

Possible Grade Configurations at BPS Sept 21, 2018

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Grade Configurations

In Boston, the Exam Schools have a large influence on K-8 schools largely by lowering enrollment for those schools in the 7th and 8th grades and the impact that has on those schools. Families love K-8s largely because they prefer their children to be with younger students when they are in the middle school years, than to be with high school students. Research has shown that the K-8, 9-12 grade configurations work well for student achievement as well. Also, the stability of a longer period in a school is beneficial for students who have had a lot of challenges in their lives.

A K-8, 9-12 Grade Configuration

It is hard to imagine that the exam schools would welcome a change to a 9-12 grade configuration. If they were that would be one good solution. K-8s are popular in the district. The biggest reason that families leave the K-8 schools is to enter the exam schools. Although there are seats available for 9th grade there are less than for grade 7 so many families think they need to make the shift at grade 7 or their child will not get a spot in the school.

A K-6, 7-12 and a K-8, 9-12 Grade Configuration

Another solution would be for about half the schools to have a K-6, 7-12 model and for the other half to have a K-8, 9-12 model. The main concern with this approach is making sure that each group has an equal mix of options that would suit many different needs. The fact that there are no exam schools that are 9-12 and no arts academy at grade 7-12 is one example of students not having equal choices for the different grade configurations.

I would be concerned that the K-6, 7-12 grade configurations would end up having stronger academic options and that the K-8, 9-12 would become less popular. Slowly over time the whole system might move to K-6, 7-12 which doesn't have the best academic outcomes. Also, many families love K-8s and would prefer to see them survive and thrive.

One idea would be for some 7-12 schools to offer 50% of their seats in the 7th grade, and 50% of their seats in the 9th grade. This would help K-8 schools not lose as many students in the 7th and 8th grades, making their schools stronger. This would give families more choices to choose from as well. A K-8 student might want to go to a 7-12 in 7th grade. A K-6 student might want to go to a K-8 for middle school, and then a 9-12 school. There could be different options that could be good fits for individual students. This could both add more consistency and add more good choices for each family to choose from. One downside would be an influx of new students at grade 7 and grade 9 which might make some students feel like they have lost half of their community or gained too many new faces. But because students could more easily be in a place that is the best fit for them, I think those adjustments to changes in school populations might be worth it.

Balancing Options for K-6 and K-8 students

	For K-6 or K-8 students	For K-8 or 7-12 students	For K-6, K-8, or 7-12 students
School Grade Configuration	7-12 schools	9-12 schools	7-12 schools with admissions at grade 7 and grade 9. There would be guaranteed 50% admission at grade 7 and guaranteed 50% admission at grade 9.
Percentage of these schools to ensure equal options for K-6 and K-8 students	Equal to 9-12 schools	Equal to 7-12 schools	These schools do not impact the balance between 9-12 schools and 7-12 schools. There could be any number of these schools.

I think that this framework has many strengths:

1. It makes it possible for both K-6 schools and K-8 schools to thrive in the district. If decisions were made only on a school by school basis then over time the K-8 schools would most likely be less popular and some schools might be pushed to a K-6 model if enrollment became very low. Although this would probably happen very slowly I think it is better to set up a structure that allows both configurations to be strong long term.
2. With this model there is the possibility that specialty schools could offer two times that students could enroll so both K-6 and K-8 schools would have an equal chance of being admitted to those schools. Also, those High Schools would have a more diverse student body as well.
3. This structure would work well with k-8 schools that would like to grow to include a 9-12 high school. Some K-6 students might like to go to middle school in a K-8 that has a 9-12 high school too. This would be another path for a K-6 student to take that would reduce transitions.

A K-7, 8-12 Grade Configuration

Another solution is a compromise between the K-8 supporters and the exam schools. That would be to have a grade configuration of k-7, 8-12. This would take one year away from the K-8 model. I think this might be accepted if it meant that most students would have all the BPS high schools open as options. That would be a great improvement. It would be a little harder to get K-5 schools to a K-7 configuration. For Roslindale I would imagine that the Irving could become a 6-7 school and possibly have a strand of K-5 if there was additional space. The smaller K-5 schools could continue to feed into the Irving. For the other small K-5 schools either additional grades could be added or perhaps they could pair with Early Learning Centers so that the grade configurations could start later and go to grade 7.

The other part is that the exam schools would need to lose one year of their school. The main benefits would be the following:

- More students could go to the exam schools
- Students that need more time to catch up academically to be ready for exam school work could get to that place
- There would be the potential for more diversity at the school in race, income, special needs, LGBT, etc..

Things to consider would be:

- Presently students have two years where they can apply to the exam schools. Perhaps the first exam could happen a year earlier, and half the class could be picked at that point. Then there would still be two years that students could apply.
- As for Latin classes, students could still take those classes. The current students who join in grade 9 are able to make that work. Also Latin could be offered to 7th graders in a summer program or through online courses.

As for alternative High Schools they provide a very specific and necessary contribution that is not in conflict with a K-7, 8-12 model. They can coexist fine alongside other schools with k-7, and 8-12 grades.

This grade configuration would also work well for busing.

As for schools outside of the district they could choose to adopt this grade configuration if they choose to.

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