

A district's capital building program can have a significant impact on virtually every aspect of the school system. The physical condition of a building can help to promote learning or it can be detrimental to the educational process. Teachers will struggle to effectively educate children if they don't have access to an environment which is conducive to learning. The educational process can't be optimized if the facilities are not clean, safe, and orderly. Overcrowded conditions, poor ventilation, inadequate lighting, lack of electrical supply, and ineffective heating and cooling systems can produce a number of challenges for the teachers and administration. It is critical that we develop a responsible capital building plan to create the necessary facilities for us to be successful. We must use our limited financial resources to create the best learning environment for our students. In addition, we must be good stewards of the taxpayers' money. Renovations to existing buildings and new construction are the greatest financial investments the school district will make and it can have long term impacts. We need to make sure we do this right the first time.

We are currently discussing two capital building options for Hamblen County. We want to make sure the community has an opportunity to review these options and to provide feedback to us. Option 1 is the plan we have discussed for the last several months. This option is comprised of three phases. Phase one would be the renovation of West High School and the expansion of the cafeteria. The renovation would include significant upgrades to the classrooms, HVAC systems, plumbing, electrical, and general conditions.

The second phase of Option 1 would be the construction of walls within our open-classroom schools. This would involve Lincoln Elementary, Lincoln Middle, Meadowview Middle, and John Hay Elementary. Our primary reason for this is centered on safety and instruction. Anyone entering the school to do harm would have easy access to virtually all classrooms in these schools. Staff members have no way to protect themselves within their classrooms. Also, distractions and interruptions are constantly occurring within these open-concept classrooms. It is not a strong learning environment. The third phase of Option 1 would be the construction of additional classrooms at Fairview-Marguerite Elementary. This addition would eliminate some of the overcrowding which currently exists within our schools. It would also eliminate the need for mobile units and would help to increase security because students would not be forced to travel outside the building.

The Second Option is similar to the first but would involve a different course of action for Lincoln Elementary. The first phase of Option 2 would still be the renovation of West High School and the expansion of the cafeteria. The renovation would include significant upgrades to the classrooms, HVAC systems, plumbing, electrical, and general conditions.

The second phase of Option 2 would still be focused on the open-classroom schools, but we would go a different route to accomplish this. Each of the open-classroom projects has over \$1 million associated with relocation costs of some nature. This would include mobile units, restricted construction schedules, length of the construction window, and safety issues connected with completing projects with students in close proximity. This is money that would provide no long-term benefits and could be considered wasted money. We could avoid these relocation costs by constructing a new addition to Witt Elementary and combine Witt and Lincoln Elementary into one school on the existing Witt campus. We have adequate site space, which would require limited

grading, and all infrastructure are already on campus. We could build the addition to Witt and make it large enough to hold all of the Lincoln Elementary students. This would have an approximate enrollment of 700 students. Construction could take place with limited interruption to Witt, and we could complete the project quickly. Lincoln Elementary students and staff would be moved to the new addition once it was completed. This would allow us to save over \$500,000 a year on operational costs that include both personnel and facility savings.

Phase three of Option 2 would involve renovating the old Lincoln Elementary School and converting it to the newly renovated Lincoln Middle School. We would not have to incur many of the relocation costs connected with option I. Lincoln Middle would move into the new space once the old elementary space has been converted to the newly renovated middle school. Classrooms walls would be installed and all necessary upgrades to mechanical, electrical, and plumbing would be addressed.

Phase four of Option 2 would involve renovating Meadowview Middle School. We would eliminate the open-classroom concept at Meadowview and make a few more renovations. We could utilize some of the empty space at Lincoln as temporary classrooms while the renovations at Meadowview take place. Phase five would focus on John Hay. The open-classrooms concept would be eliminated and all necessary improvements to mechanical, electrical, or plumbing would take place at this time. Phase 6 would involving building an addition to Fairview-Marguerite Elementary to eliminate the need for mobile units at Fairview and Hillcrest.

There are no easy answers to most capital building needs because the issue is so complicated and it directly impacts the community. The following is a quick summary of the advantages and disadvantages of both options. The first option has been discussed and many understand this plan. It addresses our instructional needs and would most likely receive the most support from the community; however, this plan may not be the most financially responsible plan in the long run. We will spend a considerable amount of money in each open-classroom concept school to deal with relocation costs and there will be significant interruptions to the instructional program. In addition, I am extremely concerned that the additional classrooms needed at Lincoln Elementary and Lincoln Middle (because we will lose classrooms within the building due to the construction of walls and hallways) will consume an already crowded campus. We will be forced to take space for classrooms from existing playgrounds, parking areas, and traffic routes.

The second option could generate some community and staff opposition, depending on their viewpoint. The increased traffic on 25-E by Witt could also be an issue. Although we can never run a school district completely like a business, we probably need to be more financially responsible in all matters. We must always be good stewards of taxpayers' money. The consolidation of Witt and Lincoln would produce significant savings and would make a great deal of business sense. There are a number of positions that would not be necessary if there was only one school. It is important to note that no one would lose a job in this process. We may have to transfer some staff members to another school but most will transitioned to the new school. Normally we hire a significant number of new staff members each year, which will enable us to effectively deal with staff management issues through attrition, resignations, and retirements. We would also eliminate the financial waste associated with relocation costs during renovations. Witt is one of our smaller schools and often these schools are not financially efficient. Placing the

schools together would create a more efficient school and would serve the district for many decades in the future. The site at Witt would provide an excellent building pad for the new addition, and all infrastructure elements are already present.

It is important to understand that the Board of Education has not made any official decision at this point. The Board has directed the superintendent to solicit feedback from both communities on these options and to report back to them. **We will conduct a community forum on August 28 at 6:00 p.m. in the Heritage Room of the Central Office.** This will provide community members and parents an opportunity to express their thoughts and ideas concerning the two options. Please join us on August 28 to find out additional information about the two options, to ask questions, and to provide feedback. It is important to the Board to solicit community feedback on all projects of this nature because we exist to serve our communities.

Thank you for your attention to this article. Remember – School Matters!