

Special Meeting Minutes
Joint Meeting: BOE and Adhoc Committee on Operational Effectiveness
Fairfield BoE, October 24, 2017

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Call to Order of the Special Joint Meeting of the Board of Education and Adhoc Committee on Operational Effectiveness and Roll Call

Chairman Philip Dwyer called the special joint meeting to order at 7:35PM. Present were BoE members, Marc Patten, Donna Karnal, Jessica Gerber, Philip Dwyer, Trisha Pytko, Nick Aysseh, and Jennifer Maxon-Kennelly. Present from the Adhoc Committee for Operational Effectiveness were Chris Dewitt, Bill Gerber, Carolyn Trabuco, Frank Sahagian, Kevin Kiley and student representatives Caroline Donnelly and Zach McKay.

Others present were Superintendent Dr. Toni Jones, members of the central office leadership team and approximately 30 members of the public.

Mr. Dwyer reviewed the agenda for the unique meeting and noted that citizens may comment on the committee's work on the Fairfield Public Schools website.

Business Items

Presentation: Milone and MacBroom

Mr. Zuba and Mr. Gallagher, from Milone and MacBroom, presented "Elementary School Facilities and Scenario Planning." This included theoretical and operational capacity studies, enrollment trends and scenario planning. District-wide programs, space needs and class size (loading levels) for CLC, Pre-K, ECC Pre-K and District Behavior Need programs were accounted for.

Scenarios were tested using October 1, 2017 enrollment data – students were reassigned to hypothetical boundaries. Operational capacity was used, with the assumption that all portables are off-line. Noted which schools had available space to house CLC and PK classrooms. Utilized the new Holland Hill school capacity of 504 students.

Scenarios are not recommendations, but are informational exercises meant to help the BoE assess feasibility of different actions and quantify associated impacts.

Scenario A: Close Jennings School; redistrict Jennings to Burr, Stratfield, North Stratfield and McKinley. Results in several schools over 100% utilization; racial balance at McKinley and Holland Hill is at "impending." Does not address Sherman overcrowding, impacts middle school feeder pattern. May not be a sustainable long-term solution.

Scenario B: Close Dwight School; redistrict Dwight to Burr, Osborn Hill and North Stratfield. Results in several schools over 100% utilization; racial balance at McKinley over the K-5 district average. Students will have excess travel times, does not address Sherman overcrowding, impacts middle school feeder pattern.

Scenario C: Pocket re-district Sherman students to Holland Hill; feasible only after Holland Hill renovation is complete. Does not address racial imbalance at McKinley. Could be combined with other scenarios.

Scenario D: Jennings (grades K-2) and McKinley (grades 3-5) school pairing; essentially creates a combined Jennings/McKinley district. Feasible to achieve racial balance that is likely sustainable in the long-term. Creates additional transition for students and impacts middle school feeder pattern.

Scenario D2: Jennings (grades PK-1) and McKinley (grades 2-5) school pairing; ECC moves to Jennings; WFC moves to former ECC space. Feasible to achieve racial balance that is likely sustainable in the long-term. Creates additional transition for students and impacts middle school feeder pattern.

Scenario E: Pocket redistrict McKinley, Holland Hill and Stratfield. Reduces racial imbalance at McKinley but increases it at Holland Hill. Does not address overcrowding at Sherman; Holland Hill could accommodate 50—75 Sherman students, reducing racial imbalance.

Scenario F: Move 5th grade to the middle schools. Would require 37 fifth grade classrooms; not a feasible option based on current projected middle school enrollments.

Mrs. Gerber:

- School populations can change, and the scenarios are based on current enrollment. Mr. Zuba agreed; demographic data would have to be reviewed again at the time of redistricting.
- Were McKinley's smaller class sizes factored in? Mr. Gallagher said pairing scenarios were based on a 21-student class-size, which also affects the facility usage percentage.

Mr. Patten:

- Questioned scenario C, which seemed to overcompensate for Sherman's overcrowding. Mr. Gallagher said natural boundaries were considered. Projections for 2 scenarios will be developed at the committee's direction.
- Some scenarios can be combined with others; would that count as one scenario? Mr. Zuba said yes, combined scenarios would count as one scenario to be fully tested.
- Would like a cost scenario of moving ECC and WFC and educational ramifications; would like to hear from the Executive Director for Special Education.

Ms. Karnal:

- When are portables factored in? Mr. Gallagher said portables were not included in operational capacity.
- At the previous presentation, redistricting was not supported until Mill Hill was renovated. Mr. Zuba agreed; that presentation occurred before the Holland Hill renovation began and specifically addressed racial imbalance.
- Are projections tracked for accuracy? Mr. Zuba said yes; the biggest drivers being the economy and the housing market.

Mr. Dwyer said the community has generally not been in favor of pocket redistricting.

Mr. Gerber:

- Why are enrollment projections from the February 2016 presentation different from these projections? Numbers can change a lot; seems that a redistricting analysis would have to go beyond five years. If a school is closed, it may have to re-open at great cost. Mr. Zuba said the most accurate projections do not extend beyond five years.
- The grade 6 bump is worrisome. Mr. Zuba said grade 6 has always been a large class starting in KDG. Also, Fairfield has positive migration.
- What class size should be used for McKinley?
- What is the granularity of data? Mr. Gallagher said student address information drives each scenario. Also used are birth records and home sale data at address level.
- Any thought to how many private school students return to public schools? Mr. Zuba said there is some data on private schools, but CSDE is too short-staffed to provide this information. Could get a general percentage since it is a fairly stable number.

Mr. Dewitt:

- Had expected to see financial impact included with scenarios. Need a rough order of magnitude to move forward. Mr. Zuba said financial impacts are outside his scope of work.

- All schools are not 504's, but 504 ed spec was used for these scenarios. Mr. Zuba recognized that and added that this is the closest fit of information that exists for Fairfield.
- Does slide 10 assume that a school must be a 504 to meet the full-size classroom need for special education? Is this based on a scaled down version of a 504 school? Mr. Gallagher said assumptions were made at the instructional level.

Ms. Pytko: felt the D2 scenario would not work, as ECC enrollment typically increases as the year progresses and the CLC number may also change. The prospect of possibly providing PK to all students in future years makes this scenario unworkable. Mr. Gallagher said more PK classroom space could be reserved should projections increase.

Mr. Aysseh: How did Milone and MacBroom arrive at these scenarios? Did the district have input? Mr. Zuba said the district gave information regarding Sherman overcrowding, racial imbalance and construction. From that, a logical menu of options was presented.

Mr. Aysseh:

- How many times in the last eight years have you suggested scenarios that close schools and how many districts have actually closed schools? Mr. Zuba said a large part of their work since 2007/08 involves consolidation; it is not suggested, rather, projections have included school closings and districts have followed through. Can provide that information with pros and cons of that process.
- What was the original charge in hiring this firm? It is important for the committee to understand that Milone and MacBroom work is not free. Dr. Jones said it was to develop 10-year projections, research facility utilization using current ed specs, analyze unique program spaces, provide analysis of space available for general education across the district, examine grade reconfiguration and pocket re-districting, and examine renovation vs. expansion.

Finances are not within this scope of work.

Mr. Dwyer reiterated that scenarios are not recommendations, but factual information. The PowerPoint will be posted to the website.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly:

- This information contains statistics and facts and helps form the current conversation.
- On the initial page, does the Spanish office refer to ELL space requirements? Mr. Gallagher was not familiar enough with district resources to know if that referred to ELL space.
- Had hoped to see clear budget impacts – did anything suggest a budget impact? Mr. Zuba said that is beyond his expertise and scope.
- Other than D2, any other consideration of moving the Walter Fitzgerald Campus? Mr. Gallagher said no, but could look at other scenarios if so directed.
- How easy would it be to update this information, now that you have raw data? Mr. Zuba said that a similar report could be provided by plugging in new numbers. The intention for today was to start the conversation.
- What is the basis for using 21 as the class size across all 6 grades? Mr. Dwyer believes 21 was used as an average in the initial 2010 facility plan.

Ms. Trabuco:

- Is there a specific facility issue with smaller schools not having enough small spaces for support instruction, how acute a problem is that? Mr. Gallagher said these spaces can be re-engineered in older, smaller buildings like Jennings – larger classrooms are subdivided for support education.
- Can you speak more to the enrollment trough cycle? Are birth rates taken into account? Mr. Gallagher said yes, projections will be developed in the next few weeks. Mr. Zuba added that multiple data points are used in projections.
- Did you consider expanding Dwight instead of Mill Hill? Mr. Zuba said no, he wasn't sure if that was feasible; Mill Hill has already been looked at by engineers, so that option was kept.

Mr. Sahagian:

- Asked if KDG is the hardest number to predict. Mr. Gallagher said yes, the margin of error is lower once students are in the system.
- Why are school-closing scenarios presented given the rise in 2016 projections? Mr. Zuba said it would feed and fuel the conversation. He felt that it would be a good idea to show the possibility of closing a school, even if it didn't make sense in the end.

Mr. Kiley:

- Requested data on excel spreadsheets to help prioritize items having financial impact. Mr. Gallagher said he will provide that.
- Need to communicate serious ideas to Milone and MacBroom for further study.
- Operational efficiency should include Mill Hill portables; not sure when those will be eliminated.
- Would like a similar historical enrollment chart for the Town of Fairfield. Mrs. Gerber reviewed Fairfield enrollment data she had already collected, beginning with data from 1949. Fairfield's historical enrollment is very similar, peaking in 1970/71 and at its lowest in 1988/89. However, Fairfield's second peak occurred in 2012, a full 7 years after the state's second peak in 2004/05. Mr. Sahagian added that the 2012/13 budget archive shows a similar enrollment summary dating back to 1981/82.
- In scenario D – how long will racial balance be maintained in the high teens? Mr. Gallagher said enrollment projections do not include race or ethnicity so there is no data point to use; typically what has been done is to use past data to test feasibility and variation from year-year. The internal benchmark is set at 20%.
- How are trends determined? Mr. Gallagher said projections are based on underlying assumptions of housing. Regression models are tied to housing and economics.

Mr. Dwyer added that it may not be the best use of staff time to cost out each scenario; rather to cost out what the committee takes seriously.

Ms. Donnelly and Mr. McKay thanked the presenters.

The Board discussed a chart that reflected ideas on cost-effective measures. Dr. Jones added that the measures listed were not recommendations, rather ideas already present in the community. Some of the ideas on the list aren't viable, such as adjustments to the mandated teacher evaluation.

Mr. Dwyer asked the committee for input on the chart.

Mr. Dewitt said class size guidelines and policies should be reviewed, as well as how they are implemented.

Mrs. Trabuco

- Would like to understand the genesis of the House structure; asked that the term 'eliminate' be changed to 'review.'
- Recommended adding self-redistricting with transportation opt-out.
- Revisit transportation; compare distances for walkers with neighboring districts – some are longer than ours.
- Review Chromebooks vs. textbooks for certain classes.

Mrs. Gerber asked that Board members have access to the Prismatic audit and the 2 district responses.

Mr. Dwyer said it will be posted, if it isn't already.

Ms. Pytko : The option to close one high school should be moved to the 'not viable' column.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly: Corporate sponsorship for teams should be added.

Mr. Sahagian: Questioned whether the committee could determine which high school students would attend.

Mr. Dwyer: The Board determines feeder patterns; that should be added to the list.

Mr. Patten: A change to the feeder pattern is redistricting; suggested keeping the list simple.

The Board continued discussion on committee process.

Mr. Kiley: Remains unclear on the process – the list of ideas is extensive.

Mr. Dwyer: The committee will set the ground rules; additional members will join the committee following the elections.

Mr. Dewitt:

- Would like to get all meeting materials ahead of time.
- Cost-driven guidelines are different than other drivers; this needs to be discussed.
- Would like to see every comment from the public submitted on the website.
- Requested committee members state who they represent. Asked which members filled out an application.

Discussion on committee member representation continued:

Mr. Dwyer:

- The Commission Statement is clear; members represent themselves and can give perspective from the boards they serve on. Applications were not requested from members recommended by an entity; at-large member applications provide consistency. Ms. Trabuco and Mr. Sahagian did not fill out applications.
- Committee officers will be voted on the next meeting; is providing interim leadership until that time. The BOE By-laws state the Chairman makes appointments to the committee.

Mr. Aysseh: Felt misled; the Board voted to have membership that represented elected officials and the FEA. Why would individuals from the town bodies be chosen if they're not representing the bodies they are members of.

Confirmed that officers will be installed at the next committee meeting.

Mr. Dwyer said he took issue with the word "misled" – he believed that there was a difference between someone having the perspective of the town body they belong to, versus representing that body.

Mr. Sahagian: Could not possibly represent all FEA teachers.

Mr. Dwyer said that for at large members of the committee they are asking applicants to fill out the application that people complete when they are applying for town commissions.

Ms. Pytko: Asked for clarification on membership, who is on the committee? Concerned about meeting the January deadline, the first charge of the committee. She voted for the idea that people from other town bodies were included as representatives from those bodies. Mr. Dwyer said the committee's purpose is long-term, but discussions may produce savings for next year. The committee may decide on the focus.

Mr. Aysseh: asked Ms. Trabuco who she represented and if she filled out an application. Ms. Trabuco said she was an at large member, and that she didn't fill out an application for this committee but she did when she joined the pension board. Mr. Aysseh asked that all non-BoE committee members fill out applications since they aren't representing the town bodies they are members of.

Ms. Karnal: Questioned the number serving on the committee. Mr. Dwyer said there are currently 11, the 12th member will be the Republican RTM member. There will be three additional at-large members, equaling 15.

Ms. Pytko said that in the last meeting they discussed meeting the January budget deadline, so she is concerned about how the committee will do this.

Mr. Dwyer believes this committee's purpose is to look for long term changes to costs in the district. But that's up to the committee. Ms. Pytko said she was confused because she thought Mr. Dwyer had stated that the committee should focus on short-term savings first. Mr. Dwyer reiterated that that was for the committee to decide.

Mr. Dewitt:

- Would be ill-advised to have newly elected BOE members on this committee. Mr. Dwyer added that newly elected BoE members will have a fresh outlook.
- Requested a list of the educators consulted by Mr. Sahagian. Mr. Dwyer said there is no requirement for committee members to divulge names of people they consult with.

Ms. Karnal remarked on her 4-year term. The district is in good hands and moving in the right direction.

10:50 PM - Motion to Adjourn: Mrs. Gerber

Second: Ms. Karnal

Approved: 12-0

*Respectfully Submitted
Jessica Gerber
Fairfield Board of Education, Secretary*