

Bainbridge Island School District
SCHOOL CONFIGURATION COMMITTEE REPORT

November 2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COMMITTEE FORMATION AND PURPOSE:

During the 2011-12 school year, the Bainbridge Island School District Board of Directors discussed the economic and demographic challenges confronting the school district due to multi-year reductions in state funding and declining enrollment. In response to these concerns, the Board of Directors appointed a School Configuration Committee (SCC) in fall 2012 to analyze, consider and ultimately recommend school configuration options that would best accomplish the district's mission, vision, and guiding principles within the constraints of the district's economic and demographic challenges. Twenty-nine staff, parent, community and school board members were appointed to serve on the SCC.

WORK OF THE COMMITTEE IN 2012-13:

Between October 2012 and April 2013, the SCC discussed and analyzed a significant amount of information: research on school size and grade level configurations, educational programs and services including staff and facility needs, enrollment patterns and projections, operational and staffing costs, and current condition and location of district facilities. The committee developed a set of guiding principles and used them to conduct a detailed analysis of several different grade level configurations including:

- Current Configuration: Gr. K-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-12
- Gr. K-8, 9-12
- Gr. K-6, 7-8, 9-12
- Gr. K-5, 6-8, 9-12
- Gr. K-3, 4-6, 7-8, 9-12
- School configurations for 7 schools & 6 schools
- Implications for closure of a facility

In April 2013, the committee narrowed the options to 3 configurations that would be presented to staff, parents and community members for further discussion and consideration: Current school/grade configuration (7 schools), K-5 configuration (6 schools), and a Two-K-4 school configuration (6 schools).

In April-May 2013, committee representatives conducted presentations for staff and Parent-Teacher Organization groups throughout the district as well as 4 presentations for the community. The presentations provided information about the work of the SCC and the 3 options that were being considered. Community presentations provided opportunities for attendees to ask questions and provide feedback. The SCC also sent a survey to staff and parent/community members at the end of May to solicit feedback from those who could not attend the presentations. During the April and May meetings, the SCC created a draft of key findings that emerged from their meetings and discussions throughout the year.

CURRENT STATUS AND RECOMMENDATION:

The SCC reconvened in November 2013. Committee members reviewed the results of the staff and parent/community surveys that were available online from late May through mid-September. They also reviewed October enrollment data that showed a significant increase from the 2012-13 school year (118 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) students higher than budgeted) and discussed changes in state funding for 2013-14.

After reviewing the charge to the SCC, survey data and changes in demographic/enrollment data, the committee unanimously recommended that **the work of the School Configuration Committee and any consideration of changes to school configuration be placed on hold for at least one year.** The consensus was that current conditions suggest it would be prudent to observe enrollment and financial trends before considering configuration changes that would impact a significant percentage of the district's students, staff, and families.

SCHOOL CONFIGURATION COMMITTEE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Spring 2013

The primary purpose of all economically or demographically driven strategic change is to utilize available resources to provide the students of Bainbridge Island with the highest quality educational opportunities in alignment with the district's mission, vision, and guiding principles.

The School Board's charge to the committee is to develop configuration options that best accomplish the district's mission, vision, and guiding principles within the constraints of the district's economic and demographic limitations.

-- School Board Charge to the School Configuration Committee

The members of the School Configuration Committee considered the following guiding principles in formulating recommendations:

1. **Educational Programs and Educational Research:**

Seek to maintain or enhance educational programs and opportunities for students that are aligned with educational research and support the district's mission, vision, and guiding principles.

2. **Costs and Cost Savings:**

- **Operational Costs:**
Maximize opportunities to increase efficiency and operational cost savings over time while sustaining and enhancing educational programs.
- **Facility Costs:**
Maximize the use of district facilities to provide the highest quality learning environment for students while enhancing efficiency, flexibility, and optimal investment of taxpayer dollars.
- **Human Costs:**
Consider implications for staff, students, and parents as well as organizational capacity to manage change.
- **Short-term vs. Long-term Costs:**
Balance one-time and short-term (1-2 year) transition costs with long-term (10-15 year) opportunities for reducing operational and facility costs.

3. **Community Values and Input:**

Integrate community perspectives and values into options analysis, providing numerous outreach opportunities for constituent groups to engage in dialogue with committee representatives and the Board.

SCHOOL CONFIGURATION COMMITTEE FINDINGS

Spring 2013

The School Configuration Committee identified several pivotal “findings” after analyzing numerous grade and school configurations; potential impacts on staff, students and families; staffing and operational costs (General Fund); and facility costs (Capital Fund). The following findings guided the development of the 3 configuration options that were forwarded for consideration and discussion by Bainbridge Island School District staff, parents and community members in Spring 2013:

1. A change in grade configuration should only be considered by the District if there will be consolidation from 7 schools to 6 schools.

Rationale: Changing grade configurations while maintaining 7 schools would not reduce General Fund or Capital Fund expenditures and would create significant disruption. Students in each grade would be spread across a greater number of schools, resulting in fewer sections of each grade at each school. This would create the need to transfer a significant number of students each year to balance class size or change to multi-age classes at each school. Changing grade configurations while maintaining 7 schools would also lead to boundary changes for several schools.

2. Grade configurations that were analyzed by the School Configuration Committee but were not forwarded for further consideration:

- Gr. K-8, 9-12

Rationale: With only 1 transition between elementary and high school, students may not be ready for the size and complexity of program when they reach Gr. 9. It would be very difficult to duplicate Woodward Middle School's elective offerings across 4-5 schools; most K-8 schools have a narrower set of elective courses and often have a “specialist” model similar to our elementary schools. Many districts that have changed from an elementary school/middle school model to K-8 have made the change due to concerns about poor academic achievement in middle school programs.

- Gr. K-3, 4-6, 7-8, 9-12

Rationale: This configuration does not change the number of school transitions (students would continue to change schools 3 times from K-12). This configuration would not work with just 1 K-3 school or 1 Gr. 4-6 school. The only way to carry out this configuration with 1 less school would be to close Commodore and disband its programs. This option would increase transportation costs by \$200,000. The District would need to change back to a 3-bell schedule with 3 morning and afternoon bus runs in order to transport all K-3 students from the center of the Island to the north and south ends and then transport all Gr. 4-12 students from all around the Island to the center (Ordway, Sakai, MWS, BHS, Commodore).

- Gr. K-6, 7-8, 9-12

Rationale: A change to a K-6 configuration would reduce the number of transitions (students would change schools 2 times from K-12). However, this configuration would require facility changes that cannot be accomplished by adding portables. Several classrooms would need to be added to Blakely and Wilkes, including science labs for Gr. 6 science. This configuration poses challenges for assignment of Gr. 6 academic teachers, some of whom are not elementary certified but are instead certified as subject area specialists (e.g. science, math, or LA/SS endorsements). Most school districts have moved away from a K-6 configuration; it may limit academic acceleration opportunities for Gr. 6 students.

3. The 3 options programs currently housed at Commodore (Mosaic, Odyssey, Eagle Harbor) should continue to be kept together on the main campus.

Rationale: These programs have unique components (e.g. Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) courses, home-based parent partnership) with specific requirements. It is more efficient to keep these programs together, with staff who are knowledgeable about state laws governing ALE regulations or requirements for Written Student Learning Plans (WSLP). The Eagle Harbor High School program needs to be located in close proximity to Bainbridge High School since many EHHS students need to access courses that are only offered at BHS.

4. Closing a building would offer the opportunity for annual savings in General Fund expenditures that could be used for educational program and staffing enhancements. Initial estimates indicate that the savings would be in the range of \$300-450 K.

Rationale: The closure of a building reduces operational costs (e.g. utilities, transportation, etc.) and staffing costs (e.g. administrative, support staff). It would also reduce long-term capital costs by reducing the number of buildings that need to be renovated or replaced over time.

5. If the District consolidates to 6 schools, the facility that the committee considered for closure is Commodore. (The programs housed at Commodore would be relocated to another facility.)

Rationale: The current Commodore facility is a combination of different buildings built at different times, with different operating systems that have been added over time. It is inefficient to operate and would require significant funds to maintain. The facility was scheduled to close after the construction of Woodward and Sakai; however, enrollment increases from 1999-2005 and construction projects on the BHS campus created the need to keep it open. (NOTE: The District recently received a grant that will pay for an update to the 2004 "Study and Survey" analysis of every school structure and its electrical and mechanical systems. The survey will begin with an analysis of Commodore and Ordway facilities. This committee "finding" should be considered subject to change, pending the outcome of the Study and Survey reports.)

6. Blakely Elementary School should not be closed and will need to be replaced at some point in the near future.

Rationale: Blakely Elementary is now the oldest school in the District. The possibility of closing Blakely was considered by the committee; however, transportation costs would increase since students from the south end would all need to be transported to the center of the Island. Demographic studies also indicate that the south end of the Island is likely to have higher number of school-age children. The 3 grade and school configuration options that were forwarded by the committee for community consideration were based on the assumption that Blakely would not be closed.

ADDITIONAL DATA & CONSIDERATIONS

Fall 2013

The SCC received additional data in the fall of 2013:

1. SURVEY: Survey results from 522 parents/community members and 164 staff members indicated that the highest priorities for both groups were to: maintain elementary schools in the north, central and south parts of the island; keep elementary school enrollment below 500 students; and maintain intermediate/middle school enrollment below 600. Many respondents favored maintaining the current configuration; a second choice would be to change to a K-5 configuration and close a school in order to realize operational and facility cost savings. There was limited support for the third option: closing a school and moving to a configuration with only two K-4 elementary schools.

2. ENROLLMENT: October 2013 enrollment was significantly higher than anticipated (118 FTE higher than budget; 90 FTE higher than the average enrollment for 2012-13). The numbers exceeded the "high forecast" scenario from the spring 2012 demographic study commissioned by the Board of Directors. The district has been in contact with Seattle SD officials who have their own internal staff working on enrollment projections. Seattle anticipates growth of 10,000 students in the next decade. Several SCC members noted that given the importance of enrollment projections, the district should supplement larger scale periodic demographic studies with alternative strategies that would provide more specific, local data (e.g. meeting with realtors).
3. STATE FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS: The state legislature finished its budget negotiations during a special session that ended June 30th. Overall funding for K-12 education increased by approximately \$1 billion, compared to 2011-13; however, only \$650 million of that amount was new revenue. (The balance represented reinstatement of reductions such as the cuts made to staff salaries during the last biennium.) The Bainbridge Island School District received an additional \$100 thousand for pupil transportation and \$650 thousand for maintenance, supplies and operating costs. These funds represent the first significant increase in state funding during the past 5 years; however, it will take several years to make up for the cumulative effect of budget cuts such as \$1.8 million/year of I-728 student achievement funds and \$450 thousand/year of support for reduced class sizes in Gr. K-4. Our district does not yet qualify for new state allocations for K-3 class size reduction or Full-Day Kindergarten. Those disbursements are being phased in with priority given to schools with a high percentage of low income students.
4. FACILITY CONDITIONS, CAPACITY, OPERATING AND STAFFING COSTS: Last spring, the district received a grant to cover the costs of updating the 2004 "Study and Survey" analysis of every school structure and its electrical and mechanical systems. Results of the study will be presented to the Board of Directors in 2014 and will be used to update the district's Facility Master Plan.

During discussions last spring, several SCC members recommended that the district develop templates for providing citizens with more detailed information about school capacity, operating costs and staffing costs. For example, the request was made to develop documents that would describe, with greater specificity, the way space is utilized. In response, the Capital Projects Department developed a capacity calculation chart for each school and a sample was presented to the SCC at its November meeting.

Several SCC members also recommended that the district consider development of documents that can be regularly updated and provide information about operating and staffing costs for each school or program. It was also recommended that the district obtain a second opinion regarding projected facility cost savings if a school were closed. A peer review was conducted over the summer by a local firm. The consultants concluded that the district's projection was conservative and suggested that the savings could be higher when considering maintenance costs.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on survey results and potential changes in enrollment and state funding, the committee unanimously recommends to the Board of Directors that the work of the School Configuration Committee be placed on hold for at least one year. The consensus was that current conditions suggest it would be prudent to observe enrollment and financial trends before considering configuration changes that would impact a significant percentage of the district's students, staff, and families.

SCC members agreed that the detailed analysis and preliminary findings of the SCC will be of value to any future discussions related to school configuration. Several members also voiced the view that in the future, the work of any configuration committee would benefit from additional data, and the Board of Directors may

need to specify what the specific financial or demographic “tipping point” will be for precipitating a change in school configuration.

CONCLUSION

The members of the SCC made the commitment to serve on the committee through fall 2013 and have now completed that term. The district expresses its deepest gratitude to the dedicated staff members, parents, and community representatives who devoted the past 14 months to this important work.

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