

Grade Level Configuration Study

Overview, Process & Options for Public Review and Input

Public, staff input meetings set in February & early March

The public is invited to attend one of the public information and input meetings:

- February 15:** 7:00 – 9:00 pm, Fossil Ridge High, 5400 Ziegler Road
- February 22:** 7:30 – 9:30 pm, Fort Collins High, 3400 Lambkin Way
- March 1:** 7:00 – 9:00 pm, Rocky Mountain High, 1300 West Swallow road
- March 7:** 7:00 – 9:00 pm, Poudre High School, 201 Impala Drive (Spanish translation provided)

In addition, the following meetings are scheduled for PSD staff to attend:

- February 13:** 4:00 – 6:00 pm, Lincoln Junior High, 1600 West Lancer Drive
- February 21:** 4:00 – 6:00 pm, Preston Junior High, 4901 Corbett Drive

At the input meetings, options for PSD grade level configurations will be presented for review and feedback. Those attending will have the opportunity to work through the advantages and disadvantages of the options and meet in small groups with facilitators from CSU's Center for Public Deliberation to ask questions, provide feedback, and consider the tradeoffs. **Public input will be recorded and shared with the design committee and the public in March** before the committee makes a recommendation to district leadership.

Additional information: 482-7420, PSD website www.psdschools.org, e-mail info@psdschools.org. All informational materials are available on the website, along with a 30-minute overview video.

Poudre School District February 5, 2007



*Educate...
Every Child, Every Day*

Grade Level Configuration Study—PSD brings forward options

Over the last 2 years, Poudre School District has been exploring options to help address enrollment, school efficiency, and student transition challenges facing our schools. Following action by the PSD Board of Education in February 2006 to convene a study, committees have been studying a complex set of factors to help balance school enrollments and provide equitable educational opportunities, given limited funding.

Reasons PSD is considering grade level changes

Many factors are driving the need to consider grade level changes. Foremost is to do what's best for students long-term as they progress through Poudre School District. Additionally, we are studying grade level changes:

- **To provide high school students with the best 4-year experience possible**, including increasing academic and extracurricular opportunities for 9th graders, meeting and exceeding graduation requirements, and making all students post-secondary ready.
- **To improve PSD's dropout rate.** Our district is lagging well behind others in northern Colorado and we need to address this, regardless of our grade levels. . PSD's 2005 dropout rate was 5.0%; the state avg. was 4.2%. For the past 2 years, PSD's 8th-grade dropout rate has been double the state average.
- **To improve equity and access** of educational opportunities for all students. Due to uneven enrollment across junior and senior high schools, some students are able to take more high level courses than others; and some students are unable to access the required 9th grade courses they need to graduate.
- **To help balance enrollment between schools.** Enrollment is uneven across the district—PSD is experiencing rapid growth in the southeast and Wellington areas, and declining enrollment in others. We want to better utilize all our school facilities—balancing enrollment among overcrowded and underutilized schools.
- **To address the lag in achievement that currently occurs during “transition years” as students move from one level to the next**, regardless of the grade where these transitions occur.

Any changes considered should **either improve or have a neutral impact on student achievement**. And, we want to **assure the overall financial impact is neutral or minimal** and will better use resources to serve students, schools, and staff over time.

2006-07 marks 3rd time PSD has studied grade level changes since 1990

PSD has conducted two in-depth grade level studies prior to this study. The first was held during planning for construction of the new Fort Collins High School (1990-1991), and the second was prior to construction of Fossil Ridge High School (2000-2001). Both studies looked at the advantages and disadvantages of several grade level options. Large committees of teachers, administrators, and parents were involved.

In both, **the recommendation was to move to the middle school model, grades 6-8 or 7-8, and move 9th graders to high schools, as soon as it was feasible to do so**. However, rapid enrollment growth was occurring in the district during those years, and a lack of space in schools and limited funding to build enough new schools prohibited grade level changes. Both studies resulted in the same final recommendation to the Board of Education: **Even though the change was desired, it was not feasible at that time due to a lack of space and rapid growth**.

Currently, space in schools is available, and enrollment is “flat” or declining slightly. This enrollment trend is projected to continue for approximately the next 5 years.

Timeline for Grade Level Studies in PSD

1991: Middle level task force study recommends PSD make grade level change

2001: Small learning communities task force recommends PSD make grade level changes

February 2006: Board of Education asks for study on grade level changes

June 2006-January 2007: committees formed, input gathered, research reviewed, options selected and shared

February-March 2007: Public & staff input meetings to be held, input gathered

March-April 2007: Committee studies feedback and makes recommendation to Superintendent

April 2007: Superintendent makes recommendation to Board for action

Goal to provide equitable educational opportunities to all students

“The goal for considering these options is to provide an equitable education to all students district-wide, taking into consideration enrollment, budget, school efficiency, and student transition challenges,” says Jerry Wilson, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools.

“We are asking parents, staff, and the community to look at a broader vision—what’s best for students 5, 10, and 15 years down the road. We must make decisions based on what makes sense for the future of Poudre School District students. We know it is difficult to make changes, and we will work very hard to make sure transitions are successful for all involved.”

Current process studies implications, research, selection criteria

In **February 2006**, the PSD Board of Education took the following action: “Appoint a study group to recommend the redesign and reorganization of high schools to enroll ninth-grade students in PSD high schools by 2008-09, and also to examine the possible changes in elementary and junior high school grade-level configurations.”

- ∞ In **spring 2006**, rationale and design committees comprised of principals, administrators, teachers, and parents were formed to lead the study.
- ∞ In **June 2006**, committees began holding extensive input sessions with more than 100 stakeholders—parents, students, teachers, and principals—exploring many implications of the following grade level options: K-5, 6-8, K-6, 7-8, K-8, and 9-12.
- ∞ Implications input sessions continued and culminated in **fall 2006**, with more than 400 stakeholders involved overall. Reports were prepared and shared with the committees and placed online for public access. The implications reports provided foundational information about the pros and cons of each new grade configuration, and also helped the committees consider potentially negative outcomes that should be avoided.
- ∞ Numerous input and informational sessions have been held specifically with Principals and Administrators and the parent District Advisory Board (DAB) provided input in **fall 2006**.
- ∞ Committees, meeting almost weekly since **October 2006**, have studied research on grade configurations, discussed numerous issues, and developed priorities or decision-making criteria to select the grade level options being presented in **February and March 2007**.
- ∞ Public input will be recorded and shared with the design committee and public in **March 2007** before the committee makes a recommendation to district leadership.
- ∞ A recommendation to the Board of Education is expected by **April 2007**. If approved, grade level changes would not take place until **fall 2008**.

Four grade level options brought forward for public review and input

The 4 options selected by the design committee for review and input by the public are the following (for detailed information on each option, please see the **Grade Level Options on pages 5-8** and online at www.psdschools.org):

Option A: K-6, 7-9, 10-12 (current levels)

Option C: K-6, 7-8, 9-12

Option B: K-5, 6-8, 9-12

Option D: Hybrid Model

Committee establishes criteria and priorities for grade level decision

In the process of determining grade level options for review, the committee established the following selection criteria for the decision (for specific information on criteria and options to be presented, access the Issues and Possible Solutions, and Options documents on the web). **The committee selected the following priority areas:**

- ∞ Equity of educational opportunities
- ∞ Preparation for post-secondary options
- ∞ Curriculum alignment
- ∞ Successful transitions between grade levels
- ∞ Cost efficiencies
- ∞ Competitiveness with alternative choices

PSD studying issues, possible solutions involved in levels changes

Within the selection criteria or priority areas listed above, issues or concerns have been identified that would need to be addressed in some of or all 4 options.

These and other issues are being studied for possible solutions: equal access, accelerated/advanced courses and diversity of course options, curriculum alignment, access to extracurricular activities, removal of obstacles and credit recovery for students retained in 9th grade, improving dropout rates, improving student transitions between levels and at current schools, learning gaps, transcript coordination, high school trends in grades and student achievement, student maturity, closed campus options, philosophy/system design for junior highs vs. middle schools, opportunities for early childhood education (pre-school) and full-day kindergarten, challenges for counselors, teacher transition, staffing, and professional development for new levels, alignment with state high schools and grade levels, implementation of new grade levels, balancing enrollment among schools, facilities impact and underutilization, transportation, and School Choice considerations.

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Options for Consideration

Option A. K-6 7-9 10-12

Details: Retain current grade level configuration with the following exceptions: 145 ninth graders enrolled in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program attending Poudre High, and Zach Elementary 6th graders currently attending Kinard Junior High, due to overcrowding at Zach facility. **Parents, students, teachers, administrators, and committee members identified the following advantages and disadvantages.**

In Support:

Elementary schools:

- ∞ Students stay in one educational setting for 7 years.
- ∞ Elementary schools are more fully utilized and have higher enrollment numbers (efficient use of space).
- ∞ Art, music, P.E. ("specials") are less likely to be reduced if enrollments remain higher.
- ∞ 6th graders have a single teacher or fewer teachers.
- ∞ Leadership and mentoring opportunities are available for 6th graders.

Junior and senior high schools:

- ∞ Due to smaller grade span and fewer required courses, opportunity exists to offer more high-level courses in comprehensive high schools, given an equal number of students.
- ∞ Attending a smaller school allows students to have more access to activities, leadership opportunities, and specialized support.
- ∞ Some 9th-grade students may be intimidated and more comfortable remaining in junior high setting.
- ∞ Closed campus at junior highs keeps 9th graders on site during school day.

All levels:

- ∞ The current grade levels are a known entity or system for students, parents, and staff.
- ∞ Teachers are able to focus on improving instruction without major changes to the system.

Option A "Likely Tradeoffs"

This is a known grade level system, where teachers are currently able to focus on improving instruction without major changes occurring. However, we need to improve transitions between levels and provide support systems for at-risk students to improve dropout and graduation rates. In addition, overcrowding currently exists at some schools, while others have space for additional students.

In Opposition:

Junior and senior high schools:

- ∞ Two senior highs (FCHS and FRHS) currently are significantly under-enrolled (inefficient use of facilities and decreased programs).
- ∞ Due to smaller grade span and fewer required course offerings, inequity currently exists for students between some high schools and others to offer more high level courses.
- ∞ Statistics show the earlier students become involved in high school, the less likely they are to drop out. PSD's 2005 dropout rate was 5.0%; the state avg. was 4.2%. For the past 2 years, PSD's 8th-grade dropout rate has been double the state average.
- ∞ For graduation and college entrance requirements, high school is considered a 4-year commitment and transcripts include 9th-grade credits. Students' 9th-grade performance goes on their high school transcripts, impacting post-secondary opportunities. Currently, graduation requirements are maintained at each junior high and high school.
- ∞ Students retained in 9th grade because they have not passed all 40 credits become further behind because they don't have access to 10th-grade classes. This impacted approximately 30 students in 2006 at high risk of dropping out (retention policies and practice need significant revision).
- ∞ 9th-grade students are considered high school students for participation in athletics, but must be transported there.
- ∞ 9th-grade students miss opportunities to participate in high school clubs, activities, and organizations, affecting scholarship and other competitive criteria, and delaying engagement in high school.
- ∞ 6th-grade students have fewer extra-curricular opportunities than in middle/jr. highs.
- ∞ Junior highs lose some of their highest achieving 9th graders each year to the IB program at PHS.
- ∞ PSD is the only district statewide without a 9-12 high school alignment and the only district with grades 7-9 public schools. Students entering PSD from another district or leaving PSD at 6th or 9th grade are at a disadvantage.

All levels:

- ∞ Boundaries/attendance areas may need to be changed to address uneven enrollment across the district
- ∞ Due to overcrowding, enrollment at some schools will need to be capped, limiting access by new neighborhood students and School Choice students.
- ∞ Achievement of students following transitions between levels needs to be addressed, regardless of the grade level configuration we have.

Options for Consideration

Option B. K-5 6-8 9-12

Details: Move 6th graders to junior highs/ middle schools for grades 6-8, and 9th graders to high schools (grades 9-12). Parents, students, teachers, administrators, and committee members identified the following advantages and disadvantages.

In Support:

Elementary schools:

- ∞ Fewer disciplinary issues due to fewer students and decreased age span.
- ∞ Space available for early childhood programs (birth to age 5) to grow.
- ∞ Space available for more all-day kindergarten programs.
- ∞ Leadership and mentoring opportunities are provided for 5th graders.
- ∞ Curriculum alignment and continuity (e.g., single math program, building wide) are improved, leading to fewer instructional gaps and redundancies.

Junior and senior high schools:

- ∞ Equity of opportunity for students at all high schools more balanced.
- ∞ 9th graders would be engaged in high school earlier. Statistics show the earlier students are involved in high school, the less likely they are to drop out. PSD's 2005 dropout rate was 5.0%; the state avg. was 4.2%. For the past 2 years, PSD's 8th-grade dropout rate has been double the state avg.
- ∞ For graduation and college entrance requirements, high school is considered a 4-year commitment and transcripts include 9th-grade credits. Students' 9th-grade performance goes on high school transcripts, affecting post-secondary opportunities. Graduation requirements maintained only in high schools.
- ∞ Students retained in 9th grade because they have not passed all 40 credits attend high schools and would have the opportunity to take 10th-grade classes, as well as retake 9th-grade coursework. This would positively impact approximately 30 students in 2006 at high risk of dropping out.
- ∞ 9th-grade students are considered high school students for participation in athletics, and no transportation would be needed.
- ∞ 9th-grade students no longer "in limbo," with opportunities to participate in high school clubs, activities, and organizations—additional ways they become engaged in high school.
- ∞ 9th graders could participate in more accelerated academic programs & classes; more advanced classes offered at under-enrolled high schools.
- ∞ Junior highs/ middle schools enrollment remains similar to current levels.
- ∞ In middle school model, 6th graders would have a single or fewer teachers.
- ∞ Schools have flexibility to meet the transitional needs of grades 6-8, tailoring programming to physical/emotional development of students.
- ∞ 6th graders' academic and extracurricular opportunities increase.
- ∞ High school counselors help 9th graders become more aware of post-secondary options and help students implement and monitor 5-year plans.
- ∞ Curriculum is aligned to improve continuity, leading to fewer instructional gaps and redundancies.
- ∞ Teachers are able to work more collaboratively on robust 9-12 curriculum and more effective instruction.
- ∞ PSD aligns with other districts statewide with 9-12 alignment; 9th-grade students entering PSD or leaving PSD are no longer at a disadvantage.
- ∞ Greater cost and building use efficiencies are possible with a larger school that includes 9-12.
- ∞ Having 2 years of CSAP scores could lead to better academic growth ratings on senior high School Accountability Reports.

All levels:

- ∞ Curriculum coordination and sequencing and student support improvements should lead to decrease in dropout rate.
- ∞ Grade levels are aligned with the rest of the state.

In Opposition:

Elementary schools:

- ∞ Enrollment in elementary schools decreases, creating challenges to provide teachers with full-time jobs at one site in smaller schools (music, art, P.E., counselor, literacy) areas.

Jr. and sr. high schools:

- ∞ Currently, little space in 2 high schools (PHS and RMHS) exists for adding another grade.
- ∞ Teacher planning time schedules and number of courses taught varies between junior and senior high. Must address without increasing costs or teacher workload.
- ∞ Decision and plan needed regarding middle school vs. junior high philosophy.
- ∞ Open campus a concern given 9th graders' maturity.

All levels:

- ∞ Teacher transition issues (6th and 9th grades) must be addressed to assure qualifications, training, and placement.
- ∞ Boundaries/attendance areas and caps for School Choice may need to be changed to address uneven enrollment across the district.
- ∞ Achievement of students following transitions between levels needs to be addressed, regardless of the grade level configuration we have.

Option B "Likely Tradeoffs"

Benefits of better sequencing and coordination of curriculum K-12, earlier engagement of 9th graders, and equity of opportunities; however, elementary schools would lose enrollment.

Options for Consideration

Option C. K-6 7-8 9-12

Details: Keep 6th graders in elementaries and move 9th graders to high schools. Junior highs/middle schools would have only 7th and 8th graders. Currently, no PSD schools have this grade level configuration. **Parents, students, teachers, administrators, and committee members identified the following advantages and disadvantages.**

In Support:

Elementary schools:

- ∞ Current grade levels are a known entity or system for students, parents, and staff.
- ∞ Teachers able to focus on improving instruction without major changes to system.
- ∞ Students stay in one educational setting for 7 years.
- ∞ Elementary schools are more fully utilized and have higher enrollment numbers (efficient use of space).
- ∞ Art, music, P.E. ("specials") are less likely to be reduced if enrollments remain higher.
- ∞ Enrollment at elementary schools remains relatively the same.
- ∞ 6th graders have a single teacher or fewer teachers.
- ∞ Leadership and mentoring opportunities are available for 6th graders.

Junior and senior high schools:

- ∞ Equity of opportunity for students at all high schools would be more balanced.
- ∞ 9th graders would be engaged in high school earlier. Statistics show the earlier students are involved in high school, the less likely they are to drop out. PSD's 2005 dropout rate was 5.0%; the state avg. was 4.2%. For the past 2 years, PSD's 8th-grade dropout rate has been double the state average.
- ∞ For graduation and college entrance requirements, high school is considered a 4-year commitment and transcripts include 9th-grade credits. Students' 9th-grade performance goes on their high school transcripts, impacting post-secondary opportunities. Graduation requirements would be maintained exclusively in the high schools.
- ∞ Students retained in 9th grade because they have not passed all 40 credits attend high schools and would have the opportunity to take 10th-grade classes, as well as retake 9th-grade coursework. This would positively impact approximately 30 students in 2006 at high risk of dropping out.
- ∞ High school counselors help 9th graders become more aware of post-secondary options and help them implement and monitor 5-year plans.
- ∞ 9th-grade students are considered high school students for participation in athletics, and no transportation would be needed.
- ∞ 9th-grade students no longer "in limbo," with opportunities to participate in high school clubs, activities —additional ways they become engaged in high school.
- ∞ 9th graders could participate in more accelerated academic programs and classes; more advanced classes offered at currently under-enrolled high schools.
- ∞ PSD aligns with other districts statewide with 9-12 alignment; 9th-grade students entering PSD or leaving PSD are no longer at a disadvantage.
- ∞ Curriculum is aligned with improved continuity, leading to fewer instructional gaps and redundancies.
- ∞ Teachers are able to work more collaboratively on robust 9-12 curriculum and instruction.
- ∞ Greater cost and building use efficiencies are possible with a larger school that includes 9-12.
- ∞ Having 2 years of CSAP scores could lead to better academic growth ratings on senior high School Accountability Reports.

All levels:

- ∞ Improved curriculum coordination and sequencing and student support systems should lead to decrease in dropout rate.
- ∞ Grade levels are more closely aligned with the rest of the state.

In Opposition:

Junior and senior high schools:

- ∞ Open campus is a concern given 9th graders' level of maturity.
- ∞ Smaller enrollment numbers in all junior highs, with inefficient use of facilities.
- ∞ Strong 9th-grade teachers may move to the high schools.
- ∞ 9th-grade teachers need support transitioning to high schools to assure qualifications, training, and placement.
- ∞ 7th and 8th graders are always in transition, either entering or exiting the middle school/junior high level.

All levels:

- ∞ Boundaries/attendance areas may need to be changed to address uneven enrollment across the district
- ∞ Achievement of students following transitions between levels needs to be addressed regardless of the grade configuration we have.

Option C "Likely Tradeoffs"

Benefits of better sequencing and coordination of curriculum 9-12, earlier engagement of 9th graders, and equity of opportunities; however, junior high schools would lose significant enrollment.

Options for Consideration

Option D. Hybrid Model

Details: A “hybrid” grade level system would consist of schools of each level, perhaps grouped by PSD’s four neighborhood feeder systems (elementary schools that “feed” junior and then senior highs) or specialized curriculum or instructional delivery. For example, one feeder system might be K-5, 6-8, 9-12, and other might retain the current levels of K-6, 7-9, and 10-12. Core Knowledge curriculum is offered grades K-8, and International Baccalaureate (IB) delivery is packaged by Primary Years (K-5), Middle Years (6-8), and Diploma program (9-12). In summary, different grade levels might be adopted in different parts of the community, and school by school, based on a variety of factors (enrollment levels, curriculum, instructional delivery, etc.).

Parents, students, teachers, administrators, and committee members identified the following advantages and disadvantages.

In Support:

ALL advantages listed in Options A, B, and C on the previous three pages apply to the Hybrid model.

In addition, the following advantages are exclusive to the Hybrid model:

All levels:

- ∞ More variety is available in continuum of choices for families.
- ∞ Could help balance enrollment short term.
- ∞ Could be a short-term solution to transition to a consistent, district-wide grade level configuration.

Option D “Likely Tradeoffs”

Strengths of Options A & B would be incorporated regionally, while increasing enrollment in Fort Collins High and Fossil Ridge High schools. Different grade level configurations could add pressure to School Choice, creating unanticipated problems with enrollment between schools.

In Opposition:

ALL disadvantages listed in Options A, B, and C on the previous three pages apply to the Hybrid model.

In addition, the following disadvantages are exclusive to the Hybrid model:

All levels:

- ∞ Could increase the number of school transitions and inconsistency of levels for students moving across town.
- ∞ Curriculum articulation (alignment and sequencing) and system-wide coordination in general would be more difficult across inconsistent grade levels district wide.
- ∞ Does not address enrollment changes long term.
- ∞ Inconsistency of levels would add to inequity of educational access and offerings (e.g., 9th graders in some parts of town would not have the opportunity to attend high schools, while others would).
- ∞ Schools would have different philosophies for middle school vs. junior high years.
- ∞ Complex and difficult to understand for parents exploring all educational options—neighborhood schools and School Choice. Few school districts in Colorado or nationally use hybrid grade configurations for high schools. Most are all three year or all four year high schools.
- ∞ Would affect delivery of district-wide programs such as Special Education.
- ∞ More difficult to deliver professional development for teachers across varying grade-level systems.