

Elementary Reorganization

Island Trees has included the “Princeton Plan” as a cost savings measure in the 2010-11 budget. Over a half century ago, Princeton, New Jersey, developed a plan to create diversity in their school district by modifying the neighborhood school model into schools grouped by grade levels. With this plan, the elementary schools are organized by grade level, not by geographic location. Since that time, many school districts have adopted “Princeton” for economic and educational reasons rather than for societal ones.

In today’s economic climate, the decision to reorganize our schools into a “Princeton” model is clearly an economic one. We have calculated that the district could gain approximately \$450,000 in staffing savings each year by reconfiguring the current K-4 neighborhood model. Sparke would serve kindergarten–grade 1, and Stokes would serve grades 2-4. The economic stewardship would grow exponentially each year, and in ten years a \$4.5 million savings could materialize. Quite significant indeed.

One of the biggest complaints in districts adopting the “Princeton” configuration is the loss of neighborhood schools. However, Island Trees would still be able to retain the neighborhood schools since both district schools are located on the same campus. This is very different from other “Princeton” districts where students in the neighborhood are bused to the other side of town to attend schools.

During the budgetary process, an elementary reorganization committee of parents, staff, and community members explored this option with our school administration and Board of Education. All in all, the committee was very positive about the “Princeton” plan and saw little downside for students if the district decided to pursue this option.

Princeton Plan Frequently Asked Questions

Would the current playground equipment be age appropriate under the “Princeton Plan” model?

At present, we have all of our youngsters, K-4, using our new playground equipment. Therefore, our playground equipment is appropriate for children of all elementary ages.

Student transitions from school to school can be challenging. How would we prepare students for a possible transition this year, as well as in future years?

There are many things that we can do to ease the transition this year. The principals could arrange for the students to visit their new school, giving the children a tour of the buildings. In addition, each principal could read to the students in the grades that will be transitioning into the respective schools. To further ease the transition, we could arrange for the children to have a book buddy or pen pal from their grade level. We could also combine the already-established common recess time for both Stokes and Sparke, so that the students could play together for the remainder of the year. With the help of the PTA, special events and orientations could be planned to help make the transition a positive experience for the students, staff, and families. In future years, we would plan ways to ease the transition from one school to the next (although this transition would be less challenging for our students, who will be making the move with their cohort of friends from the entire grade). The intermediate principal could come and read to the first grade classes. Primary students could have intermediate grade book buddies or pen pals. We could plan more cross-building activities such as cultural arts programs, holiday celebrations, concerts, field day activities, etc. Toward the end of each year, we could plan an orientation program for the first grade students to prepare them for their years in the intermediate school.

Would students still be eligible for transportation under the “Princeton” model?

Yes. The Island Trees School District provides transportation for all students who live at least a .5 mile from the school. This will not change for next year.

I heard at a Board meeting that dismissal time may be an issue. Is this true? My children are walkers. How will I pick up my children if one attends Stokes and the other Sparke?

At this time, it seems that the best option is to establish a central meeting location for walker dismissal. Students from each school could be escorted out of each building to a central location where they would meet their parents. We are working to pinpoint a common

pick-up area between both schools on the shared campus. This would alleviate any parent concern about picking up one student at one school and then traveling to the other school to pick up another child.

Would the Sparke and Stokes PTA remain intact or merge?

This question would be decided by our local PTA. Please note that our middle and high school buildings have one “merged” PTA rather than two separate units.

Will the Stokes and Sparke teachers remain in their current buildings or move as well?

Of course, we would staff our buildings in order to optimize our teachers’ talent and skills and to best serve the children of Island Trees. There are teachers who work well with children at any age, while others are particularly talented at working with primary or intermediate students. Prior to assigning our professional staff, we would survey the staff and look for volunteers before moving teachers from their current grade levels or buildings.

How will the schools handle the cultural arts and assembly programs? From what I understand, the elementary schools have different programs.

The cultural arts programs would be tailored to the grade level of the student population in the school. The schools would continue to work collaboratively to plan age-appropriate cultural arts programs.

How will student support and AIS programs work under the K-1 & 2-4 model?

Children who qualify for AIS services will continue to receive these services. Both schools would continue to have remedial reading and math support staff.

School activities and events, and holiday traditions make our schools truly special in Island Trees. How will these be impacted?

Of course, both schools would continue to have school activities, events and holiday celebrations. As the administration, faculty, staff and parents of each newly-configured building come together, they would collaborate to continue those long-cherished traditions while developing new, age-specific traditions together. One concern that may arise for parents who have children in the two schools is scheduling for those events. The principals would make every effort to schedule the celebrations at different times to allow parents who have children in both buildings to participate in these special activities and events.