

Early Grades Reconfiguration Analysis, Hanover Research. April 2018 (24 pages)

“Current research does not identify or support one grade configuration as the most effective. However, some studies suggest that students perform better at schools with a larger number of grade levels. Another frequent finding is that the most effective grade configuration will vary by district based on internal factors such as projected enrollment, transportation costs, school facilities, and community support.” (pg3)

“Critics of configurations that cluster students into schools with smaller grade spans often cite the increased number of school-to-school transitions as a negative consequence. Research on school transitions finds that academic loss across all content areas should be expected, though most studies focus on elementary to middle school transitions and middle school to high school transitions.” (pg4)

“Proponents of configuration that cluster students into smaller grade spans highlight the ability to create more targeted programming for students.” (pg4) “Having grade level staff under one roof leads to tighter and more beneficial collaboration.” (p17)

Narrower grade level configuration do not offer students the exposure to older learners and there is less opportunity for teachers of transitioning students to discuss students with their new teachers.

Primary challenges to reconfiguration of schools: transportation, staff redistribution, and moving classroom supplies and furniture.

Cultural challenges: breaking up school “families”, parent pushback, and possible loss of parental support.

Other challenges: suitability of physical space and impact of transition especially for younger children

“The critical success factors for grade level reconfiguration are planning, communication, and collaboration.” (pg4) Strategies for successful configuration include clearly define the roles and responsibilities, communicate to secure buy-in, get input and talk with constituents, and allocate ample time.

https://cdns5-ss10.sharpschool.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_158566/Image/Update%20-%20Early%20Grades%20Reconfiguration%20Analysis%20-%20Attleboro%20Public%20Schools.pdf

School Building Utilization and Grade Configuration Study, Dr. Kevin Baughman & Associates.2019 (70 pages)

Summary of Key Research Results (pg19)

- The impact of grade level configurations on student learning is generally inconclusive.
- What a teacher does in the classroom is far more important than a specific grade configuration.
- Each school community considers different factors when making grade configuration decisions.
- No grade configuration is right for all districts.

- The longer students stay in one school, the more relationships they form with teachers and other adults.
- At least in the short-term, student achievement is adversely affected when students make transition to new schools.
- A feature of a grade 6-8 middle school is grade 6 students are more likely to be instructed by a content specialist in a middle school instead of a generalist in an elementary school.

Elementary Grade Configuration (p20-21)

There is little research examining student outcomes when comparing grade K-2 or K-3 grade configurations with intermediate school grade 4-5 or 4-6. Consistent with other grade span research, the most significant factors that positively affect student outcomes are the quality of the teacher, classroom practices, and the overall learning culture of the building. Dividing the grades of an elementary school into a K-3 and a 4-6 requires that students make one or more transitions from one school to another. Researchers have found that the frequency of transitions can have at least a short-term negative effect on student development and achievement. A study by Alspaugh found a significant achievement loss during each transition year. The study indicated that some students regain what is lost in the following year, but it would seem that students who make fewer transitions need fewer years to make up for achievement losses caused by transitions.

At a practitioner level, there are positive features for dividing elementary grades into two or more buildings (e.g., grades K-3 in one building, grades 4-6 in separate building). Dividing elementary into two or more grade level groups permits each school to narrow the focus of curriculum. Teachers can focus intensely on fewer subjects and become subject expert specialists. Locating one or more grade levels in a single district building also permits larger numbers of teachers at the same grade level to collaborate using a common curriculum. Having more classrooms at each grade supports more opportunities to match students to teachers according to teaching and learning styles. Other features of a divided elementary configuration may include students feeling safe being with other students their own age, and students may be able to participate on an equal level in more activities and be less influenced by older students. Since teachers in this setting are more content specialist, it may be more difficult to assign a teacher to teach another grade level or teach in other elementary content areas after a period of time serving as a specialist.

The positive features of a continuous grade configuration (K-5 e.g.) is more convenience for families for parental involvement, PTA participation, and parent volunteers. Grade level communication of curriculum, alignment, and coordination is easier to facilitate. This configuration encourages consistent communication with families since all children are at one campus or in one building. Of consequence and as previously mentioned in the research, the continuous grade levels reduce the needed transitions between schools for children. Since students are in a building for more years, staff/student/parent relationships have more longevity. Under this grouping, the articulation and coordination of curriculum is easier and more seamless with more grade levels. Since teachers in this setting are more generalists, they can be more easily assigned to other grade levels or teach in any elementary content area.

<https://resources.finalseite.net/images/v1579649447/onteorak12nyus/oivvezpqwzwpypy1xjpu/OnteoraGradeConfigurationFinalReport.pdf>

Grade Level Configuration Report: Educational Considerations Submitted by Amy Clouter Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment Shrewsbury Public Schools October, 2011

The research reveals that grade level configurations have little impact on student achievement (Hooper, 2002; Howley, 2002; Klump, 2006; Renchler, 2000). In other words, it does not matter which grades are grouped together in a building. More important than the physical or structural set up is the appropriate selection and sequencing of curriculum, effective teaching practices and alignment of the written, taught and tested curriculum (Hooper, 2002) When these are done well throughout the district, it does not matter which grades are housed in which building; students will achieve. (pg3)

The literature on school size indicates that when parents are surveyed, they generally feel that the smaller the school the better, and there are some studies that support this belief. A 2006 study concluded that achievement gaps between boys and girls were narrower in small schools (Black, 2006) Smaller high schools tend to have better rates of attendance, behavior and achievement (Nathan and Thao, 2007) However, findings are inconclusive when it comes to students in the lower grades. (pg4)

Researchers claim that achievement declines when students transition from one level to another, regardless of the grade in which the transition occurred. Further, studies of students in the middle grades (6-8) conclude that the number of transitions a student makes is correlated to the likelihood that he or she will drop out of school (Pardini, 2002) For this reason, many educators advocate for schools with bigger grade spans, arguing that students and their families develop stronger relationships with teachers when they remain in one school over time. It's important to note, however that others refute this belief, claiming that the effects of a transition can be mitigated by thoughtful planning. (Cromwell, 2006) (pg4)

<https://campussuite-storage.s3.amazonaws.com/prod/11162/b2004386-1ca3-11e6-b537-22000bd8490f/1668675/4b80e19a-dbfc-11e7-a9e3-12c1b375d1de/file/BealGradeConfigurationEducationalConsiderationsReport.pdf>

ALTERNATIVE GRADE CONFIGURATIONS: Hanover Research

Research indicates that students do not benefit from isolated grade configurations. Students in standalone pre-primary schools (i.e., PreK and/or Kindergarten) do not gain skills as fast over the course of the school year as their peers in elementary schools. Rather, research suggests students benefit from aligned PreK-3 pathways. Intermediate schools (Grades 5 and 6 only) are not supported by the literature. Students in Grades 5 and 6 perform better in schools with more grade levels (i.e., traditional elementary schools) than in isolation.

Schools with few or single grades create more school transitions, which can negatively impact student academic and social-emotional outcomes. Research associates transitions with decreased academic achievement, an increase in negative student behaviors, and fewer positive student-teacher relationships.

Although there are numerous possible grade span configuration options, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) finds that the most common elementary school configuration is

PreK/Kindergarten through Grade 5, while the most common secondary school configuration is Grades 9 through 12.

<https://www.gocruisers.org/Downloads/Alternative%20Grade%20Configurations.pdf>

Grade Level Configuration Study Group Report – 2022

Research Review:

Published research on the impact of grade-level configuration and student achievement does not identify or support one grade configuration as the most effective. Much of the research on grade configurations relates to school-to-school transitions and specifically focuses on the potential impact that such transitions have on student achievement. This is also a common concern cited by districts considering changes to their schools' grade spans. Researchers generally find that a higher number of school transitions may result in decreased student achievement and "affect instructional continuity and communication across grades."

Multiple research studies in the 1990s by John Alspaugh conclude that academic loss across all content areas should be expected during transition years between elementary and intermediate grades, regardless of the grade level. Achievement typically rebounds in the second year after a school transition.

Research into the potential impact of grade configurations is generally inconclusive, with results difficult to generalize to other districts. However, studies suggest that students perform better at schools with more grade levels. Research on school transitions finds that academic loss across all content areas should be expected during transition years. To address concerns and mitigate the impact of changing schools, districts should implement ongoing and comprehensive transition plans that engage students, teachers, and parents.)

Key Findings:

- Grade-level configurations are typically driven by available space, not by programmatic design.
- Grade-level configuration significantly impacts whether resources are being used efficiently (time, people, materials, and instructional resources).
- Reducing the number of transitions between schools in a K-5 experience does impact student performance and a student's/family's sense of community.
- How educators are logically grouped across buildings impacts the opportunities for teachers to collaborate.
- Researchers generally find that a higher number of school transitions may result in decreased student achievement and "affect instructional continuity and communication across grades." (p6)

<https://www.nsboro.k12.ma.us/cms/lib/MA02216193/Centricity/Domain/62/FINAL%20NB%20Elementary%20Grade%20Configuration%20Study%20Group%20Report%20-%20Spring%202022.pdf>

**BENEFITS OF A PREK-2/3-5 REORGANIZATION OF THE EPS ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS (May 25,2010) -
Example of Pro list developed by another school district**

- When children of early childhood age, PreK-2, are grouped together in educational settings, there can be more of specific focus on the developmental needs of this age level, which are different than those of children in grades 3-5.
- School routines, assemblies and activities can be more grade and age focused.
- With multiple classes at a single grade level, there can be more opportunity to distribute students more evenly among classes by academic ability levels, special needs, and/or social/behavioral issues.
- If redistricting is done properly, this reorganization can address the racial and socioeconomic imbalance that currently exists among schools in the district.
- Parent involvement opportunities can focus more specifically on the developmental stages of the students in each building (PreK-2 or 3-5).
- In each building, there would be more staff with specialized knowledge and expertise in a specific developmental stage of educational growth.
- Because the focus and the concentration of services such as special education or literacy and numeracy intervention has only a 3 grade span, teachers are better able to integrate curriculum areas and provide appropriate services for the smaller range of grade levels.
- There will be a better balance of class sizes due to a greater concentration of classrooms at each grade level in a school.
- If the redistribution of staff and students is done properly, the opportunity exists to maximize building usage.
- Multiple staff at a single grade level allows for increased collaboration among staff at the same grade level.
- There is increased potential for common planning periods among same grade level teachers
- Professional Development can be more focused on the educational needs of a specific developmental stage (PreK-2 or 3-5).
- A more equalized distribution of students among classes at a single grade level will result in a consolidation of grade level and special area staff.
- With only 3 grade levels in a building, the potential exists for fewer teachers who are scheduled to travel among buildings which will result in a saving of time and cost to the district.
- There will be cost savings on instructional supplies, texts, and library/media materials due to less need for duplication among nine K-6 buildings.

https://cdnsm5-ss7.sharpschool.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_142018/File/Community/Capital%20Facilities%20Planning/Long-Range%20Facilities/ProsforthePre-K-2and3-5Model.pdf

Research Articles Involving Grade Bands, K-8 Configurations and Junior/Senior High Schools As Well as other Salient Research on What Works Best In Schools

“For school districts seeking a definitive answer on the best grade-level organization, no definitive answer exists.” “Researchers tend to agree that a school program’s quality is far more important than its grade-level organization.” “Both the research and the practical experiences of local school districts indicate that no one grade level organization can meet all the needs, circumstances and situations of all students and all school districts. Each pattern has its advantages and disadvantages. Local school districts, well aware of their own needs, must weigh the pros and cons of each structure and decide which one is best for their purposes.”

Reflection on the Research about School Configuration: There appear to be pros and cons to all school configurations, but there is no definitive comprehensive research that suggests one configuration or another will predict student outcomes. The research does seem to indicate that one negative factor to be considered in school reconfiguration is the number of transitions between schools. School transition can have a negative impact on student outcomes, however, there are ways to mitigate these effects: have fewer transitions overall in k-12, reduce the changes in social groups during transitions (group students in cohorts that remain together) and align instruction, curriculum, school rules and overall school expectations so there are few changes in those areas during transitions.

[https://core-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/asset/uploaded_file/763/Ojai Unified School District/2741034/Research Articles Involving Grade Bands K-8 Configurations and Junior Senior High Schools.pdf](https://core-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/asset/uploaded_file/763/Ojai_Unified_School_District/2741034/Research_Articles_Involving_Grade_Bands_K-8_Configurations_and_Junior_Senior_High_Schools.pdf)