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**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
REGARDING THE SMARTR COMMITTEE
SCHOOL FACILITY PROPOSAL**

The following questions and the responses emerged from two public forums on school facilities, and other questions directed to the Board of Education.

GRADE 5-6 SCHOOL

1. Has the Board of Education made any decisions regarding the SMARTR Committee recommendation to construct grade 5 at the Cheney site?

At its school facilities workshop on February 8, 2014 the Board considers the grade 5-6 school as a viable school building project option providing is coupled with a plan for the elementary schools. The Board has established a timetable and a deadline of April 7, 2014 for completing its recommendation on improving elementary school facilities

The Board of Education did take some previous action in support of the grade 5-6 school and voted:

- a. On April 22, 2013 to recommend to the BOD the completion of the schematic drawings for the school;
- b. On May 13, 2013 to recommend to the BOD that the grade 5-6 school be placed on a fall 2013 referendum;
- c. On June 10, 2013 to approve the educational specifications for the grade 5-6 school.
- d. On June 10 to recommend to the BOD the formation of a building committee and the submittal of a construction grant application with the State.

2. How common is a grade 5-6 schools in Connecticut?

The following school districts have grade 5-6 schools: Avon, Farmington, Portland, Newtown, Shelton, Naugatuck, Winchester, and West Haven.

3. What are the educational and other benefits of a grade 5-6 school in Manchester?

There is no clear evidence that one grade configuration plan is universally better than others. Whatever plan is adopted should depend upon the unique circumstances and needs within a school district. For Manchester the plan offers these benefits

- Better curriculum and instructional articulation with two grades in one school
- Consolidation of instructional resources such as teachers and materials
- Educational equity for minority children
- Allow students to acclimate to the school for two years rather than one year
- Greater opportunity for parent involvement
- Underutilized academic space at Bennet Academy
- Builds a like-new school at the Cheney site for considerably less cost than a new school
- Economize on bus transportation
- Creates immediate space in other elementary schools already at capacity

- Contributes to creating a more racially balanced school district
- Addresses immediate need for classroom space in all elementary schools
- Maximizes state reimbursement
- Creates a desirable campus environment in downtown Manchester
- Promotes an integrated and interdisciplinary approach to teaching by extending the team teaching model to grade 5
- Promotes flexible staffing options like “looping”
- Allows administrators and teachers to have a longer opportunity to be more familiar with and respond to the needs of student
- Improves parent engagement and investment by maintaining a connection to the school for two years.

4. How long will the town maintain this grade configuration?

School buildings are planned typically for twenty years based on enrollment projections. Any change in the future will likely be determined by changes in circumstances within the community such as politics, finances, enrollment shifts, and demographic shifts in population.

5. Will the creation of the grade 5-6 school result in the closing of two schools?

The opening of the grade 5-6 school will create available classroom space in all the elementary schools and provides an opportunity to consider the merits of creating two larger elementary schools. Support for the school will still require the Board of Education to consider its plan for the elementary schools, that is, close one or more schools, or renovate all the elementary schools.

6. Why start with the grade 5-6 school? Why not include other schools in a planned referendum?

Based on defeated referenda in the past, community feedback then suggested that this approach was too significant of expenditure..

7. Since moving grade five out of existing schools creates surplus classroom space, has consideration been given to using available space in the elementary schools for pre-school classrooms?

The SMARTR Committee did consider pre-school classroom space in elementary schools. Any investment now will not receive State reimbursement or funding. However, the SMARTR Committee did propose that any future building design at the elementary school level accommodate opportunities for pre-school classrooms.

8. Will the Cheney building accommodate 500 students? Why is there a need to expand existing space at the Bennet Academy?

The design for the Cheney Building will accommodate general instructional space for grade five hundred students. Some minor modifications will take place within the Bennet building to provide shared space for art and music. The library and gymnasium will also be a shared between both grades. The current Bennet cafeteria, which is currently undersized for its current population, will be expanded into the courtyard of the school to adequately

accommodate student enrollment. The original gymnasium cannot be renovated since it is protected as an historic site.

9. Have the preliminary designs accounted for adequate parking, playground, traffic, and projected enrollment?

Additional parking will be planned for without impacting housing in the area. The used grassy area behind Bennet Academy will accommodate additional parking. The planned open courtyard between the buildings will provide an area for recess. A playground, appropriate for 10-12 year olds could be included in the design . With the closing of a portion of School Street, Vine St will be reopened to connect traffic to Wells Street.

By the 2023-24 school year, the grade 5-6 school will have a projected enrollment of 882 students. Enrollment will peak in the 2021-22 school year at 937 students. Maximum class sizes of 22 students are planned for in the design.

10. Has the planning for this school considered the social and emotional impact of housing grade 5 and 6 students in the same building?

Students will be taught in separate instructional areas for language arts, science, social studies and mathematics. Educators recognize developmental differences between age and grade level. Regardless of grade configuration, administrators and teachers must constantly be aware of the social and emotional needs of students. There are growing trends, particularly in urban areas in Connecticut, to revert back to elementary schools including grades K-8.

11. What impact does moving grade five to the Cheney/Bennet site have on maintaining racial balancing our schools?

The moving grade 5 to the Cheney/Bennet site will not disrupt the current racial balance and will improve the racial balance for the district since all grade five students will be located in one school. The Board of Education must review its attendance and student demographic data every year to maintain a racially balanced school district.

12. How much will the school actually cost the town?

The estimated cost to the town, after State reimbursement, is \$7.2 million?

SCHOOL SIZE and CONSOLIDATING SCHOOLS

1. What is the current enrollment and class size in each of our elementary schools?

School	Enrollment	Average Class Size
Bennet	376	17
Bowers	431	21
Buckley	300	19
Highland Park	268	18
Keeney	338	18
Martin	280	19
Robertson	371	19
Verplanck	370	20
Waddell	346	18
Washington	362	18

2. How common is a school size of 530 students in Connecticut?

Among the 169 school districts and 593 elementary schools in Connecticut, 32% of the schools have enrollments of 500 students or more and 20% of the schools have enrollments of 450-500 students.

3. Are there any benefits of having a school of 530 students?

- Acquire maximum state reimbursement for school construction
- Consolidation of instructional resources such as teachers and materials
- Flexibility in achieving racially balanced schools in high density population areas

4. What if student population increases over time beyond the projected enrollment?

The State's reimbursement formula is predicated on building to a capacity that does not exceed the projected highest enrollment within an eight year time frame. Architects always consider future additions in school design.

5. With the potential for seven teachers per grade level in a school of 530 students, will teachers have the opportunity to collaborate during the school day?

The school design provides for five teachers in each grade level. Collaborative planning time will be provided for each grade level during and after school time.

6. If one or two schools are closed, how will those properties be used? Is there a long range plan or ideas?

Once the Board of Education turns a school over to the town, it will be the Board of Directors that decides if and how the building is repurposed. Some preliminary ideas include relocating the district offices, an additional pre-school center, housing for the elderly, and additional public library. The SMARTER Committee did include \$5 million dollars in its

proposal to renovate a closed school building for some future use.

7. Will the closing of the one or two schools require redistricting? Where will students end up?

Whatever plan is adopted, the district must assure that schools will be racially balanced, which will require redistricting. If one or two schools are closed, students will be relocated to a school that is most contiguous to their residence with the intent to minimize impact on transportation and maintain racially balanced schools.

8. Since the proposed SMARTR plan includes closing two schools, which schools plan to be closed?

The SMARTR committee received from the Board of Education three potential options. The Board is currently investigating other options including the closing of one school. The Board will adhere to its policy and procedure for closing any school before it makes a recommendation to the community.

9. How are schools selected for consolidation or closure? Who is responsible for making the decision to close a school?

School building planners select the areas of town with the highest population density, the location of schools within these neighborhoods, and school sites that have space to expand. The Board also follows its own policy with regard to the process for closing any school (Policy 3270).

10. If two larger schools are built, will these plans require more teachers and administrators?

The larger schools will likely result in a reduction of administrative personnel. Unless student enrollment projections change, no change in the number of teachers is expected.

11. What are the savings, if any, and ongoing operational costs associated with consolidating schools?

TBD

OTHER RELATED QUESTIONS

1. Why wasn't the Nathan Hale School building considered in the planning?

The SMARTR Committee recommended that the building be considered as a possible magnet school providing the State has the funding available to assist the town with its complete renovation. The State has suspended funding for new magnet schools.

2. Why didn't the SMARTR Committee propose renovating like new all their proposed K-4 elementary schools?

The community rejected this proposal in the past because of its high costs. The Committee estimated the cost to the town to renovate like new all the elementary schools to be \$120 million. Whereas, the plan to build two larger schools, close two schools, and renovate the remaining four schools would cost the town \$60 million dollars.

3. How much State reimbursement would the town receive if it renovated-like new all the K-4 elementary schools in comparison to the SMARTR Committee plan?

The SMARTR Committee estimated reimbursement to the town for renovating like new all its proposed K-4 schools to be \$83 million. Under the SMARTR committee's proposed plan, the estimated reimbursement would be nearly \$48 million.

4. Why has the public waited two years before any public input on these school facility plans?

The Board of Directors and the Board of Education charged the SMARTR Committee with very specific responsibilities. The work of this Committee was complicated and required additional studies along the way to help the Committee with its deliberations, complete its recommendations, and come prepared to make its recommendations to both boards.

5. Why is Highland Park School not fully enrolled?

With the opening of Highland Park School in September 2012 and the simultaneous closing of Nathan Hale School, the students from Nathan Hale School were reassigned (redistricted) to Highland Park, Martin, Keeney, and Washington schools. The SMARTR Committee's charge was to propose a plan that would fully enroll students at the Highland Park School.

6. Why has nothing been done about renovating Illing Middle School?

In 2012, the community did approve funding to complete some renovation at the school including the elimination of the portable classrooms and the renovation of space in the building, which will be completed this summer.

7. Why didn't the proposed SMARTR Committee consult with the parents whose children have special education needs?

The Board of Education has the responsibility, under State and federal law, to be certain that any eventual building design must consider and ensure the space requirements for children requiring special education programming is accounted in the planning.

8. Why didn't the SMARTR committee develop schematic designs for the Waddell School?

The Board of Education, after it approved SMARTR Committee's proposal for the grade 5-6 school last April, requested that the SMARTR Committee focus its attention on developing designs for Washington and Robertson schools since these were the schools with the most needed facility improvements.

9. How will the Board of Education know if a school is racially balanced?

The Board contracts with an agency that completes such work. The Board hired the firm of Milone and MacBroom to complete the most recent racial balance studies.

10. How many elementary students walk to school and are not assigned bus transportation.

It is difficult to provide an accurate number since many students participate in after school programs sponsored by MELC or the 21st Century Grant programs. Nevertheless, the administration estimates the following on a average daily basis:

School	"Walkers"
Bowers	244
Buckley	178
Highland Park	165
Keeney	108
Martin	80
Robertson	142
Verplanck	195
Waddell	281
Washington	250