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<https://nij.ojp.gov/library/publications/grade-configuration-associated-school-level-standardized-test-pass-rates-sixth>

♣ The most common grade level configuration for the middle grades is a middle school beginning in Grade 4, 5, or 6 and ending in Grade 7 or 8. The Grades 6-8 middle school configuration first developed in the 1960s and 1970s in response to low academic achievement and high rates of risky behavior among young adolescents. This model frequently includes strategies such as collaborative team teaching, integrative curricula, and flexible block scheduling. ♣ Although research indicates that transitions from one school to another can negatively impact student outcomes, research does not conclusively suggest that any particular grade level configuration has a positive or negative impact on student achievement. Transitioning to a new school may disrupt existing social relationships, reduce bonds between students and teachers, and expose students to less effective teaching methods. Some research suggests students who complete Grades 6-8 in K-8 schools outperform their peers in middle schools, but this effect has not been demonstrated in large-scale empirical studies. Further, many advocates of middle level education believe that grade configuration is less important than instructional practices within a school. ♣ Schools may wish to adopt strategies to support students as they transition from one school to another. Several school reform models include elements designed to offer more intensive support to students in their first year within a school, particularly to Grade 9 students entering high school. In addition, some schools have implemented programs designed specifically to address transitions, such as Where Everyone Belongs and Link Crew, which pair incoming Grade 6 and Grade 9 students with older students who act as mentors. ♣ Interdisciplinary team teaching, a practice recommended by advocates of the middle school concept, appears to be the most common instructional model for Grades 6-8. This arrangement allows teachers to develop closer relationships with students and alleviates the loss of connection between teachers and students as a result of the transition from self-contained classrooms to multiple classrooms. Smaller teams of two teachers in Grade 6 have been shown to positively impact student achievement, as compared to larger teams of four teachers. ♣ The school districts profiled in Section II of this report identify several distinct advantages and considerations associated with a Grades 6-8 configuration. Lake Washington School District and Stillwater Area Public Schools report that assigning Grade 9 students to high school improves alignment with state graduation requirements and curricular standards. In

addition, students in Grades 6 and 9 benefit from increased opportunities for extracurricular activities and accelerated courses in higher-level schools. School districts also report that the Grades 6-8 configuration can reduce overcrowding in elementary schools and increase the need for instructional space in school buildings that teach students in the upper grades.

<https://www.napls.us/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=4047&dataid=8327&FileName=Hanover-Review-of-Grade-Level-Configurations-Morgan-Hill-Unified-School-District.pdf>

The research on grade configuration is inconclusive at best and there is no research that shows one configuration is better at improving student learning. There is some evidence that each of the three approaches can positively, or negatively impact students. But reorganizing grades is merely a shifting of students, teachers and programs from one site to another. Research shows that there is greater impact on student learning when the emphasis is not on location of the students but on the educational experience students receive. Grade configuration is merely a tool that can create the potential to improve student learning. Here's a brief summary of what the research says.

- Grade configuration is not a predictor of student academic success (McKenzie et al., 2006).
- Students in K-8 settings have beneficial effects on achievement, attendance and behavior over students in separate middle grades programs (Abella, 2005).
- There is less achievement loss for rural and small-town students when they transitioned to high school from a K-8 setting rather than from a 6-8 middle school (Alspaugh, 1998).
- Middle grades students located in the same building or on the same campus as high school students had greater access to specialized teachers and more opportunities for advanced classes (Wren, 2003).
- More grade levels per building (i.e. fewer transitions to new schools) is related to higher achievement and improved behavior regardless of SES (Offenberg, 2001; Wren, 2003)
- When 7th and 8th graders are part of a K-8 school some studies found more individualized student attention and more personal student-teacher relationships (Weiss & Kipnes, 2006).
- A separate middle grades program has a greater impact on students from high SES settings than it does for students from low SES settings (Paglin & Fager, 1997).
- When middle grades students remain in an elementary setting there are fewer discipline problems (Cook, MacCoun, Muschkin & Vigdor, 2007).
- School size is important. Larger schools were more likely to negatively impact student learning (Weiss & Kipnes, 2006).

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED538738.pdf>

We examine the implications of separating students of different grade levels across schools for the purposes of educational production. Specifically, we find that moving students from elementary to middle school in 6th or 7th grade causes significant drops in academic achievement. These effects are large (about 0.15 standard deviations), present for both math

and English, and persist through grade 8, the last year for which we have achievement data. The effects are similar for boys and girls, but stronger for students with low levels of initial achievement. We instrument for middle school attendance using the grade range of the school students attended in grade 3, and employ specifications that control for student fixed effects. This leaves only one potential source of bias—correlation between grade range of a student's grade 3 school and unobservable characteristics that cause decreases in achievement precisely when students are due to switch schools—which we view as highly unlikely. We find little evidence that placing public school students into middle schools during adolescence is cost-effective.

[https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1076&context=bepp\\_papers](https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1076&context=bepp_papers)

Educators and researchers have long debated the best grade configuration grouping for middle grade students. This study examined school-level differences in reading and mathematics standardized test pass rates for students placed in middle schools versus alternative grade configurations. Latent growth modeling was conducted separately for 6th, 7th, and 8th grades across a 3-year sampling period. Sixth-grade pass rates were significantly higher in elementary schools (e.g., Kindergarten–7th grade) than in middle schools for reading (78.9% vs. 72.0%) and mathematics (82.5% vs. 76.3%). Seventh-grade pass rates in elementary schools were also significantly higher than in middle schools for reading (78.5% vs. 75.9%) and mathematics (83.1% vs. 69.2%). Eighth-grade pass rates were significantly higher in middle schools than in high schools (e.g., 8th–12th grade) for both subjects (74.7% vs. 70.0% for reading, 63.3% vs. 52.0% for mathematics). These findings suggest that students benefit from remaining in elementary school through at least 7th grade.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09243453.2019.1654526>

- Research indicates that students do not benefit from isolated grade configurations.
- Schools with few or single grades create more school transitions, which can negatively impact student academic and social-emotional outcomes.
- The decision to reconfigure grades is typically driven by practical needs such as budget, space, and school accreditation.

**The Benefits of PreK-3 Alignment Experts consistently recommend that districts create aligned pathways for students in Grades PreK-3 to reduce the fade-out of PreK benefits and promote successful school transitions.**

**Intermediate schools typically serve students in Grades 5 and 6 at a separate campus. These campuses aim to isolate late elementary and early middle school students, who experts argue typically require additional supports. Intermediate schools, in theory, can allow teachers to become subject-area experts and provide resources dedicated to the unique social and emotional needs of students in these grades. However, recent empirical studies find that intermediate school (Grades 5 and 6 only) do not benefit**

**students, and that students in the early middle grades demonstrate higher achievement in elementary schools with more grade spans than students in intermediate or single-grade schools.**

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

The literature on grade span and school configuration informs us that there is no single model to achieve all desired goals related to what we hope to accomplish through the use of various models. Indeed, there is no single configuration to achieve any particular goal. And goals need to be balanced. Academic achievement, student social development, and school drop out rates are all influenced by grade span configuration. Focusing on one of these must take into consideration how the others will be affected. In order to make the best decision about which configuration to use, therefore, it is imperative to know what goals are being sought and where they fit in the organization's list of priorities. Any chosen grade span configuration will have strengths as well as weaknesses.

<https://files.cityofportsmouth.com/school/centraloffice/eefc/4i.pdf>