

Date: May 10, 2018

For ACTION _____

For INFORMATION x

Board Agenda: Yes x

No _____

FROM: Erika Gulick, Facilities Planner/GIS Specialist

THROUGH: Lois F. Berlin, Ed.D., Interim Superintendent of Schools
Clinton Page, Chief Accountability Officer
Terri Mozingo, Ed.D., Chief Academic Officer
Mignon Anthony, Chief Operating Officer

TO: The Honorable Ramee A. Gentry, Chair, and Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: Grade Level Feasibility Study Update

BACKGROUND:

As part of the FY 2017 Capital Improvement Program Budget, the School Board approved funds to conduct a study of grade level configurations to determine whether a reconfiguration at ACPS could provide additional capacity while improving the academic achievement of students. Hanover Research Group will present its final deliverables and findings through this presentation.

SUMMARY:

In the fall of 2016, ACPS contracted Hanover Research Group (HRG) to conduct the study. HRG has completed the following deliverables which were included as part of the update given to the School Board in October 2017 and are included again here:

- Benchmarking Study (Attachment 2) - Studies several different school districts and their approach to solving capacity constraints and reconfiguring grade levels
- Analysis of Elementary and Secondary Grade Span Configurations (Attachment 3) - Includes research on grade level configurations impacts to academic achievement and capacity

In addition to the above, HRG is presenting to the School Board information from the following deliverables:

- Environmental Scan for Grade-Level Feasibility (Attachment 4) – Includes demographic analysis of Alexandria City
- A Qualitative Study for High School Configurations (Attachment 5) – Includes results of school-based staff interviews on grade level configuration at the high school level
- Grade-Level Feasibility Study: Executive Summary of Findings (Attachment 6) – Compiles all information to formulate key findings and themes for potential grade-level reconfiguration

It is important to note that each school district or division is unique and will be impacted differently by different grade span configurations and that academic achievement is most

greatly impacted by classroom quality and social environment. A common theme of the research indicates that, though there is no industry recognized standard for the amount of transitions that is appropriate, minimizing transitions results higher levels of academic achievement. The following key findings related to grade span configurations are outlined in the analysis:

- Isolated pre-K centers do not benefit students academically; however they have been used by other school systems to the extent that they can improve access or provide capacity.
- Alignment from pre-K through 3 is critical to academic success in later years for students.
- Pre-K – 5 is the most prevalent elementary grade level configuration; however, studies show that 6th graders benefit from being in an elementary setting academically and behaviorally.
- Research on K-8 schools and their effects on academic achievement are inconclusive.
- Research on 9th grade academies is limited; HRG conducted a school-based qualitative analysis with staff on the current operation of the split high school and potential grade configurations. HRG found that the concerns brought up by staff do not support the split campus model.
- Comprehensive grades 9-12 high schools are the most prevalent grade level configuration and research on other high school grade spans is limited.

HRG also offered several considerations for grade space reconfigurations that need to be considered should a reconfiguration be pursued which may have financial, operational and programmatic implications. Engagement with the community to identify concerns of a reconfiguration should be conducted by ACPS.

RECOMMENDATION: The Superintendent recommends the School Board review the presentation and attachments.

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ATTACHMENTS:

- 1 – Presentation
- 2 – Benchmarking Study
- 3 – Analysis of Elementary and Secondary Grade Span Configurations
- 4 – Environmental Scan for Grade Level Feasibility
- 5 – A Qualitative Study of High School Configurations
- 6 – Grade Level Feasibility Study: Executive Summary of Findings