



The Value of Shifting Grade Configurations

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1

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Reconfiguration is driven by our core values.

- Increase equitable distribution of resources
- Improve instructional coherence of the district and minimize the number of transitions for students
- Create the conditions for schools to be innovative and reimagine 21st century learning

2

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Why are we proposing grade level reconfigurations in BPS?

We do not seek to arbitrarily reduce or increase the number of grade configurations. We are looking at a number of inter-related issues simultaneously to consider what changes will:

- (1) Create more seats in high-quality schools for students at all grade levels
- (2) Support increased coherence for students by reducing the number of transitions students make as they move from preK-12 in BPS
- (3) Strengthen program quality across the board, but particularly at our secondary grades
- (4) Allow for more significant college and career experiences (such as career exploration, job shadowing and work-based internships) as part of students' secondary school experiences
- (5) Accommodate our expanded demand for pre-K and early elementary instruction
- (6) Incorporate data from the Facilities Master Planning process into our work

3

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24 Grade Configurations in BPS

BPS's 24 grade configurations contribute to confusion and anxiety for parents and students about whether there are clear pathways through the system and often result in students making many, stressful transitions.

There is growing consensus among educational researchers and practitioners that transitions can be disruptive for students and that, in general, the fewer transitions, the better.

BPS's Grade Configurations

Grades	Schools	Students
K0 - 12	1	100
K0 - 1	7	1,090
K0 - 2	1	188
K0 - 3	3	660
K0 - 5	29	9,812
K0 - 6	1	57
K0 - 8	16	9,435
K1 - 3	1	344
K1 - 5	9	3,810
K1 - 8	9	4,208
K2 - 5	1	233
K2 - 8	4	2,298
2 - 8	1	332
3 - 8	2	845
4 - 8	1	257
5 - 8	1	55
5 - 12	2	189
6 - 8	6	2,680
6 - 11	1	263
6 - 12	3	1,936
7 - 12	4	5,652
9 - 10	1	183
9 - 12	26	11,539
11 - 12	1	159

4

Proposed Emphasis of Grade Configuration Shift

Elementary Grades Pre-K-6

Secondary Grades 7-12

Our emphasis is not envisioned as a reconfiguration intended to produce a uniform system with just these two configurations. It is intended to help us consider how to begin to reduce our current 24 configurations **and** make the most effective use of the school buildings we have as we also begin to prioritize overall improvements to, or replacement of, facilities in our portfolio.

5

Secondary Grade Level Reconfigurations

We began our work by looking at options that could **reduce transitions for secondary students** because

- Including 7th and 8th grade students on high school campuses expands their access to more advanced academic course work, career and technical education opportunities, and college and career exploration and planning.
- There is more flexibility vis-à-vis space in our secondary portfolio of schools because several of our open enrollment/comprehensive high schools and our five remaining traditional middle schools (grades 6-8) are not fully enrolled.
- Additionally, many of our K-8 schools are under-enrolled at the 7-8th grade levels. With staffing requirements, this puts a strain on these schools' budgets.
- Several BPS principals of 9-12 schools were already exploring the 7-12 option for their sites and shared their very intriguing proposals with us.

6

Elementary Grade Level Reconfigurations

We began this portion of our work by looking at options that could **help increase the availability of early childhood seats and reduce the number of grade level configurations** at the elementary and middle school levels.

- There is much less flexibility vis-à-vis space in our elementary portfolio of schools, in part because there are many small elementary schools, including several single strand schools.
- Additionally, as mentioned in the previous slide (but also relevant to this set of proposed reconfigurations), many of our K-8 schools are under-enrolled at the 7-8th grade levels. With staffing requirements, this puts a severe strain on these schools' budgets.
- Overall, half of BPS's 24 grade configurations include elementary grades.
- The demand for early childhood seats continues to increase.

7

Research on Grade Span Configurations

Three key findings and an admonition emerge as most timely and relevant.

- There is not a single grade span configuration that will serve all purposes.
- There is not an agreed upon "best model."
- Current practice is in a state of flux.

"This underscores the need for clarity regarding why a particular grade span is used and awareness of the limitations of that particular configuration."

(Sellar, 2004)

8

Additional Research Findings

- “School-to-school transitions negatively impact academic achievement. The fewer transitions, the better chance a student has of completing high school; the more transitions, the higher the drop-out rate.” (Alspaugh, 1999; Alspaugh and Harting, 1995 as quoted in Tulsa Public Schools (2011)).
- “The reduction of school-to-school transitions and longer grade spans within schools is correlated with improvements in student achievement in a 2003 study of 232 Michigan schools.” (Wren (2003) as quoted in Tulsa Public Schools (2011)).
- “Minimizing transitions ensures that students have more stability in their learning environment. This also encourages relationship-building and a sense of community in schools. Together, over time, these things can positively influence teaching and learning, leading to improved program quality, and most importantly, improved student achievement.” (McVey, 2012)

9

One more research finding

- “The clearest and most worrisome evidence on middle and junior high schools comes from two recent studies, one in New York City (Rockoff and Lockwood 2010) and the other in Florida (Schwerdt and West 2011). Both are statistical analyses of large administrative databases that track student achievement over the majority of the primary grades and, in the Florida case, into high school. The clear result of both of these studies is **that students who move to a middle or junior high school in Grades 6 or 7 experience a sharp decrease in their learning trajectories and continue to struggle, relative to their peers who attended K-8 schools, through a Grade 8 and into high school.**” (Jacob and Rockoff, 2011)

10

Principal and Headmaster Interest in 7-12

- Last August, more than 20 of our headmasters attended a session to discuss the possibility of moving to a 7-12 configuration. Some spoke about ongoing planning regarding potential configuration changes.
- In early September, more than a dozen submitted “pitch decks” summarizing their intent to consider 7-12 as an option for their schools.
- Through these activities and our continuing conversations with principals, it is clear there is significant interest in this topic and much detailed planning work underway.

11

Learning from 6-12 and 7-12 BPS Schools and Districts that have Changed Secondary Reconfigurations

- We already have successful 6-12, such as TechBoston and Boston Green Academy, and 7-12 schools in the Boston Public Schools right now. This is evidence that each of these models is viable here when done well. BPS Principals have generously offered to support their colleagues’ learning and planning.
- We have been reaching out to districts, such as Cincinnati, Ohio, that have successfully transitioned some or all of their schools to 7-12 to learn from their experiences.
- We are also reaching out to districts, such as Indianapolis, Indiana and our neighbor, Cambridge, to learn about their implementation and reasons they consider the outcome less than fully successful.

12

Next steps

- Existing 9-12 schools interested in transitioning to 7-12 (or 6-12) should complete a comprehensive planning process and BPS should review, approve and support transitions that will increase student engagement, learning and outcomes.
- BPS also needs to begin to nurture the creation of new, thoughtful 7-12 (or 6-12) secondary school options as one component of our work to strengthen the quality of our secondary schools and improve outcomes for all of our students.
- Elementary schools interested in shifting to a K-6 configuration should begin a proposal planning process, similar to that used with the secondary schools last summer. BPS should review, approve and support transitions that will increase student engagement, learning and outcomes.

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