



Arlington

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Regular Board Meeting, June 4, 2026



Arlington
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

SIXTH GRADE NEXT STEPS COMMITTEE REPORT

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Office of School Leadership

PURPOSE

Share an overview of the work of the Sixth Grade Exploration Committee, as well as recommendations for next steps for Board consideration.



What started this conversation?

Students: Spring 2025 surveys show 6th graders feeling **less belonging and more anxiety**, indicating a potential **misalignment** with the elementary environment.

Parents: Survey data highlights a strong **desire for smoother transitions** and a **safer, developmentally appropriate experience**.

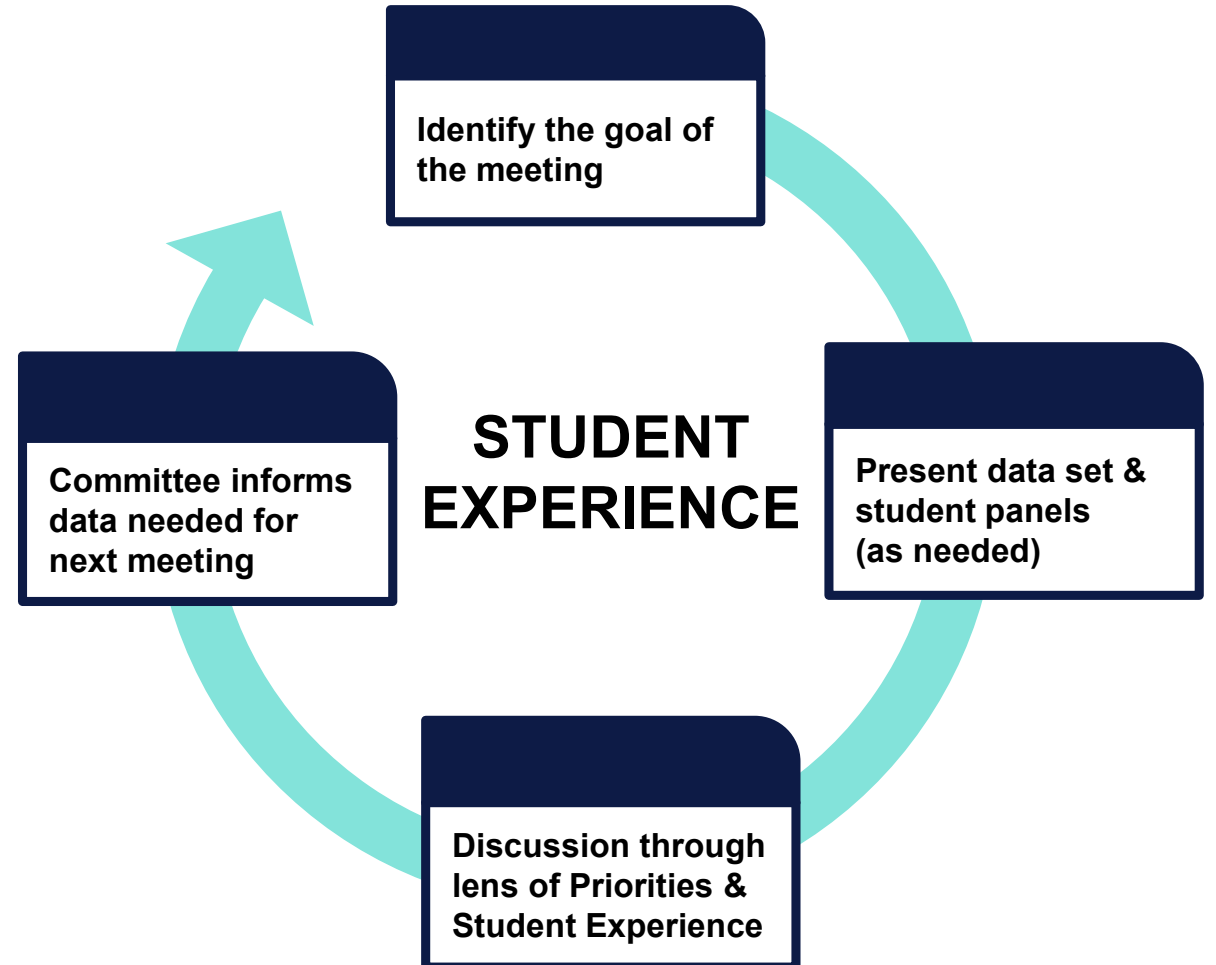
Staff: Elementary teachers raised concerns with current placement, suggesting a move could **reduce behavior issues** and **improve learning**.

Principals: Elementary leaders note 6th graders are **ready for independence**; Junior High leaders want **more time to positively shape campus culture**.



Our Charge & Our Lens

Garner stakeholder feedback, study current research, and evaluate the **Student Experience** in a way that allows for the committee to make a recommendation to the Board by June of 2026 whether sixth grade should move to junior high or remain in elementary school for the 2027-28 school year.



Work to Date

November

Board Presentation



January

Meeting #1

- Our Charge
- Principal Panel
- R&A



February

Meeting #2

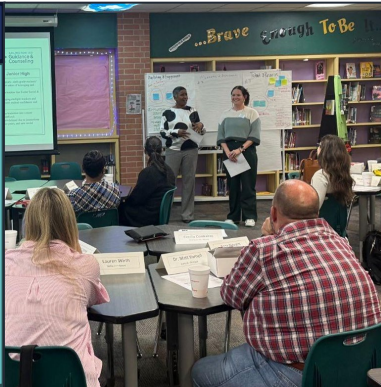
- Student Panel (Gunn)
- Fine Arts
- Career & Tech
- Athletics



March

Meeting #3

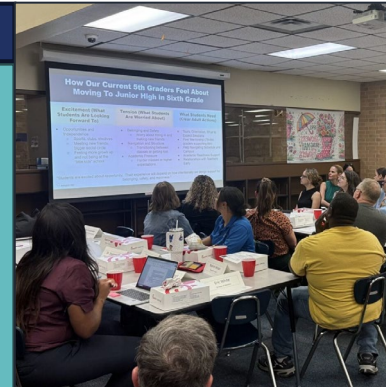
- Student Panel (Young)
- C&I
- Adv Acad
- SEL



April

Meeting #4

- Student Panel (Workman)
- Special Population
- Facilities
- 5th Grade Perspective



May

Meeting #5

- Discipline
- R&A
- Consensus Building



Input from aisd.net/6gradestudy



PROJECT GOAL

Garner stakeholder feedback, study current research, and evaluate the Student Experience in a way that allows for the committee to come to consensus and make a recommendation to the Board by June of 2026 whether sixth grade should move to junior high or remain in elementary school for the 2027-28 school year.

WHAT STARTED THIS CONVERSATION?

STUDENTS Student surveys conducted in Spring 2025 show some 6th grade students feel less belonging and more anxiety than older peers, showing a potential misalignment with them at the elementary school.	PARENTS Parent surveys highlight a need for smoother transitions and a safer, more developmentally appropriate 6th-grade experience.
STAFF Elementary teacher surveys show concerns with current placement and suggest moving 6th graders to junior high could reduce behavior issues and improve learning.	CAMPUS LEADERS Elementary leaders say 6th graders are ready for junior high independence, junior high leaders want more time with students to shape campus culture.

MEETING 4 SUMMARY (APRIL 15, 2026)

At the fourth meeting, held at Workman Junior High, the committee heard from a panel of seventh-grade students reflecting on their transition from sixth to seventh grade. Students described increased independence and responsibility as a key shift, along with greater freedom and opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities. While they initially experienced challenges related to workload, time management, and navigating a larger environment, they shared that support from teachers, family members, and peers helped them adjust. Students highlighted the opportunity to meet new people, participate in school events, and explore interests as meaningful aspects of their experience, noting that the junior high setting helped them build connections and feel part of a broader community. When asked if they would have preferred to attend junior high in sixth grade, several students indicated they would have welcomed the opportunity to adjust earlier and have more time to prepare for high school expectations.

Following the student panel, district leaders representing Special Education, Emergent Bilingual services, and Facilities shared perspectives on how grade configuration may impact program delivery, student supports, and system-level capacity. Discussion highlighted that maintaining sixth grade in elementary provides continuity for some specialized services and family relationships, while transitioning to junior high may expand opportunities for students to build independence, access a broader range of electives and pre-vocational experiences, and receive support from content-specialized staff. Leaders also noted considerations related to staffing, certification requirements, and program alignment, as well as the need to ensure adequate capacity and resources to serve students effectively across campuses. Facilities data indicated that current junior high campuses have available capacity to accommodate sixth grade, while also raising broader considerations related to rezoning, utilization, and long-term planning.

The committee also reviewed feedback from fifth-grade students, who expressed both excitement about increased opportunities and independence, and concerns about belonging, safety, and navigating a larger school environment. Students emphasized the importance of structured transition supports, including orientations, peer mentorship, and clear guidance on expectations. The meeting concluded with a broader reflection that, while structural decisions are important, student outcomes are shaped by how intentionally systems are designed and implemented. Committee members noted the importance of clear communication, thoughtful planning, and alignment across campuses and programs as the work moves toward a recommendation.

COMMITTEE PRESENTATIONS

BOARD MEETING PRESENTATION THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6 Board of Trustees Meeting Slideshow	COMMITTEE MEETING 1 THURSDAY, JANUARY 15 The committee convened on January 15 at the Central Administration Building to begin exploring the question of sixth-grade placement. The Chief Schools Officer and Executive Director of Junior High Schools opened the session by... Read More Committee Meeting 1 Agenda Committee Meeting 1 Presentation	COMMITTEE MEETING 2 THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12 At the second meeting, held at Gunn Junior High, the committee heard from a student panel of seventh-grade students who had attended Gunn as sixth graders, followed by district leaders representing Career & Technical Education, Fine Arts, and Athletics. Students described the transition from 6th to 7th grade... Read More Committee Meeting 2 Agenda Committee Meeting 2 Presentation
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SHARE YOUR INPUT

As the committee continues its work and evaluates a potential recommendation, we welcome your perspectives.

First Name * Last Name *

Email (if you would like to be contacted)

Phone (if you would like to be contacted)

What factors or considerations do you believe the committee should take into account when evaluating whether sixth grade should be placed at the junior high level? *

Input from aisd.net/6gradestudy

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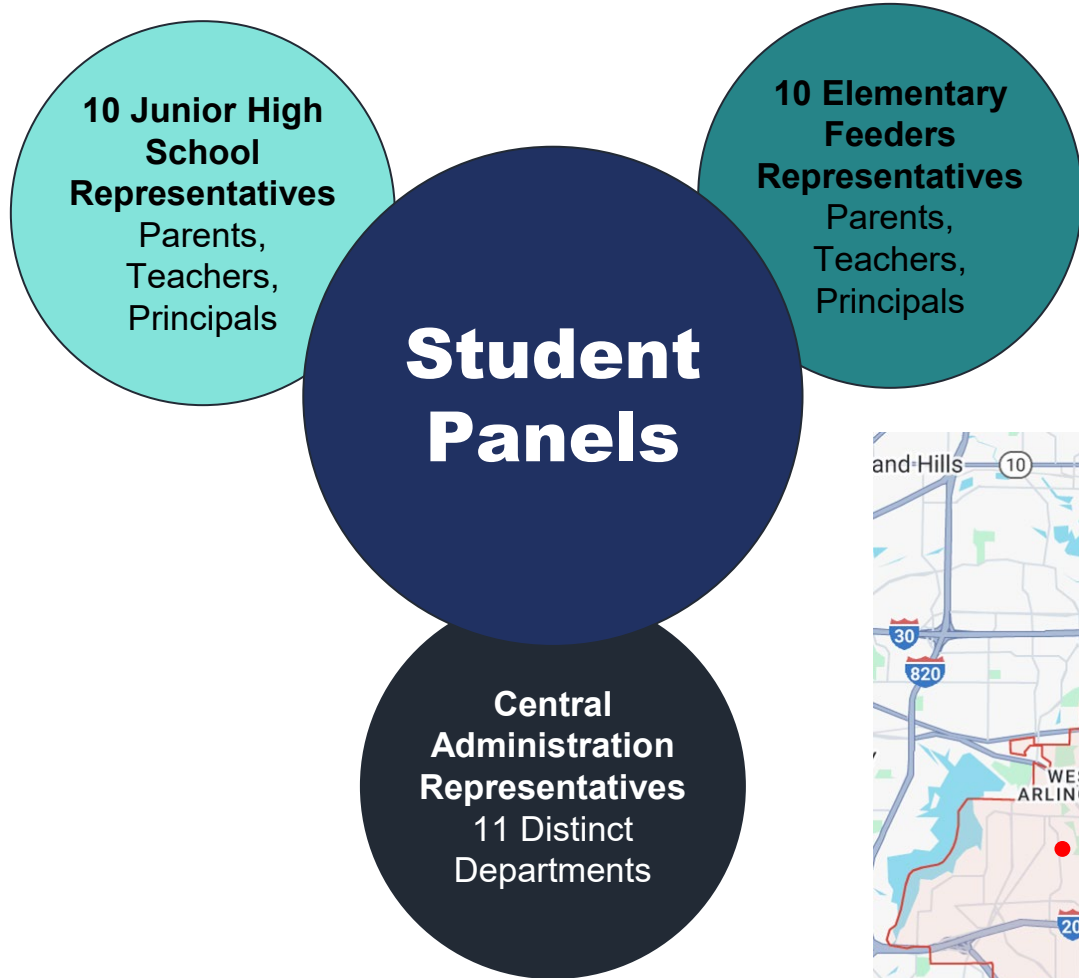
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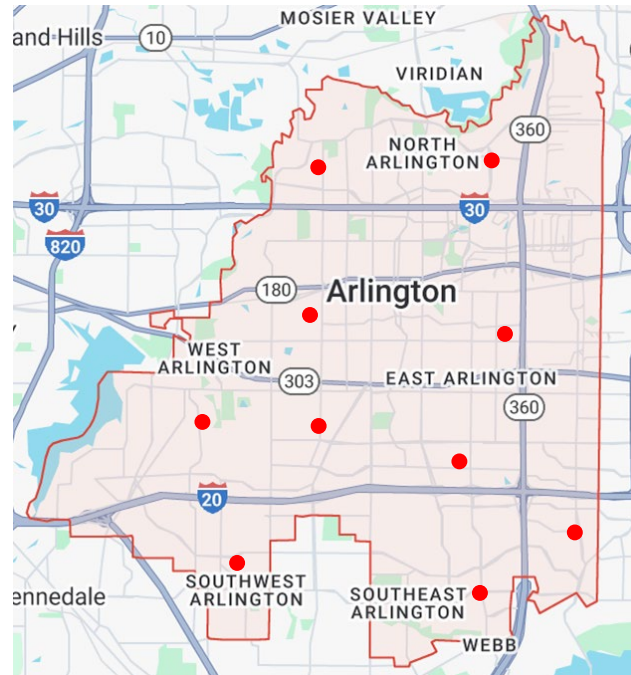
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Responses

Potential Benefits	Key Concerns
Expanded access to electives, advanced coursework, and specialized programs	Social-emotional readiness and developmental appropriateness
Earlier development of independence, responsibility, and accountability	Exposure to older students, peer pressure, and bullying
Greater access to subject specialists and departmentalized instruction	Potential impact on academic performance
Earlier preparation for secondary education expectations	Loss of elementary leadership opportunities
Stronger junior high identity, belonging, and continuity (3 years vs. 2)	Increased transition stress for students
Better alignment with adolescent developmental needs	Loss of elementary traditions and experiences
More age-aligned student grouping	Capacity, staffing, and facility considerations
Alignment with surrounding district grade configurations	Parent satisfaction and potential enrollment impact
Potential for increased student engagement through expanded opportunities	Concerns about accelerating childhood and adolescent exposure

Committee Makeup

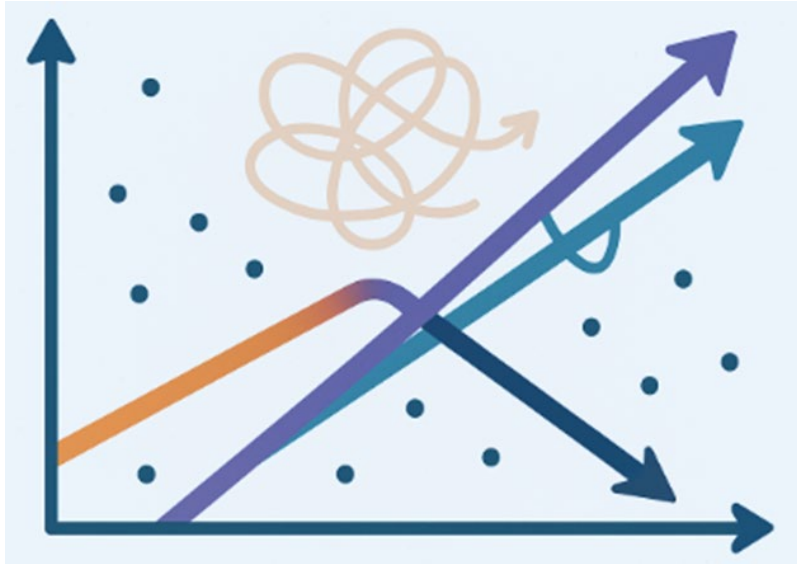


Junior High School			Feeder Elementary		
Name	Campus	Role	Name	Campus	Role
Lauren Wirth	Bailey	Parent	Kasie Longoria	Hill	Principal
Rodrick Wilson	Barnett	Parent	Roxanna Sierra	Starrett	Principal
Heather Boggs	Boles	Teacher	Hailey Reichert	Moore	Teacher
Matt Varnell	Gunn	Principal	Lauren Jones	Short	Parent
Brenda Torres	Nichols	Parent	Ayesha Ramos	Peach	Principal
Michelle Fletes	Ousley	Parent	Christi Wilks	Beckham	Principal
Cecilia Contreras	Rodriguez	Parent	Perla Picazo	Patrick	Parent
Matt Nagel	Shackelford	Teacher	Heather Frisina	Butler	Parent
Erin Fogleman	Workman	Principal	Anna Nguyen	Burgin	Teacher
Kirsten Lundin	Young	Principal	Chelsea Moore	Ditto	Parent



Central Administration	
Name	Department
Karen Zeske	Advanced Academics
Eric White	Athletics
Telisa Brown	Counseling
Jamie MacDougall	Curriculum & Instruction (3-6)
Danielle Reynolds	Curriculum & Instruction (7-12)
Christopher Anderson	Fine Arts
Melody Lopez	Human Resources
Stephanie Lee	Office of School Leadership
Genéa Stewart	Research & Accountability
Cindy Brown	Special Education
Patty Bustamante	Specialized Learning Services
Jackeline Orsini	World Languages

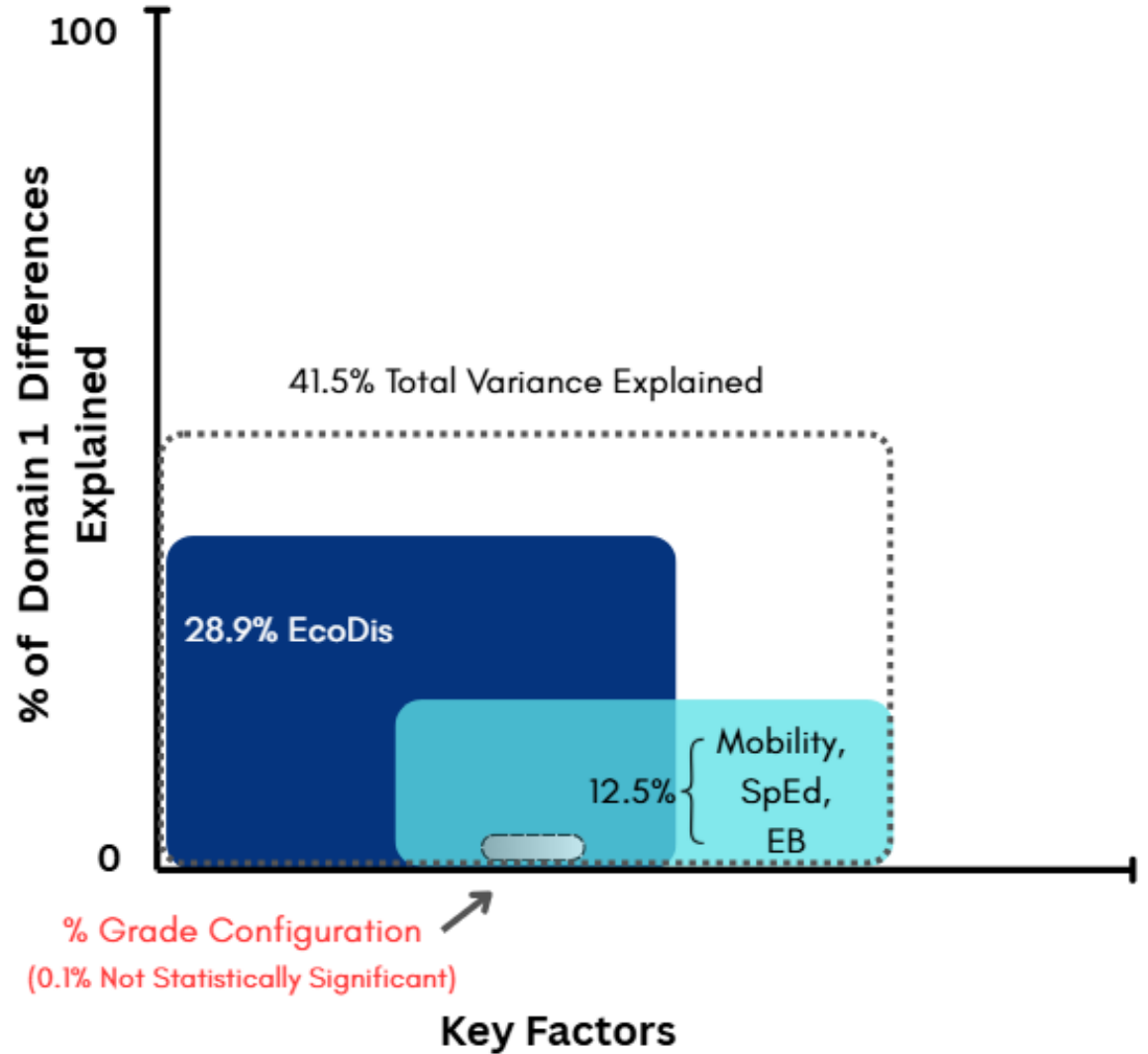
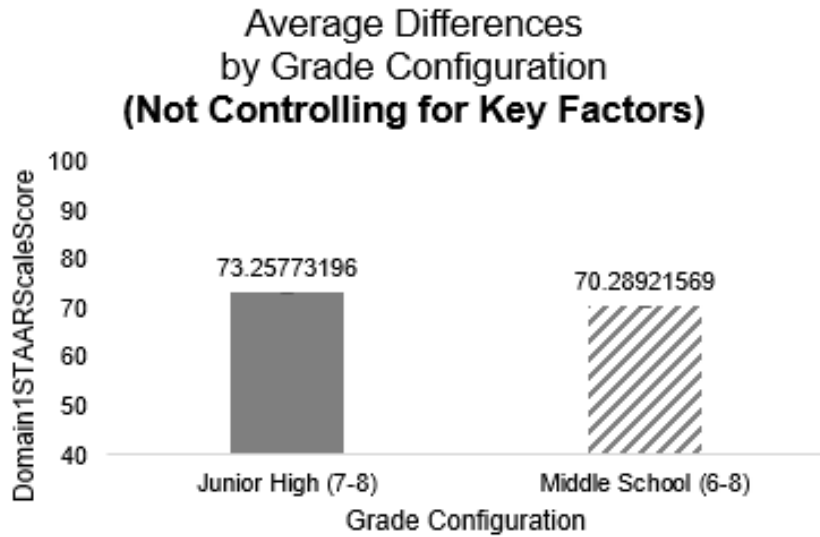
What Research Can *Actually* Tell Us...



- No universal “best” configuration
- Implementation quality matters
- Student transitions require support
- Relationships and school climate matter
- Correlation \neq Causation
- Strong claims require careful review

“Education research may be the hardest science of all.” – David C. Berliner

Domain 1: At-a-Glance Differences vs What Explains Them

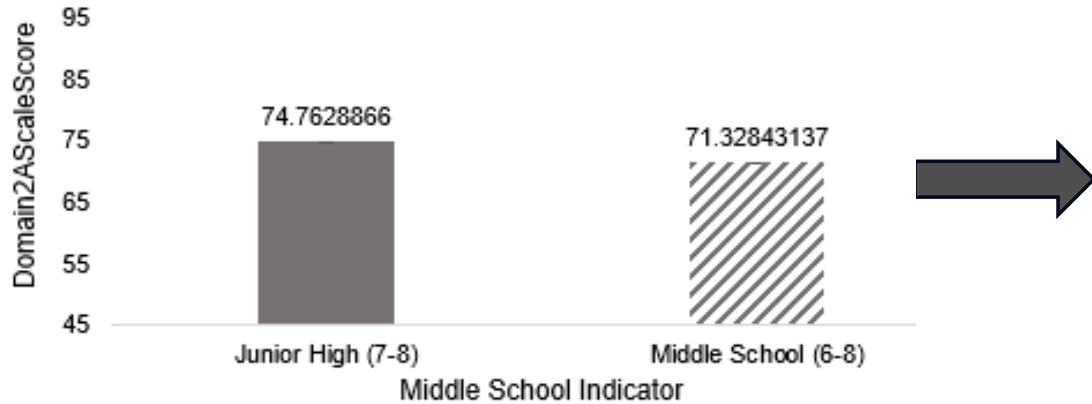


At first glance, there are differences between grade configuration models (6-8 vs. 7-8). But when we account for student and school factors, grade configuration itself isn't what explains those differences.

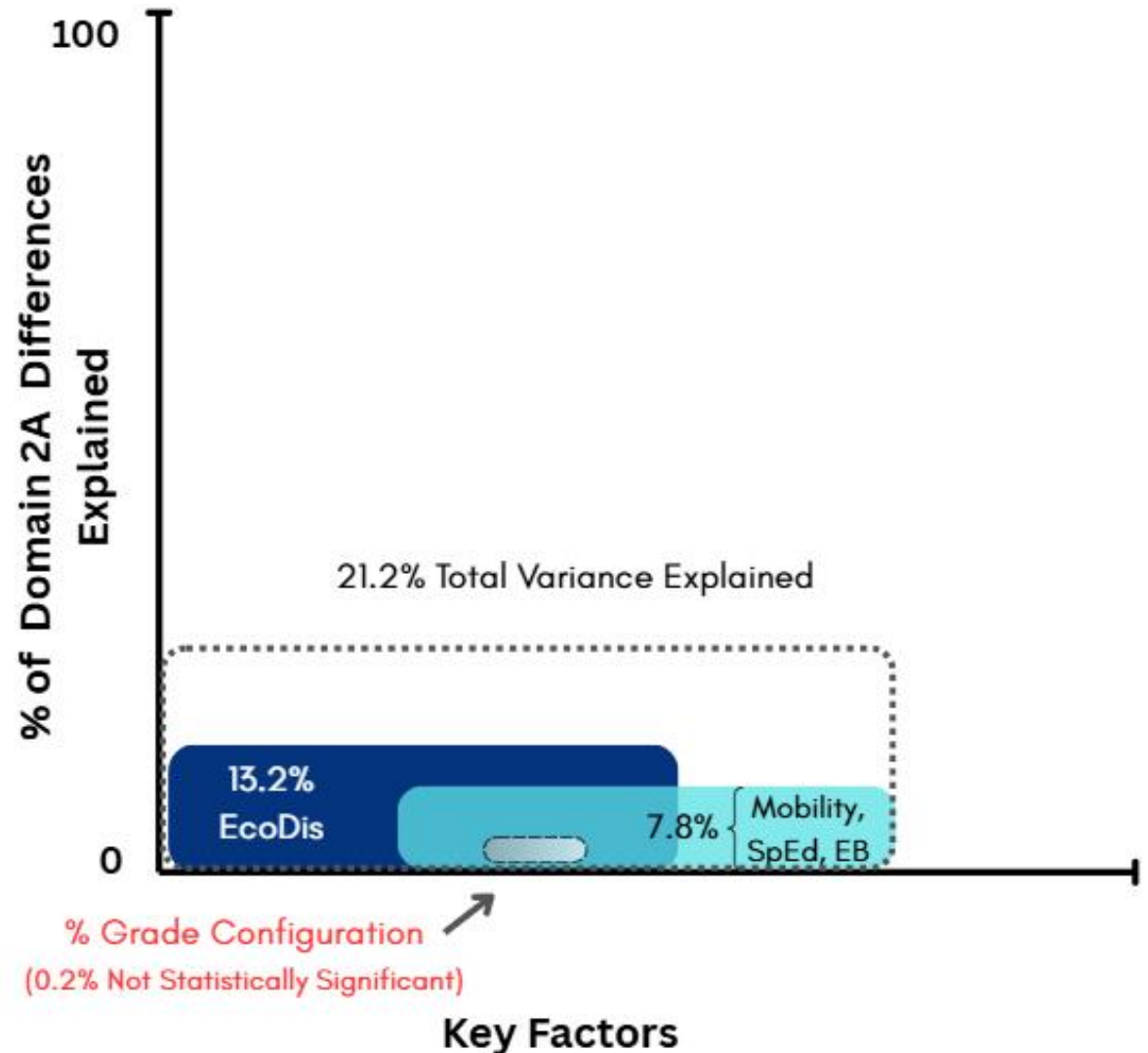
Domain 2A: At-a-Glance Differences vs What Explains Them



Average Differences by Grade Configuration (Not Controlling for Key Factors)



At first glance, there are differences between grade configuration models (6-8 vs. 7-8). But when we account for student and school factors, grade configuration itself isn't what explains those differences.



Student Voice Elevated



This year's 7th graders that experienced 6th grade at a junior high school



This year's 7th graders that experienced 6th grade at an elementary school



This year's 5th grade elementary students

What did junior high students say?

- Initially overwhelming due to larger campuses, multiple teachers, and increased responsibility
- Most adjusted within the first few weeks
- Teacher, peer, and advisory support eased the transition
- Increased independence viewed positively
- Expanded access to electives, activities, and programs
- Greater opportunities to build friendships and find a sense of belonging
- Navigation and passing periods were common early challenges
- Some noted limited access to athletics in sixth grade

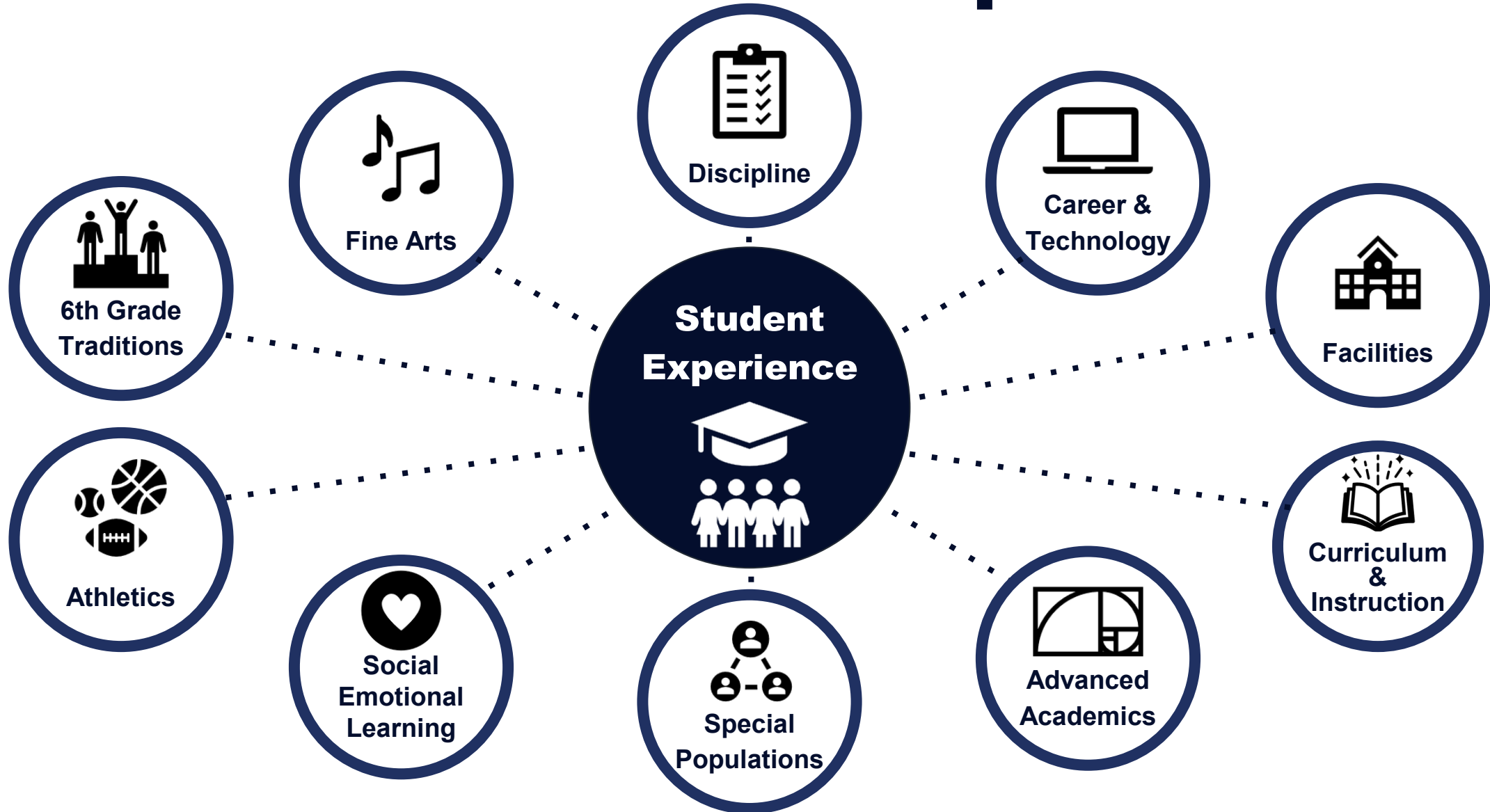


What did elementary students say?

- Excited about electives, athletics, clubs, fine arts, and new learning opportunities
- Looking forward to meeting new friends, teachers, and students from other schools
- Viewed junior high as an opportunity for greater independence and responsibility
- Most common concerns were bullying, fitting in, and interactions with older students
- Worried about navigating a larger campus, changing classes, and finding classrooms
- Expressed concerns about increased academic expectations and more challenging coursework
- Desired opportunities to visit campuses, meet teachers, and learn expectations before transitioning
- Suggested orientation, peer mentoring, campus tours, and transition supports to build confidence and readiness



10 Factors of Student Experience



Factors on Student Experience

Factor	Opportunities	Concerns
Curriculum & Instruction	Greater alignment of 6th grade curriculum with 7th and 8th grade TEKS (from state and external vendors)	Teacher certification transitions, intervention supports, scheduling, and implementation planning
SEL	Increased counseling access, stronger sense of belonging through a 3-year junior high experience	Strong transition supports needed; intentional scheduling and culture-building



Factors on Student Experience

Factor	Opportunities	Concerns
Advanced Academics	Increased access to advanced coursework, math acceleration, and earlier preparation for high school credit courses	Communication around rigor/readiness; thoughtful scheduling and staffing
Special Populations	Better alignment for bilingual, newcomer, and special education programming; potential for more targeted supports and staffing efficiencies	Investigate possible ESOL course inclusion for junior highs



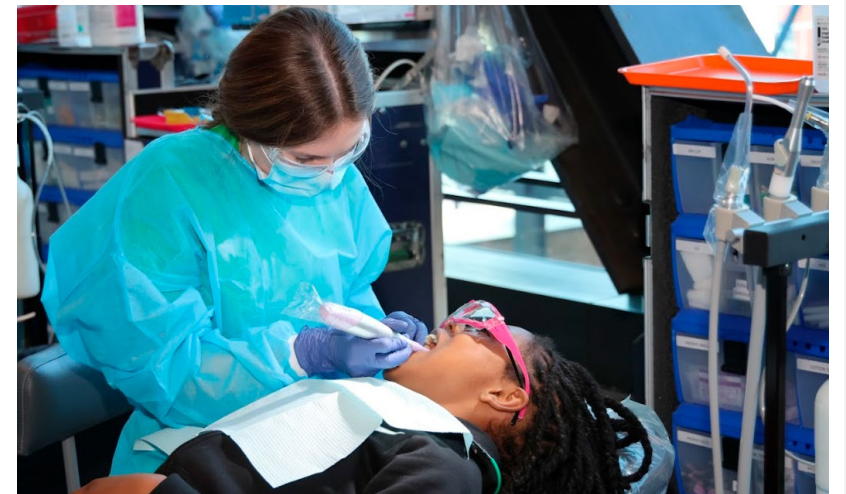
Factors on Student Experience

Factor	Opportunities	Concerns
Athletics	Earlier exposure to pre-athletics, team structures, and stronger long-term program development	Clarify course progression and participation expectations; ensure consistent implementation across campuses
Fine Arts	Increased opportunities for engagement, competitions, mentoring, performance participation, and skill development over a 3-year experience (specifically band)	Impact on elementary fine arts staffing (Orchestra would need to remain for fifth graders)



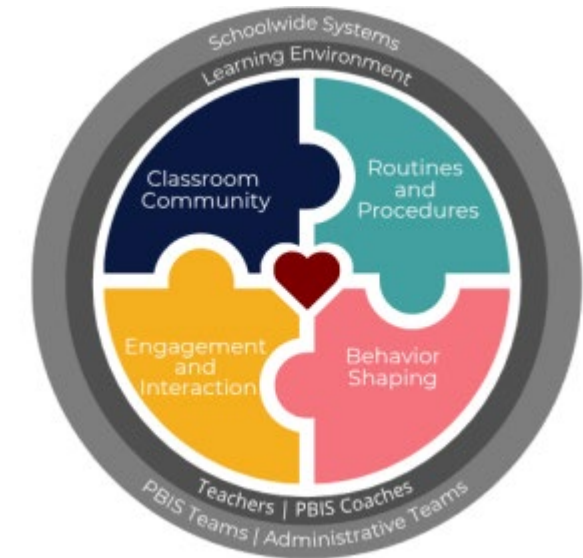
Factors on Student Experience

Factor	Opportunities	Concerns
Facilities	Capacity and right-sizing opportunities; available space identified at junior highs	Facilities readiness, zoning, logistics, community impact, timelines, and transition planning
Career & Technology	Increased exposure to CTE pathways and career awareness opportunities	Clear communication on what 6th graders can and cannot participate in; limited direct access to actual CTE courses



Factors on Student Experience

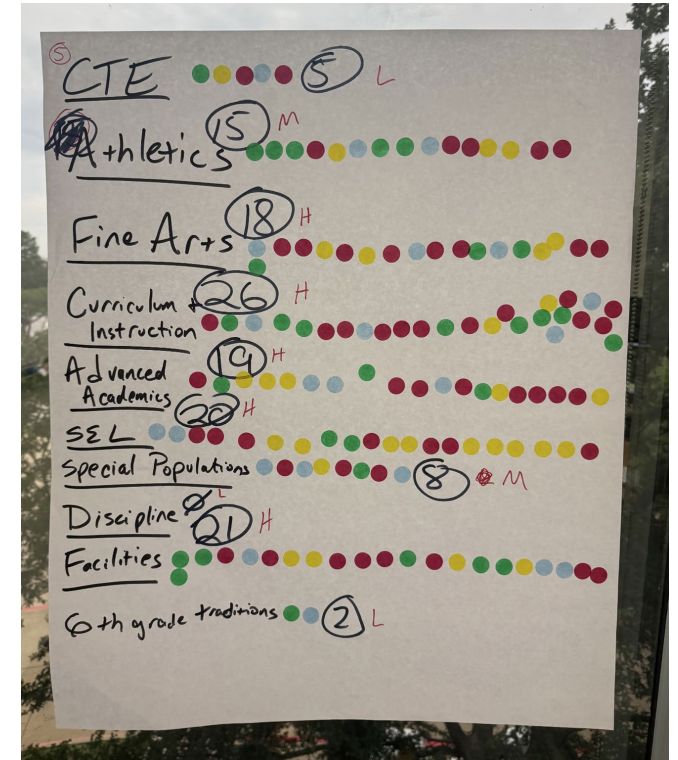
Factor	Opportunities	Concerns
6th Grade Traditions	Traditions can transition to 5th grade or be recreated at junior high campuses	Need intentional planning to preserve community traditions and create meaningful new experiences for students and families
Discipline	Data does not currently show significant differences between configurations	How are clear expectations for junior high students communicated to students before they leave elementary



Building Consensus

Factors of Student Experience

Curriculum & Instruction	SEL	Discipline
Advanced Academics	Facilities	6th Grade Traditions
Career & Technology	Athletics	
Special Populations	Fine Arts	



- 10 Areas
- 3 Levels of Impact on student experience
- 4 Different Recommendations possible
- Based On
- Considerations

Retain Sixth Grade at the Elementary Level

Transition Sixth Grade to Junior High

Balanced Perspective

No Consensus Reached

6th Grade Placement Rubric

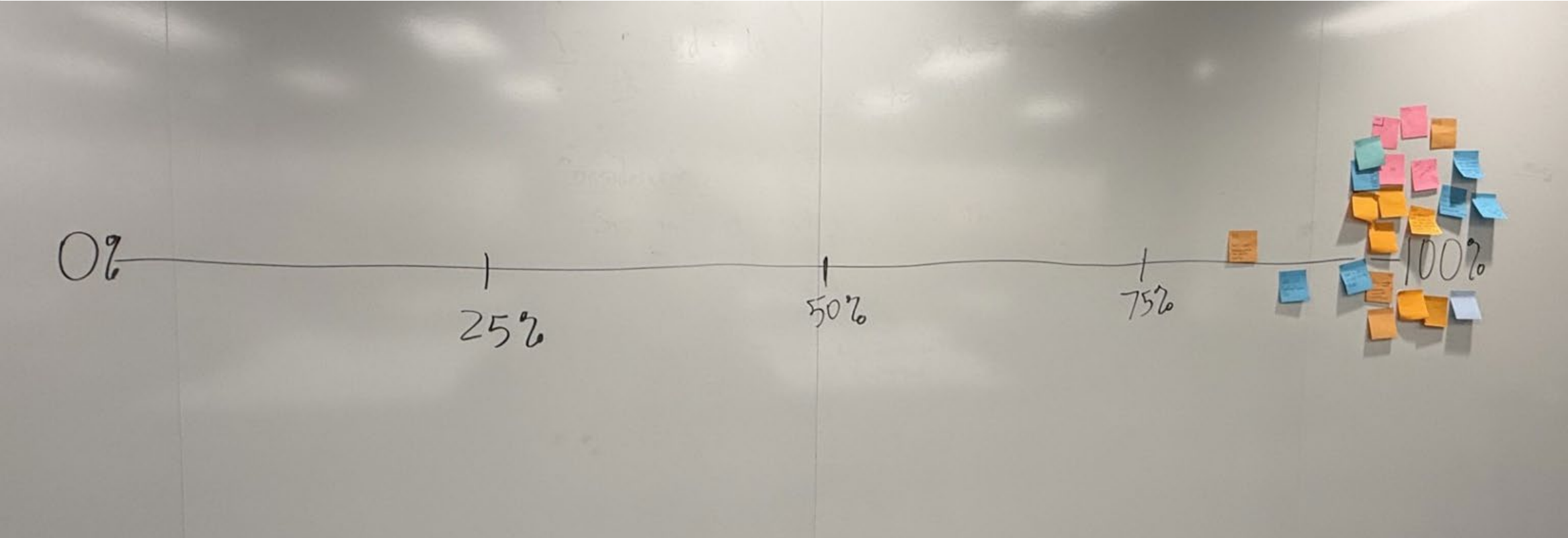
Area	Impact	Recommendation	Based On	Considerations
Curriculum & Instruction	Large	Transition Sixth Grade	Better alignment K-5 and 6-8	Staffing, certification, and scheduling
Facilities	Large	Transition Sixth Grade	Better use of space and capacity	Zoning, timelines, and community impact
SEL	Large	Transition Sixth Grade	Increased belonging and counseling supports	Strong transition systems needed
Advanced Academics	Large	Transition Sixth Grade	Expanded access to advanced coursework & leveling of classes	Communication and scheduling logistics
Fine Arts	Large	Transition Sixth Grade	More opportunities for participation and growth	Impact on elementary programs/staffing
Athletics	Moderate	Transition Sixth Grade	Earlier exposure to athletics culture and skills	Consistent implementation across campuses
Special Populations	Moderate	Transition Sixth Grade	Better alignment of specialized supports	Intentional staffing and programming
Career & Technology	Low	Balanced Perspective	Increased CTE exposure and awareness	Clarify participation opportunities
Discipline	Low	Balanced Perspective	Little difference shown in data	Maintain consistent expectations
6th Grade Traditions	Low	Transition Sixth Grade	Traditions can shift or be recreated	Preserve meaningful student experiences

Committee Recommendation

Concerning the student experience, the committee recommends transitioning sixth grade students to junior high through a systemwide, executable plan that is graceful, purposeful, and collaborative, while considering facilities readiness, successful student transitions, and stakeholder voice.

We elevate the importance of readiness and communication prior to determining an implementation timeline.

Consensogram





DISCUSSION