



## **School Committee Beverly Public Schools**

502 Cabot Street  
Beverly MA, 01915

Annemarie Cesa, President  
Maria T. Decker, Vice-President  
Paul A. Manzo, Secretary  
William F. Scanlon, Mayor  
David Manzi  
Karen Fogarty  
Kristin Silverstein

### **Strategic Planning Committee - Ad Hoc Committee on Facilities Planning Report Summary – Joint School Committee/City Council Meeting November 15, 2011**

#### Members:

Maria Decker, Chair; Matt Poska; Sue Charochak; James Coffey; George Binns; Heike Gibson

#### Task:

Create school and grade model configurations for preK through grade 8 that best utilized space available, while maximizing educational opportunities for students, and minimizing operating costs. The SPC Facilities group began meeting bi-weekly in September 2010; an initial report was presented in February 2011, with the final report of recommendations delivered in June 2011.

#### Process:

The SPC Facilities Group conducted a select literature review, reviewed substantial district historic and projected enrollment data, reviewed architectural plans of district school buildings to determine number of rooms in addition to regular classrooms, held extensive discussions on members' values regarding the emerging issues, and reviewed models of both peer communities, and those to which we strive to be more like. In addition, district budget survey data was reviewed and interviews were held with members of district administration, school building architects, and the city Commissioner of Public Services. In an effort to provide engaging and equitable opportunities to enhance and sustain learning, and to prepare students for higher education and the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce, the SPC Facilities subgroup recommends the following.

#### Areas of Focus:

- Incorporate best educational practices at all levels.
- Maximize existing space.
- Create 21<sup>st</sup> century facilities with the ability and flexibility to house technological infrastructure and advances.
- Appreciate trends in grade and school configurations.
- Expand academic, co-curricular, and extra-curricular offerings for students.
- Allow for growth in full-day kindergarten.
- Smooth out class size inequities at elementary level, and student teacher ratio between elementary and secondary levels.
- Retain and/or increase revenue opportunities.
- Allow for growth in preschool.
- Expand in-house Special Education programs.
- Examine to what extent building capacities and projected enrollment limit or allow different grade configuration scenarios.

### Findings:

The experience of grade level structures currently in operation both across the country and in neighboring districts shows that grade and school configurations indicate a myriad of grade spans. Decisions are influenced by a community's history, values, facilities, budget considerations, and educational philosophy. Grade span configurations vary greatly and range widely. Sometimes, within the same district, grade level patterns vary almost as much as they do across districts.

### Models Explored:

Seven different school/grade configuration models were explored in depth, accounting for school size, class size, number of classrooms, transportation, educational groupings, and curriculum alignment. Projected student enrollment is based on NESDEC estimates from December 2010.

### Results:

Most models explored did not work logistically – too few classrooms forcing the need to purchase/rent modular classrooms, great loss of rental revenue, duplication of services (nursing, library/media specialists, special education therapies and related programs), wasted space, teacher certification issues, redistricting, more transitions, curriculum losses, need to purchase non-consumables, transportation costs, loss of neighborhood schools, cafeteria lunch scheduling and more.

### Executive Summary:

The research and data collected for this report support the following conclusions:

1. Beverly must renovate/expand its middle school. The current facility (Briscoe) cannot support educational objectives and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning and is failing structurally and systemically. This strong, beautiful building has served our community well, yet is in great need of costly long and short-term repairs and renovations, as well as increased space for special education programs and support services for all students. None of the systems in the building meets today's code.
2. Schools with larger grade spans can strengthen a school system's vertical articulation of the curriculum and provide more opportunity for positive interactions between students of different ages both academically and in co-curricular activities. Literature suggests a grade 5-8 middle school will also lend itself to increased parental involvement at a time when parents are beginning to step back but assistance is crucial.
3. The more students of like grade in a building, the more opportunities for activities which contribute to curriculum consistency. A configuration with more students per grade in each building may minimize unhealthy competition and perceived inequities among the elementary schools, and allow for elimination of trivial comparisons and distinctions. More students per grade in the same school also results in a more cost efficient design.
4. Small schools are particularly good at improving the academic achievement for students who have not done well in traditional settings. Small schools have a higher graduation rate,

promote greater student involvement in co-curricular activities, and experience improved student behavior. The small school philosophy can be attained from a school within a school model, such as a Lower Middle School (grades 5 & 6) and an Upper Middle School (grades 7 & 8) housed in a shared building.

5. Increasing the number of transitions between schools leads to a decrease in student achievement during those transition years. Conversely, with fewer transitions, children fare better academically and behaviorally. The more grade levels that each school services, the better the students perform. The longer a student stays in a given school, the better the student performs.
6. Children who do not come to school ready to learn are destined to struggle throughout their educational experience, and are more likely to fail. Attendance at full day kindergarten is positively associated with increased learning in reading and math during the kindergarten year.

#### Rationale/Benefits:

The rationale for the recommended middle school model is based on the following benefits:

- Developmentally appropriate age groupings allows for social/emotional growth and curriculum growth. Statewide curriculum framework is written in these age groupings and allows for increased vertical articulation of curriculum, professional development, and common planning time. Teacher certification reflects these age groups. Students in grade 5 have more in common, socially and emotionally, with 6<sup>th</sup> graders than 4<sup>th</sup> graders.
- Benefits of longer time in one middle school building builds community and family involvement with PTO. Fundraising for traditional trips (6<sup>th</sup> grade Nature's Classroom and 8<sup>th</sup> grade NYC) can occur over a two-year period.
- Enhanced extra and co-curricular activities for 5<sup>th</sup> grade students.
- Increased opportunities for cross-curricular lessons and enhanced differentiated instruction.
- Increased educational opportunities for students in grade 5 through exposure to expressive arts, technology, and foreign language, and daily instruction in science and social studies.
- With four grades, the larger middle school is more cost effective, while the smaller school aspect (lower and upper divisions) allows for academic, social, and behavioral benefits. The upper/lower configuration allows for improved social/emotional support for adolescent students; it enables them to be in daily contact with adults who know the pre-teen/teenaged student well, take an interest in them, and provide them with both academic and emotional support. This model provides a balance between a nurturing environment and academic rigor.
- McKeown is retained for revenue and the ability to keep some of our children's education currently provided through Consortium programs, in the community, decreasing busing costs, and time spent in transportation.

- Expansion of in-house Special Education programs at both the middle and elementary levels allows for return of out-of-district placements, reducing Special Education costs and providing appropriate education for Beverly students in Beverly Schools.
- Science rooms currently used as elementary classrooms will be returned to their intended purpose.
- Capstone projects at 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade year end align with district standards based grading and service learning initiatives.

Recommendation:

The proposed long-term solution is based on where we as a district want to go, with a solid foundation in educational principles. The school committee and administration support the following:

- One grade 5-8 middle school at expanded, updated Memorial, subdivided into a Lower Middle School of 2-person teams for grades 5 and 6, and an Upper Middle School of 4-person teams for grades 7 and 8.