

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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**SUPERINTENDENT**  
Faith A. Chapel

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May 29, 2012

TO: Board of Directors

FR: Faith A. Chapel, Superintendent

RE: Strategic Planning Process Phase I - Proposal to Form School Configuration Committee

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At its last meeting on May 17, the Board of Directors discussed two different sets of processes for moving forward with strategic planning. Although a specific process was not selected or fully defined, Board members discussed the need to place a priority on addressing economic and demographic challenges.

Following that meeting, Board President Patty Fielding, Vice President Mary Curtis and I met to discuss the appropriate next step. As a result, I am proposing the formation of a School Configuration Committee for the first phase of strategic planning. The attached draft proposal is submitted for Board discussion on Thursday evening. If the Board reaches consensus that such a committee should be formed, a formal document describing the "charge" to the committee would be submitted for Board approval at its next meeting on June 14<sup>th</sup>. At that time, I would also share my recommendations for planning Phase II: a review of educational trends and programs.

**Bainbridge Island School District****Proposal to Form School Configuration Committee**

May 29, 2012

**Context****Economic challenges**

Like all districts in Washington State, the Bainbridge Island School District has experienced five years of cumulative reductions in state funding. However, unlike many other districts, Bainbridge Island has been able to largely maintain the educational programs, services, and opportunities that directly impact student learning. To do this, the district has employed numerous strategies including deep cuts to non-teaching services such as transportation, central administration, and custodial/maintenance. It has also requested and received significant additional support from the community through the Bainbridge Schools Foundation, Parent-Teaching Organizations, Educational Programs and Operations Levies, a Technology Levy, and a Capital Facilities Bond. As the district looks to the future, it appears unlikely that state budget allocations for K-12 education will dramatically increase within the next few years.

**Demographic challenges**

The challenges confronting the district are now both economic and demographic. Like other districts in the Puget Sound Region that experienced significant growth in enrollment between 1990 and 2005, the Bainbridge Island School District is now serving fewer students. During the past 7 years, student enrollment decreased by 7.5%. The district regularly monitors enrollment trends, and as part of its ongoing strategic planning efforts, it conducts a demographic study every 3-4 years. The most recent study was commissioned last November, completed in April, and presented to the Board of Directors on April 25th. The report indicates that student enrollment during the next 10 years is likely to remain flat or slightly decline.

**Implications for School Configuration****Purpose for considering change**

The primary purpose of all economically or demographically driven strategic changes 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.

During recent years, the district has significantly reduced operating costs of infrastructure, non-teaching services, and operations in order to focus district resources, to the greatest extent possible, on the classroom and the educational programs and services that directly impact student learning. It is becoming increasingly difficult to identify additional cost-cutting strategies that will not have a significant, negative impact on student learning.

The district has also made every effort to be a good steward of taxpayer dollars by keeping school taxes stable, utilizing any available opportunity to reduce tax impacts of facilities bonds (e.g. Build America Bonds, Qualified School Construction Bonds, refinancing of existing bonds), and returning to citizens any unused portion of previous bonds.

**Purpose for considering school configuration changes**

The term "configuration" refers to the relative disposition or arrangement of the parts or elements of an object or system. In this case, a School Configuration Committee would be formed to consider factors such as school size, school locations, grade levels served, and the relationship of these types of elements to the district's delivery of educational programs and services.

The two key drivers for considering changes to school configuration are economic and demographic projections. The purpose for revisiting school configuration is to consider whether changes to the number or size of schools or the grade levels they serve would ultimately be of greater educational and strategic benefit to the students and citizens of Bainbridge Island.

## **Factors to be Considered**

### **Competing values**

The district last debated school configuration in the late 1990s, when it was experiencing rapid growth in student enrollment. At that time, there were three Gr. K-5 elementary schools (@550 students each), one Gr. 6-8 middle school (@900 students), and one G. 9-12 high school (@1200 students). The existing facilities were not built to accommodate those numbers, and there was significant overcrowding at the elementary and middle schools. Numerous portables were being utilized, and class sizes were large. A district committee was formed, and the decision was made to create smaller schools for Gr. K-8 students by constructing a new, Gr. 5-6 intermediate school which opened in the fall of 1999.

Student enrollment on the Island continued to grow through the 2005-06 school year; but since that time, changes in birth rate, population trends, and housing have contributed to a reduction of 365 students (43 in Gr. K-4; 47 in Gr. 5-8, and 175 in Gr. 9-12). While the community expressed its preference for smaller neighborhood schools in the late 1990s, smaller schools present an additional economic challenge when dollars for operating schools are scarce. The district cannot take advantage of economies of scale, is less able to efficiently deploy staff resources, and has more facilities to operate and renovate. Therefore, maintaining small schools is in competition with the district's need to minimize non-teaching operational costs. A School Configuration Committee would provide the forum for reconciling these types of competing values.

### **Programs and facilities**

Any discussion of reconfiguration must also take into account the implications for existing programs and facilities. Changing grade level configurations or closing or combining schools could have significant impacts, both positive and negative, on the number and type of educational programs and opportunities that are available to students. This is especially true in Gr. 5-12 where students have elective opportunities. Additionally, consideration must be given to the costs that would be associated with improving or reconstructing facilities when closing or combining schools. Certain programs require specialized facilities (e.g. special education, science, music, art, etc.). Facilities will always be important to the quality of educational opportunities the district can offer its students.

### **Adaptive change**

The School Configuration Committee would need to be aware of educational trends that are driving changes in the content and delivery of educational programs and services. The committee would be working in parallel with district processes to assess program and service offerings with the goal of providing the most value for the available resources. The committee would also need to work in concert with other district committees as they consider adaptive and innovative changes in educational programs and services.

## **Committee Tasks and Responsibilities**

The School Configuration Committee would be asked to accomplish a number of tasks as it develops options and recommendations. Committee members would :

1. Consider relevant research regarding school size and grade level configurations in determining options.
2. Consider educational programs and services in relation to space and facilities needs in determining configuration options.
3. Consider size and location of school populations that would make any recommended configuration a viable option.
4. Consider enrollment patterns and projections to determine time frame possibilities and constraints relative to configuration options.
5. Consider the current condition and location of existing facilities and implications for configuration options.

6. Develop both short-term and long-term configuration options, ranging from the option of no change to closing school(s) and combining school populations.
7. Communicate with constituent groups regarding committee activities and deliberations and solicit feedback for consideration.

### Proposed Committee Composition

- District administrators (3)
- School administrators (2-3)
- Certificated staff (5)
- Classified staff (3)
- Parents (7)
- Community members (5)
- Ex-Officio School Board representatives (2)

### Proposed Timeline

The School Configuration Committee would present its recommendations to the School Board following no later than Fall 2013. The Board will receive regular updates of SCC work during the 2012-13 school year.

Should the School Board determine that schools should be reconfigured to better serve the students of Bainbridge Island, additional public process would need to take place before decisions are made.

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| • Determine committee composition                        | June 2012           |
| • Distribute background information to committee members | August 2012         |
| • Committee meetings to be held Wednesdays, 5:30-7:30 pm | Fall 2012-Fall 2013 |

Proposed schedule for 2012-13:

- ✓ September 19
  - ✓ October 3
  - ✓ October 17
  - ✓ November 7, 28
  - ✓ December 12
  - ✓ January 16, 30
  - ✓ February 13, 27
  - ✓ March 13, 27
  - ✓ April 17
  - ✓ May 8, 22
  - ✓ (Fall 2013 meetings TBD)
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| • 2-3 community outreach meetings to be held in 2012-13 school year | Fall 2012 -Spring 2013 |
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