



General Brown Central School District

Reconfiguration FAQ

Updated Jan. 25, 2019

Grade reconfiguration: What is it and why is it being considered?

Throughout the current school year, the General Brown Central School District's Leadership Team and Board of Education have been exploring options to address concerns regarding differences between its elementary schools and how to ensure that regardless of which school students attend, all students are receiving access to the same educational experience.

The District's mission is to prepare and inspire each student to meet future challenges. Our staff has the passion and ability to fulfill that mission, but under the current grade structure of our schools (PK-6 and 7-12), we are noting disparities between the two elementary schools that are impeding the district's ability to fully realize its mission.

Most notable are the unbalanced classroom sizes between the two elementary schools, the loss of instructional time for some students who are bused to a school further from their home due to large class sizes at the school closest to their home, and few opportunities for teachers to collaborate with their grade-level peers outside of the school where they are based.

To address these challenges, the District is recommending a change to the grade-level configuration of the elementary schools. One school would serve all students in pre-kindergarten through grade 2, and the other would serve all students in grades 3-6. There would be no change at the junior-senior high school level.

This recommendation grew from ongoing discussions of the Leadership Team, Board of Education, and the District's strategic planning process, which involved more than 30 individuals, including school staff, students, parents and community members. The Board of Education is slated to vote upon the strategic plan proposal, which includes recommendations to consider changing the grade-level structure, at its February 25 meeting.

We know that this potential change could prompt many questions from parents, staff and community members, so in advance of the board meeting, the district will hold three community forums, each at 6 p.m., to talk about the proposed grade-level changes:

- **January 23:** Brownville-Glen Park Elementary School Cafeteria;
- **January 29:** Dexter Elementary School Library; and
- **February 4:** Junior-Senior High School Auditorium.

Below are some common questions and answers about the proposed changes within the two elementary schools. We look forward to sharing more information and answering questions at

the forums. If you are unable to attend one of the meetings and have a question or concern, please contact Superintendent Barbara Case at 315-779-2300 or BCase@gblions.org.

How would the grade levels change at the elementary schools?

Currently, Brownville-Glen Park and Dexter elementary schools are each set up as neighborhood schools, meaning they serve all students in pre-kindergarten through grade 6 who live within a set geographic boundary around the school.

If the board approves changing the grade levels within the two buildings, Dexter would serve all students in pre-kindergarten through grade 2, and Brownville-Glen Park would serve all students in grades 3-6, regardless of where in the district they live.

Why is the district considering a grade reconfiguration?

The General Brown Central School District's mission is to prepare and inspire each student to meet future challenges. Our staff has the passion and ability to fulfill that mission, but under the current grade structure of our schools (PK-6 and 7-12), we are noting disparities between the two elementary schools that are impeding the district's ability to fully realize its mission.

Most notable are the unbalanced classroom sizes between the two elementary schools, the loss of instructional time for some students who are bused to a school further from their home due to large class sizes at the school closest to their home, and few opportunities for teachers to collaborate with their grade-level peers outside of the school where they are based.

How would a grade reconfiguration help class sizes?

At the start of this school year, some BGP students were in classrooms with as many as 26 of their peers while Dexter students were in rooms with as few as 17 students. Teaching a class with as many as 26 students makes it challenging for staff to meet each students' individual needs. Because of the differences in class sizes, students within the two schools are not having the same educational experiences.

Under the proposal, if enrollment were to grow at a particular grade level, class sizes would be adjusted amongst the number of classrooms available so as to achieve similar class sizes.

Why are some students currently losing instructional time?

Because some classrooms are already stretched to—and really past—enrollment capacity, the school cannot accommodate all the students within its enrollment zone. Additionally, while special education classes are offered in each building, the particular services some students

need may not be located in the school closest to them. Because of these issues, about 24 students are bused to the other school after their peers are dropped off. This extra transportation step causes those students to miss the first 20 minutes of instructional time daily, which adds up to about 3,600 minutes per school year, or 60 lost hours of instruction time. That clearly puts those students at a disadvantage to their peers.

How would a grade reconfiguration prevent loss of instructional time?

Students in the same grade level would all be bused to the same school and start school at the same time. They would all have access to the same amount of instructional time.

Why can't you move the enrollment boundaries to even out class sizes?

If the district makes a change, it is our responsibility to implement a solution that best addresses the ongoing challenges our schools have struggled with for many years.

Moving the enrollment boundaries or reconfiguring the grade levels would both bring change for some families; however, a grade reconfiguration better addresses all identified problems. Changing boundary lines would not address the need for greater collaboration amongst teachers.

The disparity in class sizes is not a result of one building being overcrowded—either building may have the disadvantage at any given time and in a variety of grades. After studying the issue, we determined that the best solution to address class size is to house an entire grade level within the same building, which is also the least disruptive option for our students as it keeps them with the teachers and classmates they know.

Why is grade-level collaboration important?

Research has shown that the most important factor contributing to a student's success is the quality of teaching to which they are exposed. To this end, professional development and collaboration amongst our teaching staff is critical to ensure that our educators continue to strengthen and grow their skill sets throughout their careers.

How would a grade reconfiguration allow for more grade-level staff collaboration?

The ability of our staff members to currently interact, share ideas and learn from their grade-level peers is hindered when they have few opportunities to physically interact. While there are scheduled professional development days throughout the school year, and those would continue if this proposal is approved, having all teachers who teach the same grade in one school allows for more formal and daily, informal opportunities for those staff members to

meet, share ideas and observe each other, thereby learning new teaching techniques and strategies and growing their own skill sets from which students will ultimately benefit.

My elementary-age children ride the bus to school. How would this change affect busing?

Because of the rural nature of our district, we recognize that some of our students have long bus rides to and from school. Because the two elementary schools are relatively close to each other, approximately 3 miles apart, our transportation department anticipates that for some students, an additional 15-30 minutes may be added to their daily commute.

This is the biggest down-side to the plan, but we feel that when weighed against the benefits, the district would not be meeting its mission of serving each student if it continues to operate under the current model.

My elementary-age children walk to school. If the grades are reconfigured, what will they do next year?

If the grade levels are changed, students who walk to school would continue to walk to the school they live closest to, and our transportation department would then bus those students to the other school. The District would accommodate siblings attending different schools by making sure they are united before walking home.

I drive my elementary-age children to school. If the grades are reconfigured, what will they do next year?

If the grade levels are changed, students who are dropped off at school would continue to be dropped off at the school they live closest to and the District's transportation department would then bus those students to the other school.

There is already so much traffic at drop-off and pick-up times. Won't there be even more if some parents drop their children off at both buildings instead of having them use the shuttle?

To avoid increasing traffic during the morning commute, we strongly recommend parents drop their children off at one building and have them take the district-provided shuttle if they need to transfer to the other building.

We understand that some parents may still drop their children off at both buildings. So as to not interfere with the buses and cause more congestion, families will be asked to strictly adhere to the established drop-off and pick-up times.

My elementary-age children attend SACC. If the grades are reconfigured, what will they do next year?

If the grade levels are changed, students who attend SACC would continue to attend the SACC program in the school in which they live closest.

What would happen if there is an early dismissal?

Transportation would follow its regular dismissal procedures but at an earlier time.

What if we had an emergency evacuation?

In the event of an emergency that forced a building to evacuate, the District would follow the procedures laid out in its safety plan, which is reviewed and updated as necessary on an annual basis. In the event of an emergency, the District would communicate with parents and notify them of dismissal procedures for those students who walk to school, are dropped off or picked up and that ride a school bus.

Why is grade reconfiguration being proposed now?

In 2018, the District established a strategic planning committee to develop a new 3-year plan. Some of the committee discussions focused on the possibility of reconfiguring the elementary school grades to eliminate barriers of achieving District goals. The recommendation to consider reconfiguration has been included in the proposed strategic plan that the Board will vote on in February.

When would this change take place if approved by the board in February?

If the Board of Education approves the new reconfiguration plan on February 25, the new grade structure would begin with the start of the 2019-20 school year. As part of the planning process to determine if this initiative would be feasible, the administration worked closely with architects to make sure each building could accommodate the grade levels as proposed.

What would this cost me? Will taxpayers have to foot the bill for any expenses related to reconfiguration?

Since both schools are already serving prekindergarten and elementary-age children, the physical changes to the buildings would be minimal.

In February 2017, voters approved a \$9.37 million capital project that included work at both elementary schools, such as replacing cabinets. Phase B of the current project is slated to be done this summer, and any modifications to classrooms related to the grade reconfiguration could be incorporated into that project, so there would be no additional costs outside of the money already allocated for the current capital project.

However, there would be a slight increase in transportation costs, both in salary and fuel. We estimate these costs to be approximately \$8,500 in salaries and \$1,000 in fuel after transportation aid is applied.

My children seem fine. They like their school and teachers. Why do we have to do anything?

We like our schools and teachers, too! If this proposal is enacted, our youngest students will have the benefit of spending a portion of their education in all three of our school buildings. In addition, all students would start and end their school experiences with the same group of students, making the transition to seventh grade easier. Staffing and grade-level sections would not be reduced because of the change, but instead, if necessary, teachers would shift to the building that would be accommodating their grade level.

We know change is hard, but it would be irresponsible of district officials to not seek a way to improve the challenges that have been identified in our elementary schools. The community has entrusted its youngest members to us to care for and educate so they grow into successful, contributing members of our society. We take that responsibility seriously and can't ignore the inequity that clearly exists between our two schools.

What other solutions did you consider? Is there another way to solve our problems?

Each year, the District evaluates the number of students who are bused to a school outside of their enrollment zone, and we have tried shared faculty meetings and currently have grade-level meetings to try and allow for more collaboration amongst our staff. However, we have not been able to find solutions that have adequately resolved our current challenges.

What will happen if we don't make any changes?

If we make no changes, we will continue to operate with the identified disparities amongst our students. The District would not be fulfilling its obligation to the community or meeting the needs of all of its students and staff members if we keep the status quo.

Grade reconfiguration transportation proposal

If the grade-level configuration of its two elementary schools is approved by the Board of Education, Dexter Elementary School would serve all students in pre-kindergarten through grade 2, and Brownville-Glen Park Elementary School would serve all students in grades 3-6, regardless of where in the district they live. There would be no change at the junior-senior high school level.

The chart below outlines various transportation scenarios if the proposal is approved, based on which elementary school is considered a student's home school.

Home School	Morning		Afternoon	
	Walker PK-2	Bus PK-2	Walker PK-2	Bus PK-2
Dexter	Student will walk to school and remain at school in a designated, supervised area until start of school.	Student will be released off bus and remain in a designated, supervised area until start of school.	Student will be released to a supervised area. If a student has a sibling arriving from Brownville Glen-Park, the student will remain in a designated location to be paired with the sibling before walking home.	Student will be transported home when buses arrive from Brownville-Glen Park.
	Walker 3-6	Bus 3-6	Walker 3-6	Bus 3-6
Dexter	Student will walk to school and be placed on a specified bus to be transported to Brownville-Glen Park.	Student will arrive at Dexter and remain on the bus to be transported to Brownville-Glen Park.	Student will be assigned to a bus that will transport him/her from Brownville-Glen Park to Dexter Elementary. Upon arrival, the student will be released to walk home, unless he/she has a younger sibling. The student will be paired with the sibling and walk home.	Student will ride his/her normal bus from Brownville-Glen Park to Dexter Elementary to pick up PK-2 students. Student will be transported home.

Home School				
Brownville-Glen Park	Walker PK-2	Bus PK-2	Walk PK-2	Bus PK-2
	Student will walk to school and be placed on a specified bus to be transported to Dexter Elementary.	Student will arrive at Brownville-Glen Park and remain on the bus to be transported to Dexter Elementary.	Student will be assigned to a bus that will transport him/her from Dexter Elementary to Brownville-Glen Park. Upon arrival, the student will be released to walk home, unless he/she has a younger sibling. The student will be paired with the sibling and walk home.	Student will ride his/her normal bus from Dexter Elementary to Brownville-Glen Park to pick up 3-6 students. Student will be transported home.
	Walker 3-6	Bus 3 - 6	Walker 3-6	Bus 3 -6
	Student will walk to school and remain at school in a designated, supervised area until start of school.	Student will be released off bus and remain in a designated, supervised area until start of school.	Student will be released to a supervised area. If a student has a sibling arriving from Dexter Elementary, the student will remain in a designated location to be paired with the sibling before walking home.	Student will be transported home when buses arrive from Dexter Elementary.
<p>Students dropped off by parents will follow the pattern of walkers with designated times communicated at a later date. Please note, parents will be asked to drop students at one location only, their home school.</p> <p>Other extenuating circumstances will be addressed with individual parents.</p> <p>Other occurrences, such as two-hour delays, will follow the same pattern described above.</p>				