

Middle School Grade Reconfiguration

Community Feedback Session

JANUARY 2018

STATEMENT: As a town, we were promised enhancements 30 years ago and they dissipated. There is not any impact scope on the SALT change.

RESPONSE: State and Local Tax (SALT) has remained a difficult challenge for New Jersey's public schools in terms of the fair funding to adequately support necessary (and required) instruction. Collaboration must continue between the school district, county, state, and federal governments to find funding solutions that support education, but do not burden the local taxpayer.

STATEMENT: Were Beverly and Riverton included in the demographic study?

RESPONSE: Yes. Pages 24 and 25 of the Grade Reconfiguration Feasibility Study Demographic Study provide addition information on enrollments for both Beverly and Riverton.

STATEMENT: How did you estimate percentage of Beverly & Riverton students going to PHS?

RESPONSE: Enrollment projections were calculated using cohort-survival rates based on the last six years of historical enrollment data. Enrollments were computed for each grade from 2018-2019 through 2022-23, a five-year period. Information retrieved from pg. 29 of the Grade Reconfiguration Feasibility Study & Demographic Study.

STATEMENT: What specifically in bringing the 6 Grade to PHS enables PHS to bring 6 special needs students back into district?

RESPONSE: Presently, all available classroom at the Charles Street School are occupied for instructional purposes. The transfer of the 6th Grade from Charles Street School to Palmyra High School creates vacancy of 4 classrooms. This vacancy now allows the district to examine programming opportunities, especially for students who may be placed in Out-of-District locations because necessary programming was previously unavailable in the district. Providing in-district programing to meet specific learning needs in the least restrictive environment is the legal expectation.

STATEMENT: Why are there 17 rooms for 3 grades and 16 rooms for 4 grades?

RESPONSE: Recommendations presented in the Grade Reconfiguration Feasibility Study & Demographic Study are only recommendations and should not be considered as an absolute. District administration will further review specific classroom needs and provide input to the Board of Education.

STATEMENT: Where will 6th through 8th graders go to the bathroom?

RESPONSE: Available facilities will be reviewed by the Board of Education to ensure sufficient resources are made available to students and staff.

STATEMENT: At least 10 minutes each class in high school will be lost (equal to 1 hour & 10 minutes) by requiring teachers to switch classrooms/hook up computers to projectors, etc. How will this be addressed?

RESPONSE: As with all classroom assignments, student schedules, and operations, administration will review and provide recommendations to the Board of Education.

STATEMENT: The Report does not address implications for high school students; does this not matter?

RESPONSE: A number of references are made in the Grade Reconfiguration Feasibility Study & Demographic Study that provide input on the implications for the high school (new science labs, computer labs, movement of classrooms, highly qualified teachers, participation in programs such as music, drama, art, etc.).

STATEMENT: Are we hiring a new music & art teacher to provide services to 6th graders?

RESPONSE: Staffing considerations will be addressed based on the decisions made by the Board of Education. The district must provide content certified teachers for instruction as per applicable NJ code and statute.

STATEMENT: What happens when those special needs children hit 6th grade? Won't they need to come over to the 2nd floor of this building?

RESPONSE: Student learning needs will be supported based on the individual student's IEP and/or 504 Plan in conjunction with the requirements of FAPE (Free and Appropriate Public Education).

STATEMENT: How are you increasing autistic/ special needs students' education without spending the money being saved?

RESPONSE: Costs associated with education, regular or special, are calculated each year based on the identified needs to provide necessary services for students. Allocation of funding used for out-of-district tuition could be potentially redirected for other use, to include salaries, if tuition costs decrease.

STATEMENT: Is the school going to increase special needs education/educators when moving these students?

RESPONSE: Certified teachers with appropriate content endorsement must be utilized for all student instruction. The district will examine student placement and learning needs when assigning and recruiting staff.

STATEMENT: Was external street/ parking availability for additional staffing considered?

RESPONSE: Sufficient parking capacity exists at Palmyra High School.

STATEMENT: What would the student/teacher ratio become? Per classroom?

RESPONSE: Student teacher ratio can only be calculated once a total population count of staff and students becomes available (based on assignments). Based on the 2016 NJ School Performance Report for the Palmyra School District, the current student to teacher ratio at PHS is 9:1, and 10:1 within the district.

STATEMENT: Can there be more defined added value to not only the 6th graders moving to the HS campus, but also, the value-added to K-5th graders?

RESPONSE: The Educational Impact Study addresses opportunity to bolster special education support within Charles Street School as a result of classroom space acquired from the departing 6th Grade students. Additionally, appropriate space can be provided to the Charles Street School music program to provide students with an actual music classroom (presently they use the back portion of the stage).

STATEMENT: For residents not familiar with the limited programming and extra-curricular programs for 6th graders, further explanations need to be given to the community.

RESPONSE: Opportunities exist for middle school sports (basketball, wrestling, track, and soccer), increased participation in the performing and visual arts (advanced options to perform with high school music and drama programs), and other extracurricular programs such as robotics, clubs, honor societies, etc.

STATEMENT: When looking at other suggested alternatives a cost should be estimated to the public on how it will affect the future of the district. *ie. nurse at Delaware Avenue.

RESPONSE: Utilizing the existing services (guidance, nursing, athletic trainer, technology, media center, etc.) within the high school building is the most cost effective solution. Duplicating these services within the Delaware Avenue School building will have a substantial cost impact that is not built in to the budget (additional revenue would be required and most likely sought through increased taxes).

STATEMENT: In the past, this HS housed 1000 students from surrounding communities; now housing 500 should not be a problem.

RESPONSE: The Long Range Facility Plan and current code requirements provide guidance on the availability and usage of district facilities.

STATEMENT: I think the transition is an excellent introduction to enhancing the educational value here; however, I do believe more research is needed in transferring the PK to Delaware Avenue and taking that into consideration.

RESPONSE: The Palmyra Board of Education is researching grade reconfiguration for students in Grades 6-8. The pre-kindergarten program was moved to the Charles Street School several years ago to provide for a more inclusive elementary learning experience. Transitioning the pre-kindergarten students back to the Delaware Avenue School significantly reduces the educational learning environment for these students.

STATEMENT: I want my 5th grader challenged, challenged in comparison to other 6th grade students, labs, band, higher math, etc. The traffic flow is higher in MS/HS due to class dynamics.

RESPONSE: Providing a true middle school experience would include lab sciences, extracurricular activities, athletics, and advanced educational programming.

STATEMENT: Is there gym every day vs. recess?

RESPONSE: Current 7th and 8th Grade students receive Health/PE every day.

STATEMENT: Will there be a hiring of Middle School Administration?

RESPONSE: Dedicating an administrator to be responsible for the middle school program is recommended.

STATEMENT: Great suggestions were brought up about the library and Delaware Avenue School. What has stopped these things from happening so far?

RESPONSE: The Palmyra Board of Education is researching additional options, to include structural additions to the Charles Street School and the Delaware Avenue School. The Board has a fiduciary responsibility to the community to effectively and efficiently manage the operational budget.

STATEMENT: The study is geared to give more space to middle school for the students to flourish & thrive, but in an effort to avoid comingling it sounds that the high school will be more confined.

RESPONSE: Identifying designated areas for middle school and high school students will be necessary to help mitigate the comingling of students. Reasonable models exist within the county and state where students in Grades 6-8 share spaces with students in Grades 9-12.

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STATEMENT: Will crossing guards be available for kids? Will crossing guards be available for 6, 7,8th as they don't always have the same schedule as Charles Street?

RESPONSE: Coordinating schedules with the Palmyra Police Department to afford crossing guard coverage will be looked at if the students have different arrival/dismissal times.

STATEMENT: Preschoolers could still be held at Delaware Avenue!

RESPONSE: Preschool was once held at the Delaware Avenue School. Students were moved to the Charles Street School to provide them with a full elementary school experience while reducing "start of school" anxieties experienced by many students at this age.

STATEMENT: 10 years old is too young to mingle with 17 years old.

RESPONSE: A typical 6th grade student is 11 turning 12 in the school year.

STATEMENT: According to the capacity analysis in the feasibility study, the HS will be over capacity by 74 students, while CSS will be under capacity by 296 students in 4 years—so why move 6th graders to overcrowded conditions?

RESPONSE: Capacity remains a challenge regardless of building. Today, there is overcrowding at the Charles Street School while underutilization occurring at Palmyra High School. It is anticipated that updates to the Long Range Facility Plan (LRFP) along with room reconfiguration will alter the actual seating capacity. Palmyra High School can seat well more than 535 students which would be the anticipated count. The footnote on page 31 of the capacity analysis provides additional clarification.

STATEMENT: Would 6th graders be in after school activities with older kids?

RESPONSE: As part of the current and anticipated growth of the middle school, additional activities would be afforded for students in Grades 6-8. Presently, there are students participating in both middle school and high school activities without issue.

STATEMENT: Does the public/parents get a VOTE on this?

RESPONSE: The Palmyra Board of Education has solicited public input as part of the process for possible grade reconfiguration.

STATEMENT: What about teacher's different certifications?

RESPONSE: The district is obligated to place certified teachers with appropriate educational endorsements in classrooms as per NJ administrative code.

STATEMENT: It seems like the expense to taxpayers, and upheaval to the students would not be worth the purported benefits to the reconfiguration—will you consider scrapping the plan & leaving current status?

RESPONSE: The Palmyra Board of Education is examining all options that will provide for a free and appropriate public education to the students attending district schools.

STATEMENT: Page 8 Division of classrooms: What are the sizes?

RESPONSE: Determination of exact classroom assignments has not been made at this time. However, necessary modifications and/or usage of available instructional spaces within Palmyra High School will be utilized to the benefit of students.

STATEMENT: How does the adjustment of schedules affect contracts?

RESPONSE: Collective Bargaining Agreements between the Palmyra Board of Education and the respective Associations represented within the district are current and in-force. In the

event that grade reconfiguration would impact the current Agreements negotiations between the Palmyra Board of Education and the affected Association may need to be addressed.

STATEMENT: What are the strategies to help 6th graders adjust?

RESPONSE: In all likelihood, a committee of school and community members would be assembled to identify and assist with student transition.

STATEMENT: Concerned about school starting too early

RESPONSE: The start and end time for Charles Street School and Palmyra High School are established by the Board of Education. Any changes to the start and end times would reviewed by district administration prior to a recommendation being made to the Board of Education. The public is always able to comment on agenda items.

STATEMENT: Are we going to have to go through this again in 8-10 years if/when enrollment increases?

RESPONSE: The Palmyra Board of Education is responsible for ensuring that a free and appropriate public education is provided to all eligible residents. That being said, the Board monitors student needs and achievements and makes decisions based on what serves the educational, emotional, and social interests of the students within the parameters of policy, code, and statute.

STATEMENT: What is cost to convert BoE Building to Middle School?

RESPONSE: Although not an exact cost as this is still in preliminary discussion, but a reasonable cost expectation for 6-classroom addition only (not inclusive of other required updates to the current Delaware Avenue School structure) is approximately \$1,800,000.00 (without any state assistance) this could be a minimum additional cost of \$365 annually to the property tax based on the average assessed home price in Palmyra.

STATEMENT: What is benefit to kids to have “paper” establishment of Middle School?

RESPONSE: Obtaining student performance data that is reflective of Grades 9-12 (high school) allows administration and staff to focus necessary resources most effectively. Likewise, obtaining performance data for students in the middle school range (Grades 6-8) will afford administration and staff more specific information pertinent to grade level.

STATEMENT: What is Benefit to kids for putting (money) resources into combined middle school or HS compared additional educational tools?

RESPONSE: Student learning and educational experiences differ significantly between middle and high school aged students. This is evidenced in the NJ Student Learning Standards. Additional resources and information can be found on sites such as: www.sreb.org/publications ; <http://www.amle.org/> ; <http://www.nasbe.org/contact-us/directory/connect-with-other-education-orgs/national-middle-school-association/>

STATEMENT: Has solution been discussed for bathroom problems and the isolating of middle school from HS if combining schools?

RESPONSE: The Palmyra Board of Education is presently reviewing the district's Long Range Facility Plan to evaluate specific options. Additional restrooms do exist within Palmyra High School that have not been used (operationally) for many years. The Board is reviewing plans to possibly restore functionality of these restrooms. Regarding available instructional space, this determination was identified in the Educational Impact Study.

STATEMENT: Once a decision to establish a middle school happens, what is timeframe to complete plan?

RESPONSE: The Palmyra Board of Education continues to explore all options and possibilities involving grade reconfiguration. At the earliest, grade reconfiguration if approved by the Board of Education, would occur in September 2019.