

UPDATE:

Board of Education members approved the grade configuration change and the adoption of middle schools during their January 19, 2008 meeting.

Grade Configuration Frequently Asked Questions

What is “grade configuration?”

Grade configuration is the term used to describe where different grades of students are provided educational services. Currently, Enid Public Schools includes pre-kindergarten through 6th-grade elementary schools, 7th- through 9th-grade junior high schools; and a 10th- through 12th- grade high school.

We are considering changing the configuration to include pre-kindergarten through 5th-grade elementary schools, 6th- through 8th-grade middle schools; and a 9th- through 12th- grade high school.

How is the middle school concept different than the current structure?

Middle schools and junior high schools are very different. A middle school focuses on the specific developmental, academic, social and emotional needs of sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students, while a junior high is more like a mini high school. In a middle school, each grade becomes a “school within a school.” Each grade of students has a primary area of the building where classes are offered and lockers are located.

In a middle school, a group of students are instructed by a team of teachers, which helps develop a "family" unit that encourages students to succeed and provides a sense of belonging. This system allows for flexibility of scheduling and collaborative planning and activities that are not possible in a traditional junior high setting. The middle school concept also places significant focus on parental involvement.

What is a team?

A team is a group of teachers who have the same group of students (100-120) every day. Their classrooms are located together in the same wing or area of the building. Each teacher provides instruction in a different subject area, including science, language arts, social studies, and mathematics. The number of teams depends on the number of students in the grade level. The teachers have a common planning time, where they can talk about the needs and goals of their students, as well as plan exciting interdisciplinary units and activities.

What would a middle school schedule look like?

For example, students might have science, math, language arts and social studies, in addition to electives, such as technology education, reading, Spanish, band, art, physical education, and/or others. This flexible schedule also would allow students to participate in enrichment opportunities or to benefit from intervention and tutoring, if they need extra assistance in a certain subject. Additionally, one of the classes throughout the day would likely be 15 to 20 minutes longer than the others so that students can have advisory time with a teacher. (This allows extra time for relationship building with a mentor and trusted adult who the student can turn to for questions and help.)

I have an eighth-grade student. Will he be ready for high school next year?

Yes, because the high school will provide an environment that fosters his success and prepares him for higher education and/or his post-high school plans. By academic standards, ninth-grade is high school. Students' grades are included on their high school transcripts. We believe this change would help promote the fulfillment of graduation requirements, which include legislation that requires students, beginning with 2008-09 freshmen, to pass four of seven end-of-instruction exams. Most high schools in Oklahoma are 9th- 12th-grade facilities.

The ninth-grade students would attend a "school within a school" at EHS – a freshmen academy, if you will. Freshmen students would have their lockers and core classes offered in one primary area or wing of the building, with advanced classes and electives offered throughout the building. They may also have a separate lunch period or may share lunch with the sophomores. This would allow freshmen to be part of the EHS community, but would also assist them as they make the transition to high school.

How will you ensure that students are successful in their new environments?

That is the most important question of all! Whether or not this change is approved, EPS is in the process of developing transition teams to help students who are making the move from one level to the next. These teams, which will consist of school employees and parents, will develop plans to help students with their transition. Students will have the opportunity to explore all areas of their new school – to find their classes, to ask questions, to try their locker combinations and more – so they will feel comfortable and ready to learn on the first day of class.

Why is Enid considering this change?

Grade reconfiguration would allow the district to use its dollars and facilities more effectively and efficiently, while expanding and improving opportunities and services for students. **We believe it is most important to base our decision on what is best for student learning.**

Middle schools are very common across our state and our nation. In fact, according to a study of 10 Oklahoma peer districts, Enid is the only one that has seventh- and ninth-grade students in the same building. Currently, our teachers attend middle school workshops because junior high workshops are no longer offered by state and national organizations. The possibility of implementing middle schools has been discussed in our own community for more than 15 years.

Does increasing enrollment have anything to do with this proposal?

We do have a pressing need that has brought this issue to the forefront this year – a lack of elementary classroom space. For the last several years, we have experienced an increase in enrollment, which is great news for Enid. This growth, however, has created a significant need for additional classrooms (and smaller class sizes) at the elementary level, which has increased by more than 400 students in the last four years. Adequate space is available in the junior high and high school buildings to

make this change. EHS currently has 600 fewer students than its actual capacity, and the junior highs will continue to serve just three grades of students, representing little change in enrollment numbers. On the other hand, if the grade reconfiguration is not implemented, we will be seven elementary classrooms short next fall.

How would this change the athletic program?

Students would see few changes to their sports, except that the ninth-grade students would no longer have to be transported to the high school, which would save the taxpayers' money and give students more practice time. If anything, this option should expand opportunities for students, especially those who might want to participate in more extracurricular activities or student clubs at the high school level. There would still be ninth-grade teams, just as in the past. Sixth-grade students would continue to participate in community-sponsored sports and would begin school-sponsored sports in the seventh grade.

How would this change the band program?

Many have asked if ninth-grade students would join the high school band. While this has not yet been decided, we pledge to select only the option that will encourage the most students to participate in the program. With guidance from EHS Band Director Mr. Anderson and from parents, together we can make the best decision for students. Sixth-grade students would continue to be offered band, with the added benefit of an instructor in their building.

What are the educational benefits of changing the grade configuration?

There are many educational benefits to this change. They include:

- Providing more electives and advanced classes for sixth-grade and ninth-grade students.
- Promoting the fulfillment of graduation requirements by having students at the high school in the ninth-grade, which is included on the high school transcript.
- Allowing schools to offer smaller class sizes at the elementary level, working towards the district's goal of 1 teacher for every 20 students.
- Offering students in grades six through eight the middle school concept, which is more conducive to their educational needs.

Additionally, in the area of extracurricular activities, this change would allow for more time on task and less travel for students and staff members who participate in band, orchestra and athletics.

Could class size/elementary classroom space be addressed in other ways?

At this time, there are no available classrooms at the elementary level. In fact, in many cases, we have converted rooms intended for other purposes to classroom space. Portable buildings could be purchased for elementary campuses, but they would not provide the quality learning environment that our students deserve. Also, EPS provides only one non-mandated program that could be reduced to regain classroom space: the four-year-old program. EPS, however, is committed to providing first-class early childhood education for Enid. We want to expand services and opportunities for children and their families, not decrease them.

Would changing the grade configuration address all facility needs?

Grade reconfiguration would assist with facility needs, but would not address all problems and deficiencies. EPS will continue to work with The Facility Group, a facility planning company, and a community advisory committee to identify and prioritize facility improvement needs. The grade configuration change would, however, provide the district with more time to plan because it would help ease class sizes and space restraints immediately. Additionally, it will allow the district to use its facilities in a more efficient manner, which should result in fewer newly constructed classrooms in the future. This would save taxpayers millions of dollars.

I have a fifth- or eighth-grade student. How will his time at the elementary or junior high level be recognized if this change is made?

While EPS does not have “graduation” from elementary and junior high school, most every school site hosts an end-of-the-year recognition ceremony, assembly or musical program that commemorates the time that 9th- and 6th-grade students have spent at the school. If changes are made, the 5th- and 8th- grade students would be included in these activities. Principals and teachers will ensure that their time at the school is recognized and celebrated and that they feel valued and appreciated by their school community.

What kind of input has been gathered on the issue?

Over the last two months, more than 32 community and staff meetings have been conducted to gather feedback, ideas and suggestions from parents and local residents. Feedback can also be shared by visiting www.enidpublicschools.org or calling Central Office at 234-5270. Your input is encouraged and appreciated.

Will the sixth- and ninth-grade teachers move, too?

EPS will continue to need great teachers at every level! If a change is made, teachers would not be required to move from their buildings; however, there would be opportunities to move to the next level, if they would like. Their input would be very valuable for planning needed course offerings and addressing other transition issues.

How would this change affect transportation?

EPS will continue to provide transportation to elementary, junior high and high school students who live more than two miles from their home school site, per board policy. Bus routes will be added, if needed.

If approved, how quickly could this change be implemented?

If the Board of Education decides to reconfigure the grades, it will be implemented in 2009-2010.