

Grand Island elementary schools may undergo grade configuration

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Elementary schools in the Grand Island School District might have a slightly different look in the future.

Administrators on the district's facility committee have been considering changes to grade configuration at schools throughout this academic year. In a presentation to the School Board on Monday, some committee members recommended altering how the three elementary schools are segregated by grade level.

Specifically, they recommended sending all prekindergartners through second-graders to Sidway School, while third-through fifth-graders would be sent to Huth Road and Kaegebein schools. Doing this would allow teachers to more finely focus their curriculums to student needs, said Huth Road Principal Kerri Nowak.

"Staff development can be enhanced with teachers together," she said. "You can group students according to general learning needs. As [students are] learning to read, much of the resources that are out there group those pre-K through grade two levels together."

Grand Island students in prekindergarten through first grade currently attend Sidway, while second-through fifth-graders attend the other two elementary schools.

An examination of dozens neighboring districts found that no single configuration worked best, Connor Middle School Assistant Principal Eleanor Payne said. Rather, most districts aligned their grade levels according to geography and other non-education-based factors.

Even so, additional research revealed that separating elementary-level grades in this fashion could yield better results in reading achievement.

"In kindergarten to second grade, they learn to read. In grades three to five, they read to learn," said Payne. She said teachers of similarly focused grade levels could collaborate

more if they're all under one roof. "As those students get older, we're looking more at the content which the students will use those skills in."

Focusing such early-level reading activities in one building rather than three would allow teachers to maximize their effectiveness, Nowak said.

"You can group students according to general learning needs," Nowak said. "Once you hit third grade, that's when social studies and science tend to play a bigger role. One of the greatest predictors for [a more desirable] graduation rate is early reading level."

There is no firm timetable for the board to act on the recommendation, which was requested as part of the district's ongoing capital project. The facility committee will, however, present its findings at the next capital project committee meeting May 11.