



Middle School Restructuring Committee Recommended Plan

February 12, 2025 Refined Version 2

Goal:

Restructure current middle school model to include a grades 5-6 and grades 7-8 school configuration to create a more unified and intentional educational experience, with the aim of providing universal Pre-K opportunities by the 2026-2027 school year. This restructuring will take place gradually, with a slow rollout that allows for thoughtful adjustments and implementation.

Plan SY26-27: Grade 5-6 and Grade 7-8 Middle Grade Model Begins.

Reimagining the middle grades includes the following targeted areas:

1. Instructional Strategies: Model Focus Area (for 5-6 and 7-8)

- Review and refine educational programming to support **co-teaching models**, **project-based learning**, and **restorative practices** that encourage more personalized learning and student engagement.
- Implement **nontraditional scheduling** to offer more flexible time blocks, allowing for personalized instruction and deep dives into academic content.
- Introduce **personal instructional blocks** designed to address individual student needs, offering tailored support and enrichment.

2. Early Middle Grade Model: Grade 5 and 6 Model Focus Areas

- Bringing grades 5 and 6 together in small, elementary-like cohorts allows for an intentional, more supportive transition into upper middle grade education. This approach emphasizes close-knit, small group learning and a potential two-teacher-per-team model, fostering stronger relationships and personalized attention. It helps students develop the social, emotional, and academic skills needed for the demands of middle school while maintaining a sense of stability and community before entering the more independent environment of Grades 7-8.

3. Early College and Career Readiness: Grade 7-8 Model Focus Areas

- Introduce early credit-bearing courses for Grades 7-8 to help students transition to the expectations and demands of high school.
- Integrate early college and career readiness courses into the Grades 7-8 curriculum to support students in developing the skills and mindset needed for high school success. These courses will help students explore career paths, and gain real-world experience, empowering both students and families to make informed decisions about high school and post-secondary pathways while easing the transition to higher academic expectations.

4. Academic Support and Retention Policies:

- Review and revise the **retention policy** to move away from social promotion practices, focusing on academic mastery.
- Offer **multiple opportunities** for students to achieve success in the classroom, and when necessary, provide **in-time grade repair** to ensure mastery of content before advancing to the next grade.
- Emphasize personalized support systems to ensure that every student has the tools and resources they need to succeed.

5. UPDATE: Increased opportunities for honors and accelerated courses

Recommendation:

The restructuring of Grades 5-6 and 7-8 provides a strategic opportunity to modernize the learning environment. By integrating co-teaching, project-based learning, and nontraditional schedules, we can create a more dynamic and responsive educational system. Additionally, early exposure to credit-bearing and career-oriented coursework will not only help students see the relevance of their education but will also better prepare them for the transition into high school.

This phased approach allows for careful implementation, providing time to assess progress and make necessary adjustments. By the target year of SY26-27, the restructuring should result in a cohesive, forward-thinking middle school experience that supports both academic and personal growth for the students of Pittsfield Public Schools.

Considerations

- Ensuring educator licensure is in line with grade span model
- Designing and implementing **targeted professional development** for educators and staff to effectively support the **instructional model** and **grade span-specific focuses**. This includes providing **ongoing training, workshops, and collaborative learning opportunities** that align with best practices, curriculum expectations, and student needs.
- A flexible instructional day schedule that aligns with the needs of each grade span while ensuring that start and end times remain practical for both staff and families.
- Evaluation of grading frequency and platforms, including the use of **Canvas** for grading instead of **PowerSchool**, as well as considerations for **trimester vs. quarter-based grading** and the implementation of **standards-based report cards**.
 - *IMPORTANT NOTE: The use of Canvas for grading would need to be negotiated for grade 5 teachers. Currently grade 5 teachers do not use Canvas for grading.*
- Ensuring that the **student assessment schedule** is thoughtfully aligned with **grading practices** to provide a coherent and effective evaluation system. This includes reviewing the **timing, frequency, and format** of assessments to support meaningful feedback, accurate progress tracking, and a balanced workload for both students and educators.
- Creating a **comprehensive and effective communication plan** to engage families, ensuring they receive **timely, clear, and accessible** information. This plan will incorporate **multiple communication channels**, such as emails, newsletters, school websites, social media, and in-person meetings, to foster transparency and collaboration. The goal is to strengthen the **home-school connection**, keep families informed about important updates, and provide opportunities for meaningful engagement in their child's education.
- Modifying transportation policies while ensuring that our current bus fleet and staff have the capacity to implement and uphold those changes.