

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**DATE: May 8, 2009**  
**FROM: Jim Smith, Communications Specialist**  
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**RE: Board receives recommendation for middle school transitions**

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A recommendation to assign students to Rolland-Warner and Zemmer Middle Schools based on a north-south geographic plan was presented to the Lapeer Board of Education at its regular meeting Thursday night.

While both schools appear different in their outward architecture, the interior classroom, music, media center, computer, science, art, cafeteria and performance spaces will be equitable in size and opportunity for both schools.

In February, a group of 32 parents, staff and a student worked through a process that examined a number of demographic issues related to assigning students on an east-west or a north-south basis to two new middle schools set to open in the fall of 2010.

Specific student populations such as special education and economically disadvantaged students were studied in the process. It would not be academically sound to have an imbalance of either of those populations at one school. The negligible difference between a north-south or east-west plan, turned out to be a non-factor in the recommendation.

Superintendent Debbie Thompson researched transition issues that put the most stress on students. Some of those factors are obvious, like elementary students moving into a new building and learning their way around and adjusting to having more than one teacher. Socialization is a huge issue with middle school students.

A survey of current students in the 7<sup>th</sup> through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade was done to get information about how they viewed some of these transition issues.

Students noted that social networking was the most important aspect of their middle school experience. Nearly half, or 48 percent of 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders said they developed and made new friends when they ended up at either high school after leaving Zemmer Junior High School, and only 28 percent said they met their current friends at Zemmer.

Looking at current elementary populations the Superintendent studied the demographics of keeping students together from elementary into middle school. An east-west plan keeps 74 percent of the students together from elementary school to middle school, while a north-south approach keeps 88 percent of the students together.

The administration believes the two middle schools will, and must, develop a unique identity and not one necessarily tied to which high school to which students will eventually attend.

“New middle schools are not being developed as a ‘junior high school’ program or as appendages to the high schools, but as a unique academic experience designed and focused on this special population of student,” said Superintendent Debbie Thompson.

Each middle school will have its own mascot, school colors and identity.

“One thing the new middle school plan will not do is dampen the friendly East-West high school rivalry that both we and our community enjoy,” said Mrs. Thompson “In recent years, the Lapeer East and Lapeer West competition has become a positive force in making both schools better, academically, athletically, musically and artistically. Iron sharpens iron, as they say.”

Many students make and keep friends at the rival high school.

In recent years students from the District’s three high schools have worked, played and shared together in the Omni Council, which was designed to foster better and more healthy relationships between the schools.

The Board of Education will discuss the recommendation at its next work session, May 21, and likely vote on the plan in June.

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