Grade Realignment Study

Richmond Community Schools

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Richmond Community Schools
Board of School Trustees
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PART I: Framework of Study

Need Assessment

For long-range planning and considering declining student enrollment, the Richmond Community Schools (RCS) Board of Trustees and School Administration Leadership Team determined a need to study grade-level configurations and school building utilization. The district contracted with Administrator Assistance team members Tracy Caddell, Steve Edwards, and Wayne Stubbs to conduct the study, which began in mid-March and was completed in May 2024.

The consultants collected data and information on the school district through individual interviews, a review of school district data, and a review of Indiana Department of Education data. As part of the study, prior and current student enrollment were analyzed. A grade-level configuration comparison study was done on similar school districts and neighboring districts for the district to review.

The results of this study are intended to provide a series of recommended actions for decisions to be considered by the RCS executive leadership team and the RCS Board of Trustees.

To further provide the most accurate feedback possible to the school board, a qualitative research model has been used to report more detailed evidence from the interview sessions. As this report is analyzed by district and board leadership, please be aware that those interviewed provided diverse answers to the same question.

A review of educational research suggested that school grade level configuration and grade span have a limited impact on student achievement, while the number of student transitions between schools negatively affects student learning. See this report's Grade Level Reconfiguration Research and Analysis for more specific details.

The key questions RCS identified needing answers through the Administrator Assistance study are:

- · Determine the community's support for closing elementary schools
- · Determine the community's support for the establishment of 6, 7, and 8 middle schools
- · Develop supporting rationale for the movement of Hibbard programs back to home schools
- · Determine the community's support for the establishment of an Early Learning Center

Purpose of Study

School reconfiguration (realignment) changes a school's grade structure to realize educational and operational benefits. Consultants Tracy Caddell, Steven Edwards, and Wayne Stubbs from Administrator Assistance were asked to review the grade alignment and offer recommendations on potential grade realignment.

Grade reconfiguration, also known as grade reorganization, is a school reform strategy that involves restructuring the traditional grade-level structure of a school or district. This can include changing the age range of students in each grade, combining or separating grades, and modifying the curriculum and instructional approaches to better meet students' needs.

Research on grade reconfiguration has yielded mixed results, with some studies suggesting positive outcomes and others indicating potential drawbacks. Here are some key findings from the research:

Positive outcomes:

Improved student outcomes: A study by the National Center for Education Statistics (2009) found that grade reconfiguration was associated with improved student outcomes, including increased student achievement and reduced dropout rates.

Better alignment with developmental needs: Research by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2005) suggests that grade reconfiguration can help schools better align their curriculum and instructional approaches with the developmental needs of students at different ages.

Increased flexibility: A study by the American Educational Research Association (2007) found that grade reconfiguration can give schools more flexibility in curriculum design and instructional approaches, allowing them to better respond to students' needs.

Factors influencing success:

Communication and planning: Research suggests that effective communication and planning are critical to the success of grade reconfiguration. Schools should involve stakeholders in planning and provide clear information about the changes.

Teacher training and support: A study by the American Educational Research Association (2007) found that providing teachers with training and support is essential for successfully implementing grade reconfiguration.

Parental involvement: Research by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2005) suggests that parental involvement is essential for successfully

implementing grade reconfiguration. Parents should be involved in planning and decision-making processes.

Conclusion:

Grade reconfiguration is a complex issue that requires careful consideration of various factors. Research suggests that it can lead to positive outcomes, such as improved student outcomes and increased flexibility. The success of grade reconfiguration depends on effective communication, planning, teacher training, parental involvement, and a commitment to equity. RCS should carefully consider these factors when implementing grade reconfiguration to ensure it benefits all students.

Methodology

The study lasted approximately three months, culminating with the final report and presentation of key recommendations and future planning. The study required collecting and analyzing critical information about RCS and actively engaging the school community to solicit vital input.

A sample of the study activities included:

- Review and analysis of numerous district instructional and financial documents and policies
- Conducted facility tours of each K-8 building
- Development of a series of questions - a base set discussed in most interviews and a set of more unique questions for specific district roles
- 1:1 interview(s) with teachers, parents, community members, school administrators, and Board of Trustees ranging from 30-45 minutes
    - 14 teachers interviewed
    - 24 administrators interviewed
    - 5 board members interviewed
    - 14 parents interviewed
    - 22 community members were interviewed
- Multiple periodic meetings with numerous district staff to discuss data
- Consultants review of applicable educational research on grade reconfiguration
- Review of the Indiana Department of Education online data sources
- Met with local architect Kevin McCurdy to discuss the School District's facility needs.

Study Timeline

March 14, 2024   Meeting with Superintendent and other district administrators.

Toured the elementary buildings.

March 20, 2024   Consultants video call meeting for project planning

March 21, 2024   Steve Edwards, and Mark Fowler met to discuss the

coordination of the study.

April 2, 2024   Interviewed school district employees and

community members.

April 3, 2024   Interviewed school district employees and

community members.

April 4, 2024   Interviewed school district employees and

community members.

April 5, 2024   Interviewed school district employees and

community members.

April 12, 2024   Consultants video call meeting for project planning

April 16, 2024   Interviewed school district employees and

community members.

April 17, 2024   Interviewed school district employees and

community members.

April 17, 2024   Met with Kevin McCurdy, architect, to discuss facilities.

Toured Test, Dennis, Hibberd, Baxter schools and Richmond High School

April 18, 2024   Interviewed school district employees and

community members.

May 2, 2024   Video call with Mark Fowler and Karen Scalf

May 7, 2024   Consultants met in Huntington for project planning.

May 15, 2024   Consultants video call meeting for project planning

May 22, 2024   AA Consultant toured Ivy Tech with Mark Fowler

and Superintendent Wright

May 24, 2024   Consultants video call meeting for project planning

Overview of School District and Grade Configuration

Overview of RCS

RCS has much to be proud of. The high school is on the National Register for Historic Places. It has the famous Tiernan Center, which seats 8,500 and was built in 1986 to host athletic events, the Civic Hall Performing Arts Center, an auditorium that seats 924, and McQuire Hall, which hosts the Richmond Art Museum, the first and only Art Museum located in a high school in the United States.

Academic programs are in place to meet the needs of all students. The high school provides dual credit and advanced placement courses, Career and Technical Education, five academic teams, orchestra, marching band, and selected Foreign Language classes. The school district has expanded offerings for STEAM education at Hibberd School for students in grades five through eight to meet the needs of students seeking a more advanced curriculum. Hibberd hosts the district's high-ability program, Logos, and applied skills classes. Both programs are for students in grades three through eight.

The school district offers a wide range of extracurricular activities. The high school has twenty varsity sports and provides a rich menu of student clubs and activities. Richmond High School (RHS) students participate in the Hoosier Academic Super Bowl. Academic teams are fielded in English, fine arts, social studies, science, math, and interdisciplinary. High School teams have qualified for the State meet and have been State champions in several subject areas. The performing arts are a big part of the school's curriculum, with orchestra, marching band, and "The Red Devil Players," which produces at least two shows annually, travel to regional and state conferences, and work with professional and amateur theater groups that perform in Richmond. The high school marching band annually participates in the State Fair marching band contest. Both Test and Dennis Schools offer a variety of sports activities for students. There are many opportunities throughout the school district for students to further enhance their education through involvement in activities outside the classroom.

Alternative education is provided at the high school and the Community Youth Services Program at Baxter School. These programs serve students who need additional support to progress through the school curriculum. Six elementary schools are small neighborhood schools for kindergarten through fourth-grade students. The elementary schools also host Pre-K education programs to meet the needs of the youngest learners and help prepare them to be learning-ready when they reach kindergarten.

The challenges the district faces are:

- · Older school buildings with increasing maintenance costs and needed renovation
- · a declining student population,
- · a high number of students identified for special education services and
- · a high student poverty rate.

Historic Grade Alignment in RCS

RCS has closed buildings and utilized different grade configurations during the past fourteen years. The district had nine elementary schools, each serving students in kindergarten through the sixth grade in the 2010-2011 school year, an early learning center for Pre-K students, two junior high schools serving students in grades seven through eight, and a high school serving students in grades nine through twelve. A program for alternative students was added at Richmond State Hospital during the 2011-2012 school year. The alternative program moved to the Community Learning Center beginning with the 2012-2013 school year.

Three elementary schools, Paul Garrison, Highland Heights, and C R Richardson, closed beginning with the 2012-2013 school year, and Test and Dennis Schools became middle schools serving students in grades five through eight. Charles Elementary School became a school for kindergarten through fourth-grade students, and the remaining elementary schools, Crestdale, Fairview, Starr, Vaile, and Westview, all became pre-K through fourth-grade buildings. Charles added Pre-K students in the 2013-2014 school year.

RHS collaborated with the Excel Center sponsored by Goodwill Industries during the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years and sent a limited number of students there for services.

The Hibberd School has hosted different education programs through the years. It once hosted adult education and alternative education programs. The Discovery School, which had multilevel classrooms and an alternative way of teaching, was located at the school for a time. The high ability program, LOGOS, for students in grades three through eight is now based at Hibberd and has been for several years. The school recently began hosting the STEAM program for grades five through eight. The school also provides applied skills classes for grades three through eight.

Students in the LOGOS, STEAM, and applied skills classes attend Hibberd but, for student count, have their student numbers assigned to their sending schools.

The district last changed grade alignment in the 2021-2022 school year. Test School became a school for fifth and sixth-grade students, and Dennis School for seventh and eighth-grade students. Both schools functioned as junior high schools for seventh and eighth-grade students years ago and became middle schools serving students in grades five through eight before the current grade alignments.

 One school configuration that has stayed the same for RCS over time is the grade configuration of the high school. The school has maintained a grade alignment of grades nine through twelve.

The IDOE online database for school enrollments begins with the 2005-2006 school year. RHS had an enrollment of 1620 students that school year and likely larger enrollments before then.

Current RCS' Organizational Structure and School Facts

Indiana school districts have different school configurations. The current organizational structure for RCS, which includes six elementary schools, grades Pre-K through grade four, an intermediate school, grades five through six, a junior high school, grades seven through eight, and a high school, grades nine through twelve, is not unique.

The current district school alignment is shown in the Table: School Organizational Structure, along with crucial facts about the schools regarding age and available classrooms. As previously noted, one of the challenges RCS faces is older buildings, which have increasing facility costs for maintenance and renovation.

Capturing spaces now used for other functions can increase the number of available classrooms in the six elementary schools. The amount of additional classroom space that might be available is listed in Table: School Organizational Structure.

Table School Organizational Structure

	Year Built	Age of Building	Available Classrooms	Grades Served
Charles	1954	70 years	19 Possible 20	P-K to 4
Crestdale	1965	59 years	23 Possible 26	P-K to 4
Fairview	1929	95 Years	16 Possible 19	P-K to 4
Starr	1957	67 years	16 Possible 17	P-K to 4
Vaile	1954	70 years	14 Possible 17	P-K to 4
Westview	1950	74 years	15 Possible 17	P-K to 4
Test	1922	102 years	30	5 to 6
Dennis	1920	104 years	30	7 to 8
Hibberd	1976	48 years	20	3 to 8
Baxter	1959	65 years	8	K – 12
Richmond High School	1941	83 years	93	9-12

Part II: Analysis of School District Data & Community Input

Student Enrollment

Current School Enrollment

RCS has a student enrollment of 4,250 students which is composed of 1,340 high school students, grades 9-12, plus 11 students who have returned as 12th grade+, 1,288 students enrolled in grades five through eight, and 1,611 students enrolled in grades kindergarten through the fourth grade. Hibberd School had 280 students in attendance in the fall of the 2023-2024 school year, but these students are enrolled in their sending schools for student count purposes. Pre-K enrollment is 231, but it is not counted in the enrollment of 4,250 students because Pre-K students do not count for Average Daily Membership (ADM) reimbursement. The Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) was the source of enrollment numbers presented by the AA consultants.

The four largest student ethnicity groups in the district, as reported by the IDOE, are White (61.1%), Multiracial (15.8%), Hispanic (12.3%), and Black (8.9%).

Other vital statistics for school district enrollment, as reported by IDOE and in the district's 2022 Annual Performance Report, are:

- Twenty-six percent of enrolled students receive Special Education Services compared to the State average of 17.0%.
- 5.86% of enrolled students are English Language Learners (ELL) compared to the State average of 6.9%.
- 9.8% of students enrolled in High Ability Programs compared to the State average of 12.6%.
- 62.5 % to 74.3% of enrolled students receive Free or Reduced Meal Prices compared to the State average of 43.2%. The IDOE online report for the 2023-2024 school year is 62.5%, and the 2022 Annual Report for RCS reported 74.3 %.
- 7.3% of students enrolled in Alternative Education Programs compared to the State average of 7.l%.
-
- 15.4% of students enrolled in Career Technical Education Programs compared to the State average of 42.3%.

Declining Student Enrollment

RCS has experienced a significant decline in student enrollment over the past decade (2015-2024). This can be attributed to the State policy of open school enrollment and the State's voucher policy, which provides a financial avenue for public school students to attend private schools. Table: Ten-Year Student Enrollment provides annual student enrollment numbers for the past ten years.

The 2017-2018 and 2021-2022 school years saw miniscule growth. Enrollment has declined in the other eight years. The overall decline in student enrollment for the ten years is 764 students. Pre-K students are not included in the yearly decline/growth numbers in the right column of Table Ten-Year Student Enrollment because they do not count for ADM reimbursement.

Table: Ten-Year Student Enrollment

Richmond Community Schools Ten Year Student Enrollment
Source: Indiana Department of Education

Year	Grades Pre-K		K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	12+ Adult	Total	Decline
2024	231		340	344	320	301	306	332	301	328	327	378	353	314	295	11	4250	-79
2023	197		359	332	299	304	345	307	333	333	361	361	358	354	268	15	4329	-98
2022	211		333	320	318	343	330	350	341	350	366	373	384	303	304	12	4427	10
2021	157		319	333	344	331	354	334	370	371	360	377	329	329	256	10	4417	-146
2020	257		348	374	354	372	355	388	384	364	367	329	353	302	263	10	4563	-44
2019	252		364	359	371	357	381	384	365	374	317	362	335	305	322	11	4607	-107
2018	271		406	385	388	387	400	373	356	346	347	329	331	354	298	14	4714	9
2017	293		407	384	391	398	374	351	362	345	302	343	387	343	307	11	4705	-156
2016	298		388	417	402	387	378	366	359	339	328	423	370	353	343	8	4861	-153
2015	284		450	440	410	396	383	372	336	338	422	378	377	369	338	5	5014	NA

Pre-K students not counted in student loss totals or total number of students.

The number of students enrolled in the school district's elementary schools, kindergarten through fourth grade, has declined 468 students over the last ten years. Table: Ten-Year Elementary Enrollment provides the annual elementary school enrollment numbers for the past decade. The total enrollment numbers in the right column do not include Pre-K students.

The elementary schools with the most significant loss of students in grades kindergarten through the fourth grade for the past decade are Charles (loss of 175), Starr (loss 129), and Crestdale (90). The schools with the fewest loss of students are Fairview (loss of 19), Vaile (loss of 23) and Westview (loss of 39). When combined, the decline in student enrollment numbers cited for each school does not exactly match the total enrollment decline provided in Table: Ten-Year Elementary Enrollment. AA consultants obtained the data from two different IDOE data sources. There is a slight variance of seven students, which is not significant.

The highest enrollment of Pre-K students was 298 in 2016. The lowest enrollment numbers for the past decade were 157 students in 2021. That year's low enrollment could have been due to the COVID-19 epidemic and parent concerns about having their children in public settings. There has been a steady increase in the number of Pre-K students enrolled since the 2020-2021 school year to a total of 231 for the current school year. This is a positive trend.

Table: Ten-Year Elementary Enrollment

Ten-Year Richmond Elementary School Enrollment Numbers								
Year	Pre-K		K	1	2	3	4	K-4 Total
2024	231		340	344	320	301	306	1611
2023	197		359	332	299	304	345	1639
2022	211		333	320	318	343	330	1644
2021	157		319	333	344	331	354	1681
2020	257		348	374	354	372	355	1803
2019	252		364	359	371	357	381	1832
2018	271		406	385	388	387	400	1966
2017	293		407	384	391	398	374	1954
2016	298		388	417	402	387	378	1972
2015	284		450	440	410	396	383	2079

Source: Indiana Department of Education

Over the past decade, student enrollment has declined 180 students in grades five through eight in RCS. Table: Ten-Year Five through Eight Enrollment provides the ten-year annual enrollment numbers for grades five through eight.

Table: Ten-Year Five Through Eight Enrollment

Richmond Ten-Year Enrollment, Grades 5-8					
Source: Indiana Department of Education					
					Total
Year	5	6	7	8	
2024	332	301	328	327	1288
2023	307	333	333	361	1334
2022	350	341	350	366	1407
2021	334	370	371	360	1435
2020	388	384	364	367	1503
2019	384	365	374	317	1440
2018	373	356	346	347	1422
2017	351	362	345	302	1360
2016	366	359	339	328	1392
2015	372	336	338	422	1468

The Table: High School Enrollment provides RHS' ten-year annual enrollment numbers. A low enrollment of 1,247 students occurred during the 2020-2021 school year. Since the end of the 2019-2020 school year, there has been an increase of ninety-three students.

Table: High School Enrollment

9	10	11	12		Total	Year
378	353	314	295		1340	2024
361	358	354	268		1341	2023
373	384	303	304		1364	2022
377	329	329	256		1291	2021
329	353	302	263		1247	2020
362	335	305	322		1324	2019
329	331	354	298		1312	2018
343	387	343	307		1380	2017
423	370	353	343		1489	2016
378	377	369	338		1462	2015

Richmond High School Ten-Year Enrollment

Source: Indiana Department of Education

Other Enrollment Information to Consider and Comparisons

Declining student enrollment is a trend for urban districts. The decline in RCS' student enrollment numbers of 764 students over the last ten years is less of a decline than that experienced during the same time in two other close-by urban school districts with similar student demographics. Muncie Community Schools experienced a decrease of 941 students, and Anderson Community Schools experienced a decline in student enrollment of 1,041 students. Source: IDOE

As documented by the IDOE in the 2023-2024 public school transfer report, 1,450 students living in the school district are attending schools outside the district, and 59 students living outside the district are attending schools in the district. Thus, the district's net loss is 1,391 students.

The loss of students due to public school transfers is common in the other two urban districts previously mentioned. The same IDOE report for the 2023-2024 school year lists Muncie

Community Schools with a net loss of 2,522 students due to public school transfers and vouchers and Anderson Community Schools with a net loss of 4,019 students for the same reason.

With the concept of money following the child, losses in student enrollment have severe financial impacts. The basic tuition support per ADM for RCS is $7,960.95. The loss of 1,391 students represents a loss of over $11,000,000 for the district.

Student District Transportation

RCS owns a fleet of sixty buses and has contracted with Student Transit LLC. since 2005 to provide student transportation. Student Transit leases the district's buses for one dollar annually and insures, maintains, and pays for all personnel, repairs, inspections, and fuel. The school district employs thirty-one drivers, several bus aides, and two mechanics. RCS encompasses approximately seventy-eight square miles, and buses travel approximately 2,600 miles each day and over 468,000 miles per year. The annual cost to the school district for student transportation is $2,470,000, plus the cost of field and athletic trips. The average cost for the additional trips is between $150,000 - $200,000. The school district's three-year capital project plan for 2023-2025 estimates the cost of bussing at $3,600,000 for each of the 2023-2024, 2024-2025, and 2025-2026 school years. School officials indicated in their interviews that student transportation is a significant issue for the district. Students must wait several minutes at the end of the day for school departure at some locations. The following questions were asked of the school district's transportation department to gain a better understanding of the transportation system and how grade realignment might impact student transportation.

The questions and responses were via email.

Q.   If the district were to reorganize into two 6-8 middle schools, would it significantly impact bussing? How many bus routes run east to west for the 5-6 and 7-8 alignments? Potentially, how many could be reduced or made more efficient with the change? Any ideas about cost reduction?

.... (There are) eleven routes for the Test/Dennis/Hibberd run, including Applied Skills, Special Services, and McKinney Vento transportation. These routes in number would not necessarily reduce; however, the length of time students would be on the bus would be dramatically impacted. (The) routes would be significantly shorter as we could canvas the city and go only to (the student's) home school versus the staggered drop off/pick up we do now which adds an additional 25-45 minutes per route on an average day. The savings (made) would be on fuel, wear and tear on buses, and time. Parents and students (as well as staff) would be thrilled with this change as delays at one building now significantly impact all three buildings and create .....

additional frustration for parents. This would also be highly positive for extracurriculars as currently, when we are short of .... drivers, it can impact how accessible drivers are and the earliest time to depart as they pick up teams for travel to extracurriculars. While we would not want to base our decision on athletics, this is something to consider..…………………………..

(There could be) separate routes for the buildings, but that means multiple pickups at Stops and students would have to know which bus they should take. We did not believe this was in the best interest of students as we would have fifth and sixth graders routinely hopping on incorrect buses, especially when a sub-driver is involved.

Q. **How much potentially could an early learning center increase costs for Bussing?**

Daily Routes cost approximately $65,000- $70,000 per route when considering personnel, routing, maintenance, fuel, etc. We would .... need to purchase seat belts and car seats, thereby reducing the available bus seats by at least one-third. (It would be) necessary to continue appropriate student ratios for adult supervision if we deem early childhood routes necessary. Depending upon ridership numbers, it would .... serve us to either utilize fourteen-passenger buses with an aide and driver or if using a 72-passenger bus, it would mean ...… forty-four or fewer students in car seats with four aides. For a population of two hundred, saying 50% were riders (our district average is 67%), we would need at least 2 or 3 large buses or 5-7 small buses. In the best case, this would cost approximately $130,000 in transportation routes and $25,000-$81,000 in personnel costs not currently realized in our transportation budget.

Q. **Annual cost of student transportation?**

$2,470,000 (plus the cost of field trips and athletic trips). Depending on approvals, the average cost of the additional trips is between $150,000 and $200,000.

Q. **Why the delay in the pickup of Dennis students at the end of the day? Are there other examples?**

The delay is due to a.) shortage of drivers. We have been short-staffed periodically since October, when we started seeing ...… call-offs, no-call no-shows, etc. It has often been that when we have been able to onboard a new driver, (when) we lost one. We continue to recruit with the plan to be fully trained, certified, and staffed at the start of the next school year. b.) The other cause of delay is if elementary routes have issues with K-1 parents being at stops or Test Intermediate or the Hibberd Shuttle has any delay at dismissal, Dennis will be additionally delayed. If Dennis and Test are aligned identically, the Test delay issue is no longer a factor.

*Q.   I know we discussed this, but just wanted to be sure: elementary students
are bussed together, and secondary students are bussed together.*

*Correct, we have elementary routes and secondary routes. Richmond High School (RHS) is
separate from the Test/Hibberd/Dennis routes as Dennis and RHS have the same start time;
however, they run at the same time. Four regular buses and two special services buses are
designated for RHS daily.*

Q.   Does Richmond have buses of its own (for example, the small minibuses)?

*Richmond owns all buses. Student Transit leases the buses for $1 per year and insures,
maintains, and pays for all personnel, repairs, inspections, fuel, etc.*

Q.   Anything else we need to know about bussing but have forgotten to ask?

*We currently have a board policy/administrative guideline that requires grades K, have one
parent to be at the stop to get students off the bus. This does cause daily delays as parents are
away from stops. We have implemented actions that place students at risk of losing their
ridership rights, but that is not always easy when they will have truancy issues if we do not
transport them. It is a daily challenge.*
*... As we combined Dennis and Test, we have found that it is challenging when athletic activities
require busing students from one building to another for practices. Due to the length of time of
routes, this is a challenge to get everyone everywhere at times. The alignment would ..... allow
for more flexibility for the abovementioned reasons.*

Student Transportation is an essential function of a school district. Efficient and quality student
transportation impacts students' academic performance. Students must arrive at school daily if
they are to learn. They must arrive on time, depart with minimal delay, and be transported so as
to avoid spending an inordinate amount of time on buses traveling to and from school. The
process of school reconfiguration or grade realignment must recognize how changes in school
realignment might impact student bussing and students.

Limits on Results and Analysis

Throughout the interview(s) of community partners and school personnel, it was evident that most staff and administration are deeply committed to serving parents and children in the Richmond Community. Their hard work and dedication, which was unanimously acknowledged, is a testament to their sense of ownership and pride in the schools. Many personnel desired to see this dedication further strengthened through enhanced communication and collaboration with district leadership and community partners.

Staff members appreciate the atmosphere of neighborhood schools, the ability to know one another, and the willingness to make changes to benefit students in RCS. They welcomed the examination of district facilities and appeared to appreciate the desire of central office leadership and school trustees to improve the schools.

A qualitative research model has been used to collect more detailed evidence from interview sessions with community partners and school personnel identified by Richmond school leaders to provide Richmond leaders with the most accurate feedback possible.

As this report is analyzed by Richmond leadership, please be aware that diverse answers to the same question were provided by those interviewed. As this report is analyzed, consideration should be given to the following:

● Those interviewed spoke from their experiences, and the responses contained their opinions and perceptions.

● There was a fair amount of concern expressed regarding school facilities, with an acknowledgment that current buildings are antiquated and the realization of the political climate that a significant referendum is not likely to be successful at the current time. Principals want adequate facilities that meet the needs of their teachers and students but also recognize that their needs are more significant than the current financial realities will likely produce.

● Further communication between principals and the maintenance departments may help identify areas for improvement, as it is evident that the administration and the staff want to work together to serve the children of Richmond.

● Some of the reporting is inconsistent. The survey results indicate that the staff enjoys working in Richmond Schools, and the community partners are very proud of RCS and the graduates being produced. There is also hope that this study will lead to a vision, mission, purpose, and goals for upgrading facilities, that facility planning will continue and that a district strategic plan will be implemented. At the same time, collaboration and communication with key community partners and staff will be a priority as district leaders make decisions to address the future of RCS.

__Grade Level Reconfiguration Research and Analysis__

This report explores past research on early childhood education and grade-level configurations, as well as the drivers, processes, and impact of early-grade reconfigurations

Research

Current research does not identify or support one grade configuration as the most effective. Research into the potential impact of grade configurations is generally inconclusive, with results that are difficult to generalize to other districts. Reorganizing grades merely shifts students, teachers, and programs from one physical site to another. Research shows that there is a more significant impact on student learning when the emphasis is not on the location of the students but on the educational experience students receive. Grade configuration is one tool that may improve student learning. However, some studies suggest that students perform better at schools with more grade levels. Another frequent finding is that the most effective grade configuration will vary by district based on internal factors such as projected enrollment, transportation costs, school facilities, and community support.

The decision to reconfigure the early grades is typically driven by practical needs such as budget, space, and school accreditation. While schools may see additional benefits due to reconfiguration, these are not cited as a driver in implementing the change.

Critics of configurations that cluster students into schools with smaller grade spans often cite the increased number of school-to-school transitions as a negative consequence. Richmond has an additional transition with grades 5-6 and 7-8 configuration model.

Research on school transitions finds that academic loss across all content areas should be expected during transition years, though most studies focus on the elementary-to-middle or middle-to-high school transitions. To address concerns and mitigate the impact of changing schools, RCS should implement ongoing and comprehensive transition plans that engage students, teachers, and parents.

Proponents of configurations that cluster students into smaller grade spans highlight the ability to create more targeted programming for students. Districts with distinct elementary and intermediate grade-level buildings note the benefits of being able to tailor both academic and student behavioral programs to a narrower range of student interests and needs.

Districts face logistical and cultural challenges when implementing a grade-level reconfiguration. Administrators must consider student transportation, moving schedules and plans, staff contracts and distribution, and effects on school traffic. Teachers and parents must also be reassured and encouraged about a new school culture. In cases of early grade reconfiguration, additional care should be taken when scheduling classroom set-up time and guiding students through a transition.

The critical success factors for a grade-level reconfiguration are:

Planning   **Communication**   **Collaboration**

Districts should plan well in advance and work to anticipate any challenges or consequences of a reconfiguration. Districts should develop project schedules and communication plans early in the process. Administrators should hold informational meetings for community questions and be prepared with information and answers to common questions.

Districts should ensure reconfiguration plans are feasible before introducing them to the community for input. Logistical details such as building capacity, transportation resources, and school schedules should be considered and used to narrow down options for grade configurations. Introducing configurations without proper vetting can lead to frustration and mistrust in the community.

To secure buy-in from teachers, parents, and students, district leaders should communicate about the plan early, often, and through multiple channels (e.g. emails, website, circulars). Schools should hold parent information nights in the evening and student orientation events to ease the anxiety over the transition.

Districts must ensure that teachers across grade levels are communicating and sharing information around academic expectations. Teachers of younger grades should participate in regular meetings with teachers from upper elementary schools, so that they are familiar with the increased academic rigor and expectations of these grades.

The division of elementary grades is viewed as a challenging transition with cultural implications. Many stakeholders believe that transitioning to a new school and a lack of exposure to older grades may delay students' academic progress in the primary grades. Young students separated from older grades should be exposed to older students through other means, such as high school volunteer programs.

The proposed Pre-K-Grade 1 configuration may also require special planning and consideration to integrate Pre-K classrooms into an elementary school setting. Differences between Pre-K and K-3 instructional practices, teacher professional development, and daily schedules may create a disconnect within the school. Schools should develop specific goals for Pre-K integration and strategies that support integration. Additionally, school leaders should support opportunities for meaningful interaction between teachers and students in Pre-K and elementary grade levels, such as through professional learning communities, paired classrooms, and professional development.

Past Research

Current research does not identify or support one grade configuration as the most effective. A 2010 literature review of research on the relationship between school grade spans and academic achievement found "minimal empirical information" in this area. In a frequently cited 1997 report on grade spans from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Paglin and Fager conclude that "Research has not provided definitive answers to the myriad possible questions about grade spans."

Studies that do exist are often inconclusive, with results that are difficult to generalize to other districts. Some studies suggest that the more extensive the range of grades served in a single school, the better students perform. However, many of these studies focus on differences between a merged K-8 school and a more traditional K-5 and 6-8 organization. For example, one 2008 study shows that students enrolled in K-8 schools had "significant short-term beneficial effects on achievement, attendance, and suspension rates" compared to 6-8 middle schools. However, the study did not consider factors influencing these results, such as school size and performance. Other studies reached similar conclusions.

Despite an extended debate over ideal K-12 grade configurations, researchers have yet to determine how much grade configuration influences student achievement. For example, a 2010 study published in the Journal of Advanced Academics found that grade configuration alone did not account for differences in academic achievement. Multiple studies ultimately conclude that

the most effective grade configuration will vary by district and should consider factors such as projected enrollment, transportation costs, school facilities, and community support.

Districts that are most successful at reorganizing grades start with an articulated vision for the education of middle-grade students. Organizational changes are best when guided by clearly articulated and accepted goals. That means the decision is best when not made in isolation but emerges from a community discussion about goals. Without clear goals, the school organization is merely an administrative plan for organizing teachers and students. Simply changing the location of grades will not change the way teachers teach or result in significant curricular and instructional change.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

This section presents advice from experienced reconfiguration participants on best practices for a smooth transition. The three primary areas leading to success are planning, communication, and collaboration. All information in this section was obtained by reviewing online research reports and hearing actual "practitioners" share their experiences.

- Dr. Gary R. Mazzola, Retired Superintendent of Schools, Ashburnham Westminster Regional
  School District

- Anonymous Respondent, Superintendent of Schools, Anonymous School District, New England

- Anonymous Respondent, Anonymous School District, Midwestern US

Planning

Both interviewed administrators emphasize the need for thorough planning before moving ahead with a grade reconfiguration. Districts should establish schedules and communication plans far ahead of time. The Anonymous School District 2 administrator explains, "There is just so much more to it than what people think, which is packing up a bunch of boxes on the last day of school and moving to a new room. It is so much more in-depth than that. So you have to start the year as early as possible."

Consider All Effects

Participants advise districts to step back and consider the 'big picture.' Considering the undertaking from every angle, including the district calendar and logistics like transportation, can avoid pitfalls further down the line. The Superintendent of Anonymous School District 1 explains:

> "I always ask my people to think about all the unintended consequences that can happen. Let us really think about them and solve for them. In this case, since school got out late last year, we knew that we had to do [several building projects] right from the beginning…just in case something happened that slowed things down."

Clearly Define Roles and Responsibilities

The administrator from Anonymous School District 2 urges other districts to be explicit when outlining key players' and departments' roles and responsibilities throughout the reconfiguration process and communicating this early. He notes, "Building principals and district office staff are pretty busy, but they need to be told what their responsibility is. The district facilities guys… the district technology coordinator, all these people have things that are impacted by reconfiguration. They must be brought in initially so you are not caught off guard."

Talk With Community Partners

As part of the planning process, all participants stressed the importance of getting input from the community. Hearing others' concerns can broaden a district's ability to anticipate and preempt any issues that arise. As the Superintendent of Anonymous School District 1 suggests, "You want to make sure you talk to as many constituents as possible before making the decision. As much as you want to understand all the unintended consequences, you do not know them all."

However, the Anonymous School District 2 administrator urges districts to curate potential options and configurations before discussing the topic with the larger community. He stresses the need to first think through what is feasible for the district, offering, "Ultimately, you should not be putting forth things to your community that you cannot carry out, or else you are just going to create a lot of frustration and mistrust in your leadership's ability to carry through initiatives."

Furthermore, districts should prepare before holding public meetings and understand the questions and concerns that may arise. The Superintendent of Anonymous School District 1 explains, "We did [not] just go in front of a bunch of parents, unprepared for what they might say… We could probably anticipate about 80-90 percent of their concerns. Still,

I would suggest you should be ready for those concerns and be able to answer them." Similarly, Dr. Mazzola recommends that the individuals representing the district at parent forums should be "well-versed in what is going to happen." Lastly, the anonymous Superintendent notes that districts should be able to provide research on the efficacy and outcomes of early-grade reconfiguration. Even in cases where budgetary or space concerns drive a reconfiguration, the research presentation can help validate the decisions.

Allocate Ample Time

In addition to letting teachers and the community know about plans to reconfigure early in the process and leaving plenty of time for staff and community feedback, Dr. Mazzola notes that moving should be done as early as possible. Teachers want assurance that they have enough time to pack up their classroom materials and set things up at a new school. Providing staff with packing materials early allows teachers to pack up their classrooms promptly and in a relaxed manner. Dr. Mazzola explains, "[if] boxes and tape were available, they could box things as they taught them and were [done using] them…the sting was not so bad in June."

Dr. Mazzola also describes renting storage containers where teachers could leave boxes as they packed. This staggering of work over the regular workday, he claims, saves the district money and human resources. Furthermore, this proactivity saves the district money in honorariums since teachers require fewer days to pack and move at the end of the school year.

Communication

Communicating about grade-level reconfigurations and planning are critical for a smooth transition. The anonymous Superintendent explains, "If people know what is happening and they understand why we are doing it, as long as it does not affect their lives too greatly, you will be in pretty good shape." Dr. Mazzola agrees that "If you keep Community partners are informed along the way…people are better able to receive it."

All interviewed administrators note frequent and multi-channel means of communicating plans across the district. These include sending out circulars, communication from school principals through emails and backpack mail, posting an FAQ page on the website, holding public meetings and information nights, and posting minutes for meetings. The administrator from Anonymous School District 2 describes sending regular updates to district employees to avoid any surprises or pushback:

> "Every two weeks, I would send out these long updates alerting everybody to what was happening within the next two-week band, like what decisions were coming, what decisions had been recently made. I just felt like I constantly needed to communicate

with them so they felt in the loop and stay ahead of rumors that might arise, which sometimes happens when you have a lot of change."

Secure Teacher Buy-In

The administrator from Anonymous School District 2 echoes other districts in highlighting staff pushback as a challenge. In supporting teachers through this transition, he notes the importance of creating "different avenues for teachers to post questions and concerns" and ensuring that teachers know the district is listening to their feedback. Additionally, this administrator suggests that communicating a promise of long-term stability can help to reassure teachers and staff who are concerned about moving away from their established school 'families:'

> "We told them that if we reconfigured into these bands, grade level bands, that based
> On enrollment projections, we did not need to see any changes made for ten years.
> So I think they are always seeking stability, so they knew long-term that there would
> be stability."

Lastly, this administrator indicates the importance of communicating with teachers that the reconfiguration's ultimate goal is to benefit students.

Dr. Mazzola recommends negotiating with staff when possible to support staff during a move to arrange for compensation for moving days. A district should offer honorariums or per diem payments for time spent relocating. Furthermore, districts should consider that primary teachers have more materials to move and should be given more time.

In terms of helping staff feel more comfortable in a new location, the anonymous The Superintendent says that school principals should check in on teachers and ensure they have the support—both social and instructional—they need.

Secure Parent and Student Buy-In

All administrators describe holding evening or late afternoon information sessions for parents to learn about the grade-level reconfiguration. Additionally, Dr. Mazzola and the administrator from Anonymous School District 2 describe additional opportunities for students to acclimate to a new school setting and eliminate anxiety on the first day of school. These events are described below.

Parent-Child Orientation

> "The school can lessen the tears and the anxiety...if you have some sort of orientation, but include it like a scavenger hunt type of activity where kids have a little scavenger hunt with 15-20 tasks that they have to find with their Mom or Dad, and they mark it on their scavenger sheet…It can be fun things that they can do, and they get a little map of the school, and they get to explore with somebody that they are familiar with." (Mazzola)

School Day Visit/Open House

> "I used to do building tours…We put the future students on the bus with their classroom teacher, and they came to the new school, and they all got into the auditorium or the cafeteria, and the principal welcomes them…But we want you to be familiar with the teachers and the classrooms, so what we did is we break the kids up into groups of 20-22 kids, and we would assign them to one of the teachers in the building, and they would take them to their classrooms and show them around. Then, they would take them on a tour of the building… it is an awesome opportunity." (Mazzola)
>
> "Our principals knew it was important to form new relationships with all the people…so we had several weeks of open houses at each of the schools, so families and kids could come in the evening and get a tour of the building leadership…people seemed to appreciate that, and putting faces to the names and looking at each of the different schools."

Collaboration

Share Between Teachers

In cases of grade level reconfiguration that divide the elementary grades, participants noted the need for opportunities for teachers from older grades to share with teachers of younger grades what they are teaching and observing in their classrooms. Dr. Mazzola suggests that as part of teachers' professional development, districts create common meetings, cross-grade meetings, and team meetings for special education groups to set accurate expectations for academics at other grade levels. He believes that this collaboration helps teachers in lower grades understand the expectations of upper elementary classes and allows the teachers to actively prepare students for these standards. Dr. Mazzola also recommends regular meetings for staff to create a smooth academic transition for students. He argues that it is critical to ensure constant communication about expectations from upper grades when younger elementary school teachers are not regularly in that environment.

Grade Configuration Comparison Chart
Richmond Community Schools
2024

Richmond Community Schools 4414 students	Huntington Schools 4208 students	Greenfield Central Schools 3592 students	Logansport Schools 4310 students	New Castle Schools 2304 Students	Muncie Community Schools 5064 students
Pre-K Center	Pre-K Center	PK-3 All PK in one bldg. Stephens – 565	Pre-K Center	Pre-K Center	Pre-K Center
None	94		111	None	None
PreK – 4 Charles – 335 Crestdale – 373 Fairview – 271 Starr – 253 Vaile – 309 Westview – 276	K-5 Andrews – 304 Flint Springs – 438 Horace Mann – 431 Lincoln – 338 Roanoke – 409 Salamonie - 278	K-3 Eden 166 Harris – 291 Weston - 311	K-4 Columbia – 447 Fairview – 454 Landis - 769	PreK -5 Eastwood – 280 Parker – 285 Riley – 253 Westwood – 272 Wilbur Wright - 327	Pre-K-5 E. Washington Acad – 491 Grissom – 451 Longfellow – 332 North View – 390 South View – 498 West View - 490
5-6	6-7-8	4-5-6	5-6	6-7-8	6-7-8
Test Interm - 624	Crestview MS - 614 Riverview MS - 523	Greenfield Interm- 458	Logansport Interm - 672	New Castle MS - 633	North Side MS – 605 South Side MS - 459
7-8		7-8	7-8		
Dennis Middle - 642		Greenfield JH - 662	Logansport JH - 622		
9-12	9-12	9-12	9-12	9-12	9-12
Richmond HS 1331	Huntington North HS 1396	Greenfield Central HS 1430	Logansport HS 1235	New Castle HS 824	Muncie HS 1348

Recommendations for the RCS Executive Leadership Team and Board of Trustees

1.   Strong consideration should be given to moving the 5th grade back to their respective elementary schools during the 2025-2026 school year. The administration, teachers, and staff need a minimum of a year to plan and communicate with parents and community partners.

Is the fifth grade capable of moving to the elementary schools? AA consultants thought it fair to address that issue in this part of the report. Moving the fifth grade would provide the school district with flexibility for other grade alignments.

School capacities on paper only sometimes tell the true story of how many students may be placed in a building. A building with twenty available classrooms and four hundred students would appear capable of having a class size ratio of twenty students per classroom. The issue all districts face is grade by grade the numbers do not nicely fit into boxes for ideal class size. RCS has a target class for fifth-grade students at 25 and a cap size of 27. A fifth-grade class of thirty-four students would require two classrooms of seventeen students or a split class of fourth and fifth grade students with twenty-seven fifth grade students in one room and seven fifth grade students in a classroom with fourth-grade students. These grade numbers could present themselves in more than one grade in any building, making scheduling difficult. Split classes are not harmful if scheduled, with the focus being on the learning level of the students involved. It is a decision school districts often make to accommodate student numbers and classroom space. AA consultants have carefully reviewed the elementary schools in the district, available classroom space, and potential enrollments to guide the potential feasibility of placing the fifth grade in the elementary schools.

Items considered in reviewing the feasibility of moving the fifth grade back to the RCS elementary schools were:

· Number of potential retentions on the I-Read test for an elementary school. Several retentions could impact class sizes as the students would be retained. The General Assembly enacted a law in the last session to force the retention of third-grade students who fail the test unless there is a "Good Cause Exemption" to exempt an eligible student from additional IREAD testing and retention policies. English learners, students with disabilities, and students who have already been retained twice are eligible for a Good Cause Exemption. The estimated number of potential I-Read retainers per school was based on the failure rate by the school on the 2022-2023 I-Read test.

· Number of available classrooms within a school and areas that can be utilized as classrooms but are now used for other purposes. AA consultants determined the number of classrooms from four sources: building walkthroughs,

the RCS' ten-year facility plan, 2024-2034, computer-aided drawing supplied by the RCS' maintenance department, and the RCS Classroom Usage Report to the Richmond Board of School Trustees, October 14, 2015.

·   Potential student enrollment in a building for the coming school year.

·   To obtain the potential enrollment, the numbers for each class were moved up a level, with the fourth graders potentially staying in the building as fifth graders and the largest Pre-K class for school over the last three years as a target for Pre-K numbers entering the building in the coming year.

·   The largest number of students in the building at any time over the last ten years.

·   The buildings' capacities in the RCS' ten-year facility plans and available classroom space, 2024-2034.

The above information is used for the analysis in Table: Analysis of Fifth Grade in Elementary Schools.

Table: Analysis of Fifth Grade in Elementary Schools

The placement of the fifth grade in the elementary schools							
	Potential Enrollment	Available Classrooms	Potential Classrooms	Class Size Available Classrooms	Class Size With All Classroom Space	Building Capacity and Classrooms 10-year Facility Study		School's Largest 10 year Enrollment
Charles	390	19	20	21	20	418	19 CR	526
Crestdale	485	23	26	21	19	462	25 CR	483
Fairview	356	16	19	23	19	396	18 CR	351
Starr	272	15	17	19	16	352	16 CR	384
Vaile	331	14	17	24	20	374	17 CR	343
Westview	315	15	17	21	19	352	16 CR	381

Concluding thoughts on the potential movement of the fifth grade into the elementary schools is that it may be tight in a few areas and a word of caution about class sizes never being pure because some grades within a school have class sizes that do not easily accommodate the district's class size targets or good educational practice.

Moving the 5th grade back to elementary schools may also lead to additional academic benefits, although the research is inconsistent. Some potential benefits include:

A K-5 elementary school offers a more traditional and sequential learning experience, with five years of elementary education (Kindergarten to 5th grade). This model has been the norm in the United States for many decades.

Research suggests that a K-5 elementary school has several academic benefits:

> **Improved academic achievement**: Studies have shown that students who attend K-5 elementary schools tend to perform better academically than those who attend K-4 elementary schools (K-3, K-4, or K-6) (Huey & Zhang, 2018; Johnson, 2017).

> **Better retention rates**: Students who attend K-5 elementary schools tend to have better retention rates, as they are more likely to stay in the same school for five years, allowing for a more consistent learning environment (Huey & Zhang, 2018).

> **More comprehensive curriculum**: A K-5 elementary school typically offers a more extensive curriculum, covering all core subjects (reading, writing, mathematics, science, social studies) in each grade level (Johnson, 2017).

> **Enhanced social skills**: A K-5 elementary school provides students with more opportunities to develop social skills, such as teamwork and communication, as they interact with classmates from different grade levels (Huey & Zhang, 2018).

The research suggests that a K-5 elementary school may have a slight academic advantage over a K-4 elementary school. The additional year of education provides students with a more comprehensive learning experience, better retention rates, and enhanced social skills, and one less significant transition for Richmond students.

2.   To transition the 5th grade back to their respective elementary schools, Richmond is strongly suggested to return to a ½ day preschool program during the 2025-2026 school year. The administration, teachers, and staff need a minimum of a year to plan and communicate with parents and community partners.

 Implementing a 1/2 day preschool program at RCS may be a great way to free up classroom space and optimize facility' use. This approach can be especially beneficial for preschools or childcare centers with a high enrollment demand but limited space to accommodate all the children. This may happen in Richmond if the administration and school board move the 5th grade back to their respective elementary schools.

Benefits of a 1/2 day Richmond preschool program may include:

1. **Increased capacity**: By offering a shorter program, you can increase the number of children you can enroll while maintaining a safe and manageable student-to-teacher ratio.

2. **Reduced space requirements**: With fewer children attending for a shorter period, you will need less space to accommodate them, freeing up areas for other activities or purposes.

3. **Cost savings**: Operating a 1/2 day program can be more cost-effective than maintaining a full-day program. You may need fewer staff members, less equipment, and reduced supplies.

4. **Flexibility**: A 1/2 day program can be designed to accommodate different schedules and needs, such as part-time enrollment for working parents or flexible scheduling for families with non-traditional work arrangements.

5. **Enhanced curriculum**: With a shorter program, you can focus on delivering a more concentrated and intense curriculum, allowing for more in-depth learning experiences and improved student outcomes.

To make the most of a 1/2 day preschool program, consider the following strategies:

1. **Schedule carefully**: Plan the program's schedule to ensure efficient space use and minimize overlaps between classes.

2. **Streamline activities**: Design engaging and educational activities while minimizing the need for extensive materials and equipment.

3. **Communicate with parents**: Keep parents informed about the program's schedule, curriculum, and activities to ensure they are comfortable with the new format.

3. **Strong consideration should be given to reconfiguring Test Intermediate and Dennis into two middle schools during the 2025-2026 school year. The administration, teachers, and staff need a minimum of a year to plan and communicate with parents and community partners.**

Reconfiguring Test Intermediate and Dennis into two middle schools to serve Richmond students is an opportunity to serve students more efficiently and effectively after considering transportation issues previously discussed. More importantly, the instructional benefits of 6-8 middle schools are numerous and well-documented. A middle school that spans grades 6-8 can provide a more comprehensive and cohesive educational experience for students, leading to

improved academic performance, social skills, and emotional well-being. Some of the key potential benefits include:

1.   Transition to High School Readiness: By having a middle school that spans grades 6-8, students can better prepare for the transition to high school. This allows them to develop essential skills such as time management, organization, and independence in a more gradual and supportive environment. This will also involve one less significant transition for Richmond 5-6 and 7-8 students.

2.   Increased Academic Rigor: Middle schools spanning grades 6-8 can offer more challenging academic courses to help students prepare for the demands of high school. This can also help identify students needing additional support or acceleration.

3.   Better Teacher-Student Ratios: With a smaller student population, middle schools that span grades 6-8 can often provide better teacher-student ratios, leading to more personalized instruction and attention.

4.   Improved Student Engagement: Middle schools that span grades 6-8 can offer more opportunities for students to engage in extracurricular activities, clubs, and sports, which can help to build social skills, confidence, and teamwork.

5.   Better Support for Students with Special Needs: Middle schools that span grades 6-8 can offer more targeted support for students with special needs, such as individualized education plans (IEPs) or accommodations for students with disabilities.

6.   More Opportunities for Electives: Middle schools that span grades 6-8 can offer more opportunities for students to take elective courses, such as music, art, or foreign languages, can help build interest and talent in these areas.

7.   More Opportunities for STEM Education: Middle schools that span grades 6-8 can offer more opportunities for students to engage in STEM education, such as science fairs, robotics clubs, or coding classes.

8.   More Opportunities for Leadership Development: Middle schools that span grades 6-8 can offer more opportunities for students to take on leadership roles, such as class officers or team captains, which can help to build confidence and leadership skills.

9.   More Opportunities for College and Career Readiness: Middle schools that span grades 6-8 can offer more opportunities for students to engage in college and career readiness activities, such as college prep classes or career assessments.

10. More Opportunities for Socialization and Community Building: Middle schools in grades 6-8 can offer more opportunities for students to socialize and build relationships with their peers, which can help build social skills and community.

In conclusion, the instructional benefits of 6-8 middle schools are numerous and well-documented. By providing a more comprehensive and cohesive educational experience, middle schools that span grades 6-8 can help students prepare for the demands of high school and beyond.

4. **Strong consideration should be given to building a 600-student facility on the Hibbard site for STEAM, Logos, Applied Skills, and an early learning center. Construction will require the relocation of programs, so it is recommended that by the 2026-2027 school year, the CTE would move to Ivy Tech, STEAM would move to the high school, and LOGOS and Applied Skills would move to their home schools until construction is complete. The relocation during construction may also require temporary modular classrooms at elementary sites, but further study is needed at the time of the move after careful planning with the administration and Board of Trustees.**

Hibberd is popular with STEAM and Logos programs. The building was built in 1929, with additions in 1953, and maintenance costs are significant. Costs for Hibberd included the most recent three-year capital projects report included:

2023: $1,055,000 routine maintenance

2024 $3,055,000 Building improvements, including routine maintenance

2025 $1,055,000 routine maintenance

Further, in the Facility Master Plan - Current Analysis Fanning Howey 2018/LWC 2020 Studies, Hibberd was listed for a **total renovation/rebuild**, with a date to be determined.

The current building is not a suitable long-term facility solution for students and staff.

During the construction of a new approximate 600-student facility, consideration which could house Logos, Applied Skills, STEAM, and a new early learning center should be given to transitioning the Logos and Applied Skills programs back into the elementary and middle schools and moving the STEAM program to the high school until the new facility is completed. Final cost estimates and square footage requirements are outside the scope of this study and would need to be determined before any final commitment by the Board of Trustees.

Part IV: Points of Consideration for Executive Leadership and the Board of Trustees for Future/additional Planning

1.   Relocate the RHS Career and Technical Program from Richmond High School to the Richmond Ivy Tech Campus

The Richmond Ivy Tech Chancellor is offering to host the high school's Career and Technical Education (CTE) Program on-site on the Ivy Tech campus, where RHS students would have the opportunity to use state-of-the-art training equipment in their classes. The potential benefits for the high school students would be immense. They could experience the most modern training equipment for CTE education in their classes.

The Chancellor has indicated that RCS could use their high school CTE teachers to teach the classes. The Ivy Tech facility for CTE training is used primarily in the evening. During the day, it is not used. The high school students would occupy the building during the day during Ivy Tech's off hours. This could be a great example of a public school system collaborating with a post-secondary institution. This is a unique opportunity for RCS.

Potential Benefits:

The relocation of the CTE classes from the high school to the Ivy Tech campus would free up classroom space at the high school. This could allow the school district to relocate the Hibberd programs to the high school and close Hibberd. See recommendation #4.

Since Ivy Tech and Indiana University East (IU EAST) are located on the same campus, RHS CTE students would have the opportunity to conveniently enroll in other dual-credit classes with both institutions and earn College Core Credits. The district has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in place now with IU East for the provision of dual credit classes to RHS students.

The potential supervision issues of having high school students intermingling with college students on campus would be minimal because the Ivy Tech facility is empty during the day. The CTE learning opportunities would be enhanced for RHS CTE students. Expanding CTE opportunities to additional students outside the junior and senior classes may be possible.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) would need to be investigated, reviewed, and implemented by the respective legal counsels and Board of Trustees of the two respective entities with an acceptable revocation clause that would protect the interests of both parties, and is outside the scope of this study.

2. All RCS elementary schools are over 50 years old. There appears to be little political will necessary to have a successful referendum at this time in the Richmond community, during a time of inflationary pressures, a decline in enrollment, and the desire to keep neighborhood schools.

All RCS elementary schools have outdated facilities, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of modern amenities, which may negatively impact the learning environment and student outcomes. New school construction or a major renovation can provide a unique opportunity to modernize and improve the educational experience. However, new construction in Richmond would require a significant referendum with community partner buy-in, which may significantly impact the tax rate.

Here are some key considerations when deciding whether to construct new elementary schools or continue renovating existing ones.

> Age and Condition: If any school is over 50 years old (all Richmond Schools), its structure, plumbing, and electrical systems are likely outdated and may not meet modern safety and accessibility standards.

> Enrollment and Growth: If the school is experiencing rapid growth or is close to capacity, constructing a new school or expanding the existing one can help accommodate the increasing student population.

> Curriculum and Technology: Modern schools require updated technology and facilities to support innovative teaching methods and curricula. New construction can provide opportunities for state-of-the-art classrooms, libraries, and science labs.

> Sustainability and Energy Efficiency: New construction can incorporate green building practices, such as solar panels, energy-efficient lighting, and sustainable materials, reducing the school's environmental footprint.

> Community Engagement: New construction can be an opportunity to engage with the local community, involve community partners in the design process, and create a sense of pride and ownership.

3. Multiple buildings in RCS have water infiltration issues.
Water infiltration can be a significant concern for school administrators, teachers, and students. This can lead to a range of problems, including:

> Mold and mildew growth: Water infiltration can create an ideal environment for mold and mildew to grow, exacerbating respiratory issues and creating unpleasant odors.

Structural damage: Water can seep into the building's foundation and walls, causing erosion and weakening the structure over time.

Disruption to learning: Water infiltration can cause classrooms to be closed temporarily or permanently, disrupting the learning process and affecting student performance.

Health risks: Standing water can attract pests, such as rodents and insects, which can spread diseases and risk students' health.

Increased maintenance costs: Repairs and maintenance are required to address water infiltration.

4. Multiple RCS elementary buildings have an asbestos maintenance program

According to district leadership, RCS has an asbestos maintenance program. However, in the long term, the problem of asbestos in schools is a significant concern for the health and safety of students, teachers, and staff. Asbestos, a known carcinogen, was widely used in building construction and renovation materials, particularly from the 1950s to the 1980s. Many schools, including those of RCS, built during this period contain asbestos-containing materials (ACMs), such as insulation, ceiling tiles, and floor tiles.

The presence of asbestos in schools poses several risks, including:

1. Asbestos fibers can be released into the air when ACMs are disturbed or damaged, and individuals can inhale them.
2. Long-term asbestos exposure can cause serious health problems, including mesothelioma, lung cancer, and asbestosis.
3. Asbestos can also be spread through contaminated soil, water, and air.

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that all Richmond schools are over 50 years old and need significant renovation, which may create an issue with asbestos.

To address this issue, district leadership must continue to take steps to identify and manage asbestos-containing materials on their premises. This includes:

1. Conducting regular inspections and testing for asbestos-containing materials.
2. Maintaining a plan for managing and removing asbestos-containing materials.
3. Continue to provide staff with training and education on asbestos awareness and response procedures.
4. Continuing to ensure proper ventilation and air quality control measures are in place.

By taking these steps, district leadership can continue to reduce the risk of asbestos exposure and ensure a safe and healthy learning environment for students and staff.

5. **All RCS elementary buildings are susceptible to drinking water issues.** Older school buildings are at risk of having lead-in-water issues due to the widespread use of lead-containing materials in plumbing systems and fixtures before the 1980s. Lead is a toxic substance that can cause serious health problems, especially in children. When lead enters the water supply, it can leach into drinking water and pose a risk to students' health.

Older school buildings may be particularly vulnerable to lead-in-water issues due to the following factors: Aging plumbing systems: Older buildings may have outdated plumbing systems that contain lead pipes, solder, or fixtures, which can corrode and release lead into the water.

Lack of maintenance: Older plumbing systems may not be adequately maintained without regular maintenance and inspections, increasing the risk of lead contamination.

Galvanized pipes: Many older schools have galvanized pipes, which are prone to corrosion and can leach lead into the water.

Historic renovations: Older schools may have undergone renovations that did not address potential lead hazards, exposing students to contaminated water.

To address lead in water issues in older school buildings, it is essential to:

Conduct lead testing: Regular testing of water samples is crucial to identify potential lead contamination.

Replace outdated plumbing systems: Replacing old plumbing systems with modern, lead-free materials can significantly reduce the risk of lead contamination.

Implement maintenance protocols: Regular inspections and maintenance can help prevent corrosion and reduce the risk of lead contamination.

Provide education and awareness: Educate students, teachers, and staff about the risks of lead contamination and the importance of reporting any concerns.

6. **All RCS elementary schools need upgrades in the cafeteria.**
The cafeteria at an elementary school is a critical space that may serve as a hub for students, teachers, and staff. However, all Richmond elementary schools have inadequate cafeteria facilities that fail to meet the needs of modern students. Upgrading the cafeteria at a later point is essential for several reasons:

Health and Safety: Inadequate cafeterias can pose health risks to students, including poor ventilation, inadequate lighting, and old equipment that can harbor bacteria and other contaminants.

Nutrition and Food Quality: Modern cafeterias may provide students with healthy and nutritious food options that cater to diverse dietary needs and preferences. Upgrading the cafeteria can enable schools to offer fresh, locally sourced ingredients and innovative meal options.

Socialization and Community: The cafeteria is a space where students socialize, make friends, and build relationships. A modern and inviting cafeteria can foster a sense of community and belonging among students.

Educational Opportunities: A well-designed cafeteria can provide students with opportunities to learn about food science, nutrition, and sustainability. Upgrading the cafeteria can enable schools to integrate hands-on cooking classes, gardening programs, and environmental education.

Accessibility and Inclusion: A modern cafeteria should be designed with accessibility and inclusivity in mind. Upgrading the cafeteria can ensure that all students, including those with disabilities, can access and participate in mealtime activities.

To upgrade the cafeteria, consider the following strategies:

Conduct a needs assessment: Identify the specific needs and challenges of the existing cafeteria.

Involve community partners: Engage with teachers, parents, and students to gather input on design preferences, menu options, and program ideas.

Prioritize sustainability: Incorporate eco-friendly features such as energy-efficient equipment and locally sourced materials.

Design for inclusivity: Incorporate accessible seating, adjustable tables, and visual aids to support students with disabilities.

7. Multiple RCS elementary schools need upgrades in the Media Center.

Elementary school media centers provide students access to various educational resources, promote literacy, and foster a love for learning. However, many media centers in Richmond elementary schools need upgrades to ensure they remain relevant and practical in today's digital age.

The benefits of upgrading Richmond elementary school(s) media centers include:

- Providing students access to modern technology, such as digital books, e-readers, and online databases, can help improve their reading and research skills.
- Creating a welcoming and engaging environment that encourages students to explore and learn can help boost their confidence and motivation.

- Offering teachers and staff access to professional development resources, such as online tutorials and training programs, can help them stay current with the latest educational trends and technologies.
- Enhancing collaboration and communication between teachers, students, and parents can help foster a sense of community and shared responsibility for student learning.
- Supporting curriculum development and implementation can ensure that students receive a well-rounded education that prepares them for success in the 21st century. Some potential upgrades to consider include:
- Installing new furniture and fixtures, such as comfortable seating areas and flexible workspaces, creates a more inviting and functional environment.
- Implementing new technologies, such as digital bookshelves, online databases, and interactive whiteboards, to enhance student learning and engagement.
- Providing professional development opportunities for teachers and staff, such as workshops and training programs, to help them integrate technology into their teaching practices.
- Creating a maker space or innovation lab where students can use technology and other materials to tinker, make, and problem-solve.
- Establishing a library or media center program that promotes literacy and love of reading among students.

8. Multiple RCS elementary schools have HVAC issues.

HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning) issues can be a significant problem in elementary schools for several reasons:

1. Indoor Air Quality: Proper HVAC systems ensure clean, well-ventilated, and pollutant-free air. In elementary schools, where children are more susceptible to respiratory issues, poor air quality can exacerbate existing conditions and even lead to new health problems.
2. Temperature and Humidity: Extreme temperatures or humidity can make learning uncomfortable and affect student performance. Temperature and humidity fluctuations can disrupt their ability to focus and learn in elementary schools, where students are still developing cognitive skills.
3. Allergy and Asthma Triggers: HVAC systems can harbor allergens like dust, mold, and pet dander, which can trigger allergic reactions and asthma attacks in students who already have these conditions.
4. Health Concerns: HVAC issues can spread germs and viruses, increasing the risk of illness and absenteeism among students.
5. Academic Impact: HVAC problems can cause distractions and disruptions in the learning environment, negatively impacting student achievement and teacher morale.
6. The Financial Burden of replacing or repairing HVAC systems can be substantial, often diverting resources away from crucial educational programs and activities. This

underscores the need for proactive measures to prevent and address HVAC issues in elementary schools.

7. Student Discomfort: Uncomfortable learning environments can lead to frustration, decreased motivation, and a negative overall experience.

By promptly and efficiently addressing HVAC issues, elementary schools can significantly improve the health and well-being of their students. This, in turn, creates a healthier, more comfortable, and more productive learning environment, ultimately benefiting their academic success and overall quality of life.

9. Book Study for Consideration

Improving communication between teachers, principals, administration, and the Board of trustees is essential to the grade alignment process. One book we have found valuable is Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High.

This may be a viable option for a book study for the Richmond administrators, principals, and directors to collaboratively read and discuss to improve communication between administrators and staff, as realignment will involve a lot of planning and honest dialogue between all parties involved in this change.

Another option for a shared book collaboration is The Five Dysfunctions of a Team by Patrick Lencioni. Lencioni makes the argument that all teams have dysfunction. These include Absence of Trust, Fear of Conflict, Lack of Commitment, Avoidance of Accountability, and Inattention to Results. There is an overview of the model beginning on page 187, a team assessment, and an understanding and overcoming dysfunction section. We believe this may be a positive opportunity to discuss with the Richmond administrative team, principals, and directors articulating a shared vision for schools, particularly the grade alignment under consideration.
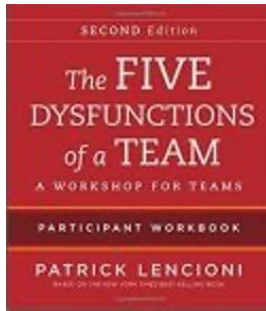
10. If enrollment declines significantly in RCS over the next decade, consideration should be given to converting RHS into a Jr. Sr. 7-12 High school. Dennis and Test Intermediate may be reconfigured into two k-6 elementary schools, serving all Richmond elementary students.

This last consideration is a long-term strategy that would need substantial discussion among all community partners in the Richmond Community, including teachers, staff, administrators, and the Board of Trustees.

Converting a high school into a junior high school involves a comprehensive process of reorganization and adaptation. The transition necessitates careful planning to ensure a smooth shift in educational structure and resources. Items to consider include:

1.   Administrative adjustments may be needed or adjusted. This includes appointing potential new leadership suitable for managing the dynamics of a junior high environment. A principal and administrative team with experience in middle-level education is essential. Administrators must develop a vision for the junior high that aligns with the needs of early adolescent learners.

2.   Curriculum restructuring is vital. High school-level courses may have to be redefined and adjusted to suit younger students' cognitive and developmental needs. The curriculum should be tailored to foster exploration, curiosity, and skill-building appropriate for junior high students. Additionally, elective offerings might need to be expanded to accommodate a broader range of interests at this age.

3.   Physical spaces within the school must be adapted. Science labs or technology centers may need modifications to suit the curriculum requirements of junior high programs. Classrooms might require rearrangement to create a more nurturing and age-appropriate learning environment.

4.   Staffing considerations. Teachers must be selected or trained to work effectively with early adolescents. Professional development opportunities focused on middle-level pedagogy should be provided to ensure teachers are equipped to meet the unique needs of junior high students.

5.   Extracurricular activities and support systems need to be expanded. Junior high students benefit greatly from opportunities for social interaction, personal development, and emotional support. Clubs, sports teams, counseling services, and mentorship programs should be established or expanded to provide a holistic support system.

6.   A strong communication plan is essential. Frequent communication with community partners, including parents, students, and the broader community, is critical throughout the transition process. Open dialogue and transparency can help address concerns and garner support for implemented changes.

In conclusion, this potential long-term strategy needs significant discussion before moving forward. Converting a high school into a junior high school requires careful planning, collaboration, and a commitment to meeting the diverse needs of early adolescent learners and would significantly change the educational landscape of Richmond Community Schools.

Appendix

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7. Richmond High School HVAC Study and Master Plan
8. IDOE Instructional Guidance
9. Richmond Community School Corporation Capital Projects Plan 2023-2025
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a. 2023 I-Read Reports: Corporation and School Results

b. <u>Corporation Enrollment by Grade Levels (Update SY 2023-2024)</u>

c. <u>Corporation Enrollment by Special Education and English Language Learners</u>

(ELL) (Updated – SY 2023-2024)

d. <u>Fall 2023-2024 Public School Transfer Report</u>

e. <u>Corporation Enrollment by Grade Level (Update – SY 2023-2024)</u>

f. <u>School Enrollment by Grade Level (Updated- SY 2023-2024)</u>

g. <u>Corporation Enrollment by Ethnicity and Free/Reduced Meal Status</u>

(Updated-SY 2023-2024)

h. <u>School Enrollment by Special Education and English Language Learners</u>

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    Assistant Superintendent, 1998-2009
Marion Community Schools, Superintendent, 2009-2013
Muncie Community Schools, State Appointed Emergency Manager
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Concord Community Schools Superintendent 2011-2015
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