

**Revised**

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Utilization Committee met in regular session on Thursday, September 19, 2019 at 6:00 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School, Durham, Connecticut.

Committee members present: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich (by phone), Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino

Other board members present: Mr. Moore and Mrs. Petrella

Community members present: Mr. Giammatteo

Administration present: Dr. Veronesi, Superintendent of Schools and Kim Neubig, Director of Finance

Dr. Taylor called the meeting to order at 6:03 PM.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**Public Comment**

Heidi Johnson, from Durham, reviewed the history of a proposed amendment to the Plan of Regionalization and read the statute as well as the case from 2009, she does not feel that the actions taken (closing of schools, etc.) require an amendment to the plan. She is frustrated that this is being dealt with now at the last minute because it creates distrust and division in the community. She believes that the temporary Regional School Study committee's final report should be available on the website so that people can review it and that the process be communicated with a timeline to parents so that the community can understand.

Christina Gates, from Durham, stated her support of a letter from Missy DiPietro and the possibility of returning to a town-based K-5 configuration. She would like to see healthy, community-based, student-based, family-friendly K-5 town-based schools. She felt that a lot of parents feel this way and also noted that a lot of parents feel defeated by the process. She asked why the district is going down the path of a convoluted configuration when they could simplify things and avoid long bus rides for the students. Families will have kids at several schools and won't be able to be strongly involved. She asked the committee to take a step back and get back to a simple, common sense solution.

Carl Stoup, from Durham, would like to see the board take into consideration the fact of voting the full board members in at election time.

Carolyn Jameson, from Middlefield, entered various letters from Missy DiPietro, Jenna Driscoll and Erin Canning into the record. She also stated her own recommendations and concerns about the impact on kids and their development. Ms. Jameson is a licensed clinical social worker and she has seen how a breakdown of schools can impact the mental health of students. She cautioned the district to consider the mental health impact of dividing schools and forcing transitions and losing the connectedness. She believes transparency is necessary, but also asked that the committee look at what exists now, what mental health services the students have and gauge how the district will respond.

Allison Alstead, who just moved to Durham in January, also supports community K-5 schools and stated that she moved here because of the education that District 13 provides and the close community. She did

write a letter in support of K-5 as opposed to the single track that the board of education seems to be moving toward. She stated that it is very difficult for moms of young children to participate and knows of a lot of other moms that feel that K-5 schools would foster a stronger, more unified families and stronger, more unified communities. She then read from her letter for the committee members, but will email a copy. She also noted that families could be spread out over four schools. Ms. Alstead also felt it would create a friendship problem and mentioned bus routes as well. She stated how attached her daughter is to John Lyman and talked about the way the older children took her under their wing.

Carol Liptak from Middlefield stated that her children are no longer in the lower grades, but she has spoken to a lot of parents who are concerned about the transitions every two years. She also grew up in District 13 and felt that she benefited from being in a community school. She supports K-5 and maybe even 6-8 in the community. She asked the committee to uphold the original regionalization plan because that's what the towns wanted and continue to want.

Another community member from Middlefield stated that she has come to a lot of board meetings and echoed the sentiment of the other parents. She felt that Middlefield is something really special with John Lyman and the HOT program. She also felt that Brewster is an amazing school, but didn't choose to have her children go through that system and appreciates having the option. She echoed the sentiment that frequent school changes are not ideal and hoped that having a community school is something that is still on the table.

Sara Gresh stated that she moved to Durham two years ago and picked Durham for the school system. Her son has been very happy at John Lyman and is heartbroken to hear that his school is closing.

Cheryl Pizzo, from Middlefield, reviewed that on February 7, 1968, the towns formed a temporary regional school study committee. When the study was done, it was very clear that the regionalization was only to take place at the high school level and that children from each community would stay in their own community schools. That vote failed on March 4, 1968, 472-486 because people were not convinced that their children would stay in town and that Middlefield would no longer have schools in the community. She felt that community-based schools bring good economic development, offer the child a sense of security and are community building blocks. She asked the committee to consider where this all started and where it is going and felt it would be a detriment to close the elementary school in Middlefield. Mrs. Pizzo then showed the schools in 1968, which included three schools in each town, and where the district is going, to include three schools in Durham and one in Middlefield. She felt that that makes the system Durham-centered and is not what people signed on for. She also felt that the new plan would be a detriment to Durham as well because they will lose their neighborhood school as well. She asked when the board will look at the quality of life rather than just dollars.

### **Approval of Agenda**

*Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Mr. Yamartino, to approve the agenda, as presented.*

*In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed unanimously.*

### **Approval of Minutes - August 14, 2019**

*Mrs. Geraci made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to approve the minutes of the August 14, 2019 meeting, as presented.*

*In favor of approving the minutes of the August 14, 2019, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion approved unanimously.*

### **Plan of Regionalization Amendment**

Mr. Moore explained that as the board went to propose a referendum for the current improvements at Brewster and Memorial as planned and approved, the bond counsel indicated that he felt that the current Plan of Regionalization needed to be amended. He was basically concerned with the recommendations that are in the plan to have schools organized on an elementary, middle and high school basis and that children attending elementary and middle schools remain in their present locations. The plan also stated that the regional board of education would determine the programs and facilities of the district which would logically mean that the board could give consideration to recommendations of the committee but would not be legally bound by them. Mr. Moore believes that the study committee also understood that the regional board of education would be the decision-maker on the future of the school system.

Mr. Moore reviewed that Center School and Korn School have both been closed, students went to middle school in Middlefield and moved to Strong for seventh and eighth grade. The Integrated Day program was initially at Brewster, but then moved to Lyman as an open-classroom school and children had the choice of moving back and forth. Over the last 52 years, a number of changes have occurred that have not complied with the initial recommendation, but have generated different things as needs, populations, enrollment, costs of schools and the budget process have changed over time.

Mr. Moore believes that these decisions were made over the last 50 years to meet the needs at the time. All of these changes passed, got budget approval and went through the whole process. The board went through a very long process to come up with this current proposal of a single education program, a HOT approach, through all of the system.

The process of an amendment includes the development of a report which Mr. Moore has started to draft and the submission of that report to the full board for approval. That report would then be submitted to the Connecticut State Board of Education for their approval and then there would be a public hearing and a referendum. The referendum would then have to be passed in both towns, not just by majority vote. The board felt that that process would take enough time that it would be necessary to hold off on the bonding proposal for the school improvements and move ahead solely on this issue.

Mr. Moore read his proposed draft, "the Board of Education of Regional School District 13, notwithstanding any recommendations of the Temporary Regional School Study committee of 1967 for the towns of Durham and Middlefield, is authorized to determine the programs and facilities required to best serve the students of the district established, including the alteration, expansion or closure of district school buildings." He explained that he wanted the wording about facilities to include expansion and closure of buildings. He also recommended that they do a series of how the district got to where it is and how the decisions were made over time so that everybody has a full understanding of what has happened over the last 52 years.

Dr. Taylor asked if any board members had any comments. Mr. Yamartino wanted to make sure that everyone understood that the board has already made the decision to go to a single program and regardless of the number of schools, it will still be one program. He believes that the schools were never going to be decided on town boundary lines, but more on proximity to the facility. Dr. Taylor agreed and explained that that decision was made mainly from a building configuration standpoint. If they were to go on strictly a town configuration, the number of students going to Brewster would be significantly more than what is being proposed and would require significantly more work to be done there as well as the

under-utilization of Memorial. Dr. Taylor reviewed that the position of the board has been that there has not been the appetite within the towns to dedicate significant resources to changing building configurations. Board members have been in favor of a single K-5 as an option, but that option was difficult because of the dollar figures. There were also other plans for complete K-5 renovations. Dr. Taylor felt that the only viable approach to cut down expenditures was to do this kind of split between the two towns.

Dr. Taylor added that they had explored many different configurations, but did not explore a town-by-town K-5 as they felt it would be a significant expenditure. He added that these decisions have been made based on declining enrollment along with all of the other competing interests.

Mrs. Booth explained that if Memorial did become a K-5 school, the classrooms are very small, especially for kindergarten, and the building is not meant for young kids according to space standards as shared by our architect.

Mr. Moore commented that Mrs. Petrella had suggested that, in the report, they identify that a school will always be in Middlefield. That would assure that this is not to eliminate everything in Middlefield, but just to consolidate. They would also consider additional enhancements in and around Memorial.

Another issue was the election of board of education members to a four-year term based on a November vote on the ballot, rather than in Town meeting. This is now in the charter for the Town of Durham, but not Middlefield. Mr. Hicks recalled that Durham was in favor of that, but Middlefield was not and both parties needed to agree to have that move forward. He felt that making it political would be dangerous.

Mr. Moore stated that he and Dr. Veronesi have addressed this issue with their attorney. The board was originally 50/50 from each town, but because state law required a balance based on population, that was changed however the plan was never amended. Once they have a determination from the attorney, it will have to go through the board, public hearing and a referendum as well. Mr. Yamartino felt that both towns can do it whichever way they prefer; however, the terms have to be concurrent. He would also like the attorneys to advise on that. Mr. Hicks believed it had to be unanimous. Dr. Veronesi explained that the attorneys are working on a memo to advise the board on those issues.

Mr. Moore reviewed that there is a lot more information that needs to be gathered, including the actions that have been taken by the board and by the towns over time. Mrs. Geraci feels the draft is very clear and provides a history. Dr. Taylor felt that there are two real competing interests in this decision, that being what is best for an individual town and what is best for the regionalized school district as a whole. He strongly believes that, as a board member in a regional district, his decision-making should be guided by what is best for the students in the district as a whole, regardless of the towns. That does not necessarily mean that they would not consider what is best for the individual towns. Dr. Taylor realizes that this will ultimately be a town decision.

Mrs. Petrella asked if this will be revisited or if this is what will be recommended to the board. Dr. Taylor explained that counsel will need to review it and make any suggestions. He would also want to ask for comments and suggestions from the members of this committee and probably the whole board. Mr. Giammatteo thought that this seemed to be outside of the scope of the Utilization Committee and Dr. Taylor agreed that the voting aspect is not in the committee's purview. Mr. Moore felt that this committee just needed to help with the draft of the report and that all the issues have been covered. He added that he will take the responsibility of finishing the draft and then ask board members for comment.

Dr. Taylor suggested the document be put on Google Docs for review and Dr. Veronesi thought that the document could be discussed at the October board meeting. Dr. Taylor asked to have the sections on the voting component be kept separate from the rest of the issues so they can be modified easily. Mr. Yamartino felt that would be better for the referendum as well.

Mr. Yamartino also felt that the Utilization Committee should start preparing information to share with the public. Mr. Moore stated that the changes have already been submitted to the State Board of Education, including the funding for the alterations. He explained that they may need to resubmit this information if the state does not extend the time period due to this delay. Dr. Veronesi felt that the board should consider withdrawing at this point and resubmit next year which Mr. Moore felt could be done at the normal budget referendum in May.

Mr. Moore reviewed that this decision needs to be made first, which will probably go into January for a referendum. Mrs. Neubig commented that that would be unlikely because the priority list goes to the legislature to determine what projects they will fund in December/January. All projects need to be submitted by November 30<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Moore added that they will ask for a legislative exemption. Dr. Taylor asked if there would be any disadvantage to withdrawing and Mrs. Neubig explained that the only disadvantage would be lost time. She felt it was more advantageous to withdraw before the state starts working on it.

Mrs. Petrella felt that the comments from the public are different from what is being proposed, but the board already voted on that direction. The public will vote when it's time and that would be their opportunity to speak on this. She would feel more comfortable to add wording that basically states that there will always be at least one school in each of the two towns. She would also like to ensure that the district always solicits input from the communities prior to voting on any restructuring proposals. Mr. Moore reminded everyone that most of these issues end up in the budget process or bonding and the towns make those decisions, but Mrs. Petrella mentioned that that was not the case for Korn School. She also requested to see the document several days before the meeting.

Mr. Moore asked everyone to send their comments/suggestions to Dr. Veronesi.

### **Brewster/Memorial Alteration Project**

Dr. Veronesi reviewed that Dr. Taylor had stated at a prior board meeting that he would like the board to talk about any considered modifications to be made to the original plan so that the public would be fully aware of any proposed changes. The possible future changes could include site plan modifications at Brewster for the bus drop-off, parent pick-up, etc. as well as the addition of a gymnasium and some other additions to Memorial. Mr. Yamartino mentioned that funding should be included in those discussions as well since capital will be rolling off and may be able to be used for funding some of those projects.

Mr. Moore stated that if they decide to withdraw the request to the state, they should look at this in phases. This proposal was based on the minimum amount of work needed, but could now be looked at as different phases.

Mr. Moore felt that they should see if they could get an extension and then make the decision as to whether to withdraw or not and move this ahead to the May referendum. Mrs. Petrella agreed and felt that people needed to know the options and the costs. Mrs. Booth added that the septic systems were talked about at both schools and she would want to be sure that is included.

Dr. Taylor worries that the process would get a little muddled when future items get included that were not part of the original decision. He thought that they should decide what is necessary and what is desired, but felt that if the board felt the steps were necessary, they would have been included in the original proposals. He would not be in favor of lumping things together as it would make the decision difficult for the public.

Mrs. Booth asked if Dr. Taylor thought it should be bundled together or brought forth as two separate issues. He felt it should be kept separate as they were working on a needs-based framework. Mrs. Geraci felt that was a fair way to do it. Mrs. Petrella felt that the proposals were all needs, rather than wants, including the gymnasium and cafeteria. Dr. Taylor stated that he had explicitly asked about the cafeteria/gymnasium and was told it was desired, but not necessary.

Dr. Veronesi felt that the board wanted to take the first step as that was what was affordable to the community. Mrs. Petrella felt that the rest of it is not necessarily a desire, but more of an enhancement to what is proposed. She would agree with phasing the work in. Dr. Taylor didn't see the necessity to talking about those additional components now as they are independent of the initial decision and should be clearly separate.

Mr. Moore reminded everyone that, at the time, there was also the bond proposal for \$6.9 million for building needs that were necessary to keep the building alive and well. Mrs. Petrella felt that if a project might be on the table, it should be out there for discussion. Dr. Taylor gave an example of the field house and felt that the additional steps (bathrooms, lighting, etc.) would need to be completed to make it functional. He felt that the construction work can be done at the schools and there would be no need to do anything further to be able to implement the plan. Anything after that would be enhancements. Dr. Taylor felt that enhancements do not need to be talked about up-front.

Mr. Yamartino asked if space would be available for school-wide events at each school as that was repeatedly brought up during all of the public hearings and outreach. Dr. Taylor felt that each school would be able to provide that without any additions.

Mrs. Booth stated that before she was actually on the board, she had no idea there was ever a phase 2. If there is a phase 2, she felt that that needs to be apparent as she feels that a lot of people wouldn't realize that was the plan. She also felt that they would need to do something to the exterior property at Memorial, in terms of a playground or something else, in order to make people happier. Mr. Yamartino felt that the recreational facilities at Memorial should not have to wait for the bonding and other decisions and hoped that it could be included in the budget. He noted that a tennis/pickleball court would be advantageous.

Dr. Veronesi said the board discussed what would need to be done now to accommodate the program changes and all of the other items she mentioned earlier had been talked about previously. She did not feel that the board ever had a plan for a definitive phase 2 and Dr. Taylor and Mr. Moore agreed. Mrs. Neubig noted that the wording of "phase 2" in the ed specs document is a way to note possible future alterations to the state.

Mr. Giammatteo also felt that it's important for the board to communicate their ultimate vision, even if the work is to be done in more than one phase. Dr. Taylor summarized that he did not want to formalize the different phases unless it's built into the actual budget process. He would not want to send the wrong message that the board was trying to mislead anyone. Mr. Giammatteo felt that they would not want to have to go back to the public for more money without them knowing it first. Dr. Veronesi added that she felt there were members of the public who would like to see more enhancements.

Dr. Taylor reminded everyone that all of this was being done to free up about \$1 million in inefficiencies and can therefore be directed elsewhere to improve the educational environment.

Mr. Moore stated that he was speaking to Ed Bailey today who asked him to remind everyone that Middlefield's ECS grant will go down by \$1 million over the next seven years and Durham will go down by \$2 million. Dr. Taylor noted that that was another component of the decisions that were made.

### **Public Comment**

Heidi Johnson agreed with the committee's characterization of the process and is on record as agreeing with the configuration. She liked Mrs. Geraci's suggestion of something like a menu for townspeople to understand what might be included in the plan. The statutes provide for the regional plan and where there are broad provisions, those govern unless there is a more specific provision. Before 2009, the statute that governs amendment was construed differently by the Supreme Court and she felt it was important for the board to know that some of their power was derived from the plan as it is and from how the statute was construed prior to 2009. The board of education did not have to seek amendment for things that they now have to. She explained that the fact that the board closed schools in the past has nothing to do with now.

Carl Stoup, from Durham, thanked the committee for addressing the election issue. He would like to see this done with one referendum instead of two. As far as the agreement, he hoped that it would be more available. Dr. Veronesi explained that they will put the agreement on the Announcements section of the website.

Another member of the public addressed what Mrs. Petrella said about transparency and stated that she would like to know what is in the works, even if it doesn't transpire. She felt that it is important for the public to know what the board has on their mind. She also noted that sometimes it feels like the public's opinion goes in one ear and out the other of board members.

Someone else agreed with more transparency as well and felt that it would be simple to share the information of what is possible in the future.

### **Adjournment**

*Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Geraci, to adjourn the meeting.*

*In favor of adjourning the meeting: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed unanimously.*

Meeting was adjourned at 7:38 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First



***Schools for Successful Communities:  
An Element of Smart Growth***

September 2004

Council of Educational Facility Planners International

United States Environmental Protection Agency

**The Council of Educational Facility Planners International**

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PUBLISHER



Thomas Kube

Schools and their locations have a tremendous effect on how our communities grow. The cycle of growth and development of new communities is influenced by school sites. The resurgence of urban neighborhoods is impacted by school location and their educational quality and condition. New schools in our cities are challenged by site locations and limited availability of land. Rural communities also wrestle with keeping their communities intact as growth moves in concentric rings to push the neighborhood outside of the traditional town locations. This publication was developed to help provide real-world, viable alternatives to communities and their citizens who want to engage in well-planned and thoughtful growth.

The Council of Educational Facility Planners International has been engaged in the ongoing conversation about healthy, high-performing schools, including their locations, since 1921. This publication, jointly produced with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is our effort to further add to the collective body of knowledge that school districts and community leaders need when planning school buildings. It is our obligation to identify balanced perspectives on school locations and the manner and means through which communities can become engaged as they discuss these plans.

CEFPI produces a wide array of resources used expressly for helping plan, design and construct effective schools. We view *Schools for Successful Communities: An Element of Smart Growth* as a supplement to the Council's highly regarded *Creating Connections: The CEFPI Guide for Educational Facility Planning*, as it helps amplify and focus the discussion on this particular aspect of school planning.

I believe it important to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of Janell Weihs, who functioned as the Editor in Chief for this project. And, if not for the vision of Geoffrey Anderson, director, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the help of Tim Torma, policy analyst, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Policy, Economics and Innovation this publication would not have been possible.

We hope that you will find this publication the resource that we intend it to be.

Thomas A. Kube, Executive Director/CEO

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The Council of Educational Facility Planners International would like to thank Ms. Victoria Hay for her expert editorial skills. She has been very helpful in completing several CEFPI projects. In addition, the Council would like to recognize the following U.S. Environmental Protection Agency staff members who helped with this project: Sophie Cantell, Eric Sprague, and Amber Levofsky. The following primary authors deserve special thanks and recognition for their dedication to the Council and to this project specifically.

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Dr. Barbara Kent Lawrence is a consultant, researcher and writer specializing in small schools and facilities policies. She is the lead researcher for *Dollars and Sense: The Cost-Effectiveness of Small Schools* and the author of several reports and a new book, *The Hermit Crab Solution: Creative Alternative for Improving Rural School Facilities & Keeping Them Close to Home*. Dr. Lawrence is also an adjunct professor at Lesley University teaching writing, research methods, and a course in introductory sociology.

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**Megan M. Susman**

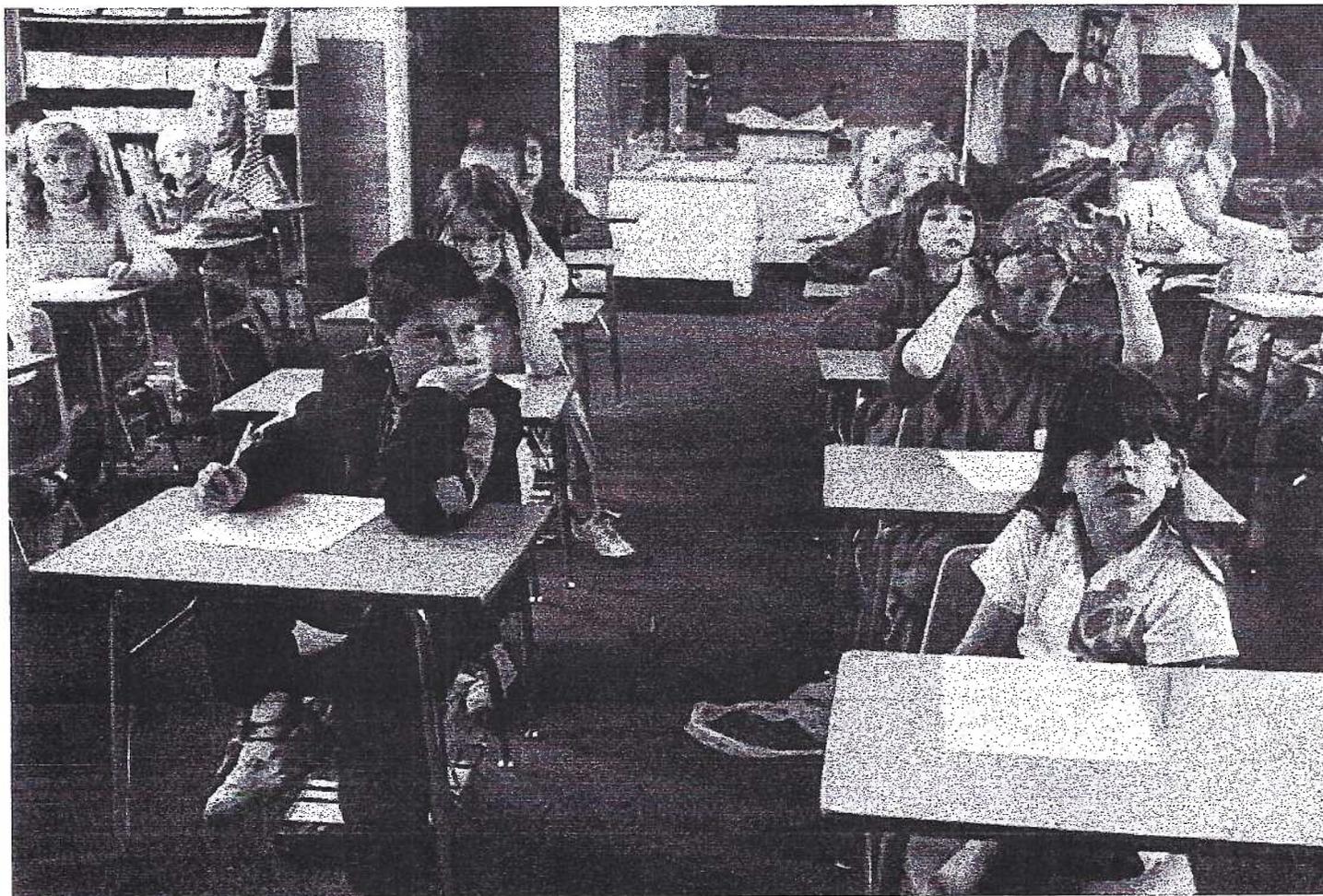
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Tim Torma is an environmental policy specialist in U.S. EPA's Development, Community and Environment Division. He was the EPA project officer for this cooperative agreement. His recent work has included projects related to environmental and health effects of school siting and research and writing on school siting and planning. He has been a contributing writer, editor or reviewer on a wide range of growth-related publications, most recently *Getting to Smart Growth II*, and *Creating Great Neighborhoods: Density in Your Community*. His writing has also appeared in the *Washington Post*. Prior to working at EPA, Mr. Torma was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Cameroon, West Africa and a Legislative Intern in the U.S. House of Representatives.

**Janell Weihs**

As the Grants and Special Projects Manager for the Council of Educational Facility Planners International, Ms. Weihs is responsible for the Council's government contracts and partnership. She has collaborated with the National Park Service to produce two publications regarding the renovation and appraisal of older and historic school facilities and with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Indoor Environments Division, to distribute and implement the *Tools for Schools* program in districts throughout the world. Ms. Weihs is a former high school English teacher and received a B.A. degree in English and Communications from Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota, and an M.A. in Literature from Northern Arizona University.



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## INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Council of Educational Facility Planners International (CEFPI) cooperatively developed this publication. It explains why and how communities should employ smart growth planning principles to build schools that better serve and support students, staff, parents, and the entire community. It presents examples of supportive state and local policies, as well as case studies from around the country that show how community-centered schools and the planning process used to design and build these schools have improved education and fostered more livable places. EPA and CEFPI recognized a need for such an integrated planning process in the urban planning and environmental fields and among educators and school board members.

Over the next few decades, thousands of school facilities around the country will be built and renovated. Where and how schools are built or rebuilt will profoundly affect the communities they serve. In making the decisions these projects demand, school boards, educational facility planners, and communities will have to meet many goals—educational, environmental, economic, social, and fiscal.

Although challenging, the boom in school construction offers an unprecedented opportunity to improve the quality of schools and communities together, by applying the principles of smart growth to educational facility planning. Smart growth development conserves resources and land; offers choices in housing, transportation, shopping, recreation, and jobs; encourages community collaboration; and fosters distinctive, attractive neighborhoods. Smart growth proponents share many principles with educators who support community-centered schools. Both groups believe that schools should provide quality educational programs and services. Both see community-centered schools as resources and enhancements for the entire community, not just for students. Both believe schools should be located in existing neighborhoods, within walking distance of residents and services, rather than in outlying areas accessible only by car or bus.

Many communities are realizing that the random, dispersed growth patterns they have experienced in recent decades have eroded their quality of life. Traffic congestion is increasing; municipalities spend funds on building new infrastructure in far-flung development, abandoning their investments in existing neighborhoods; open space seems to be vanishing. In reevaluating growth patterns, communities are also assessing how and where they spend their education dollars. Investments in schools at once respond to and influence growth.

When school districts collaborate with city leaders to incorporate smart growth principles in the master facility planning process, the community benefits socially and economically. Each community should use its education dollars to fulfill academic considerations and to express the values and vision of the community. This publication helps communities invest in schools that will give their children the best possible education, use taxpayer dollars wisely, and improve the quality of life for all citizens.



## THE CHALLENGE TO GROW; THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXCEL

School districts across the nation are currently faced with providing more than 53 million students in grades K-12 with healthy, secure, high-performing educational facilities. This challenge will only grow—the U.S. Department of Education estimates that by 2030, the student population will reach 60 million (National Center for Education Statistics, *Baby Boom*, 2000. Hereafter the National Center is abbreviated NCES). Renovations and additions to existing schools and the construction of new facilities will be needed to address this projected growth. At the same time, many small schools in cities, towns, and rural communities are closing as large schools are built on the edges of communities. In many cases, economic considerations have encouraged consolidation. Some state and local policies are biased toward larger schools. The rationale for many of these policies remains unclear. For example, twenty-seven states have some form of minimum acreage standards, which often demand sites so large they can be found only in less developed parts of communities or outside of town.

The National Center for Education Statistics notes that the number of schools in the United States has decreased from approximately 247,000 in 1930 to 93,000 today (U.S. Statistics 2002), while the student population over the same period has risen from 28 million to 53.5 million (NCES, *Digest*, 2002). Furthermore, NCES reports that the average public school facility is more than forty years old and needs critical repair and modernization (Lewis 2000). To accommodate the growing demand, school districts are constructing new facilities and considering fresh approaches, such as adaptive reuse of buildings, to house students safely and to provide a high-quality education.

Over the past several decades, investments in educational facilities have often followed the model of most real estate development—building new schools at the edges of communities on large, undeveloped parcels of land. This approach, whether initiated by a town or by a school district, abandons the community core and existing facilities and increases public expenditures, traffic congestion, pollution and loss of open space.

To respond to changing demographics, school districts need efficient and innovative ways to plan, build, adapt, and renovate facilities. Faced with the costly consequences of independent master planning, many communities are seeking better ways to grow by applying the principles of *smart growth*. Smart growth improves the quality of life in communities by providing more transportation choices, preserving green space, making communities walkable, increasing fiscal capacity, and improving existing infrastructure.

The challenge of accommodating the growing student population presents an opportunity to invest in smart community development and to unite planning efforts between city planners and school district personnel. Any expenditure of public money should provide the greatest benefit for the community as a whole; educational investments are no exception. Integrating school district planning with smart growth planning can produce neighborhood-centered schools that offer high-quality educational programs while benefiting their communities in many ways.

The National Education Association (2000) estimates that billions of dollars are needed to bring schools into "good" physical condition. The ten states with the greatest need are these:

1.	California	\$32.9 billion
2.	New York	\$32.9 billion
3.	Ohio	\$25.1 billion
4.	New Jersey	\$22.0 billion
5.	Texas	\$13.6 billion
6.	Illinois	\$11.3 billion
7.	Pennsylvania	\$10.4 billion
8.	Massachusetts	\$ 9.9 billion
9.	Michigan	\$ 9.9 billion
10.	Utah	\$ 9.0 billion



## SMART GROWTH PRINCIPLES

The EPA defines smart growth as “development that serves the economy, the community, and the environment. It provides a framework for communities to make informed decisions about how and where they grow” (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency 2001. Hereafter in references abbreviated EPA). The principles of smart growth promote economic development and job creation along with strong neighborhoods and healthy communities. Based on specific community needs and characteristics, smart growth may look different in each community that employs its principles.

Incorporating smart growth principles into the facility master planning process, school districts can provide high-quality learning environments that also enrich their communities. The ten principles below were developed from the experience of communities around the nation that have benefited from smart growth:

- **Mix land uses**

By mixing housing, shops, offices, schools, and other land uses in the same neighborhood, communities can encourage alternatives to driving, such as walking or biking. Streets, public spaces, and pedestrian-oriented shopping areas become places where people meet. With more people walking through the streets at different times of the day, communities are livelier and more secure.

- **Take advantage of compact building design**

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, Americans developed land three times faster than the nation’s population grew (EPA 2001). Communities can be designed to preserve open space and use land and resources more efficiently. Compact building design saves localities money and supports more transportation choices by putting destinations close enough for people to walk or by creating a concentration of users for public transit. Services such as water, sewer, electricity, phone service, and other utilities are cheaper to provide and maintain per unit in more compact neighborhoods than in dispersed communities.

- **Create a range of housing opportunities and choices**

Providing quality housing for people of all income levels is an integral component in any smart growth strategy. No single type of housing can serve the varied needs of today’s diverse households. Smart growth encourages communities to increase housing choices by modifying their land-use patterns on newly developed land and by developing the housing supply in existing neighborhoods and on land served by existing infrastructure. Housing is also a key factor in commuting patterns, energy and other resource consumption, and access to transportation, community services, and education.

- **Invest in walkable neighborhoods**

Walkable communities expand transportation options and create places that serve a range of users: pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and drivers. Walkable places also encourage everyday physical activity, which is vital to good personal health. To encourage walking, communities should mix land uses, build compactly, and ensure safe and inviting pedestrian corridors.



- **Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place**

Development should represent the values and the unique history, culture, economy, and geography of a community. Smart growth development creates a sense of defined neighborhoods, towns, and regions. It encourages construction and preservation of buildings that prove to be assets to a community over time because of the services they provide and the unique contribution they make to the look and feel of a city.

- **Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas**

Farmland, pastures, forests, and other undeveloped land are key to the local and national economy and to a healthy environment. Open space preservation bolsters local economies, preserves critical environmental areas, improves air quality, improves the quality of life, and guides new growth into existing communities.

- **Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities**

Development that invests in existing neighborhoods takes advantage of the infrastructure and resources already in place, thereby maintaining the value of public and private investment. By encouraging “infill” development, communities benefit from a stronger tax base, greater proximity of a range of jobs and services, and reduced development pressure in fringe areas.

- **Provide a variety of transportation choices**

A balanced transportation system that incorporates many means of travel—private cars, buses, rail, walking, biking—and is supported by land-use patterns increases choices for moving around a city. Providing more transportation options can help reduce air pollution and traffic congestion. For citizens who cannot or choose not to drive, it increases mobility.

- **Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost-effective**

Government must create a more attractive investment climate to promote smart growth. The private sector must support a community vision for smart growth development for it to occur and be successful. To make that possible, state and local governments must be able to make decisions quickly, cost-effectively and predictably.

- **Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration**

Growth can create great places to live, work, and play—if it responds to a community’s sense of how and where it wants to grow. Smart growth involves residents, businesses, and all other stakeholders early and often to define and implement the community’s vision and goals.



## The Connection: Smart Growth Principles and Community-Centered Schools

Integrating smart growth principles into the educational facility planning process will assist school districts and communities in delivering a first-rate education *and* improving the neighborhood. The results of the collaborative planning process are community-centered schools that offer many benefits similar to those of smart growth: better living and working environments, an enhanced sense of pride in the community, and a human scale for facilities and programs that serve the citizens of large cities. Just as smart growth development looks different in each community, each neighborhood school is unique because it serves specific academic programs and communities. Community-centered schools may be new facilities, renovated or retrofitted historic buildings, or buildings adapted to accommodate educational functions. Public and private organizations may share a community-centered school facility, and it may be accessible throughout the year to residents for various purposes during the day, evenings and weekends. Community-centered schools that are a result of a collaborative smart growth planning process share at least one common physical characteristic: all are located in the towns and neighborhoods they serve.

### Educational Benefits

Through long-term and careful planning with the community that includes students, teachers, administrators, and members of all community constituencies, high-quality, community-centered educational environments

- Promote a sense of safety and security
- Build connections between members of the school and the community
- Instill a sense of pride
- Engage students in learning
- Encourage strong parental involvement
- Foster environmental stewardship.

Each community-centered school may look different and function differently, but they all hold the following six traits.

*Promote a sense of safety and security:* Community-centered schools can reduce student isolation and alienation that often breed discipline problems and violence. Students in small schools have a stronger sense of identity and belonging, of being connected to a community (Cotton 2001). This sense of belonging manifests itself in increased participation in extracurricular activities, strengthening students' connections to each other and to the school. Simply stated, in a small group, each individual feels that he or she matters more than in a large group. Thus the community-centered school fosters self-worth, improves behavior, and increases students' ability to learn (Cunningham 2002).

### A Note about "Small Schools"

Community-centered schools are often smaller than schools built outside of town. In part, their size may be constrained by the limits of space available in an existing community. More important, regardless of the number of students enrolled, all community-centered schools create a "small school" atmosphere.

Research demonstrates that smaller learning environments, like community-centered schools, provide high-quality education. Just as smart growth differs from community to community, the definition of "small" varies from school district to school district. The school's population and enrollment must be defined so that the facility serves the students and the neighborhood in which it is located. As CEFPI notes, "The reality is that the size of the school is not as critical as the delivery systems used in meeting the educational needs of students. . . . In all cases, planners must decide what kind of program will meet the needs of all students. . . . One size does not fit all. The debate over school size should center on addressing the identified educational program in the most effective manner" (CEFPI 2004: 2.6).

"Smaller schools create intimate learning environments where each learner is well known and can be guided and coached individually by teachers" (Cunningham Group 2002). Many studies show that students in small schools improve their grades, test scores, attendance, and graduation rates (Blank 2003, 19-20). Moreover, small schools reduce the effect of poverty on achievement. In fact, according to a recent U.S. Department of Education study, "a higher percentage of students, across all socioeconomic levels, are successful when they are part of smaller, more intimate learning communities" (Irmsher 1997).

Small schools encourage teachers to become more involved in their students' success. Staff members find themselves playing multiple roles, more fully participating in decision-making, and working together to integrate the curriculum across disciplines and grade levels. Their increased participation gives them greater satisfaction in their work, reduces staff turnover, and offers a greater chance for a strong connection between the learner and teacher (Blank 2003, 19).

*Build connections between members of the school and the community:* Community-centered schools foster increased involvement in the school by all members of the community, including parents. This has been proven to play a role in students' success (Blank 2002, 27-28). Increased community participation may be due in part to the ease with which parents and other visitors can get to the school and to the welcoming feeling of a neighborhood school, in contrast to large, often intimidating facilities located outside of the center of the community.

"A true community partnership recognizes schools as an integral part of the town, city, and state, and it involves all members of the community who have a vested interest in the schools. Whether financial, political, social, or educational, these interests should be recognized and addressed" (CEFPI 2004, 3-2).

Such a school acts both as an educational facility and as a community center. Members of the business community might serve as guest lecturers; senior citizens might come in for meals, recreational opportunities or to assist with instruction; neighbors might use the facility for evening or weekend classes or recreation. Schools may also organize volunteer programs for students to help adults who live in the community.

*Instill a sense of pride:* Community-centered schools can reinforce a "sense of place" or distinctive neighborhood character, because they blend into the fabric of the community. In contrast, schools isolated on vast tracts of land, separated from communities they serve often have no architectural context on which to draw. By reflecting a community's unique identity and culture in its design and activities, neighborhood schools can instill pride and ownership, key ingredients to successful learning environments. The new high school in Foresthill, California, for example, reflects its site's heritage as a former timber mill property by blending traditional timber-mill elements with the high-tech look that students wanted and by working with a nearby forestry education center.

The convenience of getting to and from a community-centered school often increases student participation in school-related activities. At a neighborhood school, students are more likely to walk or bike between home and school, instead of having to rely on a school bus or private ride that can limit their freedom to participate in after-school activities. Students also develop independence and responsibility in getting to and from school and community activities on their own, instead of being chauffeured by their parents and guardians.

*Engage students in learning:* Strong connections between local businesses and a community-based school allow students to apply what they are learning at nearby businesses, offices, cultural venues, and libraries. For instance, Moore Square Museums Magnet Middle School in Raleigh, North Carolina, collaborates with nearby museums and arts facilities to give students the opportunity for hands-on learning (for more details, see the case studies). Likewise, students in California's North Hollywood High School Animal Studies/Biological Sciences Zoo Magnet Center go behind the scenes at the Los Angeles Zoo to work with zoo research staff on unique, exciting science projects.

*Encourage strong parental involvement:* As students participate more in the school, so do their parents. Recent research has shown that when parents are involved in school activities, their children do better and stay in school longer. In fact, a critical mass of parental involvement improves the performance of all students, not just those with more involved parents (Blank 2003). Clearly, the connection between parents, students, and the school is an important influence on student achievement. Community-centered schools support and encourage these connections.

"Community partnerships often produce more systemic recommendations, incorporating a broad range of the community's physical, cultural, social, economic, organizational and educational assets" (CEFPI 2004, 3-3).

*Foster environmental stewardship:* Community-centered schools are themselves excellent teaching tools to instruct children on preserving and protecting the natural environment and to instill in them a sense of environmental stewardship. Teachers, for instance, can use the school's compact site to talk about land use and development; a renovated or reused building provides lessons on resource conservation. Many schools that install energy-efficient heating, cooling, or lighting systems leave the mechanical workings exposed to be used as educational and

instructional tools. For example, the Neptune Community School, in Neptune, New Jersey is working with the Liberty Science Center to develop a rooftop green space that will serve as a living classroom. The school also will install transparent floors so that students can see the geothermal heating and cooling systems and other energy-conserving components and learn, from the example of their building, how energy consumption affects the environment.

"Revitalizing a neighborhood school may stimulate local businesses and residents to make improvements to their properties. This new investment can raise property tax assessments, broaden the tax base, and ultimately enhance tax revenues."

Yale Stenzler, Ed.D.  
Former Executive Director  
School Construction Program, Maryland

### Community Benefits

Quality of education is *always* the primary consideration when investing in school facilities. Schools that are centered in the community enhance their educational programs and improve the overall quality of education. However, they also benefit the community as a whole by

- Promoting economic development
- Strengthening neighborhoods
- Improving human and environmental health.

### Economic Development

Major employers with considerable purchasing power, schools significantly influence a community's economic well-being. The economic consequences of a school's location are often underestimated or ignored, yet they affect not only students and teachers but the local business community as well. A study by Charles H. Sederberg of the University of Minnesota found that in six rural Minnesota counties, the school district payroll made up, on average, 4 to 9 percent of the county's total payroll. District expenditures comprised 1 to 3 percent of a county's total retail sales, and the take-home pay of school employees accounted for five to ten percent of total retail sales (Lawrence 2002, 15). Other studies show that property values can fall when nearby schools are closed (Lyson 2002; McClelland 2004). When the high school in Lund, Nevada, closed, the town's retail sales dropped 8 percent (Lawrence 2002, 16).

Meanwhile, new construction in outlying regions may create unexpected negative consequences. A school built outside of town may limit places for parents or teachers to shop as they travel to and from the school and provide few opportunities for students to work part-time near the school. In rural areas, building schools near farms can render agricultural land unusable, because of state laws regulating pesticide use near schools and buffer zones between schools and farms (Fried 2004).

### Travel and Environmental Implications of School Siting

This U.S. EPA study was the first to empirically examine the relationship between school location, the infrastructure and environment around schools, transportation choices for trips to school, and impacts of those choices on air pollution. It found that:

- School proximity matters. Students with shorter walk and bike times to and from school are more likely to walk or bike.
- The built environment influences travel choices. Students traveling through neighborhoods with sidewalks and bike lanes are more likely to bike or walk.
- School location has an impact on air emissions. Centrally located schools that can easily be reached by walking and biking reduce air pollution. (EPA 2003)

[http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/pdf/school\\_travel.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/pdf/school_travel.pdf)

### Strong Neighborhoods

Community-centered schools help create strong neighborhoods whose residents know one another. When the school is an integral part of the community, it becomes an icon of the community as well as a gathering place for residents of all ages. Residents and students are likely to use a community-centered school for many activities before, during, and after school hours throughout the calendar year. Community schools create a venue for neighbors to

build relationships, encouraging them to invest time, money, and effort in building a cohesive neighborhood. In rural communities and small towns, the community school may be the only civic gathering place, and its loss can be devastating; a survey of small towns in North Dakota that had lost schools showed that residents participated

less in local organizations and activities following the schools' closure. Residents also rated their quality of life significantly lower than did their counterparts in communities that did not lose their schools (Lawrence 2002, 17).

Citizens are more likely to participate actively in the daily life of small neighborhood schools than they are in schools located far from where they live (Cotton 1996, 17). This participation gives them greater influence regarding academic curriculum, educational standards, budgets, teacher qualifications, and the daily operations of the school—factors that contribute to an economically and socially vibrant place in which to live, work, and play.

School boards have long been an important vehicle for involving residents in community governance. But the number of people serving on school boards fell from one million in 1930 to less than 200,000 today as the number of school districts declined. At the same time, U.S. population doubled. This loss of opportunities to serve on school boards may be contributing to the general disengagement of Americans from civic life (Lawrence 2002, 17).

### *Healthy Communities*

Integrating educational facility planning with smart growth planning will create community-centered schools and provide health benefits for residents, who can use

school facilities for recreation and exercise. It also helps to improve the environment. Locating schools close to where people live can reduce the number and length of automobile trips, reducing auto emissions and thus air pollution. An EPA study of two high schools in Gainesville, Florida, suggested that neighborhood schools could generate 13 percent more walking or biking trips and 15 percent fewer auto emissions than schools built outside a community. (EPA 2004)

## **Walking to School: A Quick Guide**

### **International Walk to School Day**

<http://www.iwalktoschool.org/>

A one-day event that occurs around the world every October. Children, parents, teachers, and community leaders walk to school together to promote physical activity and making streets more friendly for walking and bicycling.

### **Walk to School Programs**

<http://www.walktoschool-usa.org/>

Programs that extend Walk to School Day events into more sustained programs to encourage safe walking and bicycling to school. They rely on neighborhood, school, transportation, public works, health, safety, and environmental partners to accomplish specific goals. They occur at the neighborhood, school, county, or state level.

### **SAFE KIDS Walk This Way**

<http://www.safekids.org>

A year-round pedestrian safety program conducted by the National SAFE KIDS Campaign with support from Federal Express and 3M. Local SAFE KIDS coalitions launch the programs by participating in International Walk to School Day. SAFE KIDS coalitions work with parents, educators and community leaders to teach pedestrian safety to children, enforce speed limits and other traffic regulations, and improve school environments through research, engineering, and traffic calming.

### **Walking School Bus**

<http://www.walkingschoolbus.org>

A small group of students who are accompanied by one or more adults on their walks to and from school.

### **KidsWalk-to-School**

<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/index.htm>

A walk-to-school program to guide community members and local and state health officials on how to implement walking school buses and other walk-to-school programs.

### **Safe Routes to School**

<http://www.saferoutestoschool.org>

A sustained walk-to-school program that uses a comprehensive approach to make school routes safer for children to walk and bicycle. The programs often use policies and dedicated transportation funding to create permanent change and normalize walking.

### **Safe Routes to School Legislation**

<http://www.walktoschool-usa.org/funding/index.cfm>

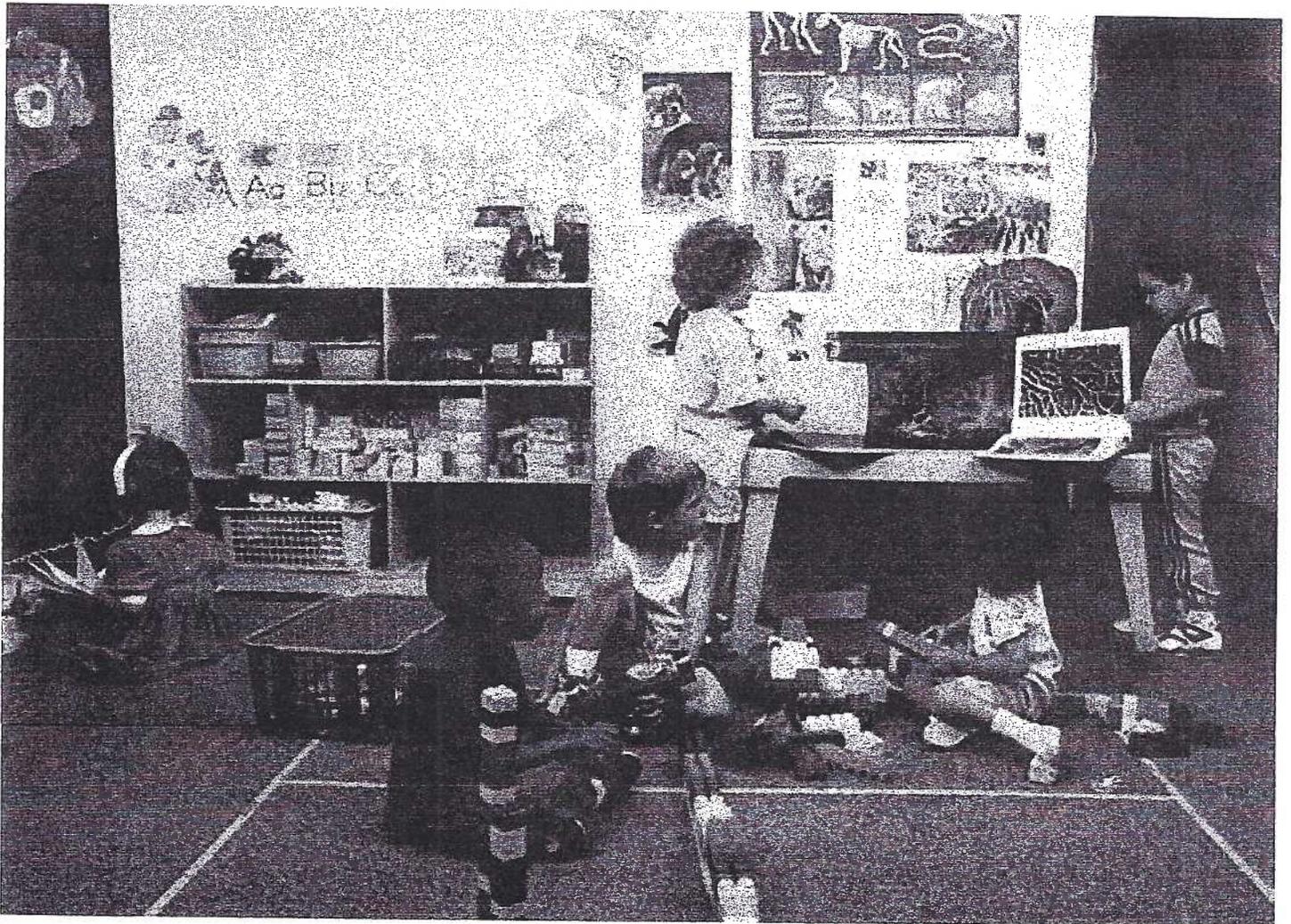
Legislation that dedicates funding to create safe walking and bicycling routes to school. The model is California's law that directs significant transportation funding to local Safe Routes to School programs.

Reprinted from the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center of the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center for the Partnership for a Walkable America.

<http://www.walktoschool-usa.org/downloads/WTSDbooklet.cfm>

Walking or biking to school gives students an opportunity for everyday physical activity. Fifteen percent of children aged 6 to 19 are overweight, triple the rate of just twenty years ago, according to the 1999-2000 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. Another 15 percent are on the verge of becoming overweight. The soaring obesity rate has brought with it startling rises in the incidence of childhood diabetes (McConaughy 2003), asthma, and even high blood pressure (Stein 2004). Although many factors are to blame for the obesity epidemic, one element is a lack of physical activity. The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey for 2001 found that on at least five days in the previous week nearly a third of the students surveyed had not engaged in even moderate physical activity. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that only a quarter of American children regularly walked or biked to school in 1999 (U.S. CDC 2002). Physical activity recommendations for children suggest a variety of activities each day—some intense, some less so; some informal, some structured. Walking or bicycling to and from school is an ideal way to incorporate exercise into a child's daily routine at no extra cost. However, proximity to a school, though necessary, may not suffice to spur this activity. That's why many jurisdictions have begun "Safe Routes to School" programs that ensure children can walk safely to and from school.

Locating schools in neighborhoods, reusing infrastructure, and renovating buildings conserve energy and resources. Integrating schools into existing neighborhoods, instead of building them on undeveloped land on the fringe of the community, also preserves the natural environment, including farmland, fields, and wildlife habitat. By reusing buildings, roads, parking lots, and other infrastructure, communities can avoid building more impervious paved surfaces, which in turn reduces contaminated water runoff into nearby lakes, rivers, and streams. Rather than draining the natural and human resources of their communities, neighborhood schools promoted by smart growth preserve and nourish them (Lawrence 2002, 15).



September 16, 2019

Dear District 13 Board of Education Members,

My name is Alyson Ulstad and I am writing to express my family's support of a K-5 elementary school configuration as opposed to the currently proposed single-track program.

Our family just recently moved to Durham in January 2019. It is my understanding that the community was surveyed last fall on whether they wanted a single-track program or a 2-elementary school configuration. Since we did not have an opportunity to vote last year, I felt it necessary to express my husband and my opinion on the outcome.

My husband, Ryan Ulstad, and I are in support of two K-5 elementary schools for the following main reasons:

- Stronger Families - K-5 schools would foster stronger, more unified families and thus stronger, more unified communities. Learning starts in the home. Students learn first from their parents, then from their siblings. Older siblings take on leadership roles and gain confidence by modeling good behavior for their younger family members. Younger siblings feel more comfortable and at-ease knowing they have someone else in school with them. Without the K-5 school, those larger families at one point or another may be spread between the 4 schools and we are missing out on the opportunity for children to develop these beneficial skills and positive relationships between age groups. Additionally, it will be very challenging to manage schedules, attend PTO meetings, family time, etc. Families will likely feel they're unable to dedicate any quality time and money to any one school.
- Close Friends – Combining the schools would now mean more students and more classrooms per grade, therefore making it very difficult for close friendships to develop. One student can have a completely new set of classmates every year for his/her entire elementary career.
- Fewer Transitions – As Carolyn Janis stated in a previous letter to the Board, “Our youngest students cannot and should not be going through that much change in their earlier educational experiences... From a developmental standpoint, this is a time of industry and a sense that they belong... I work in a district that has taken (the single-school track) and I can honestly tell you the rates of childhood anxiety and outplacements have only increased during such changes. They have brought in two separate community organizations and school based health centers in an attempt to supporting the students and their families... Children should be in their schools longer than a mere two years to feel connected, wanted and heard.”

- Fewer Buses and Shorter Routes – 2 K-5 Elementary schools would allow for siblings and neighbors to ride the bus together, again reinforcing the sense of community as well as shorter routes for those who are currently travelling across town.

Personally, we moved from Middletown to Durham for good schools, close families and close friends. We have a 6-year-old daughter, currently in 1<sup>st</sup> grade at John Lyman, a 4-year-old son at Middlefield Children's Center and a one-year-old daughter. We used to live very close to the Middlefield border and regularly attended Middlefield and Durham libraries, visited Lyman Orchards, golfed on the local courses and were members of the St. Colman parish, thus already immersed in the community and developed relationships with our neighbors before the move. I note this because my oldest daughter, Ainsley, is a smart, quiet and shy young lady who is very sensitive to change. Her introduction to kindergarten for the 2018-2019 school year was quite difficult for her. She cried at departure for the first few days of school and so, naturally, we were both very concerned about the move to Durham and her transition. However, she adjusted much easier to John Lyman primarily because of a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader she already knew who graciously took her under their wing. Had she been entering a K-2 school, this would not have been possible.

It takes a village and support of close families and friends to built up the next generation. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Alyson & Ryan Ulstad

Good evening and a happy New Year to you and your families:

I am pleading with the Board to please gravely consider the impacts of all the transitions that Option A is offering. Our youngest students cannot and should not be going through that much change in their earlier educational experiences. From a developmental standpoint, this is a time of industry and a sense that they belong. It's a task of childhood.

“During this stage, often called the Latency, we are capable of learning, creating and accomplishing numerous new skills and knowledge, thus developing a sense of industry. This is also a very social stage of development and if we experience unresolved feelings of inadequacy and inferiority among our peers, we can have serious problems in terms of competence and self-esteem.

As the world expands a bit, our most significant relationship is with the school and neighborhood. Parents are no longer the complete authorities they once were, although they are still important.” <https://www.learning-theories.com/eriksons-stages-of-development.html>

I work in a district that has taken Track A and I can honestly tell you the rates of childhood Anxiety and outplacements have only increased during such changes. They have brought in two separate community organizations and school based health centers in an attempt to supporting the students and their families.

Children should be in their schools longer than a mere two years to feel connected, wanted and heard.

Why did we (as a Nation and as a town) adopt neighborhood schools? Why are they important? Because they keep kids and their families connected to a community.

How many of you who had siblings had teachers ask you about your older siblings, or knew about your advances in sports because they followed your career or simply because they kept tabs on you because you mattered to them? When we shorten a child's exposure to the same community and move them along to another school, we rob the student and the professional of the longevity of the relationship and tell them that they “only matter for 180 days of the year.”

We also create a potential issue with different administrative visions that simply are inconsistent across the schools and leave kids feeling confused and uncertain of the rules and expectations.

We further rob them of appropriate modeling and learning opportunities from our older students when we separate our schools.

We limit our resources rather than allowing support services to remain within a building as opposed to stretching them across the district.

I am asking you to talk to your kindergarten teachers in the District and ask them how many of their former students come back and give them hugs in the morning and tell them about their days. Why do they do that? They do that because those relationships matter. They go back to where they felt loved and connected and successful.

I am requesting information on how the Board has studied other Districts that have shifted to this model. There is information on the State Education websites that can also show the trends of outplacement and identification for Special Education and SRBI services. Please take a strong look at the patterns and trends of Districts that have shifted to this model.

I will also add that on a personal note I worked at an outplacement educational setting for 13 years. I know the struggles of the students. I know that they feel like they failed at school and that no one wanted them at school. I can also share that my primary focus now is prevention. Prevention of children needing to be outplaced. It is my belief that Option A would increase outplacements as the behavioral experiences may be misread, mislabeled and misdiagnosed by the educational teams. Anxiety is real. School-based anxiety and school avoidance is very real. If you go with Option A, please tell me what are the steps that the District has in place for truancy related issues and concerns. With recent changes in FWSNs, many families feel underserved when children refuse to go to school. They feel helpless. Please share how the district will address the looming increase in mental health concerns that, in my opinion, will be exasperated by the earlier onset of concerns.

My family moved to Middlefield in 2013 and the biggest draw besides overall safety was the education offered by Region 13. And most specifically, the HOT program. I am hoping that if I am reading this correctly, that this will be offered to all students, that assemblies and grade looping will continue and that the STEAM program will remain available.

Lastly, in none of these options is the staff mentioned and I can't not advocate for the people who are shaping the lives of the students that I very much care for. Where will the staff at Lyman end up? How many forced retirements are going to be asked of the staff? How many staff members will feel alienated by the decision to closing the school? How will Region 13 continue to keep amazing talent in District if we are changing their support system?

John Lyman is a gift to our residents and it is because of the teachers. It is because of their efforts. It is because of their mission to capturing the student beyond the common core demands. I care very much for the people that are the professionals in that building. And I cannot help but be afraid of how these decisions will impact their lives. Ms. Holland, for example, was my gym teacher when she was in Guilford at the Melissa Jones Elementary School. And I can't tell you if I ever told her that she was one of my favorites as a 9-year old, as

I can't remember. But I can tell her now. I can thank her now because she is working with my son and caring for his needs beyond the classroom. She's given him a place where he felt like he belonged and was wanted. I can go on and on about each individual but it will be mundane as it's the same message for each staff person. Please remember them as you are considering your decisions.

We recently lost a teacher in Portland and I can tell you it was one of the hardest days I've had as a professional to be a member of the team to have to tell them that someone who worked besides them daily for 18 had passed away. And do you know what they told me? What the staff said, that they worried for each other? Yes they did. That they were looking out for each other? Of course they would. But something else. I had a professional who shared that she felt that because the schools were so divided in their approaches, philosophies and sense of connectedness was gone because of the current infrastructure of the buildings DIVIDED them and made them at odds. Now I can't say that this would necessarily happen in Region 13 but I was shocked at this person's perspective on how she viewed staff dynamics.

I have three boys, 6,5, and a 3 1/2 year old. I am your prime consumer of educational goods as what you will unroll in these next few weeks will outline their ENTIRE educational experiences. I hope that Region 13 will strongly use its voice to rejecting Option A as it requires too many transitions for inexperienced, nervous and uncertain learners.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Janis, LCSW, School Social Worker. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

“Empowering families to living their best lives possible.”

Erin Gratton has a child in Frist grade and will eventually have another child attending this school system and FEELS strongly to keep BOTH schools!  
As it is my daughter bus right is LONG enough!!!!

On Thursday, September 19, 2019, 10:37:38 AM EDT, <[REDACTED]> wrote:

Quick reminder to all families ~ important members of the Durham and Middlefield communities! We need your voices, please. The BOE has stated that they believe only a few of us want the K-5 schools in each town.

\* Please, if you feel strongly, send me your statements today that we can print out and read out loud at the meeting.

\* Our desires have to be on the record to count.

\* Even a single sentence with your name stating that you want two K-5 schools for each town, is all we need.

\* Please attend tonight if able and speak K-5 neighborhood schools for Middlefield and Durham! Even if just for a little while.

\* If you're going to be attending but don't feel comfortable speaking, email me or bring the statement and we can read it out loud for you.

We're all so busy and this is HARD, I know it. But if we stand together it'll be easier and worth the time and effort for our kids and communities!

Thank you, thank you for your anticipated support!  
~Missy DiPietro

Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 18, 2019, at 12:10 AM, Miss D <[REDACTED]> wrote:

Hello Middlefield & Durham Families!

Just a few reminders to any families wanting a K-5 elementary school configuration for both Durham and Middlefield (rather than the proposed Pk-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12 plan):

- There will be a Utilization Meeting this Thursday at CRHS Library at 6:00PM.
  - The Regional District 13 Board of Education Utilization Committee will meet in regular session on Thursday, September 19, 2019 at 6:00 p.m. in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School. Agenda: 1. Pledge of Allegiance 2. Public Comment 3. Approval of Agenda 4. Approval of Minutes – August 14, 2019 5. **Plan of Regionalization Amendment 6. Brewster/Memorial Alteration Project 7. Public Comment 8. Adjournment**
- We've been blessed with a second chance to make our case for the K-5 configuration (the bond council has put a halt to the referendum that was to take place in November - this is postponed until 2020 until our two towns make a decision regarding the legal document that was uncovered dating back to 1967 -stating that our children were to remain in their own communities until they reached high school)
- **Please make every effort to attend.** Otherwise the Board will move forward with the PK-2 plan.
  - The Board has stated that the PK-2 is the preferred configuration for our towns (after an invalid survey taken earlier this year in which those participating in the survey could vote more than once).
  - **Our voices need to be seen and heard in order to make a change in the direction our towns are headed.**
  - And a proper referendum should be carried out to officially determine the preferred building configurations for our towns.
  - Is there a plan in place to support the need for a playground at Memorial?
- *If you're unable to attend*, but are in support of the K-5 configuration - please send me a brief email with your plea for the K-5 and we will print and bring the emails to the meeting to show your support.
- **Please forward** this email to any friends/family who you think can attend the meeting in support of the K-5 configuration, or who might want to send me an email with their support plea.
- **Please post** the meeting reminder on Facebook/other social media platform to rally friends/family to attend Thursday's Utilization meeting.
- **Please rally together** and make our voices heard on **Thursday!** Help us to further enrich each of our communities by pressing the Board to strongly consider an elementary school in each town. *Research shows that most regionalized towns in CT have a K-4 or K-5 configuration in each town.*

9/19/2019

Gmail - Important Utilization Meeting - Thursday, Sept. 19th, 6:00 PM CRHS - K-5 configuration for DM

- Finally, it is with a heavy heart that I must admit that we've had two deaths in the family this week. I will not be able to attend Thursday's meeting due to the funeral and wake that I must attend instead in Prospect and Stamford. Carolyn Janis has been so kind to offer to bring and read my emails during the meeting, as well as copies of the town documents showing the original regionalization plan between the two towns. I hope you'll all attend too.

[Quoted text hidden]

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Miss D <[REDACTED]>  
To: Erin Canning <[REDACTED]>

Thu, Sep 19, 2019 at 12:42 PM

Thank you sweetie!!  
xoxoxo

[Quoted text hidden]

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Miss D <[REDACTED]>  
To: Carolyn Janis <[REDACTED]>

Thu, Sep 19, 2019 at 12:44 PM

Hi Carolyn-  
Here's one email to read at the meeting from Erin Gratton. She lives in Middlefield.

[Quoted text hidden]

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Cindy Saraceno <[REDACTED]>  
To: [REDACTED]

Thu, Sep 19, 2019 at 1:22 PM

Hi Missy.

I am in favor of K-5 schools in each town.  
(Sorry I cant make it!). And thank you so much for doing this!!!!

Cindy Saraceno

Sent from my iPhone  
[Quoted text hidden]

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[REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>  
To: [REDACTED]

Thu, Sep 19, 2019 at 2:31 PM

Here's another from Cindy Saraceno, Middlefield parent if 3.

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Cindy Saraceno <[REDACTED]>  
**Date:** September 19, 2019 at 1:22:49 PM EDT  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Re: Important Utilization Meeting - Thursday, Sept. 19th, 6:00 PM CRHS - K-5 configuration for DM

From: Jenna Driscoll [REDACTED]  
Subject: Re: Please read this for me!!! Thanks . Re: Important Utilization Meeting - Thursday, Sept. 19th, 6:00 PM CRHS - K-5 configuration for DM  
Date: Sep 19, 2019 at 2:35:17 PM  
To: <[REDACTED]>

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Thanks for your efforts!  
:) JD

Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone

On Thursday, September 19, 2019, 1:23 PM, [REDACTED] wrote:

Jenna! This is a wonderful letter! Thank you!  
We'll make certain it's read.



Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 19, 2019, at 12:57 PM, Jenna Driscoll <[REDACTED]> wrote:

Dear Dr. Veronesi and Board of Education Members,

I am so sorry that my schedule does not allow me to attend the meeting tonight, however I am pleased that this statement is being read on my behalf.

As a parent of 4 children (2 who remain in the system, and 2 who have moved on to private high school), I strongly support the idea of 2 K-5 elementary schools. The main reason for my strong feeling regarding the topic is my belief that **limiting transitions** between schools improves performance, decreases children's anxiety, allows for better behavioral control measures because staff truly know the children, and encourages greater family participation in school-related activities. Spending more time in a school allows families to truly become "vested" in the community and culture of that particular environment. Having 3 grades at Strong would have a similar positive effect there.

Thank you for listening.

Jenna Driscoll, Durham



Miss D &lt;[REDACTED]&gt;

## Equality for Middlefield - K-5 Neighborhood School Appeal

4 messages

Miss D &lt;[REDACTED]&gt;

Tue, Sep 10, 2019 at 4:25 PM

To: Robert Yamartino <ryamartino@rsd13.org>, R Andrew Taylor <ataylor@rsd13.org>, jroraback@rsd13.org, lpetrella@rsd13.org, vfriedrich@rsd13.org, Maura Caramanello <mcaramanello@rsd13.org>, mbooth@rsd13.org, cgeraci@rsd13.org, nhicks@rsd13.org, Bob Moore <rmoore@rsd13.org>  
Cc: Kathryn Veronesi <kveronesi@rsd13.org>

Good Afternoon,

I hope you all had a wonderful summer, filled with quality family time and rest. I'm writing today to politely request an appeal for the K-5 neighborhood school option for our building configuration versus the PK-2, 3-5 option. I truly feel that the decision to close our only elementary school in Middlefield, leaving us with a single 3-5 school in town is a detriment to our community. Not only is this bad for the future of Middlefield (who will move or stay here without an elementary school??), but it was never supposed to be this way. I understand that Middlefield and Durham were only supposed to come together to regionalize the high school. Now, if the vote goes through as it's slated to, Durham will have 3 schools and we'll have 1 (a 3-5). I've heard mention that the Board really hasn't heard that enough of us want the K-5 option for the town. So, here I've compiled some of our views supporting the K-5 configuration:

1. An elementary school is a staple for bringing and keeping families in the town. It builds community.
2. A K-5 neighborhood school would provide fewer school transitions, and shorter bus routes.
  - Without the K-5 school - our families with younger children will have to transition through 4 schools
  - Without the K-5 school: Longer bus rides - 3 schools in Durham, a long bus ride for many of us - some of our kids in Middlefield already have some routes that are 45-60 min long each way
3. A K-5 Neighborhood school would foster a stronger, more unified community.
  - Without the K-5 school: those larger families at one point or another may be spread between the 4 schools making it very challenging to manage schedules, attend PTO meetings, etc.
  - Without the K-5 school: Families will likely feel they're unable to dedicate any quality time to any one school.
4. A K-5 Neighborhood school would in many cases allow families to dedicate more time and money rather than being dispersed between 4 different schools
5. A K-5 Neighborhood school would allow more time for learning and comfort for students.
  - Without the K-5 School: children are resilient, however, there will inevitably be less time for learning as the students will need more time to adjust to new routines and expectations per school transition (in addition to the transitions they already face moving to a new classroom each year, new teacher).
6. Memorial lacks a sufficient playground for grades 4-6 now. Families are only there for 2-3 years. They're not as invested in the school and no fundraising has been done to raise money for sufficient play equipment. I brought the question up at one PTO meeting last year, as my daughter (a 5th grader last year, and not a soccer player) consistently complained that there was nothing for them to do at recess time to expend their energy - behavior becomes an issue because there's nothing else for the kids to do if they do not have interest in playing soccer.
  - The playground literally has 1 swing set (just swings), and 1 set of monkey bars.
  - The current plan has grades 3-5 there in a couple years.
  - In the Spring of 2019, I was informed that there is no budget in the current building plan to supply Memorial with an appropriate playground for the children.
  - If this is still true, we'll need to fund raise. But we'll need a real dedicated group of parents to help. A K-5 school plan would be a real motivator to do right by the children.

It takes a village to care for our children and to do what's right for them. Thank you in advance for your consideration of our plea: **Equity for Middlefield: K-5 Neighborhood School**

With much gratitude,  
Missy DiPietro  
(parent of 3 children in district: 6th, 3rd & K)  
[REDACTED]

**Robert Moore** <rmoore@rsd13.org>  
To: Miss D <[REDACTED]>  
Cc: Kathy Veronesi <kveronesi@rsd13.org>

Thu, Sep 12, 2019 at 9:19 AM

Missy

Thank you for your email and expressing your support for a K-5 school in Middlefield.

The Board of Education has evaluated many options including two k-5 schools before arriving at the current proposal. This configuration of a PK-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12 was also supported by a district-wide survey as most favored.

While not in the current proposal the Board is also discussing options to enhance the playground facilities at Memorial School.

As you may know the referendum on the bonding of the improvements to Brewster and Memorial has been delayed on the recommendation of Bond Counsel to amend a certain provision of the 1967 regionalization plan.

Sincerely  
Bob Moore

Sent from my iPhone  
[Quoted text hidden]

[REDACTED]  
To: Cheryl Pizzo <[REDACTED]>

Fri, Sep 13, 2019 at 1:28 PM

From Bob Moore

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

[Quoted text hidden]

**Miss D** <[REDACTED]>  
To: Robert Moore <rmoore@rsd13.org>

Tue, Sep 17, 2019 at 2:50 PM

Cc: Kathy Veronesi <kveronesi@rsd13.org>, Robert Yamartino <ryamartino@rsd13.org>, R Andrew Taylor <ataylor@rsd13.org>, jroraback@rsd13.org, lpetrella@rsd13.org, vfriedrich@rsd13.org, Maura Caramanello <mcaramanello@rsd13.org>, mbooth@rsd13.org, cgeraci@rsd13.org, nhicks@rsd13.org  
Bcc: ICE Joe DiPietro <[REDACTED]>, Carolyn Janis <[REDACTED]>, Cheryl Pizzo <[REDACTED]>, Elaine Diaz <[REDACTED]>, Alyson Ulstad <[REDACTED]>, Jennifer Stula <[REDACTED]>, Maygan Morello <[REDACTED]>, Heather Castiglia <[REDACTED]>, Tina McGoldrick <[REDACTED]>, Janina Eddinger <[REDACTED]>, Christine Gerardi <[REDACTED]>, Ashley McDowell <[REDACTED]>, Elizabeth Waterman <[REDACTED]>, Helen Putnam <[REDACTED]>, "Saraceno, Cindy" <[REDACTED]>, Colby Fraschilla <[REDACTED]>, Jenna Driscoll <[REDACTED]>

Dear Mr. Moore,  
Thank you so very much for your response. I do recall the survey, although, it was discovered that voters could vote more than once on the survey provided, which would appear to be an invalid method of polling the community. I strongly urge the K-5 option be voted upon in an official referendum format involving both communities, Durham and Middlefield. Otherwise, I'd believe the Board is doing both communities a great disservice. Many families in both Durham and Middlefield feel strongly that each town should have their own K-5 elementary school to further enrich their communities.

And, please tell me, where will the discussion take place regarding the Memorial playground facilities? Will that be at the Utilization meeting taking place this Thursday at 6PM at CRHS?



Miss D &lt;[REDACTED]&gt;

## Important Utilization Meeting - Thursday, Sept. 19th, 6:00 PM CRHS - K-5 configuration for DM

10 messages

Miss D <[REDACTED]> Wed, Sep 18, 2019 at 12:10 AM  
 To: Carolyn Janis <[REDACTED]>, Cheryl Pizzo <[REDACTED]>, Elaine Diaz <[REDACTED]>, Alyson Ulstad <[REDACTED]>, Jennifer Stula <[REDACTED]>, Maygan Morello <[REDACTED]>, Heather Castiglia <[REDACTED]>, Tina McGoldrick <[REDACTED]>, Janina Eddinger <[REDACTED]>, Christine Gerardi <[REDACTED]>, Ashley McDowell <[REDACTED]>, Elizabeth Waterman <[REDACTED]>, Helen Putnam <[REDACTED]>, "Saraceno, Cindy" <[REDACTED]>, Colby Fraschilla <[REDACTED]>, Jenna Driscoll <[REDACTED]>, Carissa Connell <[REDACTED]>, Nina Healy <[REDACTED]>, John Finn <[REDACTED]>, Melissa Fuggi <[REDACTED]>, Melinda D Lauderdale <[REDACTED]>, John Lauderdale <[REDACTED]>, Jessica Poetzsch <[REDACTED]>, Amy King-Painter <[REDACTED]>, Erin Gratton <[REDACTED]>, Sheryl Slight <[REDACTED]>, Carrie Reny <[REDACTED]>, Felicia Harris Robichaud <[REDACTED]>, Shana <[REDACTED]>, Etleva Babasuli <[REDACTED]>, Robin Calamo <[REDACTED]>, Allan Kristy Crouch <[REDACTED]>, Stacy Allen <[REDACTED]>, Erica DeFrancesco <[REDACTED]>, Marie Greco <[REDACTED]>, Gregg Debowsky <[REDACTED]>, Grace Stern <[REDACTED]>

Bcc: ICE Joe DiPietro <[REDACTED]>

Hello Middlefield & Durham Families!

Just a few reminders to any families wanting a K-5 elementary school configuration for both Durham and Middlefield (rather than the proposed Pk-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12 plan):

- There will be a Utilization Meeting this Thursday at CRHS Library at 6:00PM.
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- We've been blessed with a second chance to make our case for the K-5 configuration (the bond council has put a halt to the referendum that was to take place in November - this is postponed until 2020 until our two towns make a decision regarding the legal document that was uncovered dating back to 1967 -stating that our children were to remain in their own communities until they reached high school)
- **Please make every effort to attend.** Otherwise the Board will move forward with the PK-2 plan.
  - The Board has stated that the PK-2 is the preferred configuration for our towns (after an invalid survey taken earlier this year in which those participating in the survey could vote more than once).
  - **Our voices need to be seen and heard in order to make a change in the direction our towns are headed.**
  - And a proper referendum should be carried out to officially determine the preferred building configurations for our towns.
  - Is there a plan in place to support the need for a playground at Memorial?
- *If you're unable to attend*, but are in support of the K-5 configuration - please send me a brief email with your plea for the K-5 and we will print and bring the emails to the meeting to show your support.
- **Please forward** this email to any friends/family who you think can attend the meeting in support of the K-5 configuration, or who might want to send me an email with their support plea.
- **Please post** the meeting reminder on Facebook/other social media platform to rally friends/family to attend Thursday's Utilization meeting.
- **Please rally together** and make our voices heard on **Thursday!** Help us to further enrich each of our communities by pressing the Board to strongly consider an elementary school in each town. *Research shows that most regionalized towns in CT have a K-4 or K-5 configuration in each town.*
- Finally, it is with a heavy heart that I must admit that we've had two deaths in the family this week. I will not be able to attend Thursday's meeting due to the funeral and wake that I must attend instead in Prospect and Stamford. Carolyn Janis has been so kind to offer to bring and read my emails during the meeting, as well as

copies of the town documents showing the original regionalization plan between the two towns. I hope you'll all attend too.

**It takes a village to care for our children and to do what's right for them. Equity for Middlefield & Durham: K-5 Neighborhood Schools**

With much gratitude,  
Missy DiPietro  
(parent of 3 children in district: 6th, 3rd & K)

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**Miss D** <[redacted]> Wed, Sep 18, 2019 at 12:14 AM  
To: Melissa DiPietro <[redacted]>  
Bcc: Christina Dreyfus Bates <[redacted]>, Christina Collin <[redacted]>, Wendy Marran <[redacted]>

[Quoted text hidden]

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**Christina Dreyfus Bates** <[redacted]> Wed, Sep 18, 2019 at 5:40 AM  
To: Miss D <[redacted]>

I will be there! You're absolutely right!!

[Quoted text hidden]

--  
Christina Bates

[redacted]  
[redacted]

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**Felicia Harris Robichaud** <[redacted]> Wed, Sep 18, 2019 at 7:39 AM  
To: Miss D <[redacted]>

Missy, Do you mind if I post this to the "save the integrated day program" page?

Thanks,  
Felicia Robichaud  
[Quoted text hidden]

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**Middlefield Democrats** <[redacted]> Wed, Sep 18, 2019 at 7:49 AM  
To: Miss D <[redacted]>

Hi Missy,  
Excellent, Very Very nicely done!!!! I think it will be very effective! It is smart to get Durham in on the conversation ,realizing most will also want an elementary school in Durham as well.  
Hopefully someone from Durham will take up the cause, perhaps Allie!  
So sorry to hear of your loss.  
Sincerely,  
Cheryl

On Wed, Sep 18, 2019 at 12:10 AM Miss D <[redacted]> wrote:  
[Quoted text hidden]

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[redacted] <[redacted]> Wed, Sep 18, 2019 at 8:15 AM  
To: Felicia Harris Robichaud <[redacted]>

Dear Mr. Moore,

Thank you so very much for your response. I do recall the survey, although, it was discovered that voters could vote more than once on the survey provided, which would appear to be an invalid method of polling the community. I strongly urge the K-5 option be voted upon in an official referendum format involving both communities, Durham and Middlefield. Otherwise, I'd believe the Board is doing both communities a great disservice. Many families in both Durham and Middlefield feel strongly that each town should have their own K-5 elementary school to further enrich their communities.

And, please tell me, where will the discussion take place regarding the Memorial playground facilities? Will that be at the Utilization meeting taking place this Thursday at 6PM at CRHS?

Thank you!

Kindly,

Melissa DiPietro

Missy

The discussion of playground facilities at Memorial school is not planned for tomorrow's Utilization Committee meeting.

Bob

Jk--