

**ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL
STRUCTURES IN-DEPTH –
ATTENDANCE CENTERS**



Unit 5 Citizens Advisory Council

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction.....	3
Figure 1: Examples of attendance center configurations.....	3
Figure 2: Examples of “cluster” configurations.....	3
Recommendation	3
Foundational Research.....	5
Introduction.....	5
Literature Review.....	5
Issues Examined by the Committee.....	6
Attendance centers experiences of other districts.....	8
How identified advantages and challenges of attendance centers apply to Unit 5	10
Table 1: Opportunities and Challenges of Attendance Centers	11
Possibilities for organizing attendance centers in Unit 5.....	15
Fall 2007 Elementary Demographics Table	16
References.....	17
Appendix A - Grade Span Configuration Feedback Survey.....	18

Executive Summary

The 2008 Unit 5 Citizens Advisory Council Committee on Attendance Centers was charged with examining and making a recommendation on elementary attendance centers. The committee has found insufficient data and positive evidence to recommend attendance centers either district wide or on a pilot basis for the Unit 5 School District at this time. We did not survey the public regarding their opinions of attendance centers in order to avoid confusing voters in regard to the February, 2008 referendum. If implementation of attendance centers is considered in the future, the committee recommends that significant time be spent gathering community input on the idea. The committee asked, "How will this make Unit 5 better than we are now?" The study of the potential adoption of attendance centers for Unit 5 left too many questions unanswered to assure a better educational environment for the district's students at this time.

Introduction

The 2008 CAC Committee on Attendance Centers was charged with examining and making a recommendation on elementary attendance centers. Elementary attendance centers have been adopted by some school districts to address a variety of needs. This report will address the benefits and challenges of implementing attendance centers. The impact of attendance center benefits and challenges on the district, teachers, and students must all be considered in any recommendation. However, the impact on the students must be given the most significance in the final recommendation.

Attendance centers differ from traditional elementary schools by how grades are assigned to schools. Traditional elementary schools have grades K-5 in one school. Attendance centers, also known as grade span configuration schools, have fewer grades and more classes for each grade in a school. In practice, sometimes this is done as a K-2, 3-5 configuration, or a K-1, 2-3, 4-5 configuration. Some attendance centers use a cluster concept in which multiple school buildings house lower grades, feeding into a single building for higher grades. An example of the cluster concept could include two or three K-1 schools feeding into a single 2-3 school, which in turn feeds into a 4-5 school. Another possibility of cluster grouping is a configuration of three K-2 schools that feed into a single 3-5 school. Graphically:

Figure 1

Examples of attendance center configurations

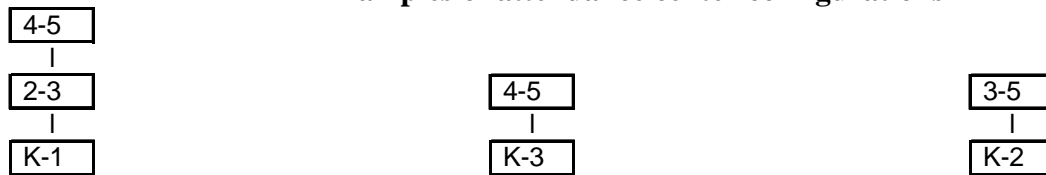
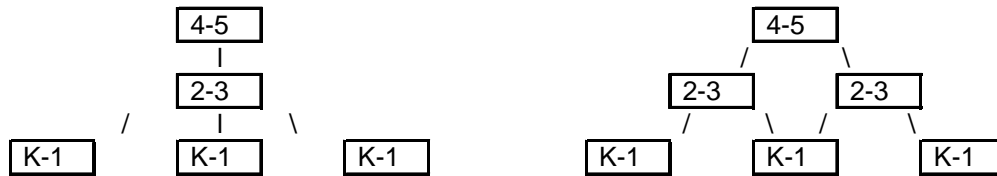


Figure 2

Examples of “cluster” configurations



Recommendation

The Attendance Center Committee has found insufficient data and positive evidence to recommend attendance centers either district wide or on a pilot basis for the Unit 5 School District at this time. The committee's report contains research, basic surveys of existing programs and interviews detailing both support for and challenges inherent in the

implementation of attendance centers. Numerous references pointed to positive improvements for student achievements. However, several of these references were derived from districts that differ significantly from Unit 5. There were limited performance enhancement references that provided quantifiable data. Comments referencing support of attendance centers were generally transparent descriptions of observed benefits but without supporting data.

The committee recognizes that with the passage of the 2008 referendum, redistricting will be required as the new schools open and Sugar Creek is expanded. This report contains information that may be applicable in the redistricting process. This information identifies requirements for the successful implementation of attendance centers should they be considered in the future. Unified curricula, common classroom materials, administration and teacher assignments that complement specific schools and prioritization for bringing each school to a standard Unit 5 model are to be noted.

The committee recommends considering the following important issues in planning for and implementation of an attendance center concept should such be considered at some point in the future.

- How many school transitions a student will make during their K-12 years if the attendance center concept were adopted
- Which grades to group together, with special attention on the interests and training of staff, the size and design of the buildings, financial resources, the size of the student population, and the location of the school in relation to other schools
- How to arrange for student transportation paying particular attention to travel time for students and travel costs for the district
- How parental involvement, including the effectiveness of Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs) will be impacted, including the loss of the neighborhood school identity
- How teaming of attendance centers impacts the balance of socio-economic status in the district not only at the elementary level but also at the junior high school level

In addition, if at some point in the future implementation of attendance centers is to be considered by Unit 5, we recommend that significant time be spent gathering community input on the idea. Our committee did not survey the public regarding their opinions of attendance centers in order to avoid confusing voters in regard to the February, 2008 referendum.

The primary question to be answered in making all decisions for our students in Unit 5 is: "How will this make Unit 5 better than we are now?" The study of the potential adoption of attendance centers for Unit 5 left too many questions unanswered to assure a better educational environment for the district's students at this time.

Foundational Research

Introduction

There is no research on which specific grade span configuration will serve all purposes, or an agreed upon best model (Seller, 2004). Because of this, the grade level configuration of schools varies across the country, though the traditional model is elementary and middle schools grades K-8 and secondary schools with grades 9-12. Around the 1920s, a new trend of junior high schools emerged (grades 7-9), though this changed in the 1960s, when many schools changed to middle schools (grades 6-8) (Seller, 2004). More recent trends include Grade 9 only schools, multi-age classrooms, and K-12 schools. Since the 1980s, districts have also considered other forms of grade span configuration, most often at the elementary level with K-2 schools or a variation of that.

Research shows that addressing the early learning needs of students is critical. Karoly, et. al. (1998) draw attention to this stating that children not reading at grade level by 3rd grade face a 90 percent chance of dropping out of school and a high probability of being unemployed, underemployed or unemployable. Because of this, the committee commends the district for its interest and focus on the elementary level.

In 2006, a CAC committee charged with studying alternative educational structures conducted an analysis of attendance centers, among other alternative structure options for the Unit 5 school district. That committee highlighted the issues and advantages of attendance centers and our report will build off of the research of that committee. The report begins with a review of the literature on attendance centers integrated with internal and external analysis by the committee on how the attendance center concept could be integrated into Unit 5 schools.

Literature Review

At best, the literature on attendance centers provides examples of practices, though no agreed upon model has been reached. Similarly, very little research is able to determine if a cause and effect relationship exists between grade configuration and academic achievement, let alone specific grade configurations tied to student achievement gains. Most of the limited causal research is related to K-12 grade span configuration schools, which in Texas have shown gains in student achievement scores, despite the development of larger schools as a result of grades consolidating.

The original purpose of designing grade level schools was for economic purposes – primarily to prepare students for the work force. Elementary schools were originally designed to instill the basic skills needs for life development, while high schools (and later junior high schools) were for more specialized workforce preparation (Seller, 2004). No Child Left Behind (NCLB), passed in 2001, made schools accountable for ensuring that all students are learning optimally. This has sparked discussion among educators on how best to design schools and classrooms to maximize student learning.

According to Paglin and Fager (1997), issues to consider with grade level configuration include:

- How many school transitions a student will make during their K-12 years
- Which grades should be grouped together, with special attention on the interests and training of staff, the size and design of the building, financial resources, the size of the student population, and the location of the school in relation to other schools
- How many grades should be in one school and how many classrooms and how this will impact course offerings and instructional groupings
- How student transportation will be affected by reconfiguring schools, including travel time for students as well as travel costs for the district
- How parental involvement, including the effectiveness of Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs) will be impacted, including changes in the neighborhood school identity

Other challenges expected to come with the implementation of attendance centers raised by the 2006 CAC committee that studied this topic included:

- Assuring that staff at reconfigured schools have experience working with the new student populations in which they are assigned;
- Accounting for missed opportunities for older children to serve as role models or engage in cross-age activities

The 2006 CAC committee also identified a number of advantages of attendance centers, which are included in Table 1.

Issues Examined by the Committee

The key issue identified by the 2008 committee for attendance centers is the potential for achievement loss when students move between schools. The Committee's concern was reflected in several articles in the literature. Seller (2004) referenced a study by Alspaugh (1998) that found when students transition to a new school, achievement levels go down and the greater the number the transitions, the greater the loss in achievement. Citing an article by Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, and Feinman, Seller (2004) notes:

The transition to a middle or junior high school typically requires accommodation to an increasingly large, impersonal, and bureaucratic educational milieu. Youth need to adjust to a dramatic increase in disciplinary specialization, rules and regulations, and the number of teachers and other school personnel with whom they have only limited and circumscribed contact. Similarly they are confronted with a new set of school peers and interpersonal "tests". Such disruptions in daily social regularities require a restructuring of social roles. (p. 7).

Recognizing this, Barr and Parrett (2003) note that many schools are moving to the practice of looping, a practice where a teacher stays with the same group of students through the first two or three years of school, or grades 1-3 multi-age classrooms, both with the goal that all students are at the same reading level by the end of third grade. Research is beginning to recognize these

practices as options to minimizing the mobility of students during these first critical years (Rasmussen, 1998; Walser, 1998).

In the case that multiple transition points are required, Paglin and Fager (1997) recommend that districts put mechanisms in place to ensure that students move smoothly through the system academically, socially, and emotionally. Paglin and Fager suggest that districts practice multiple strategies, including between school visits, mentoring by older students, special assemblies, ~~or~~ programming for new students, communication and collaboration between faculty and staff at partnering schools. These strategies ease the stress encountered by students during transition periods.

A few districts in Illinois have tried to work around the transition issue created by attendance centers by grouping their attendance centers into clusters. In Pekin District #108's cluster, a K-8 district, attendance centers exist for primary schools (K-3), intermediate schools (4-6) and junior high schools (7-8). Each level of attendance center feeds into the next level, and then into the next level as a cluster. One parent teacher organization serves each cluster, rather than each school (see Figure 2 above).

The cluster concept allows each level of attendance center to feed into the next level and, when done successfully, allows enhanced communication and participation between feeder schools. Pekin learned of the concept from Glenview District #34, which also has attendance centers based on the cluster formation.

The committee interviewed a K-2 building principal from Glenview who provided his thoughts on managing a K-2 building,

From my perspective as a principal of a K-2 building, it is wonderful to have an early elementary setting like this. While it does create one more transition for kids compared to a K-5/6-8 configuration, I believe our configuration allows us to focus well on the needs of children at this level. It does, of course, require us to put a lot of energy into successfully transitioning our second graders to third grade. Our cluster system (i.e., each K-2 paired up with a 3-5 with the exact same attendance area) greatly facilitates this process.

While multiple transitions may cause extra social, emotional and academic stress, students attending schools with high student mobility rates may benefit from attendance centers. Attendance centers have fewer grades within a single school. Several schools in Unit 5 have high mobility rates. Oakdale (32.9 percent), Brigham (24.5 percent) and Fox Creek (21 percent) all have higher mobility rates than the district average (14 percent) and the state average (15 percent) although some of this mobility appears to relate to special programs such as ESL and early childhood education.

As suggested in the literature, the grouping of the grades should also be coupled with the experience and expertise of teachers and staff. Research by Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) documents that teachers and school leaders have the first and second greatest influence, respectively, on student achievement and this brings attention to the ever growing

need for schools to be organized around the right staff. The research all points to the positive benefits (though impact data is not available) resulting from having several classes of the same grade level in one school.

Another concern of the committee related to decreased parental involvement that may result from the attendance center concept – largely due to the move away from neighborhood schools. After looking at the cluster concept, the committee discussed what would need to be done to ensure that a PTO serving multiple schools fairly distributes funds and serves each school equally. It was decided that this would require an increased role from the district to ensure equity and fairness.

Attendance centers experiences of other districts

In December 2007, this committee distributed an electronic survey to large unit districts in Illinois. The districts encompass grades K-12 and many have district demographics comparable to Unit 5. A copy of the survey is available in Appendix A. Ten districts completed and returned the survey, of which half had implemented attendance centers. While the response to the survey was not large, the open ended responses given by the districts provided very useful information.

Reasons given by districts for implementing attendance centers included (n= number out of 10):

- To create more efficient use of resources (n=4)
- To create equity in programming and facilities (n=3)
- To reduce district costs (n=2)
- To increase teacher collaboration (n=2)
- To create consistency in class size (n=2)
- To improve curriculum alignment (n=2)
- To standardize grade level practices and policies (n=2)
- To balance diversity across schools (n=1)
- To decrease mobility rates (n=1)
- To improve intervention strategies (n=1)

Those districts that chose not to implement attendance centers gave the following reasons for not doing so:

- “Teachers in each building complained that it would ‘break up their family’. Board of Education members felt pressure. The community at large didn’t seem to care.”
- “It was never viewed by the community or the administration as a viable option. It was considered only briefly but due to the larger geographic distance between schools as well as the overall geographic size of the district, it was not seen as viable.”
- “There is a desire in our community to have neighborhood elementary schools in order to foster a sense of community. In addition, our district spans 72 square miles and we wanted to keep commute times as low as possible.”
- “Though more economical, you lose the sense of school community and student role models for the younger students.”

When asked what advice they had for Unit 5, the responding school districts said,

- “Make sure that it (the attendance center) isn’t too large. Provide parent and student orientations so that everyone can feel comfortable with the change from one building to another. Create an equitable way for teachers to be re-assigned. Every school building should have a fair chance at getting some of the best teachers at their school. In two school districts I worked at, one building was designated as ‘special’ and got to select the best teachers first. It wasn’t good for anyone. Avoid elitism.”
- “Have some lead teachers take ownership. The majority of the community won’t care one way or another.”
- “Visit our school district with a team of parents and teachers.”
- “Spend time talking with parents and testing out the logistical issues with a single school per grade level(s). Read the research on grade level configurations and let that help to guide your decisions.”
- “Balance demographics to the greatest extent possible. Project enrollment to the greatest extent possible for as far into the future as possible (e.g., survey families regarding pre-school aged children at home, consult longitudinal census data, etc.). Consider carefully, through lots of communication and collaboration, how buildings would be staffed (e.g., how much teacher movement between schools and/or teachers changing grade levels would occur and why). View all of your conversations and decisions through the lens of what is best for children.”

In the survey, the districts were also asked to look in hindsight and tell us what they would have done differently in preparing the community to transition to an attendance center. Those districts who had implemented attendance centers provided the following feedback:

- “The biggest issue was equity. If I were ever involved in making the decisions about the process, I would make sure that all schools would be treated equally. In one district, the underlying issue involved race relations. As a response to the shouting matches and the feelings that explored to the surface, the community began AAUW (American Association of University Women) Study Circles on race relations. If I were in that position again, I would try to do the study circles the year before the planning year. Anticipate your community issues and be proactive and talk about them and address them before they become something to shout about and/or interfere with the planning and implementation.”
- “I would have had my best teachers lead the charge. The most vocal were my weakest teachers.”
- “The community did not accept rationale that it was better for student achievement (which it has turned out to be). The only rationale that seemed to work was that it would save the district money.”
- “We are taking a second look at our grade span situation and considering more grades for a school since the research tends to support a K-8 configuration.”

When asked what evidence the districts had to support student achievement outcomes, like the mixed outcomes reported in the literature, the survey results were also mixed. One superintendent responded,

If there is only one school serving the grades, mobility among schools is not an issue! It is easier for all the teachers of that grade level to meet and collaborate on curriculum development, staff development and other issues. Our curriculum is aligned across the grade level because of all the teachers being in one school. The grade level practices are easier to standardize because of one school. An observation of classrooms presents evidence that, with minor exceptions based upon a teacher's teaching style, our practices are standardized.

However, another superintendent questioned the direct link between grade span configuration and improved student achievement. According to him,

There were grade level spans when several of our buildings were not making AYP (Annual Yearly Progress). We began to move to a unified curriculum, common materials, a shared vision of the three tiered interventions and several buildings were able to make AYP without the configuration changing. What you teach and how you teach it has a much greater impact on test performance than where you teach it.

Several committee members visited Madison, Wisconsin for a direct dialog with administrators, teacher and parents in a district that has attendance centers. Madison has had three sets of paired school (K-2/3-5) attendance centers in place since 1984, when they were required by law to do so as a result of a desegregation lawsuit. None of the paired schools were new buildings. Two of the pairings are no longer as diverse as in earlier years because of gentrification of the area's families but choose to maintain the pairing configuration. Overall, the experience with attendance centers in Madison has been very positive. Specifics related to the Madison experience with attendance centers are included in the next section.

How identified advantages and challenges of attendance centers apply to Unit 5

Table 1 below summarizes the significant opportunities and challenges of implementing attendance centers in Unit 5, citing opportunities/challenges identified in the literature, through the survey of LUDA districts, and through the visit to Madison School District. However, the challenges and opportunities related to the logistics of designing a district-wide attendance center plan are not in the chart but discussed in the following section.

Table 1
Opportunities and Challenges of Attendance Centers

Opportunities	Challenges
<p><u>Equalizing resources</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levels out socio-economic status and ethnic diversity between schools • Immediate, temporary relief from capacity concerns • More equalized number of students at each school – efficiency • Levels out class sizes at each grade level • Balances out facilities differences between older and newer schools • In some cases pairing allows access to Title 1 money because through pairing the involved schools met the criteria for funding¹ 	<p><u>Equalizing resources</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many teachers in Unit 5 have purchased many of their resource materials personally or have resources that have been purchased for a specific teacher by the PTO. These they believe personally belong to them. There is question about them wanting to take them with them when being asked to move to another school.
<p><u>Economies of scale within building</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More shared resources • Some after school activities could attract a critical mass of student involvement • More efficient focused professional development geared toward a specific grade-level • More efficient to offer special programs/presentations for students that “fit” age level • With more classrooms per attendance center, there are greater opportunities to match students to teachers according to learning and teaching styles, to place students with others with whom they work well, or to separate students who don’t get along with each other • Facilitate coordinated and collaborative lesson planning within grade level • Staff able to focus more intensively on the developmental needs of the younger children 	<p><u>Economies of scale within building</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current teachers from larger schools who already have collaboration and shared resources may be resistant to the idea of moving

<p><u>Improving Teaching</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More collaboration within grade level for teachers that have been at singles and doubles • Curriculum more aligned across classrooms within grade level • Each school focused on specific needs of narrower range of ages 	<p><u>Improving Teaching</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More effort to align curriculum across transition to grade level in new building
<p><u>Transportation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distance to school has the potential to negatively impact on school activities. Through cooperative planning the negative impact can be minimized by procuring special transportation grant funding for “after school” programs and PTO events. Children can be transported back to their neighborhood school for “after-school” programming that included ballet, hobbies and other identifiable enrichment programs. This provides a single after school pick-up site.¹ • Children have a tendency to develop neighborhood friends and school friends in attendance centers when school borders are contiguous. 	<p><u>Transportation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most parents do not like extended bus rides for their children • Likely to increase transportation costs as some students now walk to school K-5 and would ride bus for some years with attendance centers • In most cases, contiguous attendance center areas do not meet the Unit 5 goal of balancing socio-economic status • Less opportunity for younger students to walk or bike to school with older siblings who provide safety assistance
<p><u>Student transitions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mitigating factor if all students in upper grade school were already together in lower grades • Providing a mid-year orientation program and meeting the next year’s teachers can ease the transition for students.¹ • An orientation program can decreased significantly the “white flight” to private schools when children attend school in what is determined as a lower economic area. Through education the parents’ fears and anxieties can be diminished. Many children return to public school when they attend middle school.¹ • Principals need common philosophies 	<p><u>Student transitions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One (or two) additional transitions to new school buildings in a student’s career • Forces children to expand their social interaction due to the fact that they have to change schools more often and find ways to adapt • In some cases, teachers of 3-5 may believe that the K-2 teachers have a tendency to pamper the children but through working together they can solve the problem by developing expectation levels.¹ • Teaming elementary schools whose students who will eventually attend different junior high schools adds a loss of friends at the 6th grade transition.

<p>and strong communication skills including the willingness to work together closely.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A common school handbook so expectations change little during the transition. • Developing a school value system aids in sharing the benefits of diversity and decreasing the focus of the street values of designer clothes and play stations. ¹ • Ensuring 5th graders in a given attendance center attend the same junior high school together will smooth the transition to 6th grade. 	
<p><u>Specialty areas of education</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers planning programs in music, art, IMC, PE will have the opportunity for more focused planning when developing programs for fewer grades versus 6 grades. 	<p><u>Specialty areas of education</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For example, if 1st and 2nd grade classes require 85 minutes of IMC instruction per week and there are too many 1st and 2nd graders going to one IMC, the demand may be too high for the facility to meet the required minutes
<p><u>Community support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing attendance centers simultaneously with redistricting could mitigate some resistance. Parents would already be expecting some changes. • At least one year prior to implementation of attendance centers there should be monthly study group meetings including Unit 5 administration, enthusiastic teachers, parents, students, and community. Madison stated that it is imperative that the school administration view these study groups openly and not just an exercise in pushing the district's view. • Unit 5 Administration must be willing to be objective and willingly commit the necessary resources when entering into the project. The first set of attendance centers must be successful for the community to be supportive of expanding the concept. 	<p><u>Community support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bloomington-Normal is a generally conservative community not likely to embrace changes perceived as out of the mainstream • Radical change implemented quickly after a referendum is likely to stir up distrust of the district within the community • Redistricting in Unit 5 is always controversial. Attendance centers would likely be even more controversial, especially if implemented at different time than redistricting. • Not everyone within the Unit 5 community views diversity as an asset. • Teachers may be resistant to change for a variety of reasons

<p><u>School identity/Parent issues</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteerism is less affected by paired schools when administration and parents looked at both schools within the pairing as twins; each needing equal nurture. ¹ • Having a joint PTO encompassing all clustered schools (i.e., each K-2 paired up with a 3-5 with the exact same attendance area), a board comprised of parents of both schools, meeting times with alternating sites, cooperative fund raising and a strong focus on community development. ^{1, 2, 3} • Address school identity by focusing on the school as a “place of pride.” As this concept developed with the children and teachers there was a tremendous decrease in discipline issues. Principals at the schools visited stated that they have 1-2 children in their office monthly for discipline related issues with less bullying over the entire school. ¹ • Having the diversity of socio/economic/cultural/race at school does impact many decisions. In our changing world it is important that children learn this early in their education and developmental years. 	<p><u>School identity/Parent issues</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower volunteer rate due to having to volunteer at more than one school • Increased distance from school for after school functions (PTO, open house, family fun activities, etc.) • Loss of identity with “neighborhood school” • Children of same family might be attending different schools • Parents choosing certain neighborhood in which to live only to have children travel elsewhere to attend school • Parents with children in before/after school care would have to drop off/pick up at multiple schools
<p><u>No Child Left Behind</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Larger subgroups across a broader range of socio-economic status may facilitate NCLB adequate yearly progress within subgroup • Potential for increased test scores at schools that have higher levels of poverty 	<p><u>No Child Left Behind</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some subgroups for NCLB adequate yearly progress are too small to report within school now but may pass the reporting threshold in attendance centers • Lower grade buildings may not feel penalties if they inadequately prepare students for testing at upper grade schools • In some cases, when pairing schools for socio/economic reasons there are decreases in test scores at some schools. ¹

<u>Student-student interaction</u>	<u>Student-student interaction</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for a reduction of injuries in the K-2 grouping when the older children were not present. Being the oldest in the building gave a sense of “confidence” to the 2nd graders.¹ • Less bullying of younger students by older students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A program such as “book buddies” for K-2 would require a different plan if there are not older children to support the program. Additional use of volunteers could mitigate. • Programs now exist in Unit 5 where older children mentor the K-2 children. This has been a beneficial program for both groups of children. • Safety patrol students would not be available for the lower elementary schools. • More competition for leadership in student councils in buildings with many more students in each grade

¹ Based on interviews with administrators of the Madison, WI school district, which has had attendance centers for over 20 years

² Based on communication with Pekin school district administrators

³ Based on communication with Glenview school district administrators

Possibilities for organizing attendance centers in Unit 5

In considering how the attendance center concept might be implemented in Unit 5, the committee recognized that one of the critical needs in our district is to balance resources between schools that tend to enroll students from low socio-economic status (SES) with schools that tend to enroll students from high SES. Although significant SES disparity exists within the district at the elementary level, the most recent redistricting went to great lengths to balance SES within the three junior high schools. Any implementation of attendance centers in Unit 5 should not disrupt the SES balance that has been achieved at the junior high level.

With this in mind, assuming no redistricting of junior high schools or of feeder schools, it is challenging to design a district-wide elementary level attendance center configuration. This is a critical assumption, however. Teaming two schools together could combine students who will attend different junior high schools and later different high schools, given the current feeder school configuration. This is not a step forward in the view of the committee.

Two other significant challenges in designing a district-wide plan for attendance centers are the great variability in school capacities and the geography of such a large district, particularly when most of the high SES schools are near each other. The community may accept long bus rides at the junior high level but is less likely to embrace third graders who live a block from an elementary school traveling all the way across town by bus, or students in kindergarten who can

see one elementary school building from their yard traveling daily to by bus because they attend a school beyond a busy intersection..

Also, the have and have-not schools are not all easy to identify. Other than Northpoint, Grove, and Prairieland being perceived as “have” schools and Fairview and Brigham being perceived as “have-not” schools, most of the other schools fall into a big gray area in between. We did not consider the age of school building in assigning ratings of high or low SES to the schools, focusing primarily on the low-income rate. The chart below provides a snapshot of the current demographics of the district at the elementary level.

Fall 2007 Elementary Demographics

			Sept. 2007	Sept. 2007				
Kingsley Jr. High	% low income	% white	Enrollment	Enrollment	# low income	# white	# non-white	SES
			Reg. Ed.	total				
Hudson	9.6	90.8	262	262	25	238	24	Hi
Oakdale	37.9	65.2	403	440	167	287	153	Lo
Sugar Creek	44.9	47.8	234	261	117	125	136	Lo
Fairview	62.0	47.2	347	416	258	196	220	Lo
Northpoint	4.8	79.1	710	745	36	589	156	Hi
Towanda	5.7	96.4	155	155	9	149	6	Hi
				2279	612	1585	694	
					26.8%	69.5%	30.5%	
Chiddix Jr. High								
Brigham	59.9	57.1	363	402	241	230	172	Lo
Glenn	32.1	70.2	272	272	87	191	81	Lo
Grove	5.2	84.6	617	640	33	541	99	Hi
Hoose	12.1	68.5	570	653	79	447	206	Hi
				1967	440	1409	558	
					22.4%	71.6%	28.4%	
Parkside Jr. High								
Carlock	23.5	95.8	136	136	32	130	6	Hi
Fox Creek	45.6	68.5	302	371	169	254	117	Lo
Parkside	36.8	72	307	343	126	247	96	Lo
Pepper Ridge	39.2	67.6	451	511	200	345	166	Lo
Prairieland	10.6	83.4	546	583	62	486	97	Hi
				1944	589	1463	481	
					30.3%	75.3%	24.7%	

Demographic data from 2007 school report cards at <http://www.unit5.org/districtinfo/>
 Enrollment data from Sept. 28, 2007 enrollment report

Within the constraints of building capacity and current feeder school configurations for the junior high schools, we were unable to design an optimal district-wide configuration of attendance centers. The schools that show the greatest capacity to benefit from the attendance center concept by leveling out class sizes tend to be the smaller buildings which could only house one or two grades in an attendance center configuration.

With redistricting right around the corner for the two new elementary schools and middle school, we cannot recommend that any implementation of attendance centers occur prior to that redistricting.

No optimal district-wide attendance center model was identified by this committee based on analysis of multiple factors including academics and logistical needs. In considering cluster models, the major impediment is the widely varying building capacities. For example, Carlock and Towanda have such small capacities that they can only house one grade if paired with two larger schools. It may be possible to design a district-wide cluster configuration in conjunction with redistricting and realigning the feeder schools into the junior high schools but such a design must maintain the relatively equal distribution of SES across all Unit 5 junior high schools.

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Appendix A

Unit #5 School District Grade Span Configuration Feedback Survey

Please answer the following questions below

Question One: Has your district ever considered creating a grade span configuration school?

Yes No

If yes, what was the initial reason(s) for creating grade span configuration school (check all that apply)

- Reduce district costs
- Decrease mobility rates
- Increase teacher collaboration
- Create consistency in class size
- Equity in programming and facilities
- More efficient use of resources
- Improved curriculum alignment
- Improved intervention strategies
- Standardize grade level practices and policies
- Other? _____

If you answered no, why did your district decide not to implement a grade span configuration school?

If you answered 'no' to question one, you have completed the survey. If you responded 'yes' to question one, please complete the rest of the survey.

Question Two: If your district has implemented a grade span configuration school, what outcomes have you seen as a result of the grade span configuration school? (check all that apply)

- Decreased mobility rates
- Increased student achievement scores (based on state and/or NAEP scores)
- Decreased student achievement scores (based on state and/or NAEP scores)
- Increased teacher collaboration
- Increased teacher engagement
- Increased student engagement
- Improved curriculum alignment
- Improved intervention strategies
- Other? _____

Question Three: What evidence do you have to support the outcomes that you listed in question two?

Question Four: What challenges have you experienced with your grade span configuration school(s)?

(check all that apply)

- ___ Increased transportation costs
- ___ Loss of community schools
- ___ Decreased parent involvement
- ___ Decreased teacher engagement
- ___ Decreased student engagement
- ___ Other? _____

Question Five: What advice do you have for our district, which is considering the creation of an elementary grade school configuration school?

Question Six: What did you do to inform and prepare the community at large for the transition to a grade span configuration school?

Question Seven: How did you prepare the school community (teachers, staff, and students) for the transition to a grade span configuration school?

Question Eight: Are there any decisions or practices that you would have done differently in preparing the community (at large as well as the school community) for the transition to a grade span configuration school? If so, what?

III. Demographic Information: *Please answer the following questions*

<p>1) In what type of district are you superintendent? 1. suburban____ 2. large urban_____</p> <p>2) What is the zip code of your district? _____</p> <p>3) What is the Fall 2007 enrollment in your district? (Found on the Fall Housing Report) _____</p>	<p>4) How many grade span configuration schools are in your district? _____</p> <p>5) What is the size of your district's grade span configuration schools?_____</p> <p>6) What grades are served in your district's grade span configuration schools?_____</p> <p>7) For your district's grade span configuration schools, please complete the following: Percent of minority students_____ Mobility rates_____ Low-income rates (free and reduced lunch)_____</p>
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Thank you for completing this survey for the Citizen's Advisory Committee of Unit #5 School District! Please return the survey via e-mail attachment to elhunt@ilstu.edu or by fax to 309/438-8683 to the attention of Erika Hunt.