Wellness and Education Committee of the Whole Committee Meetings
Proposed Grade Realignment
March 13, 2025 - 6:00 - 8:30 PM
Community Discussion - Executive Summary (v2)

In January 2025, the administration proposed a grade level realignment prompted by space constraints in elementary buildings. As we examined solutions to alleviate the space issues, the conversations evolved into broader discussions about how to optimize programming, services and learning experiences to meet the diverse and evolving needs of Perkiomen Valley School District students.

Three of four elementary schools are facing capacity issues. In the 2024-25 school year, there has been an increase in kindergarten classes from 2-3 in schools to now 4 in all buildings. Also, over the past several years, the number of specialized classrooms and resource providers have increased. In Schwenksville, Skippack, and South all available classrooms and work space for supplemental staff are occupied. These constraints have impacted daily operations. For example, there are special area teachers on carts because they do not have a classroom of their own. There are students working in hallways or in classrooms being shared with other staff and students in a manner that is not always conducive to maximizing learning.

The administration is committed to delivering the highest quality instruction and fostering enriching school experiences. It has recommended to the Board of School Directors a shift in grade level alignments to include the creation of a 5-6 intermediate school at West and a 7-8 middle school at East. This 5-6 and 7-8 realignment is believed to benefit all students—general education, special education, gifted learners, English Learners—by creating a more cohesive, supportive, and effective learning environment. This shift presents an opportunity to revitalize instruction and improve student outcomes by providing more structured, collaborative, consistent and equitable academic experiences.

As part of administrative and community discussions, there were other alignment options reviewed to include an Early Learning Center at Evergreen for K-2 or K-1, a 5-8 alignment at both West and East, and lastly, status quo with all buildings remaining as is. None of these options have been viewed by the administration to be as beneficial to students as the 5-6 and 7-8 alignments recommended.

The benefits of this proposal are clear to the administration, however, there are

also recognized challenges related to transportation, transitions and extra-curricular opportunities. Many aspects of such a realignment, or any change for that matter, require input and refinement from staff, including scheduling, teacher teaming/assignments, elective offerings, grading/reporting structures, and extracurricular activities to name a few. Engaging staff in these discussions is a priority. If the School Board approves of a change, staff from across all buildings will be invited to share their insights and engage in the planning and implementation process.

Ultimately, this proposed realignment has the potential to significantly enhance teaching and learning for our students. Beyond academics, it will cultivate stronger relationships, promote inclusivity, and create a more cohesive and supportive environment for students and staff alike.

The following executive summary highlights feedback from community members regarding the realignment proposal. The conversations occurred during the March Wellness and Education Committee of the Whole committee meetings held on the evening of March 13 beginning at 6:00 PM.

Wellness Committee

The discussions within the Wellness Committee focused on two critical areas,

- Daily Schedules and School Start Times, and
- Extracurricular Activities.

Each station presented background information from one or more administrators, insights from the administration's perspective, and opportunities for questions and answers and discussion. The advantages and challenges of these aspects of the school experience and how they would potentially affect the student experience were noted.

Attendees transitioned through the two stations during the first hour and 15 minutes of the meeting. Each station extended approximately 25 minutes. Attendees were provided the opportunity to pose questions as well as share comments and concerns throughout. Each station also had an administrator assigned to take notes. The recorded notes have been used to create this executive summary.

The attendees moving through *Daily Schedules and School Start Times* noted the following: Overall, attendees suggested the need for smaller teacher-team environments and specialized teachers for both 5th and 6th grades.

An emphasis on keeping the 5th grade experience similar to an elementary one to ease the transition and support the experience was expressed. Additionally, the following points were noted.

- It was suggested that 5th graders maintain a structured schedule with limited choice to provide an elementary-like environment and that 6th graders retain current structure while integrating elementary-like elements.
- Maintain advisory periods to support student well-being.
- Expand ELA/Math instructional time to enhance academic outcomes.
- Introduce a special rotation incorporating additional math instruction. Implement a cohort-based approach to limit excessive student movement. Increase teacher specialization to optimize instructional quality.
- Gather teacher input to better prepare 4th graders for the transition.
- Gather teacher input on the overall plan and implementation.

The attendees moving through Extracurriculars & Athletics noted the following once the administration presented various possibilities for extracurricular activities for 5th and 6th graders, such as intramural sports, arts, music opportunities, along with the possibility of providing a late bus service for these grades.

- Concerns arose regarding funding for these activities, potential cuts in sports opportunities for 7th and 8th graders, and the need for teacher sponsorship of clubs.
- Attendees also discussed the implications of increased competitiveness for positions in ensembles and musicals.
- Concerns about budget constraints, staffing availability, and potential decline in sports participation were emphasized. Cuts were mentioned as part of a possible solution to the large number of student athletes that could result in a 7-8 building alignment. Attendees were informed that PVSD is the only middle level in the PAC that does not cut athletes.
- Concerns were expressed about potential costs to families to participate in community athletics instead of PVSD in the event positions become limited or cuts are imposed.
- It was recommended that the administration explore the introduction of JV (junior varsity) sports teams to maintain athletic engagement.

Education Committee of the Whole (ECTW)

At the conclusion of the Wellness Committee meeting, attendees shifted to a new set of station rotations as part of the Education Committee of the Whole (ECTW) meeting. The discussions within the ECTW Committee focused on four critical

areas,

- Enrollment Trends/Building Capacities,
- Academics and Student Experiences,
- Transportation, and
- Transitions.

Each station presented background information from one or more administrators, insights from the administration's perspective, and opportunities for questions and answers and discussion. The advantages and challenges of these aspects of the school experience and how they would potentially affect the student experience were noted.

Attendees transitioned through the two stations during the first hour and 15 minutes of the meeting. Each station extended approximately 25 minutes. Attendees were provided the opportunity to pose questions as well as share comments and concerns throughout. Each station also had an administrator assigned to take notes. The recorded notes have been used to create this executive summary.

The attendees moving through Enrollment Trends & Building Capacities noted the following comments, questions and concerns. Enrollment trends and building capacities were scrutinized, addressing issues such as the need for specialized classrooms and the shifting of special education classes. Administration acknowledged the importance of understanding trends in enrollment and the operations of our schools today. The conversation also covered the potential for redistricting and the emotional implications of transitioning students between grades and schools. Concerns were raised about how these transitions might affect students socially and emotionally, particularly regarding the movement of 5th graders into a "middle school environment" too early. Additional points made by attendees are noted below.

- Enrollment trends indicate declining student populations. The District is awaiting an enrollment report from the Montgomery County Planning Commission. However, enrollment does not tell the whole story; three of four buildings are currently utilizing all available classrooms/space. This is influenced by the manner in which schools operate today, i.e., more specialized classrooms and resource providers.
- One principal also noted the significant increase in the number of staff that come with the specialized classrooms.
- Elementary redistricting considerations were discussed to include the

impact on special education services and students. A special education parent noted benefits to students in the center's arrangements, for example, transitioning and being with all grade level peers.
- Concerns about classroom capacity constraints, long-term sustainability, and limited teacher input in planning were expressed.
- Community concerns included the impression of a “rushed” transition timeline and the need to consider alternative solutions.
- Questions were posed about alternative solutions for example, redistricting elementary schools. It was noted that since three of four schools are without space, this option was eliminated.
- The option of an early learning center at Evergreen for kindergarten and first grade was considered as were two 5-8 buildings. The administration considered both options and eliminated them based on the need to transition first graders in the case of an early learning center, and the combination of 5th graders with 8th graders in the second.
- Administration emphasized the belief that all students on the same grade together supports teaching and learning experiences and unifying students sooner than 9th grade.
- Questions about consulting other districts and their outcomes were posed.
- Several parents who serve as educators in neighboring districts shared their experiences with a 5-6 building and expressed concerns about the arrangement.

The attendees moving through Academics & Student Services noted the following after administration described the possibilities for enhancing academic offerings, particularly in core subjects, and efficient scheduling for special education students and services. Attendees emphasized the importance of social-emotional learning (SEL), as well as the potential challenges larger student populations might pose. Ideas about increasing the number of school counselors and addressing the needs of special education students during transitions were also brought to light.

- Administration asked attendees about what they most want to hear from their child about school. They described opportunities that maintain elementary-like schedules (fewer teachers to rotate through and increased instruction in foundational subjects), and also relieve 5th grade teachers of delivering instruction in all subjects. New and different special area subjects would be available, for example, family consumer science and technology education.
- It was suggested that the 5-6 building be branded as an intermediate school rather than a middle school.

- Maintaining a focus on class size for all grade levels was encouraged. Students in grades 7 and 8 will have access to the high school for classes as needed and appropriate. The arrangement also affords opportunities for flexibility in special education programming & scheduling.
- Are we (the administration) evaluating best practices for student support and counseling services; are there considerations for additional school counselors?
- What about Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and developing targeted transition supports for 5th/6th students? Is an additional transition supportive of SEL?
- There is a need for curriculum coordination to create clear academic identity and prevent 5th and 6th graders from being overshadowed by elementary and middle school models.
- Will larger numbers of students amplify certain student conditions?
- There were questions about the East/West issue(s) alluded to at a Board meeting. Are there differences in program delivery at East/West that are not being discussed? Are they just facility related? If we took a look at services and analyzed them, what are the differences we don't know about it?
- In 2008 - 20% less services; 30% more student services needed per student - has grown across the nation - can lead to students working in hallways, classes being on carts, etc. Concerns expressed in response to these approaches.
- If this proposal is going to happen, the 5-6 building needs to look like an elementary school and not make a 5th grader a middle schooler.
- There were concerns expressed about the 5-6 building getting lost when it comes to curriculum and school experience. Attendees wondered if there will be as many daily transitions for 5th grade students as there are in the middle school schedule.

The attendees moving through Transportation noted the following: This aspect of the proposal appears to be one of the major concerns for parents. Challenges expressed about transportation included potential changes in traffic patterns, bus/car ride times, and the impact on students' ability to participate in community based after-school activities due to the school schedule and ride times from West. The attendees discussed the implications of longer bus rides and their potential effect on absenteeism and student behavior. Suggestions included evaluating bus stop times, ensuring effective communication about transportation changes, and addressing the staffing needs of bus drivers.

- Concerns about current 6th and 7th graders on buses with high school

students.

- Will 5th graders get on or off buses alone? Will 5th and 6th graders arrive home before elementary students? May be helpful to reevaluate start time at the 5-6 center to accommodate these students being home for elementary siblings.
- Administration indicated considerations to revisit daily schedules and school start times to align with transportation logistics and what would be considered age appropriate/healthy for all students.
- Improvement to the intersection at 113 and 29 were suggested, can the District influence upgrades?
- An analysis of average ride times, stop schedules, and overall impact of the proposed realignment was shared. Questions were posed in response to the information shared, i.e., are these times accurate?
- What about students with medical needs (ex: students needed medicine on a 45 minute ride or access to medical center/facility)?
- Will there be increased gas consumption due to bus routes and therefore increased costs to the taxpayers?
- Mitigating measures were offered and included a three-tier system, increased number of cadets (fewer stops and students per vehicle), and a separate fleet to transport 5th and 6th grade students to and from West.

The attendees moving through Transitions noted the following comments, questions and concerns. Supporting transitions was a significant focus with a need for structured teams of students and teachers to aid in easing students' anxieties. Administration recognized the importance of planning specific activities to support transitions and advocated for keeping students on teams to maintain friendships. The high school administration indicated the benefits to students transitioning to high school already knowing each other. The potential for increased diversity within transitioning groups was also discussed.

- Student anxiety due to the additional transition in a two-year timeframe was emphasized. Counselors were referenced along with the idea of them looping.
- Would we be able to structure teams to keep some students from each of the buildings on the same teams? This was emphasized as important to the community.
- The diversity among our students will be present in the centers affording students a greater likelihood of connecting with others that look like them, think like them, and/or have similar interests.
- The need for equity in school assignments, and SEL in the centers' arrangement were noted.

- Suggestions for a healthy experience included retaining recess for 6th graders, implementing a two-teacher model for 5th/6th grades, and fostering sustained teacher-student relationships.
- What unique and helpful opportunities can be provided to each first class of students transitioning, current 3rd graders?
- Overarching concerns expressed include, the "community feel" - too many transitions (increased anxiety for some students), decreased walkability to and from school, disappointment for the class that does not get to be 5th grade leaders (current 3rd grade), social & emotional needs during transitions, teacher involvement and connections, and the impact to/on our teachers.
- Do we have enough time to plan this transition? Can we delay because it feels rushed to some?
- Attendees are interested in reviewing more specifics of the plan.

Parking Lot Thoughts & Key Community Concerns

Parents expressed concerns regarding long bus rides, reduced athletic opportunities, and the challenges associated with early transitions. The committee was urged to consider alternative solutions for space issues without negatively impacting student experiences. There was a call for clearer implementation plans and timelines, emphasizing the need for careful consideration and infrastructure establishment before enacting changes set for the 2026-2027 school year.

Next Steps

Information will be added to the FAQs on the District's website found here. Updates to the proposed grade level realignment will be provided as part of the April 7th Superintendent's Report during the Board work session.

Thank you to all who attended these meetings.