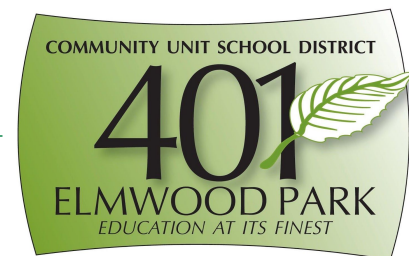


# Elmwood Park C.U.S.D. #401

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*Superintendent of Schools*



## Frequently Asked Questions About Grade Centers

*Q: What are grade centers?*

A: Grade centers are when a building holds all students within a grade strand. For example, all First and Second Grade students would be located in the same building.

*Q: Why is Elmwood Park CUSD #401 looking at moving to grade centers?*

A: The District is working to realize full-day Kindergarten, a program that would significantly benefit the progress of our students, but is also facing challenges with fluctuating enrollment numbers within and between buildings, providing consistent and equitable learning and extracurricular experiences between the elementary buildings, and having modern and updated facilities.

*Q: If the District moved to grade centers, what grades would be housed in which elementary building?*

A: If the District moved to grade centers, PreK-Grade 2 would be located at John Mills Elementary School and Grades 3-5 would be located at Elmwood Elementary School.

*Q: Why can't each elementary school be K-5 and the District have a separate preschool building?*

A: A K-5 scenario would put Elmwood Elementary School beyond capacity and, with current preschool numbers, the Early Childhood Center would be, at best, not even at half capacity at a given time. [The PreK-2 and Grades 3-5 assignments would best utilize each building's space.](#)

*Q: Where is Grade 6 during this change?*

A: [Grade 6 will be at Elm Middle School](#) in the 2020-21 school year, the same school year the District could realize a full-day Kindergarten program.

*Q: What are the benefits of moving to grade centers?*

A: Moving to grade centers would allow the District to implement a full-day Kindergarten program in the 2020-21 school year, assist in providing an equitable learning experience for students, allow teachers from across the District to collaborate more regularly and productively through professional learning communities, better monitor and address enrollment fluctuations and drops, more proactively provide additional supports and interventions for students, improve upon the social-emotional significance of having students move up from one (1) grade level to the next with one another, and promote a one (1) community feeling.

*Q: What are some of the downsides of moving to grade centers?*

A: The most discussed "con" of moving to grade centers would be the loss of the "neighborhood school." While this District has in its history changed the grade levels of its buildings over the years, this most recent change would lead to increased transportation and potentially having some parents, if they do not wish to utilize provided transportation, to make multiple stops if they have students at both elementary buildings.

*Q: Who will receive transportation as a result of this change?*

A: If a student has to cross the train tracks to reach his or her school, s/he will receive transportation. Expanding upon that service, such as providing transportation for all students regardless of their home or providing transportation connected to BASEC, are still being explored.

*Q: What do you mean “transportation connected to BASEC?”*

A: It has been suggested by some that if the District moved to grade centers that transportation be provided by the District to have students moved to the “closest” elementary school to make pick-up easier. For example, I may live one (1) block away from John Mills Elementary School, but I have a Third Grader. My child would have to be picked up at Elmwood Elementary School, but if the District provided transportation to move the student to the closer elementary building, I could pick up my child at John Mills Elementary School. There have been other parents who are opposed to providing this option, and, as mentioned above, no formal recommendation has been made.

*Q: What else can you tell me about bussing?*

A: Once bus routes have been determined, the District can look at whether it is necessary or not to add bus monitors to each route or employ additional security to monitor bus stops. Bus stops cannot be determined until the bus routes have been determined. And there will be cameras on all buses.

*Q: What if a student wishes to walk to school? How can the student cross Grand Avenue or the tracks?*

A: The District Office is working with Elmwood Park Police Chief Frank Fagiano. The crossing guards at the Early Childhood Center would be moved to a new location, most likely at Culver’s and Grand and 75th Avenue and Grand. A monitor would be placed at the train tracks at 75th Avenue. Additional crossing guards and monitors beyond that are being explored.

*Q: Will the District need to stagger start and end times?*

A: The District Office will continue to look at this, but does not see a particular issue in staggering start and end times. This would be determined by bus routes and availability.

*Q: What is the current space available at the elementary schools?*

A: Currently, Elmwood Elementary School is at capacity, but John Mills Elementary has more space and is able to “spread out” in comparison. Moving to grade centers would allow the District to better address enrollment increases and declines, and the District is expecting an increase in enrollment once it moves to full-day Kindergarten.

*Q: If the District moved to full-day Kindergarten and grade centers in the 2020-21 school year, will the Early Childhood Center be closed?*

A: Yes. The Early Childhood Center is a puzzle piece that is difficult to fit into the larger path forward. The District does not own the building, does not have an adequate amount of space to realize full-day needs, and is not in an optimal location to expand (even if the District was able to).

*Q: Will there be a full-day Kindergarten program in the 2020-21 school year if the grade centers are not approved?*

A: At this time, the District Office does not believe full-day Kindergarten can be realized without moving to grade centers.

*Q: Will there be an optional half-day Kindergarten option?*

A: By *School Code*, yes. However, if a student is participating in a half-day program, it is more than likely there will be an increased achievement gap between the student and his or her peers in the full-day option. As a result, the half-day program may be more focused on academics and not as much on Specials.

*Q: What about the school performances at each of the elementary buildings?*

A: It has been asked if school performances will be PreK-2 and 3-5, as opposed to 1-3. This is something the District can look at further, but it does not anticipate a reduction in performances.

*Q: What about the “Buddy Program” and student council?*

A: Building and District administration are looking at adapting to a new buddy or mentor program for students. With Sixth Grade moving over to the middle school it can be assumed Fifth Grade would continue this tradition, but it will need to be looked at further at how they can best develop relationships with students in another building. With Sixth Grade moving over to the middle school, it does provide the District an opportunity to reevaluate how it conducts student councils and government.

*Q: Does the District plan on cutting after school activities?*

A: The District Office does not anticipate a reduction in after school activities or opportunities for students.

*Q: Will there be increased Enrichment opportunities?*

A: By having a larger number of students in the same grade at the same location, it does allow the District the ability to better allocate staff, space, and resources to providing additional accelerated opportunities than what is can now. The same goes with intervention and support services.

*Q: What is the current state of facilities of the elementary buildings?*

A: Both elementary buildings are over 90 years old and [require significant life safety work and renovations](#). The District Office is continuing to look into what could be the best path forward in providing a modern and safe learning environment for students and staff. This could be work related to expanding, repairs and renovations or, due to the cost of the former and the age of the buildings, new construction.

Regardless of the path the District moves towards, in terms of new construction or renovating current elementary facilities, the District Office believes the grade center approach will be its best path forward in realizing full-day Kindergarten, utilizing its current space and managing resources, solidifying programming improvements, providing additional learning, support and extracurricular opportunities, and improving upon the social-emotional learning and cultural impact of students.

*Q: What are some resources the District has provided?*

A: Presentations made to the Board of Education can be found [here](#), specifically on December 19 (Section 9.4), January 16 (Section 7.3), and February 20 (Section 7.1). You can also listen to Episode 8 of the [District’s podcast](#) and read the latest [Superintendent Spotlight](#).

*Q: Will moving to grade centers increase my taxes?*

A: No.

*Q: Will moving to grade centers create a larger expenditure for the District?*

A: No, because while there would an increase to transportation, there would be savings associated from closing the Early Childhood Center.

*Q: Are there articles one could read about this topic?*

A: Yes. Please click [here](#) for some examples.

*Q: Where can I go to revisit school and district report card data and access links to compare school performance with neighboring districts?*

A: You can click [here](#).

*Q: Who do I go to if I have additional questions or comments?*

A: You can direct your questions and comments to Dr. Nicolas Wade, Superintendent, at [waden@epcusd401.org](mailto:waden@epcusd401.org).