



WILMINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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A school and community partnership that provides an inclusive, respectful, and collaborative learning environment where all stakeholders are engaged in the development of the whole child.

To: Wilmington School Committee
From: Glenn Brand, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools
Date: August 19, 2024
Re: Wildwood/MSBA Update: Building Our Future: Elementary Education in Wilmington

INTRODUCTION

The Town of Wilmington and Wilmington Public Schools is currently in the process of exploring a new elementary school to replace the Wildwood Early Childhood Center. While the replacement of this school has always been a priority for this school building project, the consideration of school consolidation with the Woburn Street Elementary School and possibly the North Intermediate School, also remains in view.

As the Superintendent of Schools, I have also been asked by the Town to serve as the Chair of the Wildwood School Building Committee, which I have had the privilege and pleasure of doing since the beginning of the current project. During this time, I have tried to be objective and neutral when governing the work of the building committee. However, I recognize that, as the project soon approaches a decision, it is time for my perspective and recommendation to emerge in order to clearly convey to the community what I believe represents the best option for the future of elementary education in Wilmington.

RECOMMENDATION

It is my recommendation that the preferred option associated with the current elementary school building project should be a PreK-Grade 5 elementary school at the North Intermediate site based upon the following reasons:

1. Community Sentiment
2. The need for modernized educational facilities
3. A means to bring improved coordination and support for teaching and learning
4. Maintain equity and access for students, families and staff as a result of fewer future building projects and reducing the overall time to completion

What follows below is further explanation and rationale that serves as my effort to justify my recommendation.



SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS
RATIONALE FOR A PREK-GRADE 5 CONSOLIDATED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

A. SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION & COMMUNITY SENTIMENT

The idea of bringing together under one roof more than one existing school community is not a new concept for the community of Wilmington. While it is not clear exactly how far back the idea started, it has clearly been a topic that has been circulating within the community:

Town Facilities Master Plan- The first formal mention of this was captured in the Town of Wilmington’s Facilities Master Plan Report published in 2018 and approved by the members of the Town’s Permanent Public Building Committee (PBC). Cited in the plan, and based on survey responses from community members and the views of the members of the PBC, two factors that pointed towards the consideration of school consolidation:

1. A need to reduce transitions associated with multiple smaller schools
2. The size of our current elementary schools is less efficient and not optimal, citing the fact that schools with student populations between 400 and 600 are more ideal with research and best practices.

Select Board and School Committee Support- the Select Board and School Committee both signaled their support and approval when voting to authorize the then Town Manager Hull and myself to submit our application for interest to the MSBA program in 2020. These applications clearly outlined the intent to explore consolidation of a PreK-Grade 3 and PreK-Grade 5 facility as part of the Wildwood project.

Special Town Meeting- During the Special Town Meeting to secure funds to begin the project there was overwhelming support to approve funding that broadly considered consolidation in connection to the Wildwood Project. While there was no specific option of the two (2) on the table selected, it was clear to both elected officials and community members that school consolidation was going to be explored.

Educational Visioning- During our educational visioning process in the fall of 2023, we brought together over 50 community stakeholders, including parents/guardians, elected officials, students, and WPS staff. Throughout the process the question around school consolidation emerged as a clear theme to consider.

MSBA Project Community Forums- The project team has held four (4) community forums on the project to date, gathering all responses/feedback captured through an electronic platform called Mentimeter. Based upon the results of these forums, school consolidation in the form of a PreK-Grade 5 facility has emerged as the strongest to pursue and more preferable than any of the other options.

In summary, while it may be true that Wilmington has structured its school system with smaller elementary schools consisting of many transitions, there are many signposts that point clearly to a desire to pursue a different roadmap for structuring elementary education in the future.

B. SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION – MODERNIZED EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES

The Town of Wilmington has routinely invested financial resources in the maintenance and operations of our public schools. At the elementary level, this has largely been in the form of capital items aimed at repairing or replacing existing components or systems (i.e. boilers, roofs, windows, and lights). However, none of our six (6) elementary schools (all of which are similar in age) have undergone any major renovations or updates, resulting in interior finishes that are as they were when built 5 to 7 decades ago. While repairs or replacements are clearly important, they cannot represent improvements that lead to modernized educational facilities to ensure that educational spaces support highly effective teaching and learning.

There are a wide range of factors that a modernized educational facility can provide over one that is 50 plus years old and far too many to cite here, but a few examples include:

- ***Better Climate Control and Energy Efficiency for Heating and Cooling***
- ***Educational Spaces That Can Support All Students***- Educational spaces that are designed to support the teaching and learning of all children (including the provision of such services as Special Education, Speech, and Language) are vital, and school facilities built five+ decades ago are simply not designed to support contemporary educational needs.
- ***Safety and Security Enhancements***- from fire suppression systems to door locks, the building design in schools of the age we are operating simply do not align with current enhancements.
- ***Handicap Accessibility***- most areas of our six (6) elementary schools are not handicap accessible, leaving a significant disadvantage in their ability to provide appropriate support access for both students and staff.
- ***Adult & Community Interactions***- facilities that provide appropriate spaces to support adult and community interactions (i.e. meetings, professional development, etc.) are simply not available in any of our current elementary facilities.

It is also worthwhile noting that future citizens looking to settle and raise a family in the general Wilmington area have choices from a variety of nearby communities with similar demographics. For many, the school system and the facilities they offer will influence a family's decision to purchase a home.

A review of nearby communities in close proximity to Wilmington provides a snapshot of how our elementary school facilities compare in terms of grade level configuration and year built and whether or not there have been major renovations. While a major renovation is not defined (and is assumed to be more than repair or replacement of infrastructure items), and the information gathered is from public record and may not appropriately share the entire story, it is fair to say that our elementary schools in Wilmington indeed have some of the oldest operating schools in the area.

Local elementary school snapshot (grade level configuration, year built, major renovations/projects)

District	Elementary School Name	Grade Span	Year Built	MSBA Comments
Wilmington	Boutwell ECC	PreK-K	Opened 1961	
	Wildwood ECC	PreK-K	Opened 1955	Currently in Feasability Study
	Shawsheen	1-3	Opened 1970	
	Woburn Street	1-3	Opened 1963, renovation 1968.	
	North Intermediate	4-5	Opened 1962	
	West Intermediate	4-5	Opened 1964	
Tewksbury	John F. Ryan Elementary School	5-6	Opened 1999	
	Loella F. Dewing Elementary School	PreK, K, 1	Opened 1969	
	Center Elementary School	2-4	Opened in January 2023	MSBA award to to consolidate and replace the existing Louise Davy Trahan Elementary School and the existing North Street Elementary School with a new facility serving grades 2-4 district-wide; this project created a School Campus (Center & Ryan Schools) for grades 2 through 6
	Heath Brook Elementary School	PreK, K, 1	Opened 1957. Major renovation in 1975.	
Woburn	Altavesta Elementary	K-5	Opened 1969.	
	Goodyear Elementary	K-5	Opened 1959. New construction project completed 2011	New construction project w/MSBA completed 2011
	Hurld Wyman Elementary	K-5	2018 (Combined 2 elementary: Hurd (open 1956) & Wyman (Open 1892/Reno 1964)	New construction/consolidation w/MSBA completed 2018
	Linscott Elementary	K-5	Opened 1971.	
	Malcolm White Elementary	K-5	Opened 2004.	
	Reeves Elementary	PreK-5	Opened 2000.	
	Shamrock Elementary	PreK-5	Opened 2002.	
	Woburn's Early Childhood Program	PreK, Ages 3-5	No data.	
Reading	Wood End Elementary	K-5	Opened 2004.	
	Joshua Eaton Elementary	K-5	Opened 1949. Major renovation 1995.	
	J. Warren Killam Elementary	K-5	Opened 1969.	Currently in Feasability Study for Warren Killam Elementary School
	Birch Meadow Elementary	K-5	Opened 1964. Major renovation 1998.	
	Alice M. Barrows Elementary	K-5	Opened 1964. Major renovation 2005.	
	Rise Preschool	PreK	No data.	
N. Reading	L.D. Batchelder School	K-5	Opened 1917. Major renovation 2006.	
	J. Turner Hood School	PreK-5	Opened 1959. Major renovation 2003.	
	E. Ethel Little School	PreK-5	Original building was constructed in 1958. In 1970 there was a major addition. 1997-98 new construction and renovation. 2001 added modular classrooms	
Andover	Bancroft Elementary School	K-5	Opened 1969. New construction 2013-2018.	New construction project w/MSBA completed in 2018.
	High Plain Elementary School	K-5	Opened in September 2002.	
	Sanborn Elementary School	K-5	Built in 1951 and renovated in 1998.	
	Shawsheen Preschool	PreK	Opened 1923. Major renovation 1989.	
	South Elementary School	K-5	Opened 1957. Major renovation 1995.	
	West Elementary School	K-5	Built 1952. First addition was added in 1956. Second addition was completed in 1970 and renovaton in 1979. <i>September of 1988 West Elementary became a K-5 school when the school system was reconfigured to K-5, 6-8, and 9-12.</i>	MSBA approved grant for a new West Elementary School; will replace the existing West Elementary School with a new facility serving grades PK-5 on the site of the existing West Elementary School. Estimated completion 2024
N. Andover	Atkinson Elementary	1-5	Opened 1964. Major renovation 1979.	
	Franklin Elementary	1-5	Opened 1958. Major renovation 1998.	
	Kittredge Elementary	1-5	Opened 1950. Major renovation 1989.	Currently in Feasability Study w/MSBA
	Annie L Sargent School	1-5	Opened 1995.	
	Thomson School	1-5	Opened 1999.	
	Anne Bradstreet Early Childhood Center	PreK, K	No data.	

C. SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION – TEACHING & LEARNING

Our District strives to provide the best level of services to support teaching and learning across our six (6) elementary school buildings. However, the reality is that there are far more challenges in coordinating and leading these services over these smaller educational facilities.

While not an exhaustive list, the following represent some of the more notable challenges in operating six smaller elementary school facilities:

- ***Social and Emotional Support and Well-Being of Students***- students in Wilmington typically attend five (5) different schools from Kindergarten through high school. The number of transitions can pose challenges for many students as they need to switch schools just as they are becoming acclimated. This can have a negative impact on their sense of belonging.
- ***Engagement of Families***- similar to the struggles students face transitioning from school to school, families often share similar concerns about their ability to feel connected to their child’s school community when they may only attend the school for a year or two. In some cases, families have children in multiple schools posing challenges with managing communication from different schools and ensuring students are dropped off and picked up at various campuses.
- ***Staffing***- optimizing the distribution of certain staff across so many schools is difficult and does not allow us to optimize their utilization. In many cases, the District cannot justify a full-time position for certain staff given the smaller enrollments and this results in the need to share the position across multiple schools. Factored into this is travel time, which only reduces the total time that staff can help serve in their roles. One might also argue that the state of educational facilities can also impact teacher attraction and retention as it relates to the physical working conditions in a school building.
- ***Leadership & Support of Existing Staff***- administrative support can be a challenge with educators in six different elementary schools. District staff members, such as the Elementary Literacy and STEM Coordinators, must travel between and among schools regularly to support teachers. Again, inefficiencies are noted with the additional travel time needed, taking away from coaching and teaching support.
- ***Consistency of Practices***- despite best efforts, it remains a challenge to ensure that there is strong consistency of practices from one school to the next around a wide range of things, from family communication between the home and school to the approach for homework for students. Coordinating these types of activities within one school is often difficult alone, but trying to do so with fidelity across so many different schools that support PreK-5 education on each side of town is a much larger challenge.
- ***Duplication of Resources***- with multiple schools, we often have to duplicate resources to ensure materials and equipment are accessible in each building. In some cases, these materials or equipment could serve a larger population of students, but given the separate school campuses, items must be duplicated. For example, a Physical Therapist who travels to two different schools must have the appropriate equipment in both locations even though it will only be used while she is in the building.

D. SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION - EQUITY & ACCESS ACROSS THE TOWN

I believe that our entire community expects similar educational experiences for children, families and staff, no matter where in Town they reside. From my perspective, this includes not only the school facility itself but also the grade level configuration and total number of school transitions from when they first enter the school system to when they arrive at middle school.

The concern that I hold is that any option other than a PreK-5 elementary school as the preferred option in this school building project holds the real and likely potential to adversely impact the equity and access of residents to the same experiences at the elementary level depending on which part of the community they reside in.

If a PreK-Grade 3 option is selected, the Town would ultimately be in a position to pursue a total of three (3) additional building projects:

- a. **A Renovation of the North Intermediate School**- this must extend beyond repair and replacement only but needs to include a full modernization of the facility including construction of appropriate spaces, right-sized classrooms, handicap accessibility, etc.
- b. **A Renovation/New School Construction for a Pre-K-Grade 3** - a school (new or renovated) on the West side of Town would need to be combining Boutwell and Shawsheen Elementary School.
- c. **A Renovation of the West Intermediate School** – which, in my opinion, represents the school that holds the greatest level of need beyond the Wildwood Early Childhood Center and would need to be completed to provide a similar learning environment as that of a renovated North Intermediate School.

If three (3) additional building projects beyond the current project included in the MSBA program were necessary, and if MSBA funding was the only means by which the Town could financially support these projects, then it is possible the timeframe below could be a reality:

Building Project	Example	Timeline *
1st Building Project	Boutwell & Shawsheen (PreK-Grade 3)	2035 School Opening
2nd Building Project	West Intermediate Renovation	2042
3rd Building project	North Intermediate Renovation	2049

** Timeline assumes that the Town will be invited into the MSBA program the first time they apply*

If the PreK-Grade 5 option is selected as part of the current MSBA project, and the Town elected to seek a ‘mirror’ image on the west side of Town for the purposes of ensuring equity and access, then there would only be one (1) additional future school building project:

Building Project	Example	Timeline *
1st Building Project	Boutwell + Shawsheen +West (PreK-Grade 5)	2035 School Opening

** Timeline assumes that the Town will be invited into the MSBA program the first time they apply*