



# The TOWN OF NORWOOD

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

**Balch • Callahan • Cleveland  
Coakley • Oldham • Prescott  
Savage • Willett**

July 5, 2017

**Norwood Public Schools  
Long Range Study Committee**

**Voting**

Alan Slater  
Myev Bodenhofer  
Patrick McDonough  
Thomas Maloney  
Sara N. Quinn

**Non Voting**

John Carroll  
David Thomson  
Ted Callahan  
Paul Riccardi

Norwood School Committee  
Norwood, MA 02062

Dear Members,

As you know, the Norwood Long Range Building Study Committee (“the Committee”) was established by Town Meeting in May 2016 to assess the physical condition for all Norwood school buildings, with the exception of the High School, and to evaluate the existing and future configurations for housing PK-K through the eight grades within the school district.

We look forward to meeting you and the public on August 16<sup>th</sup> to discuss our findings and to offer you our recommendations. Enclosed for your consideration is a copy of the Executive Summary and a proposed Coakley site plan prepared by our consultant, Ai3.

In summary, we were presented with 16 options that range from a redistribution of students throughout the district to total consolidation. These options, including in each case, building a new Middle School (\$87 million), range from \$130 million to \$230 million in total project cost. There is an additional option that only considers capital repairs, namely operating all existing buildings as is for the foreseeable future with no proposed new construction. (\$58.4 million). This option, otherwise known as the “Do Nothing Approach”, involves replacement of building systems and components, technology and security improvements, roof and window improvements to increase energy efficiency, and phased renovations of a portion of a school. It is understood that the older a building gets, the more it will require updates and repairs.

While we will run through 15 of those options for you on the 16<sup>th</sup>, we will spend most of our time on the project that will be common to all our preferred alternatives, i.e., the replacement of the Coakley School with grade 5 added to the current 6-8 configuration.

Replacement of the Coakley School with a grade 5 added will cost \$87 million.<sup>1</sup>

#### Summary and Recommendations:

The initial phases of the study involved the development of enrollment projections and the review of existing school environments, existing building conditions, and current educational philosophies. Additionally, a review of other school districts was performed to identify successful practices. Based on this work and the concerns of the Committee and community at large, we arrived at the following conclusion regarding the highest priorities facing the Norwood Public Schools:

**The most significant educational facility challenge facing the Norwood Public School system is the lack of an appropriate 21<sup>st</sup> Century middle school environment. The lack of appropriately sized classrooms and educational support spaces, combined with aged building systems and components, creates a very challenging environment that is grossly insufficient when compared to surrounding Districts.**

Many proposed options for addressing the long-term needs of all Norwood school facilities are contained within this long-range study and report, and each of them is intended to initiate a thoughtful dialogue regarding the future of Norwood's school facilities. However, every option identifies the middle school as the highest priority for the Town and the first project which should be addressed. The middle school educational environment has changed dramatically over the past four decades (since Coakley was designed and constructed), as educators and parents began to realize that young adolescents are not simply older elementary school students nor younger high school students, but that there are dramatic changes that occur during this time of life requiring a radically different and unique approach to education.

Middle school educators found that the biological event of puberty fundamentally disrupts the relatively smooth development of the elementary school years and has a profound impact upon the cognitive, social, and emotional lives of young teens. In line with this important insight, they saw the need for the provision of special instructional, curricular, and administrative changes in the way that education takes place for kids in early adolescence. Among those changes were the establishment of a mentor relationship between teacher and student, the creation of small communities of learners, and the implementation of a flexible interdisciplinary curriculum that encourages active and personalized learning.

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<sup>1</sup> All prices are in today's dollars

Newly created middle schools designed to support these changes quickly proved beneficial to the support of teaching, learning, socialization, and student confidence. These supportive middle school environments include small and large group study and instruction spaces, larger flexible classrooms, smaller academic neighborhoods, project-based learning laboratories, student socialization areas, and many other critical components and spaces.

These new middle schools, often referred to as 21<sup>st</sup> century Middle Schools, differ dramatically from those of several decades ago. People often imagine middle school students sitting in straight rows, listening intently to the teacher and reading from the same book, but this is no longer the case. Students now work in small groups, perform different learning tasks and learn from different books. They integrate real-world problems and projects into their daily academic learning, and are often collaborating with other students and presenting their ideas and concepts to their peers. These activities are greatly restricted in older facilities with undersized, inflexible classrooms with no small or large group support spaces and no project labs. Despite the best efforts by faculty and staff to offer a modern middle school education within the confines of the existing facility, the Coakley Middle School facility does not represent a 21<sup>st</sup> Century middle school learning environment. It was designed almost 50 years ago and is based on long-outdated principles and concepts. Its educational deficiencies are fully detailed in Ai3's report as well as the numerous physical challenges created by its dated building systems and components, which have been maintained well beyond their intended life expectancy.

The undersized and overcrowded school relies on six 20-year-old modular classrooms which are somewhat isolated from the remainder of the school and were never intended to be a permanent solution for an appropriate middle school instructional environment. The building is an extremely inefficient all-electric facility that is very expensive to operate and has a poorly insulated building envelope. It relies almost 100% on mechanical ventilation, resulting in poor fresh air ventilation in many areas of the building.

Subsequent to reviewing and discussing all of the options contained within this report, our Committee was unanimous in their desire to recommend that the Town act immediately to address the middle school. The critical role that the middle school environment plays in addressing the specific cognitive, social, and emotional needs of Norwood's students and supporting their teachers is much too important to be ignored, and the inadequacies of the current facility requires immediate action. We also recognized that although all options recommended that the town immediately address the middle school, those options that proposed a 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> middle school had the added benefit of resolving overcrowding across all of the elementary schools by removing the 5<sup>th</sup> grade population from the elementary schools. Also, an additional benefit could be the relief of the overcrowding

conditions at the Willett by transferring the kindergarten population back to the elementary schools.

We also reviewed other Districts and found this (5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade middle school model) to be a common practice for enhancing 5<sup>th</sup> grade educational opportunities. Ultimately, we voted to recommend that the Town consider moving forward immediately with the necessary steps to have the middle school project submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) for consideration of grant funding. The details of the exact proposed project at the middle school (renovation, expansion, or new school construction) will ultimately be developed through a lengthy and detailed process as prescribed by MSBA guidelines.

Since the Committee so strongly supports the construction of a new Middle School with the addition of grade five, at the meeting Mr. Dunlap will present you with several locations where the new facility might be placed on the present site. The intention, of course, is to keep the existing school building operating while the new one is being constructed.

He will also run through an analysis of why the existing Coakley School cannot be reasonably rebuilt or remodeled.

The process of entering the middle school into the MSBA grant program will result in several years of planning and analysis before any construction would occur, and will give the Town sufficient time to consider other future planning options associated with improvements, renovation, or replacement at the elementary schools, with no need to act with the same immediacy (as the middle school) on those decisions.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alan Slater". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and "S".

Alan Slater, Chairman  
On behalf of the Committee