



## FAQs

# MIDDLE SCHOOL GRADE CONFIGURATIONS

**Q** Why is Jeffco Public Schools moving sixth grade instruction from elementary school to middle school?

**A** First and foremost, this shift allows for greater academic opportunities for our students. Students attending sixth grade in a middle school environment have access to a broader range of electives, including foreign languages, choir, instrumental music, musical theater, STEM electives, and other enrichment classes. Core classes are taught by content specialists, and math and language can be more closely aligned to target students' abilities. Accelerated options like algebra are available, and science includes more lab work.

Jeffco Public Schools has offered several 6-8 middle school options in the district, and those experiences have been extremely positive. Sixth grade students in the Chatfield, Conifer, Evergreen, and Golden communities have thrived in the middle school setting. Our middle school leaders began championing this shift in 2010. Nationally, 75 percent of sixth graders attend class in a middle school setting.

This shift also enables Jeffco Public Schools to take full advantage of the excess capacity we have in our middle school facilities. It will alleviate pressure at many of our elementary schools, and significantly reduce the use of temporary buildings. Some schools will even be able to increase early childhood education opportunities on elementary school campuses.

Board of Education members heard from parents, staff, and students during the Facilities Master Plan review process. One common request was that the district take a consistent, systematic approach to middle school configurations, as opposed to the current system in which some sixth grade students attend K-6, 7-8 schools while others attend K-5, 6-8 schools. In too many cases, classes become fragmented when some students who had been attending a K-6 school choice-enroll into a 6-8 middle school while their classmates remain. The Facilities Master Plan now supports reconfiguring schools so that a K-5, 6-8 configuration will be consistent across the district.

**Q** What is the impact (positive and negative) on students completing sixth grade in a middle school as opposed to an elementary school or a kindergarten through eighth grade (K-8) campus?

**A** Benefits of 6-8 grade configuration:

- Sixth-graders are taught by content-area specialists for each subject.
- Sixth-graders have access to science labs, for-credit world languages, instrumental music, choir, STEM electives, and a variety of other opportunities that allow them to pursue additional interests.
- Students will have increased opportunity for differentiated instruction, including advanced or accelerated classes in strength areas, and placement in classes co-taught by a content-area specialist alongside a learning specialist (SpEd teacher) when students struggle.
- Students will also have increased options for extracurricular and enrichment activities.
- All students will prepare for the middle school transition at the same time.
- Students will have additional support provided by middle school counselors and social emotional learning specialists to help them with challenging middle school issues. These middle school resources are new this school year (2016-17), and will continue.

Two recent studies showed conflicting results for whether the transition to middle school was better for students in sixth grade or seventh grade. [One study](#) suggested the transition to middle school is slightly worse for sixth grade students, but [another study](#) said it was slightly worse for those transitioning in seventh grade. Most studies show a negative impact for students transitioning to middle school at any age. [Studies](#) on the transition to middle school demonstrate that it can negatively impact student motivation, attitude toward school, belief in ability, attendance, and academic achievement.

In Jeffco, however, student responses on the 2016 Make Your Voice Heard (MYVH) survey suggest that sixth grade students attending schools with a 6-8 configuration are doing well:

- Students in a 6-8 configuration and students in a K-6 configuration reported the same connection to school.
- Students in a 6-8 model reported a slightly higher perception of safety than in a K-6 model.

Additionally, Jeffco sixth-graders have thrived in both elementary and middle school settings. Data from the first year of the NWEA MAP district assessment demonstrated that students in 6-8 school configurations had a higher percent of students earning a High Average or High score for both math and language arts during the spring 2016 MAP benchmark assessment than students attending schools with other grade configurations.

Bottom line: excellent teachers and a supportive school environment are more important for school success than grade configuration.



When will sixth graders move from elementary to middle school campuses?



Jeffco Public Schools wants to provide a thoughtful and supportive transition for students and staff by implementing an 18-24 month transition plan for the middle schools that are ready to accommodate the 6-8 model. For these schools, the first cohort of sixth-graders would be this year's fourth-graders who would transition to middle school in Fall 2018. For those schools requiring construction modifications to accommodate the 6-8 model, the transition will occur up to two years after the 2018-19 transition for schools that will not require construction.

The Chatfield articulation area will implement the 6-8 model for the 2017-18 year. This decision was reached following a study of the benefits and impacts during the 2015-16 school year.

Jeffco Public Schools will continue to offer kindergarten through eighth grade (K-8) schools and will maintain the K-6,7-12 and K-12 grade configurations used by some Jeffco neighborhood, option, and charter schools.



Will the configuration be implemented district-wide?



The goal is to implement the configuration with as many articulation areas as feasible during the 2018-19 academic year and continue implementing the reconfigurations district-wide. However, the Chatfield articulation area reconfiguration will take place in 2017-18, and the Jefferson and Alameda articulation areas will keep their current K-6, 7-12 configuration.



What impact on Outdoor Lab will there be moving sixth grade to middle school?



All Jeffco sixth-graders will continue to attend Outdoor Lab, regardless of their school's grade configuration.