

MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC HEARING FOR 6TH-8TH OR 7TH-8TH MIDDLE SCHOOL CONFIGURATION STUDY

SEPTEMBER 9, 2026

The Board of Education of the Timpanogos School District held a public hearing on Wednesday, September 9, 2026, at 6:05 p.m. The hearing was held at the Alpine School District Special Education Office in Lindon, Utah.

Board Members Present: President Jennifer Lyman, Vice President Hilton, Guy Fugal, Grace Rex, David H. Smith, Michele Sorensen

Remote: Board member Ada Wilson

Also Present: Superintendent Joseph Jensen, Business Administrator Jason Sundberg, members of the administrative staff, and approximately 82 members of the public.

President Lyman declared the public hearing open to receive public comment on the proposed for 6th-8th or 7th-8th middle school configuration study at 6:20 pm.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

President Lyman explained that speakers would have two minutes to comment and asked each speaker to state their name and location for the record. She thanked those attending and stated that the Board would listen to and consider the comments as part of its ongoing study and decision-making process.

Jennifer McBride George – Vineyard

Jennifer McBride George expressed opposition to moving sixth-grade students from elementary schools into middle schools. She referenced research regarding the effects of school transitions and said that each additional transition requires students to readjust and may negatively affect focus, motivation, attendance, self-esteem, behavior, and academic performance. Ms. George cited a Duke University study indicating that sixth graders attending middle schools experienced higher rates of behavioral infractions and lower academic achievement than sixth graders who remained in elementary schools. She said the research was particularly concerning because younger students may be more negatively affected by school transitions. She also expressed concern about discipline, bullying, violence, and exposure to drugs at this developmental age. She encouraged the Board to consider alternatives to moving sixth graders into middle school, including potentially utilizing a K-8 configuration at one of the schools if additional options are needed.

Hunter Westbrook – Orem

Hunter Westbrook, a teacher at Lakeridge Junior High School, expressed concern about moving sixth graders into middle school, even if ninth graders are moved to high school. He identified literacy as a primary concern, stating that a significant number of seventh graders currently enter junior high reading below grade level. He said middle school instruction generally shifts from “learning to read” toward “reading to learn” and expressed concern that sixth graders who still need foundational literacy support may be better served by elementary educators with greater expertise in literacy instruction. Mr. Westbrook also expressed concerns about social dynamics and younger students' earlier exposure to inappropriate language, social media content, pornography, dating, and other behaviors encountered in middle school. He was particularly concerned about the age and maturity differences between sixth graders and older middle school students. Additionally, he expressed concern about class sizes, noting that some current classes are already at or near capacity. He cautioned that adding sixth graders while simultaneously considering school closures could further increase class sizes.

Michelle Hoeger – City Not Stated

Michelle Hoeger agreed with concerns expressed by previous speakers regarding the social and developmental effects of moving sixth graders into middle school. She said students are already growing up quickly because of social media, cell phones, and other influences and expressed concern about placing younger students in an environment with older adolescents. Drawing on her experience working in treatment centers with youth, she expressed concern about younger students being exposed to inappropriate content or relationships with older students. She also shared her positive experience attending a 7th–8th grade middle school and said she believes seventh and eighth graders are closer developmentally and socially. She supported allowing sixth graders to remain in elementary school for an additional year before transitioning to middle school.

Cynthia Gubler – Orem

Cynthia Gubler, a Central Orem resident, expressed concern about the impact a 6th–8th grade configuration could have on Dual Language Immersion programs. She said moving sixth graders into middle school could eliminate an important final year of elementary immersion and potentially reduce students' exposure to their immersion language. She also disagreed with the idea that sixth graders have outgrown the elementary environment. She described sixth-grade students serving as mentors and leaders to younger students through student council and activities with kindergarten students. Ms. Gubler said those leadership opportunities are meaningful for sixth graders and help prepare them for their eventual transition to junior high. Based on her experience with her own children, she believes sixth graders benefit from remaining in elementary school through the completion of sixth grade.

Stephanie Dastrup – Orem

Stephanie Dastrup expressed agreement with the concerns raised by the previous speakers regarding moving sixth graders into middle school. She specifically emphasized the developmental changes associated with puberty, noting that sixth grade is a significant period of physical and emotional change for many students. She said the elementary school environment can provide a safer and more comfortable setting for students as they navigate those changes. Ms. Dastrup encouraged preserving childhood for as long as possible rather than placing students into an older school environment before they are developmentally ready.

Nora Ballantyre– City Not Clearly Stated

Nora Valentine said she came to the hearing intending to support moving sixth graders into middle school; however, after listening to the preceding public comments, she reconsidered her position. She said the comments regarding Dual Language Immersion, puberty, developmental and cognitive changes, and other concerns gave her a different perspective on the issue. She expressed agreement with many of the concerns raised by the previous speakers.

Nathaniel Johnson – Orem

Nathaniel Johnson expressed support for moving sixth graders into middle school if ninth graders are moved to high school, stating that the configuration makes logistical sense. He acknowledged the concerns raised regarding bullying, social pressures, and student mental health. Drawing on his own experience of struggling significantly with mental health as a sixth grader while attending an elementary school, he said he does not believe those challenges are necessarily caused by the school configuration itself. Mr. Johnson said issues such as poverty, bullying, home circumstances, food insecurity, and access to resources can significantly affect student well-being regardless of whether a student attends elementary or middle school. He said that if sixth graders are moved into middle school, the district should ensure appropriate resources and supports are in place to meet their academic, social, and emotional needs.

Heather Stewart – Orem

Heather Stewart, an Orem Elementary sixth-grade teacher with nearly 30 years of experience, said she could see positive opportunities associated with moving sixth graders into middle school, while acknowledging that she has concerns with both configurations. She said sixth graders have changed over the years and, in her experience, many are more mature and ready for additional academic opportunities. She suggested that traditional grading and a middle school instructional model could provide appropriate challenges for students who are ready for more independence. Ms. Stewart also discussed middle school models that provide sixth graders with a more gradual transition, including configurations where sixth graders have their own area or structure within the school. She raised questions about how moving sixth grade would affect the ALL program and how teacher licensure and credentials would apply to sixth-grade teachers transitioning into a middle school environment.

Nick Tydryszewski – City Not Stated

Nick Teterchewski spoke in support of moving sixth graders into middle school. Addressing earlier concerns about literacy, he said foundational literacy instruction is generally emphasized most heavily in the earlier elementary grades and argued that sixth graders may be ready for a different instructional environment. He said sixth grade could provide students an additional year to adjust to the expectations and structure of middle school before advancing to later grades. Mr. Tydryszewski also addressed concerns about students growing up too quickly, saying that moving students into middle school does not necessarily mean forcing them to mature prematurely. He emphasized the role of parents in helping children develop emotional resilience and navigate social challenges. He also commented that many curricula are structured around a K–5 model and said sixth graders experiencing puberty may have developmental needs that differ from those of younger elementary students.

Betsy Thomas – Orem

Betsy Thomas expressed support for keeping sixth grade in elementary school. She described her family's extensive experience with the district as well as her own experience attending schools with different grade configurations in several states. She shared an experience involving her younger sister, who moved from a middle school back into an elementary school for sixth grade and felt more comfortable in the elementary environment. Ms. Thomas emphasized the importance of recess, physical activity, relationships with teachers, and the smaller elementary school environment for students at that age. She also shared her son's experience with bullying during elementary school. Although he ultimately did well after transitioning to junior high, she said she still valued the support he received from teachers and administrators who knew him personally in elementary school. Ms. Thomas said the district already has an established sixth-grade curriculum and questioned whether curriculum availability is a reason to change the configuration. She also encouraged the Board to consider how moving ninth graders out of junior high could affect junior high athletics and extracurricular opportunities.

Ben Jordan – Orem

Ben Jordan expressed support for keeping sixth grade in elementary school. He referenced research examining students who moved into 6th–8th grade middle schools compared with students who remained in elementary schools. He said the research indicated that sixth graders attending middle schools experienced significantly higher disciplinary rates, including substance-related incidents, and that some of those behavioral differences continued into later grades. Mr. Jordan also referenced research indicating lower math and reading performance among students who transitioned into middle school in sixth grade. He emphasized that the effects identified in the research were not limited to a difficult transition year but could persist academically and behaviorally. He also expressed concern about sixth graders losing close relationships with individual teachers when transitioning from an elementary classroom model to multiple teachers in a middle school environment. He encouraged the Board to carefully review the available research and recommended keeping sixth graders in elementary schools.

Amber Lowe – Orem

Amber Lowe expressed concern about both moving sixth graders into middle school and moving ninth graders into high school. She shared that the proposed changes would directly affect her children, including one student participating in the ALL program and another student with an IEP who requires additional services and support. Ms. Lowe said she had reviewed research regarding both configurations and recognized that studies identify both positive and negative experiences. However, she expressed particular concern about research showing declines in math and reading performance when sixth graders transition into middle school. She also cited concerns regarding behavioral issues that may arise when younger sixth graders are placed with older adolescents. She said sixth grade is a vulnerable developmental period and expressed concern that students may encounter social situations for which they are not yet prepared. Ms. Lowe said she believes the potential negative effects outweigh the benefits of moving sixth graders into middle school. She also expressed concern about student mental health, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, and encouraged the Board to carefully consider the developmental and emotional impact of grade configuration changes.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Board President Lyman thanked everyone who provided comments regarding the 6th-8th or 7th-8th Middle School Configuration Study.

Board President Lyman formally closed the public hearing. No action was taken, and the meeting adjourned at 6:43 p.m.