

DIVE BRIEF

NYU study: Students in K-8 model more academically confident than middle school peers

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Dive Brief:

- As more school districts replace middle schools with K-8 schools, a new study shows that the K-8 configuration is associated with students having more positive views of their academic abilities.
- Conducted by Elise Cappella, associate professor of applied psychology at New York University, the study tracked 5,754 students from 1,712 schools who were part of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class 1998-99 and were mostly in 8th grade during the 2006-07 school year.
- Cappella notes that middle schools are not necessarily the problem, but that creating schools to better serve young adolescents may “involve increasing our understanding of what kinds of schools enhance growth as well as how school can be leveraged to support students’ development and enhance the odds that youth will approach high school with the competence to succeed.”

Dive Insight:

Over the past 10 years, school districts across the country have been moving away from the middle school model and implementing the K-8 and Pre-K-to-8 configurations, in part because it creates more stability for students at a time when they are going through the changes associated with young adolescence. Many administrators have said K-8 schools allow for a stronger sense of community and talk about benefits, such as teachers who have known students since kindergarten, and cross-grade collaboration opportunities like having older students read to or tutor younger children.

A study on Miami-Dade County schools showed that students in K-8 schools had higher achievement and attendance and lower suspension rates than those in a 6-8 configuration. Researchers also note, however, that overall, the studies comparing the two models are still limited and more work is needed to determine the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Cappella suggests that whatever configuration districts have, it's important for school leaders to pay attention to the "instructional and social environment" as students progress through the middle grades. Administrators should also monitor teachers' expectations of students as they get older and students' perceptions of themselves.