



Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

PK-8 Transition Study

Year 1 Evaluation Report

August 2012

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Executive Summary

In 2011-2012, eight schools in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) adopted a PK-8 structure. The Office of Program Evaluation in the College of Education at the University of South Carolina is collaborating with the CMS Center for Research and Evaluation to better understand the PK-8 transition process as well as academic and behavioral outcomes of students enrolled in these schools. This preliminary report highlights the results of the qualitative data analysis in Year 1, which included zone superintendent and principal interviews and focus groups with key informants (teachers, parents, and students). A PK-8 Teacher Survey was also developed to explore trends in teacher attitudes and beliefs over a three-year period. Survey results are appended to this report and will be used to compare attitudes and beliefs over time in subsequent reports.

Many informants expressed optimism in the attainment of positive achievement growth in PK-8 schools. Some informants expected more modest student achievement gains in 2011-2012 based on realities of the transition and the need to establish a new school culture. Some informants, particularly teachers and parents, perceived more negative behavior within the schools than in previous years. The majority of informants cited no perceptible differences in student attendance during Year 1; however, some informants believed attendance had the potential to improve in future years. Aspects cited that may facilitate enhanced student outcomes are the availability of more human and material resources, opportunities to work more closely with teachers across a broader grade span to understand student growth and achievement, and the ability to develop stronger, more lasting relationships within the school community.

The transition to the PK-8 structure was a substantial influence on school functioning and facilities during Year 1, the 2011-2012 school year. School administrators concentrated much of their attention on reframing the school culture, restructuring school operations, addressing staffing needs, and redefining the school facility to accommodate a substantial increase in the student population. Issues related to the transition, adequacy of facilities, and the quest for best practices within the PK-8 environment resonated well into the school year at some of the schools.



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OVERVIEW

On November 9, 2010, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) Board of Education voted to close six existing schools (Table 1) and transform eight elementary schools into PK-8 schools (Table 2) beginning in 2011-2012 to accommodate students from the closed schools.

Table 1: Closed Schools

School Name
Amy James Pre-K
Bishop Spaugh Community Middle
Irwin Avenue Elementary
Lincoln Heights Elementary
JT Williams Middle
Wilson Middle

Table 2: PK-8 Schools

School Name
Ashley Park PreK-8 School
Berryhill School
Bruns Avenue Academy
Druid Hills Academy
Reid Park Academy
Thomasboro Academy
Walter G. Byers School
Westerly Hills Academy

While cost efficiencies were a primary factor in the closing of some schools and the transformation of others, the CMS Board of Education's decision was also consistent with research demonstrating positive benefits of K-8 learning environments. Some research studies that tracked students in K-8 settings and their counterparts in traditional elementary (Grades K-5) and middle schools (Grades 6-8) have found that middle school students in K-8 schools typically outperform their peers who attend middle schools (Connolly, Yakimowski-Sreblick, & Russo 2002; Offenburg, 2001; Poncelet & Metis Associates, 2004; Rockoff & Lockwood, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2007). In a recent report, *Stuck in the Middle: How and Why Middle Schools Harm Student Achievement*, Rockoff and Lockwood (2010) found that an achievement dip occurs as students transition from an elementary school to a middle school.



Rather than “rebounds in learning” after their initial year in middle school, these students continue to lag behind their peers in PK-8 schools throughout the middle grades. In addition, the achievement gap between students in PK-8 settings and those in traditional middle schools is more pronounced among certain groups of students. “A particularly distressing finding from our study is that students with lower initial levels of academic achievement fare especially poorly in middle school” (Rockoff & Lockwood, 2010, p.72).

Additional studies that have explored differences in achievement by school type include a study by Weiss and Baker-Smith (2010) that revealed that students entering Grade 9 from K-8 schools were more likely to have higher grades and less likely to receive an “F” in a class than their middle school counterparts. Byrnes and Ruby (2007) also found that there are significantly higher rates of achievement among students at well-established (older) K-8 schools. Newer K-8 schools did not share the improvements in achievement scores, which could be a result of their limited experience with the model or their student populations (Byrnes and Ruby, 2007). There are a few studies that have found that the K-8 structure makes no difference in student achievement compared to traditional middle schools, regardless of the length of time the K-8 school has been open (Weiss & Kipnes, 2006; Whitley, Lupart, & Beran, 2007).

Studies that have explored student behavior outcomes by school type have generally identified more positive behavior in K-8 schools than in traditional middle schools. Connolly et al. (2002) found that the traditionally smaller K-8 schools resulted in positive perceptions from both parents and principals with regards to student motivation to learn and their behavior. Arcia (2007) found that students in K-8 schools were suspended at lower rates than students in traditional middle schools, regardless of race and achievement of the students. Weiss and Baker-Smith (2010) also report reduced rates of delinquency among students entering Grade 9 from a K-8 school. Alternatively, Farmer, Hamm, Leung, Lambert, and Gravelle (2011) found that bullying was more prevalent in K-8 schools than in middle schools.

There is not a large body of evidence related to the impact of school type (K-8 or middle school) on student attendance. Weiss and Baker-Smith (2010) found attendance rates were higher in Grade 9 for students who attended a K-8 school compared to students who attended a traditional middle school. Conversely, the results from Connolly et al. (2002) showed no differences in attendance levels between K-8 students and traditional middle school students.

Table 3 highlights these studies and briefly summarizes the key findings from each study. Much of the current evidence appears to support the positive impact K-8 structures have on academic achievement among students in Grades 6-8. This body of research is growing and additional questions are being asked related to the influences of student populations and culture within these schools to better understand the impact of K-8 and middle schools on student outcomes. Fewer studies have compared student behavior and student attendance in traditional middle schools and K-8 schools. In addition, there is limited focus on the impact of K-8 environments on elementary student outcomes.

Table 3: Key Findings from Selected Research Studies

Author	N	Key Findings
Achievement		
Byrnes & Ruby (2007)	40,883 students	Established K-8 schools perform significantly better than middle schools; however, newer K-8 schools did not show the same student gains.
Connolly, Yakimowski-Sreblick, & Russo (2002)	168 principals 775 parents 2871 students	Increased student achievement in K-8 schools based on achievement metrics. Students in K-8 schools have less opportunity to take college preparation courses such as algebra or foreign language.
Offenburg (2001)	85 schools	Higher overall performance on standardized test scores in K-8 schools.
Poncelet & Metis Associates (2004)	4039/3562 students	Positive achievement outcomes in math/reading for students in K-8 schools.
Rockoff & Lockwood (2010)	Not reported	Declines in math/English achievement associated with transition to middle school. Middle school students continue to fall behind K-8 peers over time.
Weiss & Baker-Smith (2010)	1206 students	Students who attended middle school showed declines in grade averages in Grade 9 compared to those who attended K-8 schools.
Weiss & Kipnes (2006)	1483 students	No achievement differences between students in middle and K-8 schools.
Whitley, Lupart, & Beran (2007)	714 students	No achievement differences between Grade 7 students who transitioned to middle school and those who remained at the same school.
Behavior		
Arcia (2007)	26,137 students	Grade 6 and 7 students at middle schools had higher rates of suspension than their counterparts at K-8 schools.
Connolly, Yakimowski-Sreblick, & Russo (2002)	168 principals 775 parents 2871 students	Students at middle schools perceived as demonstrating less courtesy and respect than their K-8 counterparts.
Farmer et al. (2011)	1800 students	Bullying more frequent in K-8 schools than middle schools.
Weiss & Baker-Smith (2010)	1206 students	Former K-8 school students have less delinquent behavior in Grade 9 than their middle school counterparts.
Attendance		
Connolly, Yakimowski-Sreblick, & Russo (2002)	168 principals 775 parents 2871 students	No relationship between daily school attendance and type of school.
Rockoff & Lockwood (2010)	Not reported	Middle school students miss slightly more school days than their K-8 peers.
Weiss & Baker-Smith (2010)	1206 students	Greater number of student absences in Grade 9 among students coming from middle schools; no differences when controlling for additional factors (i.e., magnet school).

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The CMS Center for Research and Evaluation (CRE) is collaborating with the Office of Program Evaluation (OPE) in the College of Education at the University of South Carolina on a three-year evaluation of the CMS PK-8 transition process and its outcomes. The intent of the evaluation is to identify lessons learned in the move to the PK-8 structure in addition to its impact on student learning/achievement, student attendance, and student behavior. Four research questions were developed by the CRE to guide this investigation. This preliminary report summarizes information for the initial transition year, 2011-2012, specifically related to Research Question 1. The findings highlighted in this report must be interpreted with caution as they reflect perceptions related to the transitional year, which can be the most challenging year in implementing any new program, initiative, or structural change. Additional data, to be collected in Years 2 and 3, are required to fully address all research questions.

- 1) What challenges and best practices were identified during the transition to PK-8 schools?
 - a) What happened in the schools over the course of the transitional years (2011-2014)?
 - b) What factors were perceived to have greatest impact, both positive and negative, on the success of the transition?
- 2) What are the efficiencies that resulted from this transition?
- 3) How do PK-8 schools perform in terms of proficiency, growth, and Adequate Yearly Progress relative to the previously existing elementary and middle schools?
- 4) What is the impact of PK-8 schools on academic achievement, attendance, and student behavior?
 - a) How does this differ, if at all, for those students who were moved from middle school to PK-8 schools?
 - b) How does this differ, if at all, for those students who previously participated in middle school athletics but no longer have access to those programs?
 - c) How does this differ for schools that provide students with after-school enrichment programs?

EVALUATION METHODS

To address particular aspects of these research questions, particularly Research Question 1, OPE staff conducted interviews with the Central Elementary Zone Superintendent, principals of each PK-8 school, and former principals of the three closed middle schools. In addition, four (50%) of the eight PK-8 schools were identified through a representative sampling process to serve as intensive study schools. Focus groups and interviews with key informant groups were conducted at these four sites in March and April 2012. A Teacher Survey was also developed and administered to PK-8 teachers to better understand their attitudes and beliefs. An overview of the evaluation activities at each school is provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Research Procedures

School Name	Principal Interview	Teacher Survey*	Focus Groups
Ashley Park PreK-8 School	✓	✓	
Berryhill School	✓	✓	✓
Bruns Avenue Academy	✓	✓	
Druid Hills Academy	✓	✓	
Reid Park Academy	✓	✓	✓
Thomasboro Academy	✓	✓	✓
Walter G. Byers School	✓	✓	✓
Westerly Hills Academy	✓	✓	
Bishop Spaugh Community Middle**	✓		
JT Williams Middle School**	✓		
Wilson Middle School**	✓		

*optional

**closed schools

Interview protocols were developed from the research questions and used to guide the interviews with principals and the Central Elementary Zone Superintendent. In addition, focus groups and interviews occurred at four intensive study schools to gain information from a larger representation of the school population including parents, teachers, and students. Berryhill School, Reid Park Academy, Thomasboro Academy, and Walter G. Byers School were selected to participate in the intensive study process. School staff assisted in the planning and organization of the focus groups and interviews to minimize disruptions of the school day and encourage participation.

During March and April 2012, evaluators conducted focus groups and individual interviews with teachers, parents, and students at the schools. For teachers and students, focus groups were generally organized by grade-level (e.g., Grade 6 students) or by appropriate grade groupings (e.g., PK-Grade 2 teachers). Parents of students across all grades were generally invited to participate in focus groups or individual interviews that coincided with school events. These events included parent organizational meetings, English language learning classes, summer enrichment program sign-up sessions, and morning drop-off. Approximately 190 people across all four schools participated in focus groups or provided individual comments as evaluators were at their schools including approximately 60 parents. Numbers of participating teachers and students were more equally distributed across the four schools than numbers of participating parents. Interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded when appropriate and independently analyzed by an OPE faculty member and two OPE research assistants. Written notes from focus groups and interviews that were not audio-recorded were analyzed in the same method. Themes were developed based on common findings and agreement among the evaluators.

Finally, a PK-8 Teacher Survey was developed to analyze trends over a three-year period. Survey items were organized around the transition process and the three components of interest in this evaluation: student learning/achievement, student attendance, and student behavior. Personnel from the CMS Center for Research and Evaluation and two additional survey experts within OPE provided feedback in the survey development process. The survey was piloted on-site during a school staff meeting with 50 teachers at one of the PK-8 schools. Minor revisions were made to the survey based on the analysis of pilot survey results, and a link to an on-line survey was disseminated (via principals) to the remaining seven PK-8 schools. Responses were received from 86 elementary teachers, 41 middle grades teachers, 21 related staff/other (e.g., guidance counselors), and 12 who did not indicate position. It is estimated that this represents between 30% and 35% of the total population of teachers at these eight schools. Survey results are provided in Appendix A. More in-depth analysis of the teacher survey will occur once multiple years of data collection and higher response rates are received.

KEY FINDINGS

Analysis of data collected through interviews and focus groups resulted in the development of emerging themes related to student outcomes (learning/achievement, attendance, and behavior) as well as the transition process and facilities at the PK-8 schools. Emerging themes were developed based on preponderance of evidence provided by the informants who participated in this process. It is important to note that these themes represent baseline, transition year information that will be explored in more detail in Years 2 and 3. These emerging thematic findings are summarized in the following sections.

Student Learning/Achievement

Many of the stakeholders, particularly principals and school leaders, indicated that opportunities to enhance student achievement have expanded based on the PK-8 structure. In some cases, these opportunities, such as collaborating across grade levels and capitalizing on resources not previously available, have not been fully realized because of the transitioning process and determining how to effectively work across grades to accomplish student learning goals.

Many stakeholders noted the opportunity to develop relationships among students and parents as a positive step toward increasing student learning and achievement.

Stakeholder groups identified the longer length of time that students remain in the school as a positive factor in sustaining relationships among families and students. In addition, some school leaders and teachers cited the benefits of watching students grow and change and being part of students' lives for an extended period.

Relationships and collaboration among teachers were identified as an effective way to understand and address student needs. Principals and teachers often cited opportunities to collaborate and fully align the curriculum across all grades. Examples included having middle grades students who are struggling readers work with reading coaches and instructors from lower grades who are more experienced at teaching reading comprehension. In addition, upper elementary teachers indicated the potential for gaining strategies from middle school teachers to enhance instruction for students who need more challenging material.

The availability of human and instructional resources was cited as having the potential to enhance student learning. Stakeholders identified the addition of staff such as guidance counselors and facilitators who were not previously available. Also, the availability of labs and instructional resources for middle grades students was mentioned as having the potential to enhance learning opportunities among elementary students.

Teachers indicated a desire to integrate and build on each other's strengths to better prepare students. Some teachers indicated that differences between elementary and middle grades teachers and students need to be better understood to encourage full collaboration. Professional development offered within and outside of CMS focuses on the elementary or middle grades, and there was desire among some principals and teachers within these schools to have professional development opportunities better aligned with the PK-8 model.

Mobility of students was cited as an obstacle by some principals and teachers in their efforts to enhance student achievement. In 2010-2011, mobility rates at the eight schools ranged from 23% to 40% with an average mobility rate of 31.4% across all eight schools (Table 5). This was prior to the transition to the PK-8 structure. With a changing population each year, it is difficult to track the progress of students as well as integrate newly entering students who may not have the background skills necessary for their grade level. Developing relationships with students and families based on the PK-8 structure has the potential to decrease the mobility of the population; however, mobility may impact student achievement and must be considered when analyzing and understanding student achievement.

Table 5: Mobility Rates at PK-8 Schools in 2010-2011*

School	Mobility Rate (%)
Ashley Park PreK-8 School	31
Berryhill School	25
Bruns Avenue Academy	30
Druid Hills Academy	27
Reid Park Academy	40
Thomasboro Academy	39
Walter G. Byers School	36
Westerly Hills Academy	23

*Rates prior to PK-8 Transition

Student Attendance

The majority of stakeholders reported no discernible differences in attendance within the PK-8 schools; however, opportunities to enhance student attendance were cited.

Students from one family enrolled in the same school provided opportunities for teachers and school administrators to gain a better understanding of family patterns and student absences. Some stakeholders also noted that commitment to the school may increase as families are associated with the same school for longer periods of time. In addition, some informants noted that parents may be more invested in the school and understand the importance of student attendance in this structure since they may have more than one student at the school.

Some teachers commented that absences appeared to be higher at the PK-8 schools; however, upon closer investigation, these comments were often made by teachers who were new to the school. Teachers with longer tenure at the school noted that the rate of absences was typical for the school in previous years.

Student Dispositions and Behavior

Student behavior was cited as a significant challenge resulting from the transition process; however opportunities were also cited, particularly by principals and teachers, related to enhancing positive behavior outcomes. While some stakeholders noted that behavior or influence of behavior on peers was not as bad as expected, there was consensus around the notion that behavior among PK-8 students was challenging to address based on the range of developmental levels at the school and differing expectations of appropriate behavior.

Positive examples of behavior were cited by some stakeholders who indicated instances of older students mentoring or encouraging younger students. Examples were cited related to older students positively modeling behaviors for younger students and perceiving their responsibility as a leader in the school. In addition, some principals, school leaders, and teachers cited the opportunity to tutor or mentor younger students as a useful incentive for upper elementary and middle grades students.

Disciplinary action increased during the opening months of the school year at most of the PK-8 schools; however, this was often attributed to setting high expectations for student conduct. There were significantly higher suspension rates in the first four months of the 2011-2012 academic year compared to the same period in 2010-2011 at the majority of the schools (Helms, 2012). Most stakeholders explained this increase in disciplinary action as an attempt to set high expectations for appropriate conduct and discourage negative behaviors that had the potential to trickle down to the lower grades. In addition, some stakeholders attributed the increase in disciplinary action to more focused attention on individual students based on smaller middle grade cohort sizes. According to some stakeholders interviewed, it was important to set a culture of high standards for behavior and decorum at the beginning of the year, even if that meant higher suspension rates in the interim.

Many stakeholders noted the influence of bus behavior on school-day behavior. Some of the informants indicated that buses were overcrowded, and there was limited supervision on the bus, particularly at the back of the bus. The permissive nature of the bus often set the tone for the day, and at times it was difficult to readjust the students to the school day once they arrived. At some schools, the overcrowding on buses was perpetuated by overcrowding in classrooms and school facilities, which increased the likelihood of continuing negative behavior.

Bullying was cited by some stakeholders as a problem, but it was not necessarily attributed to the presence of middle grades students. Bullying was often reported within-grade or within a small range of grades. There were some ongoing concerns about the influence of middle grades students on elementary students, particularly young elementary students. Stakeholders, mostly teachers, noted examples of middle grades students being unruly in hallways or taunting other students.

In the transition process, some informants noted that **middle grades students, particularly those who had previously been at a middle school, demonstrated a level of resentment related to being at what they perceived to be an elementary school.** This resentment was cited as a factor in student dispositions and the resulting behavior. In addition, stakeholders reported that **middle grades students in PK-8 schools may have less freedom and fewer opportunities than students at middle schools.** Some of the middle grades students and parents indicated that middle grades students were treated like younger students in the PK-8

school. Middle grades students, teachers, and parents cited issues such walking in a line in the hallways as limitations of the PK-8 schools that may contribute to student resentment.

Informants indicated that elementary students modeled the actions and behaviors, both good and bad, of the middle grades students. Some stakeholder groups, particularly teachers and parents, noted that there was some resentment among some of the upper elementary students as their status of oldest in the school was removed. These students struggled to define their role as the school expanded to include middle grades students.

Transition and Facilities

The eight schools that transformed from elementary schools to PK-8 schools spent a great deal of time during 2010-2011 preparing to add at least three grades to their schools. In addition, these principals maintained their roles as principals at a current school while preparing for a new school model the following year. Seven of the eight schools also added pre-kindergarten classrooms; however, this was rarely cited as a concern. Tables 6-8 demonstrate the increases in enrollment at the eight schools as well as the middle grades enrollment at the closed schools and transitioned PK-8 schools.

Table 6: Student Populations at PK-8 Schools 2010-2011 and 2011-2012

School	Enrollment 2010-2011	Enrollment 2011-2012*	Increase in Enrollment
Ashley Park PreK-8 School	275	515	+240
Berryhill School	334	535	+201
Bruns Avenue Academy	542	745	+203
Druid Hills Academy	378	604	+226
Reid Park Academy	432	699	+267
Thomasboro Academy	379	703	+324
Walter G. Byers School	396	552	+156
Westerly Hills Academy	255	506	+251

*does not include Pre-Kindergarten

Table 7: Middle School Student Enrollment at Closed Middle Schools

School	Enrollment 2010-2011
Bishop Spough Community Middle	526
JT Williams Middle School	480
Wilson Middle School	528



Table 8: Student Enrollment by Level at PK-8 Schools

School	Elementary 2010-2011	Middle 2010-2011	Elementary 2011-2012*	Middle 2011-2012
Ashley Park PreK-8 School	275	N/A	351	164
Berryhill School	334	N/A	390	145
Bruns Avenue Academy	542	N/A	536	209
Druid Hills Academy	378	N/A	433	171
Reid Park Academy	432	N/A	507	192
Thomasboro Academy	379	N/A	485	218
Walter G. Byers School	396	N/A	394	158
Westerly Hills Academy	255	N/A	323	183

*does not include Pre-Kindergarten

The transition process included adding at least 150 new students to each of the eight schools, with an average addition of 234 students (not including pre-kindergarten students) across the eight schools. Six of the eight schools added elementary students (not including pre-kindergarten students) in addition to the middle grades students.

Parents, teachers, and students were somewhat mixed in their reactions to the PK-8 transition. Some parents, teachers, and students liked the PK-8 structure and believed there were advantages to the structure. These parents and students noted the ability to stay at a high-quality school where they knew and trusted their teachers and school leaders as a positive aspect of the transition. Other parents, teachers, and students were concerned about the PK-8 structure and its impact on students. These stakeholders often noted reduced opportunities within the PK-8 schools, facility issues, and behavior challenges as negative aspects of the transition.

Adequacy of facilities and amenities were cited as concerns across stakeholder groups. Most of the schools configured their space to allow elementary students to be somewhat separate from middle grades students. At times, this became challenging as classroom availability did not allow full floors or areas to be dedicated to certain grade levels. Many schools had higher than expected enrollment increases, and these schools had to make quick adjustments at the beginning of the school year. Several schools grouped multiple classes into a common classroom or used spaces not designed to be classrooms. The inadequate size of the gymnasium or recreation facilities and other common areas were frequently cited. Some stakeholders, particularly teachers and parents, believed the inadequacy of the facilities may

contribute to developmental issues that may impact students over time. Preparedness for high school, college, and career was important to these stakeholders, and they feared that these restrictions in space and lack of amenities may impact students' abilities to be fully prepared for high school.

Lack of school-based organized sports was voiced by stakeholders as a challenge within the PK-8 schools. Principals and teachers often cited the usefulness of sports as a motivational factor in academics and as a source of pride and investment in the school community. The lack of these opportunities on-site potentially contributed to middle grades students' resentment toward the school, which may contribute to negative student behavior and lower student achievement. Students and parents expressed dissatisfaction that sports opportunities were not as readily available for these students, and they indicated that this may impact their potential to play sports in high school. While sports activities were available at these PK-8 schools through a community organization, which many appreciated, these activities were often not perceived as the same as school-based sports.

Staffing and reframing the culture of each school appeared to be among the greatest focus areas, other than facilities, during the transition process. The importance of staffing and encouraging collaboration were cited by some stakeholders, particularly principals and teachers. As the middle grades teachers entered the former elementary schools, this added a new dimension to the school. There was an acculturation process for both groups during the transition year, and there was minimal time to establish a new school culture before the students arrived. Elementary and middle grades teachers often had limited exposure to each other, and there were some misunderstandings or perceived inequalities that arose as the two groups merged into one school. For example, some elementary teachers expressed the belief that middle grades teachers had more planning and preparation time during the day, which left them feeling angry. Additionally, some middle grades teachers expressed that they felt unwelcome in the environment because the elementary culture dominated.

Many stakeholders indicated that the school leadership, while often effective, was challenged by the number and diverse needs of elementary and middle grades students. Difficulty of school leaders in balancing the needs of elementary and middle grade teachers and students was cited as a challenge by some, particularly teachers and parents. Most of the principals had experience with either elementary or middle grades, but rarely both. There was a



suggestion, particularly made by teachers, to have two assistant principals at each school, one with a middle school background and one with an elementary background, to encourage more responsive leadership across the spectrum of grades. Some stakeholders also indicated that the middle school portion of the school consumed most of the school administration's time, and this often resulted in less attention to elementary teachers and students.

CONCLUSIONS

This evaluation explored themes and trends across eight schools that transitioned from elementary schools in 2010-2011 to PK-8 schools in 2011-2012. In 2011-2012, the focus at the schools, at least at the beginning of the year, appeared to center around the transition process. All schools experienced transition challenges through the process (e.g., facility issues and culture shifts) and some schools had greater challenges, often beyond their control, than others (e.g., overcrowding and late teacher hiring). While there were challenges in the transition process and there will continue to be challenges within PK-8 schools, many stakeholders acknowledged opportunities and advantages of a PK-8 school that may result in positive impacts on student learning and achievement.

Opportunities of PK-8 Structure

The PK-8 structure may be more likely than traditional elementary and middle schools to facilitate opportunities that have been shown to impact student learning and achievement and reduce situations that negatively affect student achievement. However, the structure alone cannot transform student outcomes. "While the experience of other states suggests that shifting to K-8 schools may help address lagging middle grade student performance, changing grade configurations alone does not alleviate the need for districts to take other steps to improve student performance," (Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability: Office of the Florida Legislature, 2005, p.6).

PK-8 schools provide a structure that may allow for more effective relationships among various groups in the school community over time. The structure provides opportunities for more effective teacher evaluation and assessment of students across a broader grade span. In addition, there may be more human resources that allow for re-teaching of particular skills or

acceleration among those ready for more advanced concepts. There may be more opportunities for peer tutoring and parent involvement in PK-8 schools. Student mobility has the potential to be reduced in PK-8 schools based on relationships between families and their schools; however, this may still be a challenge at these schools based on current mobility rates.

The information in this report in combination with results from quantitative data analysis such as 2011-2012 annual attendance rates, in-school and out-of-school suspension rates, and student performance on end-of-grade assessments will allow for greater understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement within the PK-8 model. In addition, results from Years 2 and 3 will be analyzed in relation to this information to fully address the research question and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the transition process and outcomes of the PK-8 structure.

Next Steps

This report offers an initial review of the transition to the PK-8 structure. The four research questions will be fully addressed upon completion of the planned three-year evaluation. As the PK-8 schools enter Year 2, this evaluation will continue to explore the key areas of student learning/achievement, student attendance, and student behavior. New PK-8 schools often have implementation dips or stagnation in student outcomes as the schools transition to this model; however, improvement may occur as the PK-8 schools establish effective practices and operations (Byrnes & Ruby, 2007).

As planning for the Year 2 evaluation occurs, the evaluation could address “best practice” strategies within PK-8 schools to focus on effective strategies that are used within the existing PK-8 schools. A school culture or school climate rubric that assesses aspects such as collaboration about student evaluation, peer tutoring, and parent involvement could be implemented to better understand opportunities and challenges within these schools that can be shared among all CMS PK-8 schools.

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APPENDIX A

Year 1 CMS PK-8 Teacher Survey Results

A CMS PK-8 Teacher Survey was developed, piloted, and administered in Spring 2012. Survey items were organized around the transition process and the three main components of interest in this evaluation: student learning/achievement, student attendance, and student behavior. Personnel from the CMS Center for Research and Evaluation and two additional survey experts within OPE provided feedback on the survey. The survey was piloted on-site during a school staff meeting with 50 teachers at one of the PK-8 schools. Minor revisions were made to the survey based on the analysis of pilot survey results, and a link to an on-line survey was disseminated (via principals) to the remaining seven PK-8 schools. Responses were received from 86 elementary teachers, 41 middle grades teachers, 21 related staff/other (e.g., guidance counselors), and 12 who did not indicate position. It is estimated that the response rate represents approximately 30% of the total population of teachers across the eight schools. The percentage of related or support staff is a much smaller percentage (approximately 5%) of the total population of these positions across the eight schools; however, distribution of the survey and perceptions of survey relevance may have caused fewer support staff to complete the survey. To ensure confidentiality and promote feedback/survey completion, school name was not asked on this survey; therefore the distribution of teachers by school is unable to be calculated. It is possible that responses are representative of teacher attitudes and beliefs at schools where larger numbers of teachers completed the survey. Full analysis of the teacher survey will occur once multiple years of data collection and higher response rates are received.



CMS PK-8 Teacher Survey Items: Closed-Ended Items Only

#	Item
1	I believe the students in my classroom like being at PreK-8 school.
2	I believe that the students in my classroom have adapted well to the PreK-8 school environment.
3a	How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts elementary students (PreK-5) at your school? Attendance
3b	How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts elementary students (PreK-5) at your school? Learning
3c	How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts elementary students (PreK-5) at your school? Behavior
3d	How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts elementary students (PreK-5) at your school? Overall
4a	How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts middle grades students (6-8) at your school? Attendance
4b	How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts middle grades students (6-8) at your school? Learning
4c	How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts middle grades students (6-8) at your school? Behavior
4d	How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts middle grades students (6-8) at your school? Overall
5	How has the PreK-8 structure impacted your students' daily attendance?
7	The physical environment of my classroom meets the needs of my students (e.g. desk size, classroom size).
8	The physical environment of my school meets the needs of my students (e.g. hallways, restrooms, gymnasium).
9	How has the PreK-8 structure impacted parent involvement in your classroom?
10	How has the PreK-8 structure impacted your students' learning?
12	How has the PreK-8 structure impacted your students' performance on classroom assessments?
13	How do you think the PreK-8 structure will impact your students' scores on the NC EOG assessments?
15	I have access to resources to improve my students' learning based on the PreK-8 structure.
16	How has the PreK-8 structure impacted your students' behavior?

Item (continued)

- 18 I have changed the way that I address behavior issues as a result of the PreK-8 structure.
- 19 How often do elementary and middle grades students interact during the school day?
- 20 Most of the interactions between elementary and middle level students are positive.
- 21 How often do elementary and middle grades teachers interact professionally about student learning?
- 22a How do you believe interactions between elementary and middle grades teachers at your school impact attendance?
- 22b How do you believe interactions between elementary and middle grades teachers at your school impact learning?
- 22c How do you believe interactions between elementary and middle grades teachers at your school impact behavior?
- 22d How do you believe interactions between elementary and middle grades teachers at your school impact overall?
- 23 I enjoy working at a PreK-8 school.
- 24 I would rather work at a PreK-8 school than a non-PreK-8 school.
- 25 Overall, I have received the necessary professional development to work in a PreK-8 school.
- 26 I need additional professional development to effectively work in a PreK-8 school.
- 29 I receive the necessary support that helps me use my professional development to meet my students' needs.
- 30 The leadership at my school (e.g., principal, assistant principal) allows the PreK-8 structure to function as well as possible.
-

CMS PK-8 Teacher Survey Items: Agree/Disagree Spectrum

#	Item	n	% Agree or Strongly Agree	% Neither Agree Nor Disagree	% Disagree or Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
1	I believe the students in my classroom like being at PreK-8 school.	160	23.8	32.5	43.8	---
2	I believe that the students in my classroom have adapted well to the PreK-8 school environment.	159	40.3	21.4	38.4	---
7	The physical environment of my <u>classroom</u> meets the needs of my students (e.g. desk size, classroom size).	158	58.9	5.7	35.4	---
8	The physical environment of my <u>school</u> meets the needs of my students (e.g. hallways, restrooms, gymnasium).	159	25.2	5.0	69.8	---
15	I have access to resources to improve my students' learning based on the PreK-8 structure.	157	43.9	27.4	28.7	---
18	I have changed the way that I address behavior issues as a result of the PreK-8 structure.	159	44.0	22.6	23.3	10.1
20	Most of the interactions between elementary and middle level students are positive.	158	38.0	32.3	29.7	---
23	I enjoy working at a PreK-8 school.	158	43.7	29.1	27.2	---
25	Overall, I have received the necessary professional development to work in a PreK-8 school.	158	26.6	32.3	41.1	---
26	I need additional professional development to effectively work in a PreK-8 school.	157	49.7	31.8	18.5	---
29	I receive the necessary support that helps me use my professional development to meet my students' needs.	158	50.6	33.5	15.8	---
30	The leadership at my school (e.g., principal, assistant principal) allows the PreK-8 structure to function as well as possible.	156	65.4	14.1	20.5	---

CMS PK-8 Teacher Survey Items: Positive/Negative Spectrum

#	Item	n	% Somewhat or Very Positively	% No Impact	% Somewhat or Very Negatively	% I Don't Know
3a	How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts <u>elementary students (PreK-5)</u> at your school? Attendance	152	17.8	66.4	15.8	---
3b	How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts <u>elementary students (PreK-5)</u> at your school? Learning	151	21.2	34.4	44.4	---
3c	How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts <u>elementary students (PreK-5)</u> at your school? Behavior	152	15.1	13.8	71.1	---
3d	How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts <u>elementary students (PreK-5)</u> at your school? Overall Student Outcomes	151	21.9	29.1	49.0	---
4a	How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts <u>middle grades students (6-8)</u> at your school? Attendance	149	22.8	49.0	28.2	---
4b	How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts <u>middle grades students (6-8)</u> at your school? Learning	153	32.0	28.1	39.9	---
4c	How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts <u>middle grades students (6-8)</u> at your school? Behavior	152	24.3	19.7	55.9	---
4d	How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts <u>middle grades students (6-8)</u> at your school? Overall Student Outcomes	150	26.0	28.7	45.3	---
22a	How do you believe interactions between elementary and middle grades teachers at your school impact student attendance?	150	20.7	56.7	4.7	18.0
22b	How do you believe interactions between elementary and middle grades teachers at your school impact student learning?	151	47.0	29.1	9.3	14.6
22c	How do you believe interactions between elementary and middle grades teachers at your school impact student behavior?	151	36.4	32.5	16.6	14.6
22d	How do you believe interactions between elementary and middle grades teachers at your school impact overall student outcomes?	149	40.9	34.2	8.7	16.1

CMS PK-8 Teacher Survey Items: Improved/Declined Spectrum

#	Item	n	% Slightly or Significantly Improved	% No Impact	% Slightly or Significantly Declined	% I Don't Know
5	How has the PreK-8 structure impacted <u>your students'</u> daily attendance?	155	11.0	59.4	11.0	18.7
9	How has the PreK-8 structure impacted parent involvement in your classroom?	153	26.8	64.1	9.2	---
10	How has the PreK-8 structure impacted <u>your students'</u> learning?	155	17.4	39.4	35.5	7.7
12	How has the PreK-8 structure impacted <u>your students'</u> performance on classroom assessments?	152	13.2	57.2	17.8	11.8
13	How do you think the PreK-8 structure will impact your students' scores on the NC EOG assessments?	153	18.3	30.1	34.6	17.0
16	How has the PreK-8 structure impacted <u>your students'</u> behavior?*	110	10.0	24.5	65.5	---

*Item did not appear on the pilot survey.

CMS PK-8 Teacher Survey Items: Frequently/Never Spectrum

#	Item	n	% Very Frequently/ Often	% Sometimes	% Seldom/ Never
19	How often do elementary and middle grades students interact during the school day?	158	17.7	36.1	46.2
21	How often do elementary and middle grades teachers interact professionally about student learning?	156	18.6	32.7	48.7



CMS PK-8 Teacher Survey Item: Yes/No

#	Item	n	% Yes	% No	% Doesn't Matter	% I Don't Know
24	I would rather work at a PreK-8 school than a non-PreK-8 school.	157	11.5	41.4	38.2	8.9



CMS PK-8 Teacher Survey: Open-Ended Items Only

#	Item
6	Why do you believe that the PreK-8 structure has affected your students' attendance?
11	Why do you believe that the PreK-8 structure has impacted your students' learning?
14	Why do you think the PreK-8 structure will impact EOG assessment scores?
17	Why do you believe the PreK-8 structure has impacted your students' behavior?
27	What specific professional development has prepared you to work in a PreK-8 school?
28	What additional professional development do you need to work in a PreK-8 school?
31	What opportunities have occurred for you as a result of the transition?
32	What challenges have occurred for you as a result of the transition?
33	Do you have any additional comments about the PreK-8 structure not addressed in this survey?



CMS PK-8 Teacher Survey Items: Open-Ended Responses Identified on Positive/Negative Spectrum

#	Item	n	% Positive	% Negative	% Neutral
6	Why do you believe that the PreK-8 structure has affected your students' attendance?	34	35.3	41.2	23.6
11	Why do you believe that the PreK-8 structure has impacted your students' learning?	76	26.8	53.5	19.7
14	Why do you think the PreK-8 structure will impact EOG assessment scores?	71	26.8	53.5	19.7
17	Why do you believe the PreK-8 structure has impacted your students' behavior?*	73	9.6	78.1	12.3

*The above items only appeared on the on-line survey if respondents indicated impact of the PK-8 structure on student attendance, learning/achievement, or behavior.

**Item did not appear on pilot survey



CMS PK-8 Teacher Survey Items: Open-Ended Responses Reported by Top Themes

#	Item	n
27	What specific professional development has prepared you to work in a Pre-K-8 school?	93

Most Commonly Cited Themes for Item 27	Approximate % Respondents
No Specific Training Provided	31.2
Common Core Training	10.8
Previous Experience with K-8 School or Student Population	8.6

#	Item	n
28	What additional professional development do you need to work in a PreK-8 school?	83

Most Commonly Cited Themes for Item 28	Approximate % Respondents
Classroom/Behavior Management	25.3
Unsure/Don't Know	16.9
PK-8 Specific Training/Collaboration Across School	15.7
None Needed	10.8



CMS PK-8 Teacher Survey Items: Open-Ended Responses Reported by Top Themes

#	Item	n
31	What opportunities have occurred for you as a result of the transition?	89

Most Commonly Cited Themes for Item 31	Approximate % Respondents*
None/No New Opportunities	22.5
Understand Curriculum Span: PK-8	13.5
Gain Experiences in Other Grade Levels	13.5
More Resources	12.4
Mentorship of Students/Relationships with Students	11.2

*some respondents noted multiple opportunities

#	Item	n
32	What challenges have occurred for you as a result of the transition?	103

Most Commonly Cited Themes for Item 32	Approximate % Respondents*
Behavior	41.7
School Facilities	21.3
School/Teacher Ability to Meet Diverse Needs of Students	15.5

*some respondents noted multiple challenges



CMS PK-8 Teacher Survey Items: Open-Ended Responses Reported by Top Themes

#	Item	n
33	Do you have any additional comments about the PreK-8 structure not addressed in this survey?	86

Most Commonly Cited Themes for Item 33	Approximate % Respondents*
No/I Don't Have Additional Comments	32.6
Adequacy of Facility Needs to Be Considered	11.6
More Planning Time Needed Prior to Transition	9.3

*some respondents provided comments related to more than one aspect of PreK-8 structure

