

Date: February 18, 2025

To: Salt Lake City School District Board of Education
Superintendent of Schools

From: Dr. Tiffany Hall, Executive Director Teaching & Learning
Dallin Miller, Middle School Area Director

Subject: Middle Level Review Group Report

Summary:

As part of our ongoing commitment to ensuring academic excellence and student well-being, the district conducted a review of our middle-level opportunities for students. This review focused on how we support students academically, socially, and emotionally during these critical transitional years.

During this process, we discussed insights from national best practices and educational experts on middle-level education. We also explored similar middle schools in neighboring districts to assess potential strategies for improvement.

We appreciate the Board's support as we continue to strengthen our middle school programs.

Requested Board action:

There is no requested Board action today, but the Board may provide direction at a later time.

Attachments:

- Review of Middle Level Education (Report)
- PPT

REVIEW OF MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION

SALT LAKE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT



| FEBRUARY 18, 2025 |

PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW

The SLCS Middle Level Committee was formed to review the structure, resources, and needs of middle schools within the district. This includes documenting current educational practices, enrollment, and learning opportunities to ensure the schools are effectively and equitably meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of students. The committee identified areas that could be better aligned with the district's goals for equitable, high-quality education and support for all learners.

MIDDLE LEVEL REVIEW PARTICIPANTS

In 2024, 40+ people were invited to participate in a conversation around middle level education. This group included middle school, high school, and district administrators, middle level teachers, and university partners. The core group developed as listed below.

- Michelle Amiot, Bryant Middle School Principal
 - Erin Anderson, Special Education Director
 - Kate Arch, Clayton Middle School Principal
 - Kenneth Auld, West High School Assistant Principal
 - Zoe Buroojy, Glendale Middle School Counselor
 - Brian Conley, Boundaries and Planning Director
 - Brittany Dame, Bryant Middle School Teacher & SLEA Representative
 - Monty Eyink, ALS Program Coordinator
 - Andrew Glaze, Mathematics Specialist
 - Keslie Green, Nibley Park K-8 Principal
 - Cori Groth, UEPC Associate Director
 - Tiffany Hall, Executive Director Teaching & Learning
 - Chelsea Malouf, Literacy Director
 - Allison Martin, SEL/MTSS Director
 - Holley McIntosh, Mathematics Supervisor
 - Ashley McKinney, Glendale Middle School Principal
 - Dallin Miller, Area Director
 - Sam Quantz, Chief Information Officer
 - JaNeal Rodriguez, Hillside Middle School Principal
 - Andrea Seminario, Northwest Middle School Principal
 - Brady Tanner, Bryant Middle School Teacher
 - Tracy Vandeventer, Area Director
 - Lisa Wisham, UEPC Improvement Specialist
 - Lisa Young, Area Director
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STRATEGIC PLAN FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The Salt Lake City School District's Strategic Plan for Student Achievement (2024-2029) outlines several goals and objectives pertinent to middle school education:

1. Equitable Access and Inclusion

The district aims to ensure that all students can fully participate in school programs and activities. This involves conducting reviews of our systems to identify and eliminate barriers that may hinder student access. Additionally, middle school should prepare all students for advanced high school courses and support the development of their academic identities as scholars.

2. Academic Success

To address achievement gaps and enhance learning outcomes, the district plans to use approved materials, technology, and resources to teach the Utah Core Standards consistently across all grade levels. This includes engaging students in productive academic conversations and ensuring access to high-quality, grade-level literacy, mathematics, and science instruction. Students should also have appropriate access to academic support and enrichment.

3. Access to Expanded Learning Opportunities

The district is committed to broadening students' academic skills and social-emotional capacities by connecting classroom learning to real-world experiences. This includes providing opportunities for students to participate in career and technical classes as well as extended and honors classes to prepare them for more rigorous high school pathways.

These strategic goals underscore our commitment to providing a comprehensive and inclusive educational experience for middle school students that will prepare them for success after graduation.

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MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION IN SLCS D

All young adolescents deserve schools that help them become competent and confident individuals who feel a sense of agency, are proud of who they are, are optimistic about their futures, feel connected to those around them, and are prepared to succeed in our every-changing world.

The Successful Middle School: This We Believe, page 50.

Middle schools in the Salt Lake City School District (SLCSD) offer a comprehensive and supportive educational environment for students in grades 7-8, with some schools also including grade 6. These schools provide a balanced approach to academic rigor and social-emotional development.

SLCSD middle schools prioritize academic excellence by offering a wide range of core subjects, including mathematics, science, English language arts, and social studies, while also providing access to education in fine arts, advanced academic opportunities, and dual language immersion programs. A strong focus is placed on supporting students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills, ensuring proficiency in educational standards.

In addition to academics, middle schools in the district emphasize social-emotional learning and the development of key life skills. Students benefit from programs and initiatives designed to build resilience, foster positive peer relationships, and support their mental and emotional well-being. Schools offer a variety of extracurricular activities to contribute to a well-rounded educational experience.

SLCSD middle schools are committed to helping students navigate the transition between elementary and high school, offering targeted support in areas such as academic readiness, organizational skills, and social transition. Middle school administrators work closely with families and communities to create a positive, inclusive culture that values diversity and prepares students for success in high school and beyond.

ENROLLMENT AND SCHOOL DAY

As of October 1, 2024, SLCSD had 2,634 middle level students.

School	Year Built or Remodeled	Building Max Occupancy (approximately)	Current Number of Students	Grade Levels
Bryant Middle	2006	650	360	7-8
Clayton Middle	2009	700	567	7-8
Glendale Middle	2007	900	680	6-8
Hillside Middle	2009	700	485	7-8
Nibley Park K-8	2003	n/a	70	7-8
Northwest Middle	2005	900	542	7-8
Total			2,634	

Start and End Times/ Length of School Day

School	Start Time	End Time	Annual Instructional Hours
Bryant Middle	8:45 AM	3:23 PM	1008.10
Clayton Middle	8:00 AM	2:30 PM	1000.25
Glendale Middle	8:00 AM	2:30 PM	1000.25
Hillside Middle	8:00 AM	2:30 PM	1000.20
Nibley Park K-8	8:05 AM	2:30 PM	1006.50
Northwest Middle	8:00 AM	2:30 PM	1014.40

MIDDLE LEVEL SCHEDULES

SLCSD has five middle level schools, and a K-8 school. Three of our middle schools have a similar grade configuration and schedule; one has a much different daily schedule from these three schools (though it does have the same grade levels); and the fifth middle school has a different grade configuration and schedule from the other four. The K-8 school has a schedule that allows students to participate with elementary during rotations. Please see Appendix 2 for schools' bell schedules.

Bryant Middle	8 period day
Clayton Middle	7 period day, advisory Wednesday AM
Glendale Middle	5x5 block (5 classes on A and B day)
Hillside Middle	7 period day
Northwest Middle	7 period day, advisory Wednesday PM
Nibley Park K-8	7 periods (Rotation for music, art, and PE)

Course offerings vary greatly across the schools based on enrollment, needed courses, and schedule constraints. All middle-level schools offer the courses required by the state. However, students at Nibley Park K-8 do not have full semesters of fine arts or PE in their schedule. These courses are offered in rotations with grade 6 over the course of a year.

Elective opportunities at the schools vary across schools. Also, the impact of ELD and Reading courses on a school's budget and schedule can be significant. As a result, schools that schedule fewer classes for academic support can have more options when scheduling courses such as CTE or Fine Arts.

- The 7-period schedule limits the number of electives a student can take during middle school.
- The 5x5 schedule creates more space for electives, but the increased cost of core teacher periods reduces the ability of the school to offer varied electives.

- Having different schedules and start times makes collaboration across schools and departments challenging.
- Having all schools on the same schedule would allow schools to share teachers for courses that would have sufficient enrollment for a full-time teacher at one school.

Please note that the 7-8 grades at West High are not included in this review as they are a school magnet program.

FEEDER PATTERN CHALLENGES

Students transition from elementary to middle school in different configurations—some schools feed into one middle school, and others into two or more.

The current feeder patterns for 6th-grade students who changed schools due to elementary school closures have created some unique situations. These students joined a new elementary school community this year, but their middle school boundaries did not change.

As a result, they are assigned to a different middle school than their new elementary school peers. For example, 6th-grade students who attended Mary W. Jackson last year are now attending Newman Elementary. However, they are still pointed to Bryant Middle School for 7th grade. Most Newman students are pointed to Northwest Middle School. Transition stress could possibly be minimized if elementary schools feed into middle schools in blocks, keeping students together.

Feeder patterns also effect the placement of Dual Language Immersion (DLI) programs. Students who were in the DLI program at Mary W Jackson would have enrolled in the DLI program at Bryant. However, students originally attending Newman predominately attend Northwest. Students in the Nibley Park DLI program are pointed to Hillside; those students previously attended Clayton. Students from Franklin who are in the DLI program at Mountain View are pointed to Bryant, while all other students are pointed to Glendale.

As we look at our new elementary boundaries, a subsequent conversation must include secondary feeder patterns.

MIDDLE SCHOOL STRUCTURES

Successful middle schools intentionally organize people, time, and space to maximize young adolescents' growth and development.

The Successful Middle School: This We Believe, page 50.

Creating an effective school schedule for middle-level students is critical to balancing academic rigor with the developmental needs of adolescents. Schools must choose from various scheduling models, each with unique benefits and potential challenges. This section outlines three common middle school scheduling options: traditional schedules, block schedules, and rotating schedules. Pros and cons are highlighted for each.

1. Traditional Schedule The traditional schedule consists of six to eight periods per day, each lasting between 40 to 55 minutes. Some schools may double-block courses in which students need more support. This model is found at Bryant, Clayton, Hillside, and Northwest.

Pros

- **Consistent Routine:** Students benefit from a predictable daily schedule, which can foster a sense of stability.
- **Frequent Exposure:** Subjects are covered daily, ensuring consistent engagement with content and regular practice.
- **Teacher Specialization:** Teachers can focus on their subject area, enhancing instructional quality.

Cons

- **Limited Depth:** Short class periods may not allow sufficient time for deep exploration of topics.
- **Transition Time:** Frequent transitions between periods can disrupt focus and reduce total instructional time.
- **Homework Overload:** Daily classes for each subject can lead to significant homework, which may overwhelm students.

2. Block Schedule Block schedules consist of fewer, longer class periods per day, typically lasting between 70 to 90 minutes, with classes meeting every other day or in alternating cycles. This model is in place at Glendale, which has a 5-period block.

Pros

- **In-Depth Learning:** Extended periods allow for deeper exploration of topics and more varied instructional strategies.
- **Reduced Daily Workload:** Students attend fewer classes per day, reducing homework volume for a single evening.
- **Project-Based Learning:** The longer periods facilitate project work, collaborative learning, and hands-on activities.
- **Developing Stamina for High School:** Longer block classes in middle school build stamina for entering freshmen more effectively than shorter classes through middle level.

Cons

- **Retention Gaps:** Classes meeting every other day may lead to difficulties in retention and continuity of learning, especially in subjects like language or math.
- **Attention Span Challenges:** Longer classes may challenge students' ability to maintain focus, particularly for younger adolescents.
- **Missed Instruction:** Absences can have a greater impact due to the longer class periods.
- **Additional Funding:** This model requires additional sections of core content and therefore has a higher operating cost, which can limit electives.

3. Rotating Schedule A rotating schedule shifts the order of class periods over a set cycle, ensuring that students do not always attend the same class at the same time of day. No middle schools in SLCS D are on this schedule.

Pros

- **Balanced Attention and Energy Levels:** Different times for each class prevent any subject from being consistently scheduled during low-energy periods.
- **Flexibility:** The rotation can be adapted to include varying period lengths, such as shorter advisory periods or longer core subject blocks.

Cons

- **Complexity:** The schedule can be confusing for students, especially at the beginning of implementation.
- **Planning Challenges:** Teachers must adjust lesson plans to different time slots, which may require additional effort.
- **Potential Gaps:** Rotating schedules can lead to uneven gaps between classes, affecting momentum.

Each scheduling model offers distinct advantages and challenges. Traditional schedules provide consistency and daily exposure but may limit in-depth learning. Block schedules support comprehensive lessons and project-based learning but may challenge retention. Rotating schedules offer flexibility and equity in learning time but require careful planning and adjustment.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. *While having multiple schedules in middle schools allows each school to have its individual personality, it does complicate scheduling events between schools, sharing teachers or resources, or providing comparable amounts of time for academics. What are the benefits and costs of moving to a uniform schedule?*
2. *Some schedules allow for more time in class, which is important for academic mastery; others allow for exposure to more and different classes, especially electives. Which is more important in a middle school?*

REQUIRED MIDDLE SCHOOL LEARNING

UTAH MIDDLE SCHOOL CORE

Middle school students are required to follow a course of study that ensures a well-rounded education and prepares them for high school. The Utah State Board of Education (USBE) sets the standards for required subjects. For students in grades 7 and 8, the following are the minimum course requirements (listed in R277-700-5, Middle School Education Requirements).

1. English/Language Arts (ELA): Students develop literacy skills through reading, writing, speaking, and listening, with a focus on comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary development (4 semesters / 2 years).
2. Mathematics: Integrated math instruction includes foundational topics with a focus on problem-solving and critical thinking (4 semesters / 2 years).
3. Science: The science curriculum emphasizes inquiry-based learning with an increasing focus on scientific reasoning and higher-level thinking (4 semesters / 2 years).
4. Social Studies: Middle school students study history, geography, government, and economics, with a curriculum that focused U.S. and Utah history (2 semesters of US History and 1 semester of Utah Studies / 1.5 years).
5. Health and Physical Education: Health classes cover topics like personal wellness, nutrition, and mental health, while physical education promotes fitness, teamwork, and healthy lifestyles (1 semester of Health and 1 semester of PE).
6. Fine Arts: Students must complete coursework in visual arts, music, drama, or dance, which supports creativity and cognitive development (1 semester).
7. Career and Technical Education (CTE): CTE courses introduce students to various career pathways, including technology, engineering, business, and family and consumer science,

fostering early career exploration and hands-on learning (1 semester).

8. Digital Literacy: Technology instruction focuses on digital citizenship, computer literacy, and developing skills for navigating the modern digital world responsibly and effectively (1 semester).

9. English Language Development (ELD): ELD courses support multilingual learners in developing their English proficiency across listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These courses provide targeted instruction based on students' language proficiency levels.

Electives These required courses are supplemented by electives, which allow students to explore personal interests in areas such as world language, advanced fine arts, or additional CTE pathways. Students can also improve their academic skills with classes like reading or academic studies.

SAMPLE Middle School Schedule			
Grade 7		Grade 8	
ELA		ELA	
Mathematics		Mathematics	
Science		Science	
Utah Studies	CTE	US History	
PE	Health	Digital Literacy	<i>Elective</i>
<i>Elective / ELD</i>	<i>Elective / ELD</i>	Fine Arts	<i>Elective</i>
<i>Elective</i>	<i>Elective</i>	<i>Elective</i>	<i>Elective</i>

RANGE OF OPPORTUNITY

The following chart demonstrates the range of opportunities that each middle level school provides to students. Courses are placed on the master schedule based on several factors, including student need/interest, especially for courses such as ELD, Reading, or Study Skills. Need for these courses is determined using assessment scores and other student achievement data.

Other courses provide opportunities for acceleration, such as the Math 7/8 > Secondary 1 pathway that allows students to complete a high school math course in middle school.

Factors that can influence the number and type of different courses found in a school include the number of courses needed for student intervention and support; the expertise and interest of faculty members; and the availability of resources such as staffing, scheduling constraints, and facility space. Additionally, school size and enrollment numbers impact the diversity of courses offered, as larger schools may have more flexibility in

providing a wider range of electives and advanced academic pathways.

Of concern is that students at Nibley Park do not have access to the complete core for grades 7 and 8. With fewer than 70 students, course options are limited. Music, fine arts, and PE are taught using the elementary model, providing students in with music two days a week, PE one or two days a week, and fine arts one day a week. Students do not have access to honors or extended/accelerated courses or world language. While preliminary data analysis does not show students with a significant academic gap when entering high school, Nibley Park is not providing the same opportunities for learning.

EQUITABLE ACCESS

Establishing equitable access to course offerings in all in middle schools ensures that every student receives a well-rounded education and the necessary preparation for high school and beyond. While schools may vary in their offerings based on student needs and resources, certain core courses should be consistent across all middle schools to maintain academic rigor, support student development, and align with district and state standards.

In addition to the required Utah core, attention must be paid to consistent access to extended or advanced course offerings, such as honors or high school classes, as well as the range of world language, fine arts or CTE courses available at each school.

The working group recommends that students should have access to, at a minimum, options including:

- Accelerated math pathways (Math 7/8 > Secondary 1) to earn high school credit in middle school.
- Honors courses in core areas.
- At least one world language, which could include Spanish DLI if appropriate for the elementary feeder pattern.
- At least one visual arts track and one performance art track, although more are encouraged.

CURRENT MIDDLE SCHOOL COURSE OFFERINGS

	BRYANT	CLAYTON	GLENDALE	HILLSIDE	NIBLEY PARK	NORTHWEST
Art 1	X	X	X	X		X
Art 2	X	X	X	X		
Art 3D	X					
Art Advanced		X				X
Ceramics 1	X	X	X			X
Ceramics 2		X				X
Coding		X	X	X		X
Creative Writing		X				
Current Issues						X
Dance 1	X	X				X
Dance 2	X	X				X
Dance Advanced		X				
Debate						
Dual Language Immersion 1		X	X			
Dual Language Immersion 2		X	X			
English Language Development (ELD)	X	X	X	X	Elem Model	X
Experiential Learning/PBEL	X					
Foods 1		X	X	X		
Foods 2		X				
Magnet Program		X		X		
Math 7/8 (accelerated pathway)		X		X		
Math Sec 1 (high school credit)		X		X		
Music General	X					
Music Band 1		X	X	X		X
Music Band 2				X		X
Music Choir				X		X

	BRYANT	CLAYTON	GLENDALE	HILLSIDE	NIBLEY PARK	NORTHWEST
Music Mariachi	X					
Music Mixed Choir 1				X		
Music Mixed Choir 2				X		
Music Orchestra 1		X	X	X		
Music Orchestra 2				X		
Physical Education	X	X	X	X		X
Reading	X	X	X			X
Robotics	X					
Science Research		X				X
Spanish 1	X	X		X		X
Spanish 2		X		X		
Spanish Intro						X
Spanish - Native Speakers						X
Stage Crew		X		X		
Student Leadership/Govt	X	X		X	X	X
Study Skills - Academic				X		X
Tech Exploration				X		
Techniques for Tough Times	X	X	X			X
Theater 1		X	X	X		
Theater 2		X		X		
Theater Advanced		X				
Weightlifting						X
Yearbook		X				X
Weekly Art					X	
Weekly Music					X	
Weekly PE					X	

EXTRA-CURRICULAR OPPORTUNITIES

A well-rounded middle school isn't just about good grades, it's about finding passion in the classroom and exploring interests beyond it.

AFTER-SCHOOL AND INTRAMURAL

The middle school after-school program, which includes intramural sports, has had a significant positive impact on our students and the school community. By providing opportunities for physical activity and team-based sports, the program fosters social development and helps students build meaningful relationships with peers and mentors, enhancing their sense of belonging.

Participation in these activities has been shown to increase school attendance, as students feel more connected and engaged. Additionally, the program offers exposure to experiences that many students might not otherwise have access to, broadening their horizons and building essential life skills. The structure and discipline of intramural sports also contribute to improved academic performance, as students develop time management, goal-setting, and collaborative abilities.

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

Other opportunities for students to participate in extra-curricular events include school plays (Bryant, Clayton, and Hillside), cultural performances (Northwest and Glendale), and other clubs.

These programs are an essential component of our commitment to supporting the whole child and cultivating a thriving, inclusive school community. Increasing these options would be a benefit to all students and school communities.

TRANSITION

Middle school is a critical transition period for students, both academically and socially. School counselors play an essential role in supporting students as they navigate increased academic expectations, social-emotional changes, and personal growth. Their work helps ensure students develop the skills and confidence needed for success in high school and beyond.

Middle school counselors help students set academic goals and choose corresponding courses; teach coping strategies for stress, peer relationships, and self-esteem; help students plan for future college and career goals; and provide support for students experiencing crisis.

Middle schools are allocated counseling resources based on 350 students to 1 counselor. The following table shows the number of counselors available at each school.

Bryant Middle	1.5
Clayton Middle	3
Glendale Middle	3
Hillside Middle	2
Nibley Park K-8	1
Northwest Middle	3

Transitions often result in heightened stress levels as students adapt to new routines, expectations, and social dynamics. A supported middle school transition eases the shift from elementary to middle school by addressing both academic and social-emotional needs.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON TRANSITIONS AND SUPPORT

1. Academic Readiness Students often experience declines in academic performance and motivation during the transition to middle school because of increased academic demands, changes in teacher expectations, and shifts in school structure (Eccles et al., 1993). Organizational complexity, such as multiple teachers and classes, can overwhelm students who are accustomed to a single-teacher environment (Barber & Olsen, 2004).

Academic orientation programs, summer bridge courses, or transitional academic workshops can help students adjust to middle school curriculum expectations (Akos & Galassi, 2004).

2. Social-Emotional Support Adolescents have increased concerns about peer relationships, social status, and bullying during this transition, which can affect their mental health and school engagement (Pellegrini & Long, 2002). The loss of established friendships and supportive relationships with elementary school teachers can lead to feelings of isolation and insecurity (Wigfield et al., 1991).

Counselors and social workers help students navigate the social changes of middle school. This may include advisory periods or peer mentoring programs that focus on building strong relationships, fostering a sense of belonging, and developing self-management skills. SEL programs that focus on building resilience, coping strategies, and interpersonal skills can reduce anxiety and improve peer relationships during the transition (Durlak et al., 2011).

3. Organizational Skills Development Teachers who understand and address the developmental needs of early adolescents can improve classroom relationships and foster a more supportive environment (Ferner et al., 2007). Guidance on time management, study habits, and organizational skills to help students adapt to the increased responsibility and independence of middle school life.

4. Parental Involvement Parent involvement in transition planning, such as attending informational meetings and avenues to keep an open communication with schools, correlates with improved student outcomes (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Schools that build opportunities for parents to be actively engaged demonstrate positive outcomes.

5. Social Integration and Extracurricular Opportunities Students at schools that promote a sense of belonging and experience fewer transition-related issues (Schiller, 1999). Participation in extracurricular activities, sports, and clubs help students form new friendships and explore their interests.

6. Monitoring and Intervention Advisory periods or homeroom structures where students have consistent contact with a caring adult have shown positive impacts on student adjustment (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Monitoring attendance and grades with check-ins by counselors or advisors help identify students struggling academically or emotionally during the transition.

The transition to middle school poses academic, social, and emotional challenges, but targeted and intentional interventions can mitigate these difficulties. Please refer to schools' Board approved HB158 SEL plans for detailed information regarding SEL implementation.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. *How can SLCS D middle schools further enhance the transition support for students moving from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school, ensuring academic readiness and social-emotional well-being?*

DISTRICT NEXT STEPS

- Discuss and select a consistent schedule to be implemented at all middle level schools.
- Place all middle schools on the same start- and end-time schedule to facilitate collaborative meetings and PLCs.
- Review course offerings for appropriate access at all middle level schools.
- Determine structures that would support elective courses, especially at schools impacted by the number of ELD or Reading courses needed to support students.
- Investigate ways to increase engagement in afterschool programming.
- Reconfigure Nibley Park K-8 as an elementary school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With Board direction for further study:

1. Study middle configurations to determine if creating 6-8 schools is feasible and supportive of student development and learning.
2. Study middle school boundaries to align students' movement from elementary to middle school as much as possible.

P.S. WHAT ABOUT GRADE 6?

One question asked during this process was whether including grade 6 in middle school was significantly better for students. The following is a short summary of information about including grade 6 in middle school, as Glendale does.

ADVANTAGES OF INCLUDING GRADE 6 IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

Academic Opportunities

Access to Specialized Instruction Grade 6 students benefit from subject-specific teachers, introducing them to more advanced and focused instruction compared to elementary school. Additionally, the Utah Core Standards and most curriculum materials are K-5 and 6-12, so teachers in grade 6 are using the same programs as teachers in grades 7-8.

Improved Resources Middle schools often provide access to enhanced facilities, such as science labs, libraries, and technology, which support a more rigorous curriculum.

Social Development

Peer Interaction Sixth graders join a larger, more diverse peer group, which helps build social skills and prepare them for collaborative environments.

Smooth Transition Starting middle school earlier can give students more time to adjust to the structure and expectations of secondary education.

Increased Independence

Preparation for Adolescence The middle school model encourages greater independence through changing classes, managing lockers, and interacting with multiple teachers.

Development of Time Management Exposure to rotating schedules and diverse subjects helps students develop organizational and time management skills earlier.

DISADVANTAGES OF INCLUDING GRADE 6 IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

Developmental Readiness

Emotional Maturity Many sixth graders are still in the early stages of emotional development, which may make the middle school environment overwhelming.

Exposure to Older Peers Interacting with older students in grades 7 and 8 may place sixth graders in new social interactions.

Logistical Concerns

Space and Resources Including grade 6 in middle school requires additional classrooms, staff, and resources.

Adjustment Period Both students and staff may face challenges during the initial transition period, impacting the overall effectiveness of the model.

ADVANTAGES OF LIMITING MIDDLE SCHOOL TO GRADES 7 AND 8

Developmental Alignment

Focus on Adolescence Limiting middle school to grades 7 and 8 allows educators to focus specifically on the developmental needs of early adolescents.

Gradual Transition Sixth graders remain in the more nurturing elementary school environment, providing more time for emotional and social growth.

Academic Continuity

Reduced Pressure Sixth graders avoid the pressures of middle school, such as managing multiple teachers and a more complex social environment.

Focused Staffing Teachers can specialize in early childhood education or middle-level instruction without overlapping roles.

DISADVANTAGES OF LIMITING MIDDLE SCHOOL TO GRADES 7 AND 8

Delayed Independence

Limited Preparation Sixth graders may miss the opportunity to develop independence and organizational skills in a structured middle school environment.

Abrupt Transition The shift from elementary to middle school in grade 7 can be more jarring, potentially impacting students' adjustment and performance.

Social and Emotional Development

Narrow Peer Group Staying in elementary school may limit students' exposure to wider groups of friends and varied peer interactions, which are critical for social growth.

Missed Leadership Roles Sixth graders in middle school can take on leadership roles within the school, fostering confidence and responsibility.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON GRADE-LEVEL CONFIGURATIONS

Academic Performance and Transitions Transitioning to a new school environment (e.g., from elementary to middle school) can negatively impact academic achievement and disrupt social and emotional development. Researchers found evidence that students can experience a decline in academic achievement when transitioning from elementary school to middle school and then again from middle school to high school (Alspaugh, 1998).

Social-Emotional Development Adolescents benefit from stability and sustained relationships with teachers and peers, which K–8 or 6–8 configurations may provide (Bedard & Do, 2005). Conversely, grade 6–8 or 7–8 schools are often better equipped to address the unique developmental needs of early adolescents due to specialized staff and resources (Eccles et al., 1993).

Teacher Expertise and Resources Middle school-specific configurations (e.g., grades 6–8) allow for more subject-specific teaching with subject-specialized teachers and access to resources tailored for early adolescents (Caskey & Anfara, 2014). K–8 schools may lack this specialization and have limited access to varied classes and resources (Juvonen et al., 2004).

CONCLUSION

Middle-level education is an interesting and dynamic time for schools, teachers, students, and parents. Adolescents have many different needs, including academic, social, and emotional development. They are navigating increased independence, peer relationships, and personal identity while also building foundational skills for high school and beyond. Schools must balance rigorous academics with social-emotional learning, ensuring students receive the support they need to succeed. Factors such as student interests, faculty expertise, school resources, and scheduling constraints all influence the middle school experience.

Each grade-level configuration has trade-offs. K–8 schools may support smoother transitions and stronger community ties, while middle schools (grades 6–8 or 7–8) are often better tailored to address adolescents’ academic and developmental needs. Decisions on configuration should consider the specific needs of the student population, school resources, and district goals.

APPENDIX 1: DEFINITIONS

Middle-Level Education: Education designed for students typically in grades 6-8, focusing on the unique developmental and academic needs of young adolescents.

Traditional Schedule: A school scheduling model featuring multiple shorter periods per day, providing daily exposure to all subjects.

Block Schedule: A scheduling model with fewer, longer class periods that allow for extended instructional time and in-depth learning.

Rotating Schedule: A dynamic scheduling approach where the order of class periods changes regularly to distribute learning times equitably.

Advisory Period: A shorter class period often used for mentoring, addressing social-emotional learning, or academic check-ins.

Project-Based Learning (PBL): An instructional approach emphasizing hands-on, student-driven projects to develop deep understanding and skills.

Transition Time: The time students take to move between classes, which can impact the total instructional time available.

Developmental Needs: The physical, emotional, social, and cognitive requirements of young adolescents that influence their learning experiences.

Instructional Strategies: Methods and techniques used by teachers to facilitate learning, such as lectures, group work, or hands-on activities.

APPENDIX 2: MIDDLE SCHOOL BELL SCHEDULES

BRYANT MIDDLE

Bell Schedule 1

Monday – Thursday

	Beginning	Ending
1 st Period	8:45 a.m.	9:36 a.m.
2 nd Period	9:40 a.m.	10:21 a.m.
3 rd Period	10:25 a.m.	11:06 a.m.
4 th Period	11:10 a.m.	11:51 a.m.
1 st Lunch	11:51 a.m.	12:21 p.m.
5 th Period	12:25 p.m.	1:06 p.m.
5 th Period	11:55 a.m.	12:36 p.m.
2 nd Lunch	12:36 p.m.	1:06 p.m.
6 th Period	1:10 p.m.	1:51 p.m.
7 th Period	1:55 p.m.	2:36 p.m.
8 th Period	2:40 p.m.	3:23 p.m.

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Bell Schedule 2

Friday “Early Out”

Sections		Beginning	Ending
1-2	1 st Period	8:45 a.m.	9:20 a.m.
3-4	2 nd Period	9:24 a.m.	9:59 a.m.
5-6	3 rd Period	10:03 a.m.	10:38 a.m.
7-8	4 th Period	10:42 a.m.	11:17 a.m.
	1 st Lunch	11:17 a.m.	11:47 a.m.
9-10	5 th Period	11:51 a.m.	12:26 p.m.
9-10	5 th Period	11:21 a.m.	11:56 a.m.
	2 nd Lunch	11:56 a.m.	12:26 p.m.
11-12	6 th Period	12:30 p.m.	1:05 p.m.
13-14	7 th Period	1:09 p.m.	1:44 p.m.
15-16	8 th Period	1:48 p.m.	2:23 p.m.

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CLAYTON MIDDLE

MON/TUE/THU	
Period 1	8:00-8:53
Period 2	8:56-9:44
Period 3	9:47-10:36
1st Lunch	10:36-11:06
Period 4	11:09-11:57
Period 4	10:39-11:27
2nd Lunch	11:27-11:57
Period 5	12:00-12:48
Period 6	12:51-1:39
Period 7	1:42-2:30

WEDNESDAY	
Period 1/Advisory	8:00-9:12
Period 2	9:15-10:00
Period 3	10:03-10:48
1st Lunch	10:48-11:18
Period 4	11:21-12:06
Period 4	10:51-11:36
2nd Lunch	11:36-12:06
Period 5	12:09-12:54
Period 6	12:57-1:42
Period 7	1:45-2:30

FRI EARLY OUT	
Period 1	8:00-8:42
Period 2	8:45-9:25
Period 3	9:28-10:08
Period 5	10:11-10:51
1st Lunch	10:51-11:21
Period 4	11:24-12:04
Period 4	10:54-11:34
2nd Lunch	11:34-12:04
Period 6	12:07-12:47
Period 7	12:50-1:30

GLENDAL MIDDLE

Regular Day Schedule		Friday Release (1:30pm) Schedule	
1st Lunch	2nd Lunch	1st Lunch	2nd Lunch
ADVISORY 8:00-8:30	ADVISORY 8:00-8:30	ADVISORY 8:00-8:30	ADVISORY 8:00-8:30
1st Period 8:33-9:36	1st Period 8:33-9:36	1st Period 8:33-9:24	1st Period 8:33-9:24
2nd Period 9:40-10:42	2nd Period 9:40-10:42	2nd Period 9:28-10:18	2nd Period 9:28-10:18
1st LUNCH 10:42-11:12	3rd Period 10:46-11:48	1st LUNCH 10:18-10:48	3rd Period 10:22-11:12
3rd Period 11:16-12:18	2nd LUNCH 11:48-12:18	3rd Period 10:52-11:42	2nd LUNCH 11:12-11:42
4th Period 12:22-1:24	4th Period 12:22-1:24	4th Period 11:46-12:36	4th Period 11:46-12:36
5th Period 1:28-2:30	5th Period 1:28-2:30	5th Period 12:40-1:30	5th Period 12:40-1:30

HILLSIDE MIDDLE

Bell Schedule for Hillside Middle School M-TH	
Period 1	8:00am - 8:48am
Period 2	8:50am - 9:50am
Period 3	9:52am - 10:40am
Period 4	10:42 - 11:30am
1st Lunch	11:30 - 12:00pm
Period 5	12:02 - 12:50 pm
Period 5	11:32 - 12:20pm
2nd Lunch	12:20 - 12:50pm
Period 6	12:52am - 1:40pm
Period 7	1:42pm - 2:30pm

Bell Schedule for Hillside Middle School Fridays	
Period 1	8:00am - 8:41am
Period 2	8:43am - 9:24am
Period 3	9:26am - 10:07am
Period 4	10:09am - 10:50am
1st Lunch	10:50am - 11:20am
Period 5	11:22am - 12:03pm
Period 5	10:52am - 11:33am
2nd Lunch	11:33am - 12:03pm
Period 6	12:05pm - 12:46pm
Period 7	12:48pm - 1:30pm

NIBLEY PARK K-8

Middle School		
1	8:00 AM	9:01 AM
2	9:04 AM	9:50 AM
3	9:53 AM	10:39 AM
4	10:42 AM	11:28 AM
5	11:31 AM	12:17 PM
Lunch	12:20 PM	12:50 PM
6	12:53 PM	1:39 PM
7	1:42 PM	2:30 AM
Dismissal	2:30 PM	

NORTHWEST MIDDLE

Regular Bell Schedule

First Floor				Second Floor		
Period	Start Time	End Time		Period	Start Time	End Time
Ready Bell	7:55			Ready Bell	7:55	
1	8:00	8:49	49 min	1	8:00	8:49
2	8:52	9:41	49 min	2	8:52	9:41
3	9:44	10:33	49 min	3	9:44	10:33
4	10:36	11:25	49 min	4	10:36	11:25
Lunch	11:25	11:55	30/49	5	11:28	12:17
5	11:58	12:47	49/30	Lunch	12:17	12:47
6	12:50	1:39	49 min	6	12:50	1:39
7	1:42	2:30	48 min	7	1:42	2:30

Wednesday Advisory Schedule

First Floor				Second Floor		
Period	Start Time	End Time		Period	Start Time	End Time
Ready Bell	7:55			Ready Bell	7:55	
1	8:00	8:40	40 min	1	8:00	8:40
2	8:43	9:23	40 min	2	8:43	9:23
3	9:26	10:06	40 min	3	9:26	10:06
4	10:09	10:49	40 min	4	10:09	10:49
Lunch	10:49	11:19	30/40	5	10:52	11:32
5	11:22	12:02	40/30	Lunch	11:32	12:02
6	12:05	12:45	40 min	6	12:05	12:45
7	12:48	1:28	40 min	7	12:48	1:28
Advisory	1:31	2:30	59 min	Advisory	1:31	2:30

Short Day Bell Schedule

First Floor				Second Floor		
Period	Start Time	End Time		Period	Start Time	End Time
Ready Bell	7:55	7:59		Ready Bell	7:55	7:59
1	8:00	8:40	40 min	1	8:00	8:40
2	8:43	9:23	40 min	2	8:43	9:23
3	9:26	10:06	40min	3	9:26	10:06
4	10:09	10:49	40 min	4	10:09	10:49
Lunch	10:49	11:19	30/40	5	10:52	11:32
5	11:22	12:02	40/30	Lunch	11:32	12:02
6	12:05	12:45	40 min	6	12:05	12:45
7	12:48	1:30	42 min	7	12:48	1:30

APPENDIX 3: RESOURCES

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SALT LAKE CITY
SCHOOL DISTRICT
Your Best Choice

Middle Level School Review

February 18, 2025



Purpose of the Review

The SLCSD Middle Level Committee was formed to review of the structure, resources, and needs of middle schools within the district. This includes documenting current educational practices, enrollment, learning opportunities, and student outcomes to ensure the schools are effectively and equitably meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of students.

The committee identified areas that could be better aligned with the district's goals for equitable, high-quality education and support for all learners.



Strategic Plan for Student Achievement

- Equitable Access and Inclusion
- Academic Success
- Expanded Learning Opportunities



Similarities and Differences in School Structures

- Schedules
- Course offerings
- Extracurricular
- Transitions



District Next Steps

- Discuss and select a consistent schedule to be implemented at all middle level schools.
- Place all middle schools on the same start- and end-time schedule to facilitate collaborative meetings and PLCs.
- Review course offerings for appropriate access at all middle level schools.
- Determine structures that would support elective courses, especially at schools impacted by the number of ELD or Reading courses needed to support students.
- Investigate ways to increase engagement in afterschool programming.
- Reconfigure Nibley Park K-8 as an elementary school.



Board Considerations

1. Study middle configurations to determine if creating 6-8 schools is feasible and supportive of student development and learning.
2. Study middle school boundaries to align students' movement from elementary to middle school as much as possible.



*Successful middle schools intentionally organize people,
time, and space to maximize young adolescents'
growth and development.*

The Successful Middle School: This We Believe