

Jefferson County School System Redesign Updated Questions and Answers

When would changes go into effect?

We are looking at the fall of 2012 in order to carry out a planned reduction of staff through attrition and retirements. This timeline will allow for construction if needed and a carefully planned reduction of staff.

Can we see what the various options would look like? Is it possible to see a conceptual drawing of the facilities needed for each option?

Yes, the conceptual drawings shared at the October 19 meeting will be very preliminary, but will show the possibilities – especially how the areas will be separated.

Has the Board considered any changes to the options presented at the September 28 meeting in response to community input?

Yes, the Board heard from the community that separation and safety are two primary concerns with having the 7th and 8th graders housed at the high school. One possibility that emerged from this would be to house grades 6 through 8 in a separate facility on the high school campus – it would not be a full middle school with amenities such as a gym, lunchroom, media center and band room. However, the idea would be to situate the 6-8 facility so that those amenities could be added in the future if the need arises because of growth. The Board members have expressed an interest in the building having its own entrance and bus drop-off, as well as a multi-purpose building for physical education and meals. Board members would like community input regarding this concept.

With Option 1, how will younger students be separated from older students?

The middle school could have a separate entrance and bus drop-off. We are looking at having a multi-purpose room where middle school students will eat, have health and physical education classes and their own assemblies. The plan is for high school teachers to come to the middle school wing if and when they teach classes for the middle school students.

With Option 1, will the conduct code and dress code be school wide or by grade level?

The middle school wing housing grades 7 and 8 would have its own dress code and discipline policy. Middle school would be a separate entity, as it is now.

With Option 1, will 6th graders have access to band?

Yes, we plan to structure the band program so that 6th graders housed at the elementary schools would have band. All three elementary schools presently have music and physical education. Sixth graders would have sports available to them at the local recreation departments in preparation for GHSA / Middle School Association competitive sports in grades 7 and 8.

With Option 1, will there be a separate team of administrators for the 7th and 8th grade wing? Has this been factored into the cost of Option 1?

Yes, there would be separate administrators for grades 7 and 8. This has been factored into the costs of Option 1.

With Option 1, will students be on the bus longer than they are now?

Today, middle school and high school students ride the bus together. Depending on where the student lives in the county, they may ride the bus no longer than 10 to 15 extra minutes – some would actually be on the bus less time. The effect of time on the bus would be minimal under Option 1.

With Option 1, what will happen to the old middle school buildings?

The decision would be made with community input and the ability of a government or a private entity to keep up the buildings. What we do not want is to create public eyesores that will be the targets for vandalism and neglect. We have asked the Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce and Development Authority to explore options for use of some or all of the spaces with entities like Head Start, East Georgia College, city governments and county government. We would involve the communities in deciding if any part of or all of the buildings should be demolished.

What will happen with class sizes for the various options?

With Option 1, classes should remain as they are now. Class size would increase with the other options unless taxes are raised or state revenues increase dramatically.

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Are there alternatives to reduction in staff?

Since 2003, the school system has had \$6 million in cuts in state funding (austerity). That is money we earned, but did not receive because of declining state revenues. We have made many cuts already. Areas include: professional learning, extended day for teachers, Testgate, bus routes, teaching positions through attrition, central office positions, technology, after school programs at CES, math tutorial at JCHS, textbooks, summer school, contributions to the county library system, membership in Magnolia Midlands GYSTC, tuition assistance for employees, SchoolTalk, and school budgets. All we have left to cut is personnel. We can reduce staff through a carefully structured plan over the next three years or hope for the best and make cuts as they come. We feel it is best to plan for the cuts.

When will a decision be made on which option the school district will implement?

The plan is for the Board to consider all the public input and make a decision in January of 2010.

How will the community input factor into that decision?

Not only has the Board had two well-publicized community meetings, but they have also posted information on the website that includes a survey. The Superintendent has spoken to a number of community and school groups and has had information sessions with a cross section of the community over the past several months. The Board continues to be available for input from the community and urges people to let them know how they feel about the issues facing our school system.

The County Commissioners already have a SPLOST...what would that mean for the eSPLOST?

Currently, the Jefferson County Commissioners have a SPLOST, and the Board of Education has an eSPLOST (for education) running at the same time. The eSPLOST that we are discussing would just be a continuation of the current eSPLOST that is paying for construction at Wrens Elementary and other renovations in the system, as well as the paying off the bonds for Jefferson County High School. The former eSPLOST paid for the renovations at Carver Elementary. The vote for an eSPLOST in November 2010 would be to continue the one-cent for education. It would not be a new tax.

What would the schedule look like for middle school and high school – would high school teachers come to middle school?

The middle school would have its own schedule. There are many options for using high school teachers to go to the middle school wing and teach classes, which would broaden opportunities for connections and enrichment.

How can Option 1 be an advantage for students?

The advantage would be primarily use of “economy of size,” which would allow more opportunities to use middle and high school staff and resources by putting the middle school grades together in one location near the high school. One distinct advantage would be we could offer Georgia Performance Standards Accelerated Math for grades 7 and 8 (which is too expensive to duplicate at the present). By being in close proximity to each other, the middle and high school teachers could share a strong, reciprocal content-based relationship that would provide many opportunities for vertical teaming and professional learning. The end result would be a stronger curriculum for both schools.

What method would be used to downsize?

Downsizing can be a painful process for the community. We are hoping that a carefully structured plan for downsizing spread over the next three years can be accomplished through attrition and retirements. The Board has a reduction in force policy that will be followed in the event that further reductions have to be made.

Where would the alternative school be housed?

Under Options 1 and 2, we are studying our choices. One possibility would be to move the portables at WMS to a county-owned location.

Why are we using the small group format for the community meetings?

On the advice of communication experts at the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA), we determined that this format would be the most productive process to allow all citizens an opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas on the future of the school system. A survey has also been available on the school district’s website. Board of Education members are taking all input seriously and are trying to be sure that community members have many different ways to communicate their opinions to the Board. At their December meeting, the Board will hear public comment on the options.