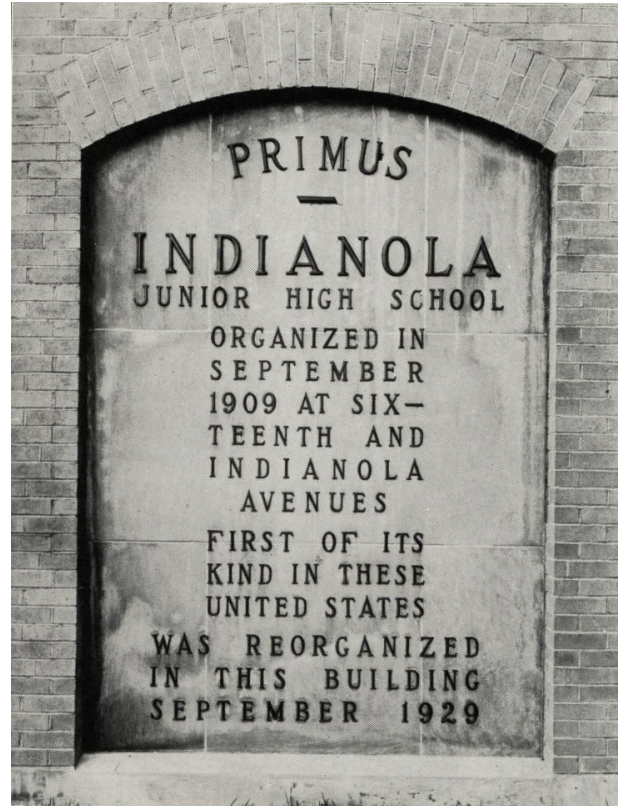


THE RISE AND FALL OF THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL MOVEMENT

Junior High No. 1 in Trenton was a prototype of the once-promising junior high school model. A century ago, junior high schools held the promise of allowing students to make a successful transition from elementary school (K-8) to successfully completing a high school diploma and being “college-ready” after grade 12.

“Columbus, Ohio, the site of the first junior high school in America in 1909. Indianola Junior High School, located at 140 E. 16th, opened on September 7, 1909 with a mission to decrease high school dropout rates. Previously, students in Columbus remained in elementary school from kindergarten through eighth grade. At this time, only 52% of Columbus’ youth made it to the tenth grade and only seven percent graduated high school. To combat the declining graduation rates, the Columbus Board of Education approved the creation of a “junior high school” for seventh, eighth, and ninth graders. The hope was that designing a school for early teenagers would better prepare them for the rigorous high school education.” --*Ohiowins website*.



Junior High No. 1 in Trenton was created just a few years later, opening in 1916. In Trenton, the desire to relieve enrollment pressure on the too-small city high school was also a factor.

The interior design of Junior One was carefully thought-out by the talented Trenton architect, William A. Poland. Poland’s design was pragmatically arranged to match the curriculum, which blended technical education with academic subjects. Over time, the junior high school curriculum changed, not necessarily for the better in terms of what parents and students desired. The technical education element diminished over time until it almost disappeared. The changing curriculum was a factor in making the interior layout of Poland’s building obsolete.

A second snag was an urban planning location problem. The site selected for Junior No. 1 was chosen because it was available. But that location was not suitable for attendance by students Citywide. That meant that addi-



Indianaola Junior High School, Columbus Ohio, opened in 1909 as the nation's first junior high school

tional junior high schools were needed in Trenton, if the junior high school paradigm was to be maintained. The school board had agreed on the priority of building junior high schools over the building of a much needed due to space, senior high school. All but a new Junior No. 2 (1940) was built before the new high school (1932.) The high cost of building and operating multiple junior high schools was a terrific economic strain on the City of Trenton, especially after the City received multiple economic shocks from the collapse of the ceramic industry in the 1920s and 1930s, the 1930s Depression, and post-WWII loss of manufacturing jobs.

A third problem for Junior No. 1 was that the junior high school paradigm itself was faulty. The concept of a middle school social environment and a curriculum for grades 6-7-8, or 7-8, proved to be significantly better for both students and teachers than the junior high school concept of pulling 9th graders out of high school. Today, middle schools outnumber junior high schools 10 to one in the United States. Another very early junior high school, Willard Junior High School in Berkeley, CA, established in 1910, is now also a middle school. A Google search for information on junior high schools will deliver information mostly about middle schools. The Middle School paradigm has triumphed, and the junior high school paradigm is superseded.

In Trenton also, middle schools have replaced junior high schools. In April 1990 the Trenton jr high schools were abolished in favor of middle schools. 9th grade then went to Trenton High School. The junior high school concept had survived 75 years in Trenton. A building such as Trenton's Junior No. 1, based upon an obsolete paradigm, with a problematic location, designed to deliver an abandoned curriculum, is archaic on multiple levels.

Curiously, the old-time K-8 educational model has in recent years been shown to be decisively better for academic results. The focus on testing, over the past 20 years, has provided answers to questions that were previously in the realm of mere speculation. Studies of test results have shown beyond any serious doubt that for student learning and academic results, K-8 is better than either the Middle School model, or the Junior High School model. So it is unlikely that the junior high School model will gain momentum for a return to prominence. The junior high School movement is now over a century old, and the middle school movement is half a century old. It seems unlikely that either movement will produce big surprises or academic breakthroughs.

In conclusion, Trenton's Junior One is a magnificent building. The exterior is especially impressive. The structure is one of William Poland's paramount architectural achievements. It is reminiscent perhaps of the Parthenon in Athens, or the Pantheon in Rome, in the sense of being an architectural triumph designed for a lost religion.

*—David Bosted, urban planner
and Trenton City Museum Trustee*

Middle School	Junior High
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Student-oriented (meeting needs of students) ❖ Emphasis on both cognitive and affective development (academics and emotional needs) ❖ Teachers and students are placed on interdisciplinary teams ❖ Observations and experiences based approaches for instruction ❖ Day broken up by blocks and flexible scheduling ❖ Opportunities for exploratory, academic, and nonacademic classes (extracurricular & interest based classes) ❖ Offers advisor/advisee meetings and teacher/student opportunities ❖ Classrooms are arranged by teams in close proximity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Subject-centered ❖ Emphasis on cognitive development (academics, intellectual growth and development, etc.) ❖ Teachers are specifically in subject-based departments ❖ Traditional instruction (teacher-oriented) ❖ 6-8 classes in one day ❖ Focus on academic classes (basic subjects: math, science, reading) ❖ Study hall & homeroom (homework periods) ❖ Classrooms are often arranged at random or by subject or grade level

The first middle school in America opened in Bay City, Michigan, in 1950. Structured to host students from grades six through eight, the early middle school movement was based upon the belief that by the time students entered sixth grade, they were intellectually and socially advanced beyond the confines of elementary schools, and that as most students in sixth grade were of the age of puberty, and hence entering the first stages of adulthood, sixth grade was the appropriate grade to begin to transition from elementary to secondary education.