

**GARRETT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
MAJOR PLANNING OPTIONS**
June 18, 2019

SUMMARY OF PLANNING OPTIONS

I. Maintain Current Educational Facilities Configuration

- I.A. Without redistricting
- I.B. With redistricting

II. Change Current Educational Facilities Configuration

- II.A. School Closure/Consolidation
- II.B. Grade band re-configuration

III. Capital Improvements

- III.A. Widespread Improvements: Capital projects for every school in inventory
- III.B. Targeted Improvements: Larger projects to address the most pressing educational and building performance needs
- III.C. Major Projects: A limited number of comprehensive major projects.

I. MAINTAIN CURRENT EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES CONFIGURATION

I.A. Without redistricting

Pro:

- Responds to the wishes of the community as expressed at the Community Listening Sessions, and to the direction established by the Board of Education.
- Preserves capacity against potential future growth, especially in the North.
- Allows time to study direction of enrollment trends.
- Does not preclude reducing inventory of administration buildings (e.g., moving BOE to Dennett Road).

Con:

- Overall under-utilization will continue.
- Disparities in utilization will continue.
- Spreads capital and operational funds across a larger inventory, so fewer projects will be funded and more building deficiencies will persist.

Concerns:

- Decisions about allocation of capital funds must be made (see below).
- Can be combined with a voluntary redistricting program to mitigate enrollment disparities and support educational programs (likely at the high school level).

Implementation process:

- No action needed with State or County.
- Determine needed capital improvements (see III. below):

I.B. With redistricting

Pro:

- Similar to I.A. option above.
- In addition:

- Mitigates disparities in school enrollment and utilization (particularly if redistricting is from South to North), with educational benefits and more efficient use of assets.
- May improve transportation efficiency.
- May assist in more equitable and efficient allocation of educational support resources (speech, vision, OT/PT, etc.) and educational programs (CTE, AP)

Con:

- Redistricting decisions may be contentious.
- May separate siblings.
- May require costly capital improvements to accommodate redistricted students.
- Bus ride times for some students may increase to unacceptable levels.
- Overall under-utilization will continue.
- Spreads capital and operational funds across a larger inventory, so fewer projects will be funded and more building deficiencies will persist.

Concerns:

- Effect on student ride times not known until detailed analysis is undertaken.
- Capital projects likely needed at some receiving schools to accommodate increased number of students (in addition to regular projects).

Implementation process:

- Identify likely schools to be redistricted.
- Establish redistricting committee (parents, educators, central office staff, others).
- Undertake thorough community engagement among the affected communities.
- Undertake detailed analysis of transportation and capital improvement impacts.

II. CHANGE CURRENT EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES CONFIGURATION
II.A. School Closure/Consolidation

Pro:

- Improves overall operations (utilities, maintenance, custodial) by reducing building footprint and allowing concentrated use of building staff.
- May improve instruction: larger student bodies can support more resources and educational offerings.
- May improve efficiency of transportation.
- By reducing inventory, allows capital funds to be used more effectively.
- If older school is closed, improves average age of square footage.

Con:

- Community opposition likely to be intense.
- Decisions about which school(s) to close/consolidate likely to be very contentious.
- If combined with grade band re-configuration, opposition is likely to increase.
- Bus ride times for some students may increase to unacceptable levels.
- Some parents may decide to home-school their children rather than allow them to travel or to be consolidated with other student bodies.
- May separate siblings.
- Financial pressure is less compelling than in 2013 (FEA proposals).
- BOE decision must be taken re: closed building (retain building in system? mothball for future use? demolish but retain property? surplus building and property to County government?)
- If surplus, County government decision must be taken re: facility (retain? demolish building but retain property? sell or lease, with portion of proceeds potential paid to State?)
- County must assume outstanding State debt on capital funds for projects less than 15 years old in closed school.

Concerns:

- Decisions about which school(s) to close should be based on data on transportation and operational costs, on impact on ride times, as well as community concerns.
- Educational advantages should be thoroughly analyzed and program improvements should be in process before closure/consolidation takes place.
- Community concerns must be addressed re: ride times, extra-curricular activities, class size and student:teacher ratio, school hours. If closure also involves grade band re-configuration, mixing of different age groups must be considered.
- Capital projects likely needed at some receiving schools to accommodate increased number of students (in addition to regular projects).

Implementation process:

- State closure process (COMAR 13A.02.09.01) must be followed.
- Agreement from County government is required.
- Conduct analysis of outstanding State debt.
- Develop prioritized list of educational and capital improvements at remaining schools.
- Undertake any needed capital projects to accommodate students via the EFMP and CIP.

II.B. Grade band re-configuration

Pro:

- May improve utilization of secondary schools (e.g., by moving 5th grade into middle schools, with 8th grade moved into high schools).
- Subcommittee research may indicate that there are educational benefits, e.g. K-8 (continuity of education, fewer transitions, etc.)
- May simplify transportation routing and costs.

Con:

- Community opposition to mixing of age groups may be intense.
- Decisions about which grade bands to reconfigure likely to be very contentious.
- If combining with school closure/consolidation, opposition is likely to increase and concerns re: repayment of outstanding State debt and future use of closed schools are similar to II.A. above.
- Receiving facilities must be reconfigured to accommodate educational requirements of different age groups and to ensure appropriate separation of age groups.
- Some parents may decide to home-school their children rather than have them participate in mixed-age settings.
- May separate siblings.
- Similar concerns to above

Concerns:

- Mixing of age groups must be thoroughly understood, with comprehensive architectural and scheduling analysis of the receiving buildings to ensure separation to satisfy parents' concerns.
- Other concerns are similar to II.A above.

Implementation process:

- Undertake architectural and schedule analysis of receiving building before final decision by Board of Education is made; include a thorough community engagement process.
- Other process issues are similar to above.

III. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

III.A. Widespread Improvements: Capital projects for every school in inventory

Examples of Projects:

- Replacement of individual HVAC components and equipment;

- Partitions to isolate a specific educational program;
- Security vestibule;
- Selective ADA projects (ramps, lifts, sidewalk, etc.)
- Parking lot improvements

Pro:

- Will have positive impacts (albeit limited) on both educational environment and building performance for all schools.
- Equitable distribution of limited funds among all communities and schools.
- Modestly assists to extend the life of the affected buildings.

Con:

- Difficulty of determining an objective method to identify and prioritize multiple projects.
- Impact on any single building will be far less than needed to address its total deficiencies; improvements visible to occupants and the public may be negligible; cosmetic improvements are unlikely to receive high priority.
- Inefficient approach to capital improvements: unaddressed deficiencies will require improvement in the future, resulting in higher costs, modification or tear-out of prior installations, repeated disruption to the learning environment; and with increased maintenance burden in the meantime.
- Most projects unlikely to improve utilization of facility or reduce average age of square footage.
- Since program is likely to be spread over many years, future costs are highly uncertain.
- Managing multiple small projects may impose a considerable management burden on limited facilities staff.

Concerns:

- Requires a transparent, easily-explained method for prioritizing projects.
- May require engaging third-party project management services for multiple small projects.
- Requires a process of re-evaluation on a two- or three-year basis to determine changing educational and building priorities.

Implementation process:

- Establish planning committee (central office staff, county officials).
- Identify prioritized needs in every school building.
- Prioritize the needs among the school buildings based on agreed objectives and criteria.
- Develop preliminary capital plan: project scopes, costs, schedule, implementation factors (e.g. vacating facilities during construction).
- Determine likely funding capacity of County and likely approval of funding by State.
- Identify other potential funding sources: grants, community partners to share space, energy performance potential, other.
- Develop detailed project scopes, costs, and schedules.
- Develop detailed annual cost projections, showing anticipated State and County budget obligations.
- Apply for County and State funding in annual CIP (and for State planning approval, if needed).
- Engage 3rd party project management services, if needed.
- Implement projects: Design, construction, occupancy.

III.B. Targeted Improvements: Larger projects to address the most pressing educational and building performance needs

Examples of Projects:

- Replacement of entire HVAC system;
- Enclosure of open space pods;
- Science classroom renovations;

- Targeted renovation of specific educational or support spaces in one or more schools, e.g. alternative education;
- Major ADA improvements (e.g. elevator)

Pro:

- Addresses a limited number of comprehensive projects that will have the largest impact on the objectives prioritized by the SFC (educational excellence, efficiency, etc.).
- For the affected buildings, will result in greater benefits to the educational environment and/or building performance than the approach outlined in III.A. above.
- Depending on project scope, may result in visible improvements to the buildings; some cosmetic improvements can be incorporated into project scope at little additional expense.
- Will extend the useful life of the affected buildings and reduce the overall maintenance burden.
- Likely that more limited number of projects can be managed within existing resources of school system.

Con:

- Likely that a majority of schools will not receive capital projects under this program.
- Will constrain resources available for the minor projects identified under III.A. above, resulting in their deferral or not being scheduled at all.
- Since program is likely to be spread over many years, future costs are uncertain.

Concerns:

- Needs a thorough, comprehensive method to identify projects and project scopes.
- Method must produce results that can be explained to the public, particularly to the school communities that will not receive improvements.
- Requires a process of re-evaluation on a two- or three-year basis to determine changing educational and building priorities.

Implementation process:

- Similar to III.A. process, without 3rd party project management services.

III.C. Major Projects: A limited number of comprehensive major projects.

Examples of Projects:

- Southern Middle School renovation or limited renovation;
- Crellin Elementary School addition

Pro:

- Will result in a substantial and visible improvement of the learning environment and building performance for all students in the affected school.
- Comprehensively addresses all, or most of, the needs in the affected school building.
- Improved building will not require further major work for several decades.
- Will reduce maintenance burden for affected school, freeing staff resources to attend to other school buildings.
- Likely to substantially improve energy and water efficiency.
- Likely to improve the average age of square footage.
- If carried out with community partners, may reduce overall SRC and improve utilization.

Con:

- Very large capital costs: constrains or even eliminates possibility of funding other projects for many years, resulting in continuation of educational and building deficiencies at the majority of schools.
- Majority of schools will not be affected, hence will perception of a “two-school system” will be reinforced: some students in modern, state-of-the-art facilities, others in facilities that are deficient.

Concerns:

- Difficulty of identifying the appropriate project(s) and the correct project scope (e.g. replacement, full renovation, limited renovation, etc.).
- Difficulty of accurately estimating the cost several years in advance.
- Difficulty of ensuring adequate staff resources are available to carry out the project.
- If full or limited renovation, decision if building will remain occupied during construction; and if not, where students and staff will be relocated.

Implementation process:

- Establish planning committee to identify project, the project scope, the schedule, and the estimated cost.
- If proposing a replacement school on a new site, identify site and begin acquisition process.
- Apply for County funding; and for State planning approval and funding.
- Implement project: design, construction, occupancy.