



Seaside School, Inc

Special Task Meeting

Published on May 19, 2025 at 1:22 PM CDT

Date and Time

Wednesday May 21, 2025 at 4:00 PM CDT

Location

Join the meeting link

<https://andrewjordan-842.my.webex.com/andrewjordan-842.my/j.php?MTID=m6916d5df9a9b81a0a63000eebca156e6>

Join by meeting number

Meeting number (access code): 2558 625 5540

Meeting password: rxBd3fFQF33 (79233337 when dialing from a phone or video system)

Join by phone

+1-650-479-3208 United States Toll

Access code: 2558 625 5540

Founded in 1996
Serving Students in Grades 5 - 12

We seek to sustain an educational community where an emphasis on academic excellence is complemented by our concern for each learner’s personal growth and intellectual, aesthetic, and psychological development. The curriculum is developmentally responsive – actively engaging students in learning skills in context, integrative – directing students to connect learning to daily lives, and exploratory – enabling students to discover their abilities, interests, learning styles, and ways that they can make contributions to society.

Information on procedures for public comment can be found on our Governance Page. ([Click Here](#))

If anyone needs special assistance to participate in the public input session, every effort will be made to provide an appropriate accommodation. When requesting accommodations for public input, please allow no less than 1 business day notice prior to the scheduled meeting.

Specific issues about a particular student should only be addressed to the school’s Director of Student Services, rather than the Board of Directors.

All public comments will be taken under advisement by the Board, but will not elicit a written or spoken response. The names of persons providing public comment and a brief summary of topics or input will be included in the meeting minutes published. A response will be provided to the stakeholder within seven (7) days.

Agenda

	Purpose	Presenter	Time
I. Opening Items			4:00 PM
A. Record Attendance			1 m
B. Call the Meeting to Order			
II. Special Task			4:01 PM
A. SNS School Structure Discussion	Discuss	Andrew Jordan	45 m
III. Closing Items			4:46 PM
A. Adjourn Meeting	Vote		

Coversheet

SNS School Structure Discussion

Section:	II. Special Task
Item:	A. SNS School Structure Discussion
Purpose:	Discuss
Submitted by:	
Related Material:	School_Structure_Analysis.pdf Special_Task_Force_Research.pdf

Model #1: Staying the same (no structure changes)

Strengths:

- SNS has been the most successful public school in Walton County if not the entire region of Florida for the last decade
- Quality teachers and traditions
- Effective community leadership and engagement
- Strong looping program
- Strong 5th grade proficiency scores

Opportunities:

- Alignment with county transitions for students: Keeping 5th grade in elementary schools ensures fewer transitions for students between schools. Developmentally, students in 5th grade may benefit from remaining in a more elementary-style environment until they are more mature.

Weaknesses:

- The building set up makes it difficult to have consistent classroom sizes.
- The middle school operates at approximately a \$482,000 deficit based on the current structure.

Threats:

1. The 5th grade will have more siblings apply for enrollment than total openings (creating a sibling waitlist in ALL middle school grades)
 - a. Last year 36 students gained enrollment through sibling and board preferences.
 - b. We currently have 11 middle school siblings on the waitlist grades 6-8
2. Space will continue to be an issue.
3. Enrolling employee preferences and any board member preferences in grades 6-8 will be a challenge based on the little to no student attrition.

Model #2: Eliminating 5th Grade and moving to three cohorts of 64 students (grades 6-8)

Strengths:

- SNS has been the most successful public school in Walton County if not the entire region of Florida for the last decade
- Focus on Developmentally Appropriate Learning: Fifth graders are still developmentally closer to elementary school-aged students. By keeping them in elementary school, students can remain in a nurturing environment that is more suited to their social-emotional needs.
- Quality teachers and traditions
- Effective community leadership and engagement

- Enhanced Resource Allocation: We'll be able to allocate resources (teachers, materials, and spaces) more effectively to the remaining grades. It may also allow for better instructional practices as teachers can focus on fewer grade levels.
- Students will be able to finish their time at Dune Lakes or Butler in a leadership role and taking advantage of activities designed only for 5th graders in a K-5 school.

Opportunities:

- Alignment with Enrollment Preferences: By focusing on grades 6-8, the school can restructure admissions policies to prioritize 6th grade enrollment, allowing more families and siblings to be admitted in middle school. This helps address the current issue of siblings not being able to gain access due to overcrowding.
- Diverse Enrollment Possibilities: Removing 5th grade will open opportunities to the student population in 6th - 8th grade. The school could establish targeted recruitment and outreach programs for underrepresented students, ensuring that the middle school does not become so homogeneous.
- Expanding Specialized Programs: With the extra space and resources from eliminating 5th grade, the school could develop more specialized programs for the 6th-8th grades (STEM, arts, etc.), attracting a wider range of students and addressing capacity concerns more strategically. Moving the looping to three years
- Immediate Capacity Relief: By eliminating 5th grade, the overcrowding in the middle school (grades 6-8) can be alleviated, freeing up space for personalized learning groups and ensuring that each classroom can operate with manageable student numbers.
- Relief for Office Space: Principals and administrative staff may be able to reclaim their office spaces as classrooms become less congested, improving administrative operations.
- Potential Savings and Reallocation: Reducing the middle school by one grade could result in cost savings in staffing, space, and resources. These savings could be redirected to programs for the remaining students or high school grades.

Weaknesses:

- SNS does a great job with 5th grade and employs a teaching strategy (looping) that is followed within the middle school.
- 5th grade is a transition year for students, that under the current system allows a transition period before elevating the academic rigor of the 6th grade.

Model #3: Moving 8th grade to the high school, remaining 5-7 at SNS, raising cohort sizes in all grades.

Strengths:

- The majority of students coming from SNS are prepared for high school courses and a more mature campus setting in 8th grade
- Quality teachers and traditions
- Effective community leadership and engagement

Opportunities:

- Preparing Students for High School: Moving 8th graders into a high school environment may better prepare them for the transition. They can experience high school-level classes and culture early, making the shift to 9th grade smoother.
- Reduction of Overcrowding: Moving 8th grade to high school immediately relieves the middle school of its space challenges, opening up classrooms for smaller, more manageable learning groups and improving the quality of education.
- Access to High School Resources: 8th graders could benefit from being in a high school environment, with access to more specialized resources like advanced coursework, labs, and extracurriculars that could enhance their academic and social experiences.
 - **8th graders will have access to high school facilities and resources, including advanced courses, extracurricular activities, and specialized teachers that could enhance their academic and social growth.**
- Addressing Enrollment Preferences: Moving 8th grade allows the middle school to open up more space for 5th-7th grade students, which could provide more slots for siblings or underserved populations. This could help to combat the homogeneity issue by opening more seats in earlier grades, creating a more diverse school culture over time.
- Balanced Enrollment and Diversity: By shifting 8th grade to high school, the middle school could rebalance its enrollment strategy to admit more diverse students in lower grades (5th-7th), addressing the issue of a homogeneous student body. This could also help more siblings gain access in middle school, diversifying the student population sooner rather than waiting until 9th grade.
- Encouraging Early Leadership and Peer Mentorship: 8th graders in a high school setting could participate in early leadership programs and mentor relationships with upperclassmen, helping them adjust to high school life while fostering a greater sense of responsibility.
- Gradual Transition to High School: Moving 8th graders to high school gives them a “soft landing” for high school. Rather than jumping straight into 9th grade, they can familiarize themselves with the high school environment, schedule, and expectations in a more gradual way, reducing stress and improving outcomes.
- Accelerated Learning Opportunities: 8th graders could have access to advanced or dual enrollment courses, preparing them academically for high school and beyond. This early exposure can accelerate college readiness for high-performing students.
- Improved Transition to High School: By integrating 8th graders into high school, they can gradually adjust to the high school environment, reducing the academic and social shock that often occurs when moving from middle school to high school.
- Cohesive Student Leadership Development: Introducing 8th graders into the high school environment could foster early leadership development by integrating them into student government, clubs, and activities alongside older students.
- More Balanced Population Distribution: Moving 8th grade to the high school would balance the student population between the middle and high schools, reducing pressure on middle school infrastructure without overcrowding the high school.

- More gradual growth: Currently the high school (9th grade) will enroll between 95 - 105 new students to our school community this year. This is a large cultural change and impacts. By moving 8th grade to SCHS campus we can gradually grow each cohort from grades 5-8 minimizing the number of new students coming to 9th grade.
 - 5th grade future (60-64) Current 52
 - 6th grade future (60-64) Current 47
 - 7th grade future (60-64) Current 52
 - 8th grade future (80-88) Current 47
 - 9th grade future (134) Current 100

Weaknesses:

- Removes students from their final year in middle school within SNS, possibly creating a dis-jointed / complicated transition.
- The transition could possibly create overcrowding issues at the high school in regard to separate space for 8th graders, possible student pickup issues, etc.
- Students would have to travel back to SNS for classes (i.e. Band), creating transportation issues.
- Lack of daily activity / contact with other middle school students possibly harming camaraderie as it relates to club and athletic activities for middle school.
- Based on conversation within the Special Task Committee meeting, parents would possibly be hesitant to move 8th graders to a high school campus.

Additional Questions to Consider:

1. Impact on Diversity and Enrollment: How will each decision impact your ability to attract and retain a more diverse student population in middle and high school? Could changing enrollment policies for younger grades solve the homogeneity issue?
2. Facilities and Costs: What is the capacity of the SNS campus with 60 students in a cohort vs 48 in a cohort? How costly would it be to adapt high school facilities to accommodate an additional grade (8th)? Will the college lease the open space or will we use the learning cottages until future building may occur? Alternatively, would eliminating 5th grade free up enough space to solve the current middle school crowding issues without additional investment?
3. Impact on School Culture: How will moving 8th grade to high school impact school culture and the overall student experience? Will younger students feel prepared for the social and academic changes of high school at that age?
4. Long-Term Planning: What are the long-term consequences of eliminating a grade (5th) or moving a grade (8th)? How will these shifts align with the school's vision for growth and serving the community over time?

5. Parental Preferences: How do parents feel about these changes? Are there preferences for keeping 5th graders in the school or concerns about 8th graders moving to high school?

6. Impact on Student Achievement: Have there been studies or data from other schools that have made similar changes? How has it affected student performance, behavior, and overall school culture?

7. Extracurriculars and Social-Emotional Needs? Will younger 8th grade students, feel integrated and supported if they're placed with older students? How will this affect their access to extracurriculars, sports, and mentorship?

8. Staff Preferences and SNS culture: How will this impact the recruitment and development of future teachers to each campus. What changes will need to be made and how will it be decided. What is the impact of more transition at the middle school?

Supporting Seaside's 5-8 Middle School Model: An Academic and Structural Rationale

Seaside Middle School's decision to maintain a 5-8 grade model, rather than shifting to a 6-8 structure, is supported by compelling evidence of student achievement, developmental benefits, and consistency in instructional relationships. The 5-8 model addresses students' unique academic and socio-emotional needs during early adolescence, a period marked by significant growth and change. This approach is validated by the school's outstanding academic performance and the stability provided through looping and teaming.

Academic Success of Seaside's 5th Graders

Seaside's 5th-grade students have demonstrated exceptional proficiency rates across multiple subjects, setting a high benchmark for academic achievement. Seaside's 5th graders scored 100% proficiency (levels 3-5) in math, 91% in English Language Arts (ELA), and 89% in science. These scores surpass both the Walton County and state averages, with the district and state 5th graders achieving 63% and 54% proficiency in science, respectively. The data below illustrates these comparisons:

Subject	Seaside 5th Grade Proficiency	Walton County District 5th Grade Proficiency	Florida State 5th Grade Proficiency
Science	89%	63%	54%
Math	100%	68%	56%
English Language Arts	91%	62%	55%

These results underscore the effectiveness of Seaside's model in delivering strong academic outcomes. By reducing the number of school transitions from three to two, Seaside's 5-8 model ensures students experience fewer disruptions, which research has shown to positively impact academic achievement. Students in Seaside's structure benefit from a consistent, supportive environment that fosters learning and growth.

Benefits of Teaming and Looping

The 5-8 model's structure at Seaside allows for the implementation of two teaching teams: one for grades 5-6 and another for grades 7-8. This team structure enables teachers to "loop" with their students, staying with the same group over two years. Looping has been shown to foster stronger relationships between students and teachers, contributing to increased engagement, higher academic performance, and better social-emotional outcomes.

Studies reveal that students in schools with high levels of teaming—where groups of teachers collaborate on curriculum planning and student support—show improvements in achievement

and school culture (Mertens & Flowers, 2006; Lee & Smith, 2000). Looping enables teachers to understand each student's strengths and challenges more deeply, allowing for personalized instruction that can address specific learning needs over time. This approach is particularly impactful during middle school, where adolescents benefit from supportive relationships and consistency as they navigate early adolescent development.

Enhanced Social-Emotional and Academic Growth

By creating a stable environment that emphasizes long-term relationships, the 5-8 model also supports students' social and emotional growth. Middle school can be a challenging time for students as they develop new social identities and face increasing academic demands. Research shows that structures which promote close, continuous student-teacher relationships improve students' self-esteem, behavior, and overall school satisfaction (National Middle School Association, 2006). For Seaside, maintaining a 5-8 model ensures that students do not experience an abrupt transition to a new school at sixth grade, thus preserving the stability that supports healthy development.

Furthermore, the 5-8 model's use of interdisciplinary teaming and common planning time allows teachers to collaborate effectively, providing consistent support to students. Teams can monitor progress closely, making it easier to identify and address issues promptly. This approach aligns with findings from studies suggesting that teaming, when combined with shared planning time, improves both student achievement and teachers' ability to implement best practices effectively (Mertens, Flowers, & Mulhall, 1998).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Seaside's 5-8 model presents clear academic and developmental advantages for middle school students. The high proficiency rates in 5th-grade science, math, and ELA demonstrate the effectiveness of Seaside's approach, while the structural benefits of looping and teaming provide students with a stable, supportive learning environment. The decision to maintain this model is supported by evidence that suggests fewer transitions, stronger student-teacher relationships, and collaborative teaching teams lead to better academic outcomes and enhanced socio-emotional development. As Seaside continues to serve students in a 5-8 model, it is well-positioned to meet the holistic needs of young adolescents, fostering success both inside and outside the classroom.

Additional Research

Research on the benefits of including fifth grade in a middle school model rather than in elementary school provides compelling support for its potential advantages, particularly in relation to academic readiness, social-emotional development, and preparing students for the structure of middle school.

One key advantage is the continuity it provides during a crucial period of social and cognitive development. Transitioning into a middle school environment earlier allows fifth graders to adjust to the demands of middle school before entering the intense developmental stage of early adolescence, which can make the shift smoother for students. In schools with a 5-8 grade middle school model, fifth graders are introduced to subject-specific classes and departmentalized learning earlier, which can support independent learning and strengthen critical thinking skills. For instance, studies have shown that fifth graders often benefit from the middle school model as it fosters a sense of autonomy, resilience, and responsibility, particularly through structured routines and teacher specialization that are common in middle school settings (Truth in American Education, Laura Jeffrey Academy).

Furthermore, schools that adopt a looping system, where the same teacher or team follows a cohort for multiple years, as seen in Seaside's 5-6 and 7-8 grade teams, show enhanced academic and relational growth. This approach allows students to build stronger, more consistent relationships with teachers and peers, facilitating a stable support system which is especially beneficial during the transitional phases of middle school. By engaging students in a stable environment, looping reduces the stress associated with adapting to new teachers and classmates each year, which can be particularly helpful for young adolescents navigating new academic and social challenges. This stability has been linked to improvements in academic performance and social-emotional resilience (Laura Jeffrey Academy, Oklahoma Watch).

Additionally, fifth graders in middle school have access to broader extracurricular and elective options, such as STEM-focused programs and various clubs. These opportunities can enhance student engagement and motivation by allowing them to explore interests beyond the core curriculum, which may not be as widely available in elementary schools. Providing such options earlier can spark a lasting interest in subjects like science, technology, engineering, and math, and help students develop a positive academic self-concept before reaching the challenging middle school years (Oklahoma Watch).

Seaside's model demonstrates these benefits through impressive academic outcomes in fifth-grade math, ELA, and science, with proficiency rates significantly exceeding district and state averages. This success can be attributed to the tailored approach of looping and team teaching, which provides fifth graders with a stable, supportive environment during a key transitional year, setting them up for continued success in later grades.

By maintaining a 5-8 model, Seaside not only minimizes the frequency of transitions for students but also cultivates an environment that encourages both academic growth and emotional well-being, preparing students more comprehensively for the challenges of middle school and beyond.