delivery and preferred instructional strategies. The instructional approach to learning for young adolescents should make the transition between the very distinct approaches of elementary school and high school.

The middle school approach is primarily a team approach. In a very traditional junior high approach, the students normally see 6 to 8 teachers in a single cycle, as they do in high schools. In a more contemporary middle school, a team of two or three teachers work closely together to provide science, language arts, social studies, and mathematics while specialists provide French, music, art, physical education, technology education and family studies. The team approach has numerous advantages for young adolescents. For example, teaching teams, if given the proper professional development and a regular, ongoing opportunity to collaborate, are able to raise the level of student engagement by creating a more nurturing environment, foster collaboration among students, improve relationships between teachers and students, and provide a more integrated curriculum.

The use of teacher teams makes other modern instructional approaches more viable. The South Shore Regional School Board is giving priority to two such noteworthy approaches. The teacher teams at New Ross Consolidated School are arranging the grade 7-9 students in “pods” or groups of students which follow more-or-less the same schedule while they focus on particular academic themes or areas of study. This grouping of students into pods allows the teacher teams to implement an “exploratory” type of learning in some courses or subject areas. Broadly speaking, the rationale underlying the use of pods, for at least some of the instructional time, is that it coincides more closely with the elementary school approach to instruction and learning.

The other relatively new approach, which is being implemented in some of the SSRSB schools, is inquiry-based learning. This umbrella term covers a number of other approaches to learning by inquiry, including problem-based learning, design-based learning and project-based learning. South Queens Junior High, which is scheduled to become a grade 6-8 middle school, refers to its interdisciplinary modules as project-based learning. It is a systematic teaching method that engages students in learning essential knowledge and life-enhancing skills through an extended, student-influenced inquiry process. Re-engaging students in learning as a way of increasing achievement is a specific outcome for this approach at South Queens Junior High.

Classroom Space at FHCS

As reported previously, the projected enrolment for 2013-14 would be 377 including grade 9 from both CAMS and NRCS and FHCS operated for over a decade with over 400 students. Although some original classrooms now serve other educational purposes---e.g., learning centres and rooms for program support teachers---the four classrooms required for the grade 9 students are available and the gymnasium schedule can accommodate the additional physical education classes without having to be curtailed into two teaching areas.

In October, the Department of Education announced good news for FHCS. \$920,000 will be spent on the facility, not only to upgrade the sprinkler system and repair the roof, but also to provide renovated teaching areas and equipment to offer the new skilled trades program which has been introduced in other high schools across Nova Scotia. It is possible that the grade 9 students could have some type of access to these new teaching areas and the equipment.

Staffing Allocations for Each School

The Human Resources Department of the SSRSB applies a staffing allocation formula to determine the number of full-time-equivalent (FTE) teaching positions for each school. The number of FTE's is based on the enrolment of each grade in a school and there are separate formulas for elementary, middle school and high schools. The staffing allocations in Table 5 and 6 were determined by applying the staffing formula to the projected enrolments for 2013-14.

According to the data in Table 5, the total number of teaching positions for FHCS would increase by 6.11 FTE positions if grade 9 was transferred from CAMS. The number of classroom teacher positions would increase by 4. The administration (principal and vice-principal) would increase from 1.75 to 2.00 FTE's; in other words, both the principal and vice-principal positions would be full-time administrative positions. Also, the guidance position would become a full-time position and other part-time specialist allocations would increase.

If the 14 grade 9 students also were transferred from New Consolidated School, the total allocation for FHCS would increase minimally because this small number of students would go into the grade 9 classes already added. In fact, the formula application to include the NRCS grade 9 students would increase the total staff allocation of FHCS by only 0.12 FTE positions, while the total allocation for NRCS would decrease by 1.39 FTE positions---a net reduction of 1.27 positions for the NRCS transfer.

Table 5: Teacher Staffing Forecast for FHCS with Grade 9 from CAMS

	Grade 10-12	Grade 9-12	Difference
Enrolment	275	363	88
Classroom teachers	10.79	14.79	4.00
Electives 7-9	0	0.88	0.88
Prep	1.35	1.35	0
Jr. High PST	0	0.52	0.52
Sen. High PST	1.63	1.63	0
Guidance	0.75	1.00	0.25
Behav. Support	0.37	0.48	0.11
Admin.	1.75	2.00	0.25
Sen. High Equity	2.00	2.00	0
Phys. Ed. Grant	0.33	0.35	0.02
O2	2.00	2.00	0
ESL	0.15	0.15	0
Flex	0.24	0.32	0.08
Total Staffing	21.36	27.47	6.11

The data in Table 6 indicate a decrease of 5.92 FTE's in the total staff allocation for CAMS if grade 9 was transferred to FHCS. Most of this decrease is due to a reduction of 4 classroom teachers, and reductions in the allocations to provide elective courses, program support (PST) and administration. The program support teacher allocation would be reduced by 50% and the vice-principal position would be 50% administration, instead of 75% as it is now.

Table 6: Teacher Staffing Forecast for CAMS

	Gr. 6-9	Gr. 6-8	Diff.
Enrolment	354	266	(88)
Classroom teachers	15	11	(4)
Prep/7-9 electives	3.01	2.13	(0.88)
Elem PST	0.53	0.53	0
Jr. High PST	1.57	1.04	(0.53)
Guidance	0.65	0.60	(0.05)
Behavioral Support	0.47	0.35	(0.12)
Admin.	1.75	1.50	(0.25)
Phys Ed Grant	0.10	0.08	(0.02)
Flex time	0.31	0.24	(0.07)
Total Staffing	23.39	17.47	(5.92)

Overall, the transfer of grade 9 from CAMS would result in a net increase of 0.19 full-time-equivalent teaching positions or 20% of a teaching position. The net reduction of the NRCS transfer (1.27 positions) combined with this would result in an overall net reduction of 1 teaching position in the family of schools or the school system.

With respect to non-teaching position in both schools, one allocation for administrative assistant positions would change, based on the present formula in use. The administrative assistant position at CAMS would remain at 1.50 full-time-equivalent positions, as it is now, and the allocation for FHCS would increase from 1.50 to 2.00 FTE positions.

Potential Impact on the Grade 9 Students and FHCS

One of the important questions in this study is about the impact on the grade 9 students of moving to Forest Heights Community School one year earlier than they do now. What are the potential benefits and challenges for the grade 9 students?

Before answering the question, it is important to emphasize that most answers can be only general in nature because they do not apply to all students. As with all age or grade groupings of students, a grade 9 class is a grouping of unique individuals who cannot be described with only one set of characteristics. Because their personal interests, maturity levels, abilities, and aptitudes vary greatly, what may be considered as a benefit for some students are challenges for others. Similarly, what may be a challenge or barrier for some individuals, leads to positive experiences or success for others.

This difficulty in trying to label a potential impact as a benefit or challenge becomes evident in discussions with families. For example, some families are deeply concerned about how their child may be influenced by negative role models in the high school. Others see more potential benefit than

challenge in how their child may be influenced by the various positive role models whether in academics, sports, the arts and student leadership. It seems important to acknowledge that this reality as one that must be kept in mind if the decision is made to transfer grade 9 to FHCS. It is referenced more than once in the explanations of potential benefits which follow.

A Better Alignment of Interests, Behaviours and Activities: The first generalization was stated earlier in this paper: The physical, social and emotional developmental stage of grade 9 students dictates that their interests, behaviors and activities are or quickly become more aligned to those of the older students in high school than those of younger students. At this point in their lives, they are quickly moving past the middle school stage of being young adolescents. Because of this alignment with older students, attending a high school in grade 9 can be viewed as a benefit for most students and, yes, a challenge for others who are more comfortable and secure with younger students. This general understanding about alignment was confirmed in all consultations with professional educators carried out for this study.

One Source of Anxiety is Removed: Grade 9 students who do not transfer to the high school until grade 10 commonly face two sources of considerable anxiety. As members of a middle school or junior high, grade 9 students have varying degrees of concern about “moving to the high school next fall” and about selecting their courses or credits for grade 10. If they have already transferred to the high school after grade 8, one of these sources of anxiety has been removed. Being in the high school a year earlier, they have the opportunity to get to know their way around and to meet students and staff members.

As students of FHCS, the grade 9 students (and their families) would be in a better position to select the grade 10 program and courses, not only because they would be familiar with students, staff and the routines of their school, but also, because various members of staff would get to know them. This creates a benefit for the students in the last few months of grade 9 when guidance counsellors, administrators and teachers begin to work with and advise students and their families to select their high school program and courses.

An Opportunity to Implement a New Grade 9 Program: The middle school concept or approach is designed, more so than not, to suit students in grade 6-8. Whether grade 9 is included in a middle school or a high school, educators have argued for many years that the program for grade 9 students should not be a simple continuation of the middle school approach or a replica of the senior high credit system. To ensure a smooth transition between two distinct approaches, it should take on some characteristics of each.

A decision to transfer grade 9 from a middle school to a high school for the first time provides an opportunity to design the grade 9 program and methods of instruction to fit the unique needs and interests of the students. Such a decision for CAMS and FHCS would be especially timely in Nova Scotia over the next few years because the Department of Education, with professional consultation from school board staffs, is presently taking a careful look at the grade 9 program. Any new program or

approach developed by the Department could be more easily implemented in a school which is taking in grade 9 students for the first time.

A particular advantage of the FHCS setting and circumstance is particularly noteworthy with respect to developing a new program for grade 9 and the high school grades. As one of the well-established “community schools” in Nova Scotia and being surrounded by large tracts of crown forest land, the school is in a unique position to develop an outdoor education learning centre. The staff of FHCS has a Professional Learning Community (PLC) working now to explore and create experiential learning opportunities. The work of the PLC could include a look at activities specifically designed for grade 9 students.

Benefits or Challenges in Extra-Curricular Activities? The fact that what is a benefit for some students is a challenge for others is particularly obvious in the area of extra-curricular activities. As the most senior students in a middle school or junior high, some grade 9 students are lifted to high achievement levels and they serve as role models for the younger students. If transferred to a grade 9-12 high school setting, some of these same students do not get the same opportunities or are not as highly motivated to achieve. On the other hand, other students who move to the high school are enthusiastic and more highly motivated by being among senior high students; they are influenced positively and encouraged by the achievements of the older students in inter-scholastic sports, band, drama and student government.

Benefits for All Students of FHCS: The fact that FHCS will have about 100 more students creates a benefit for all students. The addition of the grade 9 program adds 4 course sections of English, mathematics, science and social studies. It adds more sections in French, music, physical education, technology education and family studies. This means that teachers whose expertise and preference are in a particular subject area have a greater chance of being able to teach only in that area; i.e., they have less chance of having to teach a course outside of their expertise and/or preference. For example, those trained and experienced to teach science or physical education may not have to teach a course in social studies or English. It has been noted already that the guidance counsellor would have a full-time position and the program support positions would be extended. The same benefit results from having the classroom teachers working in their area of specialty.

Potential Impact on CAMS and Its Students

This study is primarily about what is best in the long run for grade 9 students, about the impact of being transferred from CAMS. Therefore, the potential benefits for the other students of CAMS and for the school are few in number. Before introducing the benefits, some potential challenges or disadvantages should be noted in this section---they have been introduced or at least implied indirectly in previous sections.

Some of the most obvious challenges or disadvantages are related the loss of 6 teaching positions caused by the 25% reduction in the total enrolment. The most likely effects of losing 25% of the teaching positions, to one degree or another and from one year to another, are the following:

- Less ability and flexibility in being able to match teacher qualifications and interests to teaching assignments
- Diminished breadth and depth of staff expertise to deliver program and to volunteer for extra-curricular activities
- Diminished levels of administrative, guidance and specialist, and student services support because of less time dedicated to these functions.
- Greater challenges in being able to maintain the array of French programs---Intensive French starting in Grade 6, Integrated French starting in Grade 7 and Core French in Grade 8 and 9.

The potential impact on the extra-curricular programs at CAMS can be both negative and positive. In one sense, the varied and significant contributions of the grade 9 students are a loss while, in another sense, the experience of other schools has been that the grade 8 students will rise to the challenge of being the most senior students in the school.

This positive reaction of the grade 8 students to being the most senior is related to another effect which was described by the principals who were consulted during this study. They observed that the grade 8 students and other middle school students seemed to gain some freedom to be themselves as young adolescents who are still moving slowly from childhood. One principal expressed it as “the grade 8 students wanting to play more now that grade 9 is gone”. Another principal explained how it became evident that the younger students had been living under the shadow of the older grade 9 students, the shadow of feeling inhibited under the critical eye of the older students whose interests, values and behaviours were becoming more mature.

Another potential benefit can be given priority in shaping how CAMS will continue to grow as a middle school. As noted in a previous section, the middle school concept is designed for young adolescents in grade 6-8 or grade P-8 schools. If CAMS becomes a grade 6-8 middle school, then the priorities of the teachers and administration can be more specifically dedicated to designing and implementing the teaching and learning strategies of a true middle school approach. Furthermore, one of the top priorities can be to integrate the concepts and principles of inquiry-based learning with those of the middle school approach.

Financial and Other Operational Impacts

The financial impact of transferring grade 9 is primarily related to the changes in staff allocations reported previously. The net reduction of one teaching position translates to a net saving of approximately \$60,000 annually and the addition of half an administrative assistant position would cost approximately \$19,000---both of these figures include benefits. Other than these staffing changes, some budgetary adjustments would be made to the responsibility allowances of the administrators and to the operating budgets of each school for supplies, equipment and materials.

Sufficient Time to Ensure a Smooth Transition

If the South Shore Regional School Board decides that Forest Heights Community School will include grade 9, then much should be done before the transition occurs. In the best interests of the students,

families and staff members, allowing sufficient time to ensure a smooth transition would be critical. Fortunately, there is no reason whatsoever to argue that this must be done quickly.

One of the main reasons to “take the time to get it right” is that the grade 9 curriculum has never been offered at FHCS. It is easier to transfer students, whatever their grade level, from one school to another if the program is already being provided in the receiving school. For example, when a school is closed by amalgamation with another, it is usually a matter of simply transferring students and teachers to a school in which the same curriculum has been offered at the same grade levels for many years.

Not only should the teachers presently on staff at FHCS and those transferring from CAMS be given adequate time for professional development and planning, the administration of FHCS will need time to plan how the grade 9 students will be accommodated in the school. There are important questions to be answered through a process that includes collaboration with the staff and consultation with the student leaders in the school. For example:

- Where will grade 9 classes be located?
- Will they have a separate lunch period?
- Will they be able to take senior high courses?
- How will the semester schedule of senior high be integrated with the grade 9 schedule?
- How will the distinct reporting systems of middle school and high school be integrated?
- How will the extra-curricular program, including band, student council, inter-scholastic sports and intramural programs, be expanded to include grade 9 students?

Sufficient time for the transition will be equally important for the grade 8 students of CAMS---similarly for NRCS students if the grade 9 students are transferred. Under the traditional structure and routines, grade 8 students look forward to being the “senior” students during their grade 9 year. The effects of transferring grade 9 are magnified in the first year of the changeover because the students in both grade 8 and grade 9 move from the middle school to the high school at the same time. In other words, once and only once, CAMS would lose about 50% of its students between June and September. Yes, new grade 6 students would enter in September, but losing about half of the students, who are the older students, from the previous school year would surely be felt by the staff of CAMS and would have a significant impact on the operational routines, student leadership, and the various co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. There would have to be a period of adjustment for the grade 8 students at CAMS to take over the roles and responsibilities held traditionally by the grade 9 students.

Open and regular communication with staff, students, school advisory councils, home and school associations and families would be just as important a feature of an effective transition plan as collaboration and consultation. When those who are affected directly or indirectly by such an organizational change are “kept in the loop”, through ongoing communication, anxiety levels tend to be lower and acceptance levels tend to be higher.

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