



Moving on Up: 6th Graders Head to Middle School

In my conversations around Jeffco, I have heard a lot of questions about the transition of 6th graders to middle schools. Specifically, the questions have focused on why Jeffco decided to make this shift, what the total cost of the shift will be, and how our students with special needs will be supported in the transition. In this edition of *On the Issues*, we'll address these questions.

In Jeffco, we have a variety of grade configurations. Some communities transitioned to a 6-8 grade model years ago. Others use a K-8 and 9-12 model or a K-6 and 7-12 configuration, and some are organized in K-6 elementary, 7-8 middle school, and 9-12 high school.

Last school year, the decision was made to shift to an instructional model where the majority of our 6th grade students will attend 6-8 grade middle schools, which is the most common configuration nationally. Across the U.S., 75 percent of 6th grade students attend a middle school and surrounding Colorado school districts also use this model. There is no national movement to move 6th grade students back to elementary school.

Committees of Jeffco staff and parents at our middle schools have planned community events to inform and support students and families with this transition. We also have 6th grade transition information for families on our [website](#).

Why did Jeffco decide to make this shift?

First and foremost, we want to provide more options and services for our kids! This model strengthens our schools' abilities to customize student learning experiences. More 6th graders will now have the opportunity to take accelerated classes and pursue interests through expanded elective opportunities.

An additional year in middle school also helps us build strong school communities. Rather than transitioning in one year and out the next, three years in middle school allows relationships to form, the staff to get to know students and families, and the students to get to know each other.

Finally, our facilities played a key role in this decision. Speaking generally about Jeffco, our middle schools are under capacity, and many of our elementary schools are over capacity. This transition will move students out of over 100 temporary buildings and into schools.

How much is this transition going to cost?

In all, we are expecting a total cost of less (possibly much less) than \$32 million. To date, the Board of Education has allocated \$14.5 million in funding for additions to Drake and Dunstan Middle Schools. Jeffco Public Schools also planned for potential additional costs, and reserved an additional \$2 million to cover any incidental expenses from the annual capital transfer (a fund for building and facilities needs).

It is possible additional funding needs may arise as we work to complete the transition district-wide. For example, additional classroom space may be needed at Summit Ridge, Ken Caryl, and Creighton Middle Schools. The estimated cost for additions to all three schools is \$15.5 million. The Board of Education has not yet approved these additions.

The 6th grade transition will create some ongoing savings for Jeffco, as well. Specifically, the decommissioning or elimination of temporary classrooms can save \$650,000 annually in ongoing maintenance and operations cost.

Will students with special needs be supported in the transition?

Yes! The vast majority of students with special needs will receive services in their middle school, just as they did in their elementary school.

Some of our students with more intensive special needs attend schools that host special programs called “centers” with specialized supports. Each year, in partnership with families, we analyze student learning needs to ensure the appropriate supports are in place. This transition will not change these important practices.

The big question...and next steps!

And the answer to what everyone has been wondering - yes, 6th graders will still go to our Outdoor Lab Schools! We know Jeffco families, students, and staff value this great experience and 6th graders will absolutely get to continue this important Jeffco tradition.

I encourage parents and students to take advantage of opportunities to learn about their middle school by attending open house events and parent meetings at the elementary and middle schools. Your school’s principal is also a good source for information. Certainly, there are logistical issues to manage with this change – but the shift will offer exciting opportunities for our students, and we feel this brings great new options for Jeffco kids.

Check out the Parents’ Guide to 6th Grade Transition [here](#).

There was a [presentation](#) made to the Board of Education Oct. 19 on the 6th Grade Move-Up. The meeting was [streamed live](#); the 1-hour mark is where the 6th grade move-up discussion begins.

Jeffco students, parents, families, staff, and community members may engage with Dr. Glass via Twitter [@COJasonGlass](#) and through his blog, <https://advancejeffco.blog/>.