

Report on Valley High School Student Interviews/Discussion February 20, 2002

Students were randomly selected by their teachers during the first six periods of the school day. Each group of students started with an introduction of the team by Phil Hodgin. Bruce Jilk then asked each student to give their name and plans following high school. At the end of each session the students reviewed a set of pictures and wrote down what pictures they liked or disliked. Approximately 90 students participated in the interviews.

GROUP 1

Sophomore, Jr. & Sr.

One person who has not attended SW

Valley Likes

Library – large – enough room to spread out – computers, magazines- friends are there
Gym

Rooms are numbered easy to understand

Teachers more laid back – more respect

More freedom – not as structured

Valley Change

Water is bad

¼ mile hallway carries all the traffic – hard to get around

Attended another high school – didn't experience the traffic problem – 2 stories

Don't feel there are too many students here – one feels there are too many – class sizes are nice

New student here as a junior – didn't get the feeling of getting "lost" in a large school – many checks and balances in place

Cafeteria and lunchroom – bad system for getting food – very crowded

Bigger lockers – sophomores use lockers – some don't even know where they are – use if centrally located – don't use lockers the older you get – tend to leave things in your car

Would like to see student center open during study halls – only in use during lunch

Student center a comfortable environment

Orchestra gets little space

Theater very little space – sound system – tech good but old lights other things falling apart

Band hall adequate space

The option if 2 school – 9,10 and 11, 12

Kids would be reluctant to go to the 2 schools idea

Valley/SW together

Think 9th grade should be with high school – more options

Mature faster when 9th grade combined with high school

Miss out on some of the high school experience

SW Dislikes

Didn't like Southwoods – difficulty connecting with friends

Not happy with electives

Not many options when there

Were treated very childishly

Not respected

Given a lot of busy work

Don't feel like you're part of Valley

Portfolios

SW Likes

Lockers
Gym
Younger sister did well in a new school with the pod system
Pod system forced you to make new friends
Computers
Dark room equipment

Question raised regarding cutting back on classes with 2 schools – thinks it would be a bad idea to cut classes – a lot of classes that would suffer. Feels they need those classes to make Valley such a good school

Activity opportunities helps assure students do not get lost in a large school – would lose that in 2 school
Think student response should be valued more than parents since they're "living the experience"

GROUP 2

Likes at Valley

Area before gym with skylights – see outside
Windows at end of building
Library nice – open – lots of sun light – not cramped
Because there's so many people – not a lot of grouping
Likes eating area in cafeteria – but where you get food is crowded
Outside courtyard
Tiger Park

Dislikes at Valley

Hallway intersections too compacted between classes
More lighting – feels like you're in the dark – no daylight
Some wings very cold
People stand in opening to "expensive" bathrooms – "million \$ bathrooms"
Need more parking – would not pay for a spot in a ramp

Where would you spend dollars to improve?

Bathrooms
Build a new school with more light – bigger hallways
So spread out – impossible to use lockers
6 in group use lockers – also too small to use

SW Comments (all had attended Southwoods) Compare two buildings

Like Valley much better
Do not like Southwoods class room areas due to "pods"
Liked Southwoods building – not pods – building structure and library very nice
Southwoods is easy to get around in
More connected here to teachers/counselors
Got to know class at Southwoods before you got here
Don't like the idea of two school – think athletics and band would suffer
Wouldn't get "meshing" into one
Feels classes would get larger

HS experience as it relates to college – more variety – more of a college schedule

Like it where it is
Prepares you well for college because of environment
Freedom here – more than Southwoods – allows kids to want to learn

Favorite places when not at school – read/study

Barnes and Noble

Is Valley experience successful if not attending college?

Offer a lot of business classes, etc. to prepare if not going to college

Opportunity for college classes – allows you to take classes you “want “ to take

Afraid that there will be 2 schools and kids will not be heard regarding what they feel

Most kids only want one school

Feelings on size of school

Too spread out

Too many students

Need a bigger school

Feel safe here

A lot of people to relate to

Small school would limit opportunities

Thinks another main hallway would eliminate crowding

GROUP 3**Where are favorite places in the bldg**

Cafeteria – lots of places to sit

Field house and north gym – big

Locker layout in gym is good

Student Center

Likes art and shop being removed – gives you a chance to get more of the “experience”

Not favorite

Bathrooms dirty

New bathrooms crowded – social area

Seclusion areas – shop, social studies, art area

Expensive bathrooms too open – can see the bathrooms from the doorway

Art wing very hard to get to with all the traffic

Mile long hall way so crowded (main hallway)

Avoid in front of bathrooms because everyone stands there

Almost impossible to get into the “new bathroom” because of people standing there

Cafeteria and student center do not seem like a very warm place to meet – no socializing. Media Center

then gets too crowded and loud

Student center not friendly or open

Separate computer wing for the library – not enough computers – only one computer in each classroom.

Lab computers scheduled by classes – more for independent work

All have attended Southwoods

Southwoods Thoughts

Disliked – can not meet other people – stuck with “pod people”

Had to make special trip to find your friends

Only interacted during music, art, lunch other than people in your pod

Felt like you have been sent back to elementary school

Had to have a pass to be anywhere – not like that at Valley

Did not like class layout

Architecturally much better – a lot of window – nice building – liked the layout and open space

No student center or central area

Liked Southwoods library area – windows. No place like that at Valley. Hallways bigger at Southwoods and spiral staircase and the hub area. Liked the pods
Seat assigned in study hall and couldn't talk. Only 20 in the library at a time. People only went there to talk so no work got done.
Hub was library at Southwoods, but if classes were more spread out it may work better
Make the center hub the student center

2 Schools Idea

Does not like two schools – loss of identity – two sports teams, etc.
Sports teams – opportunities are here – doesn't feel there's enough student interest for two schools
Schools will be come “rich and poor”. Feels Southwoods would be richer and this would be the lower school
One will become art school one will become sports school
Need to decide if sports or academic are more important – feels academics is more important so should stay with single school
With two schools decrease in classes
Split – can get a more personal learning experience – may be better
Valley has good student/teacher ratio
Can find better cliques or niches here because of more people in one large school

Would smaller school be safer/more secure?

Would get tired of seeing the same old people every day
Doesn't feel safety is a real concern here – feels safe here – need to work difference out
86 sets of doors here – if concerned about safety – needs to look at doors

For those not attending college

Hard here if you're not good academically. Pushed a lot but Walnut Creek doesn't push hard enough – a lot of homework
Pressure for you to do your best but if having trouble can always get help
There's no time in your life when you won't be pushed for some reason to do your best

Valley re-build

Problem with rebuilding where practice fields are – wouldn't be happy with that across the street from people – looking at a brick wall.

GROUP 4

Valley Favorite Places

Cafeteria – talk to friends
Gym – open space – new looking
Language lab – best technology – computers in classrooms (stations). Problem is not being able to use computers – not enough in library
Southwoods has just a few computers in open area – need things “out of the way” – not a community area here to do that
Hall in history wing – lots of windows to see out

Valley Least Favorite Places

Lunch area where you try to get food – too crowded
Hallways too cramped
Art wing really crowded – hard to get around

Valley Dislikes

So spread out – nearly impossible to get from one end to the other in time. Two levels might be a better option

One person in the group did not go to SW

SW thoughts

Didn't like pod structure – too confined – no freedom

Nice community area – but didn't like pods

Did not like pods – confined and packed together

If you were in a pod with friends and liked your teacher, it's good – if not – it miserable. Feels it creates immaturity

Treated like a kid – lockers were horrible

Felt Southwoods was a good transition between jr. high and high school. Freedom of being part of high school but still have guidance

No freedom – confined to your area. Feels Southwoods is separated from the high school – have to be bused here to sports

Liked locker size but not set-up – cannot get anything in Valley's lockers

Southwoods was open and colorful – looks new.

Southwoods treats you too much like a kindergartener – not a chance to mature – too structured

Always the right temperature at Southwoods so more comfortable

From Colorado – lot of natural light – very new structures – really liked the set-up. Food service instead of cafeteria

Food court would be a good idea for Valley

Lockers stacked so wider may work – lockers too narrow for books

Some don't know where lockers are

Thought on no lockers:

Have to carry huge books everywhere

Give bigger lockers and give kids a choice of whether they want them

If bigger everyone would want them so limited number probably wouldn't work

Band lockers wide – uses that for books

Thoughts on 2 schools

Makes no sense – 2 – too far apart

Add to valley – too crowded – no point of two schools – apart and still call them Valley

Architectural doesn't think Southwoods would work for a 9-12 system

So many opportunities here – two high schools wouldn't allow that

Expand Valley and turn Southwoods into 7/8 grade

Structure at Southwoods doesn't feel like a high school – afraid programs would be cut

Splitting apart activities would damage sports, band, choir

Redundancy of classes

Feels one would be more populated because of where kids would want to be

Don't know why you'd split up sport or understand how that would work.

Wouldn't you have to have two separate bus/transportation systems?

Participation at Valley

Have learned a lot from other kids that are better at something (jazz band)

If open enrollment – there would be a “split” - strong band school – strong football school

A lot of clubs here and feel not as many kids to support in a small environment

Thinks there should be a “cut list” for sports and more recreational teams

Don't like “cut list” for a sport so can never get good at any sport

GROUP 5

***ALL SENIORS

What places you like at Valley

Social Studies wing – light

Art wing – windows surrounding some of the rooms – ceiling heights
Athletic wing – always someone there

Dislikes at Valley

Choir area – dirty

Cafeteria – too small – seems dirty

Library – can't study because of noise. Have to log onto computer to find a book – no card catalog – computers full – very frustrating

Computers old and slow but don't think we need more – just newer

Not enough computers for the need

Some things don't work (technology) – would rather go home to use

Resources need to be improved and expanded – encyclopedias, books outdated – inadequate – goes to WDM or DM library

Lots of good intentions – but none of them follow through (example new language lab – computers not used when there or never work)

Teachers as frustrated as students with technology – never know if technology will be up and running that day

More effort to aid teaching – need more effort made for technology geared towards students

Alcove next to library is senior hang-out – secluded - carpeted

Do you feel Valley environment is truly about “learning”?

Can't be a life long learner if there aren't the resources or the teachers don't seem excited about learning – seems many kids that don't read

Given up using the library here – uses city library

Never checks out books here – no resources or not able to find

Program to search for resources very seldom works

Most books here haven't been checked out for years

Only uses library to take notes – does not use the resources because they're so outdated

A lot of alternative close by for students and resources

Athletics have just as much out of school opportunity as resources

All attended SW

Thoughts on two high schools

One person willing to leave here for Southwoods if became other high school

Everyone hated pods

Classes could be cut

There's always kids that fall through the cracks no matter what the size of school

School gets too big when class sizes get too big – when you become an ID number. Doesn't think Valley is too big – halls look crowded but doesn't feel classes are too crowded at all.

Too big – too many people to really get to know anyone. Working environment is becoming a pod because of the size. Likes the Southwoods set-up – didn't like it then – but does now

Good 9th grade year – good pod and teacher. Will run into a lot of different aspects in life environment – can't structure school to a certain environment

Southwoods good experience due to the teacher – has experienced some large classes and impossible to learn anything

Every experience very personal - some teachers' don't know you – some are very interested

Building seems crowded only because of two main intersections - those are the only parts

Southwoods felt like jr. high plus. Didn't take it seriously because of that

Doesn't think pod system would ever work for high school – Southwoods would have to be totally changed to get rid of the pods

Classes may be large – but you do get to know the people in your classes

Valley is a very large school district – don't feel like you can make it a small town environment and make it effective – you do get to know the kids with your similar interests

Teacher/student relationship – don't necessarily get that even with a smaller school

PAA – advising small groups – doesn't work because all you do is fill out forms – no bond with people there

What would create bonding or belonging

Community service

How do you feel about sports opportunities?

Only be able to succeed if you're truly talented – you have to pick a venue – not as many options
“No Cut” policy here – doesn't like it – no cut players will never get to play and hurts good players because there's too many people on the team – 2 high schools probably won't take care of that – there's more than enough opportunities here – you just have to find them – survival of the fittest
Opportunities to participate is a lot like real world - most people have to choose small town/large town – doesn't think breaking it up will necessarily make a difference
Smaller school would take an average student to a higher level in the class – even with that given – the opportunities won't be there with small environment
Being able to participate is the most important – so if classes are too large that's what happens
Opportunities to start you own clubs, etc here – a lot of opportunities
Likes going to a school that is known for excellence – not only sports but everything – rather be a medium fish in a big pond

GROUP 6

Favorite Places in Valley

Likes spaces with windows
Going down ramp to Tiger Park – can see out – open
Windows are good
Uses hallway by 202/203
Cafeteria is better to be than the library
No places to sit – needs to be bigger - cafeteria

Don't like at Valley

Art Area – scary – away from everything – no one there – need to be opened up
Choir room
Doesn't like how things aren't organized at all
Southwoods was too extremely organized
French room has no windows
Rooms get really hot and can't open windows
Some of the hallways are too hot and can't seem to breathe there
Between two hall ways – no windows or no fresh air
Hallways too crowded
Foreign language hallway and rooms are too old
Room 317 is depressing

Places to congregate

Bathrooms – newly remodeled – more open than any other spots in hallway

All attended Southwoods

Southwoods thoughts

Didn't like it – too much like elementary
Designed nice – very pretty – open
Organization – kids wise – not good
Jail
Did do well there – not sure why
Get to know everyone in your pods

Southwoods is homey – comfortable – Valley is so “cold”
Could organize Southwoods by departments
Liked the open areas of Southwoods – where computers are
Lockers easy to get to – don’t use lockers at Valley because you can’t get to them

2 High School Thoughts

Valley is too small for all the students
9, 10 at Southwoods – 11, 12 at Valley
Never meet new people with 2 schools
Divide up sports – but may get more people to go out – not so much competition
Hate to break up Valley sports
Could combined sports between the two schools
Valley should be made bigger and include 9th grade – use Southwoods for something else
Feels classrooms are big enough – just hallways crowded
Do not like the idea of 2 schools
Parents shouldn’t try to tell everyone what would be the best because they really don’t know
Thinks each high school would compete with each other
One school will always be better

Attitude in Jr. High about Southwoods

Bad attitude – always had heard that it was bad
Wasn’t too bad the first month
Didn’t socially prepare us
Indian Hills is more of a transitional experience than Southwoods
Grades got worse at Southwoods – you get bored and you can’t pay attention

Participation – do you feel like you participate and have opportunities at Valley?

Valley puts too much emphasis on only the best – if you’re not the best you don’t get the opportunities
Survival culture
Feels comfortable here
Everyone is given a fair change and we have a “no cut” policy for sports – have to prove what they can do

What would you change?

Modernize
Make it bigger
Get the freshman here
Bathrooms need work

Are you falling short of your own expectations?

Everyone is different – you need to excel within the opportunities given

Do you feel all students are being served?

Yes – they don’t “have” to fall through the cracks – it’s their decision
Teachers give you opportunities

Do you feel safe here?

Most of the time
Safer at SW