

East Pennsboro Area School District
District Feasibility Study Steering Committee
Middle School
August 8, 2017

Members present: Andrew Cecere, Robert Copeland, Kristen Danner, Steven David Heiser, Leesa DeMartyn, Charley Gelb, Corey Groff, Glenn Gurchik, Clint Heckman, Betsy Holley, Mike Jones, Dawn Kepler, Kathy Kramer, Greg Milbrand, Sarah Miller, Justin Newkam, Jason Oyler, Melanie Shaver-Durham, Mike Sim, Sharon Sybrant, and Rich Tysarczyk.

Others present: Jennie Stouffer, Megan Keen, and Sara Clarke.

The meeting began with Mr. Oyler confirming there is a quorum of 20 of the 28 members present.

The agenda will have two topics of discussion this evening, first a recommendation from this committee on the status of WCH and second a discussion on grade level configuration.

The committee began the discussion regarding whether to close WCH or not. The committee felt the discussion should focus on what is best for kids from a quality of education standpoint. However, putting educational issues aside, it is cheaper to fix WCH rather than build a new building. The committee felt this area of the township already feels isolated and moving all district buildings to one campus would only increase that isolation. The township boundaries are not laid out in a reasonable manner.

The committee guessed there would be a \$10 million savings to renovate the building rather than building a new one. Is this a wise use of capital funds? Is it a smart financial decision to hire an elementary dean at this time? The board surveyed the administration and the hiring of this position will alleviate some pressures on the current team. WCH is not in as bad a shape as the MS and 1/3 of the building is less than 15 years old. The MEP system needs upgrades of a little over \$7 million and the replacement of the modulares is \$2.5 million. The cost of the new building is \$27.5 million. If this is the recommended plan, EPE will not receive any renovations. The district has \$50 million to work with to maintain a budget neutral effect.

The committee also discussed concerns with security and access points for the buildings. Safety is a concern for everyone on campus and is it wise to have all students in the same location? The committee determined that there would be no way to plan for a mass evacuation of the entire township. WCH is outdated already and the circle design is old. The semi circle construction is not secure. One campus would be easier to secure. The security of the building has come far in the last five years. The committee would like to know the cost of making the building safer.

The administration presented a savings plan with the new building that consisted of \$600,000 to \$900,000. The district can achieve these savings without the new building. 4 tier bussing and the grade configuration could happen now. The committee does not believe the savings to be

accurate. The mileage and staff savings do not offset the cost of the new school. The closure of WCH is a bad deal for taxpayers because nothing is done to EPE.

For the future of personalized learning, the ideal building would house grades K through 12. Kids would have the opportunity to move between grades easily. A student could be in fourth grade and moving to 5th grade for math only. The trend in technology is to make physical presence of students and teachers not necessary. Teachers are the most valuable resource and giving the kids access to what they need is beneficial.

With all buildings on one campus it would become more collaborative. A teacher on the committee indicated that they taught at EPE for 6.5 years and there is very little collaboration between buildings. The HS students used to come to WCH and EPE. This year, the MS did take students to EPE to read to them. The teachers on the committee felt collaboration is sometimes an exercise in misery, sometimes it is not defined. The district would need a strong vision of what it looks like to collaborate.

The committee discussed how long it would take to save enough cash to build a building without borrowing any funds. Given the current limited resources of the district saving the money to build with cash would take over 30 years.

WCH is a nice building but we have a once in a 30 year opportunity to do innovative work for our students. We are in a unique position as a small enough, strong enough community to do a collaborative campus. Again, the committee asked the question, what is best for the quality of education provided to our students?

From an elementary standpoint, we are missing the early childhood piece. Kids are not quite ready for kindergarten and need the most help. Combining grades K through two should happen for the education of the students. The district needs to look at some of the programming regardless of the decision.

At this time, the committee decided to vote on the question of whether to keep WCH open or to close the building. The vote was done by ballot and counted by Mrs. Holley. The vote was as follows:

Remain open: 15

Close: 5

The committee recommends keeping the building open. Mr. Oyler will attend the board meeting on August 16 and report to the board the recommendation.

The committee then began to discuss grade level configuration. Initial thoughts are that WCH should operate with grades K to 2 and EPE grades 3 to 5. On a rare occasion, a second grader may need 3rd grade math and the district would work to accommodate this request.

The elementary principals were asked to comment on the grade configuration proposal. The students do have a community feel to start at K and finish in 4th grade. With configuration, this would be lost. The 4 tier bussing would alter current arrival and dismissal times. There a lot of advantages, it would even out the class size numbers, boundary exceptions would no longer be necessary and complete horizontal collaboration would be possible. The principals expressed concerned that it is challenging to meet all grade level needs under the current configuration.

Grade level configuration would create a similar student experience, examples are field trips and assemblies. Professional collaboration could occur everyday or close to it. All grade level resources would be available to all teachers if they are contained in one building. All students would get to know each other sooner, currently they merge in 5th grade. No mixing until 6th grade should not be a consideration because students are together in outside sports anyway.

Special education co-teaching at the 3rd to 5th grade levels is not possible now. We use the push in model rather than the pull out. Special education, depending on numbers, could move case managers now and students would not have the same teacher all 4 years either.

Per the teachers on the committee, professional education/collaboration should not be a consideration either. The district misses the boat on this item. The budget is minimal. The district needs to soul search on why more collaboration is not done now. They sit for a long time and don't get much done. A firm plan needs to be put together or we will have building vs. building.

Upcoming schedule:

- August 15 – next meeting to continue grade configuration discussion, admin building 5:30 p.m.
- August 16 – report to the board by Mr. Oyler