

PK-8 Transition Study

Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools
Year 2 Evaluation Brief

In the 2011-2012 academic year, Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools transformed eight elementary schools into PK-8 schools:

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

The Office of Program Evaluation (OPE) at the University of South Carolina is conducting a multi-year evaluation to understand the PK-8 transition process. OPE research staff collected information from district leaders, principals, teachers, parents, and students through interviews, focus groups, and surveys. The following themes emerged from the feedback from stakeholders.



Parents



Students



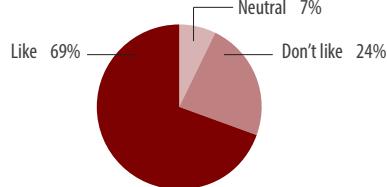
School Personnel

Outlook on the PK-8 Model

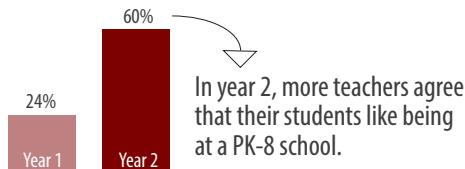
Stakeholders appear to be adjusting well to the new PK-8 structure in Year 2, sharing more positive views of the structure than in Year 1.



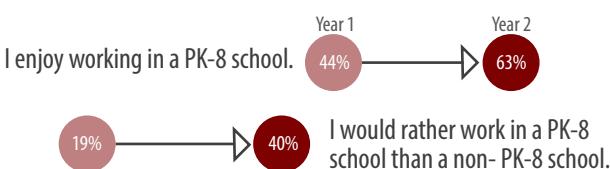
The majority of parents interviewed shared that they like the PK-8 structure.



Teachers indicated that students are adjusting well to the new structure in Year 2. Fewer students and teachers commented on middle level students' resentment to returning to their former elementary school.



Teachers shared that staff across grade levels are interacting more frequently. More teachers in Year 2 also indicated that they enjoy working at a PK-8 school and prefer working in a PK-8 school.

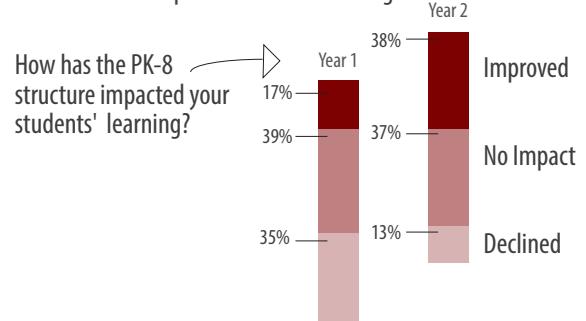


Student Achievement

Stakeholders in every group perceived benefits of the PK-8 model on student achievement, however, concerns remain about limited curricular opportunities.



More teachers reported positive benefits, such as opportunities for shared planning, of the PK-8 structure on their students' learning in Year 2, however, some teachers (37%) do not believe that the PK-8 structure has an impact on student learning.



Teachers and school leaders shared that the PK-8 model provides opportunities to collaborate across grade levels to enhance student learning and better address student needs.



In Year 2, more teachers perceived interactions between elementary and middle grade teachers to have an overall positive impact on students.



School administrators and teachers also noted benefits of eliminating the middle school transition, sharing that younger students can better understand what is expected of them in middle school.



Parents and school staff shared about the positive influence of long-term relationships between teachers and students as they progress through the PK-8 school. Consistency of the PK-8 structure and length of time spent in the same school were among the top benefits cited by parents. One parent said,

*"They grow up **knowing** the teachers,
and the teachers **know** them,
they **know** their issues from an early age..."*



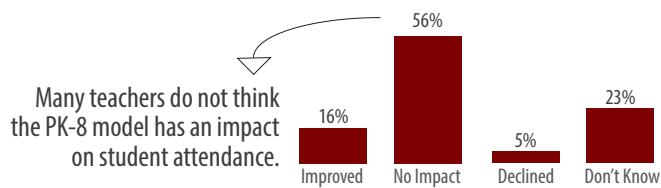
Compared to traditional middle schools in CMS, all stakeholder groups perceived that the PK-8 schools provide fewer curricular and extra-curricular opportunities. School leaders, teachers, parents, and students cited a lack of certain courses, electives, and clubs.



Students were also positive about their achievement, commenting on the benefits of the PK-8 model centering on “education” and “learning.” They described teachers as nice, helpful, caring, dedicated, respectful, and creative. Some students identified the opportunity to build long-term relationships with teachers as important to their progress in school.

Student Attendance

At this point, attendance does not appear to be impacted, positively or negatively, by the PK-8 structure. While some stakeholders mentioned the ability to better address attendance issues and understand family patterns, limited evidence related to the PK-8 impact on attendance is available.



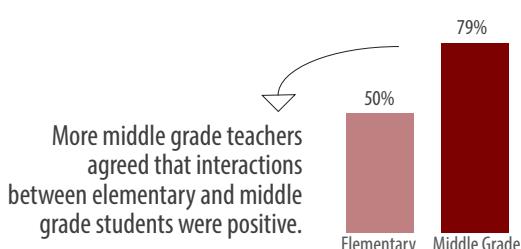
Student Behavior

Stakeholders indicated trends toward improved student behavior, but noted concerns related to the diverse age range and meeting the needs of students across all grade levels.

All stakeholder groups perceived benefits of mentoring opportunities between older and younger students within the PK-8 model. Stakeholders noted the advantage of younger students seeing beyond the elementary grades for academic progress. One teacher said,

*“Having the students collaborate across the grade levels really **helps the younger students** understand the concepts and it’s **very rewarding for the older students**.”*

Some stakeholders also indicated that older students can act as role models for younger students and encourage younger students to behave. Conversely, other stakeholders saw that older students were also modeling negative behaviors in front of the younger students, exposing them prematurely to inappropriate behavior.



Student Experience

Stakeholders shared concerns that may influence student achievement and behavior, such as inadequate school facilities at many of the PK-8 schools and missing a traditional middle school experience.

School staff mentioned the challenge of providing sports for students at the PK-8 schools and its impact on building a positive school culture. Teachers also noticed the impact of a lack of sports teams and how it negatively impacts students’ motivation to learn.

Stakeholders in every group expressed ongoing concerns about the limitations of existing school facilities to accommodate the PK-8 model. Students mentioned feeling crowded and the majority of teachers (67%) reported that the physical environment of their school does not meet the needs of their students. One teacher shared,

School leaders, parents, and students noted benefits of students being in the same school for a longer period of time, particularly related to the development of long-term relationships with teachers as well as having multiple family members within the same school.

Parents and students indicated that they miss what they perceive to be the traditional middle school experience. Students especially expressed a desire for more privileges and independence that they associate with middle school. Concern arose about the impact on future opportunities, especially with regards to participating in sports and being prepared for high school. One parent said,

*“My only concern is the middle school kids and [the] **transition to high school**. How is that going to be?”*

Summary

Perceptions about the benefits of the PK-8 model appear to be shifting. School leaders cited benefits over both years. Parents, students, and teachers involved in this evaluation were more likely to cite positive academic and behavioral outcomes in Year 2, compared to Year 1. Staff integration and collaboration appear to have increased in Year 2, and parents and students reported greater comfort levels with the support they are receiving.

While more benefits of the PK-8 model have been realized in Year 2, stakeholders continue to report challenges related to limitations of the school facilities and the lack of curricular and extracurricular opportunities, particularly for middle grade students.

Participants were not randomly selected and response rates from each group varied from year to year.

 Analysis and reporting by the Office of Program Evaluation at the University of South Carolina