

## **KEY FINDINGS ON K-8 SCHOOLS (NSC would be implementing a 1-8 model)**

**Source: Best Practices in K-8 School Configuration.pdf**

- Most research suggests that K-8 grade configurations promote higher student achievement. However, the number of studies on the subject is limited and research has yet to demonstrate long-term academic benefits from K-8 schools, as achievement gains often appear to dissipate during secondary school.
- Some studies indicate that K-8 schools help improve student behavioral outcomes, including self-esteem. Although the literature on this topic is not comprehensive, researchers have observed reduced disciplinary issues, absenteeism, and high school dropout rates among students from K-8 schools compared to students from traditional middle schools. This finding may be attributed to the social continuity provided by the K-8 school environment.
- K-8 school configurations may help districts fill vacant teaching positions, encourage parent involvement, and facilitate student transportation, among other benefits. In particular, K-8 schools support teachers and staff members in building longer-term connections with their students, which can enhance the school's learning environment. Older students in K-8 schools also have the opportunity to serve in leadership roles, providing an important opportunity for developing vital personal and social skills.
- The most effective strategies for implementing K-8 schools involve focusing on proven middle-grade standards while adopting a student-centered focus. In addition, involving parents in the decision-making process, establishing project-based instructional approaches, and ensuring that middle-grade teachers have the appropriate content expertise are critical steps to creating an effective K-8 learning environment that serves the needs of the community.
- Challenges associated with the implementation of K-8 schools include ensuring access to elective courses and extracurricular activities, as well as building appropriate physical facilities for all age groups. In addition, targeted professional development programs may be necessary to support educators in interacting with and teaching new age groups, as well as developing teachers' subject matter expertise.

### Related Studies

Available at: <http://educationnorthwest.org/news/what-research-says-or-doesnt-say-about-k-8-versus-middle-school-grade-configurations>

What the Research Says (or Doesn't Say) About K-8 Versus Middle School Grade Configurations

Offenberg (2001) determined that eighth-graders showed higher achievement in K-8 schools than in middle schools. However, he acknowledged that a contributing factor in the higher

achievement might be the lesser number of eighth-grade students in the K–8 schools compared with those in middle schools.

Hough (2004) makes a distinction between the effectiveness of K–8 ‘elemiddle’ schools that adhere to middle school philosophy and programs, and K–8 schools that don’t. His research suggests that when “K–8 “elemiddle” schools are found to be outperforming 5–8 and 6–8 schools, it is because the former are more fully implementing middle grades promising practices...” (p. 4). However, he admits that no studies have been conducted with a large enough sample size to compare middle schools fully implementing the middle school philosophy to K–8 schools. Consequently, generalizations should not be made.

Alspaugh (1998) studied 16 school districts and found that students who attended middle schools experienced greater achievement loss in the transition to high school than students making the transition from a K–8 school. “The findings imply that students placed in relatively small cohort groups for long spans of time experience more desirable outcomes” (Alspaugh, 1998, p. 25). The schools studied were primarily in rural and small-town districts, with no schools in urban areas. Alspaugh’s previous studies indicated that students typically gain back any achievement loss the year after the transition to a new school.

Results of the studies should be interpreted with caution as they are very few in number, can’t necessarily be generalized across schools, and don’t control for all possible variables. Researchers urge practitioners to study strengths and weaknesses of various configurations to create effective educational services. “Rather than debate which grade configuration is best for middle grades, we would be better off expending our energy creating a curriculum that intellectually engages and inspires young adolescents, pushing for organized structures that support high-quality relationships, and finding better ways to reach out to families and communities” (Beane & Lipka, 2006, p. 30). In a recent research review, Anfara and Buehler (2005) note that “no sequence of grades is perfect or, in itself, guarantees student academic achievement and healthy social and emotional development” (p. 57). No particular grade configuration is the “magic bullet” to improving student achievement.