Classroom Departmentalization:

Is It The Most Effective Way To Teach Upper Elementary Students?

Capstone Essay

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Abstract

Many educational stakeholders still view the typical classroom as a self-contained unit, but there are schools throughout the country making the switch to a different model – the departmentalized classroom. There are many reasons that schools are switching, some of which include diverse learner profiles, teacher turnover and the increased pressure of state and district standardized tests.

While the research is ongoing and not conclusive, this Capstone will examine the various benefits and possible drawbacks of departmentalization not only to the learner, but also the teacher, the classroom community, the school environment and parents. This Capstone also analyzes what researchers have found so far on the effects on curriculum planning and the growing pressures of assessments that lead to classroom and curriculum changes, such as departmentalization. Additionally, this Capstone will include a discussion of how the Common Core State Standards have impacted classrooms as well as an analysis of some of the existing quantitative data to analyze the research that has been conducted on departmentalized instruction. I will argue how the departmentalized classroom can support and achieve high curriculum standards that students are held accountable to, as well as demonstrate how departmentalization can support teachers in planning and delivering effective lessons, among other benefits.

There is a growing body of research indicating that classroom departmentalization is one possible way to adjust and structure learning to best meet the ever-changing social, emotional and academic needs of the students. The existing research also indicates that departmentalization helps support teachers so they can deliver quality instruction on a subject on which they are confident and in which they have passion. To be sure, classroom departmentalization is not a panacea for all that ails public education, so this Capstone will include a rigorous comparison with the self-contained classroom.

Premise

It has been 50 years since then President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) with the hope that “full educational opportunity” should be “our first national goal” (US Department of Education). Still, under the new name No Child Left Behind (NCLB), there is still an ongoing debate on how to improve the educational system to ensure “every child receives an education that sets him or her up for success in college, careers, and life” (Brenchley, 2015). This ongoing discussion among stakeholders – “administrators, teachers, parents and students” (Baker, 2011, p. 8) – is taking place as school districts throughout the United States deal with “largely stagnant or declining” funding (Baker, Sciarra & Farrie, 2014) and “changing demographics (that) pose a number of challenges for schools” (Center for Public Education, 2007). At the same time, educators are dealing with the creation and implementation of the Common Core State Standards and high-stakes testing, a “now apparent staple in US education” (Hanks, 2013, p. 18).

Given these mounting fiscal and social challenges, and growing accountability and testing pressures, “educators must continually consider options to improve their schools” (Baker, 2011, p. 4). One option that educators are exploring in school districts throughout the country is a significant organizational change to their school structure to include different “instructional resources” that “facilitate students’ learning” (Heathers, 1972, p. 47). Looking at all options means that the long-held view of elementary schools having the self-contained classroom is changing as some educators replace it with a departmentalized classroom model (Baker, 2011, p. 2). By altering the organizational structure and turning the self-contained classroom on its head, elementary schools are hoping to use this different paradigm to meet the standards, curriculum benchmarks and various student learning needs (Yearwood, 2011, p. 41).

This capstone essay examines the increased use of departmentalization at the upper elementary school level grades 3-5 and also critiques its benefits and limitations and contrasts it with the more traditional, self-contained classroom. Further, this essay will provide an analysis of departmentalization with both quantitative data and qualitative analysis to support the conclusion in favor of a departmentalized classroom in the upper elementary school classroom based on a review of the research as well as reinforced by my own classroom experience.

Definition & Characteristics

Because the research on this topic is continuing, the definition and characteristics of the modern, departmentalized classroom can differ in words and focus. In fact, Baker (2011) argues that a complicating factor in reviewing this issue is the “absence of a clear definition of the term” (p. 25). Citing research by Franklin & Johnson (1967) and Lobdell & van Ness (1967), Baker (2011) argues that any structure that does not have the student receiving all instruction from a single teacher would be considered a form of departmentalization (p. 25). Baker (2011) argues that research conducted by Des Moines Public Schools (1989) indicates that departmentalized education occurs when “students receive instruction from three or more teachers during the day” (p. 25). In an analysis by Chan & Jarman (2004), departmentalization is described as a process where “teachers teach in their area of specialization and students move from one classroom to another for instruction” (p. 70). Hanks (2013) describes departmentalization as “assigning teachers to teach a subject or subjects in which they are a specialist” and goes on to note that “the students change classes anywhere from 4-8 times per day for classes with a different teacher” (p. 10). Heathers (1972) describes departmentalization as promoting a classroom setting where “the attendant teacher (has) specialization” (p. 48). While Heathers (1972) does not directly state that students move to different classrooms for instruction, her definition of departmentalization reflects the comments made in Baker (2011), Hanks (2013) and Chan & Jarman (2004) relating to teacher specialization. Despite being in practice for more than a century, the definition has not yet been settled. However, a review of the research shows that teacher specialization and movement of students between classrooms are the most common characteristics of a departmentalized classroom.

While the use of the departmentalized classroom has gone up and down over the past century, Heathers (1972) notes that the acceptance of departmentalized classrooms has been common since the 1900’s, peaking at about 84% of all 8-year elementary schools between 1900-1930 and dropping to a low of 37% of 6-year elementary schools as of 1929 (p. 48). However, Heathers (1972) indicates that the roller coaster started going up again in about 1955 with a “trend toward increased use of departmentalization especially in the upper grades of the elementary school” (p. 48).

Benefits of Departmentalization

There are many factors that have been highlighted in various research projects supporting the value of classroom departmentalization in upper elementary grades. The benefits identified in the research range from more teacher specialization and increased lesson preparation time to exposure to different teaching styles and better development of social skills needed to transition to middle school.

Historian and writer Henry Adams penned that a teacher affects eternity, and there is a large body of research indicating that departmentalized classrooms allow for better and more engaged teachers. Hood (2009) uses the word platooning when describing departmentalized classrooms in elementary school, but she found that departmentalization “is a cost-neutral way of upgrading instruction” (p.3). She also points out that “it provides students with an opportunity to be challenged by different teachers and different classroom environments” (Hood, 2009, p. 3).

On the learning side, Liu (2011) points out that teacher specialization “means that students would get the best teaching for all subjects” (p. 45). Liu (2011) also notes that departmentalization can be an asset in developing programs “that require specialized treatment of each of several different areas of study due to the expansion of knowledge in them” (p. 42). Strohl, Schmertzing, and Schmertzing (n.d.) further supported the benefits to teachers of a departmentalized format because they would “become more proficient in their content knowledge through focused professional development,” (p. 5) adding that it also would allow teacher skills to “become more refined through the concentration of fewer subjects than self-contained teachers” (p. 5). Strohl et al (n.d.) highlight the increased productivity during planning time for teachers, and stress reduction related to workload (p. 8). They noted that compared to a self-contained setting, teachers in their study reported experiencing less stress and lighter workloads (Strohl et al, n.d., p. 9). Andrews (2006) supported Strohl et al (n.d.) on the planning issue, indicating that departmentalization allowed “the time to more fully develop lessons and more carefully construct learning opportunities” (p. 2). Andrews (2006) reinforces the point by highlighting that teachers “were each able to use that time to create careful and detailed plans for just one subject” (p. 3) She supports her analysis by citing the Hill, Rowan & Ball (2005) study indicating that having additional preparation time “was an effective predictor of increased student achievement” (Andrews, 2006, p. 7). This is a critical element for teachers as they face increased pressures from the Common Core State Standards and high-stakes testing. For example, in one instance, the 3rd Grade Common Core ELA Standards encompass nearly 100 separate skills and capabilities that students are expected to master that school year. Perhaps a departmentalized classroom is the best setting to achieve that in a measureable way. She notes that the “specialization provides an opportunity for teachers to pursue new learning and create higher-quality lessons for all students” (Anderson, 2006, p. 7). Johnson (2013), highlighting the studies of Chan & Jarman (2004) and DelViscio & Muffs (2007), notes how the “departmentalized setting allows teachers to specialize in fewer subjects becoming experts in their content areas” (p. 2). She further adds, citing Manross et al (1994), Chan et al (2009), and Coffee (2008) that the departmentalization model allows for “more focused and in-depth planning time” (Johnson, 2013, p. 2). Johnson’s (2013) research underscores the benefit that “the departmentalized approach allowed for students to be taught by content specialists” (p. 22). A better-prepared and more knowledgeable teacher is one benefit of departmentalized classrooms, according to the research noted here.

Along with the benefits of more lesson time, and better experts, the departmentalization approach also allows students to benefit from different teaching styles. Hanks (2013) found that students “have the benefit of experiencing different teaching styles” (p. 22). In looking at the work of Hood (2010), Hanks (2013) points out that exposing students to different teaching styles would impact standardized test scores (p. 22). Hood (2009) notes that departmentalization “provides students with an opportunity to be challenged by different teachers and different classroom environments” (p. 3). Hood (2009) points out a specific benefit for Special Education students and notes that “students have an opportunity to reap the benefits of more than one teaching style” (p. 3). Liu (2011) notes that Chan & Jarman (2004) included the fact that “students are exposed to the instructional wisdom of more than one teacher” (p. 43) as a benefit to departmentalization. The bottom line benefit, as noted by Johnson (2013) in her review of the Connor research (1977), is that students “have access to teachers with different styles” (p. 17). She adds that it creates a greater opportunity “for an individual student’s learning style to be addressed when working with a variety of teachers” (Johnson, 2013, p. 17). This also would be a benefit in Special Education programs.

Perhaps one of the most significant benefits cited in the still growing body of research on departmentalization vs. self-contained classrooms is the premise that the former provides elementary school students with the social and psychological skills to help matriculate to middle school. Chan and Jarman (2004) directly state that one of the advantages to departmentalization is that it “aligns with middle school organization, better preparing for transition” (p. 70). Baker (2011) notes that school officials that she interviewed indicate that “departmentalizing in 6th grade (meant) students were better prepared for high school” (p. 108) and that the practice in 5th grade provided a “segue into 6th grade” (p. 108). Yearwood (2011) notes that the research by DelViscio and Muffs (2007) that “departmentalization of upper elementary grades in the era of high-stakes testing reduced ‘transition shock’ by 6th graders when they move from traditional settings to a fully departmentalized middle school” (p. 41).

Sometimes, perception is more important than reality, and that might be the case with students who transition from elementary to middle school. Andrews noted (2006) that one thing students liked about departmentalization was “feeling like middle school students” (p. 16). Her research noted that students said their schedule set them apart from other students and that they “felt less nervous about going to middle school next year because of the experience” (Andrews, 2006, p. 16). Johnson (2013) provides a review of the Chan (2009) study that highlights the value of departmentalization “as an effective practice to enhance the transition to middle school” (p. 30). She further notes that addressing the social and emotional needs of pre-adolescent students helped pave “a pathway to academics” (Johnson, 2013, p. 30). She notes that there is a body of research including Chan (2009) that indicates “the departmentalized setting better suits this age group developmentally” (Johnson, 2013, p. 31). Johnson (2013) concludes that one of the periphery benefits of departmentalization, as noted by Chan (2009), is “enhanced readiness for upper elementary students who are transitioning to middle school” (p. 37). Johnson’s (2013) work further underscores the findings from Chan & Jarman (2004), Coffee (2008), and Mullins & Irvin (2000) that departmentalization presents an opportunity “to prepare upper elementary students for the many transitions they will face as they head off to middle school” (p. 6). In her review of the literature, Hanks (2013) highlights a study by DuShane (1916), which found that teachers believe that departmentalization “better prepares (students) for their future learning and students would learn organizational skills” (p. 27). Hanks (2013) highlighted the social benefits by reporting on conversations she had with a principal who indicated that “students are more prepared for middle school than same grade peers who are in self-contained classrooms” (p. 20). It would seem that the perception is reinforced by the research reviewed.

Perhaps one of the biggest benefits to departmentalization was the ability to more easily form grade-level instructional teams focused on teaching efforts across each discipline (Chan & Jarman, 2004, p. 70). Chan & Jarman (2004) also pointed out, as noted by Hanks (2013), that the implementation of instructional teams would give “the students the expertise of more than one teacher in the academic day” (p. 19) and that it would help avoid “instructional monotony and prevent academic limitations” (p. 19). While a lot of the research highlights specific benefits to students, Strohl et al (n.d.) said that departmentalized settings “created new types of interactions for participants” (p. 11). Strohl et al (n.d.) further noted that “collaboration was at the heart of the entire structure” (p. 11). They noted several positive factors from this collaboration, “such as understanding more about students by combining perspectives, sharing triumphs of students with someone who knows them as well, and having another person to help analyze data” (Strohl et al, n.d., p. 11). Perhaps most important, Strohl et al (n.d.) noted how some teachers “utilized the system to integrate across the curriculum…several teachers noted specific topics in their subject areas with which students struggled and how departmentalized instruction was used to help provide additional learning opportunities for those topics” (p. 12). Strohl et al (n.d.) note how Chan & Jarman (2004) highlight the “potential of implementing instructional teams designed to coordinate teaching across the curriculum” (p. 19).

Much of the research talks about how departmentalization helps promote teacher retention and more teacher job satisfaction. Chan & Jarman (2004) state that “with a more focused workload, teachers are able to complete their teaching assignments with greater satisfaction…the result is greater stability and retention of highly qualified teachers” (p. 70). Strohl et al (n.d.) highlight the anxiety and pressure of having to create quality lesson plans for all subject areas in a self-contained setting compared to the departmentalized setting, where “all teachers reported experiencing less stress and lighter workloads than any other year they taught” (p. 9). They also reported teachers in a departmentalized setting “reported feeling more confident” and that the structure “alleviates stress of workload by narrowing the scope” (Strohl, n.d., p. 12) of the subjects for each individual teacher. Strohl et al (n.d.) note that both Perrachione et al (2008) and Timms et al (2007) reported that teachers with reduced workloads reported lower stress levels and improved attitudes towards teaching (p. 12).

Despite the fact that departmental classrooms have been in use since the early 1900’s, the research is still seen by most as continuing. Nonetheless, there is a mounting body of evidence and academic research showing that departmentalized classrooms provide significant benefits to upper elementary school students and teachers compared to the self-contained classroom. A strong body of data further backs up this research.

Quantitative Data

Just as qualitative research on departmentalization is ongoing, there is an emerging body of quantitative research as well. More needs to be done on both, but there is some hard, current data to support the benefits of teacher specialization, students’ social and psychological growth and stronger team collaboration. Moore (2008) conducted a series of assessments on 4th and 5th grade students’ on a variety of subjects. While the results were mixed and/or inconclusive, a number of data points highlight the advantages of the departmentalized classroom. For example, Moore (2008) found that students in self-contained classrooms on average scored lower than students in departmentalized classrooms in social studies (p. 67). Moore (2008) also found significant differences in 5th grade math scores between the two organizational structures. His research showed that on average, students in self-contained classrooms scored slightly lower than students in departmentalized classrooms (Moore, 2008, p. 69). In 5th grade science, Moore (2008) found that on average, students in self-contained classrooms scored slightly lower than students in departmentalized classrooms (p. 71). The data Moore (2008) discovered also included teachers. He found that teachers who favored departmentalized classrooms had students who produced math scores slightly higher than teachers who did not favor departmentalized classrooms (Moore, 2008, p. 76). Moore (2008) found the same with teachers of science, with those who favored departmentalized classrooms having students who produced slightly higher scores than teachers who favored a different structure (p. 77). This trend extended to Moore’s (2008) research among teachers of social studies, with those favoring departmentalized classrooms having students scoring higher than those favoring other structures (p. 78). Moore (2008) offers additional supporting data on this issue when he points out that teachers who favored self-contained classrooms on average had students with slightly lower language arts scores than teachers who favored a different structure (p. 80). Yearwood (2011) conducted more current research that concurs with Moore’s (2008) conclusions. For example, she found that students who received “math instruction by content specialists achieved at a higher rate” (Yearwood, 2011, p. 110). While the reliability of these results can be questioned, Yearwood’s (2011) study indicates, “student achievement was positively impacted by organizational structure” (p. 110). Yearwood (2011) concludes that “there is a difference in 5th grade reading and math mean achievement scaled scores” (p. 111) among 5th graders who receive instruction in departmentalized settings opposed to those taught in traditional settings. Yearwood (2011) does provide some concrete data that indicates on average, “a student in the departmentalized setting scores 5.63 points higher on the 2010 CRCT than a student in the traditional setting when accounting for 2008 math CRCT scores” (p. 101).

Different types of data can be applied to the debate over the use of departmentalized vs. self-contained classrooms. Based on standardized test scores, “around 70% of all students enter middle and high-school with severe deficits in mathematics and science” (Strohl, Schmertzing, Schmertzing & Ling Hsiao, 2014, p. 3 as cited in Nelson & Landel, 2007). With this statistical deficit, Strohl et al (2014) note that both Nelson & Landel (2007) and Li (2008) suggest efforts be made at the elementary school level to use content specialists (p. 3). Even with these numbers and the emerging qualitative literature on departmentalized classroom instruction, “the research on the effectiveness of elementary departmentalization is inconclusive” (Baker, 2011, p. 34).

Limitations of Departmentalization

There is no magic wand when it comes to finding a solution for improving student achievement and increasing standardized test scores. If departmentalization were, indeed, the panacea for all that ails upper elementary schools, its use would be near universal. “But the approach has trade offs,” according to Gewertz (2014, p. 1). One negative impact noted by various researchers was that students would “lose the close teacher bonds and developmentally appropriate kinds of learning they need” (Gewertz, 2014, p. 1). This is especially important for elementary age students, and Strohl et al in their 2014 study noted that departmentalization has “the potential for teachers to lose the sense of personal responsibility toward student success” (2014, p. 133 as cited in Chang & Munoz, 2008). They further added that the Chang & Munoz study (2008) showed that “teachers may lose a sense of ownership” (Strohl et al, 2014, p. 133) toward student success under departmentalization.

One other disadvantage often noted is “not knowing students on a more personal level” (Liu, 2011, p. 46). Epstein and Dauber (1991), noted by Strohl et al (2014), point out that “self-contained teachers were more familiar with students as a result of more daily student-teacher interactions” (p. 116). This meant that “poorer performing students, in particular, may suffer academically from the lack of a connection to a consistent instructor with a deep knowledge of their individual needs” (Baker, 2011, p. 35 as cited in Becker, 1987).

An additional negative is that “under departmentalization, when each subject is taught by a different teacher, integration of childrens’ educational experiences into a meaningful whole becomes difficult, if not impossible” (Lobdell & van Ness, 1963, p. 213). Liu (2011) noted this as well, that the “loss of integration and connection across different subjects” (p. 46) was a common disadvantage of departmentalization. Baker (2011) noted that the departmentalization means “no opportunity exists for extended learning by modifying the schedule as a self-contained instructor can easily do” (p. 35 as cited in Walters, 1970).

A range of studies cited by Baker (2011) noted that “the rigid bell schedule places time pressures on the learners, and constrains teachers who must present their course materials within defined class periods” (p. 35 as cited in Hamalainen, 1967; Lobdell & Van Ness, 1967 & Thornell, 1980). Interestingly, some of the negatives attributed to departmentalization relate to basic logistics. Baker (2011) noted how “the transition between classes results in the loss of instructional time” (p. 35 as cited in McGrath & Rust, 2002). Liu (2011) highlighted this problem as well and criticized “the time wasted during such moves” (p. 47). Interestingly, both Liu (2011) and Baker (2011) note how these moves place unnecessary pressure on the young learners. Liu (2011) said the movement “added stress on young children” (p. 47), and Baker (2011) cites the “pressure (put) on learners” (p. 35). Further negating any benefits, Strohl et al (2014) note that departmentalization “disrupts younger students’ learning and increases their stress levels and learning problems” (p. 115 as cited in Elkind, 1988).

Another logistical problem is highlighted by Andrews (2006) when she notes, “another problem we struggled with was our physical arrangement” (p. 13). In this case, the classrooms were located in three separate corners of the building, which “created some lengthy transitions” (Andrews, 2006, p. 13). Strohl et al (2014) note significant socialization and engagement benefits with self-contained classrooms that are relevant to creating a positive classroom community. “Another argument for self-contained instruction is its impact on students’ feelings toward school. Students in self-contained structures were shown to have an increased feelings of connectedness to their school” (Strohl et al, 2014, p. 116 as cited Chang & Munoz, 2008). Further, Strohl et al (2014) note that “self-contained teachers were more familiar with students as a result of more daily student-teacher interactions, and were more likely to make contact with parents” (p. 116 as cited in Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

The body of qualitative research on the disadvantages of departmentalization is backed up somewhat by empirical data. For example, in Moore’s (2008) study, students in a 4th grade self-contained classroom performed higher than their peers in a departmentalized classroom in language arts, math and science (pp. 64-65). In addition, students in 5th grade self-contained classrooms performed better than their departmentalized peers in language arts and social studies (Moore, 2008, pp. 68-72). In another study conducted by Johnson (2013), “students in self-contained classrooms earned an average of 5.57 points higher than students in departmentalized settings” (p. 62) on standardized math tests. While this data is not conclusive, there is a body of empirical evidence suggesting that self-contained classrooms can, in fact, achieve better test results.

Analysis of Classroom Departmentalization

It is clear that there are certain differences of opinion on both sides of the issue of departmentalization vs. self-contained classrooms. Noted researchers ranging from Strohl et al (2014) , Andrews (2006), Baker (2011), Chan & Jarman (2004), and many others have come down on both sides of the issue. Yet, whatever downsides and risks there might be to departmentalization, there are clear benefits, particularly as it relates to learning and learners. Departmentalization, as some of the research shows, can provide better teachers with better specialization; it can bring more focused learning and more individual attention on specific subjects. Departmentalization can foster better lesson planning, less teacher stress and more instructional integration. Further, there are definite benefits for Special Education students, and some of the research certainly supports the contention that departmentalization better prepares students socially for middle school.

It is important to remember that all of this is happening as the world of public education is dramatically changing. Public schools, teachers and administrators are under increased pressure to elevate test scores, and to do so with less public funding. Further, public schools face more competition from charter schools, for-profit online schools, private schools, and like Wisconsin, so-called “choice schools,” where public dollars are used to allow students to attend parochial schools.

Educators and administrators have a responsibility to look at all the available options, and departmentalization certainly offers significant benefits, in my opinion. Maybe it’s the cliché “what’s old is new, and what’s new is old,” since the departmentalization model has been used since the early 1900’s. Then, again, maybe it is “the more things change, the more they stay the same,” since despite revolutionary changes in technology, standards and teaching methods, the self-contained classroom is often the default choice. My recommendation is that administrators analyze their school community, sift and winnow through test scores, Common Core Standards and teacher satisfaction surveys and consider departmentalization as an option. To be sure, there are some risks – less bond between student and teacher, possibly reduced parental involvement, wasted time during transitions, and more – but the world of public education is not what is was ten years ago, and it is likely not to be the same ten years from today. For these and other reasons, I favor serious consideration of adopting departmentalization for upper-level elementary school students.

Personal Experience

Reviewing the research and comparing it to my experience and observations in a half dozen Metro Nashville Public School (MNPS) classrooms presents an unique perspective. I have seen first hand the benefits of departmentalization. At one school, I observed how teachers in upper-elementary departmentalized classrooms have more detailed lesson plans, seem more enthused and prepared for each and every class, and seem to bring more energy and excitement to their work. While I have noted some disruptions because of classroom transitions, I viewed them as minor and fixable with administrative changes and more staff support. Further, while it may have been unique to the school I was at, parental involvement seemed very high and continuous. Additionally, I observed teachers who knew their students quite well; teachers who demonstrated an understanding for different, individual learning styles and challenges; and teachers who were truly “plugged in” to their students. Yes, a self-contained classroom might provide for a deeper relationship in some cases, but the departmentalized classroom is not a barrier to a strong student-teacher connection. In talking with some of my future colleagues, I saw teachers share information about students, talk about integrating curriculum and reflect a real passion for the next group of students they would be teaching.

My observations in self-contained, upper-elementary classrooms did not reveal any disasters or major problems, but I could sense a different classroom environment both among learners and teachers compared to the departmentalized classrooms. These self-contained classrooms often seemed tedious, stressful, and more routine than I observed in a departmentalized setting. These self-contained classrooms were still trying to serve the learners, but I observed and experienced first-hand a more challenging and engaging classroom community when working in a departmentalized classroom.

These thoughts and my opinions based on the research, my education, and my classroom experience helped inform me as I sought my first teaching job. I will be joining a departmentalized team, teaching 3rd graders Reading and Social Studies. I feel excited, and not stressed, and I believe that my lesson plans will be detailed and thorough, not simply a structure to “teach to the test.” I view the challenge of my rookie year in a departmentalized learning environment as one that I will approach with passion, excitement and the knowledge that I can overcome the potential negatives of a departmentalized classroom and avoid the limitations and inherent problems with the self-contained classroom. This is especially true in looking at the challenges public educators have in MNPS and the changes that have taken place in how schools teach students. My belief is that the departmentalized classroom will provide the best results.

Conclusion

Tennessee’s public school systems are a microcosm of what is going on with public education today. While the MNPS school system is highly regarded nationally as a model for success, the challenges will continue to mount as pressure continues to build, budgets continue to shrink, and teachers continue to be expected to be more than just teachers. Every appropriate option must be considered so that teachers can reach the goal that historian and writer Henry Adams gave to them: “teach, so that you affect eternity.” Departmentalization will help achieve that goal.

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