



**School Practitioner
Listserv**



**A Weekly Community of Practice Network
for Sharing and Interchange**

September 21, 2015

Request from a parent:

>Fifth graders into middle school: Concerns?

Featured Center Resources:

>Supporting transitions

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**Please forward this to a few colleagues you think might be interested.
The more who join, the more we are likely to receive to share.**

**For those who have been forwarded this and want to be part of
the weekly exchange, send an email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu**

**For previous recent postings of this community of practice, see
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>**

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Note: In keeping with the 2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student & Learning Supports,* this community of practice network has expanded in number of participants and topics discussed.* The thematic emphasis is on (1) daily concerns confronting those working in and with schools, (2) the transformation of student and learning supports, and (3) promoting whole child development and positive school climate.

R **quest from a parent:** From our perspective, the following concern has implications with respect to concerns about barriers to learning and, of course, mental health.

(We wonder how many folks see it that way??? Let us know your perspective.)

“My 9 year old son is currently in the 4th grade in an Elementary School. The County Board of Education and the School Building Authority in the state capitol are in discussions concerning consolidating the 5th graders; now located at four different elementary schools in the county, and moving them to the County Middle/High School next school year 2016/2017. Myself and other concerned parents are against this proposal. I would greatly appreciate it if you could steer me in the right direction to obtain statistics and/or other data that would help me gather the needed documentation and information to counter this proposal.”

C **enter Response:** As with so many school matters, concerns related to school consolidation and grade configuration are multifaceted, the issues are complex, and findings from well-designed research are limited. With respect to the specific question of fifth graders in middle school, here are links to a couple of resources:

1) The first is a National Middle School Association (NMSA) Research Summary.

<http://www.ncmle.org/research%20summaries/ressum8.html>

We have excerpted the discussion about “What research supports grade 5 (and/or grade 6) being included in middle schools?”

“... most studies of school-transition target grade 6 for the sample population and do not address the appropriateness of grade 5's inclusion in elementary or middle schools. Aside from district considerations of building capacities, zoning, and enrollments, research centers on the match between the developmental status of fifth/sixth graders and the setting of the host school, the effects of transition on the students, and school programs to familiarize the student with the new school environment.

As a result, the ‘direct’ answer to the question emerges as ‘It depends.’ There is a lack of empirical research, but in general, fifth grade inclusion depends on (1) the student and (2) the program. If the student is ready and the school is a bona fide middle school, then fifth grade might be appropriate even in the absence of empirical research.

The Issue

Two questions warrant attention: (1) Do 5th graders exhibit behaviors and characteristics that would benefit from participation in a responsive middle level environment or would they benefit more from the traditional self-contained environment of the elementary school? (2) Do 5th graders possess characteristics to withstand the transition from elementary to middle schools?...

The debate centers not only on the age-related characteristics of fifth graders, but on the educational setting of the receiving school. Although middle schools are planned to create learning environments for young adolescents, many schools for adolescents do not implement recognized practices appropriate for young adolescents.... in general 5-8 schools have higher implementation levels than other

organizations of programs and practices that provide a better match between characteristics and needs of most fifth graders. The issue therefore relates to the match between the characteristics of the young adolescents, the type of pedagogy at the new location, and contextual variables.

Stresses of Adolescence

The issue is complex for several reasons. First, the developmental rate of young adolescents is not uniform, where high stress for one youngster may be optimal challenge and stimulation for another, such a transition is accompanied by a plethora of new stresses inherent in making adjustments to new teachers, expectations, schedules, and classmates. These additional changes coincide with the developmental factors of young adolescence. Fifth graders enter an age of simultaneously adjusting to puberty, an increased capacity for abstract thought, and social changes with peers and authority figures. Some students are also adjusting to family moves, divorces, deaths in the family, and other high stressors. When several of these adjustments occur at the same time as a move to a new school stress is the result.

Developmental Level

Young adolescents have been maturing at an earlier age, resulting in the 6th graders of the 1900's being similar to the 5th graders of the 1990's....

Type of Middle School

.... Some middle schools are organized to create a gradual transition from self-contained to departmental configuration. For example, the fifth grade is self-contained, the sixth grade has 2 person teams, the seventh has 2-3 person teams with larger blocks of time, and the eighth grade has 4 or more teachers each specializing in a subject area. With such a variety of middle school configurations, any discussion of transition therefore examines the substance of the setting young adolescents are entering before addressing the appropriate grade of transition....

Decisions about which grades are included in a school are important and should be made carefully. Research repeatedly confirms the importance of the type of program and qualities of the learning environments, not grade organization, as the key to successful experiences for 5th graders.”

2) As a fairly recent research example, below is a brief excerpt of an article focusing on: “Are Middle Schools Harmful? The Role of Transition Timing, Classroom Quality and School Characteristics” (2012) by I. Holas & A. Huston in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 41, 333-345.

<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10964-011-9732-9#page-1>

“...The overall message of the results is that school level sometimes matters, but its effect depends on classroom quality and school characteristics. Middle schools beginning in fifth grade did not differ from elementary schools in classroom quality, and children’s functioning was similar to that of elementary school students. Sixth grade middle schools, however, did have classrooms of lower quality, which mediated students’ lower achievement. Some prior work found similar patterns of results. For instance, students who entered middle school classrooms with efficacious teachers maintained their sense of competence posited that moving out of elementary schools does not necessarily introduce a change in functioning if quality is maintained...”

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Listserv Participants: *What can you share about this matter?* Send your response for sharing to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Featured set of center resources:
>Supporting Transitions

School consolidation, grade configuration, and regular matriculation are among the many transition concerns that require student and learning supports. Support for transitions involves assisting students and families as they negotiate the many hurdles related to school and grade changes; this encompasses welcoming and ongoing social support for students, families, and staff new to the school to provide both a motivational and a capacity building foundation for developing positive working relationships, a positive school climate, and a quality learning experience. Such supports also focus on daily transitions, program transitions, accessing assistance, and so forth.

The aims in supporting school and grade transitions are to facilitate the move in ways that enhance student (family, staff) eagerness and optimism about the new setting and to closely monitor student adjustment so that if supports are needed they are quickly deployed. Critical, of course, is whether the school and classroom climate and learning experiences are perceived as positive (e.g., engaging and supportive).

>For a detailed discussion of “Supports for Transitions,” see Chapter 5 in the free online book *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/book.pdf>

>Also see the “Self-study Survey on Supports for Transitions” in the Appendix of the above resource.

>For links to Center developed as well as other online resources relevant to these matters, see our Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds on:

- *Supports for Transitions* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101_01.htm
- *Classroom/School Climate* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/environments.htm>
- *Engagement/Re-engagement* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>
- *Accommodating Differences* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/idea.htm>

*For information about the *2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports*, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

***Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights;
transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to
enabling equity of opportunity and promoting whole child development***

***THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND
INTERESTING THIS COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE BECOMES!***

**Send relevant resources ideas, requests, comments, and
experiences to ltaylor@ucla.edu**

**Note: Responses come only to our Center at UCLA for possible
inclusion in the next week's message.**

**We also post a broad range of issues and responses to the *Net
Exchange* on our website at**

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newnetexchange.htm>

and to *Facebook* -- access from the Center's home page

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>