

I want to thank all the parents and members of the community who have written, called, or stopped me to discuss Dr. Sherman's proposal for our middle schools. The research you have provided, the questions you have asked, and points you have made have helped me significantly.

I have also done a great deal of study on my own. In my studies, four ingredients kept popping up as essential for giving students what they need to succeed. All four are contained in Dr. Sherman's proposal: a smaller school with a caring environment; strong principal leadership and passionate administrators and teachers; an interdisciplinary approach to teaching and the time for teachers to plan for it; and accountability for student achievement. One additional factor from a book entitled "Making Schools Work" by William Ouchi jumped out at me: structure must change before culture can change.

Perhaps the most interesting person I spoke with was a principal in New York introduced to me by a fellow parent. This principal had bulldogged her way through the bureaucracy to create a grade 6 through 12 small school. Her grades 6, 7, and 8 have demographics nearly identical to our middle schools. While her numbers are impressive, going from only a third of her students showing minimum proficiency to 92% for math and in the 80s for language arts, what struck me most about the conversation was her description of her school. She said "we're a family".

With this kind of possibility for our students, we must move forward. We cannot wait. To quote the Chilean teacher, poet, and Nobel Laureate, Gabriela Mistral:

"Many things can wait; the child cannot. Now is the time his bones are being formed; his mind is being developed. To him, we cannot say tomorrow; his name is today."

The Board hired Dr. Sherman because of his expertise. He has successfully implemented school reform. Dr. Sherman, I place my confidence in you to select the very best principals and to guide this process of change. I also ask our administrators and teachers to rededicate themselves to making these changes a success. Finally, I encourage our parents to be patient and to stay actively engaged. We must truly believe in every child.