



Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

PK-8 Transition Study

Year 3 Evaluation Report
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Executive Summary

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) closed three middle schools and transitioned eight elementary schools to PK-8 schools in 2011. The Office of Program Evaluation (OPE) at the University of South Carolina collaborated with CMS on a three-year evaluation of the transition. The following eight PK-8 schools were involved in this process:

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

The evaluation focused on the perceptions and impacts of the PK-8 structure on student attendance, achievement, and behavior. Over the course of the three-year study, OPE staff collected information from approximately 700 teachers, 600 parents, 145 students, and 30 administrators through surveys, focus groups, and interviews (numbers may represent single participants more than once).

Year 1: Transition Year

Stakeholder feedback from all groups, including administrators, teachers, parents, and students indicated that the transition process was challenging for schools during the first year, especially with all three middle grades integrated in Year 1. The greatest challenges faced during Year 1 were adapting the school facilities, staffing, managing student behavior, and reframing the culture of each school.



Year 2: Emergence of Best Practices and Solutions

In Year 2, stakeholders appeared to be adjusting well to the PK-8 structure, sharing more positive views of the structure than in Year 1. Every group reported benefits of the PK-8 model on student achievement citing opportunities for shared planning, collaboration across grade levels, and sustaining lasting relationships between students and staff members.

While stakeholder perceptions appeared to be improving, several challenges persisted in Year 2. Facility deficits and managing student behavior remained at the forefront, with stakeholders noting concerns related to meeting the needs of such a diverse age range. Additionally, the compromised “middle school experience” concerned some stakeholders, with many perceiving limited course offerings, fewer freedoms and privileges, and a lack of sports or other extracurricular activities.

Year 3: Settling into PK-8 Structure

In Year 3, stakeholders generally solidified their beliefs about the PK-8 transition and are working to accept the change. Administrators and school leaders shared efforts to build a positive school culture and create the best school experience for all students. All stakeholders reported benefits related to opportunities to develop long-standing relationships with students and provide a curriculum aligned from pre-kindergarten through Grade 8, resulting in improved academic performance and fewer behavior issues.

Despite the general acceptance of the model, some stakeholders have lingering beliefs about the fairness of change for these students and families. According to these stakeholders, they felt targeted and marginalized by the school closures and drastic school restructuring in these areas. Additionally, school leaders continue to cite a need to hire additional staff and retain existing high-quality faculty to provide a broader range of courses and effectively prepare students for high school. Furthermore, facilities remain inadequate for the large student population, as well as to meet the physical needs of the middle grade students.



Next Steps

As CMS moves forward with maintaining and expanding the PK-8 model, recommendations and future analyses could help support the model and guide the understanding of the structure's long-term impact on students.

Recommendations

Provide structured time for PK-8 principals to meet as a unified group: Information at both elementary and middle levels is pertinent to PK-8 administrators, and many expressed interest in meeting as a unique group to discuss issues specific to their grade configuration. This will allow them to share ideas and best practices, as well as consider ways to maximize the structure and better prepare students.

Explore methods to provide additional course options and extracurricular activities for middle school students: While the size of the middle school cohort at PK-8 schools is smaller than traditional middle schools, which offers opportunities for better teacher-student relationships and targeted teaching, the options for courses and extracurricular activities may be limited for this same reason. Partnerships between PK-8 schools or other options to provide these students with a broad array of opportunities may lead to enhanced satisfaction with the schools and better preparation for high school.

Communicate the impact of the PK-8 model with community stakeholders: Some stakeholders feel marginalized by the radical restructuring of schools in these areas. Efforts to better understand community perceptions of the model and communicate the impact of the PK-8 model on students are important to ensure all stakeholders are comfortable and confident in the school experiences of these students.

Explore the climate of the school related to the PK-8 structure and practices: The PK-8 structure offers opportunities as well as challenges in meeting the needs of all students. The climate of the schools, including how they respond to these opportunities and challenges, offers insights into best practices within the PK-8 model.

Future Analyses

Compare courses offerings at PK-8 schools with other schools: Stakeholders perceive limitations in electives and advanced core courses as a result of the PK-8 structure. Conducting a comparison of course offerings at PK-8 schools and their counterpart elementary and middle schools will clarify if this is a valid concern and help pinpoint course deficits, if any exist.

Further analyze staffing and turnover: PK-8 administrators may benefit from further analysis of staffing allotments and teacher turnover data to allow for more targeted teacher support or to adjust hiring practices.

Analyze high school preparation and performance of PK-8 students: Stakeholders expressed concerns that PK-8 schools may not adequately prepare students for high school. An analysis comparing PK-8 students' and traditional middle school students' academic achievement, growth, attendance, and behavior will help identify any differences and areas for improved preparation.

Overview

The grade span of schools, or number of grades within a school building, has been a subject of discussion for many years. Researchers, policy makers, and school districts study the academic, social, and financial impacts of schools with varying grade spans. Today, the most common structures are elementary, middle, and high schools organized around a series of three to six grades (Coladarci & Hancock, 2002). Public schools that spanned from kindergarten to Grade 8 were more common in the early 20th century when there were fewer school facilities and smaller numbers of students. In the past few decades, a number of school districts have reconstituted K-8 schools to reduce the number of transitions from one school to another, and to facilitate long-term relationships among school staff and students (Offenburg, 2001).

Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) recently joined other school districts across the country implementing the PK-8 model of education. In the 2011-2012 academic year, eight CMS elementary schools integrated middle grades to become PK-8 schools, and three middle schools were closed. To evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the eight PK-8 schools, CMS partnered with the Office of Program Evaluation at the University of South Carolina. This evaluation focused on identifying effective practices in the transition process, understanding stakeholder perceptions, and exploring the impact of this model on student achievement, attendance, and behavior. Based on previous research findings and district-level interests, questions were developed to guide the evaluation.

Evaluation 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?
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2) How do PK-8 schools perform in terms of proficiency, growth, Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs), and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), relative to the previously existing elementary and middle schools? Note: AMOs, which measure targets in reading and mathematics for each subgroup, replaced the use of AYP.

3) What is the impact of PK-8 schools on academic achievement, attendance, and student behavior?

4) How is the middle school experience similar and different at PK-8 schools and traditional middle schools?

a) Is there a perceived impact on academic achievement, attendance, student behavior, and high school transition?

Methods

Data Collection

Evaluation methods in Year 1 focused on understanding the transition process and its impact on the PK-8 schools and their students, specifically related to 1) student achievement, 2) student attendance, and 3) student behavior.

Table 1. Participating PK-8 Schools

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

In Year 1, interviews were conducted with principals at each of the new PK-8 schools, the former principals of the three middle schools that closed, and the zone superintendent overseeing these schools. To gain more in-depth information, four schools were identified through a representative sampling process for intensive study. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with teachers, students, and parents at these four schools. Finally, an on-line survey was distributed to teachers in all eight PK-8 schools.

In Year 2, similar methods were used to collect data from zone superintendents, teachers, and students. An interview was conducted with the zone superintendent. The online teacher survey, with minimal adaptation, was distributed to teachers via the principals. Student focus groups at the intensive study schools were conducted to gain feedback from students in Grades 4-8. In lieu of individual principal interviews, OPE developed survey items to be included in a principal survey administered by CMS. Rather than parent focus groups at the intensive study schools, parent feedback was collected during the school drop-off process using a short survey form. This strategy was piloted at one school in Year 1, and it resulted in significantly more parent input; therefore, it was used at all four study schools in Year 2.

To gain information related to best practices in PK-8 schools in Year 2, focus groups were conducted with the school leadership team and parents at one school that was identified based on both performance data from Year 1 and consultation with district personnel. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four urban school districts with a large portion of K-8 schools to gather information on best practices.

In Year 3, an interview was conducted with one of the two zone superintendents overseeing the PK-8 schools. The other zone superintendent was new to the district and had limited experience with the CMS PK-8 schools at the time of this work. Instead of individual interviews or the principal survey, which yielded a low response rate in Year 2, a focus group was conducted with the principals at all eight of the PK-8 schools to allow them to share their collective experiences. Similar to Year 2, parents were surveyed during morning drop-off in the carpool lane. The CMS Office of Research, Evaluation, and Analytics selected a random sample of students in Grades 4-8 for focus groups at each of the four intensive study schools. Additionally, the teacher survey, developed in Year 1 and slightly revised in Year 2, was administered in person by an OPE staff member at faculty meetings at seven of the eight PK-8 schools to improve the response rate. The teacher survey was administered through an email to the teachers at the other school. Protocols for interviews and focus groups were developed in Year 1 and modified as necessary in Years 2 and 3 for each group. No changes were made to the teacher survey in Year 3. These protocols are included in Appendix D.

Most of the participants were not randomly selected; therefore, findings are representative of only individuals who responded to surveys and participated in focus groups and interviews. Also, evaluators did not collect participants' names to protect their confidentiality, so the same participants may or may not be represented more than once during the three-year period. In Years 1 and 2, students who participated in focus groups were identified by schools; whereas, in Year 3, the CMS Office of Research, Evaluation, and Analytics randomly selected students in each grade to participate.

Teacher survey responses rates were lower in Years 1 and 2 (approximately 25% to 35% of the estimated population), rising to approximately 80% in Year 3 due to in-person survey administration at most of the schools. Teacher survey response rates were calculated based on the number of teachers indicating that they teach elementary or middle grades out of the



number of teachers listed on the North Carolina School Report Cards. Table 2 highlights approximate number of participants by stakeholder group.

Table 2. Participation by Stakeholder Group in Years 1-3

Stakeholder Group	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Approximate Total*
Teachers	205	117	382	704
Parents	60	240	300	600
Students	95	50	59	145
Principals	11	2	8	21
Other School Administrators	0	6	0	6
Zone Superintendent	1	1	1	3
Other Districts (K-8 model)	0	4	0	4

*May represent a single participant more than once.

Data Analysis

Audio-recordings or notes from all focus groups and interviews were independently analyzed by at least two OPE staff members. Domain and taxonomic analyses were conducted with these data to understand and classify predominate themes and sub-themes (Spradley, 1980). After an independent analysis, the evaluators collaborated to determine overall themes based on a preponderance of evidence. Themes were repeated across multiple schools and multiple stakeholder groups unless otherwise noted.

Surveys were analyzed using statistical software and reported on an item-by-item basis. Survey results were checked for accuracy by at least two OPE staff members. To explore teacher turnover data, a propensity score matching process, using school demographics, was used to identify match schools for the PK-8 schools and closed middle schools. Data for five years was used to explore differences in teacher turnover in eight PK-8 schools, three closed middle schools, eight matched elementary schools and three matched middle schools.



Research Literature & Best Practices

Impact of Grade Span on Achievement, Behavior, and Attendance

In Year 1, OPE staff identified research on the PK-8 school structure and its relationship to student achievement, behavior, and attendance (see Appendix A for a full table of the literature findings). While research is still emerging related to the PK-8 structure, most of the current studies have found positive impacts or no impact. Some studies (e.g. Offenburg, 2001; Hough, 2009) found that achievement is greater for students in PK-8 schools than students in traditional middle schools. Other studies (e.g. Dove, Pearson, & Hooper; West & Schwerdt, 2012) found little or no difference between middle schools and PK-8 schools.

Findings on the effects of the PK-8 structure on behavior were also mixed. Most studies (e.g. Hough, 2009; Weiss & Baker-Smith, 2010) found that behavioral problems occurred less frequently for students in PK-8 schools than for students in traditional middle schools. Conversely, Farmer, Hamm, Leung, Lambert, & Gravelle (2011) found that bullying was more frequent in PK-8 schools than in middle schools. Research on the effects of the PK-8 structure on attendance have generally found little to no relationship (e.g. Rockoff & Lockwood, 2010; Connolly, Yakimowski-Srebnick, & Russo, 2002).

Best Practices in K-8 Schools

In Year 2, the evaluation included the identification of best practices within PK-8 schools (see Appendix B for a full summary and table of findings). Most of the best practices that were identified related to creating and implementing a middle school philosophy. Best practices include: creating a separate place for middle school students (Yecke, 2005), building collaboration between teams of teachers (Juvonen, Le, Kaganoff, Augustine, & Constant, 2004; Erb, 2006), and understanding the needs of adolescents (Association for Middle Level Education [AMLE], 2010; Pardini, 2002). Other best practices include maintaining high

expectations for behavior and academic rigor (AMLE, 2010), supporting staff through training and collaboration (Juvonen et al., 2004), and creating a welcoming school culture for students and staff (Guesno, 2012).

School Climate

In Year 3, OPE identified the influence of school climate as a potential factor in the implementation and impact of the PK-8 structure based on Year 1 and Year 2 data collection at the schools as well as discussions with other researchers. School climate has been shown to be a significant influence on school success and may help to explain why findings on the effects of school structure are mixed.

The National School Climate Council defines school climate as “the quality and character of school life” and divides the components of school climate into four categories: 1) safety, 2) teaching and learning, 3) interpersonal relationships, and 4) institutional environment (Thapa, Cohen, Higgins-D’Alessandro & Guffey, 2012). In 2012, the National School Climate Center highlighted the role of school climate in positive youth development, school connectedness, graduation rates, academic achievement, teacher retention, and effective school reform. Positive school climate is linked to beneficial results for students, including improvements in academic achievement, attendance, and student behavior, and may mediate the effects of school structure in these areas (Thapa et al., 2012).

The relationships between school climate and outcomes such as achievement and behavior are unclear in that different components of school climate seem to influence one another reciprocally. For that reason, causality should not be inferred; however, a better understanding of school climate and promoting aspects of climate that influence academic achievement, behavior, and attendance may lead to better student outcomes.

Academic Achievement

School climate has both a direct and indirect relationship with academic achievement for all school-aged children, including the elementary, middle, and high school levels (Thapa et al.,



2012). A correlational study showed that academic achievement in middle schools is related to the degree to which academic achievement is emphasized in the school and how students value academic achievement (Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, & Dumas, 2003). Achievement is also influenced by school climate indirectly. Positive school climates tend to improve relationships within schools, including teacher-student, student-student, and teacher-teacher contact (Thapa et al., 2012), and improved relationships are positively associated with students' grade point averages (Jia et al., 2009). Positive school climates also tend to reduce bullying and improve classroom participation, which are both associated with increased achievement (Cornell, Gregory, Huang, & Fan, 2013; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999).

Behavior and Attendance

School climate is also related to student behavior and attendance. Positive school climates are associated with less violence and bullying, and an increase in students' and adults' sense of safety (Nader, 2012). In a large-scale study including 18,222 students, 701 teachers, and 478 principals across 478 schools in France, researchers found that school climate is a strong predictor of verbal, physical, and cyber bullying (Richard, Schneider, & Mallet, 2011). Specific school climate characteristics that were found to result in fewer instances of bullying are schools that are perceived as safer, that have higher-achieving students, and that have more positive student-teacher relationships (Richard, Schneider, & Mallet, 2011).

Student attendance may also be predicted by school climate, especially by setting high academic standards (Phillips, 1997). According to Phillips' (1997) longitudinal study of over 5,600 middle school students, schools that have high academic expectations and offer demanding curricula encourage better school attendance and higher academic achievement.

Roles of Climate and Structure

School climate may help to explain more of the between-school differences in achievement, behavior, and attendance than school structure. Very few studies have explored the relationship between school climate and school structure on overall school effectiveness. One notable exception, Carolan and Chesky (2012), compared the relationship of school structure and school attachment (a component of school climate) with school effectiveness for traditional 6-8 middle schools, 7-8 middle schools, and K-8 schools with a sample of over 6,290 students'

Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class (ECLS-K) data. Results of this study indicate that school structure has no significant relationship with achievement in reading or math; but school attachment, or the feeling of belonging in a positive school climate, was shown to be a stronger predictor of eighth grade reading and math scores, even more so than projections based on the students' fifth grade scores (Carolan & Chesky, 2012). These studies may warrant an exploration of the impacts of school climate in addition to school structure.

Evaluation Findings

Summaries of evaluation findings are presented by year followed by a comprehensive report of themes and trends across three years.

Year 1: Transition Year

Stakeholder feedback from all groups, including administrators, teachers, parents, and students indicated that the transition process was challenging for schools during the first year, especially with all three middle grades integrated in one year. One of the most challenging aspects was adapting the school facilities to include the influx of middle grade students into former elementary school buildings, both meeting the additional demands for space and outfitting the building for older students. Other than facilities, staffing and reframing the culture of each school appeared to be among the greatest focus areas during the transition process. Assisting middle school students in the transition, particularly those who had previously been at a middle school, emerged as another challenge. Some of the middle school students were displeased with attending “an elementary school;” however opportunities such as mentorship and tutoring were also cited, particularly by principals and teachers, that encouraged positive behavior outcomes.

While the transition presented challenges, stakeholders, particularly school leaders and teachers, identified opportunities presented by the PK-8 structure related to academics and



building a school community. Many stakeholders noted the opportunity to develop relationships among students and parents as a positive step toward increasing student learning and achievement. Furthermore, collaboration among teachers was identified as an effective way to understand and address student needs. Parent and student perceptions of the PK-8 structure were more mixed, with some sharing positive examples and others indicating concerns with the new structure. Detailed findings are presented in the *CMS PK-8 Transition Study Year 1 Report* (D'Amico, Dickenson, Miller, & Tison, 2012).

Year 2: Emergence of Best Practices and Solutions

In Year 2, the evaluation focused on identifying best practices in K-8 settings, and stakeholder perceptions related to student achievement, attendance, and behavior. A number of best practices were identified including: maintaining high expectations for students, developing a welcoming school environment suitable for all grades, and encouraging participation from teachers in the transition.

Stakeholders appeared to be adjusting well to the PK-8 structure in Year 2, sharing more positive views of the structure than in Year 1. Stakeholders in every group reported benefits of the PK-8 model on student achievement, citing opportunities for shared planning, collaboration across grade levels to enhance student learning and better address student needs, and building long-lasting relationships between students and staff members. Almost 70% of parents who participated in the Year 2 evaluation indicated that they liked the PK-8 model. Many students also indicated that there were positive benefits of attending a PK-8 school, including being in the same school as their older or younger family members and developing lasting relationships with teachers. Parents and students reported greater comfort levels with the attention and support they were receiving. Teachers and school leaders also appeared to have an improved outlook about the opportunities provided in the PK-8 environment.

While best practices have been integrated at some of the schools and stakeholder perceptions appeared to be improving, there were continuing challenges identified by all stakeholder groups. Stakeholders indicated trends toward improved student behavior, but noted concerns with student behavior related to the diverse age range and meeting the needs of students across all

grade levels. Additionally, while many expressed confidence in the academic preparation of students in PK-8 schools, the compromised “middle school experience” concerned some stakeholders. This involves the perceptions that there were limited course offerings at PK-8 schools, fewer freedoms and privileges for these students, and a lack of sports and other extracurricular activities that are connected to school pride and development of motivation. More detailed findings are presented in *CMS PK-8 Transition Study Year 2 Report* (D’Amico, Miller, & Dixon, 2013).

Year 3: Settling into PK-8 Structure

In Year 3, most of the PK-8 schools had more fully integrated the grade levels and developed a new PK-8 school culture. Stakeholders generally solidified their beliefs about the transition to PK-8 schools, accepting the change and working to build a positive school culture; however, there were continuing concerns related to the reasons for the change (targeted particular communities and populations of students) and student outcomes.

The Year 3 evaluation explored the impact of school climate on student outcomes, which may have a stronger impact on the PK-8 schools now that full integration has been attained. Studies show that a positive school climate results in improved academic achievement, attendance, and student behavior, and may compensate for the effects of school structure in these areas (Brand et al., 2003; Cornell et al., 2013; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Jia et al., 2009; Nader, 2012; Phillips, 1997; Richard, Schneider, & Mallet, 2011; Thapa et al., 2012). Administrators and school leaders shared that efforts are being made to focus on building a positive school culture to include the entire range of students and creating a unified school experience. For example, during a principal focus group, many shared experiences related to bringing new sports opportunities to their schools and their positive impact on the school climate, facilitating school pride. A PK-8 principal shared:

“We have athletics for the seventh and eighth grade; the younger kids are coming to see those [sporting events] and getting much more involved and it gives them something to aspire to.”



Stakeholders in every group identified both pros and cons of the new model. Positive aspects of the model related to enhanced opportunities for staff to build long-standing relationships with students, resulting in improved academic performance and fewer behavior issues. Teachers, administrators, and parents also shared the positive benefits of teacher collaboration to provide support to struggling students across multiple grades and provide a fully aligned curriculum from pre-kindergarten through Grade 8.

Several challenges continue to be observed, mainly related to recruiting and maintaining high-quality staff. Staffing challenges emerged during Year 1 related to staff allotments. Since the first year, staffing allotments have improved, but the administrators and school leaders cite a need for additional staff to provide a range of courses for middle grade students and address administration needs. Additional concerns have arisen about maintaining high-quality staff and reducing turnover in these schools. One of the primary benefits of the PK-8 schools is the opportunity to build long-lasting relationships between staff and students; therefore, reducing turnover is essential to maintaining a unified, positive school culture. Since Year 1, five of the eight PK-8 principals have changed. Similar concerns arose about teacher turnover, as many of the individual PK-8 schools experienced a significant loss of staff prior to the restructuring, and continued to have varied levels of retention in the years following the transition.

Furthermore, facilities have remained a challenge since the first year. When the schools transitioned, the former elementary buildings experienced increases from 150 to 300 students. The previous facilities remain inadequate for the large influx of students as well as meeting the physical needs of the middle grade students.

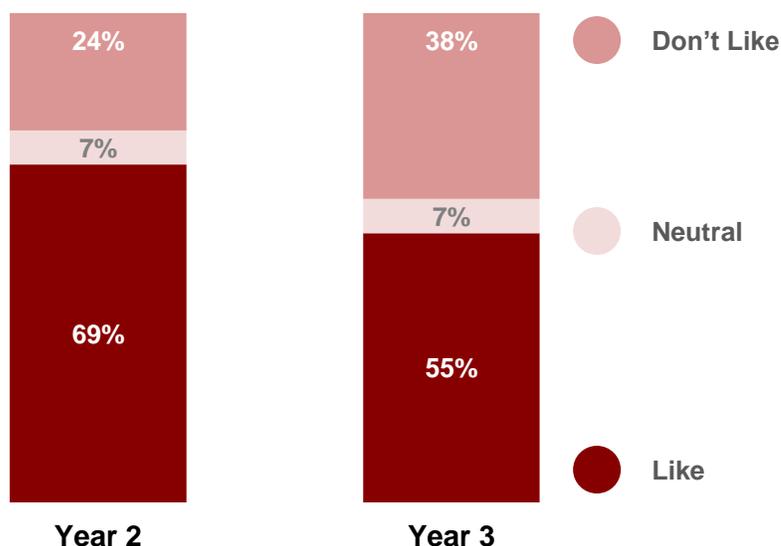
Trends Across Multiple Years

Stakeholder Perceptions

After Year 1, stakeholder groups appeared to be more comfortable with the PK-8 structure. As shown in Chart A, more than 50% of parents surveyed reported that they like the PK-8 structure in Years 2 and 3. There was a slight decline in the percentage who indicated that they liked the structure from Year 2 to Year 3. Higher rates of parent support for the PK-8 model in Year 2 could be a result of relief that the model did not produce the negative consequences that were anticipated during Year 1, with enthusiasm tapering in Year 3 as the PK-8 model became more established at their schools. Fluctuations in parent responses may also be explained by difference in parents participating in the survey from Year 2 to Year 3.

A)

While fewer parents commented that they like the PK-8 structure in Year 3, the majority like or are neutral about the structure.



*Parent data was collected in a different format in Year 1, therefore comparisons cannot be made.

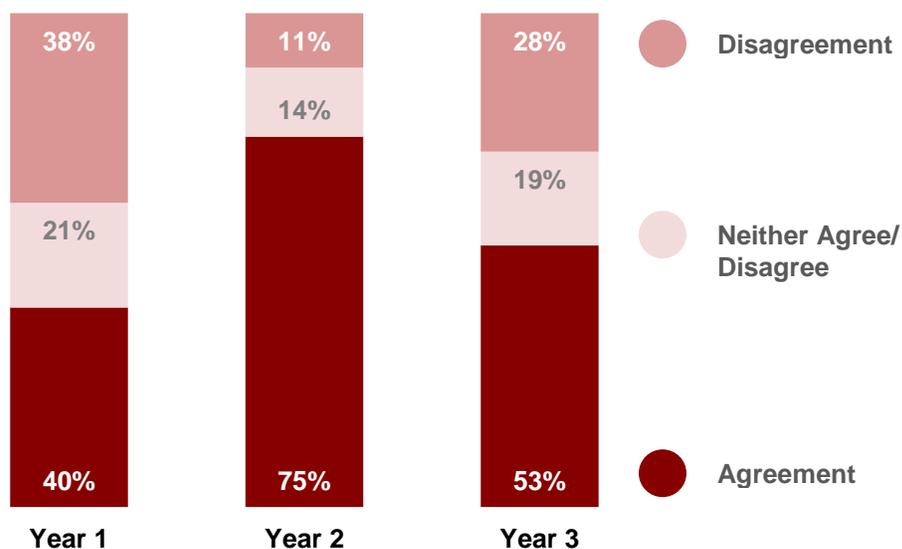
Many administrators and some teachers cited the benefits of the PK-8 structure beginning in Year 1. They cited such benefits as the opportunity to develop long-term relationships with families, the lack of transition from elementary to middle school, mentor opportunities for middle

school students, and remediation or acceleration options. Administrators and teachers shared that they are building the school culture and are better able to manage the schools and their classrooms, however, they continue to experience challenges.

Compared to Year 1, students reported more positive aspects of their school, and were less likely to cite their desire to be in a traditional middle school. In general, middle school students took longer to adjust to the new structure, perceiving it as unfair that they had to return to “elementary” schools, with fewer opportunities and limited freedoms. As the last cohort of students who returned to the PK-8 schools from the closed middle schools graduated from eighth grade, more of the current middle school students are familiar with the PK-8 structure and share fewer complaints. Chart B shows that teacher survey responses also supported the student responses, with more teachers agreeing that their students are adjusting to the PK-8 school environment in Years 2 and 3.

B)

After Year 1, the majority of teachers reported that they agree that their students are adjusting to the PK-8 school environment.



Response rates to the teacher survey were highest in Year 3, making the Year 3 data the most reliable measure of teachers' attitudes and beliefs. Year 1 and 2 response rates to the teacher survey ranged between 25 and 35%, while alterations to data collection methods yielded a higher response rate of approximately 80% in Year 3.

Community Trust

While there are generally more positive perceptions about the PK-8 schools, some stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and administrators, have lingering beliefs about the fairness of change in these locations. They commented on the general community perception that the school closures and restructuring occurred in specific areas. Some mentioned that they thought it unlikely that drastic school restructuring would happen in more affluent neighborhoods, and they felt targeted and marginalized by the change. The CMS Board of Education cited budgetary reasons as the basis for the transition; however, some stakeholders are skeptical about this rationale and are concerned about repercussions of this structure on the growth and future success of these students. Building community trust and support around the PK-8 schools through listening to concerns, addressing inequities, and providing information to stakeholders are desired as these schools continue to operate and grow.

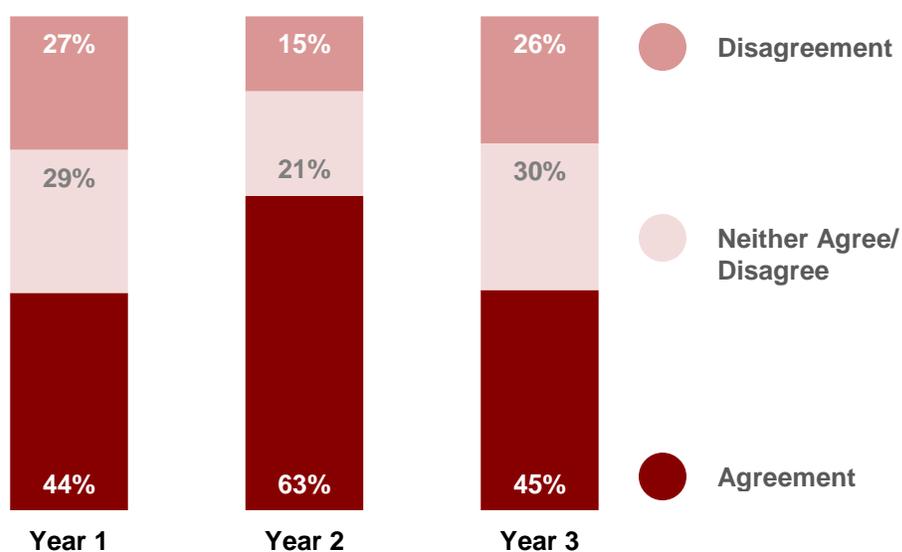
Ongoing analysis and communication of results of the PK-8 structure by CMS may help promote renewed trust between these schools and the community. In particular, stakeholders seemed to be most concerned about students' transition to high school and future student outcomes such as high school graduation and college and career readiness.

Staff Integration and Collaboration

Satisfaction

Teachers and administrators' job satisfaction has improved since Year 1. Chart C shows that over the three years of the transition study, approximately half of the teachers agree that they enjoy working at a PK-8 school, and an additional 20 to 30% did not share a preference between PK-8 versus non-PK-8 schools.

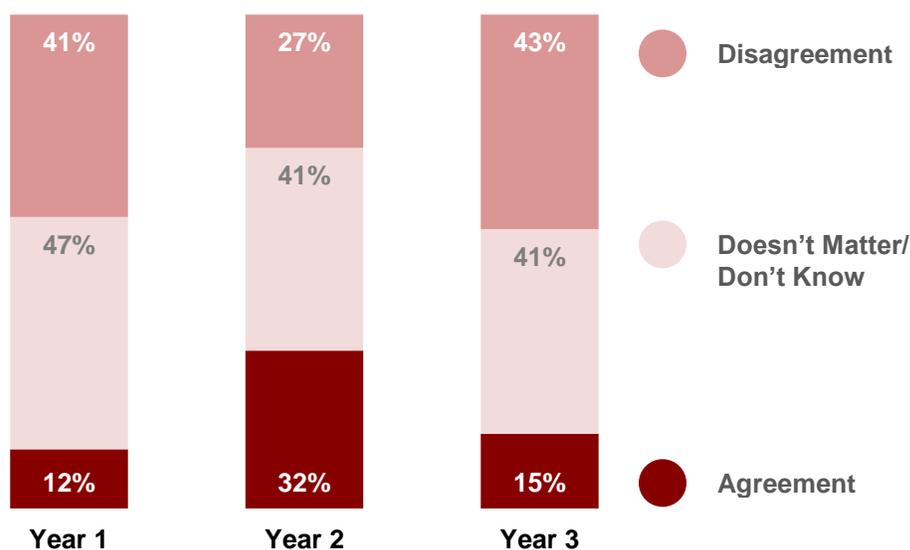
C) **Approximately half of the teachers agree that they enjoy working in a PK-8 school, with an additional 21-30% sharing no preference.**



As shown in Chart D, a small subset of teachers reported that they would rather work in a PK-8 school than a non-PK-8 school; however, many did not have a preference, or indicated they did not know.

D)

A small percent of teachers specifically prefer working in a PK-8 school rather than a non-PK-8 school, however, almost half do not have a preference.



Staffing Needs

All stakeholder groups continue to report challenges related to staffing. Administrators shared limitations in allotments to hire an adequate number of teachers and support staff. Hiring allotments have been a challenge since the transition, due to uncertainty in the projected student population after the initial mergers of the schools. Now, in Year 3, the issue persists and concerns have arisen about needs for hiring additional teachers or administrative staff, especially to offer advanced courses or special content courses for all grade levels. In focus groups with students, many shared the desire for additional staff to manage student behavior, offer more courses, and allow students to change teachers.

Staff Collaboration

During the principal focus group, administrators requested the opportunity to meet with the other PK-8 principals to share their experiences and provide support to each other. Currently, the PK-8 principals meet with the elementary schools during district meetings and professional development. Providing them the opportunity to meet together, instead of grouping them with other grade configurations, will recognize their unique position.

Staff Turnover

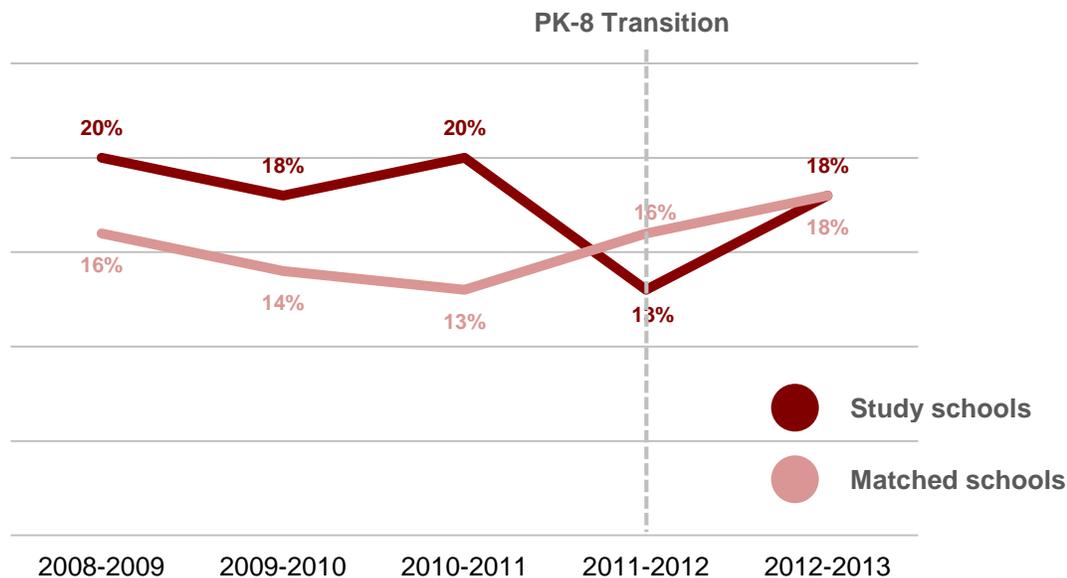
Some of the PK-8 principals were concerned about turnover, particularly among middle school teachers, that may be specifically related to school structure. At PK-8 schools, many of the middle school teachers do not have colleagues within their content area. In traditional middle school settings, teachers often collaborate within their content areas to gain support, explore new ideas, and encourage mastery of material among diverse student learners. Without peers in the same content area, middle school teachers may feel isolated, which may lead to difficulty in attracting and retaining middle school teachers at PK-8 schools.

To better understand teacher turnover, OPE evaluators analyzed turnover data from CMS and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. The eight PK-8 schools and three closed middle schools were matched with schools with similar rates of students receiving free and reduced lunch. Due to the small number of schools included in the analysis, the schools were eligible for matching on only one indicator; therefore, other relevant factors such as school size or student achievement prior to the transition were not included. Analyses were performed to determine whether there were differences in teacher turnover rates before and after the PK-8 transition, which occurred in the 2011-2012 school year.

Chart E shows that there was an increase in teacher turnover the year before the PK-8 transition in the study schools, likely as a result of the CMS Board of Education's announcement of the impending school transition. The study schools experienced a decrease in turnover the year of the transition. Since the transition year, the rate of teacher turnover at the study schools has been similar to the turnover at the matched schools. Future analyses could indicate a more detailed comparison of teacher turnover in traditional schools and PK-8 schools, including long-term teacher retention, grade-level differences in attrition, and migration.

E)

The PK-8 schools and closed middle schools experienced an increase in teacher turnover the year before the transition.

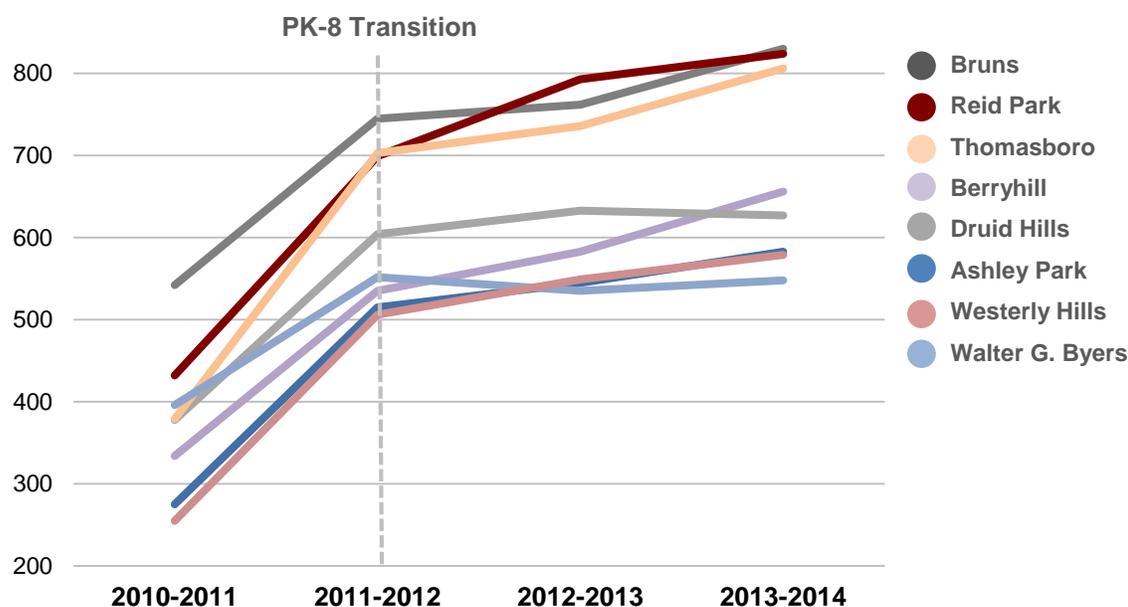


Facilities and Student Body Needs

Concerns with school facilities meeting the needs of the growing student body and range in students' physical size have remained at the forefront over the course of the transition study. Chart F shows the change in student body size at each of the eight PK-8 schools over the course of the transition study. During the first year of the transition, each school's student body grew by at least 200 students, with minor facility adaptations, including the addition of mobile classroom units. Since the transition, the student population has continued to grow at most of the PK-8 schools. The largest schools as a result of this transition are Bruns, Thomasboro, and Reid Park.

F)

All of the PK-8 schools experienced a large increase in their student population during the transition, with enrollment continuing to grow.



All stakeholder groups consistently reported challenges with the physical capacity of their schools. Administrators shared concerns every year about too few classrooms, limited space for tutoring and other special needs, inadequate space for physical education and sports, and undersized accommodations for middle school students. Principals shared the following in a focus group:

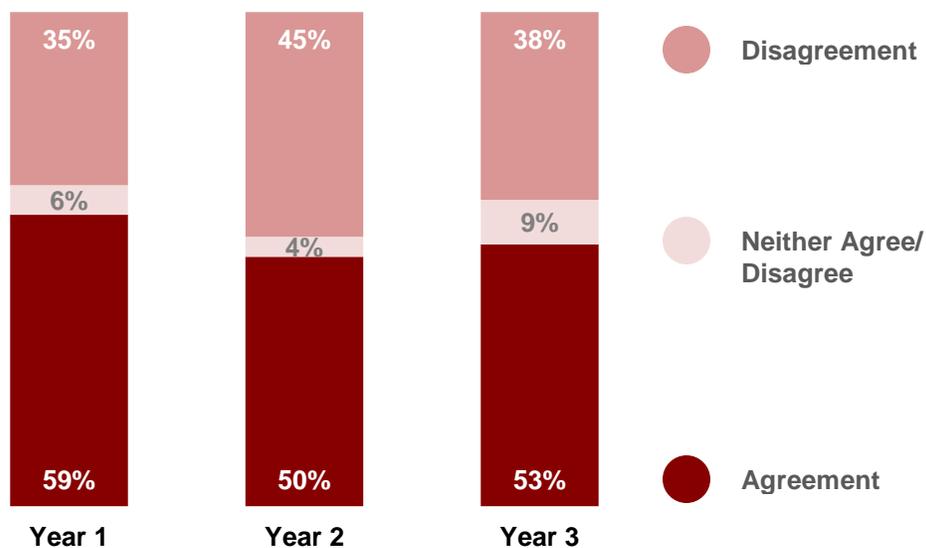
“One of the things the model has taken from my lower grades is space because art used to be a room now it’s on a cart. Music is on a cart so they [students] have to stay in that classroom and the teacher travels to them.”

“My middle schoolers always have to go outside for health and PE because there is no space; which means my 3rd through 5th graders can’t play on the black top because the middle grades are there.”

Teachers consistently reported challenges related to the limitations of their schools' facilities. As shown in Chart G, across the three years of the study, approximately half of the surveyed teachers said that their classrooms meet the needs of their students. A smaller percent of teachers, ranging from 25% to 31% in Years 1 through 3, shared that the physical environment of their schools meets the needs of their students, including hallways, restrooms, gymnasium, etc (shown in Chart H).

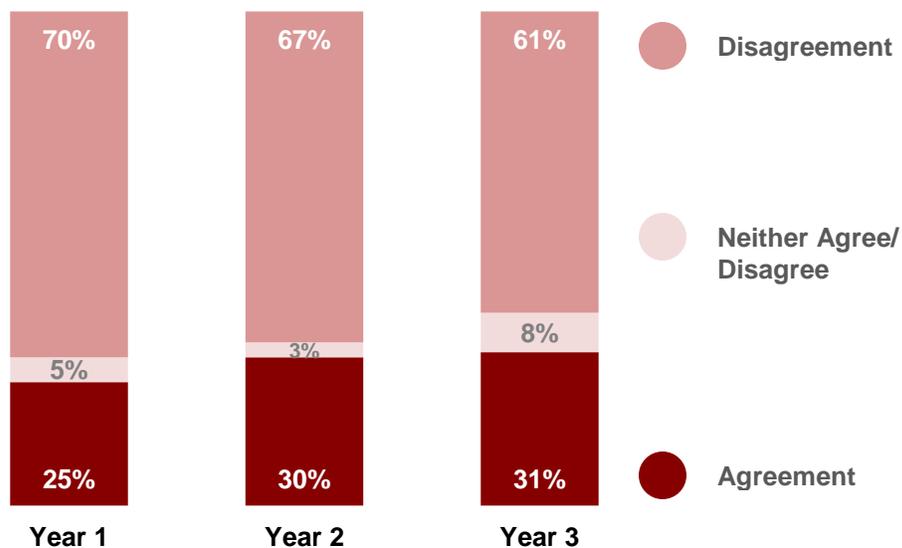
G)

Approximately half of teachers agree that the physical environment of their classrooms meets the needs of their students.



H)

The majority of teachers disagree that the physical environment of their schools meets the needs of their students.



Students also consistently commented that their schools are not large enough or do not have enough space. In focus groups, they shared desires for “bigger classrooms” and “bigger gym[s]” because the schools “feel crowded” and that the “student body is too big for the school.” Furthermore, students across all grade levels shared that buses are overcrowded.

In March and April of 2013, the CMS Board of Education shared plans for the 2013 CMS Bond Referendum to expand the use of PK-8 schools, both public and charter. Construction for several new and existing schools is underway, with opening dates between 2017 and 2020. The 2013 CMS Bond Referendum also allotted funds for various facility improvements for seven of the eight PK-8 schools participating in the study. The proposed updates include new gym facilities, additional specialty classrooms, and expanded cafeterias, and updates are slated to be complete between 2017 and 2019. Additionally, a relief school for Berryhill School and Reid Park Academy is planned to open in 2017. Administrators agree that the planned facility improvements are necessary, but shared disappointment that they will not be completed for at least two more years. Some also reported that the planned improvements are not sufficient to cover the vast deficits in facilities at their schools.

Student Behavior

Over the course of the three-year study, stakeholders in every group consistently brought up concerns about behavior. While the intensity of their concerns lessened each year, school staff, parents, and even students still cite behavior as a primary issue. Most concerning to stakeholders is the potential negative influence on younger students from their exposure to inappropriate behavior of older children, such as fighting, cursing, and talking back to teachers. Bullying also emerged as a concern, both between older and younger students, as well as between students in the same grade. A teacher commented:

“The examples set by the middle school students for behavior are not a good example for our elementary students.”

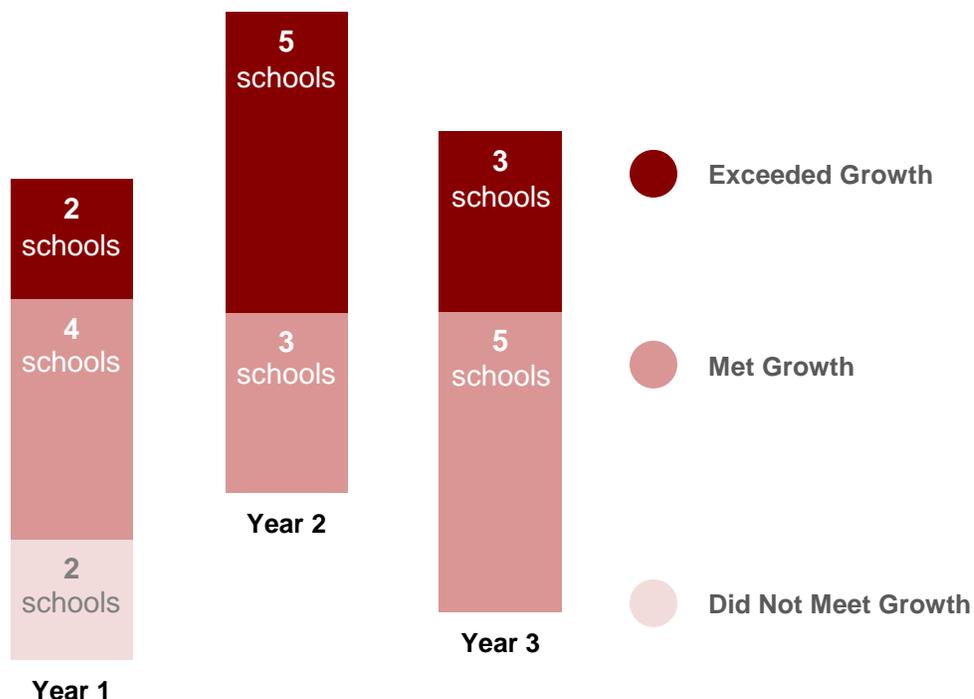
The majority of teachers consistently reported on the survey that positive behaviors declined as a result of the transition to the PK-8 structure. Many teachers agree that they have had to change the way they address behavior in their classrooms as a result of the transition. During carpool interviews, some parents expressed the desire for older students to attend a separate middle school because the older students were a bad influence on younger students. Students also noted behavior and bullying as concerns, sharing that “teachers don’t get to teach because of the behavior problems.”

Student Achievement

Providing a positive, continuous school environment to improve student achievement was cited as one of the primary benefits for transitioning the selected schools into PK-8 schools. In Year 1, six of the eight schools met or exceeded growth targets. In Year 2, all eight of the schools met or exceeded growth targets, with five exceeding growth. Similarly, in Year 3, the eight PK-8 schools met or exceeded growth. Chart I details the number of schools at each growth level over the three years of the study.

1)

In Years 2 and 3, all of the PK-8 schools met academic expectations, with several schools Exceeding Growth.



From Year 1, stakeholders, particularly principals and teachers, shared the benefits of merging elementary and middle schools to better meet the academic and social needs of the entire range of students. Administrators and teachers reported benefits such as vertical planning and aligning curriculum across the span of pre-kindergarten through Grade 8. Teachers also cited opportunities for professional growth through leadership and collaboration with teachers of all grade levels, which provides additional support to students struggling academically and socially. One teacher commented:

“I have had the opportunity to work with all grade levels...It has given me insight into developmental differences not only among different ages but among different ability levels.”

Additionally, teachers, parents, and students shared positive attributes about the model related to academic benefits and the opportunity to build long-lasting relationships with school staff. A teacher summarized:

“Building relationships with students beyond the K-5 setting has allowed for positive interactions with students in middle school to help push them for success. Teachers and students are able to see each other and each other's growth for a longer timeframe.”

Middle School Experience

While there are many academic benefits to the PK-8 school structure, students, especially middle grade students, are also limited in areas related to curricular and extracurricular opportunities. Stakeholders in all groups (principals, teachers, parents, and students) consistently reported limitations for students related to offering a variety of courses outside of the core requirements. For most schools, the course restrictions are a result of limited staff allotments. Administrators shared struggles of balancing core staffing needs with offering advanced classes and electives. Stakeholders in all groups desired a broader range of courses, particularly related to additional elective offerings.

In addition to limited course offerings, stakeholders shared other limitations of the PK-8 structure specifically related to middle grade students. Administrators, teachers, parents, and students all commented that they do not think that middle grade students get the full experience of a middle school at the PK-8 schools, with limitations in freedom, lack of lockers, fewer classes and teacher changes, and less variety in sports offerings. Students consistently shared that they “don’t feel like it is a real middle school.” A teacher shared:

“Middle school students are cheated out of a maturation process... because the environment doesn't allow for the treatment of a true middle school system.”

These challenges have been reported since Year 1, with few improvements to alleviate stakeholder concerns. Sports teams are the exception, with several of the schools offering soccer or basketball in Year 3.

Preparedness for High School

After the initial transition year, stakeholders in every group commented on the potential for middle grade students in PK-8 settings to not be fully prepared for high school. Parents, teachers, and administrators commented on the student body size difference of the PK-8 schools compared to the larger high schools, and were concerned about high schools having a much larger teacher-to-student ratio. While the close attention the staff pays to middle grade students is a positive aspect of the PK-8 schools, concerns arose about the middle grades students' ability to transition to high school where they would receive much less direct attention. Several of the administrators and teachers raised concerns about their students "getting lost" in high school. One teacher shared:

"I think we are neglecting the social development of our middle school students. They need time to interact socially, but this is often seen as misbehavior. Also, it leads them to high school and they are lost—they don't even know how to walk to class on their own."

Stakeholders also raised concerns about the students' limited freedom and opportunities, compared to a traditional middle school, making them unprepared to cope with the freedom and challenging coursework in high school. Parents and teachers shared apprehension about even minor adjustments, such as learning to use a locker and navigating the larger schools. Students reiterated many of the same issues, bringing up concerns about changing classes on their own in high school and meeting a variety of new teachers, because they currently have one teacher per subject who has remained consistent throughout their middle grades.

Conclusions

In the third year since the transition, the PK-8 culture has been fully integrated into the eight schools. Stakeholders' perceptions of the model have improved since Year 1, focusing more on the academic benefits and building a positive, unified culture within the schools. Stakeholders in every group praised the PK-8 schools for the enhanced opportunities for academic growth, as a result of teacher collaboration across grades, vertical planning, and sharing resources. Teachers and school staff also have the opportunity to build long-lasting relationships with students from pre-kindergarten to Grade 8, allowing them to better understand and address students' individual academic and social-emotional needs. Administrators and school staff are working to use the improved academics and additional staff collaboration to the benefit of building a positive school climate, which may influence student achievement as much or more than the structure. Positive school climates within the PK-8 schools can maximize the opportunities and minimize the challenges.

While the PK-8 schools are lauded for their academic benefits and unified school culture, several challenges have persisted since the transition. Stakeholders continue to cite issues with managing student behavior, especially related to older students exposing younger students to inappropriate behavior. Furthermore, many stakeholders perceive the PK-8 schools as having a limited experience for middle grade students, with regards to advanced course offerings, electives, sports, and other privileges and freedoms. Some expressed concerns that the limited middle school experience may negatively impact students' ability to smoothly transition to high school. Staffing also emerged as a concern during the first year and remains an issue. Administrators, teachers, and students cited the need for additional school staff to provide more course offerings and better manage student behavior. Additionally, stakeholders in every group shared concerns about the size of the facilities to accommodate the increased student body. The CMS Board of Education approved a bond referendum in 2013 to renovate these schools, building new facilities such as larger gymnasiums, improved cafeterias, and additional specialty classrooms. These facility updates are planned to be completed between 2017 and 2020.

Based on the location of closures, some community members question the fairness of the school transitions. Parents, teachers, and administrators understand the concerns about budget cuts in the 2010-2011 academic year, but remain skeptical about the necessity for all of the PK-8 transitions and middle school closures in these particular areas. Stakeholders felt targeted by the school closures and restructuring, especially in addition to the reduced staffing and delayed renovations. The district's understanding and resolution of issues faced by PK-8, schools and transparency in reporting outcomes of current and former PK-8 students, are important in developing the trust and support of the communities in which these schools are located. Stakeholders desire more information about the academic achievement of students in PK-8 schools compared to their counterparts at elementary and middle schools as well as the high school opportunities, performance, and graduation rates of former PK-8 school students.

Recommendations

Provide structured time for PK-8 principals to meet as a unified group.

PK-8 principals shared that, during district-wide meetings, they are frequently grouped with either elementary or middle level principals, and are not afforded the opportunity to meet separately. While the information at both elementary and middle levels is pertinent to the PK-8 administrators, they would like to receive recognition and individual attention for their unique situations. Furthermore, the PK-8 principals requested the opportunity to meet as a separate group to discuss issues specific to their specialized grade configuration.

Explore methods to provide additional course options and extracurricular activities for middle level students.

While the size of the middle school cohort at PK-8 schools is smaller than traditional middle schools, allowing the opportunity for better teacher-student relationships and targeted teaching, the options for courses and extracurricular activities may be limited for this same reason. Partnerships between PK-8 schools to provide middle-level students with a broader array of core courses, electives, clubs, and sports may be an option. Student access to more course offerings and extracurricular activities may lead to enhanced satisfaction with the school configuration and better preparation for students entering high school.

Communicate the impact of the PK-8 model with community stakeholders.

Stakeholders, especially some administrators, teachers, and parents, reported feeling marginalized by the radical restructuring of schools in their areas. Efforts to further explore the community's perceptions of the model may be needed. Then, district leaders, administrators, and policy makers can use stakeholders' feedback to enhance their communication on any concerns and the impact of the PK-8 model on students to address their concerns.

Explore the climate of the schools related to the PK-8 structure and practices.

The PK-8 structure offers opportunities as well as challenges in meeting the needs of their wide range of students. The climate of the schools, including how district leaders and school administrators respond to these opportunities and challenges, offers insights into best practices within the PK-8 model. The aspects of school climate supporting PK-8 schools should be shared with other PK-8 schools to further facilitate their growth.

Next Steps

As CMS moves forward with supporting current PK-8 schools and opening new PK-8 schools, future analyses to better understand long-term impacts of school structure on students may be warranted.

1) Analyze the courses offered at PK-8 schools compared to traditional elementary and middle schools to determine if there is a difference.

Many stakeholders perceive limitations in electives and advanced-level core courses at PK-8 schools, however, at this time, there is no evidence to confirm that limitations are a direct result of the modified school structure, or if these limitations persist at traditional schools as well. Comparing the course offerings at PK-8 schools to those at traditional elementary and middle schools will clarify if this is a valid concern and help pinpoint course deficits.

2) Analyze staffing allotments and teacher turnover to determine the effects of the PK-8 transition and structure on teachers.

The matched comparison turnover analysis revealed an increase in teacher turnover at the eight PK-8 schools the year before the transition, with turnover rates returning to similar levels as the schools matched on socio-economic status within about two years. A further analysis

comparing elementary and middle level teachers' turnover could show more detail related to teacher turnover in PK-8 schools and allow for more targeted teacher support or to adjust hiring practices. Additionally, PK-8 administrators, teachers, and students consistently commented on the limited number of staff members to provide the full range of desired courses and meet the demands of the student population. The administrators and staff at the PK-8 schools may benefit from further analysis of staffing allotments, including possibilities of staffing support and staff sharing with schools in similar situations.

3) Compare high school preparation and performance of PK-8 students and traditional middle school students.

Stakeholders in all groups expressed concerns that students in PK-8 schools may not be adequately prepared for high school, both academically and socially. Future analyses could explore differences between students from PK-8 schools and traditional middle schools with regards to graduation rates, academic achievement, or behavior. The outcomes of these analyses can help to direct PK-8 teachers and administrators to any potential areas to improve the high school preparation for PK-8 students.

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Appendix A. Achievement, Behavior, and Attendance Literature

Achievement

Byrnes & Ruby (2007)	Established K-8 schools perform significantly better than middle schools; however, newer K-8 schools did not show the same gains
Connolly, Yakimowski-Srebnick, & Russo (2002)	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
Dove, Pearson, & Hooper (2010)	No relationship between academic achievement and grade span configuration for Grade 6 students
Hough (2009)	Middle level students in K-8 schools had higher academic achievement than students attending middle school
Offenburg (2001)	Higher overall performance on standardized tests in K-8 schools
Poncelet & Metis Associates (2004)	Positive math/reading outcomes for students in K-8 schools
Rockoff & Lockwood (2010)	Declines in math/English achievement associated with transition to middle school; middle school students continue to fall behind K-8 peers over time
Schwartz, Stiefel, Rubenstein, & Zabel (2011)	Higher academic performance for students attending a K-8 school or middle school with grades 5-8, rather than students attending middle schools starting in Grades 6 or 7
Weiss & Baker-Smith (2010)	Students who attended middle school showed declines in grade point averages in Grade 9 compared to those who attended K-8 schools
Weiss & Kipnes (2006)	No achievement differences between students in middle and K-8 schools
*West & Schwerdt (2012)	Drop in achievement from elementary to middle school in Grade 6 or 7 occurs in cities and rural areas and persists through Grade 10
Whitley, Lupart, & Beran (2007)	No achievement differences between Grade 7 students who transitioned to middle school and those who remained at same school

○ Behavior

Arcia (2007)	Grade 6 and 7 students at middle schools had higher rates of suspension than their counterparts at K-8 schools
Booth, Sheehan, & Earley (2007)	Students in K-8 schools reported higher levels of self-esteem than students in other grade configurations, with the traditional grade configurations having a more negative impact on girls than boys
Connolly, Yakimowski-Srebnick, & Russo (2002)	Students at middle schools perceived as demonstrating less courtesy and respect than their K-8 counterparts
Farmer et al. (2011)	Bullying more frequent in K-8 schools than middle schools.
Hough (2009)	Middle level students in K-8 schools had fewer behavior referrals than students attending middle school
Weiss & Baker-Smith (2010)	Former K-8 students have less delinquent behavior in Grade 9 than their middle school counterparts

○ Attendance

Connolly, Yakimowski-Srebnick, & Russo (2002)	No relationship between daily school attendance and type of school
Rockoff & Lockwood (2010)	Middle school students miss slightly more days than their K-8 peers
Schwerdt & West (2011)	Students entering middle school have more absences and higher rates of Grade 10 dropouts compared to other grade configurations
Weiss & Baker-Smith (2010)	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)

Appendix B. Best Practices for PK-8 Model

To identify best practices within the PK-8 model, OPE staff reviewed literature and conducted interviews with CMS school leaders. OPE staff also contacted four large urban school districts that were cited in literature related to PK-8 schools. These four school districts are located across the country and have 57,000 or more students. The average number of K-8 schools across these four districts was 58. Administrators interviewed from these districts included a principal, chief academic officer, program director, and a network leader with specialized knowledge on the PK-8 model. The following predominant themes emerged.

● High Expectations

The Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE; 2010), Yecke (2006), and CMS school leaders recommended setting clear, intentional, rigorous expectations about procedures and boundaries. CMS school leaders suggested continuing the same school-wide expectations that worked before the transition. They also mentioned that the incidence of behavior problems will likely rise at the beginning of each year due to increased enforcement of high expectations, but these problems will decrease as students meet expectations.

● Structured Interactions Between Students

According to Yecke (2006), CMS school leaders, and administrators in other districts with PK-8 schools, separating elementary and middle levels in different wings allows school leaders and teachers to keep interactions between grades meaningful and purposeful. Alternatively, some CMS school leaders emphasized benefits of not segregating students by grade levels and integrating all students, regardless of age.

● Welcoming School Culture

CMS school leaders communicated the importance of being intentional about the school culture and making all students feel welcome. Adding one grade level at a time may be helpful (Pardini, 2002), as it gives more time for the schools to adjust (Yecke, 2006). Other districts noted that helping faculty welcome the merge can also be a challenge. Guesno (2012) recommends that leaders help faculty and staff welcome change and maintain unity by involving faculty in the new design process (AMLE, 2010). Guesno (2012) also suggests providing opportunities for the merging faculty to create relationships and respectfully share differences.

● Staff Training and Collaboration

Juvonen, Le, Kaganoff, Augustine, & Constant (2004) and school leaders in similar districts mentioned how departmental changes during merges may lead to challenges with teacher licensure and a lack of content knowledge. Professional development is needed to support teacher collaboration and learning about students in other grade levels (AMLE, 2010). CMS school leaders recommended school-wide staff development opportunities on topics that pertain to grade span and promote the development of a common academic language.

Erb (2006) and Juvonen et al. (2004) recommend using interdisciplinary teams, or looping, to facilitate teachers sharing the same group of students and planning together to provide students the necessary guidance. To support interdisciplinary planning, school leaders in similar districts across the country recommended using creative scheduling and allowing single-strand teachers to collaborate with other local schools or work within a team.

● Implementing a Middle-Level Philosophy

Several studies and administrators from similar school districts across the country mentioned the need to distinguish sixth through eighth grade students as developmentally different from their elementary counterparts and that they require appropriate support (AMLE, 2010; Bean & Lipka, 2006; Erb, 2006; Hough, 2005; Institute for School Improvement, 2004). CMS school leaders, as well as administrators in similar districts, also noted that middle level students desire

an identity within the school, and some recommendations included designating a separate location within the school with a different name, and providing lockers, clubs, athletics, and electives for middle school students. Another way to provide support for middle grade students is through adult mentors (AMLE, 2010; Juvonen et al., 2004). CMS leaders recommended pairing students who need extra support with teachers in a buddy system and coaching eighth graders individually about the transition to high school.

Recommended Practices

Implement a middle level philosophy to address developmentally different needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Association for Middle Level Edu, 2010 ▪ Bean & Lipka, 2006 ▪ Erb, 2006 ▪ Hough, 2005 ▪ Institute for School Improvement, 2004 ▪ Pardini, 2002
Use interdisciplinary teams, vertical alignment, and common planning times	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Association for Middle Level Edu, 2010 ▪ Erb, 2006 ▪ Hough, 2005 ▪ Juvonen et al., 2004
Include staff and faculty throughout the transition process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Association of Middle Level Edu, 2010 ▪ Guesno, 2012
Provide professional development for teachers to compensate for structural changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Association for Middle Level Edu, 2010 ▪ Juvonen et al., 2004
Provide academic and social support for students through adult mentors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Association for Middle Level Edu, 2010 ▪ Juvonen et al., 2004
Transition one grade level at a time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pardini, 2002 ▪ Yecke, 2006
Separate elementary and middle levels within the K-8 school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yecke, 2006
Hold students to high academic and behavioral expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yecke, 2006

Appendix C. Data Collection Protocols

Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools PK-8 Transition Project Regional Superintendent Interview Protocol

1. The PK-8 schools are now in their third year. What changes have happened since you have been involved with the 5 PK-8 Project LIFT schools?
2. Is the LIFT structure or initiative different in the five PK-8 schools than the two LIFT elementary schools (Allenbrook and Stateville Road) and the LIFT middle school (Ranson)?
3. What opportunities are occurring within the PK-8 schools?
4. What challenges are occurring within the PK-8 schools?
 - a. Athletics?
 - b. Influence of middle schoolers on elementary students?
 - c. Staffing—integration of elementary and middle school teachers? Leadership—Are there enough principals/asst. principals?
5. Are you seeing a difference in the schools overall based on PK-8 structure?
 - a. Attendance
 - b. Achievement
 - c. Behavior
6. Are there emerging practices that seem to work well for PK-8 schools?
 - a. Are there major differences in the way these individual schools have approached the PK-8 school structure or environment?

Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools PK-8 Transition Project
Principal Focus Group Protocol

1. Based on our work over the last two years, we have heard about new opportunities that emerged based on the PK-8 structure.
 - a. Vertical Alignment of Curriculum from PK through Grade 8
 - b. Better and Longer Relationships with Students and Families
 - c. Fewer Transitions (No Transition to Middle School)
 - d. More Opportunities for Remediation or Reinforcement of Skills (access to teaching reading)
 - e. Opportunities for Role Modeling and Peer Tutoring For Middle Schoolers
2. Are these opportunities accurate? What have we left out?
3. Have school-based efforts or practices in these areas improved over the last two years or in your tenure at the school?
4. We have heard about challenges that have emerged based on PK-8 structure in existing schools
 - a. Facilities (too small, not designed for middle schoolers)
 - b. Extracurricular Activities particularly Athletics for Middle Schoolers
 - c. Limited Course Offerings for Middle Schoolers (Art, Music, Varying levels of Math)
 - d. Managing Diverse Needs, particularly emotional/behavior needs, of Elementary and Middle Schoolers
5. Are these challenges accurate? What have we left out?
6. Have challenges diminished over the years since the transition or your tenure at the school?
7. If no, what do you need to alleviate these challenges?
8. Thinking about PK-5 students, what aspects of the PK-8 schools may help or hinder them?
9. Thinking about 6-8 students, what aspects of the PK-8 schools may help or hinder them?

Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools PK-8 Transition Project
Student Focus Group Protocol

1. What do you like about your school?
2. What are things that you don't like about your school?

Elementary

3. Do you like being in school with 6-8th grade students?
 - a. Why?
4. How often do you see the 6-8 grade students?
5. Are you glad to stay at the same school through 8th grade?

Middle

6. Do you like being in school with elementary students?
 - a. Why?
7. How often do you see the elementary students?
8. Are you glad to be at a PK-8 school?

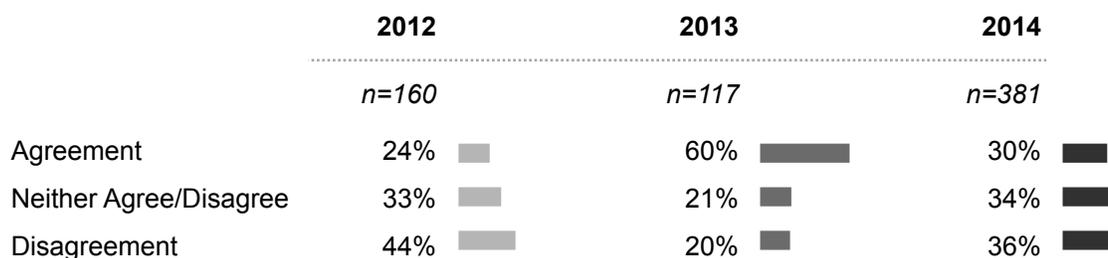
Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools PK-8 Transition Project
Parent Drop-Off Interview Protocol

Do you like the PK-8 structure?	Student Grade	Please share any comments about the PK-8 structure.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> PreK <input type="checkbox"/> Elem <input type="checkbox"/> Middle	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> PreK <input type="checkbox"/> Elem <input type="checkbox"/> Middle	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> PreK <input type="checkbox"/> Elem <input type="checkbox"/> Middle	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> PreK <input type="checkbox"/> Elem <input type="checkbox"/> Middle	

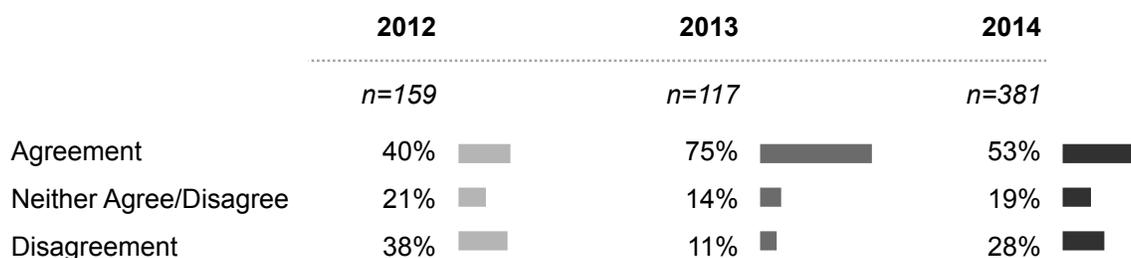
Appendix D. Teacher Survey Results 2012-2014

*Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

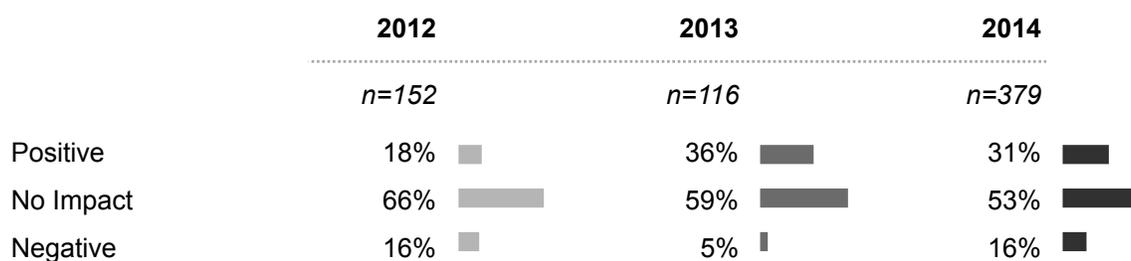
1. I believe that the students in my classroom like being at a PreK-8 school.



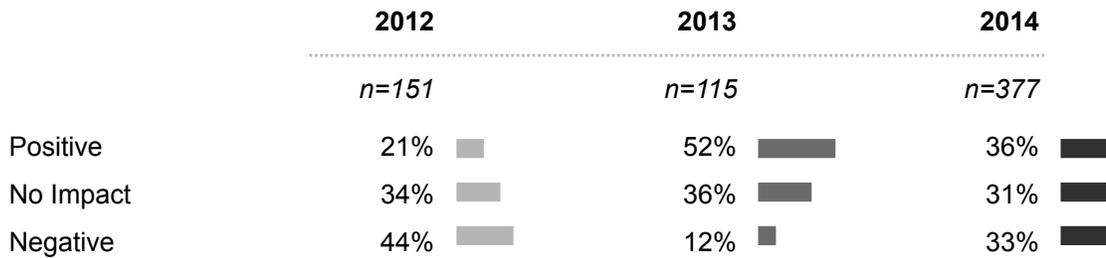
2. I believe that the students in my classroom have adapted well to the PreK-8 school environment.



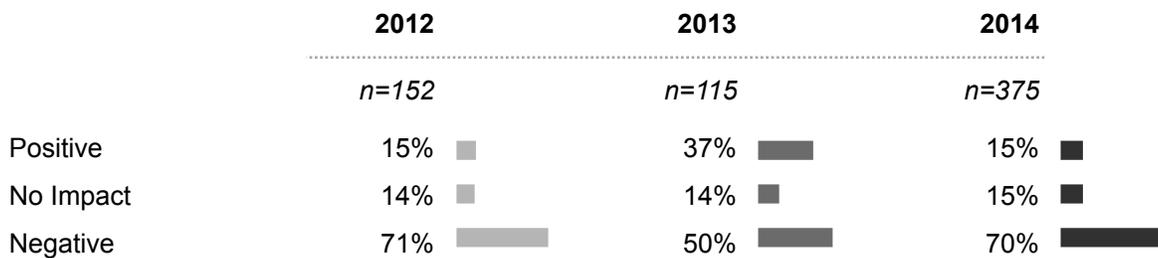
3a. How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts elementary students (PreK-5) at your school in: ATTENDANCE



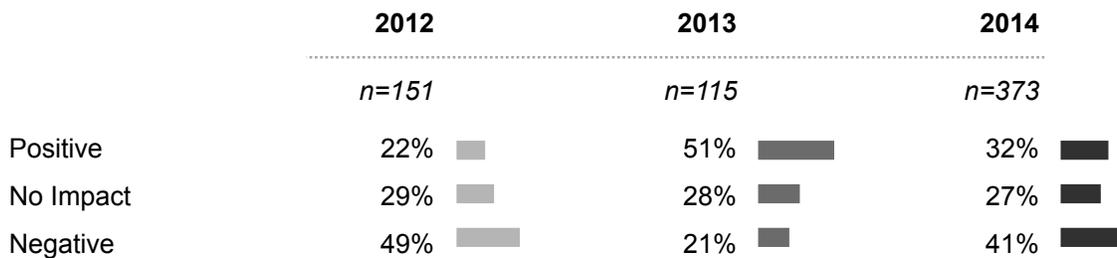
3b. How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts elementary students (PreK-5) at your school in: LEARNING



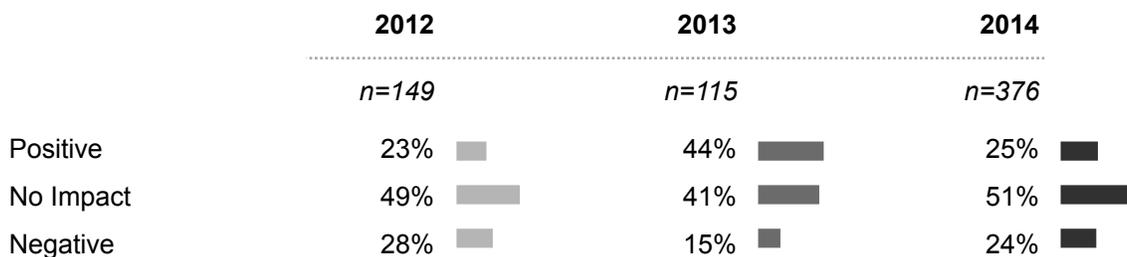
3c. How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts elementary students (PreK-5) at your school in: BEHAVIOR



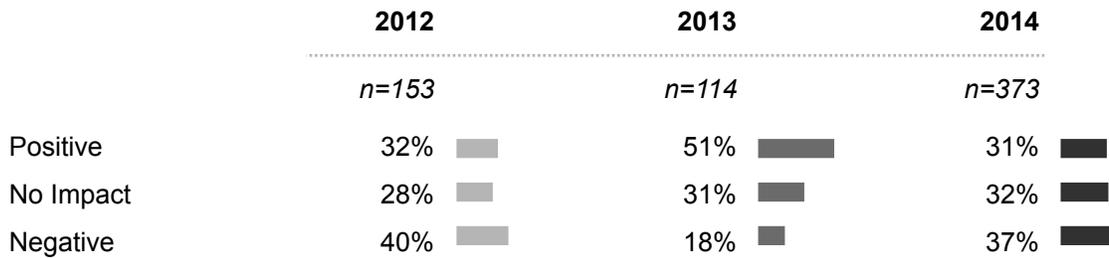
3d. How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts elementary students (PreK-5) at your school: OVERALL



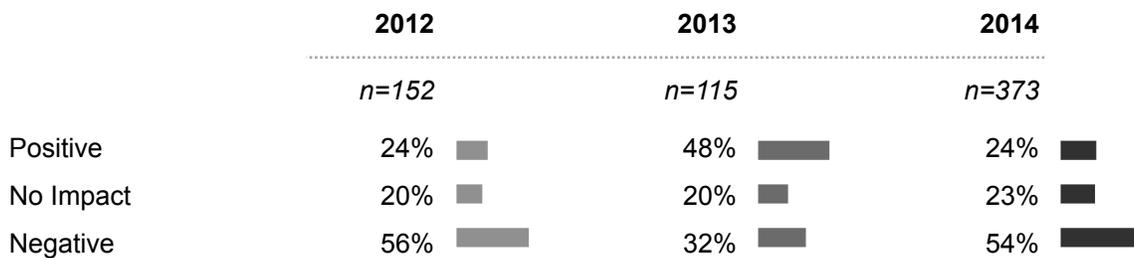
4a. How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts middle grades students (6-8) at your school in: ATTENDANCE



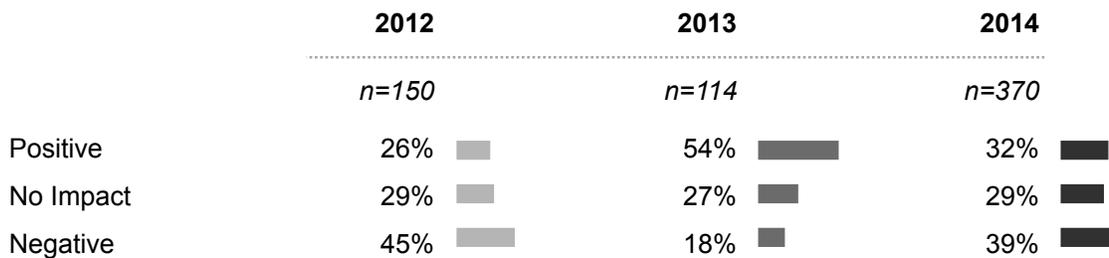
4b. How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts middle grades students (6-8) at your school in: LEARNING



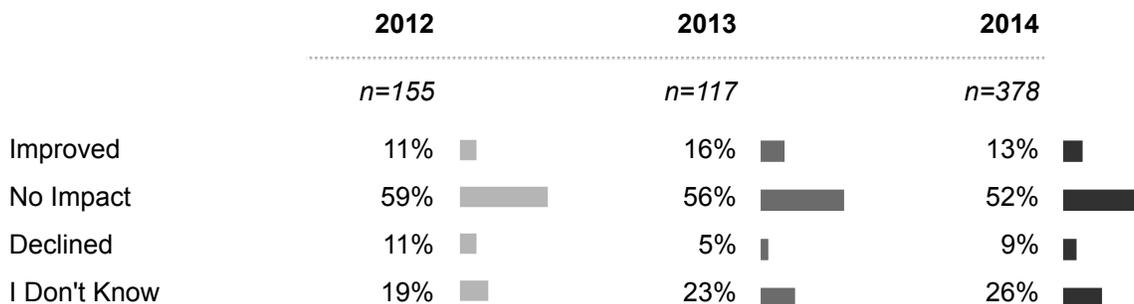
4c. How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts middle grades students (6-8) at your school in: BEHAVIOR



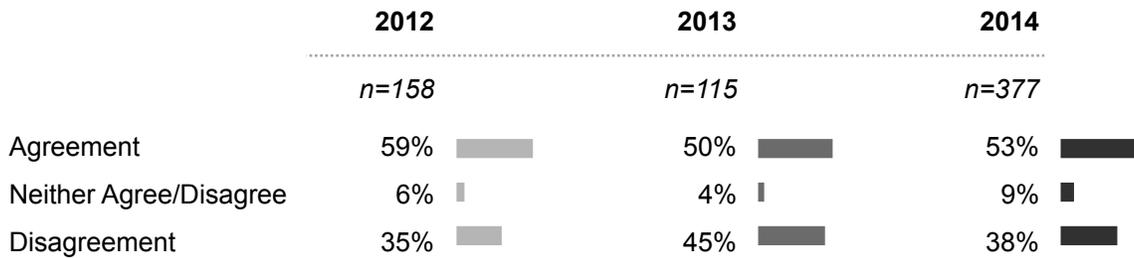
4d. How do you think the PreK-8 structure impacts middle grades students (6-8) at your school: OVERALL



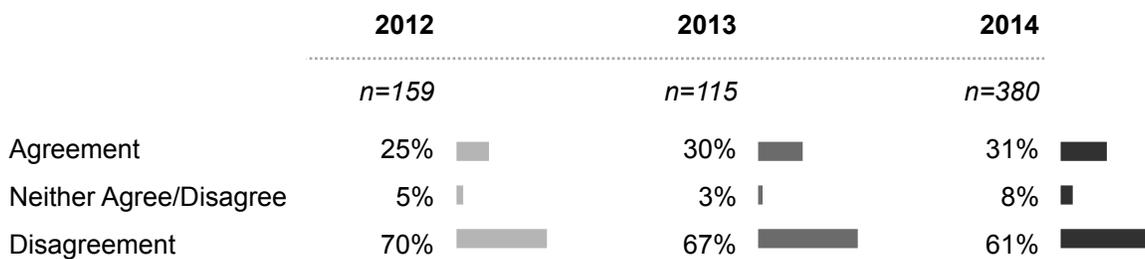
5. How has the PreK-8 structure impacted your students' daily attendance?



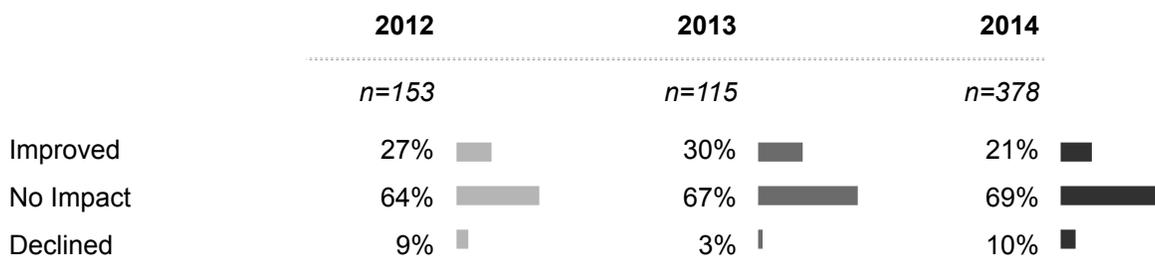
7. The physical environment of my classroom meets the needs of my students (e.g. desk size, classroom size).



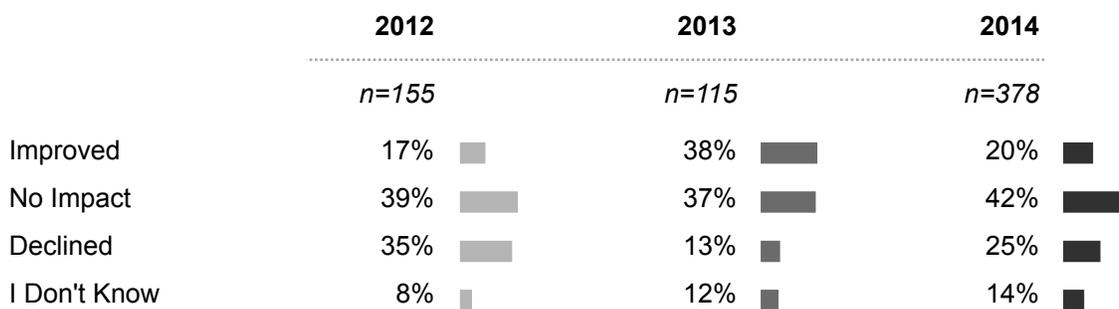
8. The physical environment of my school meets the needs of my students (e.g. hallways, restrooms, gymnasium).



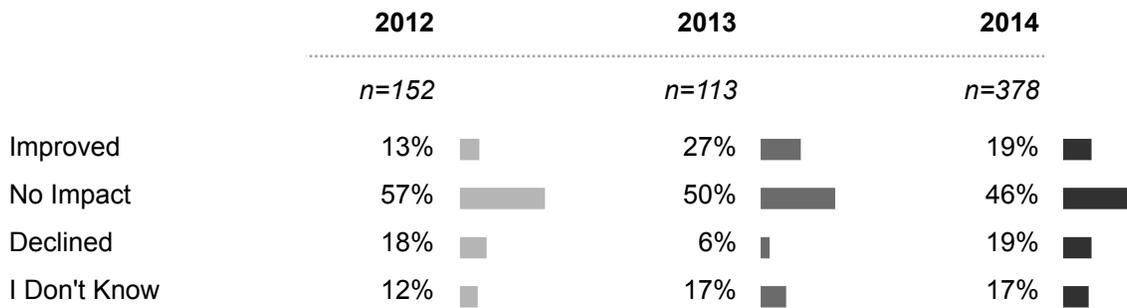
9. How has the PreK-8 structure impacted parent involvement in your classroom?



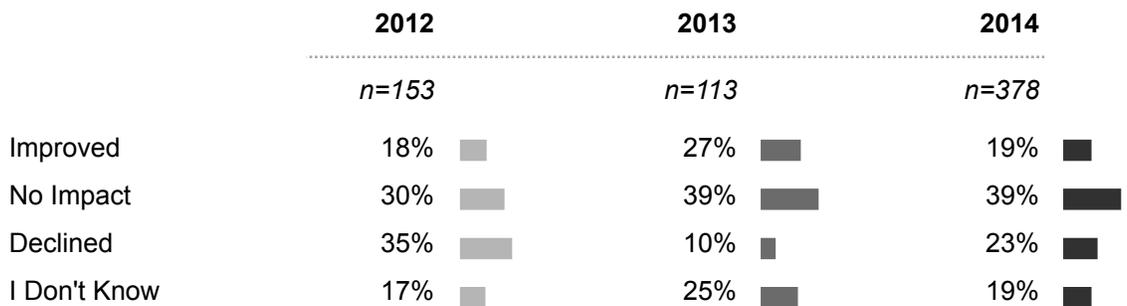
10. How has the PreK-8 structure impacted your students' learning?



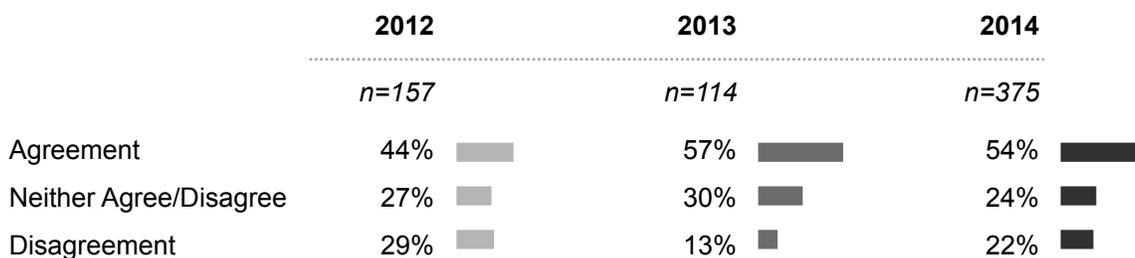
12. How has the PreK-8 structure impacted your students' performance on classroom assessments?



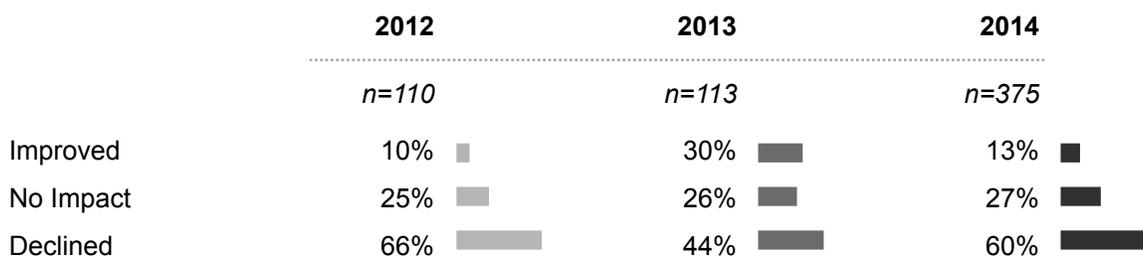
13. How do you think the PreK-8 structure will impact your students' scores on the North Carolina EOG assessments?



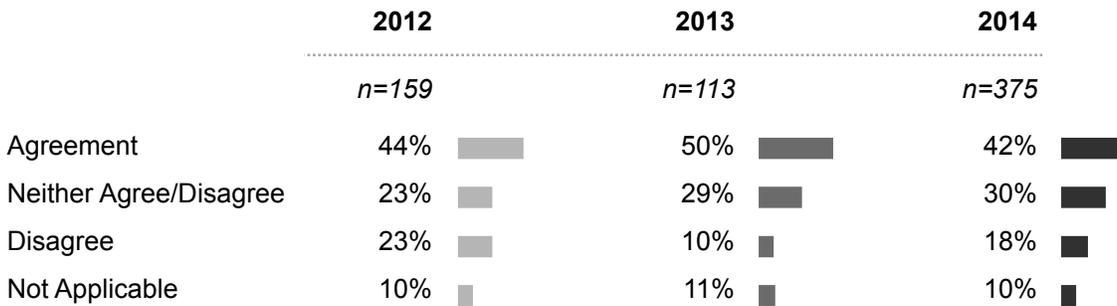
15. I have access to resources to improve my students' learning based on the PreK-8 structure.



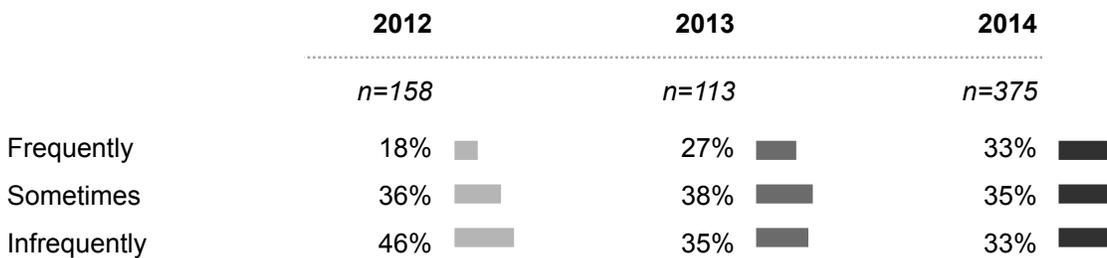
16. How has the PreK-8 structure impacted your students' behavior?



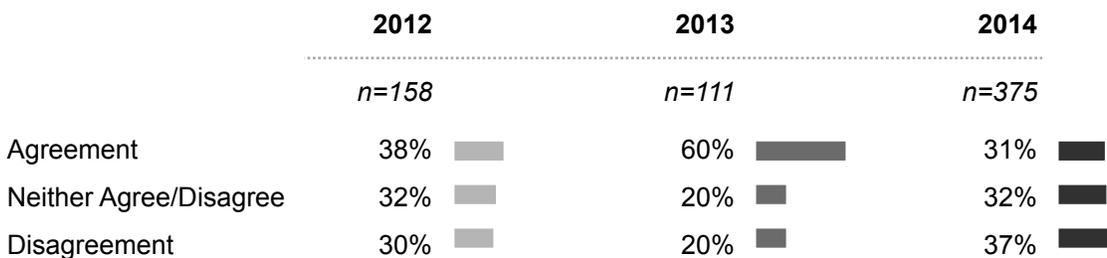
18. I have changed the way that I address behavior issues as a result of the PreK-8 structure.



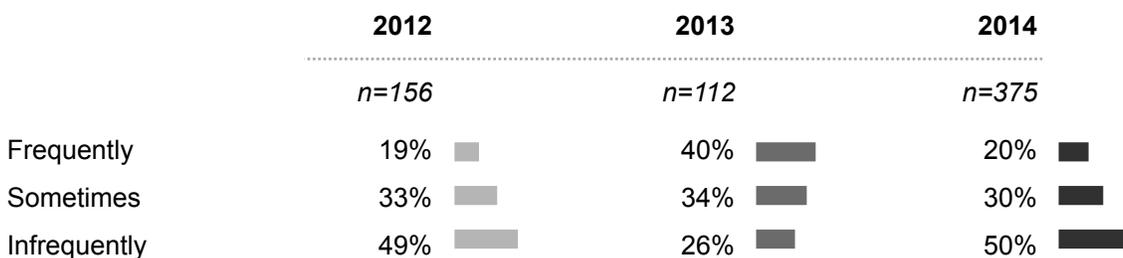
19. How often do elementary and middle grades students interact during the school day?



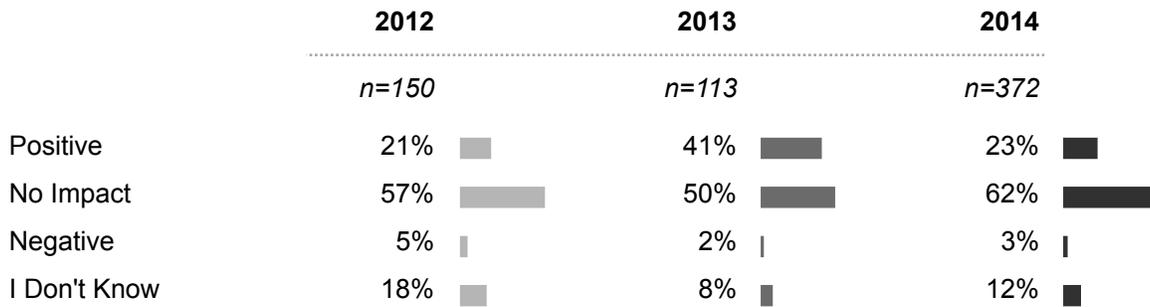
20. Most of the interactions between elementary and middle level students are positive.



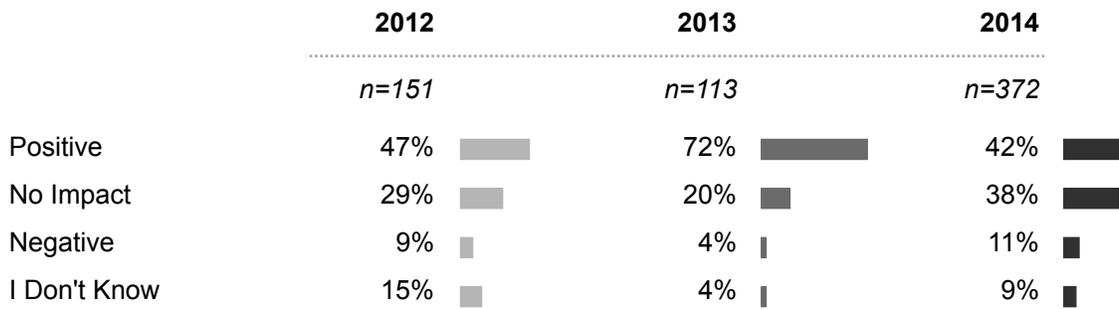
21. How often do elementary and middle grades teachers interact professionally about student learning?



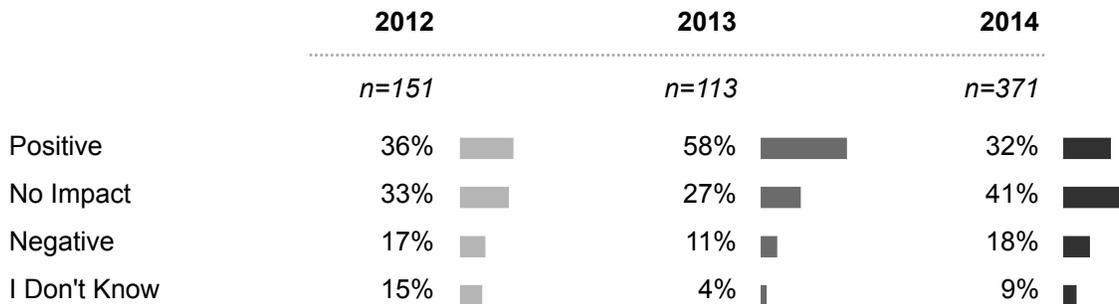
22a. How do you believe interactions between elementary and middle grade teachers at your school impact: ATTENDANCE



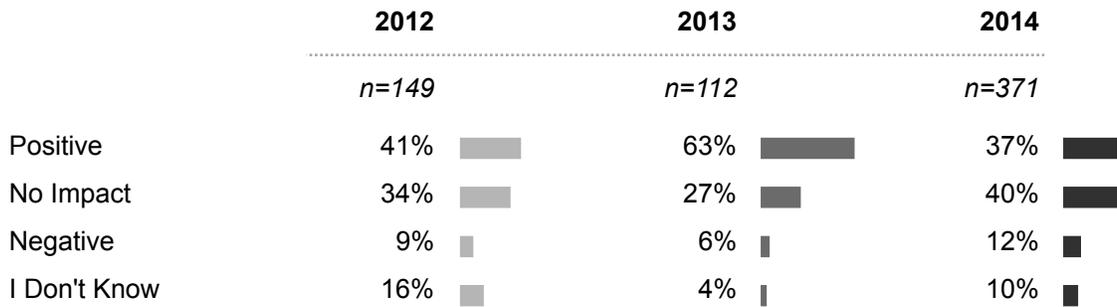
22b. How do you believe interactions between elementary and middle grade teachers at your school impact: LEARNING



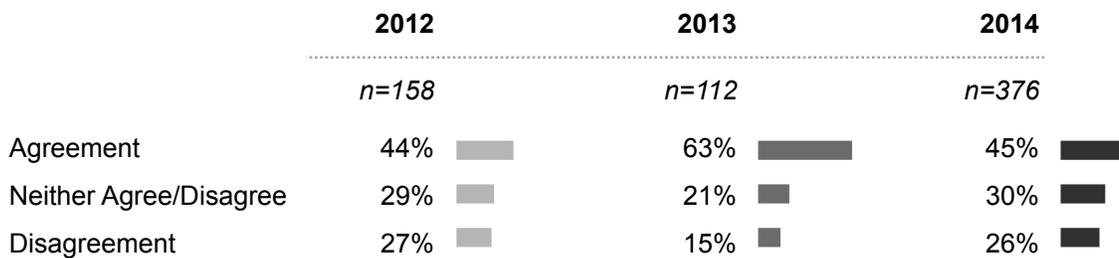
22c. How do you believe interactions between elementary and middle grade teachers at your school impact: BEHAVIOR



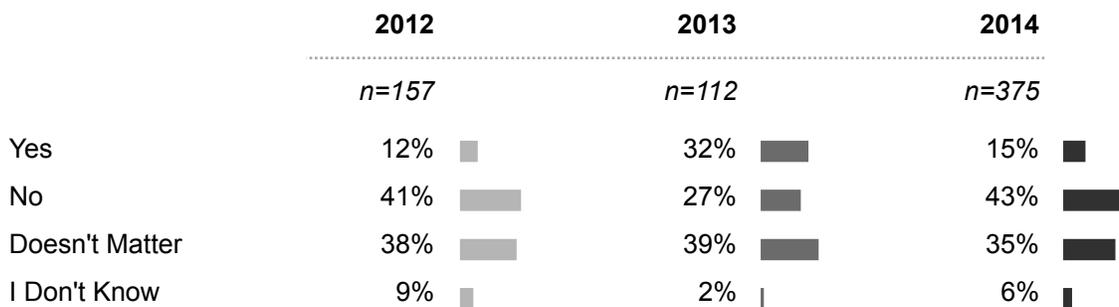
22d. How do you believe interactions between elementary and middle grade teachers at your school impact: OVERALL



23. I enjoy working at a PreK-8 school.



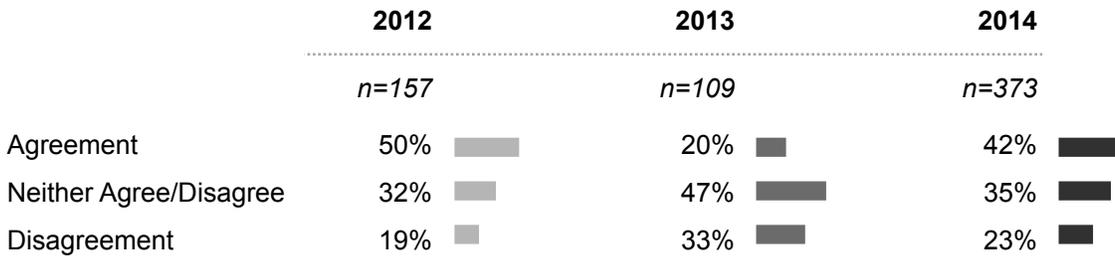
24. I would rather work in a PreK-8 school than a non-PreK-8 school.



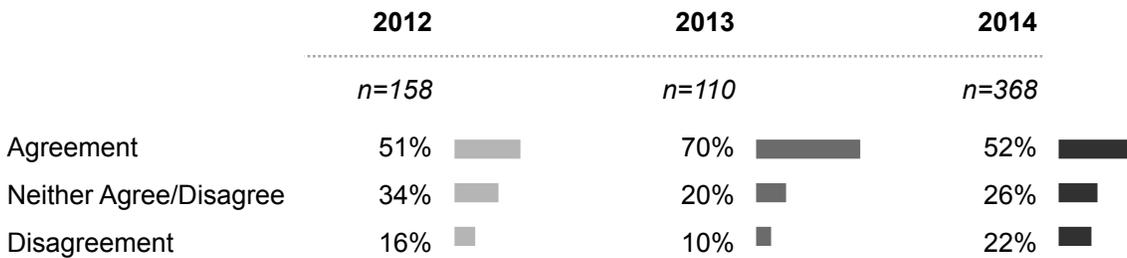
25. Overall, I have received the necessary professional development to work in a PreK-8 school.



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.

