

OPTION No. 4. GRADE BAND RECONFIGURATION
4.2 K-8 OR ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE SCHOOL

Description: Reassign the elementary school students to the middle schools, forming K-8 schools or elementary/middle schools and closing or re-purposing the vacated elementary schools.

Purpose: To balance enrollments and reduce building inventory, in order to provide more equitable opportunities for students and improve efficiency.

Planning Assumptions:

- While the State Rated Capacity figures for the middle schools indicate that capacity is available to allow this approach to work if additions are provided at the receiving schools, the architectural plans for all receiving schools and their schedules will need to be examined carefully to determine if the relocations are possible. Some spaces may need to be repurposed or re-designed. Particular attention needs to be given to core facilities like the cafeteria.
- Consideration should be given to whether these changes will apply to schools in both the north and the south.
- Separation of age groups will be a key area of concern.
- Special consideration should be given to the Swan Meadow School.
- Redistricting will be required for most elementary school students; redistricting will not be required for the middle school students.
- Since closure of a community school is likely to be viewed negatively by the affected community, it is essential to inform the public on the educational benefits that will result from the program.

Planning Goals Addressed:

- *Address the largest number of the most critical facility deficiencies*
Closing a number of facilities will significantly reduce the list of deficiencies, while alterations at the receiving schools will also correct a number of deficiencies.
- *Improve the learning environment for the largest number of students*
The program will affect all elementary and middle school students in the county, either directly through reassignment or indirectly by changing the grade configuration and increasing the enrollment at their school.
- *Correct inequities in the quality of facilities*
The closure of the elementary schools will allow operational funds to be re-directed to correct deficiencies in the remaining schools (as well as enhance operations).
- *Improve the efficiency of operations*
The concentration of all bus routes and maintenance effort on two sets of co-located or nearby schools will improve efficiency of operations.

Planning Objectives Addressed:

- *Educational excellence:* The reassignments may allow the K-8 model to be implemented.
- *Equity:* All students in the school system will be affected.
- *Community:* The changes will negatively affect communities by removing elementary schools as community schools.
- *Safety and Security:* Although the renovations required by this program will be secure in themselves, they will have marginal effect on overall building security.

Benefits:

- The K-8 model is reported to provide educational benefits through continuity of teacher-student relationships, elimination of one transition in the student's educational career, and improved coordination among teachers at different grade levels. The elementary/middle model is also thought to provide some of these benefits, particularly coordination among teachers. However,

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research shows that achieving these results depends on a number of factors, including appropriate staffing, resources, school climate, and leadership.

- Makes efficient use of the most costly spaces in the facilities: gym, science laboratories, media center.
- May provide flexibility to address future changes in enrollment, allowing classrooms and other spaces to be programmed for either elementary or middle school students as needed, or for other purposes.
- Will substantially reduce the operating expenses associated with the closed schools, allowing funds to be re-directed; however, this financial benefit may be offset by increased transportation costs and by debt service on capital projects.
- May result in reduced space demands for certain functions: administration, records, mechanical, custodial, etc.

Detriments:

- May involve substantial capital and operational cost to implement.
- Will result in very large schools:
 - If all elementary schools in the attendance area are consolidated with the single middle school, the resulting school will be very large;
 - If the size of the receiving school is to be reduced, it will be because some elementary schools remain stand-alone while others are consolidated with the middle school, resulting in different grade band configurations among the schools.
- There may be community objections to co-locating the youngest children with middle school age children, even if efforts are made at age separation. Mixing of different age groups may be difficult and may require special provisions for physical and schedule separation, particularly during arrival/departure, class changes, and use of common spaces, such as the gym, cafeteria, and media center.
- Ride times for many students will be very long.
- There are likely to be strong community objections to removing community schools.
- The closure of community schools may undermine one of the factors that attracts some households to Garrett County.

Implementation:

- Engage the principals of both the leaving and the receiving schools to fully discuss the educational, circulation, and schedule concerns, as well as the special needs of students.
- Define the scope of renovations needed:
 - Develop the designs either in-house or through engaged architectural/engineering services.
 - If possible, implement during the summer months to prepare for the fall semester.
- Seek State and local funding approval, as appropriate:
 - State: FY 20__
 - County:
 - Planning and design: FY 20__
 - Construction: FY 20__
 - Other: grants, donations, etc.
- Develop project designs:
 - Detailed architectural/engineering design
 - Detailed cost projection and schedule for design and construction
 - Project delivery method.
 - Special considerations (safety, special needs students, timing of grant funds, etc.)
- Suggested timeframe (initial round of projects):
 - Design: FY 20__
 - Construction: FY 20__

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Budgetary Implications:

- Estimated cost of improvements: \$ _____
- Estimated cost of equipment: \$ _____
- Estimated cost of training: \$ _____
- Misc. other: \$ _____
- **Total** \$ _____

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