



This analysis reviews the potential secondary school configuration models (A–F) with anticipated enrollment projections through 2035. This assessment is focused solely on **student social-emotional well-being**, informed by research on school size, grade configuration, transitions, and facilities. Additional details can be found in the [accompanying slide deck](#).

### Key Research Insights

- **School size matters:** Optimal enrollment for student connectedness and participation is ~600–1,200. Very large schools (>1,500) increase risks of alienation, bullying, and disengagement. Sources: (Cotton, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009), (Darling-Hammond, 2010), (Howley & Bickel, 2000),
- **Grade configuration:** Fewer transitions improve belonging, but middle school years remain especially vulnerable to dips in engagement. Sources: (Eccles & Roeser, 2011), (Rockoff & Lockwood, 2010), (Barber & Olsen, 2004).
- **Facilities:** Modern, well-designed spaces are strongly linked to improved climate, attendance, and social-emotional health. Source: (Earthman, 2004)

### Model Comparison

Model	Configuration	Social-Emotional Impact
<b>A</b> 7–12 schools	Two large 7–12 schools (~1,300–1,500 each)	Fewer transitions, but 7th/8th graders exposed to older peers; large size reduces belonging.
<b>B</b> 1 MS, 2 HS	One large MS (~900) + two optimal-size HS (~900–1,050)	Balanced; HS in ideal range; MS somewhat large, risk of impersonal environment.
<b>C</b> 7–9, 10–12	One large Jr. High & one large Sr. High (~1,300–1,500 each)	Rare model; keeps 9th separate, but both schools too large for strong connections.
<b>D</b> 1 MS, 1 HS	One large MS (~900) + one mega-HS (~1,800–2,000)	HS size exceeds research thresholds; most risk for alienation and disengagement.
<b>E</b> Status Quo	Two MS (400–500 each) + two HS (~900–1,050 each)	Strong research fit; schools in optimal size range; multiple transitions remain.
<b>F</b> Status Quo + Modernization	Same as E, with upgraded facilities	Combines right-sized schools with improved environments; strongest support for well-being.



## **Recommendations**

### **1. Prioritize Models F and E**

- *Model F (status quo with modernization) best aligns with research on social-emotional well-being. **This is our #1 recommendation.***
- *Model E is also strong, though facility limitations reduce benefits. This is an alternative recommendation. **This is our alternative recommendation.***

### **2. Exercise caution with large-scale consolidation (Models C & D)**

- *Both create schools well above the optimal size, increasing risks of student isolation. Models C & D are not recommended.*

### **3. Model A offers fewer transitions but poses challenges for younger adolescents exposed to older peers. Model A is not recommended.**

### **4. Model B is a viable compromise, but attention must be given to the middle school climate to prevent anonymity. Model B is not recommended.**

**Bottom Line:** Research strongly favors maintaining **right-sized schools (400–1,200 students)** with **modernized facilities** to best support students' social and emotional development. **Model F** has the strongest recommendation as it relates to students' social and emotional well being.