

ELEMENTARY SPACE STUDY UPDATE

NOVEMBER 3, 2023

Here are the ideas that have been discussed during the Lake Shore CSD Board of Education's review of elementary school space needs. Below the overall list is a brief recap of the discussion for each idea, and whether it was felt that the idea could be a good solution to the District's overall need for additional space in the elementary school buildings.

- 1) Move the District's 5th grade classes to the William G. Houston Middle School**
- 2) Reopen the W.T. Hoag building as an elementary school**
- 3) Reconfigure the District's Elementary School Attendance Zones**
- 4) Move all Special Education students into one building or out of district placements**
- 5) Add a separate portable classroom building at each elementary school (like the one at the W.T. Hoag building)**
- 6) Make the J.T. Waugh School and Intermediate (grade 4-5) building and the Highland and A.J. Schmidt elementary schools into Kindergarten – Grade 3 buildings**
- 7) Add a building addition onto the A.J. Schmidt and Highland elementary buildings**
- 8) Request funding from the Seneca Nation for building additions**
- 9) Use folding partition walls to split larger rooms in the J.T. Waugh Elementary School into multiple classroom spaces**
- 10) Have the District increase class sizes at the elementary level and reduce the number of classrooms at grade levels with lower enrollment numbers**
- 11) Have the District take over one or more of its Universal Pre-K classrooms**

Additionally, the various committees that have met have also raised a number of questions or points that include:

- Asking whether the elementary school or the Middle School environment is more appropriate for 5th grade children
- If recess would be offered to 5th grade students if they were in the Middle School

- How after-school activities would be handled if the 5th grade students were housed in the Middle School, and whether we would want the 5th graders mixing with the other grade levels after school
- How busing would be handled
- The emotional changes children are going through
- Younger children (5th graders) getting home earlier if the 5th grade were to be housed in the Middle School

Here are some of the topics that have been discussed as each of these ideas have been analyzed:

1) Move the District's 5th grade classes to the Wm. G. Houston Middle School

Much has been discussed about the possible move of the 5th grade to the Middle School, but please know that no decision has been made as of this time.

Transportation - We have discussed how busing would work, and whether 5th grade students would ride am/pm buses with secondary (6-12) students or with elementary (K-4) students. If students rode buses with secondary students, there may be a need for an additional bus run or two to accommodate the additional number of students on the early bus run. It would also mean that all grades in the Middle School building could follow the same scheduled beginning and ending times. Having 5th graders ride the bus with elementary students would mean that all buses would have to drop students off at an elementary school *and* at the Middle School.

Since the buses could not physically be in two locations at once, it would mean having to have staggered start/end times for the Middle School in order to accommodate the busing schedule. For these reasons it was felt that having the 5th grade students ride the bus along with 6-12 graders was the better option. While some people did voice concerns with having 5th graders ride a school bus with older children, it was pointed out that our Transportation Department already seats elementary students by grade level, with the youngest students sitting in the front of the bus. Drivers could follow the same practice and begin to fill bus seats from the front with 5th graders.

We will also note that it was discussed that a family with the oldest child moving into 5th grade would see their child arrive home on the earlier bus in the afternoon, which could cause parents to have to rearrange child care.

Location of the 5th Grade within the Middle School – The Middle School administrators have given thought to how four grade levels could best be housed in the three-story instructional portion of the Middle School. We discussed having all 5th graders on the ground floor along with a portion of the 6th grade classes. The second floor could house the rest of the 6th grade classes

along with the 7th grade classes.

The third floor would become the 8th grade floor. The 8th grade is currently on the 2nd floor, but we discussed that moving to the 3rd floor would increase the physical separation of the older students from the younger students and make a natural progression from floor to floor as students moved up each grade level.

Class Schedules – We have a lot of flexibility when it comes to the class schedules. 5th grade classes could operate in a secluded, “self-operating” format where students do not change classes except for special subjects like music, art, physical education, technology, home & careers, etc. If we decided to departmentalize teaching where one 5th grade teacher taught all students math, one taught ELA, one science and one social studies, teachers could change classrooms and move to the students, or students could change classrooms to go to their teachers. We could do either – whatever we decided would work best. Also, the 5th grades could follow the same bell schedule as the rest of the building, changing subjects when the bell rings. Or the 5th grades could simply ignore the building’s bells and run on their own schedule, where the teacher decides what time they will change instructional subject areas.

Breakfast/Lunch – The Middle School “overflow” cafeteria that hasn’t been used in several years could easily be reopened to accommodate seating for additional students to adjust for larger lunch periods. We would also look at the possibility of adding an additional lunch period if it were necessary – we did develop a model where we could do one lunch period per grade level to avoid mixing students in different grade levels during the lunch period.

Staffing – The Middle School 5th grade positions would be posted in accordance with the District’s collective bargaining agreement with the Lake Shore Central Teachers’ Association, and current District elementary teachers would have the ability to bid on the positions.

5th grade teachers currently working in the elementary schools would be displaced and would bid on open elementary positions (including the Middle School 5th grade positions) in accordance with the teachers association contract.

The Board of Education members and Central Office Administrators toured the District’s buildings on September 14th, noting the current use of space and the differences in certain program spaces between buildings. Based on that tour and discussions, we discussed a number of other possible options.

2) Reopen the William T. Hoag Educational Center as an elementary school building

This solution was discussed very early in the process, as it is a District-owned building and has received upgrades in the District’s various capital construction projects. The building is currently housing a number of District functions (Community Education, Technology Services, Central Registrar, Special Education offices, and the District’s Central Printing & Mailing operation). Reopening the building as a K-5 elementary school would cause the District to find space for some or all of these functions in another building. The building also has tenants, with office

spaces being rented to the Erie 2-Chautauqua-Cattaraugus BOCES, and program spaces being rented to Buffalo Hearing & Speech and the Boys & Girls Club of Lake Shore.

While there would be a loss in rental income if the District were to no longer lease the spaces out, the larger issue would be the loss in the programs in the building that serve Lake Shore children. Most of the children in the Buffalo Hearing & Speech programs are Lake Shore students, and many Lake Shore families send their children to the Boys & Girls Club after school each day. We were not sure that the Boys & Girls Club would be able to locate a comparable facility locally if the Hoag building were not available, and losing the program would negatively impact many of our families.

Last and certainly, though not least, moving back to four (4) elementary school buildings would require the District to reconfigure our elementary attendance zones. This would impact most elementary students' families, with only students on the far western side (A.J. Schmidt area) and the eastern end (Highland area) not being moved to another building. This option was rejected because it would cause disruption to too many families.

3) Reconfigure the District's Elementary School Attendance Zones

This solution would allow the District to change which elementary school building students would attend, by readjusting the boundary streets/roads for each building. While it would allow the District to possibly balance class sizes a bit more, in the end the District would still have the same number of students being housed within its three elementary school buildings. Since the overall goal was to find a way to create or free-up some instructional space in the elementary schools, this solution was found to not give the results that the District needs.

4) Move all special education students into one building or out-of-district placements

This idea is not feasible. The State of New York is very clear that it will no longer approve "center based" special education programs, where students are clustered into settings that house only special education programs. When this change was put into effect, the number of out-of-district special education placements that are available to students was greatly decreased. Since that time, it is very difficult to find placements in out-of-district programs for children because the State is clear – they want special needs children in schools with children without special needs whenever possible. This is what is meant by educating children in the "least restrictive environment."

The District has gone to great lengths to educate all of our children in our own buildings, in our own classrooms if it is at all possible.

5) Add a separate portable classroom building at each elementary school (like the one at the W.T. Hoag building)

Adding a portable classroom like the W.T. Hoag Annex Building would require voter approval – like any other capital construction project. It would also require approval from the NYS Department of Education Office of Facilities Planning. Assuming District residents would approve a capital project to add portable classrooms at the A.J. Schmidt, J.T. Waugh, and Highland

elementary schools, it would mean that at least two classrooms of children at each site would be housed in the portable classroom buildings, which would mean that these students would have to go outside each time they were changing classes for gym, art, music and library, in addition to breakfast and lunch. Winter months would require students to put their winter coats on several times during the day. There is also a question about whether the NYS Education Department would allow the District to add instructional spaces to its elementary school buildings when excess space is available in its Middle School building.

For these reasons, it was decided that this solution was not optimal.

6) Make the J.T. Waugh School an Intermediate (grade 4-5) building and the Highland and A.J. Schmidt elementary schools into Kindergarten – Grade 3 buildings

This option was studied in-depth, as the idea to return the J.T. Waugh School to an intermediate school or grades 4 and 5 was raised several times, both by some of the Board of Education members and by some members of various District committees. There were several pros and cons associated with this option.

Pros – Making the A.J. Schmidt and Highland elementary schools both K-3 school buildings would allow the District to consolidate K-3 classrooms into classes with slightly larger numbers, and better balance the classes.

It would also allow the District to do the same with its 4th and 5th grade classes, since they would all be housed in one building. Since the District would still be utilizing the same buildings, there would not be a need for increased administrative or support staff for this option. This would allow the District to create comparable spaces in each elementary school building for art, music, band, orchestra, library, sensory rooms, reading/AIS, special education and related services as well as Johnson-O'Malley/Native American Student Support. Having all 4th and 5th grade students in one building would allow the District to create combined chorus and orchestras at that level.

Cons – This option would move all current J.T. Waugh K-3 students into either the A.J. Schmidt or Highland school buildings. This would mean that the District would have to reconfigure the District's elementary attendance zones to determine which students would attend which building. This would cause an impact to most of the elementary student families in the District. It would also cause the District to alter the school day start and end times for either the J.T. Waugh school for grades 4 and 5, or the A.J. Schmidt and Highland schools for grades K-3.

This is because all District elementary school bus runs would have to deliver students to a K-3 building (either A.J. Schmidt or Highland) and the J.T. Waugh school each day. Since the buses could not physically deliver students to two buildings several miles apart at the same time, one building would have to have a later start time.

At the end of the day, the same would hold true and the building(s) that have the later start time would also have to have a later end time. It would also add time to every bus run, to go to multiple buildings in the morning and afternoon, which would increase transportation costs.

It would also place similar conditions on the Seneca Nation Transportation Department, that transports the Seneca Nation students from the Cattaraugus Territory. Another disadvantage would be that the A.J. Schmidt school would have a larger percentage of Native American students from the Seneca Nation Cattaraugus Territory assigned to its attendance zone due to the proximity of the school to the Seneca Nation. This could make it look like the District is segregating our Native American students into a separate building, which the District would never support.

7) Add a building addition onto the A.J. Schmidt and Highland elementary buildings

Building additions onto the elementary schools would require voter approval – like any other capital construction project.

It would also require building project approval from the NYS Department of Education Office of Facilities Planning. Assuming District residents would approve a capital project to add more rooms at the A.J. Schmidt, J.T. Waugh, and Highland elementary schools, it would mean that it would be several years before the District would see the benefit from this option as it would take time to propose the project, gain voter approval, develop plans and specifications, bid the projects and then complete the work.

The question about whether the NYS Education Department would allow the District to add instructional spaces to its elementary school buildings when excess space is available in its Middle School building would still remain with this option also.

For these reasons, it was decided that this solution was not the best option.

8) Request funding from the Seneca Nation for building additions

Like the last option, any addition to the District's buildings would still require the approval of the District's voters as well as the NYS Department of Education Office of Facilities Planning. The District receives Native American Building Aid on its various capital construction projects that fund the portion of construction relative to the District's Native American students who are residents of the Cattaraugus Territory.

Asking the Seneca Nation for additional funding would in essence be requesting the Nation to fund a disproportionate share of the construction costs relative to the District's Native American students, which the District would not support. For these reasons, this option was rejected.

9) Use folding partition walls to split larger rooms in the J.T. Waugh Elementary School into multiple classroom spaces

Since the J.T. Waugh Elementary School was originally built to serve as the Angola High School building, before the District consolidated its buildings, several of the J.T. Waugh classroom spaces

are larger rooms. For example, the Kindergarten classrooms are housed in rooms that were originally art rooms in the Angola High School building. Portable classroom walls would allow the rooms to be split into two classrooms instead of one.

While this would help create more space, it would only help with space at J.T. Waugh Elementary School. Also, unless the District could find portable walls that would reach all of the way to the classroom ceiling, the students in these classrooms could be distracted by classroom noise from the adjoining room. The District will keep this option in mind in case it can help with space needs at J.T. Waugh in the future, but it doesn't help solve the overall space issues in the District's other elementary school buildings.

10) Have the District increase class sizes at the elementary level and reduce the number of classrooms at grade levels with lower enrollment numbers

The District was able to identify a number of instances where classroom space could be created by decreasing the number of sections of various grade levels housed in its elementary school buildings and increasing the number of students in each classroom. The District had refrained from doing this in recent years because we needed to keep students spaced apart during the COVID period.

The District is considering this option, as it will help the District reduce payroll costs which will be important as Federal Coronavirus Relief Funding expires. It would also create additional space in each building by reducing the number of classrooms for Kindergarten through 5th grade.

The District is considering implementing this option through attrition, which would mean that as elementary level teachers retire, it would take advantage of the opportunity to reduce an identified classroom by not hiring a teacher to fill the open position. The District estimates that it could take five- to seven years to create the needed spaces using this option, but it would mean that no current employees would lose their jobs.

The District will continue to explore this option and how it can benefit the District and its students.

11) Have the District take over one or more of its Universal Pre-K classrooms

The District is considering taking over the operation of one- to three of its Universal Pre-K classrooms as a separate issue, but if the District were to implement this change it could accelerate the time period for accomplishing the desired creation in classroom space through the reduction of elementary class sections outline in option #10 above.

This would be accomplished by allowing one to three current elementary teachers to bid into the Universal Pre-K teaching positions for the District-operated classrooms. While there would be an overall increase in the cost of operating the Pre-K classes, a large portion of those costs would be covered by the District's UPK grant. While a portion of the classroom operation costs would still have to be covered by the District's budget, the District estimates that those costs

would be less than what the District currently spends for three elementary classrooms and the cost that it pays to an outside contractor to operate the current UPK program classrooms.

It would also free up three elementary classroom spaces, which could allow the District to reallocate those spaces to address its current space needs. There is also an overall sense that the District would experience an increase in its Pre-K program enrollment if it were to take over the operation of three of its four UPK classrooms. The District will continue to explore this option.

Summary – Based upon the items listed above and the discussions that have taken place, the Board is continuing discussion for all possible solutions. The final decision for each will be made by the Board of Education in the coming months.