

Students react to changes in the MCS proposed plan for 2012-2013

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Memphis City Schools Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Linda Kennard, discussed the district's academic plan for the 2012-13 school year with Teen Appeal staff, which includes a number of bold initiatives, including a possible six-day school week.

Kennard said it is difficult to predict which or how many of its proposals will be enacted and funded, especially with the uncertainty of consolidation on the horizon. She said the plan is intended to start a conversation and to begin the process of setting priorities.

The goal of the plan is to improve teaching in MCS and to help the district evolve.

The MCS academic plan features enhanced programs of study for kindergarten through high school. So how is this new academic plan to be different from what MCS is currently doing?

Elementary school students would have a six-day school week and Saturdays would be used for interactive activities and field trips, such as poetry jams and intramural sports.

Middle school students would have an hour and a half added on the each school day, which would equal 10 extra school days at the end of the semester. However, a major change associated with this plan is students would not be assignment homework.

MCS high school students could choose between three different graduation paths, ranging from two to four years. The proposed plan also includes the addition of technology-based tools, such as mobile devices, e-books and digital textbooks.

According to Kennard, the variety of pathways to graduation offer more flexibility for students through a variety of unique, extracurricular resources, such as internships, independent learning and field studies.

Kennard said, "The way we teach has to evolve...education is more than state assessments and test scores."

She continued: "This plan gives the power to the students and makes high school work for learners. Students deserve access to the best."

The overall academic targets of the plan include: attaining a district average ACT score of 19, 90 percent graduation rate, 93 percent attendance rate and ensuring that all students are college or career ready.

However, this plan has more obstacles to cross before it will be implemented into the school system, including the consolidation issue, a lack on funding and many skeptical parents.

Cordova high school parent, Felicia Munn said: "I object to this so called academic plan. It's not fair to the students, parents or teachers. If the children are at school most of the time, who will be raising the children?"

She continued: "Where have we seen this plan actually work? You can't compare the U.S. to Japan. They have a totally different moral system. It will encourage more students to drop out."

Munn said there were many unanswered questions about the academic plan.

Jasmine Norris, a Cordova high school senior, has younger siblings and believes this plan will be very beneficial to them.

Norris said: "I don't think one of my younger sisters would mind going to school longer. As for the other one, she would struggle a little bit. My mother would have more time to work and enjoy her days off.

She continued: "I wish they would have started this when I started school. I could possibly have my own business by now."

How do the younger students feel about this plan? It will affect them the most. The way they have been taught and the system could completely change.

Alyssa Arrington, current MCS sixth Cordova Middle School grader, said: "It's necessary for some students to stay in school six days a week, because some students need more help than others. I don't think as many people would show up for class and behavior would be a lot worse, because they didn't get enough time away from teachers or the break they needed."

The plan is currently in the development stages and would not go into affect until the 2012-2013 school year. The committee will have to attend a board staff conference and meet with the community to convince administrators and parents that the plan is feasible.

According to Kennard: "MCS can either stay with the 50's and 60's or get with the program. In order for the plan to work it will need public will, public funds and public action."

Another major roadblock is the issue of funding due to the increase in transportation and technology costs, and teacher salaries associated with the plan. Kennard believes one solution could be choosing several of the most exciting facets of the plan and focusing on them.

She said: "This plan is intended to start and stimulate conversation about the current school system."

Kennard continued: "The ultimate goal is to give our students a world class education and to make them ready to compete for jobs worldwide."

Munn is still skeptical of the benefits of this plan. She says: "What we need to do is expose our children to more culture so they are prepared to interact with different types of people after completing high school. The academic plan is a list of things

US falls behind world in educational rankings

By Aquira Montgomery
Ridgeway High School

The U.S may be one of the most powerful countries in the world, but according to recent rankings, it may not be the brightest crayon in the box.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report, which compares the knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds in 70 countries around the world, ranks the United States 14th out of 34 countries for reading skills, 17th for science and a below-average 25th for mathematics.

According to USATODAY.com, those scores are higher than those from 2003 and 2006, but are still far behind the highest scoring countries, such as South Korea, Finland, China, and Singapore.

"The education system's an absolute mess, but we've got all the time in the world for high gas prices and wars."

"This is an absolute wake-up call for America," U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan said in an interview with The Associated Press. "We have to get much more serious about investing in education."

"When I was in school, we earned our grades. Teachers didn't just hand them out," said Gwendolyn Cunningham, the parent of a Ridgeway senior.

Both parents and lawmakers agree that the key to improving public education in America is hiring skilled and effective teachers in all classrooms. But is that really all it takes?

The future of America's education system still remains to be seen, but the Memphis City School board has been hard at work developing a plan they hope will completely transform the MCS system for the better.

The new academic plan proposed for the 2012-2013 school year may sound really good on paper, but some people are skeptical as to whether it will really help MCS students or how likely it is to be enacted in full.

"For this plan to work, it's important for us to be open to change," said Linda Kennard, the executive director of curriculum and instruction for Memphis City Schools.

Adding an hour and a half to the school day in middle school, implementing a six-day school week in elementary schools, and letting high schools choose between two and four year paths to graduation are just a few things on the agenda.

According to the PISA report, the United States is ranked 24 in instructional hours per year, after Finland, Korea, the Netherlands and Japan.

"All this change sounds really good, but you can't get hyped off talk. That new plan takes money MCS doesn't have," said Ridgeway senior Lauren Smith.