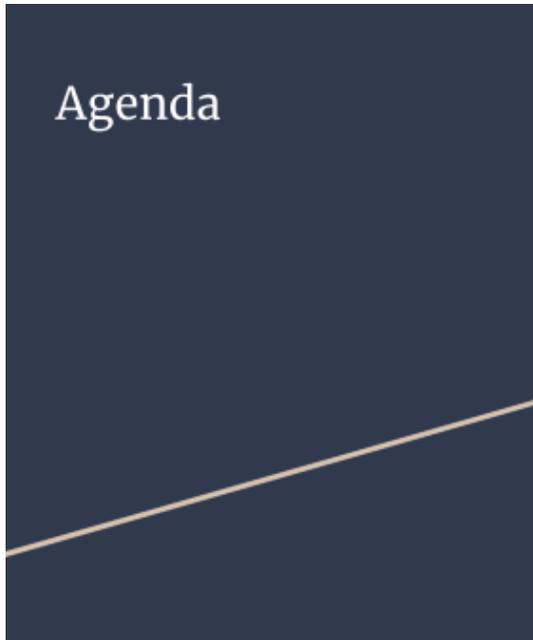
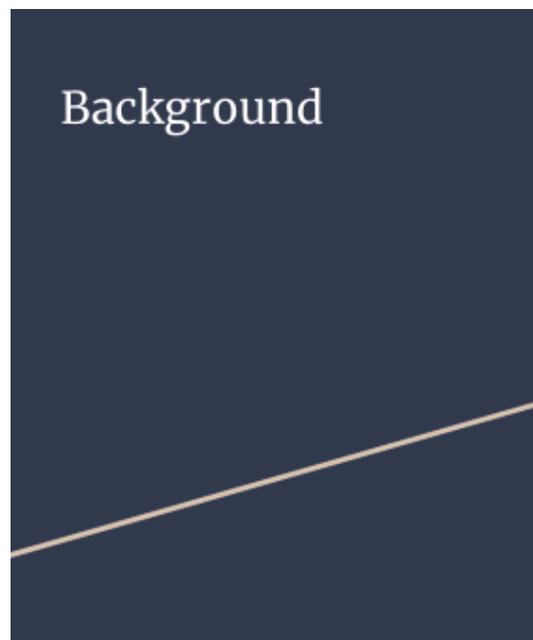


Overview of Possible Move to 6-8 Grade Configuration for Middle Schools



- Some background
- Educational Considerations for 6-8 Middle School Configuration
- Logistical Considerations for 6-8 MS Configuration
- Transition Planning
- Supporting 6th graders in the middle school setting
- Questions



- Enrollment Committee Work in 2017
- Current work of the Facilities and Bond Committee
- Middle School Exploratory Committee (MSEC)

The process to consider the implementation of a 6-8 middle school configuration began with the work of Enrollment Committee which met during 2017-18. At that time, it was noted that there was significant crowding at many of our elementary schools and one potential solution would be to consider moving 6th grade to the middle school, creating additional capacity at our grade schools.

This work was followed by the convening of the Facilities and Bond Committee which began meeting in April of 2018 to do a thorough analysis of the condition of our current schools and make recommendations to the school board for potential package of construction bond projects to be voted in in February of 2020. This committee also considered the question about 6-8 middle school configuration and the potential impact this could have on the final recommendation to the board.

Edmonds School District centers decisions around what is educationally sound for students, so the Middle School Exploratory Committee was established in November 2018 to explore and research the educational aspects of 6-8 middle school configuration. Following are some of the key details that the committee has learned through its research.

It is important to note that we are working to prepare for a potential change well in advance of when the shift to a 6-8 middle school configuration would occur. We anticipate that this potential change would begin during the 2023-24 school year. To put that in perspective, this year's current 1st graders would be the first class of 6th graders to start in middle school.

Educational Considerations for a 6-8 Middle School Configuration

- Curriculum**
 - Standards shift between 5th and 6th grade
 - Curriculum designed for K-5, 6-8, 9-12
 - Potential for access to science, math, electives
- Developmentally Responsive***
 - Students maturing faster
 - 6th graders ready for more rigor
 - 6th graders closer to 7th-8th, than 4th-5th (or K)
 - Student leadership opportunities (8th, 5th)
- 7-8 Considered too narrow a grade span for needs of adolescents who require a sense of community and connection**
- Access to activities/sports**
- Comparable District Models are working**

The research indicates there are sound educational reasons for various grade configurations. There is no “ideal,” but a wider grade span is beneficial overall. Rather, it is the **quality of instruction and programs that have the biggest impact on student success and well-being.**

The primary reasons to consider adding 6th grade to middle school are related to developmentally responsive practices and curriculum.

Our position is that schools need to be developmentally responsive and research in this area shows that 6th graders more closely resemble 7-8 graders than those in younger grades. Students at this age need to have a sense of community and support in transitioning from grade to grade. Social-emotional growth and well-being and community building are critical needs for adolescents and a 7-8 model does not provide the time for students to access positive connections with their school community. Also, opportunities for student leadership work better when there is wider age difference. Please click to see the chart on [Common Developmental Traits by Age](#) from the Center for Responsive Schools.

Regarding curriculum, there is a significant shift between 5th and 6th grade from skills-based standards to application-based standards that students must meet. The curricula we have adopted is designed in grade bands that separate between 5th and 6th grades and we currently have to spend our resources adapting curriculum to use differently that designed to fit an elementary configuration at the 6th grade level. For example, our new

science curriculum has had to be adapted into kits rather than using the scope and sequence for which it was designed. When 6th graders are included in a middle school, they also generally have access to more accelerated programs, elective choices, and extracurricular activities.

Many students in Edmonds Schools know each other from community programs such as sports, church, Boys & Girls clubs, as well as having attended the same elementary schools, which can ease the transition as well.

Access to clubs and sports might not be the top priority, but it is a question of equity for those 6th grade students' families who cannot "pay to play" in community activities outside of school.

We are one of the last districts in the area to move to a 6-8 model. Most recently, Northshore and Shoreline have implemented this configuration. Other districts in the area have had a 6-8 grade configuration for some time and we can learn from their experiences.

To see more advantages and disadvantages associated with middle school grade configuration click here: [Advantages/ Disadvantages](#)

Logistical Considerations for a 6-8 Middle School Configuration

- Capacity issues in our Elementary Schools
- Capacity issues in our Middle Schools
- We have the opportunity to learn from our neighboring districts
- SY 2023-24 is the soonest that a shift to 6-8 Middle Schools would take place

Along with the educational considerations, there are some valid logistical considerations that support a move to a 6-8 middle school configuration. As mentioned, the Enrollment Committee recommendation to consider a 6-8 middle school configuration were in part due to the current and future capacity issues that our elementary schools are experiencing.

We also know that a move to a 6-8 middle school configuration will only shift the capacity issues to our current middle schools, so there is clearly a need to address this through the bond by adding an additional middle school as well as expanding capacity at our current middle schools.

If we chose to move to this configuration, we will have the benefit of learning from our neighboring districts- Shoreline, Lake Washington, Northshore--who have already gone before us in this transition. We have already been talking with those districts to better understand their change process and what things we need to consider as we process this decision.

Transition Planning

MSEC Recommendations:

Engage the community and establish a representative Reconfiguration Task Force large enough to accommodate subcommittees to who will:

- Study and develop recommendations for a district-wide philosophy specific to grade level focus (6-8)
- Study program and instructional impacts of grade reconfiguration changes. What do we want the middle school experience to look like for students in grades 6, 7, and 8?
- Study, define and develop recommendations for the academic, activity, and athletic programs to match philosophy
- Study and develop recommendations for special programs (Special Education, EL, Highly Capable, etc) to match philosophy
- Define and initiate recommendations for staffing, budget
- Define and initiate recommendations for professional development, and curriculum work necessary for transition

The primary duty of the task force would be to ensure that we (as a district and community) are intentional and thoughtful in planning how to best serve our students at the middle level while being good stewards of the resources provided us.

So that we can be intentional and thoughtful in this transition, the Middle School Exploratory Committee is recommending that a Reconfiguration Task Force be created to focus on the following critical aspects of this transition:

1. Development of a clear 6-8 middle school philosophy for all our middle schools
2. Development of a clear vision of what the middle school experience will look like for students in grades 6, 7, and 8
3. Development of academic, athletic and activity programs that match our middle school philosophy and vision
4. Development of recommendations to support our special programs such as Special Education, English Learners, Highly Capable and others that align with our middle school philosophy and vision
5. Development of recommendations for staffing and budget
6. Development of recommendations for staff professional development to support students transitioning, and the curriculum work that match our middle school philosophy and vision

Supporting 6th Graders in the Middle School Setting

Association of Middle Level Education* recommends:

- support services to include advisory programs and comprehensive counseling services,
- integrated team teaching,
- small cohorts of students,
- bell schedule considerations,
- transition support for students moving into new school/grade
- professional development to support transitions and instruction (in integrated teams and subject areas)

*national organization which focuses on research and best practices serving adolescents

One of the most consistent questions and comments seen in the online responses gathered so far are related to whether 6th graders are ready socially, emotionally, and academically for the transition to a 6-8 middle school configuration.

We believe the answer to that question is yes, provided that we work to ensure that there are specific considerations that are intentionally addressed in the planning. The Association for Middle Level Education (formerly National Middle School Association) is the national organization which focuses on research and best practices serving adolescents. They recommend the following:

1. Include the development of support services like a strong Advisory program and a comprehensive guidance counseling program
2. When planning for curriculum and instruction, ensure that there is an integrated, team teaching approach-- blending English and Social Studies, for example, so that students have the same teacher for some subjects, and to reduce the number of transitions that students experience during the school day
3. Develop bell schedules that allow for flexibility, team teaching, integration of classes (examples: block, elective "wheels")
4. Have a very strong transition program that supports students and helps them and their families to get ready for the transition to middle school
5. Provide professional development for teachers to help support students in making the transition and to develop best instructional practices that support team teaching and integrated instruction
6. Use a cohort model to create small groups of students who share the same teams of teachers during the school day

Questions?