

Nutley Public Schools

6th Grade Transition Frequently Asked Questions

The Board of Commissioners, in partnership with the Board of Education, approved a bond to purchase a building in Nutley. This will be leased to the Board of Education for PreSchool classrooms and Board of Education offices.

In the fall of 2025, ten preschool classrooms will open at 777 Bloomfield Avenue to expand the district's state-funded Raising Raiders PreSchool Program. The Board of Education will move its offices to the third floor of that space.

Then, in September 2026, this purchase will assist the district in the transition of sixth grade students out of the elementary schools and into John H. Walker Middle School, making it a true 6-8 middle school. The students first impacted by the new 6-8 middle school are this year's (24-25) current 4th graders.

There are many beneficial opportunities for students which include:

- **Enhanced Learning Opportunities:**
 - Transitioning 6th graders to middle school allows them access to a broader curriculum, including cycles of electives like foreign languages, fine arts, technology, and career-focused programs.
 - Core subjects and electives will meet everyday, and teachers work as a Team to support students' needs, and provide cross curricular connections.
- **Smoother Transition to Secondary Education**
 - Introducing middle school routines, such as navigating class schedules and managing lockers, helps students gradually adapt to the high school environment. Provides an additional year of middle school to prepare for high school.
- **Developmentally Appropriate Support**
 - Middle schools are designed to support young adolescents' unique developmental needs. They offer specialized counseling and advisory programs to address social-emotional growth. These structures help students navigate the transition to adolescence, promoting independence and a sense of responsibility.
- **Enhanced Extracurricular and Social Opportunities**
 - Middle schools provide a wider array of extracurricular activities, including daily access to music programs (band, orchestra, and choir), sports, and clubs.
 - These activities foster teamwork, leadership skills, and social interaction, essential for holistic development.
- **Alignment with Best Practices:**
 - Studies indicate that middle school settings for 6th graders foster improved engagement and readiness for secondary education.

- Increased exposure to middle school routines builds resilience and adaptability in students.
- **Potential for Improved Peer Dynamics**
 - The middle school setting places students in an environment with peers of similar age and developmental stages. This can mitigate peer pressure often faced in mixed-grade settings and support a community-focused atmosphere

Following are some frequently asked questions to help the community navigate these transitions.

Q: How will the district ensure a smooth transition and preparation for all students entering a 6-8 middle school?

A: The district is committed to creating a thoughtful and inclusive transition plan which addresses the needs of all stakeholders. This plan will ensure current 4th-grade students experience the full range of elementary school "rites of passage" during their final year, such as celebratory events and traditions. Simultaneously, the district will prepare students for middle school through orientation programs, team-building activities, and opportunities to meet peers from across the district. The transition plan will also cover logistics, curriculum alignment, expanded elective offerings, social-emotional supports, budget planning, and other critical elements to ensure a seamless transition.

Q: Is there a timeline of events in order to make this transition?

A: While the commissioners passed a resolution that will facilitate the 6th grade transition on Tuesday, January 7th, the district is working through long-range planning for moving the 6th grade in just about a year and a half. This will include bringing stakeholders together late beginning in February to the transition plan, with outcomes, artifacts, and actions being presented to the board in May. The district will run parallel paths to transition facilities, operations, curriculum, staffing and other met parts of this transition.

Q: How will the district handle farewell events like the Junior Olympics and other “rites of passage” for students?

A: The district recognizes the importance of these traditions and will work closely with stakeholders, including families and building principals, to design meaningful "rite of passage" experiences for the 2025-2026 5th-grade class. Feedback from the community will guide the planning process to honor these cherished events.

Q: How will the district support PTOs in fundraising for the expedited 5th-grade class of 2025-2026?

A: The district will collaborate with PTOs to develop strategies for fundraising efforts to support two cohorts during this unique transition year. Where possible, the district will provide additional

resources or logistical support and work with PTOs to explore alternative options to ensure success.

Q: How will the district address parking and congestion on Franklin Avenue?

A: The district will conduct a comprehensive review of traffic patterns and building entry and exit points in partnership with the Department of Public Safety and other relevant officials. Potential solutions include staggered start and end times to reduce congestion, as well as optimizing traffic flow to accommodate the increased volume efficiently.

Q: How will the district manage potential performance dips associated with transitions and organizational changes?

A: The district acknowledges that performance dips are a common challenge during periods of transition between buildings. However, extending the middle school experience to three years will ultimately provide long-term academic benefits by reducing the frequency of transitions between schools. The district will proactively address this adjustment period by implementing programming specifically designed to meet the needs of middle-level learners. These programs will focus on building strong routines, organizational skills, and academic resilience to support student success.

Q: If a current 4th grader student experiences learning loss or a social-emotional delay during this transition, how will the district address it?

A: The district will leverage the resources currently available at JHWMS and insert additional supports to address both academic and social-emotional needs. These include specialized after-school programs focused on ELA and Math support, as well as FLEX periods that target executive functioning skills. Benchmark and common assessments will be utilized to identify and address areas of need, enabling targeted, data-driven instruction. Social-emotional learning will be supported through advisory periods and the embedded RULER curriculum. Additionally, teachers at JHWMS collaborate during designated common planning times to monitor student progress and coordinate interventions to ensure every student receives comprehensive support.

Q: How can the district support an additional grade level of students in the middle school?

A:

- Each grade level requires 12 classrooms (3 teams of 4 core classrooms).
- Reconfiguration efforts include:
 - Reducing one team last year gained **4 classrooms**.
 - Moving Pre-K from the bottom floor to newly acquired space gained **4 more classrooms**.
 - Preliminary building analysis identified potential reconfiguration of the bottom floor and media center to create **4-5 additional classrooms**.

- An alternative option includes **staggered scheduling** for the 6th grade, which could also alleviate Franklin Avenue traffic concerns.

Q: What other areas of the district will this move impact?

- **A:**
 - **Elementary Schools:**
 - Realigned to PreK-5, focusing on age-appropriate instruction and stronger foundational development.
 - **Pre-Kindergarten Expansion:**
 - Additional space will allow the district to reach capacity for state-funded, high-quality Pre-K programs.

Q: How are we affording this in light of the district's financial challenges?

A: Under the watch of a NJDOE state monitor, the district has put in place processes and procedures that allow for proper budgeting and long-range fiscal planning. Working with the township has allowed the district to afford the additional classroom and office space without increasing allocations in the budget. In accessing preschool funding the district can expand its early childhood programming without it impacting the general budget. Costs pertaining to middle school renovation, increases in staffing needs, and other areas are being planned for carefully with the business office and state monitor's approval.

Q: Will there be job losses for teachers as a result of this transition?

A: The district values its talented and dedicated teachers and does not anticipate job losses as part of this transition. Instead, staff will be strategically reassigned based on their preferences and the district's needs. With many roles requiring annual hiring, the district will take this opportunity to match highly qualified educators with positions that support the new 6-8 middle school structure.

Q: Does this plan eliminate the need for a costly referendum?

A: Yes. This plan accomplishes a similar restructuring which allows for added middle school years, and preK expansion at a fraction of the cost as the past two failed referendums.

Q: Does this plan eliminate the trailers at the elementary schools?

A: As the district restructures and realizes the needed space for universal preK expansion, the district will assess the use of trailer space. If through understanding the district's future demographics, and needs for educational space, the trailers are not needed, they will be repurposed or removed.

Q: How do other top performing school districts in NJ, and school districts in Essex County configure their middle schools?

List of Top Performing (Niche, U.S. News & World Report) School Districts in NJ with Size and Middle School GradeSpan (15 out of 18 are 6-8; 2 do not have middle school)

Millburn Township School District

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 4,800 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

Princeton Public Schools

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 3,800 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 9,700 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

Montgomery Township School District

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 4,700 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 7-8.

Livingston Public Schools

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 6,000 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

Summit Public School District

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 3,950 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

Ridgewood Public Schools

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 5,800 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

Tenafly Public Schools

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 3,700 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

Glen Ridge Public Schools

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 1,833 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 7-8.

Westfield Public School District

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 5,992 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

Moorestown Township Public School District

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 3,884 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 7-8.

Ridge High School (Bernards Township School District)

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 5,500 students in the district.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

Chatham School District

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 4,100 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

Haddonfield Public Schools

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 2,700 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

Hopewell Valley Regional School District

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 3,750 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

South Brunswick School District

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 8,200 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

Montclair Public Schools

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 6,700 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

Scotch Plains-Fanwood Regional School District

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 5,500 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

List of school districts in Essex county: Size and middle school grade span:

Montclair Public Schools:

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 6,700 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

West Orange Public Schools:

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 6,700 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

Bloomfield Public Schools:

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 6,000 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 7-8.

Belleville Public Schools:

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 4,900 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 7-8.

East Orange School District:

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 10,000 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

Irvington Public Schools:

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 7,800 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

South Orange-Maplewood School District:

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 7,200 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

Orange Public Schools:

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 5,600 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

Livingston Public Schools:

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 6,000 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

Caldwell-West Caldwell Public Schools:

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 2,600 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

Glen Ridge Public Schools:

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 1,900 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 7-8.

Verona Public Schools:

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 2,200 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.

Millburn Township Public Schools:

- Student Enrollment: Approximately 5,000 students.
- Middle School Grade Span: Grades 6-8.