

## Town Hall Questions and Answers

5/21/19

### **NEW ADDITIONS TO THE FAQ 5/21**

**The BRC rated improving educational opportunities for our students as the highest priority. Please identify empirical data (test scores) that demonstrate that a K-4, 5-8 configuration improves educational opportunities. This question was posed as Question 50 in the BRC FAQ as long ago as April 8 and has not been answered.**

Some of the top districts in the State of Michigan use a K-4 configuration:

- Bloomfield Hills (Niche #1 district in MI)
- Okemos Public Schools (Niche #2 district in MI)
- Novi (Niche #6 district in MI)

Please note that test scores are only one measure of an educational program, and do not necessarily correlate with your question on improving opportunities. Our district seeks to provide a well rounded experience that will focus on literacy and numeracy K-4, but also include critical components of physical education, fine and performing arts, library media, and languages. This coming year will provide an impetus to truly examine the specials rotation in order to provide the best educational experience we can afford for our community's children.

**Please name three school districts in Michigan that have a mandatory 5-8 middle school configuration (not a magnet or special purpose option) where parents will report a positive experience with 5-8.**

- Bloomfield Hills (Niche #1 district in MI) uses 5-8 except in one building which is 4-8
- Frankenmuth, Potterville, Schoolcraft
- And numerous others use a K-4, 5-6, 7-8 arrangement which is similar to the environment we are proposing within our middle schools.

**The BRC was tasked with making a “specific” recommendation regarding reconfiguration “including identifying facilities and options.” Yet, in the end, no vote was taken and no recommendation made. If the BRC found none of the alternatives presented by a K-4, 5-8 configuration acceptable, why are we still considering that?**

We live in a representative democracy. The elected board of education will vote. The BRC served as a filter or focus group to narrow and eliminate options. They did not move forward options including a gravity school or eliminating a middle school. The four options that moved forward included K-4, 5-8.

**Since the BRC did not make a recommendation, will the Board be presented with a specific recommendation? If so, by whom and based on what? Will the public have an opportunity to review the recommendation before the vote?**

Please see above. The public has been reviewing and commenting on the four scenarios at all of the Town Halls and board meetings.

**The assumed operating savings of \$1.1 to \$1.3 million per year seems very meager compared to the negative impact on our community from closing two schools. Scenario J revised, presented April 16, 2019, would save \$3 million per year, while keeping K-5. Yet**

**it was immediately withdrawn. Why aren't we taking time to fully consider this and other promising options?**

In the filtering process, the BRC felt that closing two of nine elementary schools, while difficult, was preferable to removing one of only three middle schools, at grade levels where more students get themselves to and from school. At the May 20 Board meeting, trustees asked for a scenario to be added for consideration that did include closing a middle school and elementary schools keeping the K-5 configuration. That will be presented June 10.

**Has a traffic study been done to assess the impact of having 250+ elementary-age students cross Jefferson twice each day?**

Trombly parents did provide a traffic study with publicly available links. Once concerns were raised, all affiliated parties were contacted to immediately begin to address these. GPPSS has met with the local mayors, city managers and police chiefs and requested they also conduct a traffic study as soon as possible to address existing concerns for students walking and biking to school now (not waiting for reconfiguration). Many community members were not aware that crossing guards are city employees, not school employees. Ideas such as reversing one-way streets by schools to ease drop-off have been shared (Richard and Defer are examples); such ideas are easier to implement at the local level than solutions that require county or state involvement. County and state officials have also been contacted to extend the Safe Routes to Schools studies and solutions at all our buildings. This takes time, but the important work has begun.

**Each of the scenarios presents hypothetical land values for the property on which the closed schools sit. I understand those values were based on the price that was paid for vacant land in in a high-end residential area the Shores near the lake. Isn't it likely that the land values are overestimated? Why haven't you enlisted real estate appraisers who can give you accurate information on the land and property values?**

Official appraisals were requested once the options were narrowed to reduce expense.

**I understand that the hypothetical land values do not account for the cost of demolition of the existing structures. Doesn't that mean that the land values are further overstated?**

The district will work with the local municipality and the community to repurpose or sell closed facilities. While demolition is an option, many of the developers that have come to visit the administration building at 389 St. Clair are not interested in demolition but in reimagining the space as apartments, senior living or condos without demolishing the historic structure.

**I understand that the annual operating savings does not account for any cost of maintaining the closed buildings. Roofs, utilities, insurance, groundskeeping, etc. will be needed. Doesn't this mean that the assumed operating savings are significantly overstated?**

Most preventative maintenance in GPPSS as well as most grounds work is completed by district in-house staff. Using that staff to maintain a closed building for a short amount of time will result in minimal cost. Certainly a closed building could incur repair costs. The district will work with the local municipality and the community to repurpose or sell closed facilities.

**The recently-hired Deputy Superintendent for Business and Support Services was hired in part for her experience working in a school district as it transitioned through reconfiguration. She unexpectedly announced that she is retiring this summer. Is this a**

**sign that there are divisions within the administration over how reconfiguration should be handled? How do you expect to have a successful transition when one of the key administrators is leaving in the middle of the process?**

The Deputy Superintendent was hired for her expertise in school business, including accounting and budgeting. She has experience from working in some of the top districts in the state. Many districts in Michigan have downsized over the last 20 years, so most people in that role would come with the experience of downsizing. Simply stated, she has chosen to retire. Her transparency efforts and work to establish protocols for this process will ease the transition.

**Poupart has the highest concentration of African-American children and Mason the second highest in the district. Trombly has the highest concentration of Asian-American children of any elementary school in the district. Has the District consulted with the Michigan Department of Civil Rights regarding the District's compliance with civil rights laws with respect to closing these schools?**

Dr. Niehaus has met with and attended a meeting hosted by the Grosse Pointe Harper Woods chapter of the NAACP recently to discuss the impact on the community if Poupart or another elementary were to be closed in GPPSS. GPPSS has reached out to the Michigan Office of Civil Rights as well. Morning and evening listening sessions hosted by the district and facilitated by OCR are being planned now and will be announced shortly.

**When the buildings bond was proposed, the need to restore Pierce's pool was one of the projects highlighted. Now that the voters approved the bond (including funds to restore the Pierce pool), why is it suddenly a given that Pierce's pool will be abandoned?**

Administration regularly evaluates district facilities. The use, size and location of the Pierce pool indicate that it is not heavily utilized. Due to its relatively small size it is not a pool that our community regularly accesses. It is currently used primarily by PE classes at Pierce for less than a total of 4 weeks a year. Given the limited use and utility of the pool, administration is recommending that the Pierce pool no longer be maintained.

**During the Town Hall, it was stated that the average class size would not increase as a result of closing two elementary schools and that the district has "spreadsheets" that show this. Someone at the Town Hall requested this information and I would like to see it, too.**

Dr. Dean is happy to set a time to review this data with any interested community member. Please reach out to him directly via email at [deanm@gpschools.org](mailto:deanm@gpschools.org) and he will gladly set an appointment with you.

**It was also stated that the reconfiguration would not result in any reduction in the number of teachers (which goes hand-in-hand with no change in average class size.) Does this mean that the only savings from closing schools is a reduction of 1 principal, 1 secretary and some janitorial staff (per school)? Is there any other major source of savings? This would certainly explain why the expected annual operating cost savings of the scenarios under consideration are not very impressive.**

During the 2017 iteration of the Blue Ribbon Committee the savings from closing an average school was developed and presented to the committee. [That presentation data linked here is the basis for the estimates.](#) The primary savings from closing an elementary school are in the reduction of the principal position, the support staff positions (secretary, custodial, etc.) and other non-personnel costs including utilities, insurance, etc.

**Why is Barnes remaining open, when its Early Childhood Program for children with disabilities is not IDEA compliant?**

Barnes Early Childhood Center (which houses our age 0 - 5 year old programming for students with special needs) has not received an IDEA complaint or MDE complaint. The Special Education department is housed at Barnes. If an MDE complaint is filed, the special education department works with MDE on it.

**Why ask our youngest students to cross Jefferson where over 15000 cars travel on it daily and 90 accidents have occurred in the past 5 years?**

Safety is a concern and will be addressed. It is a concern now, and needs to be addressed now. Trombly parents did provide a traffic study with publicly available links. Once concerns were raised, all affiliated parties were contacted to immediately begin to address these. GPPSS has met with the local mayors, city managers and police chiefs and requested they also conduct a traffic study as soon as possible to address existing concerns for students walking and biking to school now (not waiting for reconfiguration). Ideas such as reversing one-way streets by schools to ease drop-off have been shared; such ideas are easier to implement at the local level than solutions that require county or state involvement. County and state officials have also been contacted to extend the Safe Routes to Schools studies and solutions at all our buildings. This takes time, but the important work has begun.

**Will I receive a refund of my money, which I expected to be allocated to repairs to Trombly or the Pierce Pool when I voted “yes” for the bond?**

To ensure that bond funds were used responsibly the district did issue the bond in two series. The first series was designed to focus on the two high schools that were determined to not be closing. If buildings close, bond funds designated for Trombly or the Pierce pool could be spent on projects that fall within the bond categories – safe, warm, dry, connected. There are several layers of oversight to ensure bond funds are spent appropriately and within the scope approved by voters.

**In your chart for projected elementary class size presented 5/13/19, Trombly’s Kindergarten class is 13.5, but 34 students are currently registered. Please explain this discrepancy.**

As was stated at the Trombly Town Hall, the initial sheets did have an error. The presentation has been fixed and posted at [www.gpschools.org](http://www.gpschools.org).

**With an estimated 710 kids under 5 in Grosse Pointe Park, why close an elementary school with this potential population?**

Information has been brought to the administration and shared with the board. GPPSS has also worked with two demographers (Plante Moran and Middle Cities) that both projected declining enrollment. This is consistent with the SEMCOG data. All these studies point to people having children later in life, having fewer children, and living longer and staying in their homes due to the current Michigan tax structure.

**How confident are you in your decision to close schools?**

The Board is listening and no formal decision has been made yet by the Board of Education. The District has been actively talking about declining enrollment for 8 years and the possibility of school closings for 3 years. The board is working through the process and want to hear from you. The board passed a resolution 7-0 in June 2018 with specific triggers to start the school closing plan if met. In November, a trigger was met and the administration was charged with bringing back a plan to address this. Since then, the board and administration have met and corresponded with hundreds of people who are sharing their expertise and opinions.

**Can you please outline specific educational advantages my child will see as a result of school closings with K-4, 5-8 configuration?**

By consolidating into three buildings, 5th graders will have better opportunities to work with similar learning partners as well as teachers that match their learning style. 6<sup>th</sup> grade will have a softer transition to the middle school environment. K-4 will be able to focus on math and reading (literacy and numeracy on the slides). Reconfiguration also provides an opportunity to truly examine the specials rotation at the elementary level, particularly how Spanish instruction is provided. Specials teachers will have less travel time, making them more available in a particular building to build relationships and partner with colleagues. Additionally, at the MS level electives will be available throughout the day as teachers will not spend so much time travelling but instead will be in a building with a critical mass of students.

**How can we trust the BOE to make a decision about school closure, if members didn't know that Trombly was south of Jefferson?**

All current board members have been to Trombly, perhaps someone misspoke. The board president lives South of Jefferson.

**Is the district intending to take away any Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) services following the reconfiguration?**

No, the program is run by the district, but funded by Wayne County. GPPSS will have the same numbers students and same number of classrooms. Those ASD services are set based on individual educational plans.

**Have you contacted Wayne County regarding the safety issues associated with children crossing Jefferson and what was their response?**

As Dr. Niehaus shared at Trombly gatherings and in individual meetings, safety is a primary concern. GPPSS needs to deal with the concerns that have been brought forward immediately. Pierce students are currently crossing Jefferson; they need to be safe **now**. Several parents have brought data to the attention of the administration and that has been shared with the board. Several community members have backgrounds in Safe Routes to School or traffic planning and their insight has been incredibly helpful. Dr. Niehaus has met with the mayors, city managers and police chiefs to discuss. He has also reached out to our state and local

representatives for assistance in getting this quickly addressed with traffic studies being a first step. We will continue to have conversations as this moves forward.

**Have you determined if any part of the Maire's secure vestibule could be reused to minimize the financial impact of its closure?**

The majority of the resources used to construct the Maire Secured Vestibule will not be available to be installed in other buildings. If sold, the upgrades to the Maire entrance may be attractive to a potential buyer.

**Which of our revenue generating ideas have you taken seriously?**

- Early Childhood Center (ECC) Southern Hub
- Learning Lab in Auditorium
- Early College Plan
- Summer Camp

The District takes all ideas seriously. Four years ago, changes were made to the district's ECC and now it is revenue generating with profits going back into the program (replacing furniture, consumable supplies, increasing staff pay to help with retention and recruitment of the best staff for our children). Prior to that, the district program was operating at a loss. The board is interested in expanding the ECC program, but not necessarily as part of this reconfiguration. Dr. Niehaus has spoken about early college and partnering with several community colleges and Cleary University. Summer camps are break even, but GPPSS wants to have as many of those opportunities as possible and will again explore running camps on other school breaks. Regarding other revenue generating ideas, the district has also increased participation fees (sports and clubs), changed bylaws to allow attendance of children of staff, and added more leases such as with local churches and the Grosse Pointe Theatre for our facilities when not in use by the schools.

**Have you considered using Trombly's extra capacity to create a much-needed south end ECC, which will increase revenue and make our community more attractive to new families?**

The expansion of ECC opportunities has been and continues to be a focus of GPPSS, not necessarily tied to this reconfiguration.

**Is the early college plan for generating revenue even a consideration?**

Yes, it absolutely is.

**The Wayne RESA Enhancement Millage relieved the financial triggers for 2 years. Can't you use this time to develop a plan to increase revenue and bring new families to the area instead of closing schools?**

Lisa Abbey shared that the Wayne RESA millage brings GPPSS about \$2.8 million annually. Even with inclusion of that, there is a \$1.4 million deficit in next year's budget. Much of the RESA money has been set aside to increase our fund equity to almost 10% this year (9% next

year is projected without additional cuts). Even with that millage there's not enough to overcome declining enrollment – the BOE has to make difficult decisions.

**Given that Wayne RESA mileage balances our budget and increase fund balance to over 10% through 2020 school year, can school closings be delayed?**

Prior to millage passing, the board has made reductions every year. \$20 million in cuts have already been made, and the district has tried to keep those as far from the classroom as possible. BOE members have to face hard decisions in front of them now. Dr. Niehaus shared that he has been talking about repurposing buildings and declining enrollment for years. There was a suggestion to close schools before the bond (raised in Town Halls then); that is why the bond was issued in two series. The first series focuses on the high schools which both Blue Ribbon Committees said would not be closed. The district always said the second series would be levied after reconfiguration decisions are made. That is included in the [bond informational materials](#).

**If money is the bottom line, why close Trombly which uses less bond money, has higher capacity, and the value of the land is lower?**

The BRC used four lenses to view the reconfiguration options - educational opportunities, impact on community, finances, and capacity - not just the financial lens. If the Board only looked at finances, we would not have town halls as the decision would be much simpler. The reality is there are other factors that must be weighed.

**Grosse Pointe Park has had an increase in population, why are you closing our school?**

There are many factors impacting this decision. The board talked about capacity, and decided to close one school on the north end, and one school on the south end, to balance the decision geographically.

**Instead of closing schools, have you looked at full day summer camps and after school programs to generate more revenue?**

The district does break even or make a small amount of money on these programs, but not enough. We continue to look for revenue generating ideas.

**With all the new ideas presented by parents, which ones have merit and are you seriously considering?**

Please see above. All ideas are being taken seriously.

**How many more students does the school need to cancel closure?**

The board set a capacity target of 80% for school buildings. Our buildings were designed to hold 9,000-12,000 students; we currently have 7,600. That means we would need thousands more students. Our demographers (Plante Moran and Middle Cities) both projected flat enrollment for elementary for the next number of years. Closures now address the drop in enrollment the district has already experienced since 2004. With a goal of 80% capacity, there is still room for growth if enrollment increases. We would all love enrollment to increase.

**How will you entice families to move here when Troy School District is advertising for their new preschool program in OUR local news?**

That's marketing from Troy and not connected to our Board of Education. However, GPPSS does advertise in Metro Parent, ASource Relocation Guide, GP News, GP Times, and social media as well as local cable. The district is also pooling our resources on a joint marketing effort with the Chamber of Commerce, Grosse Pointe Board of Realtors, local municipalities and marketing professionals. Word of mouth remains the most powerful marketing tool, so your help in recruiting friends and colleagues to the area is most appreciated. One major impediment is the small number of homes on the market (currently hovering around only 180).

**How do you define “least amount of impact or disruption”?**

This refers to moving the least number of students the least distance. We recognize the least number of schools and lenses are in the eye of the beholder.

**Can the Magnet be moved to Trombly?**

That decision won't be made until after reconfiguration. The district's 2-3, 4-5 magnet program is currently housed at Ferry and Defer, and could be moved to any building. Grade level configuration will impact the program. A Magnet group met in January, but will reconvene this fall to determine next steps, grade level, and curricular adjustments. Please note, Trombly already houses the district's Multi-Age program.

**Why are you closing schools in GPP and Harper Woods, where the largest percentage of “yes” votes for the bond were cast?**

The district certainly appreciates the support our community has shown and continues to show the school system. That was not among the lenses used to determine school closure options. One factor was geographic – looking at balancing closures geographically among north and south end schools. Another was capacity – keeping the largest schools allows for the most capacity should enrollment rebound. That is why the scenarios look at the 2 smallest schools.

**Why close National Blue Ribbon schools?**

GPPSS is honored to have 7 schools with that national designation. Eliminating all Blue Ribbon schools would severely limit choices when all the lenses were accounted for - bond needs, value of property, geographic distribution, capacity.

**Are you putting our district at risk for a lawsuit by closing schools with a lack of perceived due diligence?**

People can sue at any time. The BOE is the one to decide the number of schools necessary to best serve the district. Steps taken in this process are outlined on our [website](#) showing years of work going into this decision. While not uncommon after closures, such suits are rarely successful.

**BOE paid a consulting firm a lot of money to advise you on closing schools. Have you considered hiring a company to help you save our schools?**

Plante Moran created a facility assessment and worked with the BRC for the bond and reconfiguration. It is not Plante Moran's job to determine to close schools or not, that's the work of the Board of Education we elected to represent us. The district does advertise and is working to enhance those measures through partnerships with the Board of Realtors, municipalities and Chamber of Commerce.

**Why is closing schools the only option?**

Declining enrollment and budget cuts are not new. We have reduced teachers in line with enrollment. We have cut administrators (18 fewer position at central office) and support staff. Over the past decade the district has cut \$1 million to \$7 million per year. One of the largest cuts was a 10% compensation reduction in 2012-13 by all staff – teachers, support staff, administration, buildings and grounds. In addition to cuts, the district introduced new revenue enhancement opportunities discussed previously (rates for Early Childhood, athletic and club fees, allowing children of staff). Many different cuts and revenue opportunities have been examined along the way. School closing became a step in the process after all of these austerity measures.

**Why did a principal say K-4 is a done deal?**

The Board of Education said April 22 to focus on the K-4, 5-8 configuration, but their final decision will be in June. The Town Halls provide the community an opportunity to share their thoughts on alternate configuration options. May 20 the Board requested additional scenarios closing a middle school and keeping K-5, 6-8.

**What supports will be provided for students who have to transition multiple times?**

Providing a positive transition at every level, from elementary to middle school, from middle to high school, and then from high school to middle college, college or work is a critical component of this process. The district is also looking to ease the transition for 6th grade students who currently go from a team-taught approach of elementary right into the 6-period day of middle school. There are several factors that will help with the transition, including but not limited to:

- Cohorts of students moving together from the current to new home school
- Familiar fifth grade teachers moving to the middle school (depending upon certification)
- Additional counseling staff at the middle school compared to elementary staffing
- Activities over the next years to help students and families get to know their next school family
- OneGP activities - concerts, playground groups
- More opportunities will develop and input is welcome. Some have suggested parent committees to look at things like camp, playground activities.

**Multiple mayors have urged you to slow down the process and leave walkable elementary schools open. How will you respond?**

The administration and board president met with mayors, city council members, and city managers from the six municipalities. There was consensus that declining enrollment is real. Several of the mayors said schools probably need to close, but no one wants it to be a school in their city. Many of the representatives, like the general public, said they see the need to close schools, just not in their community. The Shores did share that all they have left of Vernier School is the bell and their property values and connection to the school system remain strong. All the municipal leaders ask that the Board take its time and do the necessary research. It is also important to realize any sale of any building will need to go through city managers and city councils for zoning and approval. For example, the administration building (389 St. Clair) has been for sale for close to two years. There have been four offers; none made it through the preliminary approval process. GPF, GPP, GPC have all sent notices asking us to take time on this decision. They represent their own city and constituents. The school system needs to ensure the best decision for the district as a whole.

**Can you send all students south of Jefferson to Trombly so no one needs to cross a major intersection?**

We could. There is a small number of students that currently go to Maire or Richard as those schools are closer to their homes, though across Jefferson.

**Why close a school in Grosse Pointe Park, which had a 7.8% increase in population since 2010 and is the exception to Plante Moran Cresa's reports of declining population?**

Closing smaller capacity schools does preserve capacity across the district. There is an excess capacity on both the north and south end, so the district is looking at closing smaller capacity schools. And while some schools have maintained a higher capacity, and some schools have seen a recent increase, all but two still fall below the Board's 80% capacity target. The school referenced here has increase almost 8% but is below 55% capacity currently.

**If you plan to add bus services for Poupard and Mason, why is transportation not offered to Trombly and Defer?**

The administration suggested that since Poupard has 62% of its students receiving free/reduced lunch, nearly 3 times that of any other school, looking at the solution through the lens of equity they would recommend providing transportation for elementary students across the highway and Mack. The \$250,000 cost would be for two buses from the Poupard property (not door to door) to the receiving school.

**How will school closure affect millage renewals on the November election?**

The Hold Harmless and Sinking Fund represent **26% of our budget**. These renewals don't increase taxes, but since they reset to zero when they expire the ballot language needs to say "increase" (from zero to the rate we have been paying). These both typically pass with a 70-30 margin; our community has a tradition of supporting our schools. We hope our community will continue to support our schools, especially as you can imagine the impact losing over a quarter of our budget would have on the schools. However, we understand the information our community will need, especially with the current decisions we are facing.

**How does adding busing to the Poupard or Mason closure save us money?**

Busing costs the district money (\$250,000 annually for the one proposed route), it doesn't save us money unless it keeps students from leaving the school system.

**What if GPPSS opened up tuition based enrollment and Trombly served as the pilot school for the district?**

The administration brought forward the idea of Tuition Enrollment 2 to 3 years ago and the board did discuss it, but it was turned down by the community. There was a fear tuition would bring the district closer to school of choice, though these are separate State statutes.

**What is the cost of a reconfiguration expert and additional counselors for the 5<sup>th</sup> graders if they move to middle school?**

The District has not hired a reconfiguration expert to assist. We are using the services of Plante Moran CRESA to provide enrollment projections and to serve as a consultant as the District considers possible closures. The business office will be posting a specific cost from Plante Moran CRESA to this FAQ soon.

In terms of additional counseling at the middle school that will be determined in the event that the Board finalizes a plan to move 5th graders to the middle school level.

**If walkability was the second most important factor according to the Blue Ribbon Committee (BRC), why are you closing Trombly and making students walk the farthest to all 3 levels of education (ES, MS, and HS)?**

Educational opportunities was the most important lens according to the BRC. Impact on community (not walkability) and financial savings tied for second place, with capacity coming in fourth. The board is looking at this decision through all the lenses – and struggling through all the lenses to make the best decision.

**Why is the board allowed to change allocation of the bond money if we voted for specific repairs in the bond proposal?**

The [words on the ballot](#) tell us what we can and cannot do with the money. In simplified terms, bond funds must be spent to keep students safe, warm, dry and connected. Plante Moran categorized facility needs in their [report](#) as critical (needed to be repaired/replaced in 1-3 years), deferred maintenance (4-7 years), and property enhancement (see page 25 of the report link for a quick snapshot). **The bond only covers critical needs.** Those are outlined on the report and there are several layers of oversight (community bond oversight committee, transparent bid process, televised board vote at public meeting on every individual project, etc.) to ensure funds are spent within the bond parameters.

**The general public is not voting on school closing, because we have elected officials. However, none of the current BOE commented on school closure in their campaigns. Why not delay closure until after the next election?**

President Summerfield shared that he spoke about the need for building closures during the campaign – some constituents argued we should close buildings before the bond, but unfortunately the triggers were met in November 2018. That was a question asked at the League of Women Voters forum and the Town Halls before the bond.

**Have you taken into account:**

- FCA Jeep Plant Installation - yes
- New State Education Fund - yes
- Upcoming Census - yes
- Tuition Based Enrollment - yes

**Will Dr. Lee recuse himself from the vote because he has a daughter at Maire?**

There is no reason in the bylaws that keeps him from voting.

**What are we doing with potential fundraising to get to an endowment?**

The Grosse Pointe Foundation for Public Education has met with two different groups and will meet again on Thursday to discuss endowment opportunities. We know there are people who are possibly able to provide an endowment. To put this in perspective, an endowment of \$50 million would be needed to cover the annual operational savings of building closures we are discussing now. The GPFPE has worked diligently for a decade and they have raised over \$3 million to date.

**Some have said property values drop when schools close. We need to provide the very best education for students, but people are asking how much time will it take to recoup our property value?**

Several people have provided a study to the board of education showing a temporary drop of 9% in property values when schools close, but this is recouped over time. The most important factor in property values is maintaining the quality of the public school system; that is the intent of this process. By closing under-utilized buildings, funding can be focused on the classroom and on maintaining the education our community expects for our children.

**Why was this off the table? Bring 6<sup>th</sup> grade to elementary and close Brownell**

Talking with the BRC and looking at the impact on community, this was not something the BRC, BOE or community was interested in. Closing 1 of 3 middle schools was seen to have more of an impact on middle school students who more often get themselves to and from school. Additionally, moving 6th graders to the elementary school level would decrease educational opportunities for 6th graders. However, May 20, the administration was directed to provide scenarios closing a middle school and showing K-5, 6-8 configuration. The board will discuss these June 10.

**How was land value calculated?**

Land value was calculated using a per acre rate from a sale of land in GP Shores because that is the only land that has been sold of that size. However, the district is taking a deeper dive on

the remaining properties under consideration, and we are about a week out with that information.

**What Real Estate company is listing the administration building – where is it on the public market?**

There is a [Request for Proposals](#) on the district website. That information has been shared publicly, posted in the local papers, and discussed at a meeting of the Broker Owners within the Grosse Pointe Board of Realtors.

**Why keep Barnes when that population is most mobile? Why not preserve a school?**

The community is asking for more early childhood opportunities, particularly as a way to bring more young families to the area. Barnes is the location for both our 0-5 special education programming and about half of our current tuition-based preschool offerings. By having both programs in one location, we can provide the necessary same age peer interaction between both preschool populations and minimize staff travel, keeping their time focused on provision of service (speech, PT, OT, etc.)

**Questions Asked and Answered By May 2**

**TIMING**

**Who will decide and when?**

We live in a representative democracy. As presented in the timeline shared at the January 14 Board meeting, the elected Board of Education will vote at a televised public regular meeting in June 2019 regarding reconfiguration. Implementation will be for the 2020-21 school year.

**If two schools need to be closed, why wouldn't we close both now and move forward? I'd hate to delay and cause further anxiety.**

We are following the timeline established by the board in January. The goal is to make a thoughtful and reasoned decision that utilizes the four lenses (educational opportunities, capacity, financial, community impact) by June, so the administration has a year to finalize curricular and organizational structures for the 2020-21 school year. That will also give our school families a year to work on strategies to blend and build community.

**CAPACITY AND CLASS SIZE**

**What is GPPSS's cap on class size per grade? Do you have a lower elementary and upper elementary cap?**

The great news is that the board is committed to maintaining our class size caps (at or below 24 for kindergarten, 27 for 1st-3rd grades, 30 for 4th) and as the administration ran all of the scenarios, the district stays within those caps and decreases variance.

**Maire is at 81% capacity. Why is it on the list for possible closures?**

There are four lenses (educational opportunities, capacity, financial, community impact) all options are viewed through. Maire is one of our smaller elementary schools and has classes on

two levels. Aside from the largest schools (Ferry, Monteith) all elementary schools have been in a scenario.

**Why are we keeping Ferry at or around 50% capacity?**

Ferry also contains classrooms for students receiving special education services where the state and federal guidelines for staff to student ratios are much lower than our class sizes. Building utilization is higher than the capacity when you factor that in.

**If two elementary schools are closed, some schools could still have an extra 30-40% capacity. Are you looking at other ways to monetize that space?**

Absolutely and we hope the town halls will generate additional ideas. To date, some have included additional space for early childhood, Full Circle programming, senior citizen daycare, and office rental (as is currently being done at the administration building). The safety of our students must be factored into all uses, but we are open to exploring creative possibilities.

**How will these current four scenarios expand ECC opportunities, particularly for infants and full time?**

Expansion of ECC at Kerby was removed by the Board of Education from the most recent four scenarios (E.1, F.1, K, L). The possibility of doing renovations (fire safety, stairwells, etc.) at Barnes to increase opportunities at that building, as well as continuing to increase satellite locations across the district will still be pursued. But those discussions will not be tied to reconfiguration.

**DISTRICT BOUNDARIES**

**Will the inequity of proposed Middle School capacities be more evenly distributed (not Brownell 66%, Parcels 91%, Pierce 62%)? As some Brownell students are already slated to attend Grosse Pointe North, why is the district not considering redrawing lines to make the middle school capacities more equitable?**

The current and proposed capacity difference at Brownell, Parcels and Pierce is very similar. The board could choose to address this in the future with boundary changes, but that is not part of the current reconfiguration discussion as there is still room to accommodate all students within the traditional boundary at all three schools. Additionally, under our current configuration Parcels is at a higher capacity percentage than the other middle schools.

**Will we be moving middle school lines or maintaining K-5?**

Neither of those options are within the current proposals.

**If your elementary school changes, does that mean your middle school can change?**

Neither middle school nor high school boundary changes are within the current reconfiguration scenarios.

**FINANCIAL ALTERNATIVES**

**Rather than cost reductions - were there alternatives considered to increase enrollment (paid tuition) considered?**

Paid tuition has been proposed by the administration. At the time, the community came out against that option. This is something the board could consider, but comparing to peer districts

who have done this it would likely only bring us 15-20 students which is not enough to cover the shortfall. That would have to be one of many solutions.

**What is being done to bring in revenue into the district (to cover the lack of state funding)?**

Our superintendent and board have been active in educating state and federal representatives about school funding in Michigan. Efforts to date have focused on expansion of Young Fives (kindergarten) and Early Childhood programs, as the district tends to keep families once they start here. The district has also approved the attendance of children of employees (it is under a separate statute from School of Choice legislation the board has unanimously opposed).

**Do we have any plans to start an endowment fund to protect against future reductions?**

Discussions continue in this vein. Please note that an endowment of approximately \$50 million would be needed to cover the annual operating deficit. The Grosse Pointe Foundation for Public Education does have two endowments, and continues to meet with people interested in fundraising for this cause, recognizing and clearly communicating limitations of this worthy effort. For example, currently the GPFPE does not fund capital expenses or salaries and benefits for staff. It focuses on programs *enriching, engaging and inspiring our future*.

**Are there other ways to realize the \$1 million reduction without closing schools?**

Yes, but after a decade of budget cuts to the roughly 15% of the district budget that is not directly tied to salaries and benefits, that would be in making difficult choices regarding which programs and personnel to cut. The current board is considering consolidation of buildings in order to main the programs and people that make this the Grosse Pointe Public School System (25 AP classes, 5 foreign languages, fine and performing arts, 60 sports).

**What is the annual financial savings desired?**

The latest direction from the board was to look for solutions that provide 80% capacity in buildings and \$1,000,000 annual savings.

**GRADE CONFIGURATIONS/SCENARIOS**

**Monday's board meeting seemed to be narrowing the scope so fine tuning could be done. However, days later, we are hearing about adding scenarios (K-5 again). How can we create a plan and ask questions benefitting that plan when they keep changing?**

This is a fluid process and great ideas keep coming forth from our educated and invested community. The board is working hard to ensure they hear their constituents, but they also provided and have stuck to a timeline that leads to a decision in June.

**If we are only closing two elementary schools, why can't we redistribute to avoid moving fifth grade to middle school?**

If the district remains with the K-5 / 6-8 organization there are not enough middle school students to maintain three middle schools. The Blue Ribbon Committee and Board chose to move forward with 3 middle schools and the K-4 configuration, anticipating counter-proposals would come out of the town hall process for comparison.

**Why would you close a high achieving elementary school (capacity, enrollment, test scores)? So why close a growing school like Maire, Mason and Kerby? What kind of safety would we have when buying homes in Grosse Pointe?**

Those buying homes after the reconfiguration will still experience a GPPSS education; the goal is to make it even better. This is an amazing school system and we will recreate a sense of community once the new normal is established. Test scores were not one of the four lenses (educational opportunities, capacity, financial, community impact) used to evaluate options. School size was. Maire, Mason and Kerby are among our smaller schools. Kerby was originally in a closure scenario due to its number of first floor classrooms that can be used for special education and tuition based early childhood programming (a need identified by the community to attract new families to the area). The board removed the Kerby ECC scenarios April 22.

### **What is the criteria for closing a school?**

As administration reviewed the mechanics of possible reconfiguration scenarios, the following were considerations:

- Ensuring ES student capacity exists geographically across the District
- Maintaining buildings with more sq. footage typically addresses future capacity needs
- ECC must be housed on the first floor of any building, unless specific fire and safety conditions are met to allow for 2nd floor fee based programming (special education early childhood education must remain on the first floor)
- Many variables (some easily identified & some not) exist when considering which buildings to possibly close
- Reconfiguration will cause a ripple effect on attendance areas
- For the sake of this presentation, elementary schools are divided into North and South end as follows:
  - North - Ferry, Mason, Monteith and Poupard
  - South - Defer, Kerby, Maire, Richard and Trombly

### **What are you going to do with the magnet program? If you move it to another school, couldn't you keep more school communities together?**

There is a Magnet Advisory Group and it will meet again once the reconfiguration plan is approved by the board of education. Future location will take community impact into consideration.

### **Will Kids Club now be available onsite at the Middle School given the new configuration?**

That is absolutely being discussed. One of the budget cuts over the past decade was to remove *Pointe After* from the middle schools, but allow middle school students to attend at the closest elementary school. With 5th grade moving to middle school, our administration has discussed after school care/programming with peer districts using the 5-8 configuration, and they implemented it and call their program Mid Club.

### **Why is Administration not being considered to move to Poupard?**

There is still that possibility. One of the many factors being considered is the cost of construction to facilitate a separate entrance and security measures for the administration to be housed at any school. Plans must include not only office space, but a location for professional development, administrative level meetings, code of conduct hearings, and residency.

### **We heard that at the Mason parent meeting they were told the administration is working on a new scenario that closes a middle school without absorbing the elementary schools. Is that true? Are more scenarios than EF/KL being created currently?**

The administration has not been directed to do so at this time.

**What is the chance that Kerby will again be on the table this year? Brownell?**

The role of the Blue Ribbon Committee was to serve as a filter to evaluate and narrow proposals. The board of education has also narrowed options along the way. While not out of the realm of possibility for this round of closures, those would be unlikely with the current board direction. However, if enrollment continues to drop, this could be step one in the process and additional schools would be considered in the next phase if needed.

**If the fifth grade moves up, would we go from 1.5 counselors at Brownell and Pierce back to 2 counselors at each school?**

That will be one of many curricular and staffing discussions made after the board decision in June and implementation in the fall of 2020.

**Can you show the proposed bell schedule for 5-8? Is there any overlap with 5th and 7th/8th at all?**

Fifth grade would not follow a bell schedule but would rotate very similarly to how they do now among 3 set teachers in the elementary school (each teacher focusing on a subject area like science, math, social studies, getting to know a smaller cohort of students within the school setting to develop meaningful relationships). This would be a school community so there would be overlap for schoolwide activities, but daily contact would be less likely with separate lunches, recess, bathrooms, floors, etc.

**How does adding fifth grade to middle school help improve elective options at all levels of middle school? Related: If 5th/6th grades won't have elective with 7th/8th grades, how do we expand elective options? Please be specific.**

Here are a few specific examples. Specials teachers, such as those for instrumental music, who currently travel to all 9 elementary buildings would now be concentrated at the middle school. More of their time could focus on instruction, not travel. When teachers are in the building, the opportunity for adding class sections is feasible, of course within contractual bargaining agreements. Spanish is part of the current 5th grade elementary rotation but only every fourth day every other semester. By fifth grade moving to middle school, Spanish instruction could be more consistent and delivered in a more instructionally significant way.

**Could you explain why Poupard and Mason were chosen as possible closures and Monteith is not an option?**

Poupard and Mason are smaller schools. Maintaining buildings with more square footage like Ferry and Monteith typically addresses future capacity needs.

**ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS**

**Why aren't board members here?**

There are town halls scheduled at every school building in a month's time. All board members cannot attend all of them but are making an effort to attend as many as possible.

**How are the board members getting information/questions that are presented at each Town Hall?**

Board members are also watching the Q&A developed from each town hall and continue to meet with constituents and read letters and emails to the board (schoolboard@gpschools.org).

### **Why is the superintendent so concerned with meeting with Title I schools?**

The superintendent is meeting with as many groups and individuals as his schedule can possibly permit. He has been invited by the Poupard and Mason PTOs (Title I schools along with Defer) as well as Trombly, Kerby, and Maire (not Title I schools). And he is attending as many town halls as possible. He is superintendent of all our schools.

### **BUILDINGS/GROUNDS**

#### **Is it feasible to think that all three middle schools could have fifth/sixth grades on one floor, and 7th/8th grade on another floor?**

For the majority of the day, yes, but there are specialized rooms like cafeterias, science labs and music rooms that would be exceptions.

#### **What are you planning to do with buildings you close? Do you plan to sell any? What are the possibilities? Have you gotten any city approvals for rezoning? Will the community have any input on these decisions?**

State law would allow us 3 years to make decisions without requiring buildings be brought up to current codes to reopen as an educational facility. There are many options from sale or lease that could be considered. Residential use is preferred in many cases as that would open more housing options in a very small market. The last thing we want is to sell to competitive entities. Zoning would be worked out between the buyer and the city.

#### **How did you come up with this land value?**

Land value is currently be re-evaluated and will be updated as needed. These projections were based on the [Deeplands sale price of approximately \\$230.00 per acre](#) - the most recent sale of a similar size property in this area.

#### **Does Plante Moran have any real estate development affiliations?**

Plante Moran is a large corporation. The branches we are working with for this would not profit from any real estate transactions. There is a public RFP process in place as is being used currently for the sale of the administration building.

#### **Do you have a cost on what it would take to reconfigure middle schools for 5-8?**

Those are in development, but most changes would utilize the buildings as they currently are or with nominal investments such as changing some computer labs to classrooms.

#### **If the 5-8 configuration is approved, can PTOs group together money to get playground equipment for middle schools or is playground equipment already considered?**

Playground equipment is not currently budgeted for, but this would be a wonderful example of how to work together to blend the school communities. This would also be a great area to get feedback from students to help them create their new school home, as well as PE teachers to purchase equipment that could serve a dual purpose.

#### **Because school closings affect walkability, has a study been done on which schools have the most walking students?**

This has been anecdotal in speaking with staff, administration, parents and crossing guards. Weather is always a factor as well - more students walk/bike in spring and fall.

### **Does the district plan a traffic study?**

Traffic studies are conducted by the cities, as was most recently done for Monteith with the City of Grosse Pointe Woods. Please remember the consolidated projected numbers for schools are similar to actual past enrollment figures.

### **How does student safety factor into the board's decisions? With respect to pedestrian and vehicular traffic, how will traffic be accommodated at enlarged schools and maintain safety standards?**

Student safety is always our top priority. If there are concerns now with safety, we need to address those now, not after consolidation. The district will continue to urge families to carpool, walk and bike in order to reduce traffic congestion and increase safety. Thank you for working with us to enhance student safety!

## **ENROLLMENT**

### **I noticed on the heat map that there are few kids who attend GPPSS around Barnes. Has the district studied how closing this school affected this neighborhood?**

Trustee Weertz has shared her experience as a family within that neighborhood that was redistricted to Monteith when Barnes closed. Location and capacity were also factors when that closure was made. Home values remain strong in that area.

### **Why are the enrollment projections only out 5 years?**

One of the primary data points for enrollment projections is live births, so they only project out for kindergarten for those currently living. This is not the only data point as the demographers also take into account historical averages of GPPSS share of county births, and the fact that the district increases the number of students in every grade level every year along the way from kindergarten through 12th grade graduation, with bumps at 1st grade, 6th grade, and 9th grade.

### **How does the plan factor in future enrollment growth?**

Every plan allows for future growth in enrollment at every building. The goal of 80% capacity provides ample room, and every scenario includes schools below that goal. Every effort will be made to continue to attract young families to GPPSS.

## **EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMMING**

### **Are any of the current fee-based preschool programs anticipated to close? If their school building is closed or full, will they be moved?**

None of the current preschool programs are anticipated to close. They could move based on capacity and every effort will be made to expand the program using satellite locations across the district.

### **Did anyone consider a 3-year-old and 4-year-old preschool with before/after care in every elementary school as a way to soften moving 5th grade to middle school?**

Expansion of preschool is being considered, but not with the goal of keeping 5th grade at the elementary level. Moving 5th grade is tied to keeping all 3 middle schools open.

## **GENERAL QUESTIONS**

**You mentioned cost savings being re-invested in the school district, for example hiring/retaining high quality teachers. Have teachers yet regained the salary reduction that occurred, and if not, will that be a priority moving forward? Our teachers are the best and we need to make sure we keep them!**

GPPSS staff all took an approximately 10% pay reduction and have yet to regain what they made then. Both the administration and the GPEA (teacher's union) have that as a priority in a market where teacher shortages are very real and projected to continue to grow.

**Why are the GP Public schools and private schools in the Chamber of Commerce - this is a business lobby. Note, our public libraries are also members of Chamber of Commerce. Isn't this a conflict of interest? Have we lost our independence?**

GPPSS partners with the Chamber of Commerce on activities to market the area, particularly to young families.

**How is the Board of Education dealing with a growing community voice that is calling your school closing choices racist?**

While our community is becoming increasingly diverse, the diversity of the student population at individual buildings does still vary. Scenarios have been proposed across the district. The factors are not racist. They are based on the four lenses (educational opportunities, capacity, financial savings and community impact), and particularly square footage and geographical distribution (one North end, one South end school). Also, the district and school board have worked diligently to create a warm and welcoming community for all our students and families. This inclusive work started with our Strategic Plan, then our Diversity Plan, and continues with our diversity efforts in concert with The University of Michigan, Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency, and the local NAACP. We are asking for your help to ensure all students are warmly welcomed into their new school community as reconfiguration takes place.

**Why was closing a high school never an option?**

Please see the [survey results](#) from the 2019 Valentines Day Blue Ribbon meeting. These closely resemble the results from the 2017 survey. The vast majority of both groups and the board said closing a high school was not an option at this time.

## **AS PLANS DEVELOP**

**How did the decision to keep Kerby open come to be (vs. other South schools)?**

At their April 22 Board of Education, the board was informally polled and decided to remove the Early Childhood Center expansion at Kerby from the reconfiguration process. Expansion of ECC will still be pursued through satellite sites, but not as part of this process. Several board members voiced a concern regarding the ripple effect on so many school boundaries in the scenarios where Kerby elementary was closed (# and % of children at Richard, Monteith, Maire, and Defer).

**Why would Kerby come back on the list for closures?**

If enrollment continues to decline over the next five years, this could be phase one of a larger process.

**What is the primary purpose of town hall meetings - share information with the community or continue to ask for input? Will plans/scenarios continue to change as town halls occur?**

The board welcomes ideas and input. Town Halls are another way for the community to share their concerns and comments before the elected board makes a decision in June.

**How much change do you anticipate from what the board has already publicly stated in regards to which schools will be closing?**

This process started in January with 7 scenarios. Scenarios were added, changed and removed along the way as the Blue Ribbon Committee and community comments provided a filter for ideas. As the process developed, the options have narrowed. But this remains a fluid process until the board vote in June.

**What is the most accurate way to stay up to date on what the board is favoring outside of Facebook and rumors?**

All decisions will be made in public televised meetings of the Board of Education. Updates are included in the GPPSS Weekly Update and posted on the district website [www.gpschools.org](http://www.gpschools.org) under Blue Ribbon. Local press coverage in the Grosse Pointe News and Times have been accurate. Social media is the least accurate way to receive information.