

Town Hall Questions and Answers

5/2/19

TIMING

Who will decide and when?

We live in a representative democracy. As presented in the timeline shared at the January 14 Board meeting, the elected Board of Education will vote at a televised public regular meeting in June 2019 regarding reconfiguration. Implementation will be for the 2020-21 school year.

If two schools need to be closed, why wouldn't we close both now and move forward? I'd hate to delay and cause further anxiety.

We are following the timeline established by the board in January. The goal is to make a thoughtful and reasoned decision that utilizes the four lenses (educational opportunities, capacity, financial, community impact) by June, so the administration has a year to finalize curricular and organizational structures for the 2020-21 school year. That will also give our school families a year to work on strategies to blend and build community.

CAPACITY AND CLASS SIZE

What is GPPSS's cap on class size per grade? Do you have a lower elementary and upper elementary cap?

The great news is that the board is committed to maintaining our class size caps (at or below 24 for kindergarten, 27 for 1st-3rd grades, 30 for 4th) and as the administration ran all of the scenarios, the district stays within those caps and decreases variance.

Maire is at 81% capacity. Why is it on the list for possible closures?

There are four lenses (educational opportunities, capacity, financial, community impact) all options are viewed through. Maire is one of our smaller elementary schools and has classes on two levels. Aside from the largest schools (Ferry, Monteith) all elementary schools have been in a scenario.

Why are we keeping Ferry at or around 50% capacity?

Ferry also contains classrooms for students receiving special education services where the state and federal guidelines for staff to student ratios are much lower than our class sizes. Building utilization is higher than the capacity when you factor that in.

If two elementary schools are closed, some schools could still have an extra 30-40% capacity. Are you looking at other ways to monetize that space?

Absolutely and we hope the town halls will generate additional ideas. To date, some have included additional space for early childhood, Full Circle programming, senior citizen daycare, and office rental (as is currently being done at the administration building). The safety of our students must be factored into all uses, but we are open to exploring creative possibilities.

How will these current four scenarios expand ECC opportunities, particularly for infants and full time?

Expansion of ECC at Kerby was removed by the Board of Education from the most recent four scenarios (E.1, F.1, K, L). The possibility of doing renovations (fire safety, stairwells, etc.) at Barnes to increase opportunities at that building, as well as continuing to increase satellite locations across the district will still be pursued. But those discussions will not be tied to reconfiguration.

DISTRICT BOUNDARIES

Will the inequity of proposed Middle School capacities be more evenly distributed (not Brownell 66%, Parcels 91%, Pierce 62%)? As some Brownell students are already slated to attend Grosse Pointe North, why is the district not considering redrawing lines to make the middle school capacities more equitable?

The current and proposed capacity difference at Brownell, Parcels and Pierce is very similar. The board could choose to address this in the future with boundary changes, but that is not part of the current reconfiguration discussion as there is still room to accommodate all students within the traditional boundary at all three schools. Additionally, under our current configuration Parcels is at a higher capacity percentage than the other middle schools.

Will we be moving middle school lines or maintaining K-5?

Neither of those options are within the current proposals.

If your elementary school changes, does that mean your middle school can change?

Neither middle school nor high school boundary changes are within the current reconfiguration scenarios.

FINANCIAL ALTERNATIVES

Rather than cost reductions - were there alternatives considered to increase enrollment (paid tuition) considered?

Paid tuition has been proposed by the administration. At the time, the community came out against that option. This is something the board could consider, but comparing to peer districts who have done this it would likely only bring us 15-20 students which is not enough to cover the shortfall. That would have to be one of many solutions.

What is being done to bring in revenue into the district (to cover the lack of state funding)?

Our superintendent and board have been active in educating state and federal representatives about school funding in Michigan. Efforts to date have focused on expansion of Young Fives (kindergarten) and Early Childhood programs, as the district tends to keep families once they start here. The district has also approved the attendance of children of employees (it is under a separate statute from School of Choice legislation the board has unanimously opposed).

Do we have any plans to start an endowment fund to protect against future reductions?

Discussions continue in this vein. Please note that an endowment of approximately \$50 million would be needed to cover the annual operating deficit. The Grosse Pointe Foundation for Public Education does have two endowments, and continues to meet with people interested in fundraising for this cause, recognizing and clearly communicating limitations of this worthy effort. For example, currently the GPFPE does not fund capital expenses or salaries and benefits for staff. It focuses on programs *enriching, engaging and inspiring our future*.

Are there other ways to realize the \$1 million reduction without closing schools?

Yes, but after a decade of budget cuts to the roughly 15% of the district budget that is not directly tied to salaries and benefits, that would be in making difficult choices regarding which programs and personnel to cut. The current board is considering consolidation of buildings in order to main the programs and people that make this the Grosse Pointe Public School System (25 AP classes, 5 foreign languages, fine and performing arts, 60 sports).

What is the annual financial savings desired?

The latest direction from the board was to look for solutions that provide 80% capacity in buildings and \$1,000,000 annual savings.

GRADE CONFIGURATIONS/SCENARIOS

Monday's board meeting seemed to be narrowing the scope so fine tuning could be done. However, days later, we are hearing about adding scenarios (K-5 again). How can we create a plan and ask questions benefitting that plan when they keep changing?

This is a fluid process and great ideas keep coming forth from our educated and invested community. The board is working hard to ensure they hear their constituents, but they also provided and have stuck to a timeline that leads to a decision in June.

If we are only closing two elementary schools, why can't we redistribute to avoid moving fifth grade to middle school?

If the district remains with the K-5 / 6-8 organization there are not enough middle school students to maintain three middle schools. The Blue Ribbon Committee and Board chose to move forward with 3 middle schools and the K-4 configuration, anticipating counter-proposals would come out of the town hall process for comparison.

Why would you close a high achieving elementary school (capacity, enrollment, test scores)? So why close a growing school like Maire, Mason and Kerby? What kind of safety would we have when buying homes in Grosse Pointe?

Those buying homes after the reconfiguration will still experience a GPPSS education; the goal is to make it even better. This is an amazing school system and we will recreate a sense of community once the new normal is established. Test scores were not one of the four lenses (educational opportunities, capacity, financial, community impact) used to evaluate options. School size was. Maire, Mason and Kerby are among our smaller schools. Kerby was originally in a closure scenario due to its number of first floor classrooms that can be used for special

education and tuition based early childhood programming (a need identified by the community to attract new families to the area). The board removed the Kerby ECC scenarios April 22.

What is the criteria for closing a school?

As administration reviewed the mechanics of possible reconfiguration scenarios, the following were considerations:

- Ensuring ES student capacity exists geographically across the District
- Maintaining buildings with more sq. footage typically addresses future capacity needs
- ECC must be housed on the first floor of any building, unless specific fire and safety conditions are met to allow for 2nd floor fee based programming (special education early childhood education must remain on the first floor)
- Many variables (some easily identified & some not) exist when considering which buildings to possibly close
- Reconfiguration will cause a ripple effect on attendance areas
- For the sake of this presentation, elementary schools are divided into North and South end as follows:
 - North - Ferry, Mason, Monteith and Poupard
 - South - Defer, Kerby, Maire, Richard and Trombly

What are you going to do with the magnet program? If you move it to another school, couldn't you keep more school communities together?

There is a Magnet Advisory Group and it will meet again once the reconfiguration plan is approved by the board of education. Future location will take community impact into consideration.

Will Kids Club now be available onsite at the Middle School given the new configuration?

That is absolutely being discussed. One of the budget cuts over the past decade was to remove *Pointe After* from the middle schools, but allow middle school students to attend at the closest elementary school. With 5th grade moving to middle school, our administration has discussed after school care/programming with peer districts using the 5-8 configuration, and they implemented it and call their program Mid Club.

Why is Administration not being considered to move to Poupard?

There is still that possibility. One of the many factors being considered is the cost of construction to facilitate a separate entrance and security measures for the administration to be housed at any school. Plans must include not only office space, but a location for professional development, administrative level meetings, code of conduct hearings, and residency.

We heard that at the Mason parent meeting they were told the administration is working on a new scenario that closes a middle school without absorbing the elementary schools. Is that true? Are more scenarios than EF/KL being created currently?

The administration has not been directed to do so at this time.

What is the chance that Kerby will again be on the table this year? Brownell?

The role of the Blue Ribbon Committee was to serve as a filter to evaluate and narrow proposals. The board of education has also narrowed options along the way. While not out of the realm of possibility for this round of closures, those would be unlikely with the current board direction. However, if enrollment continues to drop, this could be step one in the process and additional schools would be considered in the next phase if needed.

If the fifth grade moves up, would we go from 1.5 counselors at Brownell and Pierce back to 2 counselors at each school?

That will be one of many curricular and staffing discussions made after the board decision in June and implementation in the fall of 2020.

Can you show the proposed bell schedule for 5-8? Is there any overlap with 5th and 7th/8th at all?

Fifth grade would not follow a bell schedule but would rotate very similarly to how they do now among 3 set teachers in the elementary school (each teacher focusing on a subject area like science, math, social studies, getting to know a smaller cohort of students within the school setting to develop meaningful relationships). This would be a school community so there would be overlap for schoolwide activities, but daily contact would be less likely with separate lunches, recess, bathrooms, floors, etc.

How does adding fifth grade to middle school help improve elective options at all levels of middle school? Related: If 5th/6th grades won't have elective with 7th/8th grades, how do we expand elective options? Please be specific.

Here are a few specific examples. Specials teachers, such as those for instrumental music, who currently travel to all 9 elementary buildings would now be concentrated at the middle school. More of their time could focus on instruction, not travel. When teachers are in the building, the opportunity for adding class sections is feasible, of course within contractual bargaining agreements. Spanish is part of the current 5th grade elementary rotation but only every fourth day every other semester. By fifth grade moving to middle school, Spanish instruction could be more consistent and delivered in a more instructionally significant way.

Could you explain why Poupard and Mason were chosen as possible closures and Monteith is not an option?

Poupard and Mason are smaller schools. Maintaining buildings with more square footage like Ferry and Monteith typically addresses future capacity needs.

ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

Why aren't board members here?

There are town halls scheduled at every school building in a month's time. All board members cannot attend all of them but are making an effort to attend as many as possible.

How are the board members getting information/questions that are presented at each Town Hall?

Board members are also watching the Q&A developed from each town hall and continue to meet with constituents and read letters and emails to the board (schoolboard@gpschools.org).

Why is the superintendent so concerned with meeting with Title I schools?

The superintendent is meeting with as many groups and individuals as his schedule can possibly permit. He has been invited by the Poupard and Mason PTOs (Title I schools along with Defer) as well as Trombly, Kerby, and Maire (not Title I schools). And he is attending as many town halls as possible. He is superintendent of all our schools.

BUILDINGS/GROUNDS

Is it feasible to think that all three middle schools could have fifth/sixth grades on one floor, and 7th/8th grade on another floor?

For the majority of the day, yes, but there are specialized rooms like cafeterias, science labs and music rooms that would be exceptions.

What are you planning to do with buildings you close? Do you plan to sell any? What are the possibilities? Have you gotten any city approvals for rezoning? Will the community have any input on these decisions?

State law would allow us 3 years to make decisions without requiring buildings be brought up to current codes to reopen as an educational facility. There are many options from sale or lease that could be considered. Residential use is preferred in many cases as that would open more housing options in a very small market. The last thing we want is to sell to competitive entities. Zoning would be worked out between the buyer and the city.

How did you come up with this land value?

Land value is currently be re-evaluated and will be updated as needed. These projections were based on the [Deeplands sale price of approximately \\$230.00 per acre](#) - the most recent sale of a similar size property in this area.

Does Plante Moran have any real estate development affiliations?

Plante Moran is a large corporation. The branches we are working with for this would not profit from any real estate transactions. There is a public RFP process in place as is being used currently for the sale of the administration building.

Do you have a cost on what it would take to reconfigure middle schools for 5-8?

Those are in development, but most changes would utilize the buildings as they currently are or with nominal investments such as changing some computer labs to classrooms.

If the 5-8 configuration is approved, can PTOs group together money to get playground equipment for middle schools or is playground equipment already considered?

Playground equipment is not currently budgeted for, but this would be a wonderful example of how to work together to blend the school communities. This would also be a great area to get feedback from students to help them create their new school home, as well as PE teachers to purchase equipment that could serve a dual purpose.

Because school closings affect walkability, has a study been done on which schools have the most walking students?

This has been anecdotal in speaking with staff, administration, parents and crossing guards. Weather is always a factor as well - more students walk/bike in spring and fall.

Does the district plan a traffic study?

Traffic studies are conducted by the cities, as was most recently done for Monteith with the City of Grosse Pointe Woods. Please remember the consolidated projected numbers for schools are similar to actual past enrollment figures.

How does student safety factor into the board's decisions? With respect to pedestrian and vehicular traffic, how will traffic be accommodated at enlarged schools and maintain safety standards?

Student safety is always our top priority. If there are concerns now with safety, we need to address those now, not after consolidation. The district will continue to urge families to carpool, walk and bike in order to reduce traffic congestion and increase safety. Thank you for working with us to enhance student safety!

ENROLLMENT

I noticed on the heat map that there are few kids who attend GPPSS around Barnes. Has the district studied how closing this school affected this neighborhood?

Trustee Weertz has shared her experience as a family within that neighborhood that was redistricted to Monteith when Barnes closed. Location and capacity were also factors when that closure was made. Home values remain strong in that area.

Why are the enrollment projections only out 5 years?

One of the primary data points for enrollment projections is live births, so they only project out for kindergarten for those currently living. This is not the only data point as the demographers also take into account historical averages of GPPSS share of county births, and the fact that the district increases the number of students in every grade level every year along the way from kindergarten through 12th grade graduation, with bumps at 1st grade, 6th grade, and 9th grade.

How does the plan factor in future enrollment growth?

Every plan allows for future growth in enrollment at every building. The goal of 80% capacity provides ample room, and every scenario includes schools below that goal. Every effort will be made to continue to attract young families to GPPSS.

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMMING

Are any of the current fee-based preschool programs anticipated to close? If their school building is closed or full, will they be moved?

None of the current preschool programs are anticipated to close. They could move based on capacity and every effort will be made to expand the program using satellite locations across the district.

Did anyone consider a 3-year-old and 4-year-old preschool with before/after care in every elementary school as a way to soften moving 5th grade to middle school?

Expansion of preschool is being considered, but not with the goal of keeping 5th grade at the elementary level. Moving 5th grade is tied to keeping all 3 middle schools open.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

You mentioned cost savings being re-invested in the school district, for example hiring/retaining high quality teachers. Have teachers yet regained the salary reduction that occurred, and if not, will that be a priority moving forward? Our teachers are the best and we need to make sure we keep them!

GPPSS staff all took an approximately 10% pay reduction and have yet to regain what they made then. Both the administration and the GPEA (teacher's union) have that as a priority in a market where teacher shortages are very real and projected to continue to grow.

Why are the GP Public schools and private schools in the Chamber of Commerce - this is a business lobby. Note, our public libraries are also members of Chamber of Commerce. Isn't this a conflict of interest? Have we lost our independence?

GPPSS partners with the Chamber of Commerce on activities to market the area, particularly to young families.

How is the Board of Education dealing with a growing community voice that is calling your school closing choices racist?

While our community is becoming increasingly diverse, the diversity of the student population at individual buildings does still vary. Scenarios have been proposed across the district. The factors are not racist. They are based on the four lenses (educational opportunities, capacity, financial savings and community impact), and particularly square footage and geographical distribution (one North end, one South end school). Also, the district and school board have worked diligently to create a warm and welcoming community for all our students and families. This inclusive work started with our Strategic Plan, then our Diversity Plan, and continues with our diversity efforts in concert with The University of Michigan, Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency, and the local NAACP. We are asking for your help to ensure all students are warmly welcomed into their new school community as reconfiguration takes place.

Why was closing a high school never an option?

Please see the [survey results](#) from the 2019 Valentines Day Blue Ribbon meeting. These closely resemble the results from the 2017 survey. The vast majority of both groups and the board said closing a high school was not an option at this time.

AS PLANS DEVELOP

How did the decision to keep Kerby open come to be (vs. other South schools)?

At their April 22 Board of Education, the board was informally polled and decided to remove the Early Childhood Center expansion at Kerby from the reconfiguration process. Expansion of ECC will still be pursued through satellite sites, but not as part of this process. Several board members voiced a concern regarding the ripple effect on so many school boundaries in the scenarios where Kerby elementary was closed (# and % of children at Richard, Monteith, Maire, and Defer).

Why would Kerby come back on the list for closures?

If enrollment continues to decline over the next five years, this could be phase one of a larger process.

What is the primary purpose of town hall meetings - share information with the community or continue to ask for input? Will plans/scenarios continue to change as town halls occur?

The board welcomes ideas and input. Town Halls are another way for the community to share their concerns and comments before the elected board makes a decision in June.

How much change do you anticipate from what the board has already publicly stated in regards to which schools will be closing?

This process started in January with 7 scenarios. Scenarios were added, changed and removed along the way as the Blue Ribbon Committee and community comments provided a filter for ideas. As the process developed, the options have narrowed. But this remains a fluid process until the board vote in June.

What is the most accurate way to stay up to date on what the board is favoring outside of Facebook and rumors?

All decisions will be made in public televised meetings of the Board of Education. Updates are included in the GPPSS Weekly Update and posted on the district website www.gpschools.org under Blue Ribbon. Local press coverage in the Grosse Pointe News and Times have been accurate. Social media is the least accurate way to receive information.