Research Brief

7-12 grade configuration

Question: What are the pros and cons of the 7-12 configuration?

Summary of Findings:
Throughout its history, the American high school has experienced several restructuring movements, all in the hopes of having every student graduate while adequately preparing them for the world after commencement. One of the current trends in this era of high stakes testing and accountability is to structure high schools into a 7-12th grade configuration. According to the research and literature, there is very little conclusive evidence that this arrangement best meets the needs of most students. There is some evidence that suggests if there must be a choice between a K-8 or 7-12 structure, that the students seem to make more academic gains in the K-8 composition. The needs of the young adolescent, aged 10-15, are quite different from older students and many secondary teachers do not have adequate and/or the appropriate training in working with students at this age level. Where there is conclusive verification is in the area of what makes a robust instructional program, regardless of the configuration.

Major Findings and Conclusions:
1. In examining reasons for a possible reconfiguration the following areas should be studied and addressed:
    • What is the purpose of the restructuring?
    • What are beliefs, values, and expectations of the school and its program?
    • How will the culture of the school be changed and not just "more of the same?"
    • What would the targeted skills be?
    • What would the non-negotiables be?
    • How can a logical instructional program be appropriately sequenced?
    • How would the instructional program meet the needs of every student?
    • How has the staff been trained in order to best meet the needs of every student?
    • What type of on-going professional development would be needed in order to support the staff in their professional growth that will meet the goals and beliefs of the school?
    • Have all of the staff worked on this structure together and are in total support and agreement to commit to this program?
    • How will new staff be brought along in the program and trained?
    • How will the program be assessed?

2. In the secondary school setting, small schools of about 400-800 students seem to be optimum.
   • Students are well known by adults and there is less of a tendency for students to fall through the cracks.
   • More students participate in extra-curricular activities and tend to hold more responsible positions, thus allowing for more gratifying experiences.
   • Students from smaller schools tend to do as well, if not better, academically.
   • Proportionately, there are fewer truancies and behavior problems.
   • There is a higher rate of student involvement.
   • Students who are from low SES and/or are a minority tend to do better academically

Pros & Cons of 7-12 structure

Pros
1. Fewer transitions to new school settings. Some research indicates that students can lose up to a year while adjusting and that fewer transitions could result in students not losing time due to the transition adjustment
2. Possibility of more consistency in the curriculum.
3. More lower level course offerings.
4. More opportunities for older students to be role models for younger students.

Cons
1. School programs often tend to revolve around the high school students' needs, not around those of the young adolescents.
2. Fewer opportunities for more students to have leadership positions in extracurricular activities.
3. Teachers are not well trained in meeting the needs of the young adolescent.

Online Resources:

• Converting large high schools into Successful Small Learning Communities
  A description of the concepts and ideas for consideration in developing a new learning community is given in this article.
  http://www.topschools.com/StartUpFAQFrame3Source1.htm

- Crisis or Possibility? Conversations about the American High School
  Issues facing the effectiveness of high schools in the 21st century are provided, however,
  suggestions or ideas to do so are not given.
  http://www.hsalliance.org/resources/resource.asp?id=9

- Figuring and reconfiguring grade spans: While most remixes result from enrollment
  challenges, some changes start with academics in mind.
  This provides a brief overview of reasons why different configurations are used..
  http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0JSD/is_3_62/ai_n13467080

- Grade Span
  This article briefly describes a few research studies on the academic effects and drop out
  rates in different grade level configurations.
  http://eric2.uoregon.edu/trends_issues/organization/grade_span.html

- Report Questions Wisdom of Separate Middle Schools (log in required)
  In order to best meet the needs of the young adolescent, this article briefly describes
  research conducted by the RAND corporation.
  http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2004/03/17/27research.h23.html?querystring=Report
  %20Questions%20Wisdom%20Separate%20Middle%20Schools

- School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance
  A thorough description of the research done on smaller versus larger schools is
  presented in this article. It includes an exhaustive annotated reference list on this topic.
  http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/10/c020.html

- Smaller High Schools Proving to be Educationally More Effective
  A brief overview on why smaller schools are better than larger ones is provided.
  http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&contentId=A25572-
  2003Mar25&notFound=true

- Still Crazy After All These Years
  This is a manuscript of a speech given by Hayes Mizell regarding the needs of the young adolescent in grades 6-8.
  http://www.middleweb.com/mw/resources/HMgradeconfig.pdf

- The Relationship Between Middle Level Grade Span Configuration, Professional Development, and Student Achievement
  A thorough article on research regarding student achievement as it relates to professional development and grade configuration.
  http://www.nmsa.org/research/rmle/spring04/article_1.htm

- Test Score Targets for High Performance Small Learning Communities
  The scores of 10th grade students who had enrolled in the Lake Washington International School in the 7th grade are reported in this article, along with an explanation of possible reasons for the high scores.
  http://www.topschools.com/TestScores.htm

Schools

- Aim High Academy, San Francisco, CA 6-12
  Home page
  http://portal.sfusd.edu/template/index.cfm

- Almont Jr./Sr. High School, Michigan
  Home page
  http://www.almont.k12.mi.us/AHSMain.htm

- East Rochester Junior/Senior High School, NY
  Report card for state of NY
  http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/repcrd2004/schools/261313030002.shtml

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- International School, WA 6-12
  Home page
  http://www.bsd405.org/international/

- Lake Washington International School
  Home page
  http://www.lkwash.wednet.edu/lwsd/html/programs/choice_schools/international.asp

- Lutcher High School
  Home page
  http://www.stjames.k12.la.us/?agenda=headline&mode=default&task=default&schoolid=7

- St. James High School
  Home page
  http://www.stjames.k12.la.us/?agenda=headline&mode=default&task=default&schoolid=10

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http://www.principalspartnership.com/