

## **November 21, 2013 Board Work Session – Addressing District Enrollment, Demographic and Facilities Needs**

### **Issue:**

The implementation of State-funded all day every day kindergarten beginning with the 2014-15 school year has triggered the need to provide additional classrooms in almost every elementary school building across the State. In Northfield, we have actively worked to provide appropriate spaces for all programs especially in elementary buildings that were not originally constructed to house all day kindergarten or the variety of space intensive special education programming that is currently required of public school districts. While an imbalance of enrollment has left one elementary building with the potential of additional classroom space, the other two elementary schools are already at capacity with no additional space for growth in students or in additional programs. This situation is compounded by community support of neighborhood elementary schools while maintaining the freedom to transfer between buildings to accommodate daycare and the desire of parents to attend a particular building. In addition, our District and community's support of open enrollment and charter/parochial school choice increases the complexity of addressing enrollment and facilities needs.

To resolve this issue we believe it will be important to gather data about current enrollment as well as demographic trends for the Northfield area by engaging the support of a demographer. We also need to engage the support of an architect or planner to complete a long-term facilities study. We also will need to work with Benjamin Bus and a transportation consultant to review the current elementary boundaries and bus routes to determine how boundary changes might provide the best balance of students in each elementary school that would allow us to get maximum efficiency and effectiveness from the classroom spaces in each building.

While a short-term solution may allow us to address the immediate kindergarten space needs, a long-term plan is also needed if we are to continue to demonstrate good stewardship of our District's facilities and financial resources.

### **Background:**

As the Northfield Public Schools prepares for the implementation of voluntary, free all day every day kindergarten at all three elementary buildings, we are facing the following significant issues:

1. Despite efforts to provide additional elementary classroom space and specially constructed special education spaces to house district-wide special education programs at Sibley Elementary, open enrollment to and from other school districts and charter/parochial school choice by Northfield families have continued to result in an imbalance of both student enrollment and demographic factors between the 3 elementary buildings.
2. Current elementary enrollments at the three buildings are:
  - a. Bridgewater – 555 students with a district-wide special education EBD and Deaf and Hard of Hearing programs.

- b. Greenvale Park – 473 students.
  - c. Sibley – 582 students with district-wide special education Autism Spectrum, DCD Moderate, and Low Incidence (LI) programs.
3. The imbalance in building enrollments is coupled with an imbalance in enrollment of students in poverty, students of color and students who are English learners. While the higher concentration of poverty provides additional State compensatory dollars to Greenvale Park, it also increases the needs that must be addressed by the regular classroom teachers.
  4. Bridgewater currently has 4 kindergarten classrooms and has no additional rooms available if kindergarten enrollment would require a fifth kindergarten classroom.
  5. Greenvale Park currently has 4 kindergarten classrooms and has 1 additional kindergarten classroom available based on needs.
  6. Sibley currently has 3 kindergarten classrooms. Sibley does not have a fourth kindergarten classroom available unless support staff are moved to a portable classroom or one of Sibley's current district-wide programs moves to Greenvale Park.
  7. There is a reasonable expectation that kindergarten enrollments will maintain or increase next fall. Currently, St. Dominic's and Randolph have full day kindergarten programs at a lower cost than Northfield or for free. When our program is free, parents may be more likely to stay within the Northfield School District for free all day kindergarten programming. Across the state and in Northfield, there also seem to be families who have held their kindergarten student back a year perhaps in order to take advantage of the free all day program available beginning in 2014-15.
  8. With construction of new subsidized housing in the Sibley attendance area and the relocation of tenants in the apartment buildings on Dresden from the Greenvale Park attendance area to the Sibley attendance area, we may see even larger enrollments at Sibley.

**Long-Term Solution Parameters:**

The ideal long-term solution would provide the following:

1. Accurate data about current elementary enrollment and enrollment projections.
2. A minimum of four permanent all day every day kindergarten classrooms in each building based on current enrollment data with the ability to house an additional fifth all day kindergarten section if needed.
3. Minimum disruption of current programming or relocation of programs to other spaces within the building or in other buildings.
4. Building enrollment that balances student numbers and provides the flexible capacity of each building to comfortably house building programs.
5. Demographic factors, including students in poverty, students of color, and English learners are better balanced across all three elementary buildings.
6. Minimum or no reduction in state funding available to meet the needs of students in poverty and English learners.

7. Clear understanding by our community about range of options and the issues, rationale, and solutions that are proposed for implementation.

**Recommended Short-Term Option** - Shift the district-wide DCD Moderate special education program from Sibley Elementary to Greenvale Park impacting four students. Four special education classrooms at Sibley were specifically constructed to serve the needs of our most complex special education students:

1. The current Low Incidence (LI) classroom was constructed using Federal special education dollars and for that reason, cannot be moved. No other space in another elementary building has the toileting facilities necessary to support the LI program.
2. The adjoining classroom is used for students with moderate cognitive disabilities. Because they are adjoining, they are able to share resources and the teachers and EAs support one another.
3. The two Neuro-Biological (NB) classrooms were constructed to support the needs of students on the Autism Spectrum. They adjoin one another so that teachers and EAs can go back and forth to support one another, they are located next to the motor room (actually one room has an accordion type wall that can open into the motor room), and special education dollars were used to purchase and install a Smart Board in one classroom (this must remain in a special education classroom).
4. The motor room is used by both LI and NB students. If one of the programs moves to another building, that building would also need a special education motor activity room.
5. We deliberately constructed these classrooms so they are near the psychologist office, a testing room, and handicapped accessible restrooms.

**Pros:**

1. Opens up one classroom space at Sibley Elementary for an all day every day kindergarten classroom.
2. All 3 elementary buildings have space for up to 100 kindergarten students.
3. Slightly decreases enrollment at Sibley while slightly increasing enrollment at Greenvale Park.
4. Short-term solution would have the least impact on the structuring of curriculum and assigning of teachers.

**Cons:**

1. Does not significantly address imbalance in elementary enrollment between the three buildings or the imbalance in enrollment of students in poverty, students of color and students who are English learners.
2. Moving the DCD Moderate classroom to another building would result in having to purchase additional materials (often expensive) to support the program, and the loss of the ability to physically support one another could result in the need to add additional staff.
3. One of the reasons for moving the LI and other programs to Sibley was to reduce special education transportation costs and time. The more schools

- with district-wide special education programs requiring special education transportation stops, the longer the bus routes, and the greater the cost.
4. Does not provide space for a fifth all day kindergarten section if kindergarten enrollment exceeds 100 students.

**Recommended Periodic Demographic Study and Pre-K-12 Facilities Review –**

Review attendance boundaries to determine needs to balance enrollments and/or provide adequate classroom spaces for kindergarten and all other Pre-K-12 regular education classrooms and programs as well as special education/special needs programs. Desired results of the demographic study and Pre-K-12 Facilities Review include:

1. Each elementary building's enrollment is controlled at approximately 535 students.
2. Potentially decreases the imbalance of students in poverty, students of color and students who are English learners in each building.
3. Allows the school district to maintain the classrooms that were specifically designed for special education students. (LI and NB at Sibley)

If attendance boundary modifications are warranted:

1. May require Board action eliminating parent choice in selection of elementary building for intradistrict, non-resident agreement, and open enrollment building requests.
2. Has the potential to negatively impact district funding when parents are not able to make choices about their child's elementary building attendance and choose to leave or open enroll outside our district or not request a non-resident agreement or open enrollment into our district.

If modifications beyond attendance boundary are warranted, the District should be prepared to consider long-term options that may require remodeling or construction.

**Long-Term Options** – If the results of the demographic study and the Pre-K-12 Facilities Review determine that even more additional classroom space is required to address current and future enrollment needs, the District will need to develop multiple long-term options for the Board and community's consideration. These options would need to consider a variety of scenarios that could impact not only our elementary buildings but our entire Pre-K-12 program. A few of the possible options that would free-up multiple elementary classrooms in each elementary building could include:

- Creating an early childhood center that would support preschool and kindergarten regular and special education programming
- Creating leveled elementary programs with two grade levels per building
- Creating a different middle school configuration that would include a current elementary grade