



## **K-8, Union High School Districts Provide Key Benefits to Home and Business Owners**

When you think of the average school district in Wisconsin, you might picture a district that educates students at all levels, starting with kindergarten and ending with grade 12. While K-12 districts are the most common type of school district in Wisconsin, they are not the only type.

There are 421 individual school districts in Wisconsin. Each of these districts is open to all students, must meet state and federal laws and is accountable to community members through a locally elected school board. While most districts educate students in grades pre-kindergarten or kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12), some only educate students in grades pre-kindergarten or kindergarten through grade eight (K-8). Others, known as union high schools (UHS), only serve students at the high school level.

K-8 and union high school (UHS) districts follow a somewhat different model. These districts offer their communities distinct characteristics and numerous benefits while educating students with a tremendous degree of success. In all cases, after students complete 8th grade in a K-8 district, they attend a union high school for 9th through 12th grade. Of the 421 individual school districts in the state of Wisconsin, 43 are K-8 districts and ten are UHS districts.

- There are 43 K-8 districts in Wisconsin: *Brighton 1, Bristol 1, Dover 1, Erin, Fontana J8, Fox Point J2, Geneva J4, Genoa City J2, Glendale-River Hills, Hartford J1, Hartland-Lakeside J3, Herman-Neosho-Rubicon, Holy Hill Area, Lac du Flambeau 1, Lake Country, Lake Geneva J1, Linn J4, Linn J6, Maple Dale-Indian Hill, Merton Community, Minocqua J1, North Cape, North Lake, North Lakeland, Norway J7, Paris J1, Randall J1, Raymond 14, Richmond, Salem, Sharon J11, Silver Lake J1, Stone Bank, Swallow, Trevor-Wilmot Consolidated, Twin Lakes 4, Union Grove J1, Walworth J1, Washington-Caldwell, Waterford J1, Wheatland J1, Woodruff J1, and Yorkville J2.*
- There are ten union high school districts in the state: *Arrowhead, Big Foot, Central/Westosha, Hartford, Lake Geneva/Genoa City, Lakeland, Nicolet, Union Grove, Waterford, and Wilmot.*

### **How K-8 and UHS districts operate**

The most notable difference between K-12 and K-8/UHS districts has to do with the grade levels each serves. While K-12 districts educate students from pre-kindergarten or kindergarten through grade 12, K-8 and UHS districts each focus on a particular grade level. Students in K-8 districts are served from kindergarten to grade eight, after which they usually move onto a UHS district that serves grades nine through 12.

Most K-8 and UHS districts work together to create a seamless educational path for students as they transition from one district to the next. The focus each district has on its particular grade level allows it to master the needs of students better than many K-12 districts.

Our schools actively work to create cohesion between the Holy Hill Area School District and Hartford Union High School not only between eighth and ninth grade, but throughout the entire educational experience. Principals work together to plan and host a variety of field trips and events for students including theatrical plays, the Homecoming Parade, Math Competition, and Engineering field trips.



## Key benefits of the K-8/UHS model

Both K-8 and UHS districts offer a range of benefits to their students, families, and community members. Specifically, students in K-8/UHS districts benefit from higher achievement than their peers in other districts. The specific focus each K-8 and UHS district can place on its students in a particular grade level allows it to better meet learners' needs. Research supports higher test scores in smaller school districts, and K-8/UHS districts are often among the top-performing schools in Wisconsin.

Communities also benefit from more direct local control when it comes to K-8 and UHS districts. School boards are more accountable to the communities they serve and are also able to foster innovation and change more easily than in large districts.

Additionally, K-8 and UHS districts can offer real economic benefits to the communities they serve. Although some argue that consolidating K-8/UHS districts would result in automatic savings for taxpayers, this is not always the case. To lower costs for taxpayers in their communities, many K-8 and union high schools work together and share services in ways that make sense and are highly efficient.

In our case, shared services included physical education between HHASD and HUHS, School Psychologist between HHASD and Erin, and Pupil Services Director between HHASD, Erin, and HNR. HHASD also contracts with HUHS for food service, and shares transportation with HJ1 for our accelerated math programming.

As a home or business owner, you stand to benefit from living and working in one of these 53 school districts. However, these benefits will only remain possible if the unique needs of the school districts are considered when it comes to state educational policy. Share information about these districts with others and stay up to date with school news to help advocate for these high-achieving and economically beneficial schools and districts.

### Here are some things to keep in mind about K-8/union high school districts:

- ★ **They work.** K-8/union high school districts benefit students, families and communities through higher achievement. Part of the reason they perform so well is due to their specific focus on the grade levels they serve. Logically, districts that serve students at only one age level can naturally be expected to be experts at that level. Wisconsin's K-8/union high school districts are among the highest-performing schools in the state.
- ★ **They are accountable.** K-8/union high school districts have their own locally elected boards, and so they are more accountable to the communities they serve.
- ★ **They are efficient.** While some claim that consolidating K-8/union high school districts means automatic savings for taxpayers, that's not always the case. In fact, consolidation can mean higher taxes over the long term.
- ★ K-8/union high school districts benefit students, families and their communities through higher achievement and more direct local control.
- ★ Research does not support higher scores in bigger districts. In fact, evidence shows the opposite to be true.
- ★ K-8/union high school districts can more quickly innovate and adjust to change than larger districts.
- ★ K8/UHS districts already share services in many ways, keeping costs down for taxpayers.