



Lexington Public Schools

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Our Schools

October 9, 2008

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Why can't we go back to the days of Abraham Lincoln and the one-room schoolhouse? Why do schools today need both general classroom teachers and specialized instructors? Why do these general and specialized teachers need time during the workday to collaborate with colleagues and discuss students in common?

While I greatly respect the pioneers who built our country, schools in the 1800s were never designed to highly educate all students, nor were they designed to educate students to compete in a technologically advanced and interconnected world. At the end of the 19th century, only six percent of youth graduated from high school. Even a generation or two ago, large numbers of students could still drop out of high school, learn a trade, and achieve the American dream — a middle class standard of living that includes buying their own home, most often in their hometown.

That world no longer exists, and therefore our educational goals must change. Today, our goals must include providing all students with a world-class education that will enable them to compete in the global marketplace and high-quality instruction from a team of well-qualified teachers.

To achieve these goals, our schools need sufficient numbers of expert teachers in a wide array of disciplines (e.g., science, math, arts, reading, special education), and we must organize the school day with time set aside for teachers to collaborate. When teachers have common planning time each week, they are able to discuss the students they have in common and develop strategies to challenge all the learners in their classrooms. Research shows that teachers working in isolation are not as effective as teachers who work together in goal-focused teams.

For example, in 2007, two fifth grade teachers at one Lexington elementary school collaborated with the math specialist to raise student achievement for all students. By regrouping students once a week and targeting instruction based on skill levels, MCAS scores improved for most students and in particular for ten of the eleven students having the most difficulty. At the high school, the ninth grade English and social studies courses are team-taught. Since these two teachers teach the same students and have common planning time, there are opportunities to share information, integrate the curriculum across the two subjects, and provide for the instructional needs of students adjusting to the demands of high school.

Unlike the 1800s, when there was one teacher in one classroom, we now live in a time that requires teachers with specialized skills who work together as a team. Leaving no child behind means leaving behind the one-room schoolhouse way of teaching.