

Secondary Ad Hoc Committee Social-Emotional Impact

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Introduction

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 - Educational Background
 - Paraprofessional
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School Size/Configuration - What does the research say about the impact on SEL?

- School Size
 - Moderate-size schools (roughly **600–1,200 students**) tend to report higher levels of student belonging, engagement, and extracurricular participation compared to very large schools (>1,500) (Cotton, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009).
 - Smaller schools are associated with **lower rates of bullying, higher attendance, and closer student-teacher relationships** (Darling-Hammond, 2010).
 - Very large schools can offer more programs but may increase anonymity, isolation, and risk behaviors (Howley & Bickel, 2000).

School Size/Configuration - What does the research say about the impact on SEL?

- Grade Configuration
 - **Middle schools (6–8):** Research suggests this transition period often coincides with dips in self-esteem and engagement (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Smaller middle schools with strong advisory systems mitigate these effects.
 - **K–8 or 7–12 schools:** Studies show students often experience smoother transitions, fewer school moves, and stronger peer/adult relationships (Rockoff & Lockwood, 2010).
 - **9th grade “academies” or separate 9th grade structures:** Known to help buffer the difficult middle-to-high school transition (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010).
 - **Junior/Senior High (7–9 and 10–12):** Rare today, but evidence suggests 9th grade can be particularly vulnerable when merged with older high school peers. Peer pressure and developmental mismatch can heighten stress (Barber & Olsen, 2004).
- Facilities and Environment
 - Quality and modernity of facilities are directly tied to **student morale, attendance, and teacher retention** (Earthman, 2004).
 - Upgraded learning spaces that support collaboration, flexible seating, and social areas tend to improve student **sense of belonging** and **reduce disciplinary incidents**.

SEL - #1 Recommended Model (Model F)

- Model F: Status Quo + Modernization - 2 High Schools; 2 Middle Schools
- **Pros:** Same size benefits as Model E, **plus enhanced facilities** shown to improve climate, engagement, and safety; strong alignment with research on the importance of school environment in social-emotional learning.
- **Cons:** Still maintains transitions (5–6 → 7–8 → 9–12), which can be difficult, though mitigated by stronger environments.
- **Research alignment:** Likely the most balanced option for **student well-being**, given right-sized schools + facility improvements.

SEL - Alternative Recommended Model (Model E)

- Model E: Status Quo - 2 High Schools + 2 Middle Schools
- **Pros:** Both middle and high schools are in **research-supported size ranges**; multiple transitions, but smaller school environments support belonging.
- **Cons:** Buildings may not match modern learning/social needs; transitions from middle to high school still present.
- **Research alignment:** Well-supported by research on optimal school size and student-teacher connections.

Side-by-Side Comparison

Model	School Size (MS)	School Size (HS)	Pros for Social-Emotional Needs	Cons for Social-Emotional Needs	Research Verdict
A (7–12)	1,300–1,500	1,300–1,500	Fewer transitions; long-term relationships	Younger students exposed to older peers; large size	Mixed, risk of overshadowing
B (1 MS, 2 HS)	~900	~900–1,050	HS sizes optimal; MS manageable	MS could feel impersonal	Strong balance
C (7–9, 10–12)	~1,300–1,400	~1,400–1,500	Keeps 9th separate from seniors	Very large, reduces belonging	High risk
D (1 MS, 1 HS)	~900	~1,800–2,000	Program variety	Mega-HS linked to alienation, risk	Weakest fit
E (Status Quo)	~400–500	~900–1,050	Right-sized, strong connections	Older facilities, multiple transitions	Strong fit
F (Status Quo + Upgrade)	~400–500	~900–1,050	Right-sized + facility benefits	Multiple transitions still exist	Strongest fit