

MINUTES OF THE STUDY SESSION- SEPTEMBER 9, 2026

The Board of Education of the Timpanogos School District met in a study session on Wednesday, September 9, 2026, at 4:00 pm. The study session was held at the Alpine School District Special Education Office in Lindon, Utah.

Board Members Present: President Jennifer Lyman, Vice President Sterling Hilton, David H. Smith, Michele Sorensen

Board Member Ada Wilson participated electronically.

Also present: Superintendent Jensen & Business Administrator Sundberg and members of the administrative staff. There were approximately 25 others in attendance.

Board President Jennifer Lyman called the study session to order at 4:01 p.m.

Board members Grace Rex arrived at 4:03 pm and Guy Fugal at 4:12 pm.

GRADE CONFIGURATION STUDY

Superintendent Jensen introduced the Grade Configuration Study and explained that the broader boundary study had been divided into separate components so the Board could consider grade configuration independently from school closures, consolidations, and boundary changes. The purpose of the Study Session was to continue learning and clarifying the Board's understanding before the three public hearings later that evening and additional grade-configuration focus groups and cluster meetings scheduled for the following week.

Robust School Criteria and Study Background

Superintendent Jensen reiterated that the district's work continued to be guided by its vision, values, and Robust School Criteria. He emphasized that no particular grade configuration guarantees a successful school. Regardless of configuration, high-quality teaching, effective leadership, positive school culture, school safety, and effective operations remain foundational to creating robust schools.

Research and community feedback regarding K–5, 6–8, and 9–12 configurations were reviewed. Superintendent Jensen noted that Utah uses the K–6, 7–9, and 10–12 model more frequently than much of the country and that approximately 70 percent of middle schools nationally serve grades 6–8. Previous survey results, with approximately 4,000 respondents, indicated comparatively strong support for moving ninth grade to high school, while support for moving sixth grade to middle school was positive but less pronounced.

High School Configuration – Grades 9–12

The Board reviewed potential advantages and disadvantages of moving ninth grade to the high schools. Potential advantages included strengthening comprehensive course offerings; increasing access to AP, CTE, concurrent enrollment, and other programs; maintaining all four high schools; creating a complete four-year high school experience; and improving continuity for students and programs. Potential concerns included ninth graders becoming the youngest students on campus, larger schools potentially feeling less personal, additional complexity with registration and master scheduling, ensuring ninth graders remain on track for graduation, and initial capital costs associated with accommodating an additional grade.

Board Member Ada Wilson noted that although there would be initial capital costs, reconfiguration could allow the district to maximize existing resources more effectively over time.

Board Member Michele Sorensen addressed the concern that ninth graders would become the youngest students at the high school and asked whether a more structured ninth-grade schedule could provide additional support. Superintendent Jensen explained that many required courses naturally group ninth graders with their grade-level peers, while still allowing students who are ready for advanced coursework to take classes with older students.

President Jennifer Lyman identified transportation as an additional advantage of a 9–12 configuration. She noted that ninth graders participating in high school athletics and other programs may currently rely on families for transportation between the junior high and high school. Having ninth graders already on the high school campus could reduce that burden while also providing earlier access to advanced coursework and programs. Board members noted similar benefits for marching band, color guard, choir, DLI, and other programs involving ninth-grade students.

Board Member Ada Wilson emphasized that a transition to a 9–12 configuration would provide an opportunity to build on the District's vision and commitment to exceptional care. She encouraged the District to be intentional about the transition and carefully consider the culture and experience it wants to create for incoming freshmen.

Vice President Sterling Hilton observed that many of the identified disadvantages appeared to be associated with the transition itself rather than the long-term configuration. He noted that ninth graders would become the youngest students at the high school just as tenth graders are currently the youngest, and that concerns related to school size and other implementation challenges could be addressed through thoughtful planning and strong school culture. He stated that the potential advantages represented opportunities for a better educational experience in both the short and long term and, from his perspective, were more lasting than the transitional challenges associated with the change. He further noted that he had not begun the study process favoring a 9–12 configuration, but through conversations with school personnel, parents, community members, and others, he had increasingly found the potential advantages to outweigh the disadvantages.

Board Member Grace Rex similarly noted the distinction between challenges associated primarily with the initial transition and potential advantages that could continue over time. President **Lyman** acknowledged that Board members had entered the study with different thoughts and perspectives and were continuing to develop their views as they received information and participated in the process.

The Board also discussed counselor workload, student registration, master scheduling, and the transition to the Q student information system. Director of Wellness **Andrea Paxman** explained that many implementation details were not yet known but could be addressed collaboratively through the district's counseling leadership team. She noted that arena scheduling generally begins in January, providing time following an October decision to identify concerns and develop solutions. The Board also discussed learning from schools that have previously transitioned ninth grade into or out of high school configurations.

Board Member Wilson thanked the Secondary Committee members for their work and thoughtful discussion. Although the committee did not vote, she noted that the consensus emerging from its work appeared supportive of moving ninth grade to the high schools.

Board Discussion Summary: The Board acknowledged both the potential advantages and challenges associated with a 9–12 high school configuration. Discussion focused on student transition and support, scheduling, transportation, access to programs, facilities, school culture, and the opportunity to intentionally create a positive four-year high school experience. Members recognized that several identified challenges would be associated with implementation and transition, while potential educational and programmatic benefits could be longer term. The Board emphasized that the study remained ongoing and that additional information and public input would continue to inform the final decision. No decision was made as part of the Study Session.

Facility and Capital Considerations

Assistant Superintendent of Operations and Infrastructure **Dave Mower** reviewed preliminary facility and capital needs associated with grade reconfiguration. He explained that the estimates were preliminary and could decrease as staff worked directly with principals to determine actual classroom needs.

Potential needs included purchasing and relocating portable classrooms, preparing sites for relocated portables, furnishing additional classrooms, and adding auxiliary gym space at two high schools. Mr. Mower explained that the most significant capital expense identified at that point was additional gym space.

The district currently had approximately 32 portable structures available within its facilities inventory, but preliminary analysis suggested additional units could be necessary. Mr. Mower estimated that approximately seven new portables might be required under a middle-range scenario, although further analysis could reduce that number. He also discussed the logistical challenge and expense of relocating a significant number of existing portables during a single summer.

The Board discussed whether permanent classroom additions might make greater long-term financial sense in some circumstances. Mr. Mower explained that permanent construction costs more initially but could provide better long-term value than repeatedly purchasing or moving portable classrooms. Administration emphasized that the estimates remained preliminary and that grade reconfiguration, possible consolidation, and boundary changes were interconnected when evaluating facility needs.

Middle School Configuration – Grades 6–8

Superintendent Jensen explained that the 6–8 configuration warranted the most discussion because community feedback reflected more uncertainty about moving sixth graders from elementary schools into a secondary setting.

Potential advantages included designing schools specifically around the academic, social, emotional, and developmental needs of early adolescents; providing sixth graders with additional exploratory and elective opportunities; and allowing middle schools to focus on grades 6–8 without simultaneously managing ninth-grade high school credit and graduation requirements.

Superintendent Jensen emphasized the distinction between a traditional **junior high model** and a **middle school philosophy**. Under a middle school approach, independence is intentionally taught and gradually developed rather than simply expected, and teachers focus on the development of adolescents in addition to content-area instruction.

Jeff Schoonover, Pleasant Grove Junior High Principal shared preliminary work completed by his leadership team to envision what a 6–8 middle school could look like. The team had begun developing possible schedules and course offerings that could provide sixth graders with significantly more exploratory opportunities than are generally available in an elementary setting.

Principal Schoonover reported that he had met with his School Community Council, PTA, feeder elementary principals, and high school administration. He described growing enthusiasm for planning a strong middle school experience if the Board ultimately selected a 6–8 configuration.

The Board discussed teacher endorsements and whether sixth-grade teachers interested in moving to a middle school would have appropriate credentials. Principal Schoonover reported that some sixth-grade teachers from feeder elementary schools had already expressed interest in teaching at the middle school level and were enthusiastic about opportunities to specialize in areas such as mathematics or social studies.

Principal Schoonover also discussed character development and explained that his school already incorporates intentional character-building work. He believed those efforts could be adapted developmentally for sixth-grade students.

He emphasized, however, that implementation should be thoughtful. Feedback from his leadership team indicated enthusiasm for reconfiguration while also recognizing the significant amount of change occurring across the district. He suggested that the schools may not need to implement every aspect of a new middle school model during the first year and could intentionally develop the model over time.

Kate Ross, Oak Canyon Junior High Principal provided perspective from her experience in both elementary and secondary education. She explained that she had initially been concerned about the proposed reconfiguration, particularly the loss of ninth grade and the impact on CTE. Through continued study, however, she had become increasingly supportive of the educational possibilities of a true 6–8 middle school.

Principal Ross described the current junior high model as attempting to serve two different purposes: providing nurturing and belonging for seventh- and eighth-grade students while simultaneously operating a high-school-credit model for ninth graders. She explained that significant school resources, including advocates, guided studies, credit recovery, and intervention efforts, appropriately focus on keeping ninth graders on track for graduation. Removing ninth grade could allow middle schools to focus more intentionally on the developmental and educational needs of students ages 11–14.

She emphasized that she would not support simply placing sixth graders into the existing junior high structure. A successful transition would require intentionally adopting a **middle-level philosophy** designed around the developmental needs of sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students.

Principal Ross discussed the importance of gradually teaching independence. She described a student-success course developed at Oak Canyon to teach students how to organize, study, manage increased responsibility, and successfully navigate a secondary environment rather than simply expecting students to arrive with those skills.

She also reflected on previous middle-level practices in which interdisciplinary teacher teams shared common groups of students and collaborated across subjects. She explained that such models became difficult to sustain because ninth-grade credit requirements required a different structure. A 6–8 model

could provide an opportunity to revisit interdisciplinary teams and create greater continuity between elementary and secondary instruction.

Principal Ross noted that she has hired sixth-grade teachers to teach seventh-grade courses and that teachers can obtain the necessary credentials. She suggested the district could create cohorts to assist interested teachers in obtaining appropriate endorsements. She also emphasized the instructional benefit of stronger communication between elementary and secondary educators so that teachers understand the skills and instructional approaches students bring with them from elementary school.

Both **Principal Schoonover** and **Principal Ross** emphasized the importance of collaboration among the five middle school principals in developing a model appropriate for Timpanogos School District rather than simply replicating the existing junior high structure.

CTE and Course Offerings

Michelle Price, CTE Director addressed concerns regarding the impact of removing ninth grade from junior highs on CTE programming and funding. She explained that junior high CTE funding is complex but manageable and that the district would not necessarily need to remove existing kitchens, technology labs, or other specialized equipment.

Ms. Price explained that moving ninth graders to high school could strengthen high school CTE programs by increasing enrollment in courses that currently operate below capacity. This could allow the district to more fully utilize existing staff, equipment, and facilities and provide more robust pathways for students.

At the middle school level, funding options could include general education funds, Perkins grant funds, and the Workforce Learning Fund. Ms. Price also discussed teacher endorsements and explained that many elementary teachers hold K–8 licenses to which additional endorsements can be attached. Teachers needing an endorsement may generally work toward it within a three-year window.

Assistant Superintendent of Innovation, Learning Support & Technology, **Darren Draper** added that reconfiguration would also provide an opportunity to consider appropriate technology and hardware for sixth graders entering a middle school environment.

Elementary Configuration – Grades K–5

Superintendent Jensen noted that many of the concerns surrounding a K–5 elementary configuration was directly connected to the discussion regarding whether sixth graders were developmentally ready to move to middle school.

Katie Bowman, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Teaching and Learning discussed the elementary perspective and explained that sixth graders are developmentally different from younger elementary students and often begin to outgrow some of the structures designed for younger children. She noted that sixth-grade curriculum is increasingly aligned with secondary content and that sixth-grade teachers frequently work with curriculum and standards distinct from those used by other elementary grades.

Ms. Bowman stated that, although elementary schools would miss their sixth-grade students, she believed a thoughtfully designed middle school could provide a beneficial learning environment for them. She also noted that students moving into middle school during the transition would do so alongside familiar peers, providing some built-in social support.

The Board discussed whether moving ninth grade to high school would make a 6–8 configuration functionally necessary. Administration reviewed enrollment implications and explained that retaining only grades 7–8 would result in approximately 3,200 students districtwide at that level. Four schools would average approximately 790 students each, while three schools would average approximately 1,060 students each. The discussion also included concerns that a two-year 7–8 experience could provide less opportunity to establish a sustained school culture.

Employee Transition and Staffing

Kraig Brinkerhoff, Assistant HR Director, presented a preliminary staffing and employee-transition plan. He emphasized that the district's goal would be to take care of employees by communicating early, surveying staff regarding their preferences, and providing as much flexibility as possible in placement.

If grade reconfiguration were approved, the equivalent of the sixth grade and ninth-grade teaching staffs could be significantly affected. HR would survey employees to determine who wished to remain at their current level, who might be interested in moving with a grade, and whether other teachers might prefer opportunities at different levels.

Mr. Brinkerhoff explained that placement decisions are needed to consider certification requirements and District policy. If there were more interested employees than available positions or too few volunteers for necessary positions HR would establish priorities using applicable policy and criteria. The Board discussed seniority and clarified that length of service may be one factor considered but would not be the sole basis for placement decisions.

The proposed timeline would follow the Board's grade-configuration decision, with staff preferences gathered after the October action and placement work continuing through the winter and spring. Mr. Brinkerhoff emphasized that a reduction in force would be a last resort and was not anticipated as the primary approach.

The Board requested more specific information regarding the number of sixth-grade teachers and anticipated retirements for a future Study Session. Preliminary information suggested approximately 50–60 sixth-grade FTE positions, subject to further verification. The Board also discussed counselor and support-staff needs associated with changing enrollment at each level.

Next Steps

Superintendent Jensen reminded the Board that the Study Session was part of an ongoing learning process and that no final grade-configuration decision was being made that evening. Three formal public hearings were scheduled immediately before the Board meeting to receive input regarding the proposed 9–12 high school, 6–8 or 7–8 middle school, and K–5 elementary configurations.

Additional targeted focus groups and community cluster meetings were scheduled for the following week. Board members were encouraged to listen for new information and perspectives as the study continued before formal action anticipated in October.

ADJOURNMENT

With no additional study session business, President Lyman concluded the study session.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 5:40 PM.